

## ST. AUGUSTINE CONCEPT ON THE BODY AND SOUL

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### Abstract

*The present research study is intended to investigate and encapsulate the theological thought process of St Augustine and his influence on the development of Christianity. We know that Augustine, who is a lover of philosophy and searcher of truth was greatly influenced by the ideology of Manichaeism and later on by the Neo-Platonic, though underlying his mother's influence had its place too. The medieval period is of great importance in the history of philosophy and theology and its development.*

*The writings of St. Augustine was of such influence on Martin Luther who brought about Reformation. St. Augustine further influenced John Calvin, whose book, Institute of Christian Religion is the laying systematic doctrines for Christian belief. This research paper is intended to see the flow of thoughts of St. Augustine on the development of doctrines and its influence on Christianity.*

**Keywords:** Manicheans, Augustine, Monica, Neo-Platonism.



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### Introduction:

Augustine was born in 354 AD, into a community that was incorporated into the Roman empire after the dissolution of the Latin League at a place called Thagaste, in the province of Numidia. Augustine's mother Monica was a devout Christian and his father Patricius was a pagan but on his death bed became a Christian. Augustine's mother greatly desired that he grows up in Christian faith. Both his parents recognized his intellectual capacity and he was trained in the best of schools of his days at Carthage. He loved wisdom and truth and read a lot from Cicero's Hortensius.

His love for wisdom and quest for answer's with respect to evil led him to the Bible for answers but he couldn't find them. When Augustine was nineteen years old, he found his

quests for the philosophical questions being satisfied in a religious sect known as Manichaeism.

Augustine joined the sect Manichean and he was able to quench his thirst for the answers he was looking in Manicheanism. It was here that he conceived that both God and soul as material entities, the soul being in fact a portion of God that had fallen into the corporeal world where it remained a foreigner, even to its own body (De duabus animabus 1; Confessiones 8.22). Manichean theology held to a belief of dualistic view of good and evil. The core belief of Manicheanism is that the powerful though not omnipotent good power (god), as opposed to the eternal evil power (devil). Gnosticism and Manichaeism, both took their ideas from Plato. They blended some of the teaching of Plato into their concept of dualism. The Neoplatonist rejected the Gnostic distortion of Platoism. The Gnostics concept that matter is evil and spirit is good, defined their understanding of God. Evil for them is the absent of Goodness.

#### **Augustine struggle about God:**

It was here that Augustine begin to struggle of the idea of evil being the absent of good and vice versa leading him to question this very thought. This made Augustine to rethink his view of Manicheanism and start to look at other worldviews and he narrowed down to Neoplatonist.

Augustine became Neoplatonist in an indirect way, and we know that Neoplatonistic texts helped in his transition to Christianity. He used the Platonic writings to attack Manichaeism, a sect which he once belonged. He came across Neoplatonic works of Plotinus and Ambrose written in Latin that helped him to change his Manichaeian way of thinking about good and evil. Augustine said that Manichaeian God is not true God because He is vulnerable to evil, stating that a true God is omnipotent and can't be affected in any way. After Augustine encountered Neoplatonic teachings he called Manichean teachings extremely simplified, pointing out that people are not found in every life situation torn between just two alternatives: good and evil, since people have multiple, complex and complicated desires and needs. According to Augustine we do not have two substances in us that are in war with each other, light and darkness, good and evil, but the problem is in our will that longs for a multitude of things that we want, of which only some are good. In this way he formulated his doctrine of good and evil influenced by Neoplatonism which was completely different from the dualistic approach we find in Gnosticism and Manichaeism.

Augustine was drawn towards Platonism because of their exposition and teaching of the soul which he found to be logical. In his anthropology Augustine was firmly Platonist, insisting on the soul's superiority to and independence of the body. For him, as for Plotinus and Porphyry, it was axiomatic that body could not act on soul, for soul was superior in the hierarchy of reality, and the inferior cannot act on the superior.

Augustine had many phases in his life. He moved from Manichaeism which is a form of Platonism and from there he went on to become a dualist and then a Neoplatonist. Now, Was Augustine a dualist? What caused him to believe in dualism? At the time of his conversion, however, Augustine became an ontological dualist claiming that some entities are non-corporeal. He believed that among these entities are God and the soul, and these were the entities he desired to get to know most (sol. The focus of his interest, however, was the human soul.

***Augustine rejection of error:***

Augustine could not totally comprehend the dualism of Gnosticism and Manichaeism, but was convinced of the explanation of good and evil by Neoplatonism. He also tried to formulate the doctrine of God and Soul based on his understanding of Neoplatonism. Neoplatonism, is the philosophical school of thought that emerged during the Roman Imperial Crisis to the Arab Conquest around the middle of 3<sup>rd</sup> century till the mid 7<sup>th</sup> century. Epicureanism and Stoicism had their philosophical understanding fading away and Neoplatonism dominating the philosophical ideology for that period offering a comprehensive understanding of the universe and individual human being's place in it.

This attracted Augustine to become a Neoplatonist as he found answers for his quest for good and evil, God and soul in their ideology. The earlier Augustine, as I read him, was an exciting intellectual adventurer who faced immense philosophical challenges from the anti-intellectual church of Africa and from Stoic and Manichean corporealism, who found solutions to many of his problems in Plotinian spiritualism, who often enough soon found elements of Platonism in conflict with the Christian faith, but who eventually got things straight, always landing on his feet and squarely within the faith of the Catholic Church which was later distorted by the Roman Catholic Church itself, of which he stands as the greatest of the Western Fathers.

I am convinced that Augustine not only had a philosophy, but also made a significant contribution to metaphysics in Western thought by introducing incorporeal being and of timeless eternity, concepts that the West has so successfully absorbed that their source is

often forgotten. Augustine thinking of metaphysics involves a universal rational approach to whatever-in-any-ways-is. No one can engage in theological thinking without using some “metaphysics”? If God is Being, and the principal cause of all other being, then he can only be known or sought intellectually through “metaphysical” ideas, however latent or virtual or implicit that maybe. So there needs to a tinge of metaphysics in Augustinian theology. Philosophy means love of wisdom, and since wisdom is God, Augustinian view of a true philosopher is one who loves God or lover of God. Augustine though he had left the teachings of his Mother Monica who taught him much about Christ when he entered his secular studies. The North African Manichaeian community provided the setting in which Augustine reaffirmed a commitment to Christ and to 'Christianity' that he had largely abandoned in the years of his secular education, and it cultivated in him a positive relationship to 'religion' in addition to his personal fondness for 'philosophy'. In both ways, his time with the Manichaeians formed an essential background to his later commitment to the 'Catholic' Christian community, and he continued to wrestle with that debt through his endeavours to convince Manichaeians that the Catholic Church could successfully address their earnest 'Christian' spiritual aspirations in a way Manichaeian doctrine and practice never could.

This hidden spark in Augustine was always there about God being absolute Sovereign which he could never relent when he was a part of the Manichean community which derived its philosophy from Platoism. His spirit was never quiet until it found rest in the Truth. He continued his search and was never satisfied the contemporary philosophies of his time. Augustine was an intellectual prodigy which caused his thirst never to be satisfied unless that could be logically derived.

It is important that we do not treat the Manichaeian and Catholic communities with which Augustine involved himself as two abstract -isms. Nor should we assume that Augustine had familiarity with the full set of attributes we assign to each of these religions from our study of all witnesses to them. Augustine made his allegiances in a specific, regional environment, and in relation to specific individuals or small, immediate circles of people, both as a 'Manichaeian' and as a 'Catholic'. We need to conceive of his time as a Manichaeian in association with close friends such as Alypius, Honoratus, Nebridius, Romanianus, the unnamed friend who died in Thagaste, as well as in contact with the various anonymous Electi to which he refers including, at a critical juncture, the imposing figure of Faustus. Similarly, he found his way to Nicene Christianity in the specific and in some ways peculiar

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conditions of Milan, in relation to individuals such as Ambrose, Simplician, and the several socially well-connected individuals mentioned in his early literary compositions and correspondence. His commitment had to survive his departure from this unique environment in Milan and return to Africa, where he found it impossible to escape the associations of his Manichaean past.

Augustine as a Manichean always professed his loyal commitment to one True Supreme God, to Christ the revealer and saviour, to Paul the true Apostle, to the authority of the New Testament writings, to an ascetic ethic, and to a conception of the self as an exiled soul longing for a return to God.

### **Augustine journey from Manicheanism to Christianity:**

It's not clear as to when and where did Augustine actually draw a distinction between philosophy and religion at that time remains uncertain. We see him struggling with both the ideas. Augustine seems to have read quite a bit of Pythagorean literature, reflecting a model of the life in philosophy in which confession, prayers, hymn-singing, and fasting might all find a place as methods of self-cultivation. Nor was there anything strange in the members of a 'philosophical' group reading and analysing religious myths, as Augustine would have almost immediately discovered the Manichaeans doing.

He would have brought to this experience the intellectual expectation of his culture that a 'myth', by definition, cloaked rational doctrines under symbolic language. Augustine patiently awaited further initiation into these philosophical truths concealed beneath the Manichaean myth, but they never came. They did not come, not because such an allegorical decoding was reserved for the Elect, to whose ranks he did not succeed in advancing. Rather, they did not come because there was no such philosophical decoding of myth in the Manichaean tradition. Whatever we think Mani might have intended by his storytelling, the Manichaean tradition after him had dogmatised his discourse in a strictly literal sense, seeing him as the 'Great Hermeneut' who decoded prior religious discourse, but whose own words were meant in a perfectly plain and literal sense without need of further interpretation. Based on Augustine's later fondness for allegorical interpretations of sacred texts, in line with the broader hermeneutical assumptions of his culture, the Manichaean attitude quite probably suggested to him that they were not as 'philosophical' as he had initially thought.

We don't have the sources to tell us how Augustine's impression of Manichaeism evolved over the decade of his close association with its adherents. How quickly and how well did he become familiar with its full 'religious' content of Manichean understanding? We

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have no substantiated reason to think Augustine was deprived of the basic texts of Manichaeism just because he was a layperson. Nor was Augustine a typical layperson. He was a highly literate person and avid reader; and he refers specifically to reading Manichaean works as a Manichaean. So access to information was not a problem for Augustine.

Augustine had his own peculiar interests, which means, for example, that while he was aware of Manichaean being critics of the Bible, he apparently paid less attention to how Manichaeans used the Bible in more positive expositions of their faith. I think this sort of partial and selective attention and understanding best explains why Augustine, as a Catholic, could be taken by surprise by aspects of Manichaeism he had not fully appreciated when he had adhered to the system, and why we can see him learning more about Manichaeism as he continued to study its texts for polemical purposes. The tension that Augustine's interest in a life in philosophy, and the non-philosophical character of certain Manichean teachings and practices, came to a head in his time with the Manichean bishop Faustus. Faustus in some way shocked and disappointed Augustine's assumptions about what he was doing as a Manichean. That is much clear. But recovering the character of that shock, and its possible consequences for Augustine, is complicated. I have drawn parallels between the stances taken by Faustus and the principles of Academic Scepticism, and suggested how his philosophically - motivate disinterest in defending core Manichean doctrines delivered the shock to Augustine's expectations that ultimately led him out of the Manichean community. Still a few others are not convinced that Faustus' manner of dealing with the questions about Manichean dogma had its inspiration and motivation in an informed philosophical scepticism.

Nevertheless, there is sufficient consistency between the stance he takes in his public discourses, the **CAPITULA**, and what Augustine reports of his private attitudes amongst fellow Manichaeans in **CONFESSIONS** to understand Faustus as adamantly committed to a program of winning assent by reason alone, without resort to authority. This was the Manichean program to Augustine had been won over:

I fell among these people for no other reason than that they declared that they would put aside all overawing authority, and by pure and simple reason would bring to God those who were willing to listen to them, and so deliver them from all error. (Augustinus, *De utilitate credendi* 1.2)

Augustine underlying his spiritual journey is the firm foundation post his conversion is his faith in Christ. Be it his understanding of Christ as a Manichean or a Christian never wavered but his faith in Christ increase from being a mere revealer of Truth to Truth Himself.  
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### **Conclusion:**

So who is this “Christ” to whom he maintained his allegiance? He tells us himself, in the works written around the time of his conversion, and also in hindsight in *Confessions*, where he retrospectively criticises the inadequacy of his understanding of Christ at that time. We note, first, that Christ stands in good company, surrounded by other sages who excelled in immediate perception of truth; Pythagoras, Plato, and Plotinus. Western Manicheans likewise regarded Pythagoras and Plato, alongwith Hermes Trismegistus, as authentic sages of truth. In one sense, Augustine regarded Jesus as simply the most accomplished of these figures, the one who had most perfectly and directly served as a conduit of truth to humanity. Yet there was also the Christ who stood for this truth itself, as the ‘Power and Wisdom of God’. The characterisation, derived from 1 Corinthians 1:24, was a favourite amongst the Manicheans, referring to Christ in his transcendental aspect of nous and dynamis; and it likewise was Augustine’s favourite way of referring to Christ throughout his early post-conversion writings. Above all, Augustine understood Christ in the Manichean sense as a revealer, as a being who even in his death and resurrection simply communicated certain insights and lessons for others to learn. Totally missing from the early Augustine was any sense of Christ’s death as a redemptive work.

Augustine, journeyed through the false assumptions of dualistic god and an inferior god to the God of the Bible who sent forth Christ the Second Person in the Trinity for the redemption of our souls, Christ the express image of God.

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