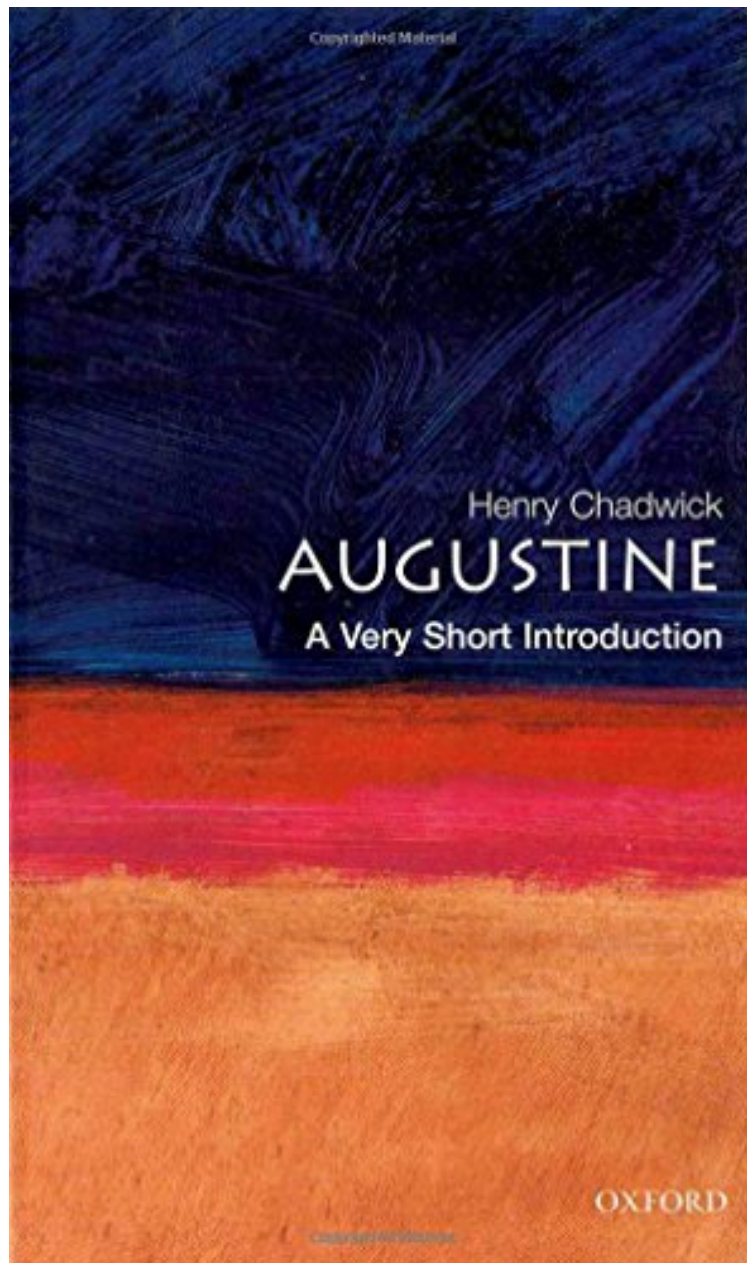


[Free] Augustine: A Very Short Introduction

Augustine: A Very Short Introduction

Henry Chadwick

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Henry Chadwick : Augustine: A Very Short Introduction before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Augustine: A Very Short Introduction:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Henry Chadwick has written an excellent introduction to Augustines

life and thought - and in ...By Garrett WaldenFor a figure as historically and theologically significant as Augustine, secondary sources hardly do him justice. However, Henry Chadwick has written an excellent introduction to Augustines life and thought - and in only 134 pages! This accessible introduction is the perfect starting point for those interested in church history and Augustines influence. SummaryChadwick insists that Augustine must be read in the context of the ancient world, factoring in how he was shaped by the literature and philosophy of Greece and Rome (5). Therefore, in every chapter of the book Chadwick details the philosophical and religious influences that undergirded the way that Augustines thought. He especially highlights the transformation and maturation of his views prior to and after his conversion. He lays out the relevant events of Augustines life in a way that supplements much of the material in Confessions, rather than repeats it. Chadwick specifically focuses on the foundation that Platonism played in Augustines embrace the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith. He points out that Augustines background in Manichee dualism invoked his study of the relationship of Gods sovereignty and human responsibility, particularly in reconciling the problem of evil with the character of God as revealed in the Scriptures (40). He shows how Augustine connected his profound philosophy with his desire for community - understanding requires love to attain its end (53). In other words, we come to true understanding by loving God and neighbor. Chadwick is intentional to show that Augustine was not a controversialist always debating abstract philosophical and theological trivialities. Augustine had a deep love for Christs church and actively sought its unity and health. He describes the historical events that led to a split between the Donatists and the rest of the church. In spite of Donatist violence and exclusivism, Augustine remained an irenic, though convictional, voice in the African church. He later explains Augustines conflict with Pelagius, however, he is intentional to state that Pelagius and Augustine agreed on far more than they disagreed. Chadwick points out how the beauty and unity of the universal church served as a significant means which the Lord used to bring about Augustines conversion. A figure as historically massive as Augustine certainly warrants an analysis of his societal impact and interpersonal relationships during his time. Shortly after his conversion and prior to his ordination, Augustine lived in a monastic-like commune with many of his friends and followers. As for Augustines vocation, Chadwick tells how Augustine was forcibly ordained as a presbyter while visiting Hippo, a role for which he felt particularly unfit. He remained in a relatively ascetic lifestyle, encouraging his congregation to do the same as they carried out their lay vocations. It was his experience as a pastor which enabled him to consider the nature of sin in relation to the Christian with greater understanding - this led him into a thorough examination of Christian ethics and the human will. Chadwick explains that Augustine was distrusted by some because of his cleverness and past as a Manichee. Therefore, during his first three years as bishop of Hippo, he wrote his Confessions. Chadwick expounds on Augustines fascination with infants, the role of friendships, memory, and time. Augustine shows how his thought on all of these topics demonstrate that he is thoroughly Christian and not a Manichee in any technical way. Chadwick goes on to explain how Augustine viewed the distinction between male and female - Augustines language being far from both the modern egalitarian and complementarian positions. This leads Chadwick into a long description of how Augustines thought developed regarding sexuality, including his treatise On the Good of Marriage. Chadwick explains Augustines engagement with politics through City of God. He gives an historical survey of the political conflict between the Roman government and Christians. He writes that the book was written as a defense of the Christian faith and as an appeal that the Christian worldview alone provides the path to true human flourishing. However, the reality of sin forced Augustine to see that true peace can only come in the age to come. Yet with that conviction, Augustine had a high view of earthly government as means of Gods providential care for the suppressing of mans sin caused by the Fall. Chadwick then describes the impact that mathematics, and especially music, had on Augustines spirituality and philosophical thought. Augustine saw that geometrical and metrical symmetry gives an objective value to beauty. This led him to an analytical exploration of the role and capacity of human language in describing transcendental absolutes. Chadwick details Augustines wrestling with the allegorical and literal interpretations of Genesis 1-3. Chadwick concludes with a brief note on Augustines legacy throughout church history. CriticismIn striving with the tension between thoroughness and brevity, Chadwick delves too deep and too quickly into the details of several of the philosophical systems that affected Augustines life and thought. It can hardly be overstated how important the thought and work of Cicero, Mani, Plotinus, and Porphyry were for Augustine, but in Chapter 1 Chadwick launches straight into the deep end, leaving the unprepared reader to drown. The first chapter of the book would be appropriate for the reader with a background in philosophy and Greco-Roman literature, but for a brief introduction to Augustines life and thought, Chadwick loses the untrained reader in philosophical jargon. It is frustrating that Chadwick seems to say that Augustine incorporates the secular and pagan influences into the Christian faith. For instance, he writes, After his conversion, Augustine sought to correct Plotinus mistakes (20). Chadwick elsewhere summarizes Augustine as believing that from Plato to Christ was hardly more than a short and simple step (26). Later Chadwick writes, Platonist though Augustine was (p. 99). Chadwick closes chapter 1 by reiterating Augustines philosophical mash up of the pagan and biblical by writing, It was momentous that he brought together Plotinus negative, impersonal language about the One or Absolute and the biblical concept of God as love, power, justice, and forgiveness (31). In chapter two, he writes that Platonism was not something Augustine could leave unamended (33). So Augustine is depicted as baptizing secular philosophical systems (particularly Neoplatonism), modifying them enough to pass for Christian

orthodoxy. While I can acknowledge the common grace of similarity in some aspects of worldviews, how does this square with the biblical teaching of how the gospel is foolishness to the secular philosophical systems of the world? I was displeased with how despiritualized Chadwick presented Augustine's conversion. He conveyed his conversion almost exclusively in intellectual terms, stating the fact that he was weakened by poor health, implying that his judgment was consequently weakened (26). At one place, Chadwick asserts that Augustine was really seeking a sort of book club for Christianized Platonists (29). Anyone who can read *Confessions* and miss the deep spiritual motivations and desperation surrounding his conversion seems to have presuppositions that disallow those factors from driving the narrative. Regarding more intramural debates, it is fascinating, though not objectionable, that in Chapter 7 Chadwick writes that Augustine denied that the Petrine confession referred to Peter, saying "We Christians believe not in Peter, but in him whom Peter believed" (87). I would be interested to read a Roman Catholic's understanding regarding what Augustine believed concerning apostolic succession. Also, in Chapter 10, I would have liked to have seen some references cited in Chadwick's description of Augustine as a paedobaptist (118). I have to keep reminding myself that Augustine is not a twenty-first century evangelical; there are some important differences between his thought and the thought of much of the modern Western church, both for good and ill. Yet I am persuaded that Augustine has much to teach us concerning the interface of the church with the government and irenic engagement in theological dialogue. The current state of the church of Christ owes much to the legacy of Augustine and an introduction like Chadwick's is a wonderful tribute to his life and thought.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Reads like a rough draft of Chadwick's book "Augustine of Hippo: A Life" By Henry Chadwick was -- and still is, posthumously -- one of the finest Augustine scholars in the world. Chadwick starts his analysis in this "very short introduction" by listing "the debates which have been part of [Augustine's] legacy" (p. 2). Chadwick's contention is not only that Augustine has made a lasting contribution to seven major issues listed in the first pages of the book, but rather and more generally, that Augustine still is today a leading source of inspiration on nearly every aspect of religious life. I will mention only a few. (The book consists of ten short chapters that present Augustine's thought in an evolutionary perspective, hence it can hardly be summarized in a short review.) Of great historical importance is Augustine's acceptance of Neoplatonism, and for more than ten years, of Manichaeism. Both schools taught a contempt for the body. According to Plotinus and other Neoplatonists, it is "by abstinence from meat and sexual activity [that] the soul could be gradually emancipated from its bodily fetters." After his conversion and his rejection of Manichaeism, Augustine "regarded sexual union with revulsion as a 'bitter sweetness'" (p. 28). This disdain for the body was even accentuated in the last years of his life and in his fight against Pelagianism. Through the centuries and to this day, Christianity has constantly vacillated between various forms of Neoplatonism, Manichaeism, and Pelagianism. Other topics of timeless significance are Augustine's discussion of the relationship between faith and reason (in philosophy as well as in science, in reference to creation and evolution); the various levels of Biblical exegesis (the literal versus the allegorical interpretation); the importance of free will and role of the unconscious (the 'longing,' that lies too deep for words); the relativity of religious absolutes (the Israelite patriarchs were polygamous); the role of prayer as an effort to conform the faithful's will to God's and not the reverse; and last but not least, his grandiose vision of the "two cities" that both must contribute to justice and peace in this world, neither through the subordination of one to the other, nor through progressive secularization. These are just some of the themes upon which Chadwick touches. As a short, relatively inexpensive introduction to Augustine's timeless insights, this book can find its way into most religionists' libraries.

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Chadwick's Introduction is a Pleasure to Read By G. Kyle Essary This book was an absolute pleasure to read. Henry Chadwick's erudition is evident in his writing, but his style keeps the reading highly enjoyable. Anyone should be able to sit down with this book and read it in a matter of hours enjoying every minute of it. This is not a biography of Augustine's life as much as a biography of Augustine's thought. It traces the development of his thought in neoplatonism and his reliance upon Plotinus in particular, his time as a follower, but later opponent against Manichaeism and his prolonged arguments against Donatism. The book is not comprehensive, but gives brief introductions to Augustine's thoughts on Creation, Trinity, Politics, Sacerdotalism, and a few other topics and shows how they developed through his life and ministry. I highly recommend this short volume and would suggest that it would be a perfect read for a short introduction to Augustine at an undergraduate level.

Augustine was arguably the greatest early Christian philosopher. His teachings had a profound effect on Medieval scholarship, Renaissance humanism, and the religious controversies of both the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. Here, Henry Chadwick places Augustine in his philosophical and religious context and traces the history of his influence on Western thought, both within and beyond the Christian tradition. A handy account to one of the greatest religious thinkers, this *Very Short Introduction* is both a useful guide for the one who seeks to know Augustine and a fine companion for the one who wishes to know him better.

About the Series: Combining authority with wit, accessibility, and style, *Very Short Introductions* offer an introduction to some of life's most interesting topics. Written by experts for the newcomer, they demonstrate the finest contemporary thinking about the central problems and issues in hundreds of key topics, from philosophy to Freud, quantum theory to Islam.

"The ten chapters of this volume discuss Augustine's views of free choice, vocation, creation, and other societal questions, while it also reveals biographical facts of the sage's life."--Worship and Arts

"The book is a marvel of comprehension achieved without a loss of clarity. As a connected account of Augustine, the thinker, it will doubtless stand as among the most popular which now exist."--International Philosophical Quarterly

"I do not know of any other summary of the mind of Augustine which serves the reader so well."--History: s of New Books

"The best brief introduction to Augustine's context and thought for the beginning undergraduate. Excellent for history, philosophy, and religion courses--clear, elegant, thorough."--Robert I. Burns, University of California, Los Angeles

"All the main thought elements of Augustine set in the attractively told narrative of a fascinating life."--John J. Glanville, San Francisco State University

About the Author

Henry Chadwick (1920-2008) enjoyed international renown as one of the leading church historians of the twentieth century. He held senior appointments at both Oxford and Cambridge Universities, latterly as Emeritus Regius Professor of Divinity, Cambridge. Chadwick's scholarship was complemented by his active involvement in church life. Ordained a priest in the Church of England in 1944, he developed a deep commitment to church unity and took a leading role in the Anglican and Roman Catholic dialogues of the mid-1970s. Chadwick authored numerous books and articles throughout his career. At Oxford University Press he held series editorship of Oxford Early Christian Texts and Oxford Early Christian Studies, and co-edited the Oxford History of the Christian Church series with his brother, Professor Owen Chadwick. His acclaimed translation of Augustine's Confessions is available from Oxford World Classics.