



Augustine 354-430

Despite the extensive nature of Augustine's writings - for he was arguably the most influential Christian thinker in the West for almost a millennium - he is beloved as much for being a personal model as for his scholarly inspiration. This is undoubtedly due to the popularity of his *Confessions*, an autobiography wherein he describes his early education, his attachment to the Manichaean belief, and his final conversion to Roman Christianity. The line of the *Confessions* (9:2), "You had pierced our hearts with the arrows of your love," inspired Augustine's symbol of a flaming heart pierced by two arrows, depicted in the lunette above his head.

The saint's conversion from a philosophy that conceived of the universe as a duality of good and evil to the Christian belief in an omnipotent good was a deep concern of his mother, St. Monica. In the *Confessions* he writes of Monica's love of God and her influence on him: "My mother had come to me, for her piety had given her strength to follow me over land and sea, facing all perils in the sure faith she had in You. In her prayers to You she wept for me as if I were dead" (*Confessions*, 6:1). In popular tradition, Monica's tears were an oft-cited aspect of the role of the attentive mother. The *Golden* quotes a bishop she pursued to intercede on behalf of Augustine: "It cannot be," the bishop says, "that the child of so many tears should perish." Directly above Augustine's name is a small portrait of Augustine and his mother. The image is based on a mid-nineteenth century painting by the then-popular artist Ary Scheffer, showing Monica holding Augustine's hands in hers and looking up to heaven with an expression of faith, eagerness and hope. Jameson's *Sacred and Legendary Art* is the source of the image.



The moment of conversion is dramatic. Augustine, after much debate with a companion on the nature of the good and of grace, absents himself to the solitude of a garden. From behind a wall a child's voice is heard: *tolle lege, tolle lege* (take up and read) (*Confessions*, 8:12). Augustine understood this as an invitation to take up the Scriptures, which he did. The book fell open to a passage from St. Paul. Upon reading, Augustine's self-doubts disappeared, and he resolved to become a candidate for baptism. The narrative panel shows the moment of his baptism at the age of thirty-two by St. Ambrose in 387. With Augustine is his son, Adeodatus, the result of his liaison with a concubine when he was a student. His mother, Monica, and four attendants observe. Augustine had attended Ambrose's sermons in Milan, which were a powerful influence on his theology.



In the central panel Augustine is dressed in a bishop's robes and carries a crosier, the staff of office modeled after a shepherd's crook. He served for thirty-five years as bishop of Hippo, a city in Northern Africa. He also holds a book bearing the Latin words, *tolle lege*. To the left of the saint are tongues of fire and in their midst the word *veritas* (truth) to indicate his lifelong thirst for truth, slaked only by Christianity. The lowest border of the window shows an oil lamp, a common representation of wisdom. The border panels continue with symbols of Augustine's name, the letter A, and the name of Christ, depicted by the Chi Rho, the first two letters of the word Christ in Greek.

