



BOOK V: Augustine Encounters Ambrose

Confessions 5.13.23 - 5.14.25; Boulding Translation, pp. 91-93

Passage Summary

Augustine earns a teaching post in Milan, meets Bishop Ambrose for the first time, starts to question his uncertainty about the Catholic religion.

App Integrations

- Digital Highlighting & Annotation
- Synchronized Audio
- Art Gallery

Learning Objectives

- Analysis and discussion
- Close reading of primary texts
- Personal reflection
- Use of secondary source(s)

Out-Of-Class Assignment Suggestions

- Read Augustine's account of his encounter with Ambrose.
- As you read, highlight all the characteristics Augustine notes about Ambrose. Summarize these highlights with the annotation feature.
- Press on the text "Bishop Ambrose" highlighted in red; this will take you to an image of Ambrose contained in the Art Gallery, a stain-glassed window on Villanova's Campus. Consider how this image conveys Augustine's impression of Ambrose, whom he greatly admired.

In-Class Assignment Suggestions

- Invite students to name a person who has had a great effect on their life: a teacher, a parent, someone they consider to be wise now, but may not have thought so for a long time.
- Listen to the passage where Augustine introduces Ambrose using the audio. Invite students to share characteristics about Ambrose that stand out.
- Open a discussion about Augustine's state of mind at this time. Where is he in relation to the Catholic faith? In relation to his former beliefs? Connect his state of mind to the experience of being at college.
- Highlight Augustine's attraction to the eloquence of Ambrose. Why is eloquence a problem? How is it effective? Note 14.24: "Nonetheless as his words, which I enjoyed, penetrated my mind, the substance, which I overlooked, seeped in with them, for I could not separate the two."
- You might end by speculating why Augustine decides to become a catechumen in the Church (14.25). Why would he do so, if he lacked the certainty of belief that he seems to require? Would we ever do the same?

Further Connections

Confessions: As the Commentary by Fr. Allan Fitzgerald notes, Ambrose returns in Book VI to haunt Augustine even more. The eloquence of the Bishop continues to draw Augustine, suggesting Augustine's judgment is mixed on the value of rhetoric. The theme of rhetoric returns again in Book IX, where Augustine decides to abandon his rhetoric profession to seek wisdom.

Augustine and Culture: Dante's *Divine Comedy*, particularly *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, depicts figures in liminal positions with respect to the truth, such as Augustine appears to be in this scene; Augustine's emphasis on certainty pairs well with Kant's "What is Enlightenment" and Descartes' *Meditations*, though Augustine disagrees with their conclusions about faith.