

it was the Lord's will that Augustine should assist their minister. Reluctantly Augustine left his life of contemplation and study, and took up the active duties of assistant pastor in a small parish in a minor town in North Africa.

Before many years the old minister died and Augustine succeeded him.

As soon as he took up his duties as assistant pastor, Augustine began to devote himself to meeting the needs of every member of the congregation. He found that many of them were attracted by the teachings of the group in Hippo which belonged to the widespread cult known as the Manichaeans. Earlier in his life Augustine himself had been attracted by the teachings of this cult, which were based originally upon Christianity, but which departed from it at its most vital points. The Manichaeans taught that life was a dualism, with flesh and spirit fighting against each other. They held that everything physical was evil. This is very far from the teaching of true Christianity, which uses the term "flesh" to mean the sinful, selfish desires of the individual, not simply that which is physical. Paul calls on Christians to offer their bodies to the Lord as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable (Romans 12:1,2). Everything physical is good, if consecrated to the Lord and used for His glory. It is not the physical that is wrong, but the misuse of the physical.

Augustine challenged the leader of the Manichaean congregation to a debate. Many expected him easily to overcome this young assistant minister, and his congregation eagerly gathered to hear Augustine bested. However, Augustine was thoroughly familiar with the Manichaean teaching and also with the Bible, and was easily able to show the greater truth and superior value of the Biblical teaching. Not only did the Manichaeans cease to draw people from the Christian Church, but the Christian Church soon began to receive accessions from the Manichaeans.

In the midst of a busy pastoral life Augustine found time to take up all the burning problems of his day and to deal with them extensively in writing. A large sect called the Donatists had churches all over North Africa. Augustine