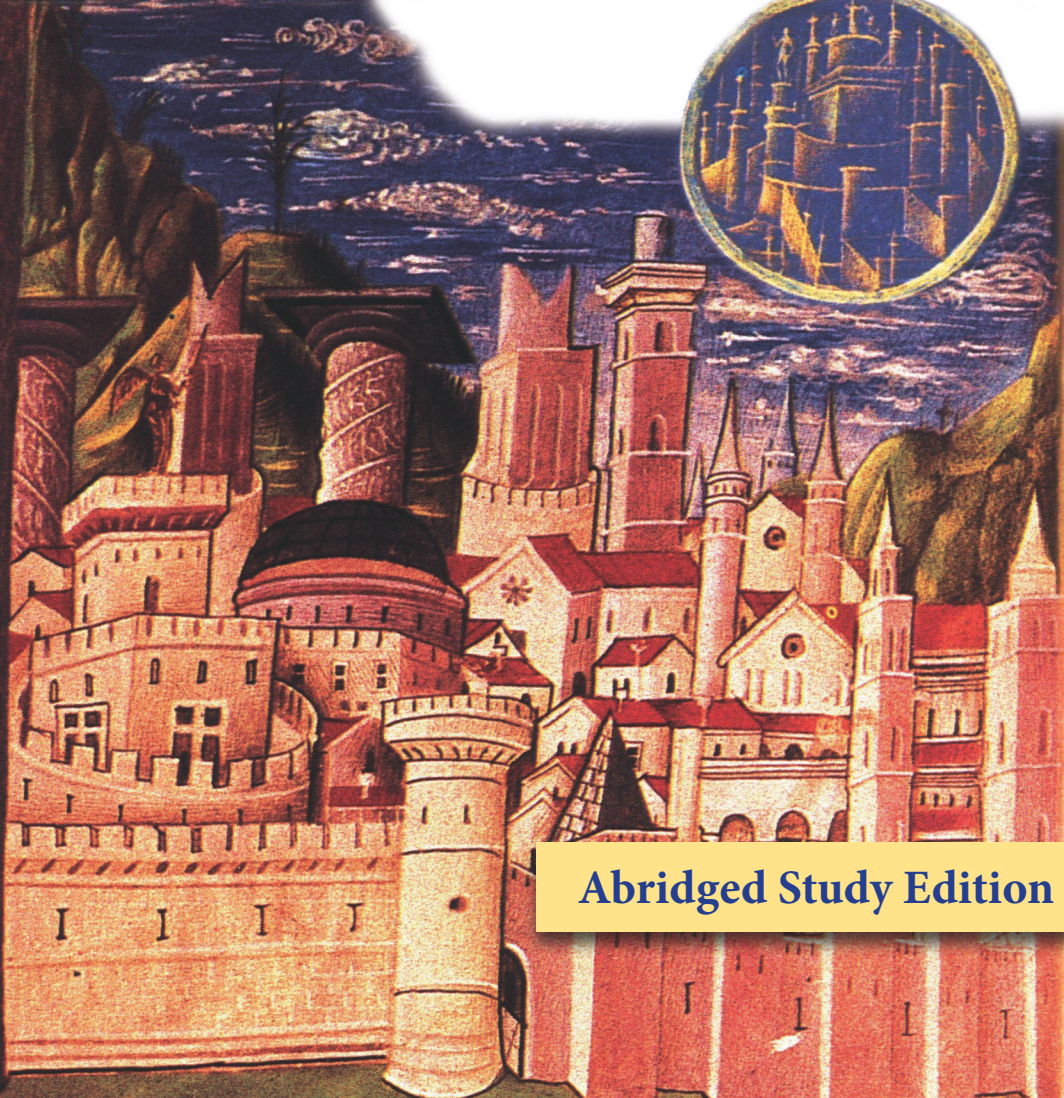


SAINT AUGUSTINE

*the*  
**City of God**

*de civitate dei*



**Abridged Study Edition**

# **The City of God**

*(DE CIVITATE DEI)*

Abridged Study Edition

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THE WORKS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE

A Translation for the 21st Century

**The City of God**

Abridged Study Edition

*THE WORKS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE*

A Translation for the 21st Century

# **The City of God**

Abridged Study Edition

*introduction and translation*

William Babcock

*notes*

Boniface Ramsey  
(general editor)

*abridgment*

Joseph T. Kelley



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## CONTENTS

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| Preface to the Abridged Study Edition .....  | xi    |
| Introduction .....   | xiii  |
| The Text.....  | xiii  |
| The Sack of Rome and The City of God (Book I) — xiv; Rome’s Gods and Earthly Happiness (Books II-V) — xviii; Rome’s Gods and Happiness in Life after Death (Books VI-X) — xxi; The Origins of the Two Cities (Books XI-XIV) — xxvi; The Eternal Destinies of the Two Cities (Books XIX-XXII) — xxxviii   |       |
| The Translation.....   | li    |
| A Select Bibliography .....  | lviii |
| <i>Revisions II,43 (70)</i> .....  | lix   |
| Book I.....  | 1     |
| Barbarian Respect for Christ’s Churches as Places of Sanctuary — 2; Rome’s “Conquered Gods” — 3; Divine Providence, Human Suffering, and Temporal Goods and Evils — 5; Why the Good also Suffered in the Sack of Rome: Failure to Correct the Evil — 7; Forms of Christian Suffering: Loss of Riches — 8; Forms of Christian Suffering: Torture and Famine — 9; Forms of Christian Suffering: Dreadful Types of Death and Death without Burial — 10; Forms of Christian Suffering: Captivity — 12; Captivity: the Example of Regulus and His Loyalty to His Gods — 12; Forms of Christian Suffering: Rape; Moral Purity and the Issue of Suicide — 13; Rape and Suicide: the Example of Lucretia — 15; Suicide: the Example of Cato — 16; Is Suicide Permissible to Avoid Sin? — 18; The Perils of Unfettered Prosperity: Scipio Nasica against Roman Extravagance — 21; The Theaters and the Gods — 22; The Intermingling of the Two Cities in this World — 23; Study Questions for Book I — 25 |       |
| Book II .....  | 27    |
| The Disasters that Afflicted Rome Prior to the Coming of Christ — 27; The Failure of the Gods to Provide Moral Guidance: the Rites of the Mother of the Gods — 28; Did the Gods Sponsor any Public Teaching of Virtue? — 29; The Fables of the Poets and the Shows in the Theaters — 30; The Greeks and the Romans on Poets and Actors — 31; Plato on the Poets — 33; The Natural “Justice and Goodness” of the Romans — 34; Roman Morality, the Constraint of Fear, and the Destruction of Carthage — 35; The Issue of Justice and Scipio’s Definition of a Republic — 38; Scipio’s Definition of a Republic — 39; Cicero: the Republic Has Perished — 40; Had the Gods Withdrawn? — 41; The Gods and the Civil Wars: Marius — 42; Christianity’s Public Teaching — 44; An Exhortation to the Romans to Abandon their False Gods — 44   |       |
| Book III.....  | 47    |
| The Fall of Troy: the Gods and Laomedon’s Perjury — 48; The Fall of Troy: the Gods and Paris’s Adultery — 48; Troy and Adultery, Rome and Fratricide — 49;   |       |

The Peace of Numa's Reign — 50; The Seizing of the Sabine Women — 52; The War with Alba — 54; The Deaths of the Kings — 55; From the Expulsion of the Kings to the Second Punic War: the First Consuls — 56; From the Expulsion of the Kings to the Second Punic War: Conflict between Patricians and Plebeians — 56; From the Expulsion of the Kings to the Second Punic War: Famines, Plagues, and Wars — 57; The Second Punic War: Hannibal — 58; The Second Punic War: the Destruction of Saguntum — 58; From the Second to the Final Punic War: the Maltreatment of Scipio and the Cultivation of Luxury — 60; From the Punic Wars to Augustus: the Massacre of the Romans under Mithridates — 61; Evils Internal to the Republic: Civil Strife and Civil War — 62; Civil War: Marius and Sulla — 63; Civil Wars in the Time of Augustus — 64; These Evils All Occurred Prior to Christianity, when the Gods Were Still Worshiped — 65; Study Questions for Book III — 67

Book IV ..... 69

The Basis for Rome's Expansion — 70; The Evaluation of Empire — 70; The Gods and the Rise and Fall of Assyrian Rule — 72; Which of the Gods Aided the Expansion of Rome? — 73; The Greater Gods: Jupiter and the Elements of the Universe — 74; Jupiter as the One God in All — 75; Why not Worship the One God Alone? — 77; God as the Soul of the World, the World as the Body of God — 78; Victory, Just War, and Foreign Iniquity — 79; The Goddesses Felicity and Fortune — 80; Virtue and the Virtues: not Goddesses but Gifts of God — 81; Virtue and Felicity — 82; The Naming of Gods for Their Gifts and the God Who Gives Happiness — 82; Three Views of the Gods — 84; Rome's Gods Incapable of Extending or Preserving Rome's Empire — 85; Cicero and Varro on Superstition, Images of the Gods, and the Religion of the Populace — 86; The One True God Is the God Who Gives Earthly Kingdoms — 89; Study Questions for Book IV — 91

Book V ..... 93

Neither Chance nor Fate Caused Rome's Greatness — 94; Against Astrological Fatalism: the Case of Twins — 94; Against Astrological Fatalism: "Auspicious" Days — 97; Fate as the Chain of Causes — 98; Cicero's Argument on Foreknowledge and Free Will — 98; Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom — 100; The Giver of Empire is the True God — 104; Roman Love of Glory and Roman Virtue — 105; The Divine Gift of Empire to Rome: an Earthly Reward for Earthly Virtue — 107; The Roman Example: an Antidote to Christian Pride — 109; The Difference between the Desire for Glory and the Desire for Domination — 110; God Is the One Who Grants Power both to Kingdoms and to Individuals — 112; The Good Christian Emperor — 113; The Emperor Theodosius — 115; Study Questions for Book V — 118

Book VI ..... 119

The Issue: Are the Gods to Be Worshiped for the Sake of Eternal Life? — 120; Varro and His Work on Roman Religion — 121; Varro's Three Types of Theology — 122; The Intertwining of the Mythical and Civic Theologies — 125; The Implied Aim of Varro's Account of Civic Theology — 126; Seneca's Boldness and Varro's Timidity — 129; Seneca on the Jews — 130; Neither the Mythical nor the Civic Theology Holds the Promise of Eternal Life — 131; Study Questions for Book VI — 132

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Book VII .....  | 133 |
| The Select Gods and Their Functions — 134; The Absurdities and Inconsistencies in Varro's Account of the Select Gods — 135; The Indecent Acts Attributed to the Select Gods — 136; Varro's Naturalistic Interpretations of the Select Gods — 137; To Worship the World or the World's Soul Is not to Worship the True God — 139; The One True God and His Works — 140; Numa's Explanations of the Rites that He Instituted — 143; Study Questions for Book VII — 146  |     |
| Book VIII .....   | 147 |
| Plato's Predecessors — 149; Socrates — 150; The Superiority of the Platonists — 153; The Closeness of the Platonists to Christianity — 157; The Issue: the Worship of Many Gods — 161; The Platonists on the Demons: Apuleius — 162; Hermes Trismegistus on the Demons: the Art of Making Gods and the Coming Abolition of the Gods — 163; Hermes's Lament and the Memorial Shrines of Christian Martyrs — 168; Christians Do not Worship the Martyrs — 168; Study Questions for Book VIII — 170  |     |
| Book IX .....   | 171 |
| Apuleius on the Demons and the Passions — 172; Philosophic Views of the Passions — 173; Scripture on the Passions — 175; The Demons' Mind, the Highest Part of the Soul, Is Subject to the Passions — 176; The Demons: Immortal Body, Vice-Ridden Soul — 177; Evil Mediators and the Good Mediator — 178; God, the Gods, the Demons and the Issue of Contamination by Human Contact — 179; Good Angels Are not Good Demons — 181; The Pride of the Demons, the Humility of Christ, and the Good Angels — 181; Good Angels and the Gods — 183; Conclusion: neither Angels nor Demons Are Mediators to Be Worshipped for the Sake of Eternal Life — 183; Study Questions for Book IX — 185  |     |
| Book X .....  | 187 |
| The One Source of Happiness, both Human and Angelic — 189; The Significance of the Sacrifices Commanded under the Old Law: the Self Directed to God in Love — 191; Porphyry on Theurgy and the Purification of the Soul — 194; The Visible Miracles and Visible Appearances of the Invisible God — 195; Divine Providence, the Education of Humanity, and the Giving of the Law — 196; Angels, Miracles, and the Worship of God — 197; Sacrifice, the Angels, and the Worship of God — 199; Porphyry on the Principles and the Purification of the Soul — 200; Christ: the True Mediator and the True Principle of Our Purification — 202; Porphyry on the Angels and the Theurgic Arts — 203; Porphyry's Failure to Recognize the Truth: Pride and Humility — 204; Corrections of Plato — 207; The Soul Has not Always Existed — 208; The Universal Way of the Soul's Liberation — 209; Study Questions for Book X — 213 |     |
| Book XI .....   | 215 |
| Faith, the Mediator, and the Authority of Scripture — 217; Creation, Time, and the Immutability of God — 218; The Days of Creation and the Forms of Knowledge — 221; The Creation of the Angels — 222; The Divine Simplicity — 223; The Angelic Fall — 224; The Case of the Devil — 226; The Separation of the Holy Angels from the Fallen Angels — 228; The Goodness of God and the Goodness of Creation — 228; Traces of the Trinity in Creation — 232; The   |     |



Holy Angels and Their Knowledge — 235; Alternative Views of the Creation of the Angels — 236; Conclusion — 237; Study Questions for Book XI — 238

Book XII .....239

The Difference between the Good and the Evil Angels: not Nature but Fault — 240; The Cause of the First Evil Will — 243; The Cause of the Good Will of the Good Angels — 245; The Origin of Humankind — 246; The “Date” of Man’s Creation — 248; Against Theories of World Cycles — 249; Eternity and Time — 250; Time, Infinity, and the Divine Knowledge — 252; Ultimate Happiness: the Refutation of the Theory of World Cycles — 254; God’s Creation of the Human Race from One Man — 255; God the Sole Creator — 257; Humanity’s Social Character — 259; Study Questions for Book XII — 261

Book XIII .....263

The Meanings of Death — 264; Death as Punishment — 265; The Death of the Saints — 267; “Before Death,” “after Death,” and “in Death” — 268; The Threat of Death — 270; The Body and Ultimate Blessedness — 271; The Issue of the Eternity of the Body — 273; Against the View that the Earthly Body Cannot Be in Heaven — 274; Self-Contradictions in the Platonic View of the Body — 274; The Body in Paradise — 277; Spiritual Interpretations of Paradise — 277; The Resurrected Body — 279; The Animal Body and the Spiritual Body — 279; The Question of Human Sexuality before the Fall — 281; Study Questions for Book XIII — 282

Book XIV .....283

Living according to the Flesh and Living according to the Spirit — 285; The Meaning of “Flesh” — 286; Living according to Man, or Self, and Living according to God — 287; The Flesh, or the Body, Is not Evil — 288; The Will, the Passions, and Love — 288; The Passions in the City of God — 291; The Emotions and the Future Life — 293; Emotion in the First Human Beings — 295; The First Evil Will — 296; The Human Fall — 298; The Evil Will Precedes the Evil Act — 299; Humility and Pride — 300; The Punishment of Sin — 302; Lust, Human Sexuality, and the Sense of Shame — 303; Human Procreation Prior to the Fall — 305; Sexuality before the Fall — 306; The Happiness of Paradise — 308; Man’s Sin and God’s Foreknowledge — 309; Two Loves Have Made Two Cities — 310; Study Questions for Book XIV — 311

Book XV .....313

Cain and Abel, the Earthly City and the Heavenly City — 314; Israel: the Earthly Image of the Heavenly City — 315; The Earthly City and the Heavenly City, Born of Nature and Born of Grace — 316; The Goods of the Earthly City and the Conflicts to Which They Give Rise — 317; Conflict between the Two Cities: the Flesh and the Spirit — 319; The Presentation of the Two Cities in the Lines of Descent from Cain and Seth — 320; The Long Lives of the Ancients — 321; The Intermingling of the Two Cities: the Sons of God and the Daughters of Men — 323; The Flood, Noah, and the Ark — 324; The Flood: History and Allegory — 326; Study Questions for Book XV — 328

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Book XVI.....  | 329 |
| The Prophetic Significance of Noah and His Sons — 329; The Tower of Confusion and the Diversity of Human Languages — 332; Are Monstrous Races Descended from Noah and thus from Adam? — 333; The Line of Descent from Shem — 335; The City of God among the Peoples of Earth — 336; Heber and the Hebrew Language — 337; A Turning Point: Abraham — 338; The First of God’s Promises to Abraham — 339; The Second Promise to Abraham — 340; The Third Promise to Abraham — 342; Abraham’s Vision at Mamre — 343; Abraham’s Sons: the Birth of Ishmael and the Promise of Isaac — 347; God’s Appearance to Abraham at Mamre — 349; The Birth and the Sacrifice of Isaac — 350; Abraham’s Marriage to Keturah — 352; The Twins Born to Isaac — 353; God’s Promise to Isaac — 354; The Blessing of Jacob — 355; Jacob and Joseph — 357; From Moses to David — 360; Study Questions for Book XVI — 363   |     |
| Book XVII .....  | 365 |
| The Age of the Prophets — 365; The Types of Prophecy — 368; The Prophecy of Hannah, Mother of Samuel — 370; The Transformation of the Priesthood: the Prophecy to Eli — 372; The Transformation of the Kingship: Saul and Samuel — 373; David, Solomon, and the Prophetic Anticipation of Christ — 376; David’s Prophecies of Christ and the Church: the Psalms — 378; Solomon’s Prophecies of Christ and the Church — 380; Prophecy after Solomon — 381; Study Questions for Book XVII — 384;   |     |
| Book XVIII.....  | 385 |
| The Divisions in Human Society — 386; Assyria as the “First Rome” and Rome as the “Second Babylon” — 387; The End of Assyria and the Founding of Rome — 388; Sibylline Prophecies of Christ — 389; The Antiquity of Prophetic Wisdom — 394; The Superiority of Divine Wisdom over Human Philosophy — 398; The Translation of Hebrew Scripture into Greek: the Septuagint — 400; The Coming of Christ in Fulfillment of Prophecy — 403; The Spreading of the Church: Persecutions and Consolations — 405; The Persecutions of the Church — 407; Study Questions for Book XVIII — 410  |     |
| Book XIX .....   | 411 |
| The Ends of the Two Cities: the Supreme Good and the Supreme Evil — 411; Varro: Possible Positions on the Supreme Good — 412; Varro’s Position on the Supreme Good and the Life of Happiness — 414; The Supreme Good and the Supreme Evil according to the City of God: Eternal Life and Eternal Death — 419; Happiness, the Supreme Good, Cannot Be Found in this Life — 419; The Struggle of the Virtues against the Vices: Temperance, Prudence, and Justice — 420; Fortitude and the Question of Suicide — 421; The Miseries of Social Life: the Household and the City — 424; The Miseries of Social Life: the World — 426; The Miseries of Social Life: the Angels and the Demons — 428; The Meanings of Peace — 429; The Universal Desire for Peace — 430; Peace and Order — 434; Earthly Peace and Eternal Peace — 436; Sin and Slavery — 437; Earthly Peace and the Two Cities — 440; The Issues of Certainty and Style of Life — 441; The Definition of a Republic — 443; Justice and the True God: against Porphyry |     |

— 445; An Alternate Definition of a People — 451; Earthly Peace and the City of God — 452; The Supreme Evil: Eternal Misery — 454; Study Questions for Book XIX — 455

Book XX

457

The Day of Judgment — 458; God's Inscrutable Justice — 459; Testimonies to the Last Judgment from Scripture — 460; Testimonies from the Gospel of Matthew: Judgment and Resurrection — 461; Testimonies from the Gospel of John: the First and the Second Resurrection — 461; Testimonies from the Book of Revelation: the Binding of the Devil for a Thousand Years — 462; The Releasing of the Devil — 467; The Thousand-Year Reign of the Saints — 467; The Last Judgment, the Second Resurrection, and the Book of Life — 470; The New Jerusalem — 472; Testimonies from the Apostle Paul: the Coming of Antichrist — 473; Paul on the Resurrection of the Dead — 476; Testimonies from the Prophet Isaiah: the Separate Ends of the Good and the Evil — 477; Testimonies from the Psalms: the Perishing of the World and Christ's Coming as Judge — 478; Testimonies from Malachi: the Purification of the Saints and Their Pure Offering to God — 478; How the Old Testament Points to Christ as Judge — 480; The Events of the Last Judgment — 484; Study Questions for Book XX — 486

Book XXI ..... 487

The Body and Eternal Fire — 488; The Issue of Eternal Pain — 489; The Issue of Survival in Eternal Fire: Natural Wonders and the Power of God — 490; The Issue of the Nature and Properties of Human Flesh — 496; The Worm and the Fire: Eternal Punishment of Both Body and Soul — 497; The Issue of the Just Correlation of Temporal Sin and Eternal Punishment — 499; The Issue of Remedial or Purgatorial Punishment — 500; All Human Life on Earth is a Trial — 501; The Warfare of Flesh against Spirit and of Spirit against Flesh — 502; The Question of Divine Mercy and Eternal Punishment: Erroneous Views — 504; Reply to Error: the Devil and His Angels Will Suffer Eternal Punishment — 507; Reply to Error: Eternal Punishment is Eternal — 508; Reply to Error: the Intercession of the Saints and the Prayers of the Church — 508; Reply to Error: Who It Is That Is Saved as through Fire — 509; Reply to Error: the Issue of Works of Mercy — 511; Study Questions for Book XXI — 515

Book XXII ..... 517

The Will of God and the Fulfillment of the Divine Promise — 519; The Miracle of the World's Belief in the Resurrection — 520; Miracles of the Present — 522; The Witness of the Martyrs — 529; Questions about the Character of the Resurrected Body — 529; Response to the Questions — 531; The Resurrection of Women's Bodies — 532; The Meaning of Complete Manhood — 533; Further Responses to Questions about the Resurrected Body — 534; The Gift of the Life to Come — 536; The Evils of this Life — 537; The Struggles of the Righteous: the Battle against the Vices — 540; The Goods of this Life — 540; The Goods of the Life to Come — 545; Against Philosophical Objections to the Resurrection of the Body — 546; The Eternal Life of the Saints: the Vision of God — 548; Will the Saints See God with the Eyes of the Spiritual Body? — 549; The Felicity of the Saints: Seeing, Loving, and Praising God — 551; Study Questions for Book XXII — 555

## PREFACE TO THE ABRIDGED STUDY EDITION

Saint Augustine's classic work *The City of God* has endured sixteen centuries of study and scrutiny, enriching a great variety of readers across many eras and different cultures. Any intent to abridge such a text might seem the height of hubris. However, the hope is that a shorter, more manageable edition will invite the reader to subsequent engagement with the full text.

The last such edition appeared in 1958, abridged by Vernon Bourke. It included four different translators. This present edition depends entirely upon William Babcock's 2012 superb translation. His excellent introduction and the summaries preceding each of Augustine's twenty-two books are an important part of his scholarly bequest. The introduction and summaries are kept in their entirety.

Two criteria were used to reduce the almost one thousand pages of Augustine's text to around six hundred. Long sections comprising several chapters have been omitted when they constitute an excursus or digression, a popular rhetorical device of Latin orators. These long omissions are noted in the text by brief, bracketed summaries of their contents.

Shorter sections of one or several paragraphs within or across chapters have also been omitted. These are passages in which Augustine elaborates, illustrates, or explores logical variations of a point already made — fine-tunings of the rhetoric advancing his argument. These omissions are noted by ellipses in the text. An unfortunate casualty of both the longer and shorter omissions is the loss of Boniface Ramsey's excellent footnotes for those sections.

This abridged study edition provides several open, thought-provoking questions for each of the twenty-two books. These questions encourage the reader to probe Augustine's text for ideas that continue to inform religious and moral critique of political power, and for themes that remain fundamental to peace and social justice within and across nations and cultures today.

"Love and do what you will — *dilige et quod vis fac*," Augustine exhorts in his *Commentary on the First Epistle of John* VII,8. That advice steadied my hand as I excised almost half of Augustine's text. If this abridged classroom resource edition helps readers — especially new readers — understand the "two loves that made two cities," then it will have been worth the many dilemmas it entailed.

This effort is dedicated to and inspired by the Austin Scholars of Merrimack College.

Joseph T. Kelley  
Merrimack College  
August 28, 2018

## INTRODUCTION

### THE TEXT

“Two loves,” Augustine writes, “have made two cities. Love of self, even to the point of contempt for God, made the earthly city; and love of God, even to the point of contempt for self, made the heavenly city.” (XIV,28) For all its vast scale and intricate complexity, then, *The City of God* is a story of love. It is, however, a love story played out in a cosmic setting, across an immense historical range, and within complicated patterns of social order. It is important to note at the outset that the two cities that Augustine has in mind cannot be equated straightforwardly with any political units or social entities. While it is true enough that he does at times identify the heavenly city, the city of God, with the Christian Church and the earthly city, the city of the devil, with the Babylonian or the Roman empire, he insists that the Church inevitably contains some members of the earthly city and that the great empires contain some members of the heavenly city who are not yet known to the Church. The two cities will only be separated out and appear in unmixed form at and after the final judgment when each attains its ultimate destiny. In the meantime, in the span of human history, they are not and cannot be sociologically or politically defined. They are formed, rather, by the deepest orientations of the human heart, by its desires and its loves; and, for Augustine, it is never possible in this life to read the innermost direction of the heart. That is one of the most heartrending features of life in this world. There is always a veil of darkness that finally separates one person from another and makes it impossible to penetrate into the inner regions of another person’s self. Augustine’s tale of two loves, therefore, does not reduce or eliminate the ambivalence and ambiguity of human history and society. It does not allow us to cut through the uncertainties of human interrelationships and declare with complete assurance that we have found the true, the just, and the good society or, in contrast, the false, the unjust, and the evil society in any specific social or political grouping. Rather, it creates a context — an immensely complex context — within which we can interpret the modes of human behavior and the forms of human society without ever being able to assure ourselves that any one group is all right or all wrong. It is not a context that prevents or prohibits moral judgment. In fact, it might well be called a guide to moral judgment and a charting of the way of virtue. But it does undercut all self-righteousness in moral judgment. Within this context, it is clear that we cannot discern the ways of God (except where they are revealed in Scripture, which rests on God’s authority, not ours), cannot plumb the depths of the human heart, and can find no morally pure community on earth. God alone, then, can see who does and who does not finally belong to each city, and God alone can achieve the separation of the one from the other.

### *The Sack of Rome and The City of God (Book I)*

The immediate occasion for the writing of *The City of God* was the sack of the city of Rome by Alaric and his Gothic army in August of 410. The Goths occupied and pillaged the city for three days and left considerable destruction in their wake when they withdrew. But the political import of the city's fall was probably not as significant as its psychological impact. After all, the capital of the Roman empire had been transferred from Rome to Constantinople almost a century earlier, and the seat of imperial government in Italy had long since been removed from Rome to Milan and then to Ravenna on the Adriatic coast.<sup>1</sup> The symbolic import of the event, however, was immense. The news rippled out across the empire, like an earthquake's aftershocks, calling into question an ideology of Rome that was shared, in one version or another, by Christians and pagans alike. Far away in Palestine, Jerome would write, "When the brightest light of the world was extinguished, when the very head of the Roman empire was severed, the entire world perished in a single city."<sup>2</sup> According to Virgil's *Aeneid*, written late in the first century B. C., Jupiter had set no spatial or temporal limits on the Romans' power and had given them "empire without end."<sup>3</sup> Jupiter's promise was not erased when Christianity became the empire's dominant religion under Constantine or even when, in the late fourth century, increasingly stringent imperial edicts were issued against the rites and practices of Greek and Roman traditional religion. In some ways, it was even reinforced, since Rome seemed now to have acquired the backing of the Christians' all-powerful God, the creator and ruler of all. These "Christian times," it seemed, should be understood as the realization of God's providential direction of history to its culmination: Roman imperial rule as the vehicle for the triumph of true religion.<sup>4</sup> In the light of Rome's fall to the Goths, however, it seemed that Rome had suddenly and disastrously lost its invulnerability and that, against all expectation, Jupiter's promise had failed.

To the empire's remaining pagan population — especially in the Latin West where the traditional accounts of Rome's founding and its rise to greatness were still strong<sup>5</sup> — the reason for the failure was all too obvious. Rome had abandoned

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1. A good, brief history of the period is Averil Cameron, *The Later Roman Empire, AD 284-430* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993). For more detail, see Averil Cameron and Peter Garnsey, eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 13: *The Late Empire, A. D. 337-425* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
  2. Letter 126,2. The translation is from J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) 304.
  3. *Aeneid* 1,278.
  4. For discussion of the way in which the "Christian times" of the late fourth century were celebrated by some Christians, and for a treatment of Augustine's own brief dalliance with and ultimate rejection of this triumphalist view, see R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) 22-44.
  5. For discussion of the lingering strength of paganism in the Latin West, see Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 1-26 (on

her gods and banished the sacrifices that earned their favor; and, as a consequence, her gods had abandoned her and withdrawn their protection. The city had fallen to the onslaught of the Goths. And in the event, the new Christian God, for whom they had traded their traditional religion, had provided no defense at all. Not only had he proved powerless against the Gothic army, he had not even been able to defend his own devotees. Like their pagan counterparts, Christians too had been taken captive, tortured, raped, looted, and killed. Their prayers for protection had fallen on deaf ears, or had been no more than pleas to a God without power.

In North Africa, as his sermons show, Augustine was already responding to such complaints in 410, in the immediate aftermath of the calamity at Rome.<sup>6</sup> When he began writing *The City of God* in 412, then, he already had an arsenal of answers to the critics of Christianity on which he could draw; and, in fact, the first book of the work makes many of the same points that he had made in his preaching. He starts by reminding the pagan critics that they would never have survived to lodge their complaints if it had not been true that the Goths themselves, although Arian heretics, were Christians and, against all the traditional rules and customs of war, had treated Rome's churches as places of sanctuary where all — pagans quite as much as Christians — could gather in safety. In this regard, he insists, the treatment of Rome stood in stark contrast to pagan practice. The Romans themselves, in all their wars of conquest, had never treated the temples of the gods as places of sanctuary or allowed those who fled to them to gain the security of a safe harbor against the threats of death or captivity. Nor had their own gods ever offered such protection. Rome's own gods were, in fact, "conquered gods," who had been defeated when the Greeks had taken Troy.<sup>7</sup> They survived only because Aeneas had carried them off on the voyage that would ultimately lead to the founding of Rome. They were gods who, far from defending their defenders, had been defended by them; and when their defenders fell to their enemies, the gods fell with them, escaping final defeat only because a few survivors were able to escape from fallen Troy and take their gods with them.

From the outset, however, Augustine had a larger plan in mind for *The City of God*. His aim was not to chronicle a competition between gods on the dubious scale of success or failure at the level of historical events. It was rather to confront — and to counter — the entire religious, cultural and political tradition of Rome on an entirely different set of issues, the issues clustering around the question of religion

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the Christianization of the empire) and 30 (on paganism in North Africa in particular). On the learned literary and philosophical culture of Latin paganism, see Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, new edition (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000) 297-311. The literary account of Rome's origins most prominent in the Latin West was, of course, Virgil's *Aeneid*.

6. For a brief account of Augustine's preaching in the immediate aftermath of the sack of Rome, with the relevant citations, see Gerard O'Daly, 28-31.
7. *The City of God* I,3. Augustine takes the phrase "conquered gods" from Virgil's *Aeneid* II,320.

and the ultimate attainment of human happiness. Even in the first book of the work, then, he turns the question of Rome's fall into a confrontation between alternate ways of assessing human suffering and relating it to the role of the divine. The real issue, he argues, is not a supposed failure of divine protection but rather the enigmatic workings of divine providence. Why is it that God extended his mercy to some of the evil as well as to some of the good? Why is it that God imposed his severity on the good as well as on some of the evil? The answer, it turns out, has to do with the ways in which divine providence makes use of historical events to shape human character. It sometimes spares the evil as well as the good in order to provide opportunities for repentance; and it sometimes afflicts the good as well as the evil in order either to punish them for their moral failures or to test them in their perseverance in the good. Thus the sufferings of Christians at the hands of Alaric's Goths can be understood either as punishment for their failings, even if their failing was no more than the relatively minor fault of being afraid to rebuke and correct the powerful for their misdeeds, or as a way of putting them to the test in order to confirm them in their goodness. In neither case, however, does their affliction affect what genuinely counts as their true good. It does not separate them from God, nor does it rob them of the promise of ultimate happiness with him.

Thus, any Christians who lost their wealth in the pillaging of the city lost only what is transient and vulnerable, not what is enduring and invulnerable to loss. Any Christians who loved their riches as if they were of supreme value discovered, through the training of experience, how badly they had misplaced their devotion. Any Christians who were tortured by the enemy to force them to hand over their earthly goods neither could nor did hand over the good by which they themselves were good; and, if they preferred to be tortured rather than to hand over their possessions, they were not actually good and should have learned to love Christ, who offers eternal felicity, rather than gold and silver. Again, Christians who were taken into captivity by the Goths did not fall outside the realm of divine consolation, as indicated by the captives recorded in Scripture who were sustained by God. And the Romans themselves venerate the example of Marcus Regulus, a general who was defeated and taken captive by the Carthaginians. Regulus was sent back to Rome to negotiate an exchange of prisoners, having first sworn by his gods that he would return if he failed in his mission. In Rome, he argued against the exchange and, keeping strictly to his oath, returned to Carthage where he was put to a horrible death by torture. The episode shows, Augustine claims, that the Romans themselves honored one taken captive; and, in addition, it proves that Regulus's own gods, the very gods to whom he remained loyal even to the point of death, could neither protect him from his fate nor give him happiness in this life. If the Romans felt no hesitation about honoring gods who failed to protect Regulus, what grounds did they have for dishonoring the God who apparently failed to protect Christians but actually preserved them in the ways that really count?

Finally, in this catalogue of Christian sufferings in the sack of Rome, Augustine considers the case of Christian women who were raped by the Goths. What is