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AUGUSTINE

The City of God against the Pagans

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY

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Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521468435

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Cambridge University Press 1998

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First published 1998
11th printing 2014

Printed in the United Kingdom by the CPI Group Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Augustine, Saint, Bishop of Hippo.
[De civitate Dei. English]
The city of God against the pagans/Augustine; edited and translated by R. W. Dyson
p. cm. – (Cambridge texts in the history of political thought)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0 521 46475 7 (hardbound). – ISBN 0 521 46843 4 (pbk.)
1. Kingdom of God. 2. Apologetics – Early works to 1800.
I. Dyson, R. W. II. Title. III. Series.
BR65.A64E5 1998
239′.3–dc21 97–38751 CIP

ISBN 978-0-521-46843-5 paperback

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In memory of
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Preface

This translation has been made from the critical edition of B. Dombart and A. Kalb, published in the *Corpus Christianorum* series (2 vols., Turnhout, 1955). Despite numerous – and inevitable – misprints, this is the best available edition. I have also from time to time consulted the *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* edition of E. Hoffmann (2 vols., Vienna, 1899–1900). In view of the great length of the text, and in keeping with the general principles of the series of which this translation is a part, footnotes have been kept to a minimum. For very extensive annotation, the reader is referred to the edition of J. E. C. Welldon (see Bibliographical Note). No abbreviations have been used which are not standard or self-explanatory.

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Introduction

St Augustine

Augustine was born at Thagaste in the Roman province of Africa on 13 November 354, to parents of senatorial rank. His mother, Monica, was a Christian; his father Patricius was not, although he was received into the Church shortly before his death. Augustine was brought up as a Christian catechumen; as was commonly the case in the fourth century, however, he was not baptised as a child. His childhood seems to have been full of unhappy experiences, especially in regard to his education;[1] but he writes of his mother with great affection, and is grieved by the memory of the pain which his youthful lapses caused her. In 370, he went to Carthage to study rhetoric. There, he lost touch with Christianity and acquired a mistress, who bore him a son called Adeodatus. As everyone knows, he regards himself as having lived a deplorable life as a young man, although he does not seem to have done much that we should now regard as very shocking. He read Cicero's dialogue called *Hortensius* (now lost), an exhortation to philosophy which fired his enthusiasm for learning; he was attracted successively to Manichaeism, Scepticism and Neoplatonism; he greatly admired the *Enneads* of Plotinus. Having taught for some years at Thagaste, Carthage and Rome, he accepted a position as municipal professor of rhetoric at Milan in

[1] One can only with sadness note his rhetorical question at Bk XXI,14: 'If anyone were offered the choice of suffering death or becoming a child again, who would not recoil from the second alternative and choose to die?' Cf. *Confess.*, I,14.

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384. At Milan, he came under the influence of St Ambrose the bishop, and two Christian friends, Simplicianus and Pontitianus. After much heart-searching, he was converted – perhaps one ought to say recalled – to Christianity, and baptised by St Ambrose in the summer of 386. Returning to Africa, he founded a small religious fraternity at Thagaste, was ordained priest in 391, and became bishop of Hippo in 395 (Hippo, or Hippo Regius, is modern Annaba in Algeria; in Augustine's day it was a flourishing seaport, second in importance only to Carthage). In addition to his pastoral duties, Augustine was for the rest of his life engaged in controversy with the various heretics and schismatics who then troubled the Church: he produced treatises against the Manichaeans, Arians, Pelagians and Donatists. He died at Hippo in 430, while the city was being besieged by the Vandals. His feast is celebrated on the day of his death, 28 August. His literary output, excluding all *dubia* and *spuria*, extends to 113 books and treatises, more than two hundred letters and over five hundred sermons.

The City of God

The *City of God* is universally regarded as Augustine's greatest work. He began it in 413 and worked at it sporadically over the next thirteen years, as his episcopal duties and other literary projects allowed, publishing it in fascicules along the way. (He tells us (v,26) that someone was preparing a reply to the first three books; but no such answer has survived, if it was ever written.) The completed work appeared in 426.

On Augustine's own account (*Retractationes*, 2,43,2), it was after the sack of Rome, in 410, by Alaric and the Visigoths, that he resolved to write the *City of God*, in rebuttal of those who then 'began to blaspheme against the true God more ferociously and bitterly than before'. Rome does not, in fact, seem to have suffered much damage during Alaric's three-day sack; and, as Augustine is at pains to point out, her attackers – who were Christians, albeit Arians – were remarkably restrained in their treatment of the populace (see, e.g., 1,1ff). But the Romans had become accustomed to thinking of their city and empire as eternal. As one might expect, the psychological impact of the sack was considerable. And only twenty-six years previously, by his edict *Cunctos populos* of 384, the

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emperor Theodosius I had abolished the worship of Rome's ancient gods and established Christianity as the official religion of the empire. Numerous anti-pagan edicts had followed. Not surprisingly, a certain current of (largely aristocratic) opinion in the Roman world attributed the events of 410 to this change of allegiance. Rome is now suffering, it was thought, because she has forsaken the gods of her fathers in favour of a God Who counsels meekness and submission.

Augustine's original intention, then, was to answer the charge that Christianity was responsible for bringing about the sack of Rome. Those parts of the *City of God* (Bks I–X *passim*) which are largely devoted to this task are easy to summarise. Rome's misfortunes are not due to the coming of Christianity; she suffered numerous calamities and reversals before Christ was born. Her gods did not protect her then, and they have not protected her now, because they cannot protect her: they are futile nonentities. They are, moreover, evil demons who love to lead men into error. This is shown by the fact that they wish to be worshipped by means of obscene theatrical displays and other degrading performances. All attempts, even by authors as formidable as Varro,[2] to construct a respectable theology out of the farrago of myth and superstition which constitutes popular religion end only in contradiction and nonsense.

But the *City of God* rapidly acquired a broader purpose than this original one. In 412 – presumably while he was planning the *City of God* according to his initial conception of it – Augustine received a letter from a friend and fellow Christian called Marcellinus. Marcellinus was a Roman civil servant, deputed by the emperor to the delicate and thankless task of trying to resolve the dispute between the Catholics and the Donatists. In his letter, he set out certain difficulties which he had come across during his discussions with educated pagans, and, in particular, with Volusianus, the imperial proconsul of Africa. Why are the miracles of Christianity regarded as anything special? Paganism has many miracles to boast of, some of them more spectacular than the miracles of Christ. If God was pleased with the sacrifices offered to Him by the people of the Old Testament, and if He is immutable, why is He not pleased with

[2] Augustine's analysis of the moral, religious, military and political culture of Rome embodies some very significant echoes and fragments of Marcus Varro's *Antiquitates* and other writings which are now lost or fragmentary. Most of his encyclopaedic knowledge of Roman religion seems to come from Varro.

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such sacrifices now? What good has Christianity brought to Rome? Is it not true that, ever since the old religion was abandoned and Christianity taken up, the political and military fortunes of the empire have gone from bad to worse? Augustine gives a provisional answer to these difficulties in two letters (*Epist.* 137 and 138), in which he sketches several of the themes later developed in the *City of God*. At the end of *Epist.* 138, he promises to deal with these matters more fully in a further letter or in a book. This is the promise referred to at Bk 1,1 of the *City of God*, and of which the *City of God* itself is the fulfilment.

We may notice in passing, however, that Augustine mentions the possibility of writing a book about the two 'cities' brought into being by the fall of the angels in his *De genesi ad litteram* (11,15,20), written between 402 and 413. Also, as early as 405, in his work called *De catechizandis rudibus* (see 19,31–21,38) he speaks of 'two cities, one of the wicked, the other of the holy, which endure from the birth of the human race to the end of time'. It is reasonable to conjecture that a *City of God* in some form or other would have been written even had the sack of Rome not occurred, and even without the correspondence with Marcellinus.

In a letter written to an African Christian called Firmus, to whom he was sending a copy of the work, Augustine says:

> There are twenty-two sections: too many to bring together into one volume. If you wish to make two volumes, you should divide them in such a way that there are ten books in the first and twelve in the second. If you wish to have more than two, you should make five volumes. Let the first contain the first five books, in which I write against those who claim that the worship of the gods – or, as I should rather say, of evil spirits – leads to happiness in this life. Let the second volume contain the next five books, written against those who think that such deities are to be worshipped by rites and sacrifices in order to secure happiness in the world to come. Let the three following volumes contain four books each: I have arranged this part of the work in such a way that four books describe the origin of that City, four its progress – or, rather, its development – and the final four the ends which await it.[3]

[3] This letter was discovered by Dom C. Lambot and published by him in the *Revue bénédictine*, 51 (1939), pp. 109ff. For a useful amplification of this description see *St Augustine: Concerning The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson with an Introduction by John O'Meara (2nd edition, London, 1984), pp.

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This division into sections of so highly discursive a work is inevitably rather inexact; but it is useful as a broad description. The chapter headings which appear in this translation may be by Augustine himself, although they are more probably the additions of subsequent editors.

Partly, no doubt, because of the episodic nature of its composition, but partly also thanks to Augustine's habitual peculiarities of style, the *City of God* is not an easy book to read. Augustine is addicted to long and involved sentences (sometimes he gets lost in them himself); he is much given to repetition, the pursuit of lengthy digressions, and to labouring a point; he is capable of great obscurity and tedium; some of his arguments are weak, tendentious and unfair. Peter Brown, one of Augustine's most distinguished modern biographers, gives a summary of the character of the work as a whole which the reader may think more charitable than it deserves.

> Even Augustine thought it a bit too long; and we tend to dismiss it, as Henry James dismissed the Russian novels of the last century, as a 'loose, baggy monster'. Above all, *De Civitate Dei* is a book of controversy. It should never be treated as though it were a static, complete photograph of Augustine's thought. It reads like a film of a professional boxing championship: it is all movement, ducking and weaving. Augustine is a really stylish professional: he rarely relies on the knock-out; he is out to win the fight on points. It is a fight carried on in twenty-two books against nothing less than the whole pagan literary culture available to him.[4]

Nor, by the same token, is the *City of God* an easy book to translate. Some of Augustine's past translators have, it must be said, yielded to the temptation to 'improve' on the original, either in the interests of some religious preference of their own or in order to make difficult passages or arguments seem clearer. In translating the *City of God*, I have followed the straightforward principle that the only task of the translator is to translate. I have, in other words, tried to give as veracious a rendering of Augustine's Latin as possible, including

xxxvii–xxxviii. Augustine gives a shorter, but broadly similar, description at *Retract.*, 2,43,2. For partial descriptions in the *City of God* itself, see II,2; III,1; IV,1f; VI, Preface and Ch. 1; XI,1; XII,1; XVIII,1.

[4] P. R. L. Brown, 'Saint Augustine', in Beryl Smalley (ed.), *Trends in Medieval Political Thought* (Oxford, 1965), p. 1.

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his many awkwardnesses and obscurities. Where necessary, I have sacrificed elegance to accuracy, and I have not tried to mitigate the fact that some parts of what he says (particularly when engaged in scriptural commentary and interpretation) are difficult to make sense of. I have sometimes had to translate more freely than I should wish, simply in the interests of intelligibility. Where it has not been possible to give a literal translation, I have at any rate tried to convey the meaning and flavour of Augustine's text as faithfully as I could. If this translation contains difficulties, this is because those difficulties appear in the original. I have tried to remain as independent as possible of the previous translators whose versions I have consulted; although it goes without saying that I am greatly indebted to them.

Augustine's political thought

At first glance, it may seem to the reader odd that this enormous work, so full of biblical exegesis and defunct theological controversy, should excite the interest of historians of political thought to the extent that it does. Despite the apparent belief of some authors to the contrary, Augustine does not offer a 'theory' or 'philosophy' of history or politics. The *City of God* is not, and is not intended to be, a treatise, systematic or otherwise, of political thought. There is no discussion in it of the merits or demerits of the different forms of government; there is no sustained attempt to recommend an ideal, or a best possible, state. Here, as in Augustine's other mature writings, all else is auxiliary to his theological purpose. Insofar as the elements of Augustine's political, social and historical thought are represented in the *City of God*, they are present, if one may so express it, in much the way that the fragments of a pot might be present at an archaeological site. They have to be identified, sorted out from large masses of other material, and assembled. When this process is complete, however, the resultant picture is a relatively clear one: in its broad outlines, at any rate, though there is a good deal of room for disagreement and debate over matters of detail.[5]

[5] The picture becomes a good deal more detailed and informative, of course, when the *City of God* is read in conjunction with the numerous other 'political' passages which are scattered throughout Augustine's works. Paolucci's anthology and the numerous quotations and references given by H. A. Deane may be consulted. See Bibliographical Note for details.

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In the following paragraphs, I shall give as complete a summary as I can. The reader should bear in mind, though, that, for reasons of space, I shall have to prescind altogether from discussion of critical and interpretational difficulties.

Augustine's social and political thinking depends most fundamentally upon his understanding (mediated through St Paul) of the biblical narrative of the Fall. When God created Adam and Eve and placed them in Paradise, their life there was originally one of untrammelled joy.

> The love of the pair for God and for one another was undisturbed, and they lived in a faithful and sincere fellowship which brought great gladness to them, for what they loved was always at hand for their enjoyment. There was a tranquil avoidance of sin; and, as long as this continued, no evil of any kind intruded, from any source, to bring them sadness. (XIV,10)

Our first parents were subject to one prohibition only: that they should not eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Had they not sinned, their happy life would have continued for ever. They would have produced others of their own kind without the shame of lust or the pangs of childbirth; they would have known no sickness or misfortune; and men would have made the transition from earth to heaven without pain and death.

But man was created with free will. Made by God out of nothing, and therefore lacking the supreme perfection of being that only He possesses, it was possible for the first human beings to fall away from Him through sin: that is, through the free choice of wrongdoing (cf. XIV,13). The serpent, envious of man's unfallen state, beguiled Eve, and she led her husband into transgression with her. Their sin consisted in placing their own wishes before the ordinance of God: in allowing their actions to be directed by pride and self-love rather than by the love of God. Let no one think that hell is too severe a penalty for the original sin. The sin of the first human beings was all the more dreadful because so little had been asked of them: 'the unrighteousness of disobeying the command was all the greater in proportion to the ease with which it could have been observed and upheld' (XIV,12).

As their own punishment, Adam and Eve were immediately expelled from Paradise and made subject to pain, death and damnation. But, as well as their own punishment, their sin has conse-

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quences for their offspring also: consequences which determine the whole subsequent course of human history. 'So great was the sin of those two that human nature was changed by it for the worse; and so bondage to sin and the necessity of death were transmitted to their posterity' (XIV,1). Because Adam and Eve abused it, the free will with which mankind was created has been lost: not by Adam and Eve merely, but by every single member of the human race whose first parents they are. 'The choice of the will, then, is truly free only when it is not the slave of vices and sins. God gave to the will such freedom, and, now that it has been lost through its own fault, it cannot be restored save by Him Who could bestow it' (XIV,11). Created to love God, man, by succumbing, in the person of his first parent, to self-love when he had a choice, has lost the capacity to choose; or, at least, he can now choose only in the sense of selecting which of the many available sins actually to commit. He has become so dominated by self-love that, unless he is aided by the unmerited gift of God's grace, it is now not possible for him to do anything except sin: that is, to live, as Augustine habitually puts it (e.g. XV,1), 'according to man' rather than 'according to God'.

Because of the original sin, then, each one of us comes into the world worthy of damnation: subject to 'the necessity of death'. This, to Augustine's mind, is the dominant fact of our individual and social existence. He does not really explain to us why or how the original sin has such consequences for all mankind, rather than merely for those who committed it; and he does not discuss the obvious difficulties which his view encounters. God's dispensation is hidden from us, but we are not entitled to question its fairness. It is, he considers, a matter of faith that the subsequent condition – moral, social and political – of mankind has been determined by the sin of our first parents.

It is not insignificant that the first city was founded by Cain, the fratricidal son of Adam (see, e.g., XV,1; 5). It is clearly Augustine's view that, had the Fall not occurred, the state, and the various devices of coercion, punishment and oppression which we associate with the state, would not have come into existence. They would not have come into existence simply because there would have been no need for them. Man is naturally sociable (see, e.g., XIX,5; 12), but he is not naturally political. Living with a rightly ordered love, and

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therefore a good will – loving God above all and neighbour as self – men would have been able to dwell with one another in spontaneous peace and co-operation (see, e.g., XIV,6f; 10). It was God's original intention that men were to be equal and ungoverned save by Him. They were given dominion over the beasts, but no man was given dominion over any other. 'He did not intend that His rational creature, made in His own image, should have lordship over any but irrational creatures: not man over man, but man over the beasts. Hence, the first just men were established as shepherds over flocks, rather than as kings of men' (XIX,15).

Fallen man, however, because governed by self-love, is constantly subject to destructive emotions and impulses. He is envious and vindictive; he loves glory; he desires material riches; he is consumed by what Augustine calls *libido dominandi*, the lust for mastery, the desire to dominate others. This desire, Augustine says elsewhere (*De doctrina Christiana*, 1,23) arises out of an intolerable pride which refuses to accept that all men are by nature equal (and cf. *City of God* XIV,13). To a considerable extent, the state is an expression of these base impulses. It arose out of man's lust for power and violence; most of its wars occur because of these things (although Augustine does acknowledge the possibility of just warfare: see XIX,7); and it has always existed largely to acquire and preserve those things which man desires only because he is greedy and sinful. In this sense, the state is a consequence of sin and an occasion for sin. It is not, as for Plato and Aristotle, a natural part of human life or a natural expression of human capacities. On the contrary, it is for Augustine an unnatural supervention, brought into being by the fact that man's naturally sociable nature has been vitiated and made selfish by sin. Even at its best, the state is a source of fear, pain, and death. Even good judges, because they cannot know men's hearts, have to resort to torture in order to get at the truth; even they make mistakes, and sometimes condemn the innocent or let the guilty go free. The wise judge can only pray to be delivered from his responsibilities (see XIX,6).

The Fall of man did not, as it were, come as a surprise to God. God does not exist within, and is not bound by, time. He contemplates the whole of eternity in one single glance. Nothing is unknown to Him, therefore. Because nothing is 'future' or 'past' to God, nothing is unforeseen or forgotten by Him, and nothing can

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take Him unawares (see XI,4ff; and cf. *Confess.*, 11,10,12ff). Thus, He knew from all eternity 'that man would sin and that, being thereby made subject to death himself, would propagate men doomed to die' (XII,23).[6] In His mercy, however, He also resolved from all eternity to rescue some few men – only a few, Augustine thinks – from the general wreck: He has predestined some members of the human race to salvation in spite of sin. And these elect, these chosen ones, are members of what Augustine calls the City of God. They are those whose vitiated wills are repaired by God's grace: who are therefore able to escape the bondage of self-love, to love God as they should, and therefore to merit salvation. By contrast, those upon whom God has not chosen to bestow His grace are members of the earthly city, the *civitas terrena*. The *civitas terrena* is the city of the lost, whose allotted end is eternal damnation: sometimes Augustine calls it the *civitas diaboli*.

Augustine speaks of these two cities or communities as deriving their respective identities, their cohesion, from their members' allegiance to a common object of love. This idea of love as a unifying force is very characteristic of Augustine. In a general sense, he describes a *populus*, a 'people', not in terms of race or language, but as 'an assembled multitude of rational creatures bound together by a common agreement as to the objects of their love'; from which it follows, he says, that 'if we are to discover the character of any people, we have only to examine what it loves' (XIX,24). As to the two cities, he says: 'Certainly, this is the great difference that distinguishes the two cities of which we are speaking. The one is a fellowship of godly men, and the other of the ungodly; and each has its own angels belonging to it. In the one city, love of God has been given pride of place, and, in the other, love of self' (XIV,13). Somewhat later in the same book, Augustine says,

> Two cities, then, have been created by two loves: that is, the earthly by love of self extending even to contempt of God, and the heavenly by love of God extending to contempt of self. The one, therefore, glories in itself, the other in the Lord; the one seeks glory from men, the other finds its highest glory in God,

[6] Augustine is, however, very explicit in his insistence that man sinned of his own free will. In several places, and especially the long discussion at Bk V,9f, he insists that God's foreknowledge is not the *cause* of sin.

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> the Witness of our conscience. The one lifts up its head in its own glory; the other says to its God, 'Thou art my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.' (XIV,28, quoting Psalm 3,3)

It is important to be clear at this point, however, that Augustine's City of God, 'a fellowship of godly men', is not simply coextensive with, or a synonym for, the institutional or earthly Church. Certainly, Augustine's language is not without ambiguity here. Indeed, he is materially inconsistent in this regard, and a number of his medieval admirers, misunderstanding him – or perhaps they deliberately exploited his inconsistencies – were apt to treat *civitas Dei* and *civitas terrena* simply as alternative terms for the earthly embodiments of spiritual and secular power. Broadly speaking, however, Augustine's preferred meaning of the terms is not in doubt. The City of God is, as it were, a community which transcends space and time. The elect who are at present alive on earth form only a small part of its citizen body. It consists also of those angels who remained loyal to God and the souls of the elect who have died and are now in heaven with Him. Those members of the City of God who are at any time alive on earth Augustine refers to collectively as the *civitas Dei peregrina*, the City of God on pilgrimage. Augustine's City of God, we might say, is what is usually meant by the 'Communion of Saints'.

Similar remarks apply to the *civitas terrena*. It is very clearly exemplified in the great pagan states of antiquity: Babylon, Assyria, the pagan Roman Empire; but (again, despite fairly frequent ambiguities of language) it is not any one of these states, nor all of them taken together. Those of the lost or reprobate who are at present alive on earth form part of its membership; but it also includes the souls of the damned who have died and who are now suffering in hell; and its founder members, so to speak, are the apostate angels who, in their pride, fell away from God. The two cities are invisible communities whose duration is coextensive with the history of the world.

It should be noted also that many who might seem to be among the saved are not. Many people who are outwardly members of the institutional Church are, in fact, citizens of the earthly city.

> [W]hile she is a pilgrim in this world, the City of God has with her, bound to her by the communion of the sacraments, some who will not be with her to share eternally in the bliss of the

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> saints. Some of these are concealed. Some of them, however, join openly with our enemies, and do not hesitate to murmur against the God Whose sacrament they bear. Sometimes they crowd into the theatres with our enemies, and sometimes into the churches with us. (I,35)
>
> In this wicked world, and in these evil days . . . many reprobate are mingled in the Church with the good. Both are as it were collected in the net of the Gospel; and in this world, as in a sea, both swim together without separation, enclosed in the net until brought ashore. (XVIII,49)

It is not correspondingly true, however, that every member of the City of God is also a member of the institutional Church (see XVIII,47ff). The righteous men of the Old Testament, who lived before there was a Church in the narrow institutional sense, are members of the City of God. Augustine even suggests at one point (XVIII,23) that the Erythraean or Cumaean Sibyl is a member, because she spoke out forcefully against the worship of false gods. So far as the earthly contingents of the two cities are concerned, we cannot tell by any outward appearance who belongs to which. For the time being, the two cities are mingled together in this world, sharing its resources and sharing its tribulations also; for God causes His rain to fall upon good and evil men alike (see, e.g., I,8). They will only be visibly divided at the end of history, when Christ will come to judge the living and the dead. Then, the sheep will be separated from the goats and the two cities will each go away to its appointed end: 'the end to which there shall be no end' (XXII,30).

Augustine's doctrine of the two cities is intimately associated with a Christian perception – it is not in any defensible sense a 'philosophy' – of history. Human history, properly conceived, is not the history of Livy, but the history of the Bible. It is not, as certain philosophers think, an endless repetition of the same cycle of creation and destruction; nor is it the history of the glorious exploits of Rome or of any other empire. It is the gradual unfolding of the respective destinies of the two cities, in a linear progression from the beginning of history to its end. History is not working towards some end or culmination in this world. The true destiny of mankind, whether it be damnation or salvation, does not lie within, but beyond, history.

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For Augustine, then, membership of the state cannot have the ethical significance attributed to it by Plato and Aristotle. The state, that is, cannot be the matrix within which man, made wise by education and practice, can achieve his distinctive good or end by making rational choices and participating in the common life. Man's final good simply does not lie, and cannot be achieved, in this life. Moreover, it is only by the grace of God, given to some men by God simply as an undeserved gift, that man is enabled to live well even in a restricted sense of the word. Without the grace of God man is, from the point of view of morality or intentionality, completely helpless. He cannot by his own effort achieve any good whatsoever, whether by political participation or by any other kind of social or political engagement. By his own effort, indeed, he cannot achieve anything which is not sinful. Even those heroes of Rome's past who have shown the most exemplary courage have done so either out of the selfish desire for glory or out of misguided loyalty to gods or institutions which are not worthy objects of devotion. It is only his membership of the City of God or the earthly city which has reference to the ethical good of the individual. There is no one who does not belong to one or other of these cites; but these 'cities', as we have seen, are not confined to any particular place or any particular time. Nor, strictly speaking, can anyone be said to 'participate' in them: their members are not 'citizens' in a way that would have made sense to Aristotle. They are the communities of the elect and reprobate respectively, bound together by their members' common love, whether of God or self.

In this context, we may note Augustine's well-known rebuttal of the traditional claim of the Roman state to be the special embodiment of justice. He sets out to show that this claim is vacuous by way of his critique – begun at II,21 and resumed, several years later, at XIX,21 – of Cicero's discussion of the Roman commonwealth in his dialogue *De republica*. As part of this discussion, Cicero says – or causes Scipio Africanus Minor to say – that justice is part of the very essence of a commonwealth: that a commonwealth cannot even exist unless justice is present. But on this showing, Augustine observes, Rome herself never was a commonwealth: that is, according to Scipio's own definition, a moral community consisting not of a mere multitude, but of a *populus*, a people, 'united in fellowship by common agreement as to what is right and by a community of

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interest'. What is justice? Augustine adopts the classical commonplace that justice is 'that virtue which gives to each his due'. But, he says – introducing a shift in the meaning of 'justice' that can hardly be regarded as fair – Rome never extended to the true God the worship which is His due.

> What kind of justice is it, then, that takes a man away from the true God and subjects him to impure demons? Is this giving to each his due? Or are we to call a man unjust if he takes a piece of property away from one who has bought it and hands it over to someone who has no right to it, yet just if he takes himself away from the lordship of the God Who made him, and serves evil spirits? . . . Here, then, is not that 'common agreement as to what is right' by which a multitude is made into a 'people' whose 'property' a commonwealth is said to be. (XIX,21).

And what is true of pagan Rome is true by implication of all pagan states. Those who do not worship the true God cannot be just men; a multitude of such men cannot be a *populus* in the required sense; and such a multitude therefore cannot form a state which is, *stricto sensu*, just: which is, in short, a *res publica*, a commonwealth. To the extent that they make a relatively safe and orderly life possible for their subjects, pagan states can achieve a *semblance* of justice: justice, so to speak, in a loose or incomplete sense of the term. 'There was, of course, according to a more practicable definition, a commonwealth of a sort; and it was certainly better administered by the Romans of more ancient times than by those who have come after them.' But this is not *true* justice; for true justice 'does not exist other than in that commonwealth whose Founder and Ruler is Christ' (II,21). True justice can exist only among the citizens of the City of God, and will be fully realised only after this world ends, when the City of God, purged of all impure elements, will finally enjoy God for eternity.

These remarks may be taken in conjunction with Augustine's pronouncement at IV,4, where he makes use of the familiar story of Alexander and the pirate (a story probably known to him in the version given in Bk 3 of Cicero's *De republica*): 'Justice removed, then, what are kingdoms but great bands of robbers? What are bands of robbers themselves but little kingdoms?' Without justice, Augustine says – and presumably he intends this statement to apply to all pagan states – the state differs from a band of robbers only in

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point of size and immunity from consequences. He suggests, indeed, that a state might actually originate in a gang of bandits. 'If, by the constant addition of desperate men, this scourge grows to such a size that it acquires territory, establishes a seat of government, occupies cities and subjugates peoples, it assumes the name of kingdom more openly. For this name is now manifestly conferred upon it not by the removal of greed, but by the addition of impunity.' Augustine possibly has in mind here the story, to which he refers at I,34 and II,29, of how Romulus originally peopled Rome by offering sanctuary to criminals. More than six hundred years later, writing to Bishop Hermann of Metz, Pope Gregory VII, in a conscious or unconscious paraphrase, says, 'Who does not know that kings and princes derive their origin from men ignorant of God who, at the instigation of the devil, the prince of this world, raised themselves up above their fellows by pride, plunder, treachery, murder and every kind of crime?'[7]

At its worst, then, the state is the institutionalisation of man's most characteristic and destructive weaknesses: greed; vanity; the lust for power, possession and glory. Even at its best, the pagan state cannot be a commonwealth, a moral community, properly so called. It can achieve only a semblance of justice: a justice which consists not in the absence but in the mere suppression of discord. None of this, however, is to imply that, strictly speaking, Augustine is hostile to the state or opposed to it. In this regard, we may make four points.

First, as an important part of his political thinking, Augustine acknowledges that even pagan states have an indispensable part to play in securing the peace and order which all men want: the peace for the sake of which even wars are waged, and without which even robbers cannot live. Certainly, this peace is not true peace: true peace, like true justice, exists only in heaven, when all the antagonisms associated with life in a fallen world have ceased (see XIX,27). Moreover, it is only a transient and unstable kind of peace, achieved and maintained by violence and fear, and often desired only so that ignoble ends may be pursued without interruption. But it is nonetheless peace of a kind, and, as such, is a kind of good: it brings

[7] This letter may be read in translation in E. Emerton (ed.), *The Correspondence of Gregory VII* (New York, 1932), pp. 166ff.

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back a measure of order to a world disordered by sin. In this sense, the state may be regarded not only as a consequence of and punishment for sin, but as a remedy: a means of restraining and controlling the disruptive aspects of human behaviour which are the result of sin. As such, it brings benefit to Christians and non-Christians alike; 'for, while the two cities are intermingled, we also make use of the peace of Babylon' (XIX,26).

Second, despite its association with man's fallen condition, the state has not come into being against the wishes of God, as it were. On the contrary, its existence is in accordance with His wishes and at His command. The state has its place in the divine will and plan, foreknown, foreordained and with its own proper purpose. Voicing what was to become a commonplace of medieval political thought (although not, oddly enough, quoting the famous dictum of St Paul at Rom. 13,1ff), Augustine insists that all power comes from God, whether conferred upon good rulers or bad. 'He gives happiness in the kingdom of heaven only to the godly. Earthly kingdoms, however, He gives to the godly and ungodly alike, as it may please Him, Whose good pleasure is never unjust . . . He Who gave power . . . to the Christian Constantine also gave it to the apostate Julian' (V,21). Wicked rulers are instruments of God's punishment. The emperor Nero, for example, was a ruler noted for abominable cruelty and wickedness. 'But the power of lordship is given even to such men as this only by the providence of the supreme God, when He judges that the condition of human affairs is deserving of such lords. The divine voice is clear on this matter, for the wisdom of God speaks as follows: "By me kings reign, and tyrants possess the land"' (V,19, quoting Prov. 8,15). (We may notice in passing here, however, that Augustine consistently fails to make the rather obvious distinction between the divine authority of the *institution* of government and the divine authority of the individual ruler. This omission was to have a significant bearing upon medieval discussions of whether or not an unjust ruler may be resisted.)[8]

Third, Augustine is certainly not without admiration for the deeds and fortitude of the heroes celebrated in the history of Rome: Marcus Regulus, Gaius Mucius Scaevola, the Decii, Curtius and

[8] See R. W. and A. J. Carlyle, *A History of Mediaeval Political Theory in the West* (5th impression, Edinburgh and London, 1962), pp. 151; 169.

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the rest. Misguided as they were in what they desired and loved, these are men who, in some ways, are a salutary example to the Christian (see especially v,18). Indeed, he suggests that God has allowed the Roman state to achieve greatness precisely in order to furnish us with such an example.

> Thus, when illustrious kingdoms had long existed in the East, God willed that there should arise in the West an empire which, though later in time, should be more illustrious still in the breadth and greatness of its sway. And, in order that it might overcome the grave evils which had afflicted many other nations, He granted it to men who, for the sake of honour and praise and glory, so devoted themselves to their fatherland that they did not hesitate to place its safety before their own, even though they sought glory for themselves through it. (v,13)

> Moreover, it was not only for the sake of rendering due reward to the citizens of Rome that her empire and glory were so greatly extended in the sight of men. This was done also for the advantage of the citizens of the eternal City during their pilgrimage here. It was done so that they might diligently and soberly contemplate such examples, and so see how great a love they owe to their supernal fatherland for the sake of life eternal, if an earthly city was so greatly loved by its citizens for the sake of merely human glory. (v,16)

Nor is Augustine without admiration for the intellectual achievements fostered by the culture of the pagan state. He speaks with consistent respect of Plato, Varro, Plotinus and Porphyry. His own philosophical range is somewhat restricted by his lack of all but a smattering of Greek. He seems, for example, to have first-hand knowledge of only the *Meno* and *Timaeus* of Plato in Latin translations. But it is clear that he cannot entirely shake off his respect for the accomplishments, insofar as he understands them, even of those whom he wishes to oppose.

Fourth, and predictably enough, Augustine considers that, in contrast to the radical injustice of the pagan state, the specifically Christian state comes as close to accomplishing justice as it is possible to come on earth. 'If', he says, at II,19 (quoting Psalm 148,11f),

> 'the kings of the earth and all nations, princes and all the judges of the earth, young men and maidens, old men and children',

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> people of every age and each sex; if those to whom John the Baptist spoke, even the tax gatherers and the soldiers: if all these together were to hear and embrace the Christian precepts of justice and moral virtue, then would the commonwealth adorn its lands with happiness in this present life and ascend to the summit of life eternal, there to reign in utmost blessedness.

The Christian state, imperfect though it inevitably is, can nonetheless provide a milieu within which the Church can do her work effectively and the Christian life can be lived by its citizens. The Christian ruler can, in his own person, furnish his subjects with an example of piety and humility. At v,24 Augustine gives a description *in nuce* of the life and tasks of the Christian emperor.

> For we do not say that certain Christian emperors were happy because they ruled for a longer time, or because they died in peace and left behind sons to rule as emperors, or because they subdued the enemies of the commonwealth, or because they were able to avoid and suppress uprisings against them by hostile citizens. For even certain worshippers of demons, who do not belong to the kingdom of God to which these emperors belong, have deserved to receive these and other gifts and consolations of this wretched life; and this is to be attributed to His mercy, Who does not wish those who believe in Him to desire such things as their highest good. Rather, we say that they are happy if they rule justly; if they are not lifted up by the talk of those who accord them sublime honours or pay their respects with an excessive humility, but remember that they are only men; if they make their power the handmaid of His majesty by using it to spread His worship to the greatest possible extent; if they fear, love and worship God; if they love that Kingdom which they are not afraid to share with others more than their own; if they are slow to punish and swift to pardon; if they resort to punishment only when it is necessary to the government and defence of the commonwealth, and never to gratify their own enmity; if they grant pardon, not so that unjust men may enjoy impunity, but in the hope of bringing about their correction; if they compensate for whatever severe measures they may be forced to decree with the gentleness of mercy and the generosity of benevolence; if their own self-indulgence is as much restrained as it might have been unchecked; if they prefer to govern wicked desires more than any people whatsoever; if they do all these things not out of

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> craving for empty glory, but from love of eternal felicity; and if, for their sins, they do not neglect to offer to their true God the sacrifices of humility and contrition and prayer. We say that, for the time being, such Christian emperors are happy in hope and that, in time to come, when that to which we now look forward has arrived, they will be so in possession.

This *speculum principis* was to have many imitators in the centuries to come. Reading it, one is inevitably struck by the words, 'if they make their power the handmaid of His majesty by using it to spread His worship to the greatest possible extent'. Two chapters later in the same book (v,26), Augustine refers approvingly to Emperor Theodosius's famous submission to the authority of Bishop Ambrose of Milan in 390; and, in the same place, he congratulates that emperor on his readiness 'to assist the Church in her labours against the ungodly by means of the most just and merciful laws'. Also, we know from Augustine's letters on the subject that, despite initial misgivings, he came eventually to feel that the Church may and should call upon the secular magistrate to aid her in her struggle against heretics and schismatics.[9] Certainly, it would be a major error of interpretation to suppose that, in the *City of God* or anywhere else, Augustine offers a 'theory' of Church and State, or *regnum* and *sacerdotium*, or that he suggests in any definite sense that the secular authorities are subordinate to or the servants of the Church. There is no doubt, however, that, in *The City of God* and elsewhere, he does present us with some of the components of such a theory.

Augustine's political thought cannot be called systematic. Arguably, indeed, it is rather misleading to synthesise his more or less scattered remarks into a continuous narrative. In fact, he does not really regard political relationships or doctrines as having any particular importance considered merely as such. After all, he says, 'what difference does it make under what rule a man lives who is soon to die, provided only that those who rule him do not compel him to do what is impious and wicked?' (v,17). It is largely because his political thought developed in so *ad hoc* a fashion and is expressed

[9] For the development of Augustine's thought on this important topic, see H. A. Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St Augustine*, Ch. 6.

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so incidentally that it is so notoriously full of inconsistency and ambiguity. Having said this, however, we may identify at least three important respects in which he is of enduring interest to the historian of political thought. First, Augustine confronts more fully than any of his Christian predecessors the ethical and political doctrines and assumptions of classical philosophy, at least insofar as these are mediated to him to him through Latin sources. In an intelligible sense, Augustine forms the turning-point from which the historian can date the beginning of the medieval Christianisation of political thought. Second, he develops a comprehensive critique of the moral and political tradition of imperial Rome: he deconstructs the ideology of Rome as the eternal city, whose peace and justice are the peace and justice of the world.[10] Third – and this, perhaps, is the main point – his ideas form a clear and important stream of inspiration for political writers from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries. The doctrine of the two cities (much misunderstood and misrepresented, but importantly so); the association of political power with sin, and with all that is base, ignoble and destructive in man; the idea of man's utter dependence upon divine grace, as bestowed through the agency of the Church, if he is to be anything more than a condemned sinner; the suggestion that the Church might and should call upon secular rulers to assist her: all these things were to take their place alongside the other familiar themes of medieval political controversy. As Augustine wishes the terms to be understood, a people, and therefore a commonwealth, cannot be truly such unless, in addition to whatever legal or social bond it has, it is united by a common worship of the true God. Viewed in terms of the subsequent history of political thought, this is, to say the least, a rather pregnant idea.

[10] On this subject, see especially Donald Earl, *The Moral and Political Tradition of Rome* (London, 1967).

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A brief chronology of Augustine's life

354	Born Thagaste, 13 November.
370	Began to study rhetoric at Carthage.
373–80	Attracted to Manichaeism; became a Manichaean auditor.
374	Taught rhetoric at Thagaste and Carthage.
375	Inspired to seek wisdom by Cicero's *Hortensius*.
374–83	Taught rhetoric at Carthage.
383	Taught rhetoric at Rome; became disenchanted with Manichaeism.
384	Accepted position at Milan; fell under the influence of St Ambrose and Milanese Christians.
386	Converted to Christianity; earliest written work, *Contra academicos*, completed at Cassiciacum.
387	Baptised, Holy Saturday, by St Ambrose.
388	Established small monastic community at Thagaste.
391	Ordained priest at Hippo; established monastic community there.
396	Became bishop of Hippo.
397–400	*Confessions*.
413	Began work on the *City of God*.
426	Finished the *City of God*.
430	Died, 28 August, at Hippo.

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