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Divine Love Directing Human History: Saint Augustine's City of God

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'Divine Love Directing Human History: Saint Augustine's *City of God*'

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I. Saint Augustine's Background

Aurelius Augustinus was born in 354 CE in the rather insignificant town of Tagaste (Souk Ahras, Algeria) in the Roman African province of Numidia. Though ethnically Punic-Berber, Augustine grew up in a Latin speaking area of Tagaste and never learned the predominant language of his home town.[1] His father, who died during Augustine's youth, was a pagan who held a modest position in the Roman administration. His mother Monica, was a simple, uneducated woman known for her Christian faith and commitment to prayer. Though his parents were very different, both were committed to Augustine receiving the best possible education. Hence, Augustine received much of his classical Roman education, which consisted largely of literature and rhetoric, in places such as Madauros (Mdaoururuch, Algeria) and Carthage. Though Augustine's father was not a Christian, he did not prohibit Monica from providing her son with an informal religious education at home. As a youth however, Augustine expressed little interest in spiritual matters preferring the allurements of the illicit theatre shows, sexual relationships, as well as philosophy. At the age of nineteen, Augustine fathered a son out of wedlock.

Upon finishing his studies, Augustine worked as a professor of rhetoric in Carthage. Frustrated with the quality of students in the African capital, he crossed the sea

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[1] Augustine, *Epistula* 20*. P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo,* pp. 468-69.

in 383 to Rome and eventually to Milan where he received an appointment as a professor of rhetoric. Yet, according to Augustine, in Milan he encountered much more than the opportunity for career advancement as he made the acquaintance of Ambrose, bishop of the city. Ambrose was not only kind to the young Augustine, but he was also an intellectual whose manner of exegeting the Scriptures appealed to the teacher of rhetoric.[2] On account of the influence of Ambrose as well as his mother, Augustine embraced Christianity in 386 and was baptized by Ambrose in the church of Milan in Easter of 387.

After resigning from his teaching post in Milan, Augustine returned to Tagaste in 388 in the company of friends and family with the goal of becoming a *servus Dei* (a servant of God). That is, with a group of like-minded friends, he formed a type of monastery on his family's estate in which their daily activities consisted of prayer, study, speculation, and writing. In 391, Augustine was ordained to the ministry as a *presbyter* in the church of Hippo (Annaba, Algeria). In 395, he was ordained bishop of the Hippo church and remained in that role until his death in 430.

Augustine was a prolific writer and communicator authoring 117 books, 252 letters, while preaching at least seven hundred sermons. His books include doctrinal and theological treatises, apologetic works defending Christianity, as well as practical books related to leading the church. His most famous works include his autobiography, the *Confessions*, as well as *City of God*, the subject of our study. Prior to his death, he revised and organized all of his writings which were preserved in the library at Hippo. Though originating from modest roots in Tagaste, Augustine continues to the present day to be regarded as one of Christianity's most significant thinkers.

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[2] *Confessions,* 5.13.23; 6.4.6.

The goal of the present article is to treat Augustine's understanding of a philosophy of history, particularly through his paramount work, *City of God*. Initially we will consider the historical context of early fifth century Rome, in which Augustine was writing, followed by a brief overview of how the entire work was structured and came together. Next, we will interact with Augustine's understanding of the origin, progress, and end of the city of God as well as that of its counterpart—the earthly city. Our treatment of *City of God* will enable us to make some conclusive remarks toward Augustine's understanding of history— a history in which God is not only involved and interacting with man, but one that He is directing through providence and love.

II. Historical Context of *City of God*

On August 24, 410, the unimaginable occurred as General Alaric led his Vandal armies into Rome and pillaged it. Before withdrawing from the city, the Vandals spent three days burning Rome, starving the people, and ultimately shaking the confidence of an entire civilization.[3] Rome had been regarded by the citizens of the empire as the 'eternal city' and her sack undermined this feeling of invincibility and security.[4] Peter Brown writes that 'Rome was the symbol of a whole civilization; it was if an army had been allowed to sack Westminster Abbey or the Louvre.'[5] He adds: 'Rome symbolized the security of a whole civilized way of life.'[6] As this security diminished, refugees began pouring into Roman Africa, including the port city of Hippo where Augustine resided.[7]

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[3] P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, p. 286.
[4] J. O'Donnell, 'Augustine, City of God,' p. 3. See also, Augustine, *Sermo*, 81.
[5] P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, p. 287.
[6] Ibid..
[7] Ibid. pp. 300-301. J. O'Donnell, 'Augustine, City of God,' p. 3.

As the Romans were trying to make sense of their defeat, reactions of anger and disbelief were felt throughout the empire. The most vocal group was the pagans, those who adhered to the traditional deities of Rome. Yet, since Constantine's edict of Milan in 313, Christianity had not only been tolerated but gained increasing stature toward becoming the official religion of the empire. In the century that followed Constantine's edict, the pagans would see their temples closed, festivals ended, and their religion suppressed.[8] So when Rome was sacked, the outcry from the pagans was that the gods, the guardians of Rome, had been angered by the lack of piety and devotion and thus allowed the city to fall. Ultimately, the pagans blamed the empire's Christians for the disaster.[9] While pagans responded with anger, the rest of Rome's citizens, including its many Christians, reacted to the events with dismay and despair. Hamman summarizes that the sack of the eternal city brought trauma for both pagans and Christians alike.[10]

III. Context and Structure of *City of God*

It was in the aftermath of these events that Augustine sat down to write *City of God*. The work, which he began around 412, would take nearly fifteen years to complete, and was published in several installments.[11] *City of God* was not a reaction to the fall of Rome but rather, as James O'Donnell puts it, 'a response to the response' of the fall of Rome. For in the first ten books of the work, Augustine, employing a mastery of Cicero, Virgil and other Roman writers, addresses the angry pagans and sets out to show the futility of the Roman gods and their inability to protect Rome. Hence, the purpose of the first ten books is to render the anger and blame of the pagans unjustified.

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[8] P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, p. 285.

[9] E. Fortin, '*Civitate Dei, De*,' *Augustine Through the Ages*, p. 197.

[10] Hamman writes: 'chez les païens et chrétiens, le sac de la Ville éternelle provoqua un traumatisme.' A. Hamman, *La Vie Quotidienne en Afrique de Nord au temps du Saint Augustin*, p. 346.

[11] Augustine, *Rectractiones*, 2.43.1. J. O'Donnell, 'Augustine, City of God,' pp. 1-2.

In the second half of his work, Books 11-22, Augustine addresses the other group—the bewildered Christians trying to come to terms with the imminent fall of their civilization. While showing great concern for the plight of the refugees filing into his city, Augustine chooses to rise above the fray and offer a deeper perspective on the events and history. It is the second half of *City of God* that will provide the basis for our discussion of Augustine's philosophy of history.

Though *City of God* was certainly a work developed in response to the fall of Rome, we must assert that Augustine's philosophy of the two cities was not. Rather, we find clear reference to the notion of the two cities in earlier works such as: *De vera religione* (written in 389-90);[12] *De catechizandis rudibus* (399);[13] and *Epistulae* 90, 91, 103, 104 (408).[14] Nevertheless, the circumstances of Rome's demise pushed Augustine and his monumental work onto the world stage to be considered by a much larger audience.

IV. A Tale of Two Cities

The basis for Augustine's notion of the two cities is found in the Scriptures. He writes that the Scriptures have 'paramount authority, and to which we yield assent in all matters of which we ought not to be ignorant, and yet cannot know of ourselves.'[15] It is therefore not surprising that Augustine takes the term 'city of God' from three different verses found in the Psalms:

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[12] J. O'Donnell, 'Augustine, City of God,' p. 8.

[13] H. Maier, 'The End of the City and The City Without End: The *City of God* as Revelation,' in M. Vessey et al, *History, Apocalypse, and the Secular Imagination,* p. 154.

[14] G. O'Daly, 'Thinking Through History: Augustine's Method in the *City of God* and Its Ciceronian Dimension,' in M. Vessey et al., *History, Apocalypse, and the Secular Imagination,* pp. 47-49.

[15] *City of God,* 11.3. All English translations are taken from Saint Augustine, trans., Marcus Dods, *The City of God*.

> Glorious things are said of you, O city of God[16]. . .Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain[17]. . . There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells.[18]

When Augustine observed the human experience, he classified people as belonging to two sets of spiritual realities—the earthly city and the city of God. Though men and women wear the same clothes, frequent the same market, or sit in the same chamber of parliament; Augustine assigned to them a spiritual citizenship based on the object of their love. In short, members of the earthly city are consumed with self love, while citizens of the city of God are in love with the ways of God. Given this brief definition let us pose the following questions which follow Augustine's line of reasoning in his work: What is the origin of the two cities, their progress through history, as well as their end? What characterizes the city of God and the earthly city? How does one become a citizen of either city? How does a citizen of the city of God dwell in the earthly city?

1. The Origin of the Two Cities

In Books 11-14 of *City of God*, Augustine describes the origin of the two cities. He begins with a discussion of the angels—beings created to serve God who were fashioned with both a mutable nature and a free will. Those angels who followed Lucifer were tempted by pride and plunged into darkness by exercising their will to rebel against God.[19] On the contrary, the faithful angels remained in the light by choosing to honor God and doing what was good.[20] Hence, the angelic members of the two cities arrived

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[16] Ps. 87:3.
[17] Ps. 48:3.
[18] Ps. 46:4. *City of God*, 11.1.
[19] *City of God*, 11.33; 12.1, 8.
[20] Ibid. 12.6.

there through the exercise of their free will which would foreshadow the path of man.[21]

Donald Burt writes:

> Both angels and humans received the gift of freedom. They were meant someday to be permanent residents in the city of God, but to realize this intention they had to claim citizenship by a free decision whereby they chose to love God more than anything else.[22]

Adam, the father of the human race, was created to dwell in paradise—a type of heaven on earth.[23] Yet, like the angels, man was created in a mutable state with a free will to love and obey God or to rebel.[24] Like Lucifer, the first humans were tempted by pride and thus chose to turn from God.[25] Burt adds: 'Apparently the only real temptation they had was the growing conviction that they could make Eden even better if they were in charge.'[26] The result was that: 'The first humans used their great gift of freedom to destroy their paradise by disobeying the one and only rule that God imposed.'[27] Despite man's choice to disobey and the disastrous consequences, Augustine asserts that God in his omniscient foreknowledge was not unaware of the direction man would take and thus remained sovereign over the affairs of man and history.[28]

Adam's fall not only caused his own expulsion from the garden and the beginning of a life of pain and separation from the presence of God, it also affected the spiritual condition of his offspring. Augustine writes: 'Man, being of his own will corrupted, and justly condemned, begot corrupted and condemned children.'[29] Hence, Augustine introduces the notion of original sin as a characteristic of the earthly city. Since the

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[21] Ibid. 11.34; 12.9.
[22] D. Burt, *Friendship and Society: An Introduction to Augustine's Practical Philosophy,* p. 13.
[23] *City of God,* 13.18.
[24] Ibid. 12.21.
[25] Ibid. 14.13.
[26] D. Burt, *Friendship and Society,* p. 14.
[27] Ibid. p. 18.
[28] *City of God,* 12.22.
[29] Ibid. 13.14.

offspring of Adam are born with a tendency to sin and disobey God and indeed realize this potential early on, they are automatically rendered citizens of the earthly city.

2. The Progress of the Two Cities

In Books 15-18 of *City of God*, Augustine sets out to describe the progress and growth of the 'two cities, or the two communities of men, of which the one is predestined to reign eternally with God, and the other to suffer eternal punishment with the devil.'[30] Augustine traces the initial progress of the two cities to Adam's two sons—Cain and Abel. Though both sons offered sacrifices to God, the apparent condition of Cain's heart and devotion made his sacrifice unacceptable to God. Cain in jealousy and anger responded by murdering his brother.[31] Hence, the initial stages of the earthly city were marked by jealousy and murder.[32] In this context, Cain went farther and established a dwelling place on earth for his family by building a city.[33] In Book 18 of *City of God*, Augustine describes the continuation of the earthly city following Cain through a chronological account of many of its kings and leaders down to Augustine's day.

The progress of the city of God begins with Cain's slain brother Abel. Augustine describes him as a 'sojourner' or pilgrim who did not settled on earth by building a city like his brother.[34] The majority of Books 15-18 of *City of God* serves as a commentary on the Scriptures and recounts the lives of those saints who, like Abel, sojourned on the earth walking with God while longing for the heavenly city to be fully realized. Hence, the members of the city of God are traced from Noah and his children; through Abraham

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[30] Ibid. 15.1.
[31] Ibid. 15.5. D. Burt, *Friendship and Society,* p. 19.
[32] Augustine parallels this set of events to the founding of Rome and the murderous feud that took place between Romulus and Remus. *City of God,* 15.5.
[33] Ibid. 15.5. Gen. 4:17.
[34] *City of God*, 15.1.

and his descendents; through the holy kings of Israel including David and Solomon; through the prophets including Samuel; and finally culminating in the appearing of Christ.[35] Augustine, citing the words of the prophets who foretold the coming of Christ, draws our attention to a thread of stewardship of those who demonstrated the values of the city of God from the time of Noah to Christ.[36] Augustine makes this connection especially between Abraham and Christ by referring to Abraham as the seed of Christ. He writes: 'on account of the Christian people in whom the city of God sojourns in the earth, we look for the flesh of Christ in the seed of Abraham.'[37]

Hence, the two cities progress simultaneously and alongside one another in space-time history. Indeed the members of each city interact with one another while living out the values of the city of their allegiance.

3. The End of the Two Cities

Augustine dedicates Books 19-22 of *City of God* to describing the end result of the cities. Both cities will realize their respective ends at the return of Christ and the subsequent day of judgment. Augustine writes:

> For that day is properly called the day of judgment, because in it there shall be no room left for the ignorant questioning why this wicked person is happy and that the righteous man unhappy. In that day true and full happiness shall be the lot of none but the good, while deserved and supreme misery shall be the portion of the wicked, and of them only.[38]

As previously noted, the destiny of the members of the earthly city will be punishment, hell, and separation from God.[39]

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[35] Ibid. 16.12; 17.1.
[36] Ibid. 16.36; 18.35.
[37] Ibid. 16.41.
[38] Ibid. 20.1.
[39] Ibid. 22.1.

On the contrary, those who have adhered to the values of the city of God will be saved from the destruction of the earthly city. As the city of God is eternal, its members will inherit eternal life in heaven. Augustine writes: 'in that city all the citizens shall be immortal, men now for the first time enjoying what the holy angels have never lost.'[40] Further, they will experience eternal happiness and rest in God—a reverse of Adam's curse which included cultivating the ground through the sweat of his brow.[41] Finally, heaven will be characterized by eternal peace between humans and between God and man. The greatest treasure of heaven will be that man will continually dwell in the presence of a loving God as Adam had lived before the fall. Augustine concludes: 'The peace of the celestial city is the perfectly ordered and harmonious enjoyment of God, and of one another in God.'[42]

4. What is the Earthly City?

Throughout *City of God*, Augustine provides a vivid description of the earthly city and its characteristics. Briefly put, the citizens of the earthly city are 'those who wish to live after the flesh' choosing to live for self and rejecting the ways of God.[43] Augustine further describes this self focus by writing: 'the earthly city [is formed] by the love of self, even to the contempt of God . . . glorifies itself . . . seeks glory from men . . . lifts up its head to its own glory . . . delights in his own strength.'[44] The result of such selfish tendencies is that the society experiences a breakdown where 'litigations, wars, [and] quarrels' are common[45] and the powerful oppress the weak. Augustine adds: 'the

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[40] Ibid..
[41] Ibid. 19.4; 22.30. Gen. 3:19.
[42] *City of God,* 19.13.
[43] Ibid. 14.1, 4. The works of the flesh that Augustine refers to are contained in Paul's letter to the Galatians 5:19-21.
[44] *City of God,* 14.28; 17.4.
[45] Ibid. 15.4; 19.5.

strongest oppress the others, because all follow after their own interests and lusts, while what is longed for either suffices for none . . . the vanquished succumb to the victorious.'[46] As noted, the earthly city is merely temporal and physical and its membership grows only through procreation.[47]

Augustine, following the influence of John in the New Testament book of Revelation, metaphorically refers to the earthly city as Babylon. The Assyrian capital whose name meant 'confusion,' was built by Nemrod—a descendant of Noah's son Ham who had been cursed for disrespecting his father.[48] Babylon was built up in the spirit of Cain's earthly city and was characterized by pride, personal glory, and defiance to God.[49] Commenting further on the confusion of Babylon, Augustine remarks that even the philosophers and historians of the earthly city disagree with each other on the nature of truth. Throughout *City of God*, Augustine certainly challenged the logic and coherency of the thinkers of his Babylon—Rome.[50] Finally, as the children of Israel had been taken into captivity in Babylon in the sixth century before Christ, the earthly city also represented a place of spiritual exile for the members of the city of God.[51]

5. What is the City of God?

Let us now consider Augustine's description of the city of God whose members 'wish to live after the spirit.'[52] He writes that the heavenly city has been formed by: 'the love of God, even to the contempt of self . . . the glory of the [city of God] is God.'[53] He

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[46] Ibid. 18.2.
[47] Ibid. 15.4, 16.
[48] Ibid. 16.4. D. Burt, *Friendship and Society,* p. 21.
[49] *City of God,* 16.11. D. Burt, *Friendship and Society,* pp. 22-23.
[50] C. Conybeare, '*Terrarum Orbi Documentum:* Augustine, Camillus, and Learning from History,' in M. Vessey et al., *History, Apocalypse, and the Secular Imagination,* p. 63.
[51] D. Burt, *Friendship and Society,* p. 25.
[52] *City of God,* 14.1.
[53] Ibid. 14.28.

adds that 'there is no human wisdom, but only godliness, which offers due worship to the true God, and looks for its reward in the society of the saints, of holy angels as well as holy men "that God may be all in all."'[54] Unlike the earthly city, the members of society and government work together harmoniously as 'the princes and subjects serve one another in love, the latter obeying, while the former takes thought for all.'[55] While the earthly city increased only through physical generation, the city of God increases through regeneration—those who have been cleansed from sin and come to God in a sort of new birth.[56] The city of God, in contrast to its earthly counterpart, is eternal and has no end.[57]

As the progress of the city of God found its completion in Christ, Augustine regards Christ as king of the heavenly city.[58] Hence, David's reign in the earthly Jerusalem was merely of shadow of the reign that Christ has in the city of God.[59] Augustine goes even farther and refers to Christ as the founder of the heavenly city, which signifies his deity and creative attribute.[60] Though king and creator, Christ rules the city of God in humility influencing his subjects to also adopt this quality. This humility of the city of God also stands in contrast to the pride and selfishness of the earthly city.

In contrast to Babylon, Augustine used Jerusalem as his metaphor to represent the city of God. He calls it: 'the Jerusalem which is above, that is, the city of God.'[61] God's particular love for the children of Israel and the earthly Jerusalem was simply a shadow

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[54] Ibid. 1 Cor. 15:28.
[55] *City of God,* 14.28. D. Burt, *Friendship and Society,* p. 13.
[56] *City of God,* 15.16.
[57] Ibid. 15.4.
[58] Ibid. 17.4.
[59] Ibid. 17.14.
[60] Ibid. 15.20.
[61] Ibid. 16.31.

of the heavenly Jerusalem.[62] Several aspects of the earthly Jerusalem point to characteristics of the city of God: the ark of the covenant, which represented the presence of God;[63] the temple built by Solomon that facilitated worship; the peace experienced under Solomon referred to the eternal peace to be experienced in the heavenly city; and, as noted, the reign of king David that foreshadowed the eternal reign of Christ.[64] One final aspect of the earthly Jerusalem that points to the heavenly city is that men from many nations, not merely Israel alone, were regarded as 'people of God' and citizens of Jerusalem. Augustine writes: 'there have been certain men even of other nations who belonged, not by earthly but heavenly fellowship, to the true Israelites, the citizens of the country above.'[65] Perhaps Augustine was influenced by John's vision of heaven in Revelation:

> After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'[66]

While likening the city of God to a heavenly Jerusalem with Christ as its king, Augustine also uses city of God synonymously with the terms 'kingdom of heaven' and 'church.'[67] Despite Kenny's assertion that 'the city of God is not the same as the Christian church on earth,'[68] Augustine quite clearly equates the two. In Book 13 of *City of God*, he speaks of 'defending the city of God, that is, his church';[69] while in Book 17

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[62] Ibid. 17.14.
[63] D. Burt, *Friendship and Society,* p. 24.
[64] *City of God,* 17.3, 13, 14.
[65] Ibid. 18.47.
[66] Rev. 7:9, 10.
[67] *City of God,* 17.1.
[68] A. Kenny, *A Brief History of Western Philosophy,* p. 107.
[69] *City of God,* 13.16.

he refers to 'the church of Christ, the city of the great king.'[70] Augustine regarded the

church as a universal network of redeemed saints who had Christ as their redeemer and

head. This description is quite consistent with Augustine's understanding of the city of

God.

6. Citizenship in the Two Cities

In Augustine's schema of the two cities, how does one obtain citizenship in each

city? As noted, one disastrous consequence of Adam's fall was that his children are born

with a corrupt nature and quickly demonstrate their ability to sin thus rendering them

citizens of the earthly city. Augustine summarizes: 'Now citizens are begotten to the

earthly city by nature vitiated by sin'[71] While citizens of the earthly city arrive there by a

rebellious act of the will, they also remain there by continuing in a state of pride, self

sufficiency, and rebellion against God.

Though all of Adam's offspring begin as citizens of the earthly city, Augustine

repeatedly preaches that one can lay hold of the heavenly city. As Burt asserts, the

biggest goal for those living in the earthly city is 'to discover how they can win

citizenship in the city of God, how they can avoid eternal condemnation in the earthly

city.'[72] How is this immigration possible? Augustine writes that one joins the city of God

through faith:

> It is written, 'The just lives by faith,' for we do not as yet see our good, and must
> therefore live by faith; neither have we in ourselves power to live rightly, but can
> do so only if He who have given us faith believe in His help do help us when we
> believe and pray.[73]

Burt, commenting further on the salvation from the earthly city, writes:

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[70] Ibid. 17.4.
[71] Ibid. 15.2.
[72] D. Burt, *Friendship and Society,* p. 29.
[73] *City of God,* 19.4; 22.16. Hab. 2:10; Rom. 1:17.

> Redemption came through the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became human in order to save the race . . . salvation was an act of love whereby those who have turned away from God, who had become aliens if not indeed enemies, were created once again as children of God.[74]

Hence, the response of the citizen of the earthly city wanting to join the city of God is to receive by faith the gift of Christ's sacrifice as payment for sins and to repent or turn from the habit of sin and follow God through the power of Christ.[75] Finally, as long as the citizen of the earthly city is alive, he has the opportunity to join the city of God.[76]

7. Pilgrims in the Earthly City

In *City of God*, Augustine addresses those citizens of the heavenly city who presently reside on earth. Like Abel, he regards them as pilgrims and sojourners on earth[77] who are characterized by the humility of Christ.[78] Living in Babylon, the pilgrim lives out his existence in a sort of exile in which he is not immune to the pain of the earthly city or the temptation to sin.[79] Rather, Augustine who believed that suffering was an excellent vehicle for spiritual growth, maintained that the pilgrim could be strengthened through what he endured in the earthly city. He writes: 'It is thus the citizens of the city of God are healed while they sojourn in this earth and sigh for the peace of their heavenly country. The Holy Spirit, too, works within, that the medicine externally applied may have some good result.'[80] In another book, *On Christian Doctrine,* Augustine also encouraged spiritual growth through persevering in the earthly city:

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[74] D. Burt, *Friendship and Society,* p. 14.
[75] Ibid. p. 15.
[76] Ibid. p. 16.
[77] Ibid. 14.19. D. Burt, *Friendship and Society,* p. 19.
[78] *City of God,* 14.13; 17.3.
[79] Ibid. 14.9.
[80] Ibid. 15.6.

> We have wandered far from God; and if we wish to return to our Father's home, this world must be used, not enjoyed . . . so the invisible things of God may be clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, that is, that by means of what is material and temporary we may lay hold upon that which is spiritual and eternal.[81]

Thus, Abel's struggle and pain in the earthly city foreshadowed what the pilgrims who came after him would endure.[82]

While encouraging the pilgrim to grow even through the adversity of the earthly city, Augustine also believed that one's earthly existence could also be enjoyed in light of the hope that he has in the city of God:

> And yet, if any man uses this life with a reference to that other which he ardently loves and confidently hopes for, he may well be called even now blessed, though not in reality so much as in hope. But the actual possession of the happiness of this life, without the hope of what is beyond, is but a false happiness and profound misery.[83]

Like Solomon and the subjects of the earthly Jerusalem, a pilgrim can also enjoy by faith the peace of the earthly city. Burt writes: 'They rejoice in love, friendship, good health, the feeling of accomplishment in a work well done, the beauty of the world around them; but they rejoice in these as good to be used along the way, not as the goal of their life.'[84]

Augustine described the city of God, or the church, as growing up in the midst of the earthly city. More than simply surviving, Augustine believed that the pilgrims could be 'salt and light' and have a redeeming influence on the earthly city.[85] Augustine advocated this through loving God and neighbor; including those neighbors of various

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[81] *On Christian Doctrine,* 1.4.4.
[82] Ibid. 15.15.
[83] Ibid. 19.20.
[84] D. Burt, *Friendship and Society,* p. 16.
[85] Matt. 5:13, 14.

races and backgrounds.[86] Further, the pilgrim should be a good citizen and obey the laws of the earthly city while praying for its leaders.[87] Burt concludes:

> The church of Christ (the people of God) is in a similar exile now under the rule of earthly kings . . . Christians should serve their temporal rulers with patience and fidelity and pray for them that they themselves may be converted to service of God.[88]

8. Summary

From the authoritative basis of the Scriptures, Augustine interpreted his own experience and history through the lens of what he termed the earthly city and the city of God. The earthly city was founded upon the rebellion of angels and men who exercised their free will to disobey God. The city of God has Christ as its founder and consists of those holy angels who remained faithful as well as men who have been rescued by faith from the ways of the earthly city. The two cities run a parallel course in a linear account of history. The earthly city begins with Cain, progresses through the lives of worldly kings and people, toward an inevitable destruction away from the presence of God. The city of God is observed in the lives of those saints of Scripture who remained faithful to God. The citizens of the city of God live out their days in the earthly city in light of the hope of heaven that will be inaugurated at the return of Christ and day of judgment. Finally, they live out their experience in the earthly city as pilgrims growing through its pain, enjoying its benefits, while endeavoring to influence the earthly city for good.

V. Augustine's Philosophy of History

Augustine's explanation of history was far from theoretical as he personally experienced the pain and struggles of what he considered the earthly city. The Vandals, who had sacked Rome in 410, continued their siege across the empire and nearly twenty

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[86] *City of God,* 19.14, 17.
[87] Ibid. 19.17. 1 Tim. 2:1, 2.
[88] D. Burt, *Friendship and Society,* p. 28.

years after the initial attack on Rome, they arrived at Augustine's city of Hippo and besieged it. Augustine passed away during the onslaught, actually dying of a fever at the age of seventy-six. His biographer Possidius wrote that in his final days, 'Augustine found strength in the sayings of a wise man: "No one is great who is amazed that wood and stone collapse and mortals die."'[89] Like Babylon and other earthly kingdoms, Rome was not an eternal city or civilization and, consistent with the values of the earthly city, it would not be immune to war or destruction. O'Daly writes: 'Within this panorama, earthly kingdoms have a limited life span.'[90] It seems plausible that Augustine's thought on the rise and fall of civilizations would influence another North African scholar, Ibn Khaldoun, who would take up this question in the medieval period.

Augustine wrote Books 11-22 of *City of God* to encourage the Christians of the Roman Empire by offering them a Christian and eternal perspective of history. That is, even if the Roman Empire fell, the city of God would not. Even if they became displaced and exiled in the earthly city, they would never lose their citizenship in heaven. Surely Augustine continued to ponder what he had written years earlier in his *Confessions*: 'We need not fear to find no home again because we have fallen away from it; while we are absent our home falls not to ruins, for our home is your eternity.'[91] Augustine could maintain such a perspective because he believed that God was sovereignly directing history and guiding it through providence and love. God would carry and strengthen those who love him through the most difficult circumstances and then reward them with eternal life marked by peace, rest, and happiness. O'Daly concludes: 'For Augustine the

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[89] Possidius, *Life of Saint Augustine,* 28.11. Possidius is most likely referring to Plotinus.
[90] G. O'Daly, 'Thinking Through History: Augustine's Method in the *City of God* and Its Ciceronian Dimension,' M. Vessey et al., *History, Apocolypse, and the Secular Imagination,* p. 55.
[91] *Confessions*, 4.16.31.

object of history is none other than the study of the mind and will of God . . . Historical study leads to an understanding of God's part in human affairs.'[92] Finally, as Eugene Kevane concludes: '*City of God* is a world history like that of Herodotus (father of history) yet he does not eliminate the relationship of the divine in telling it.'[93]

As previously noted, Augustine could have written *City of God* whether Rome had fallen or not. Nevertheless, the historical context of the decline of the Roman Empire thrust Augustine and his notion of the two cities onto the world stage with the publication of *City of God*. The result is that his *magnum opus* (great work) continues to the present day to find a significant place in the ongoing debate toward a conception and philosophy of history.

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[92] G. O'Daly, 'Thinking Through History: Augustine's Method in the *City of God* and Its Ciceronian Dimension,' M. Vessey et al., *History, Apocolypse, and the Secular Imagination,* pp. 54-55.
[93] E. Kevane, *Augustine the Educator,* p. 18.

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