

## **Lecture 17- The City of God: St. Augustine's Theology of History**

*Augustine is a role model, reminding historians of the need for a theological perspective, and theologians of the fact of their existence in history.*

*Alister E. McGrath in Historians of the Christian Tradition*

*There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the most high dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts.*

*Psalm 46: 4-6*

### **Assigned Reading**

*The Story of Christianity—chapter 25*

### **Key Terms**

City of God, man of God

### **Objectives**

- Explain the meaning of the 'Fall of Rome'
- Compare and contrast Augustine's view of the fall of Rome to that of the other Christians, and even the pagans of the day

### **Class Prayer**

*"Blessed are all your saints, O God and King, who have traveled over the tempestuous sea of this life, and have made the harbor of peace and felicity. Watch over us who are still on our dangerous voyage; and remember those who lie exposed to the rough storms of trouble and temptations. Frail is our vessel, and the ocean is wide; but as in your mercy you have set our course, so steer the vessel of our life towards the everlasting shore of peace, and bring us at length to the quiet haven of our heart's desire, where you, O God, are blessed and live and reign for ever. Amen."*

*Augustine*

## **The City of God: St. Augustine's Theology of History**

### I. The Sack of Rome in 410

- A. Augustine died in 430
- B. The last western emperor died in 476

### II. The Different Responses

- A. Pagan: vengeance of the pagan gods because of Rome's turning to Christianity
- B. Christian: God's punishment on Rome for tolerating paganism
- C. Augustine: *The City of God*—a book in which Augustine, as he says, defends "the glorious city of God against those who prefer their own gods to the founder of that city."
  1. Books 1-10: apologetic and polemic
    - a. Pagan gods ineffective and in fact nonexistent
    - b. Neoplatonic spiritualism insufficient for eternal life
    - c. God has not promised earthly peace and prosperity -"God has decreed that temporal goods and evils should be common to good and bad alike." (1, 8)
  2. Books 11-22: interpretation of history
    - a. Origin and beginning of the two cities: self-love and love of God
      - 1) Angels/ Cain and Abel
      - 2) God's predestination

## b. Progress: empire and church

## 1) Rome: “the city of this world”

- a) Not the source of all evil (the Donatists)
- b) Nor God’s chosen instrument of salvation (Eusebius)
- c) But the creation and instrument of God
- d) However, “if justice be absent, what is a kingdom but a crowd of gangsters?” (4, 4)
- e) Lack of compassion

## 2) Church: the visible expression of “the city of God” on earth

- a) Nature of the church: “...while the city of God is on pilgrimage in this world, she has in her midst some who are united with her in participation in the sacraments, but who will not join with her in the eternal destiny of the saints.” (1, 35)
- b) Diversity of the church: “this heavenly city, while it sojourns on earth, calls citizens out of all nations, and gathers together a society of pilgrims of all languages...It...is so far from rescinding and abolishing these diversities, that it even preserves and adopts them, so long only as no hindrance to the worship of the one supreme and true God is thus introduced.” (19, 17)

## c. Outcome and goal

- 1) The rule of Christ is here and now in the church (realized eschatology). The two “goods:” that which is to be used and that which is to be enjoyed for its own sake.
- 2) The two cities “are interwoven and intermixed in this era, and await separation at the last judgment.” (1, 35)
- 3) Heaven is the perfect “city of God” and the true home and reward of the Christian.

## 3. A book about everything!

- a. Allegorical interpretation of numbers (15, 20)
- b. A man and his dog (19, 7)
- c. The “immortal” flesh of a peacock (21, 4)
- d. Reflections on childhood (21, 14)
- e. The age of our resurrection bodies (22, 15)
- f. The joys of living near the sea (22, 24)

Closing paragraph of *The City of God*: “And now, as I think, I have discharged my debt, with the completion, by God’s help, of this huge work. It may be too much for some, too little for others. Of both these groups I ask forgiveness. But of those for whom it is enough I make this request: that they do not thank me, but join with me in rendering thanks to God. Amen. Amen.”

For Further Study

Of course, have a go at Augustine’s *City of God*. George Grant writes: Augustine “perhaps made his greatest contribution with his analysis of the culture war here on earth and its relation to the war in the heavenlies. *The City of God* continues to define the terms of the debate better than any other work written before or since. I recently reread the massive work and was struck by its stunning relevance some 1,500 years after it was first written.”

James Montgomery Boice’s *Two Cities, Two Loves: Christian Responsibility in a Crumbling Culture* (1987) restates for our times Augustine’s idea of two cities formed in turn by two different loves.