PAIDEIA CENTER
FOR THEOLOGICAL DISCIPLESHIP

DISCUSSION LEADER GUIDE

AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *THE CITY OF GOD*

DISCUSSION LEADER GUIDE

AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

The City of God

INTRODUCTION

If Augustine of Hippo is the most influential of Christian theologians this side of Paul, then his *Confessions* and *City of God* remain the most significant of his writings in the history of the church (and, indeed, of the wider world). To make the most of reading the text together, some things need to be said about the author and about his text.

First, Augustine of Hippo (354-430) was among the most prolific and influential of early Christian leaders. He was raised by a pagan father and Christian mother. He was taught the Christian faith as a young man, but found Scripture to be lame literature and wasn't at all drawn to the renunciatory or self-restraining nature of Christian ethics. He pursued pleasure, knowledge, renown, and material security via a career in rhetoric (at which he was quite successful). He eventually came under the influence of Porphyry and certain Platonists, and he would then be drawn into the Manichee sect. His mother's prayers, his friends' good influence, and the witness of Ambrose, bishop of Milan, helped prepare the way toward his faith and Christian baptism. He moved from baptism in 387 to ordination in 391 toward appointment as bishop of Hippo in or around 395. He served there until his death in August 430. During that time, he carried on extensive correspondence with many other church leaders (especially in North Africa), taught much of the Bible, and played a leading role in several doctrinal or ecclesiastical controversies (the Donatist and Pelagian debates being the most important).

Second, why did he write *The City of God*? In late August 410, King Alaric of the Goths led his army to invade the city of Rome for a weekend. It was a brief and focused insurgency (neither lasting nor extensive), but it punctured the seemingly impregnable self-confidence of the eternal city. Many viewed it as a cataclysmic and apocalyptic event: "When the brightest light of the world was extinguished, when the very head of the Roman empire was severed, the entire world perished in a single city" (Jerome, Letter 126.2). Rome had been ruled in ways led by Christians (such as Constantine and then especially by Theodosius) and favorable to Christians, often even to the detriment of pagans. Some Christians spoke of a *tempora Christiana*, a Christian era or epoch in Roman history, and earlier Augustine seemed to also think in this direction. But now trouble had set in, and some Romans blamed this Christian rule for this supposedly new defeat. At the very end of his life, Augustine reflected back on how this prompted his writing of *The City of God*.

> "In the meantime, Rome was devastated by an assault on the part of the Goths acting under King Alaric and by a most destructive invasion. Worshipers of the many false gods, whom we usually call pagans, attempted to impute the devastation to the Christian religion and began to blaspheme against the true God with more harshness and bitterness than usual. Hence, burning with zeal for the house of God, I started to write the books on *The City of God* in answer to their blasphemies and errors" (Augustine, *Revisions*, II.43).

Augustine wrote this work apologetically against those critics. But its title is not *Against the Pagans* (as some editions have it); it is simply *The City of God* (a phrase he takes from several Psalms). The title is instructive. While he mounts a defense of Christianity against its Roman critics, he does far more: he also seeks to help catechize Christians about their citizenship in God's city (rather than the city of man) and how that shapes their engagement of this world and time.

Third, what is the theme of this large, daunting book?

> "The glorious city of God is my theme in this work, which you, my dearest son Marcellinus, suggested, and which is due to you by my promise … as the plan of this work we have undertaken requires, and as occasion offers, we must speak also of the earthly city, which, though it be mistress of the nations, is itself ruled by its lust of rule" (preface; 3).
>
> > Marcellinus was an imperial official sent to Africa to end the Donatist schism. He wrote to Augustine in either 411 or 412 (his letter is correspondence number 136).
>
> Augustine returns to the aim and sequence of the work as a whole at the end of book 1: "In truth these two cities are entangled together in this world, and intermixed until the last judgment effect their separation. I now proceed to speak, as God shall help me, of the rise, progress, and end of these two cities; and what I write, I write for the glory of the city of God, that, being placed in comparison with the other, it may shine with a brighter luster. But I have still some things to say in confutation of those who refer the disasters of the Roman republic to our religion, because it prohibits the offering of sacrifices to the gods … And lastly, I must meet those who, when on this point convinced and confuted by irrefragable proofs, endeavor to maintain that they worship the gods, not hoping for the present advantages of this life, but for those which are to be enjoyed after death" (I.35-36; 38-39).
>
> If there is a thesis, it is this statement: "Accordingly, two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self" (XIV.28; 477).

Fourth, what is the structure of this book? *The City of God* is organized into twenty-two books (what we would today call chapters), and Augustine specifies their scope and sequence:

> "The first five books refute those who want human affairs to prosper, who believe that the veneration of the numerous gods whom the pagans used to worship is indispensable for this end, and who argue that the present evils are caused and abound chiefly because this cult is forbidden. The following five books speak out against those who declare that the life of mortals has never been and will never be free of those evils, sometimes great and sometimes

small, varying from time to time, from place to place, and from person to person, while they dispute the usefulness of the veneration of numerous gods for the future life after death by offering sacrifice to them. These ten books refute therefore those two opinions contradicting Christian religion. Lest, however, someone reproaches us that we only refute the opinions of others without asserting our own, the second part of this work does so, comprising twelve books, though in the first ten books we also assert our own opinion when it is necessary, and refute the opposing arguments in the latter twelve. The first four of the following twelve books contain the origin of the two cities, one being God's and the other one of this world; the next four treat their growth or development, and the third and last set of four describe their aims" (*Revisions*, 2.43; see also Letter 212A).

So we can sum up two aims: first, to offer an immanent critique of Roman criticisms of Christianity, showing that they do not disprove Christianity or even hold up on their own terms; second, to describe the origin, history, and end of the City of God over against the City of Man (largely to reform Christian thinking about public theology). So he first deals with external critics, then he cleans house by attending to intra-ecclesial issues.

Fifth, what are major questions and themes prompted by wrestling with this searching text?

a. What is happiness? The presence of God or the promise of the gods of Rome and the idols of today (market, consumption, health).
b. What is the good life? The virtues of Christianity over against the mores of Rome and the ethos of today.
c. Why do we suffer? The goodness of creation and the pain of a sinful existence.
d. What do we love? The love of self to the contempt of God or the love of God to the contempt of self.
e. Why do we sin? The lust for power (*libido dominandi*) and our moral psychology.
f. What is the focal image? The pilgrim wayfarer as the Christian identity.
g. How do we relate to our neighbors? The pursuit of peace eternally and the amelioration of misery now.

These and many other questions will be addressed or prompted by reading the text.

Sixth, here are a few lines to keep in mind as you enter study of this great work:

"Wars we will always have with us; worries and terrors, anxieties and uncertainties: these are our lot in life, after the fall, east of Eden. But we must never allow the terrible pressures of today to make us forget that today is not all there is" (Charles Matthewes, *The Republic of Grace*, 248).

"It is loved rightly when it is loved ordinately" (XV.22).

"The heavenly city—on pilgrimage, not at home, while it is here on earth—is not captivated by earthly things, and it does not allow them to deflect it from its ultimate destination. But it, too, must make use of temporal things to sustain itself during its earthly existence, and, for precisely this reason, it too has a stake in earthly peace" (Gary Badcock, *City of God*, vol. 1: xxxviii).

Seventh, how does *City of God* relate to *Confessions*?

Many of us have already studied Augustine's *Confessions* (either in a Paideia Center group or in previous educational settings). Are there parallels or connections between them? It won't be a surprise that there are some differences in tone and style; that work is voiced prayer, whereas *City of God* is not; and that work tells much of his personal story at points, whereas Augustine is not a character explicitly in this book. Perhaps it won't be shocking, however, that there are obvious overlaps: in discussing the psychology of temptation or in working to define the relationship of time and eternity or even in assessing the value of Platonist writers like Porphyry. Both texts manifest Augustine's enduring fascination with the early chapters of Genesis, and each of them depicts what becomes known as the anti-Pelagian understanding of original sin.

There's a more fundamental, easily overlooked connection between *Confessions* and *City of God* that deserves mention as we begin our study together. Both texts move sequentially. *Confessions* begins with Augustine pre-baptismal experiences (books 1-9) and then describes something of Christian life (books 10-13). Similarly, *City of God* depicts Roman or pagan life (books 1-10) before describing the beginning, perseverance, and eventual ending of a City of God (books 11-22). In a real sense, *City of God* is the story of a Christian society, whereas *Confessions* is the story of a Christian person.

There's an even more specific parallel to be mentioned too. In depicting pre-Christian life – whether personally there or in public terms here – Augustine moves from more basic desires (wealth, material prosperity, physical security) toward the pursuit of higher goods (legacy, civic glory, even a philosophically understood afterlife). Books 1-9 in the *Confessions* tell the story of a non-Christian searching for happiness and moving up Maslow's hierarchy of needs, in each case finding temporary satisfaction that eventually proves vain or fleeting. Here *City of God* 1-10 describe a civic ideology that similarly moves up the hierarchy of needs, with books 1-5 focusing on this worldly satisfactions and books 6-10 considering civic and eternal goods that are next pursued by pagans.

Augustine shifts his tone, reference points, and thematic concerns in both books, so much so that scholars wonder how each book can be a single book. Many think the books are a conjunction of disparate parts, stitched together (more or less elegantly). *Confessions* 10-13 turn philosophical and exegetical and leave behind autobiography, and *City of God* 11-22 shift almost entirely from pagan debates to Christian scriptural exegesis. One can experience a bit of literary whiplash when moving from one to another part. But there is a theological reason for these major shifts. The turn happens in each case because ultimate happiness – abiding happiness for an individual person or for a Christian society – can only be found in knowing God. Therefore, while his or society's own narrative of varied searches for happiness can adequately describe human failings, Augustine must end by turning to God and God's action so that we might know him and be with him. He alone gives sabbath rest forevermore, therefore we must contemplate him. Augustine concludes each book by helping us begin in that task.

One final suggestion about textual pairings may help you conceptualize and read most productively. Both *Confessions* and *City of God* read best alongside Ecclesiastes, depicting

the way in which earthly goods "under the sun" only satisfy partially and temporarily and pointing to the fact that ultimately, while we should thankfully receive earthly goodness, we ought to fear God alone, for in him alone can be found lasting peace and joy. *Confessions* is a narrative version of Ecclesiastes, and *City of God* is a sociological re-statement of it.

Further Bibliography

For the works of Augustine in Latin, see the relevant volumes in the Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina. For English translation, see the Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century series published by New City Press. Most pertinent for understanding *City of God* are two other texts: *Confessions* (on the self) and *Teaching Christianity* (on being formed by Holy Scripture).

Several translations and editions of *City of God* exist. There are a few that are acceptable, while one is especially recommended. First, the best available version would be the two-volume edition translated by William Babcock and published in the Works of St. Augustine for the 21st Century by New City Press. Unfortunately, it is very expensive. Second, the Modern Library edition translated by Marcus Dods is also an excellent option and includes a strong preface by Thomas Merton; it is very affordable in both hardback and paperback. Third, the Penguin Classics version includes a decent translation from Henry Bettenson. The key is to use one of these three editions in unabridged form. For Paideia groups, we will be using the Modern Library edition for its blend of excellence and affordability.

For biography, see Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, new edition (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000); and Miles Hollingworth, *Saint Augustine of Hippo: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

For reference works to Augustine more broadly, see David Vincent Meconi and Eleonore Stump (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (2nd edition; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Allan D. Fitzgerald (gen. ed.), *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); and C. C. Pecknold and Tarmo Toom (eds.), *The T & T Clark Companion to Augustine and Modern Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2016).

Literature on Augustine is legion, and there are many good studies. The scale of it can be taken in by observing that there is a whole journal, *Augustinian Studies*, devoted to him and his reception history. For significant monographs or books on aspects of his thought of greatest pertinence to this text, see especially:

a. David Vincent Meconi (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine's City of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).
b. Rowan Williams, *On Augustine* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).
c. John Cavadini, *Visioning Augustine* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2019).
d. Oliver O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine* (repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006).

e. Han-Luen Kantzer Komline, *Augustine on the Will: A Theological Account* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
f. Matthew Drever, *Image, Identity, and the Forming of the Augustinian Soul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
g. Carol Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology: An Argument for Continuity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
h. Gerald Boersma, *Augustine's Early Theology of Image: A Study in the Development of Pro-Nicene Theology* (Oxford Studies in Historical Theology; New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).
i. Robert Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).
j. Robert Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
k. Robert Dodaro and George Lawless (eds.), *Augustine and His Critics* (London: Routledge, 2000).

You might wish to listen to the lectures given by Charles Matthewes, *Books that Matter: The City of God* (The Teaching Company's Great Courses lectures). They are masterful aids in tracking book by book through the text.

1ST MONTH

Books 1 - 3

The first part of the CG aims to respond to criticisms of Christianity. Is Rome's recent defeat in August 410 the result of Christian influence that has turned the various Roman gods against the city and empire? Has increasing Christian presence in Roman politics actually watered down its civic piety? Augustine begins to offer what we call an "immanent critique" in these books, that is, he argues in their own terms and reliant on their own sources. He does not turn to Scripture to rebut pagans, but he argues that their own approach neither condemns Christianity nor maintains a coherent portrait itself.

Book Summaries:

- Book 1: "Augustine censures the pagans, who attributed the calamities of this world, and especially the recent sack of Rome by the Goths, to the Christian religion, and its prohibition of the worship of the gods. He speaks of the blessings and ills of life, which then, as always, happened to good and bad men alike. Finally, he rebukes the shamelessness of those who cast up to the Christians that their women had been violated by the soldiers" (3).

- Book 2: "In this book Augustine reviews those calamities which the Romans suffered before the time of Christ, and while the worship of the false gods was universally practiced; and demonstrates that, far from being preserved from misfortune by the gods, the Romans have been by them overwhelmed with the only, or at least the greatest, of all calamities—the corruption of manners, and the vices of the soul" (40).

- Book 3: "As in the foregoing book Augustine has proved regarding moral and spiritual calamities, so in this book he proves regarding external and bodily disasters, that since the foundation of the city the Romans have been continually subject to them; and that even when the false gods were worshipped without a rival, before the advent of Christ, they afforded no relief from such calamities" (74).

Big Themes or Questions:

- Did Christianity Make Recent Years Worse?

  Far from ceding the point, Augustine argues that pagans sheltered in churches during the raid of Rome, being preserved in that ark from Alaric's invasion.

- Were Earlier Years Really That Good?

  Augustine also shows that Rome wasn't as awesome as it claimed. Even in days when

religion was at its height, Rome suffered all manner of pestilence and want.

- The Doctrine of Suffering

  Augustine raises the philosophical question, showing that righteous and wicked alike suffer in this life and achieve success in this life. Providence is mysterious.

- Did the Roman Gods Help?

  The gods instituted games or spectacles that paraded vice and violence. We need to grasp that these public spectacles regularly included rape and murder; for a classic account of these theatricals, see Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 67.4. "But the fact is, that it was the gods who demanded that they should be exhibited to gratify them" (II.13; 51). "If these are sacred rites, what is sacrilege? If this is purification, what is pollution?" (II.3; 43)

  How do these calamities relate to the Roman gods? Their "habit is to be instigators and instructors in vice, not its avengers" (III.3; 76). They hinder and do not help. They set examples of moral chaos, not of moral self-restraint or discipline.
  Augustine then includes a very long paragraph recounting question upon question: "Where, then, were those gods …?" The line appears nine times in III.17/92-93. Then he shifts to ask repeatedly "Or when …?" four times in the remainder of the paragraph in III.17/93-94. As Gary Badcock puts it, "the overall point, once again, is that it is senseless to worship the gods either to avoid the evils or to obtain the goods of this temporal life" (Badcock, 71). Rhetorically, this paragraph (III.17) is the most dense and summative form of this book's argument.

- Why Did Rome Last So Long?

  The real question becomes not whether or not Christianity is ending or hindering Rome but rather: how did pagan Rome last so long and succeed so much? Here Augustine parses the effects of Roman virtue: while it's neither good in the short term (because ruthless) nor successful in the long term (because it's prideful), it does have medium term benefits for military and political success (because it involves real discipline and grit). Charles Matthewes sums it up: "Whereas the history of Rome had been told as a story of rising greatness and increasing happiness, Augustine wants to retell it as a story of series of calamities for all involved, especially the Romans" (Matthewes, 111-112).

Key Quotes:

"It grieves them more to own a bad house than a bad life, as if it were man's greatest good to have everything good but himself" (III.1).

"Our Christ has issued so many precepts inculcating virtue and restraining vice; while their own gods have done nothing whatever to preserve that republic that served them, and to restrain it from ruin by such precepts, but have rather hastened its destruction, by corrupting its morality through their pestilent example" (II.25).

"There are indeed some among them who are thoroughly well-educated men, and have a taste for history, in which the things I speak of are open to their observation; but in order to irritate the uneducated masses against us, they feign ignorance of these events, and do what they can to make the vulgar believe that those disasters, which in certain places and at

certain times uniformly befall mankind, are the result of Christianity, which is being everywhere diffused, and is possessed of a renown and brilliancy which quite eclipse their own gods" (II.3).

Discussion Questions:

- What is the *libido dominandi* (introduced on page one)?
- Augustine will reframe the question of suffering: as Charles Matthewes puts it, "the key is the character of wrong attachment to the world, and the question should be to what use we put suffering, not who we can blame for it" (Matthewes: 99). How are we shaped to play the blame game? How can we foster a culture that seeks to learn through suffering?
- What is and is not really involved in believing in God's providence?
- What were the charges against Christians then? What are they in our setting today?

2ND MONTH

Books 4 - 7

In these books Augustine shifts from his first toward his second criticism of Roman opponents of Christianity. In books 1-5, he addresses criticisms that Christianity hinders earthly happiness (i.e. wealth, security, long life), but in books 6-10 he will consider a criticism that Christianity also hinders happiness in the afterlife. He presents a typology of three kinds of theology in late antique Rome: civil theologies, fabulous theologies, and natural/philosophical theologies. In these books, he critiques civil and fabulous theologies. They promise happiness in the afterlife through the pursuit of *Gloria* and the esteem of the city.

Book Summaries:

- Book 4: "In this book it is proved that the extent and long duration of the Roman Empire is to be ascribed, not to Jove or the gods of the heathen, to whom individually scarce even single things and the very basest functions were believed to be entrusted, but to the one true God, the author of felicity, by whose power and judgment earthly kingdoms are founded and maintained" (109).

- Book 5: "Augustine first discusses the doctrine of fate, for the sake of confuting those who are disposed to refer to fate the power and increase of the Roman empire, which could not be attributed to false gods, as has been shown in the preceding book. After that, he proves that there is no contradiction between God's prescience and our free will. He then speaks of the manners of the ancient Romans, and shows in what sense it was due to the virtue of the Romans themselves, and in how far to the counsel of God, that he increased their dominion, though they did not worship him. Finally, he explains what it is to be accounted the true happiness of the Christian emperors" (142).

- Book 6: "Hitherto the argument has been conducted against those who believe that the gods are to be worshiped for the sake of temporal advantages, now it is directed against those who believe that they are to be worshipped for the sake of eternal life. Augustine devotes the five following books to the confutation of this latter belief, and first of all shows how mean an opinion of the gods was held by Varro himself, the most esteemed writer on heathen theology. Of this theology Augustine adopts Varro's division into three kinds, mythical, natural, and civil; and at once demonstrates that neither the mythical nor the civil can contribute anything to the happiness of the future life" (182).

- Book 7: "In this book it is shown that eternal life is not obtained by the worship of Janus, Jupiter, Saturn, and the other 'select gods' of the civil theology" (206).

Big Themes or Questions:

- Can Christians Contribute to Society? (i.e. Theodosius [V.24])

  Pagans won't always recognize it or celebrate it, but Augustine does argue that Christians can contribute to the good of wider society. Theodosius is an example in his imperial leadership and in his humble willingness to do penance for his own public sins (when confronted by Ambrose of Milan).

  Thus far, Augustine has sought to explore why Rome could last so long and extend so far if her own imagined rationale for that prosperity isn't accurate. Now he turns back to his initial concern, namely, the pagan challenge relayed to him by Marcellinus that Christians are a problem and cannot be contributing members of Roman society. Augustine asks now if a Christian can lead well.

  "For neither do we say that certain Christian emperors were therefore happy because they ruled a long time, or, dying a peaceful death, left their sons to succeed them in the empire, or subdued the enemies of the republic, or were able both to guard against and to suppress the attempt of hostile citizens rising against them … But we say that they are happy if …" (V.24; 178). A dozen "if" statements follow:

    "if they rule justly"

    "if they are not lifted up amid the praises of those who pay them sublime honours, and the obsequiousness of those who salute them with an excessive humility, but remember that they are men"

    "if they make their power the handmaid of His majesty by using it for the greatest possible extension of His worship"

    "if they fear, love, worship God"

    "if more than their own they love that kingdom in which they are not afraid to have partners"

    "if they are slow to punish, ready to pardon"

    "if they apply that punishment as necessary to government and defense of the republic, and not in order to gratify their own enmity"

    "if they grant pardon, not that iniquity may go unpunished, but with the hope that the transgressor may amend his ways"

    "if they compensate with the lenity of mercy and the liberality of benevolence for whatever severity they may be compelled to decree"

    "if their luxury is as much restrained as it might have been unrestrained"

    "if they prefer to govern depraved desires rather than any nation whatever"

    "if they do all these things, not through ardent desire of empty glory, but through love of eternal felicity, not neglecting to offer to the true God, who is their God, for their sins, the sacrifices of humility, contrition, and prayer"

  "Such Christian emperors, we say, are happy in the present time by hope, and are destined to be so in the enjoyment of the reality itself, when that which we wait for shall have arrived" (V.24; 178). As he said earlier, "it is God who makes us happy, who is the true riches of minds" (V.18; 168).

- Public Dignity Exceeds Wealth and Comfort

Augustine's sixth and seventh books begin to explore higher yearnings that exceed material prosperity. There's also an appetite for legacy, dignity, and what the Romans would call *gloria* (Glory).

- Did Christianity Hinder Civic Honor?

  Augustine seeks to argue in book six that Christian virtue and policy has not hindered the pursuit of civic honor. Pagan practice and character did not ensure civic dishonor, and Christian distinctiveness doesn't do so either.

- Three Types of Theology

  i. Fabulous Theology
  ii. Philosophical Theology
  iii. Civil Theology

- Are the Gods of the City Better than the Gods of the Theater?

  Augustine has little time for elites who think they're more refined than the populist gods of the theater. They really depend on populist culture to help carry their water. So he says that both civil and fabulous theologians are, in fact, both civil and fabulous.

Key Quotes:

Robert Markus observes that whereas earlier Augustine was seemingly indifferent to the earthly city, he now shows concern that it enable and not inhibit the pursuit of the heavenly city, that it be "used" appropriately (Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, 70-71). For the earlier attitude, see: "In regard to this mortal life, short and transitory, what does it matter under whose rule a dying man lives, so long as those who rule do not compel him to commit impiety or injustice" (V.17.1). For the new attitude: "So the heavenly city, too, uses the earthly peace in the course of its earthly pilgrimage. It cherishes and desires, as far as it may without compromising its faith and devotion, the orderly coherence of men's wills concerning the things which pertain to the mortal nature of man; and this earthly peace it refers to the attainment of heavenly peace" (XIX.17).

Varro: "Divine things were instituted by men" (VI.4; 188). Divine beings are humanly produced myths. Varro seems to suggest long ago what Ludwig Feuerbach later identified as "projectionism."

Discussion Questions:

- Why was Theodosius a good example? What virtues did he display?
- In what ways did Roman gods set poor examples and commend vices? Why did that example and those vices sometimes lead to military or economic success?
- If Varro said that Roman gods were mythic institutions made by men to support their ideals, what would be myths or ideals of such power today (even if not spoken of in personified or deified form)? And do such myths wind up being projected into some of our own theological beliefs?

3RD MONTH

Books 8 - 10

Augustine now completes his "immanent critique" of the Roman opponents of Christianity. In these final books, he focuses on the natural theologians, that is, the philosophers. He seeks to show that they do not truly help one find happiness in the afterlife, whereas their criticisms of Christianity do not succeed in showing it to have failed here. Augustine will focus on the concepts of transcendence, mediation, and sacrifice in these books.

Book Summaries:

- Book 8: "Augustine comes now to the third kind of theology, that is, the natural, and takes up the question, whether the worship of the gods of the natural theology is of any avail towards securing blessedness in the life to come. This question he prefers to discuss with the Platonists, because the Platonic system is 'facile princeps' among philosophers, and makes the nearest approximation to Christian truth. In pursuing this argument, he first refutes Apuleius, and all who maintain that the demons should be worshiped as messengers and mediators between gods and men; demonstrating that by no possibility can men be reconciled to good gods by demons, who are the slaves of vice, and who delight in and patronize what good and wise men abhor and condemn—the blasphemous fictions of poets, theatrical exhibitions, and magical arts" (243).

- Book 9: "Having in the preceding book shown that the worship of demons must be abjured, since they in a thousand ways proclaim themselves to be wicked spirits, Augustine in this book meets those who allege a distinction among demons, some being evil, while others are good; and having exploded this distinction, he proves that to no demon, but to Christ alone, belongs the office of providing men with eternal blessedness" (280).

- Book 10: "In this book Augustine teaches that the good angels wish God alone, whom they themselves serve, to receive that divine honour which is rendered by sacrifice, and which is called 'latreia.' He then goes on to dispute against Porphyry about the principle and way of the soul's cleansing and deliverance" (303).

Big Themes or Questions:

- Do Philosophers Have Something Better?

- Divine Transcendence

  "We are all his temple, each of us severally and all of us together, because he

condescends to inhabit each individually and the whole harmonious body, being no greater in all than in each, since he is neither expanded nor divided" (X.3; 306). Again Augustine attacks the wrongheaded notion that radical divine transcendence means that God cannot or wishes not to be near his people (see also X.28; 344-345). In fact, he will here speak of God making his altar in the human heart.

- What Kind of Mediation Is Needed?

Augustine has now wrapped up the first part of the *City of God*. A few things should be highlighted about the way he has offered "immanent critique" of the pagan, Roman opposition to Christianity.

- The lure and limits of substitutes: he acknowledges the promise and even short- and medium-term payoff to various other goods, but he concludes always by showing how they fail to satisfy in the long term.

- The trajectory from this-worldly to eternal goods: he not only considers pagan critics who care about money, sex, and power, but also those who tend to higher ideals like reputation, legacy, and glory. He charts the way in which a society and a person is likely to move through that pathway, with earlier interest in lower goods followed by later pursuit of higher goods. But none of these earthly goods (whether in this or the next life) is high enough to bring true satisfaction.

- Suspicion of wolves (CG II.3 on the dishonest elite who manipulate the masses): he points out the way many elites will knowingly sell what they don't themselves buy as a means of getting along or getting ahead.

- Augustine's Story with Respect to the Old Testament: whereas the Old Testament was a literary scandal to pagan Augustine (owing to its base concern with land and descendants), he came to learn that it had higher concerns (through the figural interpretation delivered in Ambrose of Milan's preaching).

  Perhaps most interesting are his earlier words regarding the way in which the Old Testament and New Testament, each in their own way, speak of happiness/felicity and its relationship to earthly gifts. In particular, he reflects on how the Old Testament promise of earthly goods (land, descendants, etc.) should be interpreted in light of the whole canon of Scripture. "And this is the mystery of the Old Testament, in which the New was hidden, that there even earthly gifts are promised: those who were spiritual understanding even then, although not yet openly declaring, both the eternity which was symbolized by these earthly things, and in what gifts of God true felicity could be found" (IV.33; 140).

Key Quotes:

> Elsewhere he sums up our dilemma: "We want to ascend to heaven, but there are no ladders to be seen" (*Exposition of the Psalms*, 6:31).

"A true sacrifice is every work which is done that we may be united to God in holy fellowship, and which has a reference to that supreme good and end in which alone we can be truly blessed … a sacrifice in so far as he dies to the world that he may live to God" (X.6).

"we do not build temples, and ordain priests, rites, and sacrifices for these same martyrs; for they are not our gods, but their God is our God" (VIII.27; 278; see also XXII.10; 832). The chapter concludes by differentiating Christian reverence for the martyrs from pagan practices with regard to gods or demons.

"in truth, a house is now being built for the Lord in all the earth – namely, the city of God, which is the holy Church – following the captivity in which demonic forces held captive the people, now believers in God, from whom the house is being built as from living stones" (VIII.24/273-274). For identification of "city of God" and "church," see also X.21 and XIII.16. Another text (XIV.28-XV.1) seems to differentiate the two. Gary Badcock says that "when an identification of the city of God and the Church occurs in Augustine's writings, then the Church too must be understood mystically rather than merely institutionally" (I:272 fn. 95).

See what he says to clarify elsewhere: "'Tabernacle' indicates the Church in the present era; 'house' means the Church of the heavenly Jerusalem to which we are journeying … Here in God's tent we are still groaning; there in his house we shall be singing his praise. Why the difference? Because groaning is characteristic of pilgrims, and praise of people permanently settled in their homeland" (*Exposition of the Psalms*, 6:161)

Discussion Questions:

- How could we apply Augustine's therapeutic approach to opposition to live issues today? What are relevant myths (ideals) and how does his set of diagnostic questions better help us understand their power and method as well as their limitations?

    a. Identify the Myth
    b. Show Complicating Data
    c. Observe Its Transmission through Malforming Practices
    d. Don't Overlook Its Medium-Term Social Benefits

- The Platonists talk about transcendence, so why does Augustine chastise them regarding divine transcendence?
- While Augustine doesn't yet turn to exegesis of biblical teaching on Christ, how does his argument in books 8-10 help prepare the way for us to look for a mediator? How does his depiction of Platonism set the stage for Christianity's subversive fulfilment of its aspirations?

4TH MONTH

Books 11 - 14

Augustine now begins his primary task of describing and expounding the nature of the two cities. To do so, he will speak of their beginning, their history, and their eventual end. In books 11-14, he considers the origin of the City of God and the City of Man. He has Manichee errors in mind, as he seeks to argue that there is no ultimate, metaphysical dualism in the world (i.e. good and evil are not parallel realities). Rather, creation is made good, and the entrance of evil involves a later privation of that good. He also has Pelagian beliefs in mind, and he explores the doctrine of original sin at great length.

These books focus on two things: first, the metaphysics of creation as shaped by all of Holy Scripture; second, the way in which Genesis 1-3 commends a doctrine of creation, of humanity, of sin, and of human moral psychology.

Book Summaries:

- Book 11: "Here begins the second part of this work, which treats of the origin, history, and destinies of the two cities, the earthly and the heavenly. In the first place, Augustine shows in this book how the two cities were formed originally, by the separation of the good and bad angels; and takes occasion to treat of the creation of the world, as it is described in Holy Scripture in the beginning of the Book of Genesis" (345).

- Book 12: "Augustine first institutes two inquiries regarding the angels; namely, whence is there in some a good, and in others an evil will? And, what is the reason of the blessedness of the good, and the misery of the evil? Afterwards he treats of the creation of man, and teaches that he is not from eternity, but was created, and by none other than God" (380).

- Book 13: "In this book it is taught that death is penal, and had its origin in Adam's sin" (412).

- Book 14: "Augustine again treats of the sin of the first man, and teaches that it is the cause of the carnal life and vicious affections of man. Especially he proves that the shame which accompanies lust is the just punishment of that disobedience, and inquires how man, if he had not sinned, would have been able without lust to propagate his kind" (441).

Big Themes or Questions:

- Augustine talks about the kinds of knowledge that can be had of created being. He turns

to language of morning and evening as allegorical symbols of these ways of knowing or perceiving.

> "The first three days of all were passed without sun, since it is reported to have been made on the fourth day" (XI.7; 351). Augustine allegorizes morning and evening to speak of two types of knowledge: "so it dawns and breaks into morning when the creature is drawn to the praise and love of the Creator … indeed, the knowledge of created things contemplated by themselves is, so to speak, more colourless than when they are seen in the wisdom of God, as in the art by which they were made. Therefore evening is a more suitable figure than night" (XI.7; 351; see also XI.29).
>
> Augustine returns to two kinds of knowledge paired to morning and evening: "they know the creature also, not in itself, but by this better way, in the wisdom of God, as if in the art by which it was created; and, consequently, they know themselves better in God than in themselves, though they have also this latter knowledge … In him, therefore, they have, as it were, a noonday knowledge; in themselves, a twilight knowledge … For there is a great difference between knowing a thing in the design in conformity to which it was made, and knowing it in itself" (XI.29; 374).

- On interpreting the six days of Genesis 1: "because six is a perfect number – not because God required a protracted time, as if he could not at once create all things" (XI.30; 374-375). He will offer a different allegorical reading of the six days as six ages in XXII.30; 867.

- His privative view of evil appears here for the first time in City of God; see also Confessions, XI.9. Evil is not substantial but is privation in something which is itself good.

> "Vice cannot be in the highest good, and cannot be but in some good. Things solely good, therefore, can in some circumstances exist; things solely evil, never; for even those natures which are vitiated by an evil will, so far indeed as they are vitiated, are evil, but in so far as they are natures they are good" (XII.3; 383).
>
> His privative view of evil is bound up with his participatory view of all things receiving existence and sustenance from the transcendent God. Therefore, Rowan Williams asks: "If we do not share his understanding of evil as privation, no-thing, no-space, can we in any way share his understanding of God as subsistent and overflowing fullness, no-thing, no-space, the non-competitive other whose freedom makes us free?" ("Insubstantial Evil," in Robert Dodaro and George Lawless (eds.), *Augustine and His Critics*, 121).
>
> "Thus the true cause of the blessedness of the good angels is found to be this, that they cleave to Him who supremely is" (XII.6; 385).

- The metaphysics of creation found in book 11 has ongoing consequences: the contingency of created being is matched by the dependent character of creature's ongoing existence.

> "The soul, then, lives by God when it lives well, for it cannot live well unless by God

working in it what is good; and the body lives by the soul when the soul lives in the body, whether itself be living by God or no" (XIII.2; 413).

"unless divine grace aid us, we cannot love nor delight in true righteousness" (XIII.5; 416).

- "Of the first and bodily death, then, we may say that to the good it is good, and evil to the evil. But, doubtless, the second, as it happens to none of the good, so it can be good for none" (XIII.2; 413). But existentially, death is "good unto none while it is being endured" (XIII.6; 416). "The souls of departed saints are not affected by the death which dismisses them from their bodies, because their flesh rests in hope, no matter what indignities it receives after sensation is gone" (XIII.20; 430).

  Some Platonists argue that the separation of soul from body cannot be a punishment, for they viewed this separation as a great gift and blessing. Augustine will argue that they are being inconsistent, for Plato himself did not treat such separation as a blessing for the gods (XIII.16; 424-425). He alludes also to Christian reasons for believing in the resurrection of the body but says more will be addressed later in book 22 (XIII.18; 428). They also say that it is absurd to claim that the earthly bodies of humans are made eternal, but Augustine retorts that they willingly affirm the eternality of the earth itself, so why not also earthly bodies? (XIII.17; 425-526).

- Book 14 unfolds the two cities more than any others: "though there are very many and great nations all over the earth, whose rites and customs, speech, arms, and dress, are distinguished by marked differences, yet there are no more than two kinds of human society, which we may justly call two cities, according to the language of our Scriptures. There one consists of those who wish to live after the flesh, the other of those who wish to live after the spirit; and when they severally achieve what they wish, they live in peace, each after their kind" (XIV.1; 441). On "very many" or varied "great nations," see XIX.17; 695-697).

- Augustine argues that the love of the city of God is well-ordered. It loves God above all else. When loving humans, it loves them "in the Lord" or "for God's sake."

  While Augustine would speak of enjoying God and only using other humans in Teaching Christianity, he nowhere later employed the verb "use" to speak of relations to fellow humans and instead always spoke of loving them in God (O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine*, 29).

  Ordered love can actually – ironically – love lesser goods better: "You have enlarged the scope of my love, enabling it to work with joy even in dealing with things which are beneath me, things that perish and my own body" (*Expositions of the Psalms*, 1:195). "What should a Christian do? Make use of the world, but not be enslaved to it. How can this be done? By possessing things with detachment" (*Exposition of the Psalms*, 4:435).

  "Accordingly, two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self" (XIV.28; 477). Parallel summary passages about the two cities can

be found in *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, XI.15.20; and *Exposition of Psalm*, 64.2.

- In exploring the moral psychology of sin, sex is the great case study. Why? "It was fitting that this should appear specially in those parts by which is generated that nature which has been altered for the worse by that first and great sin" (XIV.20; 470).

  Our wills lose control in the act. "So possessing indeed is this pleasure, that at the moment of time in which it is consummated, all mental activity is suspended" (XIV.16; 464).

  Our bodies don't work as we wish sexually: "Sometimes this lust importunes them in spite of themselves, and sometimes fails them when they desire to feel it, so that though lust rages in the mind, it stirs not in the body" (XIV.16; 465). Erectile dysfunction (of omission or commission physiologically) illustrates the lack of volitional control.

  Our sex is bound up with shame: "Justly is shame very specially connected with this lust" (XIV.17; 465).

Key Quotes:

"In this, too, is the origin, the enlightenment, the blessedness of the holy city which is above among the holy angels. For if we inquire whence it is, God created it; or whence its wisdom, God illumined it; or whence its blessedness, God is its bliss. It has its form by subsisting in him; its enlightenment by contemplating him; its joy by abiding in him. It is; it sees; it loves. In God's eternity is its life; in God's truth its light; in God's goodness its joy" (XI.24; 369).

> Elsewhere he puts it this way: "No human being is in his or her own right, for we are inconstant and subject to change, unless we participate in him who is the Selfsame. A human being truly is when he sees God. He is when he sees Him Who Is, for, in seeing Him Who Is, the creature too comes to be in his measure. Thus he becomes Israel, for Israel is the seeing one" (*Exposition of the Psalms*, 6:22).

"For our part, we dare not believe that God is affected in one way when He works, in another when He rests. Indeed, to say that He is affected at all, is an abuse of language, since it implies that there comes to be something in His nature which was not there before. For he who is affected is acted upon, and whatever is acted upon is changeable. In his leisure, therefore, is no laziness, indolence, inactivity; as in His work is no labour, effort, industry. He can act while He reposes, repose while He acts. He can begin a new work with (not a new, but) an eternal design; and He has not made before, He does not now begin to make because He repents of His former repose … And thus, perhaps, He would show in a very striking way, to those who have eyes for such things, how independent He is of what He makes, and how it is of His own gratuitous goodness He creates, since from eternity He dwelt without creatures in no less perfect a blessedness" (XII.18; 400).

"God, then, made man in His own image. For He created for him a soul endowed with reason and intelligence, so that he might excel all the creatures of earth, air, and sea, which were not so gifted" (XII.23; 407).

"But if our creation even as mortals be a divine benefit, how is it a punishment to be restored to a body, that is, to a divine benefit?" (XII.26; 410)

"there is nothing so social by nature, so unsocial by its corruption, as this race" (XII.27; 410).

"We are not, then, by any means to suppose that we shall in the resurrection have such a body as the first man had before he sinned, nor that the words, 'As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy,' are to be understood of that which was brought about by sin; for we are not to think that Adam had a spiritual body before he fell, and that, in punishment of his sin, it was changed into an animal body" (XIII.23; 435). Augustine here gestures to what will be further discussed in book 22, namely, that the glorified, resurrection body is better than that physical existence in Eden.

"The right will is, therefore, well-directed love, and the wrong will is ill-directed love" (XIV.7; 449). "Well-directed" is another rendering for "ordered."

Discussion Questions:

- Augustine talks regularly about creation participating in God. What does that mean?
- What are major elements of the Genesis story that draw his attention? How do they relate to those that captivate modern readers?
- Why does understanding evil as privation (rather than substance) matter? And does that affect our existential or emotional experience of evil (whether as perpetrated by us or upon us)?
- What does it mean to be the image of God according to Augustine? How does that shape how we look at ourselves and at other human beings (even enemies)?
- What can we say about Augustine's view of sex? Why does he talk about it so much here?
- What are the effects of Adam's sin and the doctrine of original sin?

5TH MONTH

Books 15 - 18

Books 15-18 are the orphans of *City of God*, often left by readers. Here Augustine turns to unpacking the narrative history found in Scripture and to offering exegesis of various passages therein. These books move from the flood account all the way through the Book of Revelation and, indeed, move on (in book 18) to consider extra-biblical history of late antique Rome. There are a couple things to observe about Augustine's hermeneutic here: first, he reads scripture in a predestinarian manner, believing that God is providentially guiding both cities toward a divinely decreed end; second, he reads scripture figurally or spiritually, wherein various texts, phrases, and figures can have symbolic value beyond their immediate historical context.

Book Summaries:

- Book 15: "Having treated in the four preceding books of the origin of the two cities, the earthly and the heavenly, Augustine explains their growth and progress in the four books which follow; and, in order to do so, he explains the chief passages of the sacred history which bear upon this subject. In this fifteenth book, he opens this part of his work by explaining the events recorded in Genesis from the time of Cain and Abel to the deluge" (478).

- Book 16: "In the former part of this book, from the first to the twelfth chapter, the progress of the two cities, the earthly and the heavenly, from Noah to Abraham, is exhibited from Holy Scripture in the latter part, the progress of the heavenly alone, from Abraham to the kings of Israel, is the subject" (521).

- Book 17: "In this book the history of the city of God is traced during the period of the kings and prophets from Samuel to David, even to Christ; and the prophecies which are recorded in the books of Kings, Psalms, and those of Solomon, are interpreted of Christ and the church" (568).

- Book 18: "Augustine traces the parallel courses of the earthly and heavenly cities from the time of Abraham to the end of the world; and alludes to the oracles regarding Christ, both those uttered by the sibyls, and those of the sacred prophets who wrote after the foundation of Rome, Hosea, Amos, Isaiah, Micah, and their successors" (609).

Big Themes or Questions:

- Both cities desire good things (albeit either rightly or wrongly).

  "But the things which this city desires cannot justly be said to be evil, for it is itself,

in its own kind, better than all other human good" (XV.4; 481).

"These things, then, are good things, and without doubt the gifts of God. But if they neglect the better things of the heavenly city, which are secured by eternal victory and peace never-ending, and so inordinately covet these present good things that they believe them to be the only desirable things, or love them better than those things which are believed to be better—if this be so, then it is necessary that misery follow and ever increase" (XV.4; 482).

"When the miser prefers his gold to justice, it is through no fault of the gold, but of the man; and so with every created thing. For though it be good, it may be loved with an evil as well as with a good love; it is loved rightly when it is loved ordinately; evilly, when inordinately" (XV.22; 510).

Ordered love can actually – ironically – love lesser goods better: "You have enlarged the scope of my love, enabling it to work with joy even in dealing with things which are beneath me, things that perish and my own body" (*Expositions of the Psalms*, 1:195).

- Power and desire play a key role in shaping the way that the evil relate to God; the concept of the *libido dominandi* ("lust of rule") is crucial here. This lust to dominate others winds up being a lust that dominates one's own self.

  "And this is the characteristic of the earthly city, that it worships God or gods who may aid it in reigning victoriously and peacefully on earth not through love of doing good, but through lust of rule [*libido dominandi*]. The good use the world that they may enjoy God: the wicked, on the contrary, that they may enjoy the world would fain use God" (XV.7; 485).

  Augustine here brings in the language of enjoyment (*frui*) and use (*uti*); see also VIII.8; 253. He first employed the distinction in *On Christian Teaching*, I.22.20-21. He will later tend to speak of loving things for their own sake or for God's sake, realizing that it is crass to speak of using things or people.

  See the analysis by Oliver O'Donovan, "*Usus* and *Fruitio* in Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* I," *Journal of Theological Studies* 33, no. 2 (1982): 361-397; *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980; repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 29.

  This distinction grounds his analysis of "signs" (*signa*) and "things in themselves" (*res*). Signs are meant to be used by pointing beyond themselves. The things, though, are meant to be enjoyed in and of themselves. Augustine makes use of this distinction in looking at general revelation and at special revelation.

- He reads allegorically but critiques those who thereby deny historical reference.

  "We must rather believe that there was a wise purpose in their being committed to memory and to writing, and that they did not happen, and have a significance, and that this significance has a prophetic reference to the church, then this book, having served this purpose, may now be closed, that we may go on to trace in the history

subsequent to the deluge the courses of the two cities—the earthly, that lives according to men, and the heavenly, that lives according to God" (XV.27; 520).

Possibly a contrast intentionally with Origen's *On First Principles*, IV.3.5, where Origen speaks of all texts having spiritual meaning even if no literal meaning. Augustine teaches the opposite: all have a literal meaning, and all contribute directly or indirectly to the spiritual meaning of some and of the whole. See also Augustine, *Sermon* 89.5.

Charles Matthewes says: "When compared with such classical historical thinkers as Herodotus and Thucydides, he was far more like us, particularly in his rejection of the idea that human history is trapped in repetitive patterns that we can come to understand, anticipate, and master" (Matthewes, 124). The story has literal and significant integrity and isn't merely a pattern which can be grasped apart from its varied particularities.

- Augustine sees the OT communicating in varied fashion. "Prophetic utterances of three kinds are to be found; forasmuch as there are some relating to the earthly Jerusalem, some to the heavenly, and some to both" (XVII.3; 570).

- The City of Man is not simply a failing in divine history but has a spiritual purpose in God's predestinating plans. XVII.11 concludes by referring to the way that those in hell were not created in vain: "those whom he did not foreknow as to be delivered, he made not wholly in vain in the most beautiful and most just ordination of the whole rational creation, for the use of those who were to be delivered, and for the comparison of the two cities by mutual contrast" (592; see also XI.18 and XXI.12).

- In Book 18, he will focus on two empires: Assyria/Babylon and then Rome as the two greatest manifestations of the City of Man.

  "Among the very many kingdoms of the earth into which, by earthly interest or lust, society is divided (which we call by the general name of the city of this world), we see that two, settled and kept distinct from each other both in time and place, have grown far more famous than the rest, first that of the Assyrians, then that of the Romans" (XVIII.2; 610).

  Charles Matthewes helpfully shows that Assyria/Babylon is a sinful parody of the Old Covenant, while Rome is a sinful parody of the New Covenant (Matthewes, 131).

  The *libido dominandi* ("lust for power" or "for domination") marks empire(s) in the City of Man. He compares the path of Assyria and Rome to their geographic reach: Assyria found lighter opposition, whereas Rome had legitimately militarized foes to defeat (XVIII.22; 628). Both, however, were marked by that yearning for what much later (in another setting) might be called "manifest destiny" or the yearning to dominate.

  Domination matters, in one sense, because these empires yearn for that which is limited; therefore, happiness is a zero-sum game. Augustine's teaching has been that "the earthly [city has been formed] by the love of self, even to the contempt of God."

- Many contemporaries thought that the conversion of Constantine and then the legal program of later Emperor Theodosius brought a new Christian age (literally a *tempora Christiana*); on this development, see now Peter Brown, "Christianisation: Narratives and Process," in *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World*, 1-26.

  Whereas earlier Augustine might have believed that the post-Constantinian reforms led to a Christian epoch, here in *City of God* he shows a much more sobered restraint in noting what has involved submission to Christ and yet what remains of further, eschatological reform. He even comments that there's no guarantee that persecution is over and gone, present-day legal protections of Christians granted. Robert Markus says "the whole myth of the Theodosian Christianisation of the empire is now revealed to Augustine as a mirage" (Markus, "'*Tempora Christiana*' Revisited," 206). Earlier in the *City of God*, Augustine refers to *tempora Christiana* in polemical engagement with critics, always referring to the Theodosian reforms, but here, when he uses the term apart from such polemical fire, he references the entire age of the Christian church beginning with the Incarnation (see Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, 38).

- Two things are said of the two cities and their relationship. First, XVIII.40 speaks of convergence on various elements. Second, XVIII.41 speaks of contradiction between them. The role of prophetic witness complements the reading of social history and helps constantly challenge the status quo. Augustine ultimately argues in XVIII.54 that convergence and contradiction cannot be solved in this life; both exist until the return of Christ in transformative glory. (It's recommended to look at these three passages, especially section 54, as a group.)

- Augustine concludes by reminding us that the two cities continue throughout this era between the two comings of Christ. "Yet both alike either enjoy temporal good things, or are afflicted with temporal evils, but with diverse faith, diverse hope, and diverse love, until they must be separated by the last judgment, and each must receive her own end, of which there is no end" (XVIII.54; 668).

Key Quotes:

"The things which then were hidden are now sufficiently revealed by the actual events which have followed. For who can carefully and intelligently consider these things without recognizing them accomplished in Christ?" (XVI.2; 522).

On the word *aionion* (Latin *saeculum*): "For many things are called secular which so happen in this world as to pass away even in a short time; but what is term[ed] *aionion* either has no end, or lasts to the very end of this world" (XVI.26; 550).

En. *Ps*. 149.7 finds him saying: "The whole world has become a chorus praising Christ."

Robert Markus's comments on the text as a whole are especially helpful here: "The City of God is a book about the politics of human societies only incidentally. In so far as it is, what it

resists is the divinization of any form of social arrangement, whether existing or proposed" (*Saeculum*, xx).

Discussion Questions:

- Why does the lust to dominate become a lust that dominates?
- How does the way that Augustine reads the Bible in these books challenge our own reading of Scripture (whether that's *what* we read [as in which parts of the Bible] or *how* we read)?
- In what ways are Christians still tempted toward the idea of a *tempora Christiana*?
- Where do we need to see convergence between the cities? Where do we need to identify greater contradiction? (Think not so much of others – whoever *they* are – but of you and your tribe.)

6TH MONTH

Books 19 - 22

Augustine concludes the *City of God* by considering the end of the two cities. Book 19 considers happiness and society. It's probably the most cited book of the entire work, as it speaks more directly to what is and is not feasible in the here and now than any other segment. Book 20 looks ahead to the final judgment, whereas books 21 and 22 address hell and heaven, respectively.

Book Summaries:

- Book 19: "In this book the end of the two cities, the earthly and the heavenly, is discussed. Augustine reviews the opinions of the philosophers regarding the supreme good, and their vain efforts to make for themselves a happiness in this life; and, while he refutes these, he takes occasion to show what the peace and happiness belonging to the heavenly city, or the people of Christ, are both now and hereafter" (669).

- Book 20: "Concerning the last judgment, and the declarations regarding it in the Old and New Testaments" (710).

- Book 21: "Of the end reserved for the city of the devil, namely, the eternal punishment of the damned; and of the arguments which unbelief brings against it" (763).

- Book 22: "This book treats of the end of the city of God, that is to say, of the eternal happiness of the saints; the faith of the resurrection of the body is established and explained; and the work concludes by showing how the saints, clothed in immortal and spiritual bodies, shall be employed" (810).

Big Themes or Questions:

- How do we use or engage this present age?

  > "When we mortals possess such peace as this mortal life can afford, virtue, if we are living rightly, makes a right use of the advantages of this peaceful condition; and when we have it not, virtue makes a good use even of the evils a man suffers. But this is true virtue, when it refers all the advantages it makes a good use of, and all that it does in making good use of good and evil things, and itself also, to that end in which we shall enjoy the best and greatest peace possible" (XIX.10; 686).
  >
  > "The things necessary for this mortal life are used by both kinds of men and families alike, but each has its own peculiar and widely different aim in using them" (XIX.17; 695).

As noted with regard to books 4-7, Robert Markus observes that whereas earlier Augustine was seemingly indifferent to the earthly city, he now shows concern that it enable and not inhibit the pursuit of the heavenly city, that it be "used" appropriately (Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, 70-71). For the earlier attitude, see: "In regard to this mortal life, short and transitory, what does it matter under whose rule a dying man lives, so long as those who rule do not compel him to commit impiety or injustice" (V.17.1). For the new attitude: "So the heavenly city, too, uses the earthly peace in the course of its earthly pilgrimage. It cherishes and desires, as far as it may without compromising its faith and devotion, the orderly coherence of men's wills concerning the things which pertain to the mortal nature of man; and this earthly peace it refers to the attainment of heavenly peace" (XIX.17).

"The heavenly city—on pilgrimage, not at home, while it is here on earth—is not captivated by earthly things, and it does not allow them to deflect it from its ultimate destination. But it, too, must make use of temporal things to sustain itself during its earthly existence, and, for precisely this reason, it too has a stake in earthly peace" (Gary Badcock, *City of God*, 1:xxxviii).

- What makes for a just or peaceful society? Love and thus order are crucial.

  "The peace of all things is the tranquility of order. Order is the distribution which allots things equal and unequal, each to its own place" (XIX.13; 690). This definition follows a number of prior statements that are really brief examples:

  "The peace of the body then consists in the duly proportioned arrangement of its parts."

  "The peace of the irrational soul is the harmonious repose of the appetites, and that of the rational soul the harmony of knowledge and action."

  "The peace of body and soul is the well-ordered and harmonious life and health of the living creature."

  "Peace between man and God is the well-ordered obedience of faith to eternal law."

  "Peace between man and man is well-ordered concord."

  "Domestic peace is the well-ordered concord between those of the family who rule and those who obey."

  "Civil peace is a similar concord among the citizens."

  "The peace of the celestial city is the perfectly ordered and harmonious enjoyment of God, and of one another in God."

- He asks, can there be a city of man here and now and what makes for one or defines one?

  Option 1: "where there is not true justice there can be no assemblage of men associated by a common acknowledgment of right, and therefore there can be no people, as defined by Scipio or Cicero" (XIX.21; 699). He shows that true justice is

bound up with worship, and Rome has not ever agreed on either (see also II.21; 63-64).

Option 2: "a people is an assemblage of reasonable beings bound together by a common agreement as to the objects of their love, then, in order to discover the character of any people, we have only to observe what they love" (XIX.24; 706). This second definition satisfies Augustine in a way that the first one does not.

- In Book 20, the final day of judgment brings clarity compared to any moral reading of providence now.

  "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 righteous man unhappy" (XX.1; 711).

  "In this present time, we learn to bear with equanimity the ills to which even good men are subject, and to hold cheap the blessings which even the wicked enjoy" (XX.2; 711).

  "But now, as it is, since we not only see good men involved in the ills of life, and bad men enjoying the good of it, which seems unjust, but also that evil often overtakes evil men, and good surprises the good, the rather on this account are God's judgments unsearchable, and His ways past finding out" (XX.2; 712).

- Transformation is spoken of in two ways: "This world shall pass away by transmutation, not by absolute destruction … The figure, therefore, passes away, not the nature" (XX.14; 732). Even so, there is a "glory so pervading and so new, that no vestige of what is old shall remain" (XX.17; 736).

  Book 22 applies this duality to how we should think of the resurrected body. Elsewhere he uses the language of transfiguration: "By a glorious transfiguration of our bodies he will give strength and power to his people, for although this body of ours is sown in weakness, it will rise in strength (1 Cor 15:43)" (*Exposition of the Psalms*, 3:362)

- Augustine regularly describes our epistemic limits in understanding judgment and the last things. While all theology runs up against the challenge of divine incomprehensibility, eschatology especially raises questions of "the new" which shall be other than our this-worldly creaturely experience.

- Love will be fully and finally ordered in glory: "the time is coming when we shall enjoy one another's beauty without any lust—a condition which will specially redound to the praise of the Creator, who, as it is said in the psalm, has 'put on praise and comeliness'" (XXII.24; 854).

- The human will shall be fully freed and therefore never sin.

  "Neither are we to suppose that because sin shall have no power to delight them, free will must be withdrawn. It will, on the contrary, be all the more truly free, because

set free from delight in sinning to take unfailing delight in not sinning" (XXII.30; 865).

He addresses the will earlier also: "however valorously we resist our vices, and however successful we are in overcoming them, yet as long as we are in this body we have always reason to say to God, 'forgive us our debts.' But in that kingdom, we shall no longer have either conflicts or debts—as indeed we should not have had at any time or in any condition, had our nature continued upright as it was created" (XXII.23; 850). See similar arguments in *Enchiridion*, 28.104-105.

This is the last of the so-called four states of humanity: in creation, able to sin or not sin; after the fall, not able not to sin; in grace, able not to sin or to sin; and in this eventual glory, not able to sin. See Han-Luen Kantzer Komline, *Augustine on the Will: A Theological Account* (Oxford Studies in Historical Theology; New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

- Augustine recaps the second half of the *City of God* by offering a sevenfold account of history leading to an eternal sabbath. He does so by using the seven days of creation (from Gen. 1-2) as an allegory for history.

  "This Sabbath shall appear still more clearly if we count the ages as days, in accordance with the periods of time defined in Scripture, for that period will be found to be the seventh:

  First Day/Age: Adam to the Flood

  Second Day/Age: Flood to Abraham

  Third Day/Age: Abraham to David

  Fourth Day/Age: David to Captivity

  Fifth Day/Age: Captivity to Christ

  Sixth Day/Age: Christ's First Coming to Second Coming

  Seventh Day/Age: Eternal and Unending Sabbath

Key Quotes:

"For what do Christians hope? Why are we Christians? We are not Christians in order to pray for some earthly prosperity, which even robbers and other criminals often enjoy. We are Christians for the sake of a different felicity, which we shall receive when our life in this world has wholly passed away" (*Expositions of the Psalms*, 3:234).

"masters ought to feel their position of authority a greater burden than servants their service" (XIX.16; 695).

Augustine views house and city as related tightly: "After the state or city comes the world, the third circle of human society—the first being the house, and the second the city" (XIX.7; 683). "The house ought to be the beginning or element of the city, and every beginning bears reference to some end of its own kind, and every element to the integrity of the whole of

which it is an element, it follows plainly enough that domestic peace has a relation to civic peace" (XIX.16; 695).

"No man has a right to lead such a life of contemplation as to forget in his own ease the service due to his neighbor; nor has any man a right to be so immersed in active life as to neglect the contemplation of God" (XIX.19; 698).

As Robert Markus says, "Membership of the two cities is mutually exclusive, and there can be no possible overlap; but membership of either is compatible both with belonging to the Roman—or some other—state and with belonging to the Church" (*Saeculum*, 60-61).

God Himself, who is the Author of virtue, shall there be its reward" (XXII.30; 864-865). "He shall be the end of our desires who shall be seen without end, loved without cloy, praised without weariness" (XXII.30; 865).

"Man has not been created stooping towards the earth, like the irrational animals; but his bodily form, erect and looking heavenwards, admonishes him to mind the things that are above" (XXII.24; 853; see also his *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees*, I.17.28; *Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions*, 51.3; and the second century text, *Letter to Diognetus*, 10).

"There we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise" (XXII.30; 867)

He elsewhere puts it this way: "The end of our running will be a stillness, and in this stillness a homeland where there will be no journeying, no unrest, no temptation" (*Exposition of the Psalms*, 2:178).

Discussion Questions:

- What's Augustine's view of the body (not just in creation and fall but now also in resurrection)?
- What is the significance of the verbs he sometimes uses to describe the glorious transformation to come ("transmutation" or "transfiguration")? What do they mean? What do they not mean?
- What does it mean for loves to be re-ordered?
- How do his repeated reminders (especially regarding the doctrine of last things) about the importance of epistemic or intellectual humility challenge us?