

"Of the Citie of God", second English edition (1620), Latin original published (426 AD) by St. Augustine: A Canonical Book"

Curated by Stephen A Batman

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Summary of this Particular Rare Second Edition

Augustine, Of the Citie of God. With the Learned Comments of Io. Lodovicus Vives. Englished first by J.H. and now in this Second Edition compared with the Latin Originall, and in very many places corrected and amended, 1620



SAINT
AUGUSTINE,
OF
THE CITIE OF GOD:
WITH
THE LEARNED COMMENTS
OF
IO. LODOVICVS VIVES.

Englified first by *J. H.* And now in this second Edition
compared with the Latine Originall, and in very many
places corrected and amended.

HEBR. 11. 10.
For he looked for a Citie having a foundation, whose builder and maker is God.



LONDON,
Printed by G. ELD and M. FLESHER.
1620.

Augustine's work, first published in English in 1610, proved enormously influential well into the 18th century. His views on trade greatly affected medieval rules of commerce and provided arguments for both sides in the struggle between Pope and Emperor. Further, his descriptions of the just ruler and the tyrant made a powerful impression on Renaissance thought. As evidenced by Grotius, the concept of international law was also derived from Augustine, and his writings formed, with the Bible, the cornerstone of Protestantism for Luther and Calvin.

"This translation of Vives' text and commentaries of Augustine's great work is the only one published in English until the latter half of the 19th century" (Pforzheimer 19). Occasional mispagination without affecting text. STC 917. Engraved armorial bookplate. Early owner ink annotations to front flyleaf.

AUGUSTINE. Of the Citie of God. With the Learned Comments of Io. Lodovicus Vives. Englished first by J.H. and now in this Second Edition compared with the Latin Originall, and in very many places corrected and amended. London: by G. Eld, and M. Flesher, 1620. Folio (8-1/2 by 12-1/2 inches), 18th-century full paneled calf rebaked with original spine neatly laid down, raised bands.

Endpapers lifted but present, text unusually clean and fine. Corners expertly renewed on nicely refurbished early calf binding. An exceptionally handsome and most desirable copy.

Introduction

"Of the Citie of God" (Latin: *De civitate Dei contra paganos*), commonly known as "The City of God," is a monumental work of Christian philosophy written by Saint Augustine of Hippo in the early 5th century AD. The book was composed over a period of about 13 years, from 413 to 426 AD, in response to a pivotal moment in history: the sack of Rome by the Visigoths in 410 AD[1]. This event sent shockwaves through the Roman world, leading many to question the efficacy of Christianity as the official religion of the Empire. Pagans blamed the fall of Rome on the abandonment of traditional Roman gods, while Christians grappled with understanding why God would allow such a catastrophe to befall a Christian empire[1].

Augustine's motivation for writing "The City of God" was twofold. First, he sought to defend Christianity against pagan accusations that it had weakened Rome. Second, and more profoundly, he aimed to provide a comprehensive Christian interpretation of history, human society, and the ultimate destiny of mankind[1]. The cultural and political climate surrounding the book's publication was one of uncertainty and transition. The Western Roman Empire was in decline, facing threats from barbarian invasions and internal instability. This period of upheaval provided the backdrop for Augustine's exploration of the relationship between earthly and heavenly realms, temporal and eternal values, and the nature of human society in light of divine providence[2].

The Author

Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) was one of the most influential figures in the development of Western Christianity. Born in Thagaste, Roman Africa (modern-day Algeria), Augustine's life was marked by a dramatic conversion to Christianity in his early thirties, following years of spiritual and intellectual searching[1].

Augustine's early life was characterized by academic success and a pursuit of worldly ambitions. He received a classical education and became a teacher of rhetoric, a profession that took him to Carthage, Rome, and Milan. During this period, he explored various philosophical systems, including Manichaeism and Neoplatonism[1].

His conversion to Christianity in 386 AD, famously recounted in his "Confessions," marked a turning point in his life. He was baptized by Saint Ambrose in Milan and returned to Africa, where he was ordained as a priest and later became the Bishop of Hippo Regius[1].

Augustine's intellectual prowess, combined with his deep faith, made him a prolific writer and influential theologian. His works, including "The City of God," "Confessions," and numerous treatises on Christian doctrine, have profoundly shaped Western thought, both religious and secular[1].

Why this is a Canonical Book

"The City of God" is undeniably a canonical book that reflects and influences elements of America's politics, governance, economics, and culture. Its inclusion in the canon is justified by several key factors:

1. Foundational influence on Western political thought:

Augustine's concept of the two cities - the City of God and the City of Man - has been instrumental in shaping Western understanding of the relationship between church and state. This idea has profoundly influenced American political thought, particularly in the development of the principle of separation of church and state[3].

2. Critique of earthly power and empire:

Augustine's analysis of the Roman Empire provides a framework for critically examining political power and the limits of earthly governance. This perspective resonates with American ideals of limited government and the recognition that ultimate allegiance belongs to a higher authority than the state[7].

3. Understanding of human nature and society:

Augustine's exploration of human sinfulness and the need for divine grace has influenced American views on human nature, morality, and the role of government in restraining evil and promoting virtue[15].

4. Historical perspective:

The book offers a Christian interpretation of history that has shaped Western historiography. This perspective has influenced American understanding of historical progress, divine providence, and the nation's role in world affairs[2].

5. Cultural critique:

Augustine's analysis of pagan culture and values provides a model for cultural criticism that has been influential in American intellectual and religious discourse[1].

6. Concept of just war:

Augustine's thoughts on just war theory have been influential in shaping Western, including American, approaches to warfare and international relations[3].

7. Exploration of free will and divine sovereignty:

These theological concepts have had a significant impact on American religious thought and debates about human responsibility and divine providence[4].

The book's enduring relevance to American political and cultural discourse, its profound influence on Western thought, and its continued ability to provoke reflection on fundamental questions of governance, morality, and human destiny make it an essential part of the canon of books that have shaped American ideas and values.

Five Timeless Quotes

1. "Two loves have made two cities: love of self, even to contempt of God, has made the earthly city; and love of God, even to contempt of self, has made the heavenly city"[15].

This quote encapsulates Augustine's central thesis about the two cities. It remains relevant today as it challenges us to examine our priorities and allegiances. In an age of intense political polarization and competing value systems, this quote reminds us to consider whether our actions and choices are motivated by self-interest or by higher principles. It speaks to the ongoing tension in American society between individualism and communal responsibility, between material success and spiritual values.

2. "God is always trying to give good things to us, but our hands are too full to receive them"[4].

This quote speaks to the human tendency to become overly attached to material possessions and worldly concerns. In our current consumer-driven society, it serves as a poignant reminder of the potential spiritual cost of materialism. It challenges the American dream of material abundance and encourages us to consider what we might be missing by focusing too much on earthly gains.

3. "What are kingdoms without justice? They're just gangs of bandits"[4].

This powerful statement remains deeply relevant to contemporary political discourse. It challenges us to critically examine our political systems and leaders, reminding us that legitimate governance must be rooted in justice. In an era of increasing concerns about corruption and the abuse of power, this quote serves as a call to vigilance and a reminder of the fundamental purpose of government.

4. "Thus, a good man, though a slave, is free; but a wicked man, though a king, is a slave. For he serves, not one man alone, but what is worse, as many masters as he has vices"[4].

This quote challenges our understanding of freedom and slavery, suggesting that true freedom is a matter of moral and spiritual condition rather than external circumstances. In a society still grappling with the legacy of slavery and ongoing issues of inequality, this quote invites us to consider deeper questions about the nature of freedom and the impact of our choices on our spiritual and moral well-being.

5. "Pride is the beginning of sin. And what is pride but the craving for undue exaltation?"[4].

This insight into human nature remains as relevant today as it was in Augustine's time. In a culture that often celebrates self-promotion and individual achievement, this quote serves as a sobering reminder of the dangers of unchecked ego. It challenges us to examine our motivations and to consider the broader implications of our pursuit of success and recognition.

Five Major Ideas

1. The Two Cities:

Augustine's concept of the City of God and the City of Man is central to the book. He argues that all of human history can be understood as the interplay between these two cities - one heavenly and eternal, the other earthly and temporal[2]. This idea provides a framework for understanding the relationship between spiritual and secular realms, and has profound implications for how we view politics, culture, and individual purpose.

2. The Nature of Evil:

Augustine grapples with the problem of evil, arguing that evil is not a substance in itself, but rather the absence of good. This perspective has significant implications for how we understand human nature, morality, and the role of governance in restraining evil[1].

3. Divine Providence and Human Free Will:

Augustine explores the tension between God's sovereignty and human free will. He argues for a compatibilist view, maintaining that God's foreknowledge does not negate human responsibility. This complex philosophical and theological argument continues to influence debates about determinism and free will[4].

4. Just War Theory:

While not the main focus of the book, Augustine's thoughts on the conditions under which war might be considered just have been hugely influential. He argues that war, while regrettable, can be morally justified under certain circumstances. This theory has shaped Western approaches to warfare and international relations[3].

5. The Critique of Pagan Philosophy and Culture:

Augustine engages critically with classical philosophy and Roman culture, arguing for the superiority of Christian wisdom. This approach provides a model for cultural critique and apologetics that remains influential in Christian thought[1].

Three Major Controversies

1. Predestination and Free Will:

Augustine's views on divine predestination and human free will have been a source of ongoing controversy. Critics argue that his emphasis on God's sovereignty and the doctrine of election undermines human freedom and responsibility. This debate has had significant implications for Protestant theology and has been a point of contention between different Christian denominations[4].

2. Just War Theory:

While influential, Augustine's thoughts on just war have been criticized by pacifists who argue that his theory provides too much justification for violence. In the context of modern warfare and international relations, the application of just war theory remains controversial[3].

3. The Role of the Church in Society:

Augustine's vision of the relationship between the City of God and the City of Man has been interpreted in various ways throughout history. Some have used it to justify theocratic governance, while others have seen it as supporting a separation of church and state. This tension continues to be a point of debate in discussions about the role of religion in public life, particularly in the American context where the balance between religious freedom and secular governance is an ongoing issue[7][3].

In Closing

Civic-minded Americans should read "The City of God" for several compelling reasons. Firstly, it provides a profound exploration of the relationship between spiritual and temporal realms, offering valuable insights into the proper balance between religious conviction and civic responsibility. This is particularly relevant in the American context, where the separation of church and state is a foundational principle, yet religious values continue to play a significant role in public life[3].

Secondly, Augustine's critique of empire and earthly power serves as a timeless reminder of the limitations and potential corruptions of human governance. In an era of increasing political polarization and debates about the proper role and scope of government, Augustine's perspective offers a valuable counterpoint to both uncritical nationalism and cynical disengagement[7].

Thirdly, the book's exploration of human nature, free will, and the origins of evil provides a framework for thinking about personal and societal ethics. These insights can inform discussions about criminal justice, social policy, and individual responsibility[15].

Furthermore, Augustine's method of engaging with and critiquing the dominant culture of his time provides a model for thoughtful cultural criticism. This approach is valuable in our current age of rapid social change and competing ideologies[1].

Finally, "The City of God" is a cornerstone of Western intellectual history. Engaging with this text allows Americans to better understand the philosophical and theological roots of many contemporary ideas and debates. It provides historical perspective on current issues and challenges readers to think deeply about the ultimate purposes of human society and individual life[2].

In conclusion, "The City of God" offers civic-minded Americans a rich resource for reflection on the nature of good governance, the proper relationship between spiritual and temporal concerns, and the ultimate goals of human society. Its enduring relevance and profound insights make it an essential read for those seeking to engage thoughtfully with the challenges of contemporary civic life.

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