

SAINT AUGUSTINE
THE CITY OF GOD

VOLUME ONE

A NEW TRANSLATION BY
HENRY BETTENSON
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
JOHN O'MEARA

CHINA SOCIAL SCIENCES PUBLISHING HOUSE
CHENGCHENG BOOKS LTD.

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

上帝之城:英文/(古罗马)奥古斯丁著. -影印本.

-北京:中国社会科学出版社,1999.12

(西学基本经典·历史学类/西学基本经典工作委员会 编)

ISBN 7-5004-2649-6

I. 上… II. 奥… III. 神学-英文 IV. B972

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(1999)第 68458 号

版权总代理:TAO MEDIA INTERNATIONAL

(2790 19th Avenue, Ste. 20, San Francisco, CA 94132 U. S. A)

西学基本经典·历史学类

西学基本经典工作委员会 编

中国社会科学出版社 出版发行

(北京鼓楼西大街甲 158 号 邮编 100720)

E-mail:5004@Peoplespace.net

诚成图书有限公司制作

中国建筑工业出版社密云印刷厂印刷

新华书店经销

1999 年 12 月第 1 版 1999 年 12 月第 1 次印刷

开本 880×1230 1/32 印张 187.5

历史学类全 10 册 定价:500.00 元

总策划 严平 野夫

项目策划 张自文 任建成

西学基本经典工作委员会

主任委员 张树相 刘波

副主任委员 李茂生 野夫 严平 张新奇 张自文 卢仁龙

责任总编辑 曹宏举 任建成

委员 刘晓珞 宋小平 徐水平 叶彤 纪宏 王磊

张金花 程三国 黄应全 阳仁生 陈晓梅 章新语

周晓慧 罗莉

版权代理 TAO MEDIA INTERNATIONAL U.S.A

※ ※ ※ ※ ※

西学基本经典专家委员会

主任 季羨林 费孝通

副主任委员 (以姓氏笔画排序)

王元化 厉以宁 江平 李学勤 张世英 罗豪才

周一良 周辅成

委员 乐黛云 成中英 汤一介 张树相 李泽厚 李茂生

杜维明 孟昭兰 唐逸 戴文葆

万俊人 王焱 王蓉蓉 邓正来 朱苏力 庄孔韶

刘小枫 刘新 汪丁丁 张祥龙 贺卫方 何光沪

陈嘉映 陈小文 高毅 高丙中 秦海 黄平

梁小民

Introduction¹

FEW books have given rise to so much misconception as the *City of God*. By some it is thought to give a philosophy, by others a theology of history. By some it is thought to contain well-developed political theories, to be hostile to the State as such and in particular to the Roman Empire, and to outline the provinces of an established Church and Christian State. By others it is considered to be primarily a Christian reply to the charge that Rome had been sacked because it had become Christian, as identifying the city of God with the Church, and as teaching that justice does not enter into the definition of the State.

More serious still: the teaching of Augustine on predestination, never accepted in its full rigour by the Church, is, although not prominent, grim and sombre in the *City of God*. The Pelagian controversy had tended to force him into some exaggeration, at least in his expressions, in relation both to Nature and to Grace. Yet when one has studied Augustine's life and works for long, one finds it difficult to believe that he was mainly a pessimist. One comes to expect, and indeed welcome, clear evidence of a countervailing optimism in keeping with a person so vital and so unreservedly generous in the service of man.

The *City of God* is no more purely theoretical than it is purely theological. It is, of course, mainly theological; but it is at the same time founded upon Augustine's own experience. It will be seen that it is an application of the theme of his own development and conversion, as described in the burning pages of the *Confessions*, to the broader, less immediate, canvas of man's destiny. Augustine's reflection upon his experience, especially at the time of his conversion, both in outline and in surprisingly precise details, is the key to much of his characteristic teaching.

We should take warning from this: however much he might regret some of the ingredients of his past, he was happy to recognize that through these experiences Providence had brought him to where,

1. Material from my *Charter of Christendom: the Significance of the City of God*, the Saint Augustine Lecture, Villanova University, 1961, Macmillan, New York, 1961, has been incorporated here and is duly acknowledged.

humanly speaking, he felt more secure. His attitude, therefore, to these things could not be wholly negative and condemnatory. On the contrary he formed from the pattern of his life a theory of providential economy that to many might seem both too living and too tolerant. If Rome and the philosophy of the Greeks could, for all their error, not merely not prevent him from accepting Christ and the Christian revelation, but actually encourage him to do so, why should they not be equally as useful to others – to all mankind? It might seem paradoxical, for example, that the bitterest enemy of the Christians, Porphyry, should through his writing play a significant role (along with other Neoplatonists) in Augustine's conversion. This, however, happened, and Augustine was willing to take account of it in his notions of the dealings of Providence with men.

It can be said that although the scope of Augustine's writings is immense, they are animated by a few central ideas that came to him from a sensitive brooding on his own life. Thus the leading ideas of both the *Confessions* and the *City of God*, as we shall see briefly, are anticipated in his first extant works. There we can see clearly how close life and thought come in the mind of Augustine.

It is a commonplace to say that the age of Augustine was very like our own. We should remember that our view of his times is distorted by over fifteen hundred years of Christian domination, which separate his times from ours. We may not be able to see the present and the future in focus; but at least we can make some attempt to strip the past of the encumbrances which our retrospective vision imposes on it.

Some now speak of our living in post-Christian times, and seem to imply that Christianity as a force in the world can but decline. And, indeed, when one contemplates the defection from Christianity and its disunity on the one hand, and on the other the emergence of the non-Christian peoples, who are as likely to assert their independence of Christianity as they are of Western political powers, one cannot feel a firm confidence in the future of Western Christendom.

And yet, when Augustine was writing the *City of God*, his confident reading of the future cannot have seemed so justified to many of his contemporaries as it is to us now. The prospects of Christianity in the first quarter of the fifth century may have seemed bright, but we tend to forget that until that time the Church's history had been one, for the most part, of bare toleration and frequent persecution. Within Augustine's own life there had been the pagan reaction under Julian the Apostate (361–363 A.D.). Even in the fifth century pagans

had not lost all countenance. Again, the decline of the powerful and closely integrated Empire of Rome, evident to all and admitted by Augustine, must have struck its citizens with a chill as great as that which affects in our day the loosely and vaguely associated West.

We should, then, note that our situation is closer to his than, perhaps, is ordinarily realized. And we should take hope from his calm confidence that, even during such a crisis, it seemed feasible to draw up in the City of God a charter for a Christian future, not only for Rome but for all the world. The great lesson of the City of God is that out of all things comes good. Augustine saw clearly that in his time both Christianity and Rome would each benefit by the good that was in the other, and by any good from wherever else it might come. For Christianity, assimilation meant acceptance that was universal in the context of his time. For Rome, it meant a new birth and an even longer future. For Greek thought, it meant transmission and development. The keynote of the City of God is fulfilment, not destruction.

The practical problem with which Augustine had to deal was the problem of a spiritual Church in a secular world: the city of God in the city of this world. It is of the first importance to understand that he did not condemn out of hand the city of this world. It was God's creation. It was used by God for his purposes. It was not only of practical use to the citizens of God's city but was also intended by God to give compelling example to them of what efforts they should make in their striving for something greater and something higher. Out of that world and what good it had to offer Christians should take the 'spoils of the Egyptians' and should make them their own. They should profit from secular philosophy (which in its own way was a kind of revelation); they should learn from secular history (which in its own way threw prophetic light upon the future).

Speaking absolutely, if things were to be judged only by the canon of the service and worship of the true God, what the Hebrews achieved in their temporal history, the Greeks in their academies and the Romans in the virtues of their worthies, was evil. For evil was merely not-to-do-that-service-and-give-that-worship. In this way what looked like virtue was really splendid vice. But relatively, or in our ordinary way of speaking, all these things were good and should be used by Christianity. Christianity had changed superficially, was no longer the religion of a few fishermen but was, in fact, the religion of an Empire accepting its intellectual responsibility. This superficial change, which was wrought through assimilation, absorption, reaction and, it might be, rejection, was the law of its life.

Almost the only thing that could not be accepted from Rome was her official religion, polytheism. Insofar as the City of God is against anything, it is radically against that. It is unfortunate that Augustine, in placing the positive part of his argument in the final twelve books and the negative in the first ten, gives the impression that he is opposed to Rome and Greek philosophy. If he had stated the basis of his positive doctrine first, it would be seen more immediately that his attitude to Rome and Greece and his general outlook is positive.

Background to the City of God

Augustine, born and reared in Roman North Africa in the second half of the fourth century, grew up in an Empire that was in evident decline. Rome's marble city, her invincible army, her wide-flung administration, her riches garnered from every corner of the world, but above all her spirit and very heart were failing. The fatal blow came quickly. On a day in August in A.D. 410, Alaric with his Christian-Arian Goths sacked the great city that had not known violation by a foreign enemy for eight hundred years.

One does not need much imagination or sensibility to understand how symbolic of impending doom Rome's fall might have seemed. Even two years afterwards, St Jerome was still so affected by it that he could not dictate his commentary on Ezechiel. He had, he complained, lost the memory of his own name and could but remain silent, knowing that it was a time to weep: with Rome had perished the human race. This was the reaction of a Christian – but, it should be added, an emotional one. Another Christian, Orosius, a contemporary of the event and the chief source of information on the sack of Rome, judges soberly that the damage to the city was not great.

It is well to bear in mind that, while the sack lasted but three days and was marked by the relative clemency of the conquerors, the overthrowing of the official Roman religion, a form of polytheism, had been prolonged, bitter and serious in its consequences. From the time of Constantine onwards, there had been a succession of edicts against paganism, twenty of them in the last twenty years of the fourth century, and as many as four in the last year of that century, as if it had been determined that with the century paganism should pass from the Empire forever: idols were to be dethroned; temples to be laicized; judges were to be supervised in the enforcement of the edicts; and bishops were to report any laxity in the carrying out of these instructions.

There had, of course, been opposition to such a policy. An instance of this can be seen in the short-lived respite of the reign of Julian the Apostate already mentioned. The symbolical event, however, in this spiritual struggle is usually seen in the confrontation of Symmachus, the Prefect of Rome and the outstanding professed pagan of his day, with St Ambrose of Milan on the question of the Altar of Victory in 384.

The great goddess Victory, associated with Jupiter (Chief of the Roman gods), and with Mars (god of war), worshipped by the army (the instrument of Rome's dominion), and intimately related to the felicity of the Emperor, had been furnished with an altar, the Altar of Victory, within the Senate House of Rome itself. There she had stood, presiding over the prosperity of Rome, an earnest and an omen of continuing success. This altar had been removed by Constantius, the father of Constantine, replaced by the pagans in due course, removed again under Gratian in 382, replaced for a brief period by Eugenius (392-394), and perhaps on a final occasion by Stilicho, who died in disgrace in 408.

Of Augustine's acquaintance with one of the protagonists, St Ambrose, in the symbolical confrontation on the Altar of Victory, it will not be necessary to say anything here. On the other hand we should remember that, when Augustine came to teach rhetoric in Carthage in 374 and had some acquaintance with official circles there, Symmachus was not only in residence as Proconsul of Africa but had also been one of the most successful rhetors of his time. It is not unlikely that they met then, but in any case Symmachus knew of Augustine at least later in Rome; for it was he, the most prominent pagan of his day, who recommended Augustine for appointment to the office of Master of Rhetoric at the Imperial Court, then at Milan, the See of St Ambrose. It is well to pause and reflect on the significance that this situation, pregnant as it was to be, must have had for Augustine. Here he was in Milan, a non-Christian as yet, recommended by the champion of the pagans – perhaps for the very reason, among others, that Augustine was not a Christian – at a court subject to the influence of the champion of the Christians. Augustine arrived in Milan in the autumn of 384, only a month or two after the dispute on the Altar of Victory.

Symmachus's part in the affair was to present a petition for the restoration of the altar, removed, as we have seen, in 382. As Prefect of the city of Rome and Pontifex Maximus, he stressed the necessity for prudence: no one knew the final secret explanation of Rome's prosperity; it was therefore unwise not to preserve the institutions

that had presided over her success: it was perilous to disown them for something new. He brought Rome herself forward to plead her cause: she is old; she has no desire to change her pieties; her religion has civilized the world, driven the Gauls from the Capitol and Hannibal from the city.

St Ambrose, however, was a doughty opponent, as his domination of the Arian Empress Justina in 385-386 and of the Emperor Theodosius (with the imposition of a public penance in 390) was soon to show. His argument was that the valour and virtues of the Romans were sufficient explanation of their successes. Was it not foolish to pretend to believe that the Empire depended on some 'power' that one must imagine but could not see? To restrict the future through reverence for the past was to retard progress and civilization. Christianity had, moreover, a positive contribution to make: it held truth and salvation, while polytheism led to perdition and error.

The Christian cause prevailed, and paganism was clearly and definitely, if not finally, defeated. Prudentius, the Christian poet, describes how the Senate in plenary session formally banished Jupiter and the other gods in favour of the Christian God. The senators, many of whom were known to be dissembling, yielded to mounting public approbation of Christianity and abandoned for monotheism the gods of their forefathers. They made haste to disown their ancient pride, submit to baptism, and pay reverence at the tombs of Christian martyrs.

The ordinary people were not slow to show their satisfaction, and soon the temples were mouldering in desolation. Theodosius in his time was relentless in his enforcement of the edicts against polytheism throughout the Empire, and particularly those against sacrifice to the gods. Some indeed in their zeal, fearing that shrines that were merely empty might one day be restored, hastened to destroy the temples themselves – some of them splendid edifices. A few of them were converted to Christian use, the most famous of these being the Pantheon, the temple in Rome of all the gods, which to this day stands as it ever stood.

The decrees of Theodosius, however, reached further even than destruction of the buildings. Sacrifice to idols and divination by inspection of entrails – the commonplaces of public life in Rome – were declared to be high treason and were to be punished by death. Even the most trivial trafficking in garlands and libations was suspected and became liable to fines and confiscation of property.

The collapse of polytheism was in the end sudden, universal within

the Empire, and practically absolute. Its absurdity as a religious system had long been accepted by the intelligent. Now the wholesale assault on buildings and institutions, with evident impunity and no retaliation from the ousted and enfeebled gods, delivered the masses from any feelings of fear or obligation. The dismemberment of the representation of the great god Serapis at Alexandria met with no revenge in either the death of a Christian or the refusal of the Nile to grant its annual and blessed inundation. Truly the gods had lost, and Christ had won.

Augustine was by his very circumstances a close observer of this stupendous transformation. As he was torn between the loyalties he owed first to Symmachus and then to St Ambrose, so his feelings and thoughts were divided between sympathy for the Rome that was and the vision of a Christian future. Nevertheless his evident delight at the destruction of the pagan temples at Carthage by Jovius and Gaudentius, for example, and his approval, even, of punishment by death for pagan sacrificing, leave no doubt where his final loyalty lay. He was not unaware that the recent desertion *en masse* from an enervated polytheism meant that there were Christians, many Christians even, who had yielded to Christ for unworthy motives – to save their lives or canvass official support for their careers and ambitions – but for all that he felt an overflowing happiness, later perhaps to be tempered, in the visible victory of the Christians.

It is hardly surprising, then, if Augustine's distress at the sack of Rome in 410 was not only much less pronounced than that of St Jerome but was compensated for by a greater optimism. If the pagan historians Zosimus and Rutilius Namatianus, writing of the period, say not a word of the disaster – possibly because they did not find it an attractive topic – we can understand that Augustine's fondness for a theme, about which he was sometimes teased, was prompted more by its wider significance, as marking a stage in the conflict between Christianity and paganism, than by any preoccupation with the material decline and fall of Rome. The theme was with him an old one even before the sack of Rome.

The question was, however, raised for him directly by a Christian official in Africa, Marcellinus – to whom in fact the *City of God* is addressed – in a letter in the year 412. Marcellinus mentioned the view put forward by some of his friends that the miracles wrought by Apollonius and Apuleius were greater than those of Christianity. He asked how, if God had been satisfied with the type of sacrifice described in the Old Testament, He could, without changing (which in

God is impossible), be dissatisfied with it in the New? Finally there arose the problem of why it was that the Empire appeared to decline when it came to be governed by princes that had forsaken the old, tried religion and embraced a new one that inculcated precepts of tolerating offences and submitting to injury. This did not seem to go well with the interests of the Empire.

One should note carefully that, although this letter was written about two years after the sack of Rome, and purported to give the views and complaints of pagans, there is not one word about the event in question, but rather the whole emphasis is on miracles, sacrifices and religion, as causes or explanations of success in Empire or failure.

Augustine replied in a letter to a friend of Marcellinus and in a further one to Marcellinus himself. The themes of these two letters (*Letters* 137 and 138) foreshadow very clearly themes of the *City of God*, and some of them must be briefly mentioned: the Saviour came when the time was ripe for his coming; that coming was foretold not only by the prophets but also by secular philosophers and poets; the true mediator delivered man from the false mediators – the demons; Christ superseded Moses, who was greater than any pagan; the truth of Christianity is seen in its fulfilment of prophecy and its confirmation by miracles; the world is declining and is in its last age; Christians are multiplying everywhere and await the eternal happiness of the heavenly city (*Letter* 137).

Letter 138 concentrates more on the question of religion and Empire: the gods of polytheism, being by definition many, were discordant and inimical to concord, which was the constituting element of the (Roman) State; this discord issued in civil wars; the gods favour the evils that corrupt man; Christianity, on the contrary, makes men better as soldiers, better as parents, better as children, better as masters, better as slaves, better as princes, better as judges, better as taxpayers and better as tax-gatherers. In short, Christianity was the great salvation for the State; it goes, however, beyond this life below and the harmony of the State, and provides entry to eternal salvation and the heavenly and divine republic of a certain eternal people. The splendid success of the Romans, achieved without the true religion, is perfected in their becoming citizens of another city. The letter goes on to insist that the pagan gods are less powerful than even Apollonius (of Tyana, 4th c. B.C.) or Apuleius (of Madauros, fl. c. 155 A.D.); the demons caused damage to the State and aroused hostility to Christianity; prosperity with the worship of the true God was seen in the temporal history of the Hebrews, whose dispersal, even as enemies of

Christianity, aided its spread; the miracles of Christianity are incomparably superior to any others.

Augustine ends this second letter by admitting that he has not managed to treat of all the points that he would wish. If Marcellinus writes for more, he will make it his business to reply either in a letter or in a book.

In the event he wrote a book for Marcellinus. It was the *City of God*, and it deals with essentially the same topics and with the same attitudes.²

Anticipations of the Theme in Augustine

Of the last stages in the conflict between polytheism and Christian monotheism, Augustine could not but have been conscious, at least from the time of his being recommended by Symmachus to Milan, where he encountered St Ambrose. His conversion in 386 represented in his own regard a victory for Christianity. It would not be surprising, then, if in the earliest compositions of Augustine there were adumbrations and preliminary formulations of what was later the dominating theme of the *City of God*. Here we shall confine ourselves to a few examples from his first extant works, which reflect very strongly his own personal experiences at the time of his conversion. Our purpose is to show how the main theme of the *City of God* – salvation, attained by the worship of the one true God and the rejection of all false gods – had already taken on a special significance for him as he reflected upon the pattern of his own life. Even at that stage he had begun to think that what was true for him was true for mankind at large.

Whereas salvation in the *City of God* is represented by citizenship in a city (*ciuitas*) – an image explicitly taken from the Scriptures – it is in the earliest formulations represented as arriving in harbour (*portus*), or at the fatherland (*patria*), or being on the way (*uia*). These images are, of course, borrowed from the stock in trade of philosophy, particularly Platonic philosophy, in its eschatological aspects. Other variants used by Augustine at this time are the 'land of desire', the 'land of happiness', the 'happy land' and the 'shining home'.

The first few pages of Augustine's first extant work, the *Contra Academicos* (*Against the Academics*), written after his conversion in 386, speak of the 'harbour' of wisdom, to which Providence, making

2. Books I-III were finished by 413; IV-V by 415; VI-X by 417; XI-XIV by 418 or 419; and XV-XXII by 427.

use of misfortune, brings us. Special emphasis is laid upon the irrelevance and instability of temporal prosperity. Here Augustine alludes directly not only to the apparent misfortunes of the friend to whom the book is addressed, but to his own: prosperity had almost entrapped him, but he had been compelled by illness to give up his profession and betake himself to philosophy, which, as the work makes clear, means philosophy subject to the authority of Christ. One can suppose that Augustine's views, on the irrelevance of prosperity and the use made by Providence of misfortune, might be applied by him to the Empire as much as to mankind in general or himself and his friend.

The image of the harbour is used again in the first five sections of the *De Beata Vita* (*On Happiness*), composed at the same time as the previous work. The major image here, however, is the 'land of desire'. There are two 'ways' to this land, both across a sea. One is the way of reason, which, possible only for the few, brings men to the harbour of philosophy, which is the harbour of the land of desire. The other way is the way of Providence which uses the storms of adversity to bring men, resist and wander in ignorance and folly as they may, to the same harbour. Those who are apparently most successful in life have need of the greatest storms. Some are brought to sanity, however, by the reading of books written by the learned and the wise. And some make their way to the 'fatherland' partly by their own use of reason, and partly by providential adversity.

One great hazard threatens all who approach the harbour – a high mountain in front of the harbour itself. It is so enticing that it lures to it not only those approaching the harbour, but even some that have already been in the harbour. The people living on this mountain are full of conceit, and fear that others might share their glory; hence they impress on those approaching the difficulty, because of submerged rocks, of joining them and are happy to advise them how they can get to the land of desire. In this way they are themselves destroyed within sight of the 'shining home'.

Finally – a most important point – the harbour is wide, and one may still fail to put ashore and so not achieve one's goal.

There are significant anticipations of the *City of God* here. The term 'citizen' is used, and the phrase 'on pilgrimage from their fatherland' is one characteristically applied in the later work to the citizens of the heavenly city in their life on earth. The illusions of prosperity and the transcendent role of Providence in its use of adversity are here fully emphasized. Of particular significance, however, is the special

mention of the envious and the proud, who help others to safety, but are themselves destroyed within sight of the fatherland. This, of course, must refer especially to certain Neoplatonists, who approached Christianity, helped others to become Christians, but rejected Christianity themselves. It is to be noted that not all mankind reaches the harbour, and those who are there may still be lost: so too might Christians fail to persevere.

What is of special interest for us here is Augustine's explicit relation of this theme and image to the circumstances of his own life at the time. Here indeed he gives a summary autobiography, parallel to that given in the *Contra Academicos* (Bk II, 4f.), and later to be expanded in the *Confessions*. It is clear that the theme, as set out in the *De Beata Vita*, is inspired by his own life: the providential use of illness, the effect of reading certain books (a very precise detail that he repeats and applies without hesitation to other men), his own part use of reason and part guidance by Providence, the illusions of prosperity, and the help of the proud Neoplatonists, who did not benefit from their own wisdom.

In short we have here the opportunity of seeing how the theme of the City of God is constructed from the details of his own conversion. To put it another way, the City of God is the application of the *Confessions* to the history of mankind. The inspiration of Augustine's themes is in his life.

The image of the way is found first in Augustine in, again, the *Contra Academicos* (Bk III, 34). Here we are given the story of two men travelling to the same destination, one of whom has too much and the other too little credulity. At a crossroads they meet a humble shepherd whose directions the one accepts without question and proceeds to follow. The other ridicules such credulity and does not move. By the time an elegant gentleman comes along on horseback he is finding his waiting tedious, and accordingly acts upon the directions given by the elegant gentleman, although he does not accept them as necessarily true and they conflict with those given by the shepherd. In the event he gets lost in the woods and trackless mountains – for the elegant gentleman was an impostor. Meanwhile his companion is resting at his destination.

The source of this image may have been epistemological, but Augustine explicitly refers its use here to the deeds and behaviour of men. Philosophers and those interested in religion had done so before him, and amongst those was one especially well known to him, Porphyry. Porphyry's search for a universal way to salvation, and

his rejection of Christ as that way, is the high point of the tenth book of the *City of God* and, perhaps, of the work as a whole. Although Augustine's use of the image of the way is undoubtedly at a later stage influenced by Moses' leading the Children of Israel to the Promised Land and by the description of the Magi's return by another way into their own country, his treatment of it in the *Confessions* (Bk VII, 26f.) and the *De Trinitate* (*On the Trinity*) (Bk IV, 13ff.) is basically the same as here in the *Contra Academicos* and later in the *City of God* (Bk X, 32): the contrasting attitudes of the proud and the humble – the simple and credulous on the one hand, and the pretentious impostor on the other. The *Confessions* (Bk VII, 26f.) marks the point well:

I should be able to see and understand the difference between presumption and confession, between those who see the goal that they must reach, but cannot see the road by which they are to reach it, and those who see the road to that blessed country which is meant to be no mere vision but our home . . . It is one thing to descry the land of peace from a wooded hilltop and, unable to find the way to it, struggle on through trackless wastes where traitors and runaways, captained by their prince . . . lie in wait to attack. It is another thing to follow the high road to that land of peace. (Translation by R. S. Pine-Coffin, Penguin Classics.)

Unlike those in the image of the harbour in the *De Beata Vita*, the Neoplatonists are here represented as seeking direction but being deceived. Both images complete the treatment of them in the *City of God*. The clearest and fullest anticipation is to be found in the *De Vera Religione* (*On True Religion*) (cf. 48ff.) which was begun at the same time as the works we have been discussing, but was not finished until four years later, in 390. Inasmuch as the *City of God* is a discussion of religion, both works share the same topic. The *De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae* (*On the Ways of the Catholic Church*), written in 388-390, has this striking passage on the 'way', which is, at the same time, a summary statement of one aspect and much of the contents of the *City of God*:

the way which God built for us in the segregation of the Patriarchs, the bond of the Law, the foretelling of the Prophets, the sacrament of the Man assumed, the testimony of the Apostles, the blood of the martyrs and the entering into possession of the gentiles: let us heed the oracles (of Scripture) and submit our puny reasonings to divine inspiration (I. 11f.).

Here the gradual revelation of the way is emphasized. Finally the

De Catechizandis Rudibus (On Catechizing the Unlearned), written in 399, speaks plainly of two cities, one the devil's, the other Christ's.

What we have tried to stress is that the anticipation of the theme of the City of God was not so much dependent upon Alaric's sack of Rome as rooted in Augustine's own experience. This will throw light on the theme as it was later set forth. Providence had used adversity to help him, and Providence dominates the life of every man and every Empire. This might be a banal teaching of a philosophical school, but for Augustine it was also a personal realization, and so it tended to colour and affect all his thoughts and all his theories. Implicit in all of this is some regret for that prosperity from which Providence tears us; but there is compensation in the assurance afforded by the fulfilment of prophecies, the miracles of the saints, and the conversion of the multitudes. Even at the temporal level an Empire must benefit from the improved moral character of its citizens, once they had become Christians.

If, then, there is sorrow and regret for the past, there is also joy for the future; and if there is sombre pessimism, there is also hope. The thoughts and images that Augustine uses reflect the experience and life of an artist, the complicated tension of whose anxious spirit reveals to us his large humanity and ardent sensibility.

The Structure of the City of God

There are a few observations that one should make about the structure of the *City of God*. The first five books deal in the main with the polytheism of Rome, with special reference to Varro. The next five deal mainly with Greek philosophy, more particularly Platonism and especially Apuleius, and the Neoplatonists, Plotinus and Porphyry, with lengthy consideration of the views of the latter. The final twelve books deal in the main with creation, time and eternity as presented in the Bible, which is of Jewish provenance. And here we have the three great focuses of the work: Rome, Greece and Jerusalem. Augustine himself draws attention to this explicitly in one of the dramatic sections of the work (Bk XIX, 22):

But it may be asked in reply 'Who is this God you talk of, and how is it proved that he is the only one to whom the Romans owed obedience, and that they should have worshipped no god besides him?' It shows extreme blindness to ask, at this time of day, who this God is! He is the same God whose prophets foretold the events we now see happening. He is the God from whom Abraham received

the message, 'In your descendants all nations will be blessed.' And this promise was fulfilled in Christ, who sprang from that line by physical descent, as is acknowledged, willy nilly, even by those who have remained hostile to this name. He is the same God whose divine Spirit spoke through the lips of the men whose prophecies I have quoted in my previous books, prophecies fulfilled in the Church which we see diffused throughout the whole world. He is the God whom Varro, the greatest of Roman scholars, identifies with Jupiter; although he did not realize what he was saying. Still, I thought this worth mentioning, simply because a man of such great learning could not judge this God to be non-existent or of no worth, since he believed him to be identical with his supreme god. More important still, he is the god whom Porphyry, the most learned of philosophers, although the fiercest enemy of the Christians, acknowledges to be a great god, even on the evidence of the oracles of those whom he supposes to be gods.

The first sentence in this excerpt indicates Augustine's overall standpoint in his inquiry: the Roman world. It is not a negative attitude; on the contrary, he is concerned for that world's future. Rome was to bring together within herself the revelation in the Bible, the wisdom of Greek philosophy, and what was good in her own tradition. Augustine is fully conscious of the fusion of the elements that in fact went to make up the civilization of the West that has endured to this day. In this sense his *City of God* is a Charter of Christendom, and here lies its greatest significance.

Roman speculation on religion, Greek philosophy, the Bible, all pointed to one God: the God of the Hebrews. This God should now be accepted as the God of Rome. The prophecies in their fulfilment, and the Church in its extension, its martyrs, and its miracles, left no possible doubt about this. The aspirations of Hebrews, Greeks and Romans were to be fulfilled in a Christian Rome. The Christian Era, the *tempora Christiana*, was already a reality.

Augustine may have come to these pregnant views through reading or argument; but it is likely that once again his own personal experience influenced him. His was a life led in a Roman environment, based on Roman education, drawing importantly upon Greek philosophy at a time most critical to his development, and resting in the main after his conversion on the Christian Scriptures. His *Confessions* not merely testify to this in contents: in very form they, too, describe a Roman's background and education (Bks I-VII, 12), the contribution of Greek philosophy (Bk VII, 13-IX), and life according to the Christian revelation. In particular the last three books of the *Confessions* cover