

STHS-4041 Truth and Authority in the City of God

Prof. F. Russell Hittinger – rhittinger@dspt.edu

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[Office hours, TBD]

Admonition

I know that today syllabi are regarded as mere “legal” contracts about work, liabilities, and obligations. This one tries to teach some important things about Augustine and about our effort to make sense of his “great and arduous work.” Read it.

→ You can skip ahead to the schedule and requirements, pp 9ff.

Overview

If the *Confessions* [Conf.] is Augustine’s most carefully considered and literarily well-crafted work, the *City of God* [Civ.] is his most ambitious and sprawling. James J. O’Donnell deems it the longest work presenting a sustained argument, unified around a coherent single theme, to survive from Greco-Roman antiquity.

Conf. was written as a history of his own soul (I-X), culminating in an interpretation of the Hexaemeron (Gen. 1:3-31) within which he exegetically locates (literally and allegorically) the creation, motions, and end of rational creatures (XI-XIII). There are two narratives, one from below and a story from above. The autobiographical books depict how an individual soul can report (and learn to confess) its conflicted career in real historical time – this is the story of a conversion modeled on the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Augustine moves from being a prodigal to a pilgrim returning to the house of his Father. In the exegetical books, Augustine considers the soul insofar as it can be taught about its trans-temporal origins and ends by the revealed Word speaking through sacred Scripture. True confession is to find self-knowledge through another, and to give it back in the form of praise.¹ Such creatures, angelic and human, are bound together in a city, the “heaven of heavens” or “heavenly Jerusalem” (Conf. XII-XIII). Its members here below “confess” in syllables and other signs while on pilgrimage, others in glory communicate without intervals or syllables (XIII.15).

In Civ. he does something similar. In place of the moral and spiritual psychology of the individual soul, conflicted even under the medicines of grace (Conf. X), his subject in Civ. is two cities, entangled and mingled with one another. “Of their rise and progress and appointed end ... I shall now speak” (Civ. I.35).² Hence, we find a history of Rome — along with its demonic associates — as it can be witnessed, reported and debated in human voices within familiar historical time (I-X).

The first ten books provide, with due qualification, a kind of secular history inasmuch as the main pattern of evidence is extra-biblical. Indeed, the most telling evidence is what Rome — as a recapitulation of Babylon (XVI.17), the antithesis of Jerusalem — says about itself. See the quotation from Virgil at Civ. I.1, which is nothing other than the pride-swollen voice of the *civitas terrena*; what Cicero says about the Republic (II.21); what the pirate says to Alexander the Great about empires (IV.4); what Varro says about the theologies (VI-VII); what the Platonists

¹ Thus, the first words of the Conf. and Civ. are words of praise.

² On the tripartite scheme: Civ. I.35, X.32, XI.1, XV.1, XVIII.54, XIX.1.

say about truth and religion in the city (IX). Let's call it the history of ignoble and noble lies which are always outing themselves.

At Bk. XI Augustine changes perspective, allowing sacred Scripture to give an authoritative account of the trans-temporal origins and ends of two cities mixed together in time. These books (XI-XXII) comprise an *historia sacra*, for "sacred" used in this sense is not chiefly *about* the nature of the things (sacred or profane) but rather points toward the dignity of the source. The evidence is nothing other than God revealing (the formal object of faith). But it is also about the things revealed. We do not have direct access to trans-temporal beginnings and endings. What we see unfolding in time is the "news" so to speak: The rise and fall of empires, of individual human careers, of Alaric's sack of Rome, and so forth. We do not know, however, how it began or how it will end. Just as the Conf. takes us from the experience of conversion to the unseen sources and ends of human life, so Civ. takes us from a mundane history to its invisible beginnings and ends.

Therefore, the patterns covered in the first ten books cannot give all of the meanings we need. Who is the "we"? Certainly Christians, who need more than the apologetics and polemics of the first ten books, which make good sport of the pagans but by means of a refutation that is a bit too clever. I think it includes some of the philosophers, for Bks. IX-X move from polemic to apologetic in their domain. Bk. X, for instance, concludes with the need of philosophers for a mediator. (The parallel is Conf. VII.9).

Written intermittently between 413 and 427, Augustine struggled not only to finish Civ. but also to keep his ever more voluminous work coherent and well-proportioned in its parts and themes. Ernest Fortin remarks, "The sheer bulk of the City of God and the subtlety of its analyses are such as to render futile any attempt to condense the whole of its teaching into a few paragraphs." Indeed, there is no point in summarizing just here its multiple themes, examples, digressions, and exuberantly polemical thrusts. Later (below), I will list some works that can be used as guides through the twenty-two books of Civ.

Theme

I suggested the title "Truth and Authority in Augustine's *City of God*." It represents my own adaptation of Joseph Ratzinger's various writings on Augustine and on Catholic Christianity's reception of Logos traditions.³ Of course, it would be in vain to make Civ. comply willy-nilly with this theme. I make no more claim than that it is broadly useful without compressing or distorting the text. You can take it or leave it, but I would prefer that you try to work with it intelligently. When or where the theme runs out of gas, move to something else.

The theme is crisis. The event is Alaric's sack of Rome in August 410, which was something like the 9/11 attack on New York and Washington. Regarding the event, two things should be kept in mind. After the Gothic depredations in the eternal city, some citizens fled Italy to take safe haven in Roman North Africa. Many, perhaps most, of the émigrés were nominal Christians who came of age just as the laws of Theodosius (391) began the process of making Christianity an imperial religion. The new religion, they grumbled, failed to protect the city.

Precisely who was grumbling? In the first place, it was pagans who still held positions of authority in the imperial and municipal governments. Augustine directly addresses them in Civ.

³ Beginning with his 1953 dissertation, *Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche*, but persistently represented and revised during his time as a professor, an ecclesial theologian, and pontiff. For a first look at his understanding of the truth/authority crisis, see Ratzinger's essays, in *Truth and Tolerance* (Ignatius Press, 2004).

II.28-29. You can learn something about these people by reading his letters to Nectarius (Ep. 90, 91, 103, 104) and his response to the Roman aristocrat Rufius Antonius Agrypnius Volusianus (Ep. 138). In the latter letter, Marcellinus begs Augustine's response to the cultured pagans like Volusianus lest the Christian flock be tempted to apostasy. Indeed, Augustine had already given an important sermon on the meaning of Alaric's sacking of Rome soon after news of the event reach North Africa.⁴ In the sermon he focuses on the question of God's justice: Why should God allow the suffering and ruination of Christian persons, places, and things?⁵ So, it was also Christians who grumbled. Civ. therefore has in mind two readers, but the weak Christians were foremost in Augustine's mind.

Your reading of Civ. depends upon firmly understanding at the outset (Bk. I) Augustine's passionate and implacable response to these Christians, including the consecrated virgins who lamented their humiliations, the deacons and priests in Christian temples who saw their altars desecrated, and the new imperial acolytes who swarmed around Christian things like K-St. lobbyists. Augustine was somewhat astonished to discover that Christians failed to understand that the "true religion" is not a familial or civic religion devoted to enjoyment of temporal goods. Christ does not promise security against brigands, enjoyment of harvests, nor even protection of virginity. The first ten books of Civ. are a rather extraordinary and brutal polemic against the pagans, but the reader being targeted is the half-converted Christian: "But those weaker Christians who, even though they did not prefer these earthly goods to Christ, nonetheless clung to them with no small desire, discovered that in losing them how much they had sinned in loving them" (I.10).

We can also speak of a crisis more generally in the ancient Mediterranean world: How to align truth and authority with religion? When Augustine came of age in the late 4th century, Christianity found itself in different relationships to the Graeco-Roman culture. Christianity had to reckon, in the first place, with the religion(s) of the gentiles that formed the cultural life in which Christians lived and from which they were converted.⁶ Christianity also had to take into account the ancient wisdoms, notably philosophy. What's more, along the borderland of political-cultural religion and the teachings of philosophy stood mystery religions and other syncretic "wisdoms" that sometimes incorporated a sacramental cult and snatches of biblical texts.

Concretely, for Augustine, this borderland was occupied by Manicheism, which he followed for a decade as an *auditor* and which he then attacked persistently after his conversion. In more than thirty discrete works against the Manicheans, he criticized their implausible myths, specious philosophy, and naïve hermeneutics of sacred texts. Even so, he always regarded them as heterodox Christians. Interestingly, until 410 Augustine had relatively little to say about what we could call standard pagan religion. For one thing, he never regarded himself as a pagan, certainly not in matters of religious cult in which he felt bound by the "name" of Christ since childhood. When he turned explicitly to pagan religion in Civ. we notice that Augustine approaches the subject as one trained in the elite literary culture, not really as an insider. No doubt, he shared

⁴ In the volume Augustine Political Writings. [PDF]

⁵ See his letter to the pagan Firmus explaining the structure of Civ. and giving permission for its reproduction and circulation: "Among your friends, some, within the body of Christian folk, may desire instruction; in the case of others, bound by some superstition, it may appear that this labor of ours can, through God's grace, be used to liberate them."

⁶ Pagans or heathens, viz. idolaters not formed by sacred scripture and Mosaic law. But, note that the *civitas terrena* is not just pagan. It includes all of the "impious" who love the world.

with Cicero and the Platonists a certain contempt for pagan religions, which were unworthy of serious investigation, and, in any event, were withering into historical obsolescence. For his part, Augustine was much more interested in reckoning with the Logos traditions of philosophy and the heresies like Manicheanism. They deeply engaged his speculative powers, and provided a kind of whetstone against which he sharpened the orthodox theology taught by Ambrose. Of these two, however, the Manichean challenge was decisive for the evolution of Augustine's theology, including the theme of the two cities. For the "two cities" was one prong of his scriptural response to Manichean dualism,⁷ and it was being crafted before the events of 410 turned his attention to the pagans.

In the Conf., we find a relatively early effort to grapple with the problem of two cities. Here, we see Augustine as a citizen of the ancient city and culture (even his mother is described as lingering in the "suburbs of Babylon," Conf. II.2-3); then as a devotee of a Gnosticism that rejected the God who creates and governs, putting in its place as divinity itself the mythic symbols of human consciousness, communicated by means a secret wisdom; then as a student of philosophical wisdoms that disdain humble and badly-lettered wisdoms; and finally as a convert to Christianity, who upon taking the waters of baptism was "emancipated from rhetoric" (Conf. IX.4). Baptism is the antidote to another religion. That is to say, he was unbound (*solvere*) from the old religion and re-bound (*religare*) to a new one (Conf. III.8). Another religion ... of a sort. Why should he identify his addiction to rhetoric as the disease to be cured by baptism? Here, it seems, Augustine touches at least indirectly on the problem of paganism expounded in Civ. I-X. Not paganism as religious cults so much as the deeper motivation of what he will later call "the terrene city" [*civitas terrena*].⁸ The gods of the cities are but poetical and political instruments of *libido dominandi*, the lust for domination. Thus, when he identifies emancipation from rhetoric as the first fruit of the true religion (Conf. IX.4), he means to underscore the art of fashioning fetters (letters) by which we bind ourselves and others in the common project of organizing our lives apart from God. In short, rhetoric stands for Babylon ("the Confusion"). It represents the love of conquest, and it stands in the "cultured" center of terrene city. Augustine was not a pagan religionist, but in the Conf. he makes it quite clear that he was nurtured and trained in this cultured center. "Behold with what companions I walked the streets of Babylon, and wallowed in the mire thereof, as if in a bed of spices and precious ointments. And that I might cleave the faster to its very centre, the invisible enemy trod me down, and seduced me, for that I was easy to be seduced." The two cities theme of Civ. was fashioned *in nucleo* in the Conf. Traditional pagan religions served a civic function. Every city had its own version of the Olympian pantheon, tailored to the particular myths of the city. This appropriation of Olympian religion sat alongside many other cults which represented familial, tribal, and professional solidarities.

⁷ And to the excessive moral dualism of the Donatists. The two cities is, so to speak, the scripturally warranted version of dualism.

⁸ On this score, it is useful to remember that *terrena* does not signify merely the "worldly," but rather represents by way of multiple tropes the city not founded by God – the "second city," so to speak, of rational creatures organizing themselves apart from God. Even so, the second city remains within the order of divine judgment and providence (Civ. V, XIX). As John Neville Figgis aptly put it, the terrene society is "a union largely unconscious and no less invisible than the invisible body of the elect." Its chief feature is *amor sui*, self love even to the contempt of God. We learn in Civ. XII-XV that the terrene city enters mundane time through Adam, but is given social form through Cain, who is the first (human) founder of cities.

The Roman word *religio* is derived from the verb *ligare* – to bind – with its prefix *re*, meaning to bind over and over again through cultic action. What was being bound together? The short answer is that *religio* binds the gods to the life and fortune of a particular people. It was an indispensable source of social and civic solidarity. Surely, ancient religion had numerous psychological and spiritual manifestations: healings, miracles, revelations, personal consolations, dreams, snake handling, and most everything we might find in Kentucky (Civ. III.31; and see Ep. 138 on pagan claims to having greater miracles). But the authority of religion consisted chiefly in its utility, binding together and protecting the city (the family, the tribe). This was Augustine’s office as master of imperial rhetoric in Milan.

From the outset, Christians understood that these religions subordinated *logos* to *ethos* and *mythos*. In the midst of the Aereopagus, for example, Paul saluted the religious piety of Athenians who erected an altar to “the unknown God” precisely because it was unusual that piety should be proportioned to truth (Acts 17:16-34). The great Tertullian said clearly enough in the late 2nd century, “Christ called himself truth, not custom.”

The ancient philosophers, for their part, understood that the religions were at best mythic, and at worst, superstitious. Even if they were not entirely false, they could not provide a true account of the ultimate roots of things. This is not to say that all philosophers denied the fact of some original divine disclosure to humankind, handed on generation after generation – a disclosure that echoes in the first stirrings of philosophy itself. But no philosopher or school of philosophy could correct and tame the religions, with their implicit imperative that *mythos* and *ethos* control *logos*. Religion was unworthy of the god of the philosophers. And if this is so, then the city itself must prove unworthy of philosophy. Power rather than truth is the principle of the terrene city. The philosophers, Augustine believed, made their peace with the supplicants of municipal and imperial power, and from his point of view, demonic powers. This is the grand conclusion of the first part of Civ. at Bk. X. The fact that Philosophers knew some of the truths of natural theology, yet preferred to remain ironical about them.

Thus was authority sundered: Worship and knowledge, religion and science, history and metaphysics, doing and thinking — the great crisis of the ancient Mediterranean world. The philosophers could have a theology but no religion, for religion sullies theology with superstition, fear, and power-mongering, and stipends for the clever. Yet, the religion of the city could not be de-mythologized without endangering political order. This was a real crisis for the world of late-antiquity, just as it was for the European world of the 18th century, when these bifurcations emerged once again during the Enlightenment. One need think only of Robespierre’s hapless effort to invent a new civic religion. The ancient philosophical critique of religion was revived, and aimed now at Christianity. The modern philosophers were no more able to produce a natural, scientific “religion” than were their ancient counterparts. Moreover, it was difficult to resist the idea that religion is useful for political purposes. Few modern political regimes abandoned political religion altogether. We are always thrown back to the original question. How to reconcile the authority of religion, politics, and science?⁹

⁹ To put the question in the context of Civ. If all of the religious bindings outside of sacred history are nothing but bindings to a terrene city that should have never existed, how can political authority take its place among the institutions necessary for human happiness? An early stab at this question is in *De libero arb.* XV-XVI. Augustine divides humans into two classes, lovers of eternal things and lovers of temporal things, and proposes that human law would never have come into existence were there not a division of loves. Human law ensues upon the founding of a city that should never have happened. At the same time, in both *De libero* and *Civ.* he contends that so long as the human law observes the unchangeable norms of justice, it is a suitable instrument of wrath. What makes Augustine’s political

This larger and deeper crisis came tumbling out of Augustine's mind onto the pages of *Civ.* Like virtually all of the sub-apostolic fathers, Augustine took the side of the philosophers, at least insofar as this meant defending the priority of scientific *logos*. At the same time, he took a sober, if not mordant, view of the inefficacy of philosophy to reform the city. Truth without a reform of the manners and morals of men turns out to be a stillborn truth. Augustine defended Christianity as a "true religion," capable of reconciling *logos* and *ethos*. He speaks often of the "humility" of the revelation the truth enters the city in Christ's humility. This disrupts both the haughty position of the philosophers (truth without religion) and the demonic subordination of religion to the politics of the city (religion bereft of truth). It establishes a new authority that is neither purely religious, nor purely political, nor purely scientific. It is called the Church (X.20-32). This new institution exercises a religious function (sanctifying), a political function (governing habits and actions), and a scientific function (teaching) – all these as participations conferred by baptism in the triplex *munus Christi* (priest/prophet/king).

Structure

In 384, at the age of thirty, Augustine took the office of Municipal Master of Rhetoric in the imperial court at Milan. No greater honor could be bestowed on a student of the liberal arts, particularly the trivium. Derived from the Latin word *via* (a road or way), the trivium includes grammar, logic, and rhetoric. These comprise a threefold work or path of arranging linguistic signs according to sign-things (words), sign-objects (referents), and sign-use (performances). Hence, the "word" considered materially, discursively, and purposively. Although the illiterate hermit Antony represented for him the epitome of the pilgrim Church (Conf. VIII), and while he would characterize the City of God in heavenly glory as prayer beyond syllables and other signs (Conf. XIII.15), Augustine hardly gave up the trivium. Rather, he expanded it into semiotics and pressed it into the service of "discourses on the divine" (*theologia*).¹⁰

On Peter Brown's estimation, Augustine cites sacred scripture more than 42,000 times, not to mention many thousands of citations of Latin authors. In short, literary structure really matters, especially in the case of the Conf. and *Civ.*

Mark Vessey correctly notes that "Augustine had a way of beginning at the beginning, and then beginning again." I have already mentioned how he made both Conf. and *Civ.* tell two stories. The last story is always the first one. The method of double-beginnings has a source in the Christian exegesis developed by the Fathers to correlate literal and spiritual meanings of scripture. Augustine learned it from Ambrose. (See Ambrose's exegesis of Christ's baptism and Leverite marriage, LCI drop box). It is on display in St. Irenaeus of Lyon's doctrine of

thought so tricky is that he doesn't have a later medieval "two end" doctrine, namely, the natural and supernatural ends. That distinction would allow, in principle, for political community to be situated in view of the natural end. Augustine is a single-city theorist, for there is one city proceeding from God and another city that is its antagonist. The terrene city does not correspond to what scholastic theologians would call the order of nature. Nor does his "two loves" correspond to the natural-supernatural distinction. Human kind are made unto the image and likeness of God, and precisely as image-bearers *amor sui* is contrary to their nature. An image bearer is meant to reflect its prototype. As my colleague Matthew Drever puts it, an image bearer is "most itself" when it is "least its own." It loves itself properly only in first loving God. So, Augustine is not only a single-city but also a single-love theorist. There is but one virtue, and one vice. This is a challenging terrain in which to work out a political doctrine.

¹⁰ On Christian Doctrine (doc. Chr.)

“recapitulation” – Christ sums up, recapitulates, the Old Adam. It was also in the toolkit of ancient rhetoricians.

Take Colossians 1:15-20. "He is the image of the invisible God,

A the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities -- all things were created through him and for him.

B He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

B' He is the head of the body, the church;

A' He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent.”

The device at work is chiasm, a literary structure that moves from A to B and then from B' to A' in order to hold two ideas in juxtaposition even while introducing a new theme in “crossing over” (from the Greek, chi X). In the case of Colossians, the meaning of “first-born” and “beginning” in A and in A' tell one story, and the things held together in B and B' tell another. Consider the structure of the first nine books of the Conf., the autobiographical books.

A (Bk I, infancy, a weaning in classical education)

B (Bk II, garden, fruit)

C (Bk III, Hortensius, discovery of mind)

D (Bk IV, fellowship)

E (Bk V, from Faustus to Ambrose <the crossing> to the Preacher of Incarnation)

D' (Bk VI, fellowship)

C' (Bk VII, discovery of spirit)

B' (Bk VIII, garden, fruit)

A' (Bk IX, rebirth, setting aside rhetorical career, vision)

At E, we find a “crossing over.” The rule here is simple: Find the chiasm and locate the elliptical vector of the ideas. So, Augustine begins with the inquietude of the human heart played out in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Conf. I-IV). At Bk. V he crosses over: from Carthage to Italy, from the household of his natural father and his heretical bishop to the new household under Ambrose. Each one of the Prodigal themes is taken up again from the standpoint of a soul become a Pilgrim (Conf. VI-IX).¹¹

A similar device is used to organize Civ. Indeed, there is a chiasm at Bk. XI, and you are forewarned that it marks a new beginning. But ... the chiasmic structure of Civ. does not display

¹¹ See the word-file “Conf Chart” for the rest of the analysis, including Bks X and XI-XIII. (LCI drop box)

the literary filigree of the Conf. For one thing, there are more digressions, and more examples.¹² We know that Augustine himself thought of Civ. in terms of larger literary units than the books of the Conf. In the letter to Firmus and in the Retractions, he divides the work as follows: 5 books refuting the position that pagan worship brings happiness in this life; 5 books disputing the more cultured position that such worship should be given for happiness in another life; and then, beginning at Bk XI, three sets of four books, respectively organized under the rubrics: origin, progress, and ends.

Augustine's own report indicates the chiasm at Bk. XI. That's sufficient for knowing that there is a new beginning and a recapitulation of the previous material. We have A and A', and it doesn't seem useful to play out the multiple chiastic pairs found in the fashion of the Conf.

Read the opening paragraph of Bks I, XI, and XXII. "Most glorious is the City of God" (I); "The City of God of which we speak is that to which the Scriptures bear witness ... Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God" (XI); "This City is called 'eternal' not because its existence is extended through many ages but will nonetheless at some time come to an end, but in the sense intended in the Gospel, where is written that 'of His kingdom there shall be no end'." (XXII) The chiasm occurs at Bk XI.

Augustine used the rubric "refutation" to characterize the first ten books. The main subject is Rome, which is both a city in history and a complex organizing symbol for what motivates the *civitas terrena*.

Books I-V. Refutation of civic religion. The crisis expounded in terms of "foundings," "productions," and "spectacles" of *libido dominandi*.

Books VI-X. Refutation of solutions. First, Varro's tripartite scheme of *theologia* adapted to stage, city, and nature (Bks. VI-VII). Second, the inefficacy of philosophy to reform the city and to bind it to an unchanging Word (Bks. VIII-IX). Third, the need for a God-Man mediator whose discourses on the divine are taught with authority (Bk. X).

At Book XI the reader must cross over and consider the crisis in the light of the unchanging Word rather than in dialectic and refutation. Bk. I began with the crisis of Rome in 410; Bk. XI.³³ names an "earlier" crisis in the invisible city, the defection of angels. For Augustine, God founded only one city, the heaven of heavens, the abode of the angelic lights mentioned in Genesis before the interval of a first day.¹³

Hence, in the next ten books Augustine endeavors, by way of demonstration and defense, to give a true (theological) account of the origin, progress, and appointed ends of two societies in time. One a prodigal, the other a pilgrim, though mixed together in time.

Books XII-XIV. Origins and division according to vectors of love.

¹² The subject of "cities" or "peoples" does not have the natural unity of an individual life. Moreover, the visible cities are "mystically" (Civ. XV.1) related to cities that are not visible either in their origin or ultimate end. Add to all of these complications the periodic episodes of work over a decade and it is a wonder that Augustine finished Civ. with a discernable pattern of textual order.

¹³ In Bk. XI of *Conf.*, Augustine contends that time, as a distension of the soul, has its origin in the motions of the treasonous angels – and thus *civitas terrena* proceeds from events antecedent to ordinary, human time and history.

Books XV-XVII. The historical unfolding of the cities, from Cain and Abel through the Prophets.

Book XVIII. Recapitulation of the story, the Coming of Christ and the Church.

Books XIX-XXII. Ends. First, in time, tranquility of order. Second, in judgment until the sixth age (of time and intervals) is completed in the condemnation of the reprobate and inclusion of the saints in Sabbath Rest.¹⁴

If I am correct, or at least on the right track, we can summarize the structure of *Civ*.

Books I-X. The two cities seen within human time.

Book XI. The crossing over, to a divine account of the matter.

Books XII-XXII. Origin, history, and ends of the two cities *sub luce revelationis*.

We can regard these two works as the bookends for our course. As Mark Vessey has remarked, there is a “curious symmetry” between the *Confessions* and the *City of God* (DCD). In the *Conf*, Augustine puts his own life in the context of origin, history, and appointed end. In the *City of God* he follows a similar tripartite scheme of “origin, history [*procursus/excursus*], and appointed ends” with regard to all humanity.¹⁵

Prospectus

This course begins two longish lectures on *The Confessions*, written sometime between 397 and 401, just after Augustine became a bishop at Hippo Regius in Roman North Africa. Of all his great works, *The Confessions* is the greatest. For one thing, it is a spiritual classic, read by every generation for the last sixteen hundred years. But it is also Augustine’s most balanced work, for it is one of his few books that was not written in an entirely polemical mode. Here, we find Augustine at the peak of his life (about 42 years old). He is still young, flush with the confidence of a conversion and elevation to ecclesiastical office; he is not yet haggard with the anxieties of office, not entirely entangled and distracted by the theological and ecclesiastical controversies that made North Africa a kind of free-fire zone of theological polemic; nor was he yet trapped in the turmoil of a crumbling Roman *imperium* that would so deeply affect his flock in North Africa between 410 and 431. To be sure, the subsequent controversies and political tumult will move Augustine to change some of his earlier ideas, chiefly on the theological and moral implications of the election, membership, and order of the saints. But, in the *Confessions*, we find, *in nucleo*, the major themes and habits of Augustine’s mind.

On February 15 we jump into Bk I of *Civ*.

Why do we read the entire *City of God*?

Because (1) it is one of the greatest works of western civilization, (2) everyone quotes or cites this work, but almost no one reads it all the way through, (3) most of you will never have another chance to read it in its entirety.

¹⁴ See the word-file “City of God Chart” for the rest of the analysis.

¹⁵ In *Civ* I.35, X.32, XI.1, XV.1, XVIII.54, XIX.1.

Expectations

This will be a reading, comprehension, and discussion seminar. You will join .0001 of living humanity who has read the *City of God*. Read, and re-read. Do not fail to read Peter Brown. Certainly Parts I and II and first four chapters of Part IV. Notice Brown's Bio-Bibliographical tables

We aim at immersion in a text worthy of our time.

Class attendance, preparation of work, and discussion are not merely required, but are inherently valuable aspects of our common effort.

Requirements

1. We will hit the ground running. In the first month, two 3-5 page seminar papers (everyone). I will designate a theme in Bk I and then Bk V.
2. One oral seminar presentation (everyone).
3. Seminar participation.
4. Final exercise. [The good news is that you are done a month before your other classes and exams]
5. The final is in-class, and will deal with what (in English universities) are called gobbets. The word seems to have meant a "small piece of flesh." But at Oxford, a gobbet came to mean a small piece of an historical source text. Students are supposed to identify the gobbet and to comment on it, explaining its significance. The French refer to such exercise as *explication de texte*. The student is required to put the text into context (including its relationship to other, companionate or opposite, texts) and then to explain what it means. Gobbet exercises are *open-book*, including whatever notes are in your book.

Calendar of Seminars

Feb. 4	Introduction to the seminar, some handouts, and thematic and structural charts of books.	Consensus on 4 additional meetings between Feb. and Holy Week.
Feb. 8	Lecture on the two cities in Conf. I-V. Ambrose as the new <i>pater familias</i> .	[provisional] Bring Chapman trans. of Conf.
Feb. 11	Lecture on the moral crisis, its resolution, and what remains in time. Conf. VII-VIII, and IX. Monica as the <i>soror sanctorum</i> , beyond the precincts of Babylon.	I will also have to say some things about the order of ordinary time in Bks. X-XIII, which anticipate Civ. Bring Chapman trans. of Conf.
Feb. 15	Civ. I. Who was grumbling, who are the models? Sermon on the Sack of Rome (PDF).	[provisional] Paper, 3-5 pages. On the difference between the early Sermon (Pol. Writings, 205ff) and Bk I of Civ. Models Cato and Job.
Feb. 18	Civ. II-IV. The gods of the Terrene City. Why does Augustine regard polytheism and the theatre as the interpretive key to the Terrene City?	Reports.
Feb. 25	Civ. V. Free choice, divine providence, and the emergence of Christian rulers. Read Eusebius, Triennial Oration on Constantine, [PDF] by way of comparison.	Paper, 3-5 pages. What differences can we discern between Eusebius's Oration and Civ. V on Christian political authority?
Feb. 29	Civ. VI-X, Varro's triadic scheme of theology, the failure of philosophy at the order of truth and authority in the city.	[provisional] Reports
March 3	Civ. X-XI. The structural and hermeneutical hinge of Civ. Who can give the true account of the history?	Reports
March 7	Civ. XII-XIII. The meaning of events that precede human histories. Angelic events and the beginning of scriptural evidence	[provisional] Reports
March 10	Civ. XIV and XV. Human fraternity, morally and scripturally interpreted. Augustine's set divine separations and callings.	Reports
March 17	Civ. XVI-XVII. The working out of these separations.	Reports
Spring break		

March 31	Civ. XVIII-IX. Must be considered in the light of Bk V. What kind of temporal order can be understood in time as the cities are mixed together?	Reports
April 7	Civ. XX-XXII. End times. The speculative account of the final separation.	Reports
April 14	Reckoning. Gobbets , in class	To be explained.

Texts

Required:

Augustine: The City of God against the Pagans (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought), Robert Dyson (Editor), Raymond Geuss (Editor), Quentin Skinner (Editor) Cambridge University Press; ISBN: 0521468434. *It must be this translation.*¹⁶

Confessions, Henry Chadwick trans. (Oxford, 2009). ISBN-10: 0199537828, ISBN-13: 978-0199537822

Eusebius, Oration in Praise of Constantine. [PDF]

Augustine, Political Writings. Eds. Atkins and Dodaro. Cambridge, 2007. [PDF]

Reading the City of God however is challenging. It was written in installments over a more than a decade. Each book varies in length and in patterns of rhetorical complexity. If you feel as though you are going over the same thing in a circular fashion, you might be. The Civ. Moves along in a sort of spiraling fashion. As the installments were sent out to friends, colleagues, diocesan centers the text was read out loud. Charlemagne had pieces of Civ. read to him every night.

You should use two handy guides.

O'Daly's *Augustine's City of God: A Reader's Guide* (PDF)

Marthinus Versfeld, *A Guide to the City of God*. Sheed and Ward, 1958. (PDF).

Augustine presupposes literacy in the basics of Graeco-Roman history, mythology and letters. For teaching purposes I use the Dyson translation and edition because he includes "biographical notes" with brief explanations of the names of gods, generals, politicians, and Christian authors of late antiquity. Unfortunately, he does not have a glossary of scriptural books and characters

Secondary Literature

Be forewarned, the secondary literature is immense, sprawling over more than a millennium. Let me emphasize, your first and most important responsibility is to read Augustine. We always learn more from reading Augustine than we learn from commentators looking over his shoulders.

¹⁶ Augustine presupposes literacy in the basics of Graeco-Roman history, mythology and letters. For teaching purposes I use the Dyson translation and edition because he includes "biographical notes" with brief explanations of the names of gods, generals, politicians, and Christian authors of late antiquity. Unfortunately, he does not have a glossary of scriptural books and characters.

You should be prepared to consult secondary literature whenever you need to look up a name, a date, a movement, an idea. Who was Valerius? Answer, the Bishop of Hippo before Augustine. You will learn most of this by reading Peter Brown's book. Where is Hippo Regius? It wouldn't hurt to consult a map. Who were the Donatists? Which collection of the Bible did Augustine use?

Consult *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*. Eds. Cavadini and Fitzgerald (Eerdmans, 2009)

Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (U Cal Press, 2000)

Here are other resources that can prove useful.

General:

Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World. G.W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar. Harvard, 1999. Not as good for our immediate purposes as *Augustine Through the Ages*, but well worth a look.

The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church. Oxford, 1997. Don't leave home without it.

Roy W. Battenhouse, *A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine*. Oxford, 1955. Widely consulted a generation ago, and I still do.

A Monument to St. Augustine. Christopher Dawson. Sheed and Ward, 1945. (I can provide a Xerox).

James J. O'Donnell's Augustine website:
<http://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/augustine/>

The very best site on-line. But not everything is of equal quality.

On the crisis of truth and religion, see the essays: Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*. Ignatius Press, 2004.

For Ancient Religion

The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome. N. Denis Fustel de Coulanges. Johns Hopkins University Press, various reprints. Order it on Amazon in paperback.

Gods and Mortals in Classical Mythology. Michael Grant and John Hazel. G & C Merriam Co., 1973. A useful reference.

Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic. H.H. Scullard. Cornell, 1981. If you can find it, this is the book to have at your bedside. Every day, you can check out the *ordo* of the ancient Roman liturgical calendar.

The Gods of Ancient Rome. Robert Turcan. Routledge, 1998.

Dictionary of Roman Religion. Lesley Adkins and Roy A. Adkins. Facts on File, Inc., 1996. Recent translations of primary texts, including Manichean liturgies.

Religions of Late Antiquity. Richard Valantasis. Princeton, 2000.

For the *Confessions*:

A Reader's Companion to Augustine's Confessions. Kim Paffenroth and Robert P. Kennedy. Westminster, 2003 (in paperback). Essays on each book of the *Confessions*. Not quite as scholarly, but more philosophically and theologically satisfying than the next entry immediately below.

J.J. O'Donnell's interactive edition and commentary on the *Confessions*, at the website above.

James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography* (Harper Collins, 2005). What I would call revisionist scholarship, but quite interesting.

Serge Lancel, *St. Augustine* (SCM Press, 2002). Not revisionist scholarship, and even more interesting.

For *On Christian Teaching*:

See J.J. O'Donnell's brief commentary at his website. Click, at left, Introduction: Augustine's Life and Works.

For the *City of God*:

Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God: A Reader's Guide*. Oxford, 1999.

James J. O'Donnell, essay on City of God:

<<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/augustine/civ.html>> Download it, it is very useful. Indeed, better than his work on the *Confessions*.

Find the Latin Civ. at same website.

Johannes Van Ort. *Jerusalem and Babylon: A Study of St. Augustine's City of God and the Sources for his Doctrine of the Two Cities*. Brill, 2013. [PDF]

Augustine's City of God: A Critical Guide, Edit. James Wetzel. Cambridge, 2012).

Herbert A. Dean, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine*. Columbia, 1963. From a previous generation, but very good. Perhaps even the first thing to read on the subject.

Marthinus Versfeld, *A Guide to the City of God*. Sheed and Ward, 1958. (I can provide a Xerox or Digital copy).

Charles Norris A. Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*. Oxford, re-issued by Liberty Fund, 1993. One of the best over-views ever written, rather in genre of Dawson's work.

Dale B. Martin, *Inventing Superstition: From Hippocratics to the Christians* (Harvard, 2004). Much can be learned from this little book.

Generally, on matters philosophical:

Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine*. Octagon Books, 1983. Magisterial.

Michael Mendelson's entry "Augustine," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available at J.J. O'Donnell's website, above.

John Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptised*. Cambridge, 1994.