



SAINT
AUGUSTINE

THE
CITY OF
GOD

INTRODUCTION
BY THOMAS
MERTON



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CITY OF GOD

SAINT
AUGUSTINE

TRANSLATED BY MARCUS DODS, D.D.
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY THOMAS MERTON



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INTRODUCTION

BY THOMAS MERTON

Here is a book that was written over fifteen hundred years ago by a mystic in North Africa. Yet to those who have ears to hear, it has a great deal to say to many of us who are not mystics, today, in America. *The City of God* is a monumental theology of history. It grew out of St. Augustine's meditations on the fall of the Roman Empire. But his analysis is timeless and universal. That is to say, it is Catholic in the etymological sense of the word. It is also Catholic in the sense that St. Augustine's view of history is the view held by the Catholic Church, and by all Catholic tradition since the Apostles. It is a theology of history built on revelation, developed above all from the inspired pages of St. Paul's Epistles and St. John's Apocalypse.

To those who do not know St. Augustine, the figure of the great Bishop of Hippo (the modern name of the city is Bona) may seem quite remote. And to one who attempts to make his first acquaintance with Augustine by starting to read *The City of God* from the beginning without a guide, the saint may remain an unappealing personality and his book may appear to be nothing more than a maze of curious, ancient fancies.

St. Augustine began to write this book three years after Rome first collapsed and opened its gates to a barbarian invader. Alaric and his Goths sacked the city in 410. Rome had been the inviolate mistress of the world for a thousand years. The fall of the city that some had thought would stand forever demoralized what was left of the civilized world. Those who still took the pagan gods seriously—and it seems they were not a few—looked about them for a scapegoat upon which to lay the guilt for this catastrophe. The Christians had emerged from the catacombs and had been officially recognized by the convert Emperor Constantine. Nevertheless Christianity remained the object of superstitious fear on the part of many, and it was inevitable that the

bad luck that had befallen the Empire should be blamed on the Catholic Church. St. Augustine took up his pen in 413 and set about proving the absurdity of such a charge. This furnished him with the subject matter for the first ten books of *The City of God*—a work that was written slowly, and appeared in instalments over a period of thirteen years. But the topic that first engaged his attention—Christianity versus the official pagan religion of imperial Rome—is not one that will strike us, today, as a living issue. Nor was it altogether worthy of the genius of Augustine. After several years of writing he abandoned this aspect of the problem, and left it to be disposed of by a certain Orosius, who will probably never find his way into the catalogue of the Modern Library. We owe him at least a debt of gratitude for having set Augustine free to write about the problem that really interested him: the theology of the “two cities” and of the intervention of God in human history.

The saint does not settle down to treat the real theme of his work until he reaches Book Eleven. And even then, he takes such a broad view of his subject that his approach to the main point seems to us extraordinarily unhurried. He pauses to solve many questions of detail. He embarks on a historical exegesis of the Old and New Testaments in order to show how the “two cities” have entered into the very substance of sacred history. Finally he completes this extraordinary panorama with a view of the final end of the two cities, and of their respective fates in eternity. How many Americans will have the patience to follow him through all of this? Those who do so will certainly find themselves profoundly changed by the experience, because they will have been exposed to a summary of Christian dogma. It is an exposition that can only be fully appreciated if it is read in the spirit in which it was written. And *The City of God* is an exposition of dogma that was not only written but *lived*.

What do we mean when we say that Augustine lived the theology that he wrote? Are we implying, for instance, that other theologians have not lived up to their principles? No. That possibility is not what concerns us here. It is more than a question of setting down on paper a series of abstract principles and then applying them in practice. Christianity is more than a moral code, more than a philosophy, more than a system of rites. Although it is sufficient, in the abstract, to divide the Catholic religion into three aspects and call them creed, code and cult, yet in practice, the integral Christian life is something far more than all this. It is more than a belief; it is a *life*. That is to say, it is a belief that is lived and experienced and expressed in action. The action in which it is expressed, experienced and lived is called a mystery. This mystery is the sacred drama which keeps ever present in history

the Sacrifice that was once consummated by Christ on Calvary. In plain words—if you can accept them as plain—Christianity is the life and death and resurrection of Christ going on day after day in the souls of individual men and in the heart of society.

It is this Christ-life, this incorporation into the Body of Christ, this union with His death and resurrection as a matter of conscious experience, that St. Augustine wrote of in his *Confessions*. But Augustine not only experienced the reality of Christ living in his own soul. He was just as keenly aware of the presence and action, the Birth, Sacrifice, Death and Resurrection of the Mystical Christ in the midst of human society. And this experience, this vision, if you would call it that, qualified him to write a book that was to be, in fact, the autobiography of the Catholic Church. That is what *The City of God* is. Just as truly as the *Confessions* are the autobiography of St. Augustine, *The City of God* is the autobiography of the Church written by the most Catholic of her great saints.

That is the substance of the book. But how is the average modern American going to get at that substance? Evidently, the treatment of the theme is so leisurely and so meandering and so diffuse that *The City of God*, more than any other book, requires an introduction. The best we can do here is to offer a few practical suggestions as to how to tackle it.

The first of these suggestions is this: since, after all, *The City of God* reflects much of St. Augustine's own personality and is colored by it, the reader who has never met Augustine before ought to go first of all to the *Confessions*. Once he gets to know the saint, he will be better able to understand Augustine's view of society. Then, no one who is not a specialist, with a good background of history or of theology or of philosophy, ought not to attempt to read the *City*, for the first time, beginning at page one. The living heart of the *City* is found in Book Nineteen, and this is the section that will make the most immediate appeal to us today because it is concerned with the theology of peace. However, Book Nineteen cannot be understood all by itself. The best source for solutions to the most pressing problems it will raise is Book Fourteen, where the origin of the two Cities is sketched, in an essay on original sin. Finally, the last Book (Twenty-two), which is perhaps the finest of them all, and a fitting climax to the whole work, will give the reader a broad view of St. Augustine's whole scheme because it describes the end of the City of God, the communal vision of the elect in Paradise, the contemplation which is the life of the "City of Vision" in heaven and the whole purpose of man's creation.

It may come as a surprise to some to learn that St. Augustine quite

spontaneously regarded contemplation as a communal endeavor. Solitude may be necessary for certain degrees of contemplative prayer on earth, but in heaven contemplation is the beatitude not merely of separate individuals but of an entire city. That city is a living organism whose mind is the Truth of God and whose will is His Love and His Liberty.

God created Adam as a pure contemplative. Material creation was subject to Adam's reason, and the soul of Adam was perfectly subjected to God. United to God in a very high degree of vision and love, Adam would have transmitted to all mankind his own perfection, his own liberty, his own peace in the vision of God. In Adam all men were to be, as it were, "one contemplative" perfectly united to one another in their one vision and love of the One Truth.

Original sin, an act of spiritual apostasy from the contemplative vision and love of God, severed the union with God that depended on the subjection of Adam's will to the will of God. Since God is Truth, Adam's apostasy from Him was a fall into falsehood, unreality. Since God is unity, Adam's fall was a collapse into division and disharmony. All mankind fell from God in Adam. And just as Adam's soul was divided against itself by sin, so all men were divided against one another by selfishness. The envy of Cain, which would have been impossible in Eden, bred murder in a world where each self-centered individual had become his own little god, his own judge and standard of good and evil, falsity and truth.

St. Augustine traces the history of this divided city of conflict and hate through all history from the fall of Adam to the end of time and even into eternity. But at the same time he contemplates and exposes to our gaze the history of that other City, planned by God to repair the work that Adam's sin could not be allowed to ruin. It was in the "new Adam," Christ, that man was to be raised again to the friendship and vision of God—not indeed the contemplation Adam had enjoyed in Eden, still less the clear vision of beatitude: but heaven was to begin on earth in faith and charity. God would be "seen" but only in darkness and man would be united in "one Body" but only at the cost of struggle and self-sacrifice. The whole of history since the ascension of Jesus into heaven is concerned with one work only: the building and perfecting of this "City of God." Even the wars, persecutions, and all the other evils which have made the history of empires terrible to read and more terrible to live through, have had only this one purpose: they have been the flails with which God has separated the wheat from the chaff, the elect from the damned. They have been the tools that have fashioned the living stones which God would set in the walls of His city of vision.

The difference between the two cities is the difference between two loves. Those who are united in the City of God are united by the love of God and of one another in God. Those who belong to the other city are indeed not united in any real sense: but it can be said that they have one thing in common besides their opposition to God: each one of them is intent on the love of himself above all else. In St. Augustine's classical expression: "These two cities were made by two loves: the earthly city by the love of self unto the contempt of God, and the heavenly city by the love of God unto the contempt of self." (Bk. 14, c. 28.) The earthly city glories in its own power, the heavenly in the power of God.

But there is a deeper psychological explanation of these two loves and of the way they contribute to the formation of two distinct societies. The love which unites the citizens of the heavenly city is disinterested love, or charity. The other city is built on selfish love, or cupidity. Now there are two reasons why only one of these loves—charity—can serve as the foundation for a happy and peaceful commonwealth. The first reason is metaphysical: charity is a love that leads the will to the possession of true values because it sees all things in their right order. It sees creatures for what they are, means to the possession of God. It uses them only as means and thus arrives successfully at the end, which is God. But cupidity is doomed from the start to frustration because it is based on a false system of values. It takes created things for ends in themselves, which they are not. The will that seeks rest in creatures for their own sake stops on the way to its true end, terminates in a value which does not exist, and thus frustrates all its deepest capacities for happiness and peace. The second reason is psychological and moral. Those who love God love a supreme and infinite good that cannot be diminished by being shared. Those who place their hopes on the possession of created and limited goods are doomed to conflict with one another and to everlasting fear of losing whatever they may have gained. Hence the city that is united in charity will be the only one to possess true peace, because it is the only one that conforms to the true order of things, the order established by God. The city that is united merely by an alliance of temporal interests cannot promise itself more than a temporary cessation from hostilities and its order will never be anything but a makeshift.

St. Augustine has left us a famous illustration of the way the citizens of the heavenly city are united in their knowledge and love of God. At the beginning of his *De Doctrina Christiana* he calls to mind the audience in a Roman theater. He shows us the spectators, coming together, strangers, from different places, to sit and watch the play. Soon

one of the actors begins to arouse the admiration of individuals. They like him and they begin to applaud. Then, finding their own enthusiasm reproduced in others, they "begin to love one another for the sake of him that they love." A bond is established; they begin to encourage one another in applauding their favorite. Anyone who has been to the opera in a large Italian city will appreciate St. Augustine's description. The enthusiasm spreads through the crowd, and a "society" is spontaneously generated by this common bond of love for a common object of contemplation. At the same time, those who do not share this admiration and love are, by that very fact, excluded and divided off into another, contrary society. So it is with the two cities of heaven and earth. Their two loves divide them beyond reconciliation. They are traveling in opposite directions and thus it is impossible that their roads should ever reach the same term.

Nevertheless, the fact that the two cities are opposed to one another does not mean that they cannot peacefully co-exist here on earth. It is not impossible that they should agree upon a *modus vivendi*. They can come to terms, and it is well that they should do so. The temporal advantage of worldly society is well served when the citizens of heaven still living in the world are protected by the temporal power. And although the Church as a whole can only profit by persecution, nevertheless temporal peace is a greater blessing, and one to be prayed and worked for, since it provides the normal condition under which most men can safely expect to work out their eternal destiny.

Was St. Augustine planning a temporal theocracy, a Holy Roman Empire in *The City of God*? It is abundantly clear that the City he described is the Kingdom of Christ which, as Jesus told Pilate, is "not of this world." Nevertheless, that does not mean that Augustine would necessarily have frowned upon a temporal theocracy. But it certainly entitles us to suppose that he would not have placed very high hopes in one.

The real value of this book, then, is not to be found in the help it may offer in solving immediate problems of policy in the world. What it offers us is something far more important. It opens our eyes to the deep and vital view of history which is the Christian and mystical view, the vision of St. Paul and of the Evangelists who knew that Christ had come into the world to "draw all things to Himself" (John 12:32) and who saw that "all things worked together for the good of them that love God" (Romans 8:28) because all the good and evil of history, all the prosperity and adversity which come upon the saints in this life serve only to forward the growth of the Mystical Christ "unto a perfect man and unto the measure of the age of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians

4:13). This eschatological view of history contemplates with joy the running out of the sands of time and looks forward with gladness to the Last Day that will make manifest the full and final glory of the "Whole Christ." *The City of God*, for those who can understand it, contains the secret of death and life, war and peace, hell and heaven.

Abbey of Gethsemani

January 4, 1950.

THE CITY OF GOD

BOOK FIRST

ARGUMENT

AUGUSTINE CENSURES THE PAGANS, WHO ATTRIBUTED THE CALAMITIES OF THE WORLD, AND ESPECIALLY THE RECENT SACK OF ROME BY THE GOTHs, TO THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION, AND ITS PROHIBITION OF THE WORSHIP OF THE GODS. HE SPEAKS OF THE BLESSINGS AND ILLS OF LIFE, WHICH THEN, AS ALWAYS, HAPPENED TO GOOD AND BAD MEN ALIKE. FINALLY, HE REBUKES THE SHAMELESSNESS OF THOSE WHO CAST UP TO THE CHRISTIANS THAT THEIR WOMEN HAD BEEN VIOLATED BY THE SOLDIERS.

PREFACE, EXPLAINING HIS DESIGN IN UNDERTAKING THIS WORK

THE glorious city of God is my theme in this work, which you, my dearest son Marcellinus, suggested, and which is due to you by my promise. I have undertaken its defence against those who prefer their own gods to the Founder of this city—a city surpassingly glorious, whether we view it as it still lives by faith in this fleeting course of time, and sojourns as a stranger in the midst of the ungodly, or as it shall dwell in the fixed stability of its eternal seat, which it now with patience waits for, expecting until “righteousness shall return unto judgment,”¹ and it obtain, by virtue of its excellence, final victory and perfect peace. A great work this, and an arduous ; but God is my helper. For I am aware what ability is requisite to persuade the proud how great is the virtue of humility, which raises us, not by a quite human arrogance, but by a divine grace, above all earthly dignities that totter on this shifting scene. For the King and Founder of this city of which we speak, has in Scripture uttered to His people a dictum of the divine law in these words: “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”² But this, which is God’s prerogative, the inflated ambition of a proud spirit also affects, and dearly loves that this be numbered among its attributes, to

“Show pity to the humbled soul,
And crush the sons of pride.”³

And therefore, as the plan of this work we have undertaken requires, and as occasion offers, we must speak also of the earthly city, which, though it be mistress of the nations, is itself ruled by its lust of rule.

¹ Ps. xciv. 15, rendered otherwise in Eng. ver.

² Jas. iv. 6 and 1 Pet. v. 5. ³ Virgil, *Æneid*, vi. 854.

1. *Of the adversaries of the name of Christ, whom the barbarians for Christ's sake spared when they stormed the city*

For to this earthly city belong the enemies against whom I have to defend the city of God. Many of them, indeed, being reclaimed from their ungodly error, have become sufficiently creditable citizens of this city; but many are so inflamed with hatred against it, and are so ungrateful to its Redeemer for His signal benefits, as to forget that they would now be unable to utter a single word to its prejudice, had they not found in its sacred places, as they fled from the enemy's steel, that life in which they now boast themselves. Are not those very Romans, who were spared by the barbarians through their respect for Christ, become enemies to the name of Christ? The reliquaries of the martyrs and the churches of the apostles bear witness to this; for in the sack of the city they were open sanctuary for all who fled to them, whether Christian or Pagan. To their very threshold the bloodthirsty enemy raged; there his murderous fury owned a limit. Thither did such of the enemy as had any pity convey those to whom they had given quarter, lest any less mercifully disposed might fall upon them. And, indeed, when even those murderers who everywhere else showed themselves pitiless came to these spots where that was forbidden which the licence of war permitted in every other place, their furious rage for slaughter was bridled, and their eagerness to take prisoners was quenched. Thus escaped multitudes who now reproach the Christian religion, and impute to Christ the ills that have befallen their city; but the preservation of their own life—a boon which they owe to the respect entertained for Christ by the barbarians—they attribute not to our Christ, but to their own good luck. They ought rather, had they any right perceptions, to attribute the severities and hardships inflicted by their enemies, to that divine providence which is wont to reform the depraved manners of men by chastisement, and which exercises with similar afflictions the righteous and praiseworthy—either translating them, when they have passed through the trial, to a better world, or detaining them still on earth for ulterior purposes. And they ought to attribute it to the spirit of these Christian times, that, contrary to the custom of war, these bloodthirsty barbarians spared them, and spared them for Christ's sake, whether this mercy was actually shown in promiscuous places, or in those places specially dedicated to Christ's name, and of which the very largest were selected as sanctuaries, that full scope might thus be given to the expansive compassion which desired that a large multitude might find shelter there. Therefore ought they to give God thanks, and with sincere confession flee for refuge to His name, that so they may escape the punishment of eternal fire—they who with lying lips took upon them this name, that they might escape the punishment of present destruction. For of those whom you see insolently and shamelessly insulting the

servants of Christ, there are numbers who would not have escaped that destruction and slaughter had they not pretended that they themselves were Christ's servants. Yet now, in ungrateful pride and most impious madness, and at the risk of being punished in everlasting darkness, they perversely oppose that name under which they fraudulently protected themselves for the sake of enjoying the light of this brief life.

2. *That it is quite contrary to the usage of war, that the victors should spare the vanquished for the sake of their gods*

There are histories of numberless wars, both before the building of Rome and since its rise and the extension of its dominion: let these be read, and let one instance be cited in which, when a city had been taken by foreigners, the victors spared those who were found to have fled for sanctuary to the temples of their gods; ⁴ or one instance in which a barbarian general gave orders that none should be put to the sword who had been found in this or that temple. Did not Æneas see

"Dying Priam at the shrine,
Staining the hearth he made divine?" ⁵

Did not Diomedes and Ulysses

"Drag with red hands, the sentry slain,
Her fateful image from your fane,
Her chaste locks touch, and stain with gore
The virgin coronal she wore?" ⁶

Neither is that true which follows, that

"Thenceforth the tide of fortune changed,
And Greece grew weak." ⁷

For after this they conquered and destroyed Troy with fire and sword; after this they beheaded Priam as he fled to the altars. Neither did Troy perish because it lost Minerva. For what had Minerva herself first lost, that she should perish? Her guards perhaps? No doubt; just her guards. For as soon as they were slain, she could be stolen. It was not, in fact, the men who were preserved by the image, but the image by the men. How, then, was she invoked to defend the city and the citizens, she who could not defend her own defenders?

3. *That the Romans did not show their usual sagacity when they trusted that they would be benefited by the gods who had been unable to defend Troy*

And these be the gods to whose protecting care the Romans were delighted to entrust their city! O too, too piteous mistake! And they are enraged at us when we speak thus about their gods, though, so far from being enraged at their own writers, they part with money to learn what they say; and, indeed, the very teachers of these authors

⁴ The Benedictines remind us that Alexander and Xenophon, at least on some occasions, did so.

⁵ Virgil, *Æneid*, ii. 501-2. The renderings of Virgil are from Conington.

⁶ *Ibid.* ii. 166. ⁷ *Ibid.*

are reckoned worthy of a salary from the public purse, and of other honours. There is Virgil, who is read by boys, in order that this great poet, this most famous and approved of all poets, may impregnate their virginal minds, and may not readily be forgotten by them, according to that saying of Horace,

"The fresh cask long keeps its first tang."⁸

Well, in this Virgil, I say, Juno is introduced as hostile to the Trojans, and stirring up Æolus, the king of the winds, against them in the words,

"A race I hate now ploughs the sea,
Transporting Troy to Italy,
And home-gods conquered"⁹ . . .

And ought prudent men to have entrusted the defence of Rome to these conquered gods? But it will be said, this was only the saying of Juno, who, like an angry woman, did not know what she was saying. What, then, says Æneas himself—Æneas who is so often designated "pious?" Does he not say,

"Lo! Panthus, 'scaped from death by flight,
Priest of Apollo on the height,
His conquered gods with trembling hands
He bears, and shelter swift demands?"¹⁰

Is it not clear that the gods (whom he does not scruple to call "conquered") were rather entrusted to Æneas than he to them, when it is said to him,

"The gods of her domestic shrines
Your country to your care consigns?"¹¹

If, then, Virgil says that the gods were such as these, and were conquered, and that when conquered they could not escape except under the protection of a man, what madness is it to suppose that Rome had been wisely entrusted to these guardians, and could not have been taken unless it had lost them! Indeed, to worship conquered gods as protectors and champions, what is this but to worship, not good divinities, but evil omens?¹² Would it not be wiser to believe, not that Rome would never have fallen into so great a calamity had not they first perished, but rather that they would have perished long since had not Rome preserved them as long as she could? For who does not see, when he thinks of it, what a foolish assumption it is that they could not be vanquished under vanquished defenders, and that they only perished because they had lost their guardian gods, when, indeed, the only cause of their perishing was that they chose for their protectors gods condemned to perish? The poets, therefore, when they composed and sang these things about the conquered gods, had no intention to invent falsehoods, but uttered, as

⁸ Horace, *Ep.* I. ii. 69. ⁹ *Æneid*, l. 71. ¹⁰ *Ibid.* ii. 319. ¹¹ *Ibid.* 293.

¹² Non numina bona, sed omnia mala.

honest men, what the truth extorted from them. This, however, will be carefully and copiously discussed in another and more fitting place. Meanwhile I will briefly, and to the best of my ability, explain what I meant to say about these ungrateful men who blasphemously impute to Christ the calamities which they deservedly suffer in consequence of their own wicked ways, while that which is for Christ's sake spared them in spite of their wickedness they do not even take the trouble to notice; and in their mad and blasphemous insolence, they use against His name those very lips wherewith they falsely claimed that same name that their lives might be spared. In the places consecrated to Christ, where for His sake no enemy would injure them, they restrained their tongues that they might be safe and protected; but no sooner do they emerge from these sanctuaries, than they unbridle these tongues to hurl against Him curses full of hate.

4. *Of the asylum of Juno in Troy, which saved no one from the Greeks; and of the churches of the apostles, which protected from the barbarians all who fled to them*

Troy itself, the mother of the Roman people, was not able, as I have said, to protect its own citizens in the sacred places of their gods from the fire and sword of the Greeks, though the Greeks worshipped the same gods. Not only so, but

" Phœnix and Ulysses fell
In the void courts by Juno's cell
Were set the spoil to keep ;
Snatched from the burning shrines away,
There Ilium's mighty treasure lay,
Rich altars, bowls of massy gold,
And captive raiment, rudely rolled
In one promiscuous heap ;
While boys and matrons, wild with fear,
In long array were standing near." ¹³

In other words, the place consecrated to so great a goddess was chosen, not that from it none might be led out a captive, but that in it all the captives might be immured. Compare now this "asylum"—the asylum not of an ordinary god, not of one of the rank and file of gods, but of Jove's own sister and wife, the queen of all the gods—with the churches built in memory of the apostles. Into it were collected the spoils rescued from the blazing temples and snatched from the gods, not that they might be restored to the vanquished, but divided among the victors; while into these was carried back, with the most religious observance and respect, everything which belonged to them, even though found elsewhere. There liberty was lost; here preserved. There bondage was strict; here strictly excluded. Into that temple men were driven to become the chattels of their enemies, now lording it over them; into these churches men were led by their relenting foes, that they might be at liberty. In

¹³ Virgil, *Æneid*, ii. 761.

fine, the gentle¹⁴ Greeks appropriated that temple of Juno to the purposes of their own avarice and pride ; while these churches of Christ were chosen even by the savage barbarians as the fit scenes for humility and mercy. But perhaps, after all, the Greeks did in that victory of theirs spare the temples of those gods whom they worshipped in common with the Trojans, and did not dare to put to the sword or make captive the wretched and vanquished Trojans who fled thither ; and perhaps Virgil, in the manner of poets, has depicted what never really happened ? But there is no question that he depicted the usual custom of an enemy when sacking a city.

5. *Cæsar's statement regarding the universal custom of an enemy when sacking a city*

Even Cæsar himself gives us positive testimony regarding this custom ; for, in his deliverance in the senate about the conspirators, he says (as Sallust, a historian of distinguished veracity, writes¹⁵) " that virgins and boys are violated, children torn from the embrace of their parents, matrons subjected to whatever should be the pleasure of the conquerors, temples and houses plundered, slaughter and burning rife ; in fine, all things filled with arms, corpses, blood, and wailing." If he had not mentioned temples here, we might suppose that enemies were in the habit of sparing the dwellings of the gods. And the Roman temples were in danger of these disasters, not from foreign foes, but from Catiline and his associates, the most noble senators and citizens of Rome. But these, it may be said, were abandoned men, and the parricides of their fatherland.

6. *That not even the Romans, when they took cities, spared the conquered in their temples*

Why, then, need our argument take note of the many nations who have waged wars with one another, and have nowhere spared the conquered in the temples of their gods ? Let us look at the practice of the Romans themselves : let us, I say, recall and review the Romans, whose chief praise it has been " to spare the vanquished and subdue the proud," and that they preferred " rather to forgive than to revenge an injury ;"¹⁶ and among so many and great cities which they have stormed, taken, and overthrown for the extension of their dominion, let us be told what temples they were accustomed to exempt, so that whoever took refuge in them was free. Or have they really done this, and has the fact been suppressed by the historians of these events ? Is it to be believed, that men who sought out with the greatest eagerness points they could praise,

¹⁴ Though "levis" was the word usually employed to signify the inconstancy of the Greeks, it is evidently here used, in opposition to "immanis" of the following clause, to indicate that the Greeks were more civilised than the barbarians, and not relentless, but, as we say, easily moved.

¹⁵ *De Conj. Cat.* c. 51.

¹⁶ Sallust, *Cat. Conj.* ix.

would omit those which, in their own estimation, are the most signal proofs of piety? Marcus Marcellus, a distinguished Roman, who took Syracuse, a most splendidly adorned city, is reported to have bewailed its coming ruin, and to have shed his own tears over it before he spilt its blood. He took steps also to preserve the chastity even of his enemy. For before he gave orders for the storming of the city, he issued an edict forbidding the violation of any free person. Yet the city was sacked according to the custom of war; nor do we anywhere read, that even by so chaste and gentle a commander orders were given that no one should be injured who had fled to this or that temple. And this certainly would by no means have been omitted, when neither his weeping nor his edict preservative of chastity could be passed in silence. Fabius, the conqueror of the city of Tarentum, is praised for abstaining from making booty of the images. For when his secretary proposed the question to him, what he wished done with the statues of the gods, which had been taken in large numbers, he veiled his moderation under a joke. For he asked of what sort they were; and when they reported to him that there were not only many large images, but some of them armed, "Oh," says he, "let us leave with the Tarentines their angry gods." Seeing, then, that the writers of Roman history could not pass in silence, neither the weeping of the one general nor the laughing of the other, neither the chaste pity of the one nor the facetious moderation of the other, on what occasion would it be omitted, if, for the honour of any of their enemy's gods, they had shown this particular form of leniency, that in any temple slaughter or captivity was prohibited?

7. *That the cruelties which occurred in the sack of Rome were in accordance with the custom of war, whereas the acts of clemency resulted from the influence of Christ's name*

All the spoiling, then, which Rome was exposed to in the recent calamity—all the slaughter, plundering, burning, and misery—was the result of the custom of war. But what was novel, was that savage barbarians showed themselves in so gentle a guise, that the largest churches were chosen and set apart for the purpose of being filled with the people to whom quarter was given, and that in them none were slain, from them none forcibly dragged; that into them many were led by their relenting enemies to be set at liberty, and that from them none were led into slavery by merciless foes. Whoever does not see that this is to be attributed to the name of Christ, and to the Christian temper, is blind; whoever sees this, and gives no praise, is ungrateful; whoever hinders any one from praising it, is mad. Far be it from any prudent man to impute this clemency to the barbarians. Their fierce and bloody minds were awed, and bridled, and marvellously tempered by Him who so long before said by His prophet, "I will visit their transgression with the rod,

and their iniquities with stripes ; nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from them."¹⁷

8. *Of the advantages and disadvantages which often indiscriminately accrue to good and wicked men*

Will some one say, Why, then, was this divine compassion extended even to the ungodly and ungrateful ? Why, but because it was the mercy of Him who daily "maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."¹⁸ For though some of these men, taking thought of this, repent of their wickedness and reform, some, as the apostle says, "despising the riches of His goodness and long-suffering, after their hardness and impenitent heart, treasure up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds :"¹⁹ nevertheless does the patience of God still invite the wicked to repentance, even as the scourge of God educates the good to patience. And so, too, does the mercy of God embrace the good that it may cherish them, as the severity of God arrests the wicked to punish them. To the divine providence it has seemed good to prepare in the world to come for the righteous good things, which the unrighteous shall not enjoy ; and for the wicked evil things, by which the good shall not be tormented. But as for the good things of this life, and its ills, God has willed that these should be common to both ; that we might not too eagerly covet the things which wicked men are seen equally to enjoy, nor shrink with an unseemly fear from the ills which even good men often suffer.

There is, too, a very great difference in the purpose served both by those events which we call adverse and those called prosperous. For the good man is neither uplifted with the good things of time, nor broken by its ills ; but the wicked man, because he is corrupted by this world's happiness, feels himself punished by its unhappiness.²⁰ Yet often, even in the present distribution of temporal things, does God plainly evince His own interference. For if every sin were now visited with manifest punishment, nothing would seem to be reserved for the final judgment ; on the other hand, if no sin received now a plainly divine punishment, it would be concluded that there is no divine providence at all. And so of the good things of this life : if God did not by a very visible liberality confer these on some of those persons who ask for them, we should say that these good things were not at His disposal ; and if He gave them to all who sought them, we should suppose that such were the only rewards of His service ; and such a service would make us not godly, but greedy rather, and covetous. Wherefore, though good and bad men suffer alike, we must not suppose that there is no difference between the men

¹⁷ Ps. lxxxix. 32. ¹⁸ Matt. v. 45. ¹⁹ Rom. ii. 4.

²⁰ So Cyprian (*Contra Demetrianum*) says, "Pœnam de adversis mundi ille sentit, cui et lætitia et gloria omnis in mundo est."

themselves, because there is no difference in what they both suffer. For even in the likeness of the sufferings, there remains an unlikeness in the sufferers ; and though exposed to the same anguish, virtue and vice are not the same thing. For as the same fire causes gold to glow brightly, and chaff to smoke ; and under the same flail the straw is beaten small, while the grain is cleansed ; and as the lees are not mixed with the oil, though squeezed out of the vat by the same pressure, so the same violence of affliction proves, purges, clarifies the good, but damns, ruins, exterminates the wicked. And thus it is that in the same affliction the wicked detest God and blaspheme, while the good pray and praise. So material a difference does it make, not what ills are suffered, but what kind of man suffers them. For, stirred up with the same movement, mud exhales a horrible stench, and ointment emits a fragrant odour.

9. *Of the reasons for administering correction to bad and good together*

What, then, have the Christians suffered in that calamitous period, which would not profit every one who duly and faithfully considered the following circumstances ? First of all, they must humbly consider those very sins which have provoked God to fill the world with such terrible disasters ; for although they be far from the excesses of wicked, immoral, and ungodly men, yet they do not judge themselves so clean removed from all faults as to be too good to suffer for these even temporal ills. For every man, however laudably he lives, yet yields in some points to the lust of the flesh. Though he do not fall into gross enormity of wickedness, and abandoned viciousness, and abominable profanity, yet he slips into some sins, either rarely or so much the more frequently as the sins seem of less account. But not to mention this, where can we readily find a man who holds in fit and just estimation those persons on account of whose revolting pride, luxury, and avarice, and cursed iniquities and impiety, God now smites the earth as His predictions threatened ? Where is the man who lives with them in the style in which it becomes us to live with them ? For often we wickedly blind ourselves to the occasions of teaching and admonishing them, sometimes even of reprimanding and chiding them, either because we shrink from the labour or are ashamed to offend them, or because we fear to lose good friendships, lest this should stand in the way of our advancement, or injure us in some worldly matter, which either our covetous disposition desires to obtain, or our weakness shrinks from losing. So that, although the conduct of wicked men is distasteful to the good, and therefore they do not fall with them into that damnation which in the next life awaits such persons, yet, because they spare their damnable sins through fear, therefore, even though their own sins be slight and venial, they are justly scourged with the wicked in this world, though in eternity they quite escape punishment. Justly, when God afflicts them in common with the

wicked, do they find this life bitter, through love of whose sweetness they declined to be bitter to these sinners.

If any one forbears to reprove and find fault with those who are doing wrong, because he seeks a more seasonable opportunity, or because he fears they may be made worse by his rebuke, or that other weak persons may be disheartened from endeavouring to lead a good and pious life, and may be driven from the faith ; this man's omission seems to be occasioned not by covetousness, but by a charitable consideration. But what is blameworthy is, that they who themselves revolt from the conduct of the wicked, and live in quite another fashion, yet spare those faults in other men which they ought to reprehend and wean them from ; and spare them because they fear to give offence, lest they should injure their interests in those things which good men may innocently and legitimately use—though they use them more greedily than becomes persons who are strangers in this world, and profess the hope of a heavenly country. For not only the weaker brethren, who enjoy married life, and have children (or desire to have them), and own houses and establishments, whom the apostle addresses in the churches, warning and instructing them how they should live, both the wives with their husbands, and the husbands with their wives, the children with their parents, and parents with their children, and servants with their masters, and masters with their servants—not only do these weaker brethren gladly obtain and grudgingly lose many earthly and temporal things on account of which they dare not offend men whose polluted and wicked life greatly displeases them ; but those also who live at a higher level, who are not entangled in the meshes of married life, but use meagre food and raiment, do often take thought of their own safety and good name, and abstain from finding fault with the wicked, because they fear their wiles and violence. And although they do not fear them to such an extent as to be drawn to the commission of like iniquities, nay, not by any threats or violence soever ; yet those very deeds which they refuse to share in the commission of, they often decline to find fault with, when possibly they might by finding fault prevent their commission. They abstain from interference, because they fear that, if it fail of good effect, their own safety or reputation may be damaged or destroyed ; not because they see that their preservation and good name are needful, that they may be able to influence those who need their instruction, but rather because they weakly relish the flattery and respect of men, and fear the judgments of the people, and the pain or death of the body ; that is to say, their non-intervention is the result of selfishness, and not of love.

Accordingly, this seems to me to be one principal reason why the good are chastised along with the wicked, when God is pleased to visit with temporal punishments the profligate manners of a community. They are

punished together, not because they have spent an equally corrupt life, but because the good as well as the wicked, though not equally with them, love this present life ; while they ought to hold it cheap, that the wicked, being admonished and reformed by their example, might lay hold of life eternal. And if they will not be the companions of the good in seeking life everlasting, they should be loved as enemies, and be dealt with patiently. For so long as they live, it remains uncertain whether they may not come to a better mind. These selfish persons have more cause to fear than those to whom it was said through the prophet, " He is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand."²¹ For watchmen or overseers of the people are appointed in churches, that they may unsparingly rebuke sin. Nor is that man guiltless of the sin we speak of, who, though he be not a watchman, yet sees in the conduct of those with whom the relationships of this life bring him into contact, many things that should be blamed, and yet overlooks them, fearing to give offence, and lose such worldly blessings as may legitimately be desired, but which he too eagerly grasps. Then, lastly, there is another reason why the good are afflicted with temporal calamities—the reason which Job's case exemplifies : that the human spirit may be proved, and that it may be manifested with what fortitude of pious trust, and with how unmercenary a love, it cleaves to God.²²

10. *That the saints lose nothing in losing temporal goods*

These are the considerations which one must keep in view, that he may answer the question whether any evil happens to the faithful and godly which cannot be turned to profit. Or shall we say that the question is needless, and that the apostle is vapouring when he says, " We know that all things work together for good to them that love God ?"²³

They lost all they had. Their faith ? Their godliness ? The possessions of the hidden man of the heart, which in the sight of God are of great price ?²⁴ Did they lose these ? For these are the wealth of Christians, to whom the wealthy apostle said, " Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil ; which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."²⁵

They, then, who lost their worldly all in the sack of Rome, if they owned their possessions as they had been taught by the apostle, who

²¹ Ezek. xxxiii. 6.

²² Compare with this chapter the first homily of Chrysostom to the people of Antioch.

²³ Rom. viii. 28. ²⁴ 1 Pet. iii. 4. ²⁵ 1 Tim. vi. 6-10.

himself was poor without, but rich within—that is to say, if they used the world as not using it—could say in the words of Job, heavily tried, but not overcome : “ Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither : the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; as it pleased the Lord, so has it come to pass : blessed be the name of the Lord.”²⁶ Like a good servant, Job counted the will of his Lord his great possession, by obedience to which his soul was enriched ; nor did it grieve him to lose, while yet living, those goods which he must shortly leave at his death. But as to those feeblers spirits who, though they cannot be said to prefer earthly possessions to Christ, do yet cleave to them with a somewhat immoderate attachment, they have discovered by the pain of losing these things how much they were sinning in loving them. For their grief is of their own making ; in the words of the apostle quoted above, “ they have pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” For it was well that they who had so long despised these verbal admonitions should receive the teaching of experience. For when the apostle says, “ They that will be rich fall into temptation,” and so on, what he blames in riches is not the possession of them, but the desire of them. For elsewhere he says, “ Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy ; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate ; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”²⁷ They who were making such a use of their property have been consoled for light losses by great gains, and have had more pleasure in those possessions which they have securely laid past, by freely giving them away, than grief in those which they entirely lost by an anxious and selfish hoarding of them. For nothing could perish on earth save what they would be ashamed to carry away from earth. Our Lord’s injunction runs, “ Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal ; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal : for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”²⁸ And they who have listened to this injunction have proved in the time of tribulation how well they were advised in not despising this most trustworthy teacher, and most faithful and mighty guardian of their treasure. For if many were glad that their treasure was stored in places which the enemy chanced not to light upon, how much better founded was the joy of those who, by the counsel of their God, had fled with their treasure to a citadel which

²⁶ Job i. 21. ²⁷ 1 Tim. vi. 17-19. ²⁸ Matt. vi. 19-21.

no enemy can possibly reach ! Thus our Paulinus, bishop of Nola,²⁹ who voluntarily abandoned vast wealth and became quite poor, though abundantly rich in holiness, when the barbarians sacked Nola, and took him prisoner, used silently to pray, as he afterwards told me, " O Lord, let me not be troubled for gold and silver, for where all my treasure is Thou knowest." For all his treasure was where he had been taught to hide and store it by Him who had also foretold that these calamities would happen in the world. Consequently those persons who obeyed their Lord when He warned them where and how to lay up treasure, did not lose even their earthly possessions in the invasion of the barbarians ; while those who are now repenting that they did not obey Him have learnt the right use of earthly goods, if not by the wisdom which would have prevented their loss, at least by the experience which follows it.

But some good and Christian men have been put to the torture, that they might be forced to deliver up their goods to the enemy. They could indeed neither deliver nor lose that good which made themselves good. If, however, they preferred torture to the surrender of the mammon of iniquity, then I say they were not good men. Rather they should have been reminded that, if they suffered so severely for the sake of money, they should endure all torment, if need be, for Christ's sake ; that they might be taught to love Him rather who enriches with eternal felicity all who suffer for Him, and not silver and gold, for which it was pitiable to suffer, whether they preserved it by telling a lie, or lost it by telling the truth. For under these tortures no one lost Christ by confessing Him, no one preserved wealth save by denying its existence. So that possibly the torture which taught them that they should set their affections on a possession they could not lose, was more useful than those possessions which, without any useful fruit at all, disquieted and tormented their anxious owners. But then we are reminded that some were tortured who had no wealth to surrender, but who were not believed when they said so. These too, however, had perhaps some craving for wealth, and were not willingly poor with a holy resignation ; and to such it had to be made plain, that not the actual possession alone, but also the desire of wealth, deserved such excruciating pains. And even if they were destitute of any hidden stores of gold and silver, because they were living in hopes of a better life—I know not indeed if any such person was tortured on the supposition that he had wealth ; but if so, then certainly in confessing, when put to the question, a holy poverty, he confessed Christ. And though it was scarcely to be expected that the

²⁹ Paulinus was a native of Bordeaux, and both by inheritance and marriage acquired great wealth, which, after his conversion in his thirty-sixth year, he distributed to the poor. He became bishop of Nola in A.D. 409, being then in his fifty-sixth year. Nola was taken by Alaric shortly after the sack of Rome.

barbarians should believe him, yet no confessor of a holy poverty could be tortured without receiving a heavenly reward.

Again, they say that the long famine laid many a Christian low. But this, too, the faithful turned to good uses by a pious endurance of it. For those whom famine killed outright it rescued from the ills of this life, as a kindly disease would have done; and those who were only hunger-bitten were taught to live more sparingly, and inured to longer fasts.

11. *Of the end of this life, whether it is material that it be long delayed*

But, it is added, many Christians were slaughtered, and were put to death in a hideous variety of cruel ways. Well if this be hard to bear, it is assuredly the common lot of all who are born into this life. Of this at least I am certain, that no one has ever died who was not destined to die some time. Now the end of life puts the longest life on a par with the shortest. For of two things which have alike ceased to be, the one is not better, the other worse—the one greater, the other less.³⁰ And of what consequence is it what kind of death puts an end to life, since he who has died once is not forced to go through the same ordeal a second time? And as in the daily casualties of life every man is, as it were, threatened with numberless deaths, so long as it remains uncertain which of them is his fate, I would ask whether it is not better to suffer one and die, than to live in fear of all? I am not unaware of the poor-spirited fear which prompts us to choose rather to live long in fear of so many deaths, than to die once and so escape them all; but the weak and cowardly shrinking of the flesh is one thing, and the well-considered and reasonable persuasion of the soul quite another. That death is not to be judged an evil which is the end of a good life; for death becomes evil only by the retribution which follows it. They, then, who are destined to die, need not be careful to inquire what death they are to die, but into what place death will usher them. And since Christians are well aware that the death of the godly pauper whose sores the dogs licked was far better than of the wicked rich man who lay in purple and fine linen, what harm could these terrific deaths do to the dead who had lived well?

12. *Of the burial of the dead: that the denial of it to Christians does them no injury*³¹

Further still, we are reminded that in such a carnage as then occurred, the bodies could not even be buried. But godly confidence is not appalled by so ill-omened a circumstance; for the faithful bear in mind that assurance has been given that not a hair of their head shall perish,

³⁰ Much of a kindred nature might be gathered from the Stoics. Antoninus says (ii. 14): "Though thou shouldst be going to live 3000 years, and as many times 10,000 years, still remember that no man loses any other life than this which he now lives, nor lives any other than this which he now loses. The longest and the shortest are thus brought to the same."

³¹ Augustine expresses himself more fully on this subject in his tract, *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*.

and that, therefore, though they even be devoured by beasts, their blessed resurrection will not hereby be hindered. The Truth would no-wise have said, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul,"³² if anything whatever that an enemy could do to the body of the slain could be detrimental to the future life. Or will some one perhaps take so absurd a position as to contend that those who kill the body are not to be feared before death, and lest they kill the body, but after death, lest they deprive it of burial? If this be so, then that is false which Christ says, "Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do;"³³ for it seems they can do great injury to the dead body. Far be it from us to suppose that the Truth can be thus false. They who kill the body are said "to do something," because the death-blow is felt, the body still having sensation; but after that, they have no more that they can do, for in the slain body there is no sensation. And so there are indeed many bodies of Christians lying unburied; but no one has separated them from heaven, nor from that earth which is all filled with the presence of Him who knows whence He will raise again what He created. It is said, indeed, in the Psalm: "The dead bodies of Thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the heaven, the flesh of Thy saints unto the beasts of the earth. Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem; and there was none to bury them."³⁴ But this was said rather to exhibit the cruelty of those who did these things, than the misery of those who suffered them. To the eyes of men this appears a harsh and doleful lot, yet "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."³⁵ Wherefore all these last offices and ceremonies that concern the dead, the careful funeral arrangements, and the equipment of the tomb, and the pomp of obsequies, are rather the solace of the living than the comfort of the dead. If a costly burial does any good to a wicked man, a squalid burial, or none at all, may harm the godly. His crowd of domestics furnished the purple-clad Dives with a funeral gorgeous in the eye of man; but in the sight of God that was a more sumptuous funeral which the ulcerous pauper received at the hands of the angels, who did not carry him out to a marble tomb, but bore him aloft to Abraham's bosom.

The men against whom I have undertaken to defend the city of God laugh at all this. But even their own philosophers³⁶ have despised a careful burial; and often whole armies have fought and fallen for their earthly country without caring to inquire whether they would be left

³² Matt. x. 28. ³³ Luke xii. 4. ³⁴ Ps. lxxix. 2, 3. ³⁵ Ps. cxvi. 15.

³⁶ Diogenes especially, and his followers. See also Seneca, *De Tranq.* c. 14, and *Epist.* 92; and in Cicero's *Tusc. Disp.* i. 43, the answer of Theodorus, the Cyrenian philosopher, to Lysimachus, who threatened him with the cross: "Threaten that to your courtiers; it is of no consequence to Theodorus whether he rot in the earth or in the air."

exposed on the field of battle, or become the food of wild beasts. Of this noble disregard of sepulture poetry has well said : " He who has no tomb has the sky for his vault."³⁷ How much less ought they to insult over the unburied bodies of Christians, to whom it has been promised that the flesh itself shall be restored, and the body formed anew, all the members of it being gathered not only from the earth, but from the most secret recesses of any other of the elements in which the dead bodies of men have lain hid !

13. *Reasons for burying the bodies of the saints*

Nevertheless the bodies of the dead are not on this account to be despised and left unburied ; least of all the bodies of the righteous and faithful, which have been used by the Holy Ghost as His organs and instruments for all good works. For if the dress of a father, or his ring, or anything he wore, be precious to his children, in proportion to the love they bore him, with how much more reason ought we to care for the bodies of those we love, which they wore far more closely and intimately than any clothing ? For the body is not an extraneous ornament or aid, but a part of man's very nature. And therefore to the righteous of ancient times the last offices were piously rendered, and sepulchres provided for them, and obsequies celebrated ;³⁸ and they themselves, while yet alive, gave commandment to their sons about the burial, and, on occasion, even about the removal of their bodies to some favourite place.³⁹ And Tobit, according to the angel's testimony, is commended, and is said to have pleased God by burying the dead.⁴⁰ Our Lord Himself, too, though He was to rise again the third day, applauds, and commends to our applause, the good work of the religious woman who poured precious ointment over His limbs, and did it against His burial.⁴¹ And the Gospel speaks with commendation of those who were careful to take down His body from the cross, and wrap it lovingly in costly cerements, and see to its burial.⁴² These instances certainly do not prove that corpses have any feeling ; but they show that God's providence extends even to the bodies of the dead, and that such pious offices are pleasing to Him, as cherishing faith in the resurrection. And we may also draw from them this wholesome lesson, that if God does not forget even any kind office which loving care pays to the unconscious dead, much more does He reward the charity we exercise towards the living. Other things, indeed, which the holy patriarchs said of the burial and removal of their bodies, they meant to be taken in a prophetic sense ; but of these we need not here speak at large, what we have already said being sufficient.

³⁷ Lucan, *Pharsalia*, vii. 819, of those whom Cæsar forbade to be buried after the battle of Pharsalia.

³⁸ Gen. xxv. 9, xxxv. 29, etc. ³⁹ Gen. xlvii. 29, l. 24. ⁴⁰ Tob. xii. 12.

⁴¹ Matt. xxvi. 10-13. ⁴² John xix. 38.

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