

## Editor's Preface

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The “City of God” is the masterpiece of the greatest genius among the Latin Fathers, and the best known and most read of his works, except the “Confessions.” It embodies the results of thirteen years of intellectual labor and study (from A.D. 413–426). It is a vindication of Christianity against the attacks of the heathen in view of the sacking of the city of Rome by the barbarians, at a time when the old Græco-Roman civilization was approaching its downfall, and a new Christian civilization was beginning to rise on its ruins. It is the first attempt at a philosophy of history, under the aspect of two rival cities or communities,—the eternal city of God and the perishing city of the world.

This was the only philosophy of history known throughout Europe during the middle ages; it was adopted and reproduced in its essential features by Bossuet, Ozanam, Frederick Schlegel, and other Catholic writers, and has recently been officially endorsed, as it were, by the scholarly Pope Leo XIII. in his encyclical letter on the Christian Constitution of States (*Immortale Dei*, Nov. 1, 1885); for the Pope says that Augustin in his *De Civitate Dei*, “set forth so clearly the efficacy of Christian wisdom and the way in which it is bound up with the well-being of States, that he seems not only to have pleaded the cause of the Christians of his own time, but to have triumphantly refuted the false charges [against Christianity] for ever.”<sup>1</sup>

“The City of God” is also highly appreciated by Protestant writers as Waterland, Milman, Neander, Bindemann, Pressensé, Flint (*The Philosophy of History*, 1874, pp. 17 sqq.) and Fairbairn, (*The City of God*, London, 2nd ed., 1886, pp. 348 sqq.). Even the skeptical Gibbon, who had no sympathy whatever with the religion and theology of Augustin, concedes to this work at least “the merit of a magnificent design, vigorously, and not unskillfully executed.” (*Decline and Fall*, Ch. xxviii. note, in Harper's ed., vol. III., 271.)

It would be unfair to judge “The City of God” by the standard of modern exegetical and historical scholarship. Augustin's interpretations of Scripture, although usually ingenious and often profound, are as often fanciful, and lack the sure foundation of a knowledge of the original languages; for he knew very little Greek and no Hebrew, and had to depend on the Latin version; he was even prejudiced at first against Jerome's revision of the very defective Itala, fearing, in his solicitude for the weak and timid brethren, that more harm than good might be the result of this great and necessary improvement. His learning was confined to biblical and Roman literature and the systems of Greek philosophy. He often wastes arguments on absurd opinions, and some of his own opinions strike us as childish and obsolete. He confines the Kingdom of God to the narrow limits of the Jewish theocracy and the visible Catholic Church. He could, indeed, not deny the truths in Greek philosophy; but he derived them from the Jewish Scriptures, and adopted the impossible hypothesis of Ambrose that Plato became acquainted with the prophet Jeremiah in Egypt (comp. *De Doctr.*

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<sup>1</sup> “Augustinus præsertim in ‘Civitate Dei’ virtutem Christianæ sapientiæ, qua parte necessitudinem habet cum republica, tanto in lumine collocavit, ut non tam pro Christianis sui temporis dixisse causam quam de criminibus falsis perpetuum triumphum egisse videatur.” I quote from the Paris edition of the *Acta Leonis Papæ XIII.*, 1886, p. 284.

# THE CITY OF GOD

TRANSLATED BY

REV. MARCUS DODS, D.D.

## Translator's Preface.

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“Rome having been stormed and sacked by the Goths under Alaric their king,<sup>4</sup> the worshippers of false gods, or pagans, as we commonly call them, made an attempt to attribute this calamity to the Christian religion, and began to blaspheme the true God with even more than their wonted bitterness and acerbity. It was this which kindled my zeal for the house of God, and prompted me to undertake the defence of the city of God against the charges and misrepresentations of its assailants. This work was in my hands for several years, owing to the interruptions occasioned by many other affairs which had a prior claim on my attention, and which I could not defer. However, this great undertaking was at last completed in twenty-two books. Of these, the first five refute those who fancy that the polytheistic worship is necessary in order to secure worldly prosperity, and that all these overwhelming calamities have befallen us in consequence of its prohibition. In the following five books I address myself to those who admit that such calamities have at all times attended, and will at all times attend, the human race, and that they constantly recur in forms more or less disastrous, varying only in the scenes, occasions, and persons on whom they light, but, while admitting this, maintain that the worship of the gods is advantageous for the life to come. In these ten books, then, I refute these two opinions, which are as groundless as they are antagonistic to the Christian religion.

“But that no one might have occasion to say, that though I had refuted the tenets of other men, I had omitted to establish my own, I devote to this object the second part of this work, which comprises twelve books, although I have not scrupled, as occasion offered, either to advance my own opinions in the first ten books, or to demolish the arguments of my opponents in the last twelve. Of these twelve books, the first four contain an account of the origin of these two cities—the city of God, and the city of the world. The second four treat of their history or progress; the third and

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<sup>4</sup> A.D. 410.

be necessary. Some are original, some from the Benedictine Augustin, and the rest from the elaborate commentary of Vives.<sup>27</sup>

Marcus Dods.

Glasgow, 1871.

[On the back of the title pages to vols. I. and II. of the Edinburgh edition, Dr. Dods indicates his associates in the work of translation and annotation as follows:

“Books IV., XVII. and XVIII. have been translated by the Rev. George Wilson, Glenluce;  
Books V., VI., VII. and VIII. by the Rev. J. J. Smith.”]

## THE CITY OF GOD.

### Book I.

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*Argument—Augustin 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<sup>28</sup> is my theme in this work, which you, my dearest son Marcellinus,<sup>29</sup> 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

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<sup>27</sup> As the letters of Vives are not in every library, we give his comico-pathetic account of the result of his Augustinian labors on his health: “*Ex quo Augustinum perfeci, nunquam valui ex sententia; proximâ vero hebdomade et hac, fracto corpore cuncto, et nervis lassitudine quadam et debilitate dejectis, in caput decem turres incumbere mihi videntur incidendo pondere, ac mole intolerabili; isti sunt fructus studiorum, et merces pulcherrimi laboris; quid labor et benefacta juvant?*”

<sup>28</sup> [Augustin uses the term *civitas Dei* (πόλις θεοῦ) of the church universal as a commonwealth and community founded and governed by God. It is applied in the Bible to Jerusalem or the church of the Old Covenant (Ps. xl. 6, 4; xlvi. 1, 8; lxxxvii. 3), and to the heavenly Jerusalem or the church perfect (Heb. xi. 10, 16; xii. 22; Rev. iii. 12; xxi. 2; xxii. 14, 19). Augustin comprehends under the term the whole Kingdom of God under the Jewish and Christian dispensation both in its militant and triumphant state, and contrasts it with the perishing kingdoms of this *world*. His work treats of both, but he calls it, *a meliore, The City of God*.—P.S.]

<sup>29</sup> [Marcellinus was a friend of Augustin, and urged him to write this work. He was commissioned by the Emperior Honorius to convene a conference of Catholic and schismatic Donatist bishops in the summer of 411, and conceded the victory to the Catholics; but on account of his rigor in executing the laws against the Donatists, he fell a victim to their revenge, and was honored by a place among the martyrs. See the Letters of Augustin, 133, 136, 138, 139, 143, 151, the notes in this ed., vol. I., 470 and 505, and the Translator’s Preface —P.S.]

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,”<sup>30</sup> 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.”<sup>31</sup> 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.”<sup>32</sup>

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.

## Chapter 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.<sup>33</sup> 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 blood-thirsty 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

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<sup>30</sup> Ps. xciv. 15, rendered otherwise in Eng. ver. [In the Revised Vers.: “Judgment shall return unto righteousness.” In Old Testament quotations, Augustin, being ignorant of Hebrew, had to rely on the imperfect Latin version of his day, and was at first even opposed to the revision of Jerome.—P.S.]

<sup>31</sup> Jas. iv. 6 and 1 Pet. v. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Virgil, *Æneid*, vi. 854. [*Parcere subjectis et debellare superbos.*—P.S.]

<sup>33</sup> [Aug. refers to the sacking of the city of Rome by the West-Gothic King Alaric, 410. He was the most humane of the barbaric invaders and conquerors of Rome, and had embraced Arian Christianity (probably from the teaching of Ulphilas, the Arian bishop and translator of the Bible). He spared the Catholic Christians.—For particulars see Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall*, and Millman’s *Latin Christianity.*—P.S.]

showed themselves pitiless came to those spots where that was forbidden which the license 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.

## Chapter 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;<sup>34</sup> 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?”<sup>35</sup>

Did not Diomedes and Ulysses

“Drag with red hands, the sentry slain,  
Her fateful image from your fane,

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<sup>34</sup> The Benedictines remind us that Alexander and Xenophon, at least on some occasions, did so.

<sup>35</sup> Virgil, *Æneid*, ii. 501–2. The renderings of Virgil are from Conington.

Her chaste locks touch, and stain with gore  
The virgin coronal she wore?"<sup>36</sup>

Neither is that true which follows, that

“Thenceforth the tide of fortune changed,  
And Greece grew weak.”<sup>37</sup>

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?

### Chapter 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 are reckoned worthy of a salary from the public purse, and of other honors. 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 virgin minds, and may not readily be forgotten by them, according to that saying of Horace,

“The fresh cask long keeps its first tang.”<sup>38</sup>

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”<sup>39</sup>...

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,

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 166.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Horace, *Ep.* I. ii. 69.

<sup>39</sup> *Æneid*, i. 71.

His conquered gods with trembling hands  
He bears, and shelter swift demands?"<sup>40</sup>

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?"<sup>41</sup>

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 a 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?<sup>42</sup> 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 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.

Chapter 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

Phoenix and Ulysses fell

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. 319.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 293.

<sup>42</sup> *Non numina bona, sed omina mala.*

In the void courts by Juno's cell  
Were set the spoils 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."<sup>43</sup>

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 fine, the gentle<sup>44</sup> 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.

#### Chapter 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, writes<sup>45</sup>) "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.

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<sup>43</sup> Virgil, *Æneid.* ii. 761.

<sup>44</sup> 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 civilized than the barbarians, and not relentless, but, as we say, easily moved.

<sup>45</sup> *De Conj. Cat.* c. 51.

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.

#### Chapter 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;”<sup>46</sup> 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, 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 honor of any of their enemy’s gods, they had shown this particular form of leniency, that in any temple slaughter or captivity was prohibited?

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<sup>46</sup> Sallust, *Cat. Conj.* ix.