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St. Augustine Of Hippo: The City Of God



Synopsis

In The City of God (begun in 413, but Books 20-22 were written in 426) Augustine answers the pagans, who attributed the fall of Rome (410) to the abolition of pagan worship. Considering this problem of Divine Providence with regard to the Roman Empire, he widens the horizon still more and in a burst of genius he creates the philosophy of history, embracing as he does with a glance the destinies of the world grouped around the Christian religion, the only one which goes back to the beginning and leads humanity to its final term. The City of God is considered as the most important work of the great bishop. The other works chiefly interest theologians; but it, like the Confessions, belongs to general literature and appeals to every soul. The Confessions are theology which has been lived in the soul, and the history of God's action on individuals, while The City of God is theology framed in the history of humanity, and explaining the action of God in the world.

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Customer Reviews

Although I am normally a quick reader, it has taken me about six months to finish The City of God. At times I was frustrated, and believed that the book was imbued with a generative power, and grew longer the further I read. And yet I am a little sad to have finished it, for no matter what was going on

in my life, like Scripture, the City of God had relevance. How to summarize such a monumental work? First of all, I do not concur with the diminishment of the early parts of the work. While Books 1 through X are indeed more clearly tied to the dissolving Roman world, it is extremely helpful for us to get our minds into a time when pagans were more than countercultural "post-Christian" teenage losers. Augustine's vivid arguments against the pagan "theology" are incisive. More notably, they bring into focus a world that was both ultra-rational in the Platonic/Aristotelean tradition, and "superstitious" in its belief in household gods, demons, curses, and magic. That both a very advanced science and such beliefs could coexist is a lesson to us in our secularized, smug modern world. The temporal proximity of Augustine to Christ and the Apostles brings another level of clarity. While Augustine emphasized that "none shall know the day nor hour," it is clear that there is an apocalyptic undercurrent in the Christian society he inhabits. The urgency of Christian life seems to me to have diminished. Particularly striking are Augustine's arguments against those "tender-hearted Christians" who hold various levels of Salvation for even the most depraved. In our world of ecumenical outreach, guitar-Mass hippy communalism, Augustine's defense of the limited Salvation is a necessary wake-up call.

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