



THE CITY OF GOD

PART II

BY L. CARLOS LARA

[Editors' note: Although the professional output of "Lara-Murphy" is devoted to financial matters, especially in the coming storms we think it is important to occasionally remind our readers of our own personal view on the true path to security. To understand how Carlos' reading of this particular book was actually due to considerations of economic and political events in 2016, see the podcast discussion at: <https://lara-murphy.com/podcast/episode-30-city-god-versus-city-man/>.]

ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO IS RECOGNIZED as one of the great doctors of the Latin Church, yet he is equally admired and respected by the great reformers, such as Martin Luther and John Calvin. This mutual acknowledgment by the scholars of both sides of church doctrine is due in large part to Augustine's centrality in Christian history and the development of Christian thought during the Middle Ages.

The City of God, a compilation of 22 books written between 413 A.D and 427 A.D., is considered to be a timeless classic and among

the world's greatest theological works. Written in defense of the Christian faith during the collapse of the Roman Empire, Augustine was able to pour into these texts his entire life's perspective on the ancient pagan religions of Rome, the arguments of the Greek philosophers, and the sacred wittings found in the canonical Bible. His conclusion was that there is a city with heavenly origins rising up alongside the kingdoms of the earth, one that transcends politics and world governments—a city that will never fail and never end. It is a city that has eternal foundations whose builder and maker is God.

BACKGROUND

In Part I of this article we explored the origins of this city from the renderings in the book of Genesis as Augustine interprets them. Basically, we learned that it all begins with the angels. These are very special beings created by God who are endowed with the capacity of free choice. In effect, Augustine from the outset is establishing that these an-



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gels did not coexist eternally with God, but that they too were created (out of nothing) during the six days of creation soon after the creation of the heavens and the earth.

Then astonishingly, when Genesis states that God said, "*Let there be light, and there was light,*" Augustine boldly asserts that this particular act of God's was the creation of the angels! (The other forms of light, namely the sun, the moon and the stars, were not created until the fourth day. Man was created on the sixth day.)

The statement, which immediately then follows in Genesis, says, "*And God separated the light from the darkness.*" Augustine, just as remarkably, claims that this statement implies the separation of the good angels from the angels that would fall away and become the enemies of God—a fact that God foreknew and was a part of his eternal plan.

Augustine's writings provide me, for the first time in my life, a coherent explanation of where the speaking serpent (a fallen angel) that came to tempt Eve in the garden came from. Augustine's account of creation makes logical sense. But what Augustine is really trying to establish from these opening verses in Genesis is the origins of the inhabitants of the two cities, the worldly city and the city of God.

In this Part II and conclusion, I will attempt to explain Augustine's view on a subject that has confounded the human mind since time immemorial right up to our own present day—the subject of *evil*. We all certainly know what evil is and what it does, but why does it exist? Where does it originate? Most importantly, did God create it, or has it always existed as an enemy of God and the good he stands for? If God did create evil why did he create it?

GOD IS THE ONLY FIRST PRINCIPLE

For our present purposes and to begin unraveling this mystery it is important to know



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that Augustine was for ten years in his life as a young man a disciple of “Manichaeism,”¹ which was a religious sect derived from the Gnostic beliefs and pagan elements that existed before the time of Christ. Gnostics and (later) the Manichees encouraged asceticism because fundamentally they were “dualist.”² “Their central idea (of Manichaean thought) was that there are two powers in the universe, ‘two first principles,’ good and evil, eternally at war.”³

This religious movement was widespread during Augustine’s time and easy to embrace by most Romans and their beliefs in pagan gods. But it was also easy to embrace by Christians who had no better way to de-



cipher the nature of evil contrasted with an omnipotent God who is wholly good. Christians of that day dangerously concluded that Manichaeism best explained the genuine inward consciousness they felt of actually being involved in a literal war between good and evil.

I can certainly see how this could happen because I have personally struggled with similar misconceptions as exemplified by the Apostle Paul in the book of Romans when he says. *“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.”*

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*Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.”*⁴

According to Gnostics and the Manichees, the evil god was the creator of all matter, while the good god was the creator of all things spiritual. Consequently, all material things, including the body, were to be mistrusted, hence arose the philosophy of asceticism. Later in life, after he became a Chris-



tian, Augustine came to understand the error of this misguided belief and he wrote many books and sermons refuting Manichaeism. *The City of God* is one of those books.

By demystifying evil, Augustine refuted Manichaeism. His first and central point was that God is the only ‘first principle’ and that He created everything that exists out of nothing. Of all the visible things that exist, the world is the greatest, but by the same reasoning we understand that of all the invisible things the greatest is God. Yet the existence of the world is proved by observation, whereby the existence of God is determined by belief. To know that God made the world we have no greater testimony than that of God himself.

Augustine completely disproves Manichaeism by an elaborate process of deductive reasoning using the Holy Scriptures, which he confirms is the ‘Wisdom of God’ passed on inwardly and soundlessly to holy souls (friends of God and prophets) about His works at creation and how he accomplished them. The angels also are messengers of God who announce His will to those who are fit to know it. Augustine’s conclusion and pivotal point is that there was no

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time before the world began. The beginning of time and the beginning of the world occurred simultaneously.

Time depends on motion and change, without these there is no time. Consequently, there is a clear distinction between eternity (where there is no change) and time. From this, as difficult as it may be for us to understand, Augustine infers that God had created nothing before he created the world—referencing the statement in Genesis, “*in the beginning.*” At the time of creation there was no past simply because there was nothing created to provide change and movement, which is an attribute of time. In other words, the world was not created *in* time but *with* time.

From there he goes on to confirm that Genesis makes it clear that the world and everything God created in it was *good* and that on the 7th day He rested. Consequently evil has no origin in God’s creation. “There is no such entity in nature as evil, evil is merely a name for the privation of good.”⁵ Looking for evil’s origin is futile and is like trying to see darkness or hear silence. The main point to draw from this is that the nature of God is not only unchangeable, but is also complete-

ly incorruptible. Nothing can do God any harm for all of God's creation is under his supreme sovereignty. Hence, "all things that do not belong to God's own being, though inferior to God, are nevertheless good and the creation of God's goodness."⁶ This is Augustine's second and greatest point.

EVIL IS NOT NATURAL— SIN IS AN ACT OF THE WILL

In this second main argument, which is the emphasis that all of God's creations when made were *good*, including that of the nature of the angels that fell away. Augustine underscores that it is the turning away from God that is the perversion. That turning away is what damages the good nature and causes it to lose its former status. Here we have to understand that the angels who fell away actually had the ability to remain good (remember they possessed complete freedom of choice), but they chose otherwise.

Evil, Augustine says, is not natural. Sin is an act of the will, but not of the good nature as created by God. Wickedness is contrary to nature. All evil can do is harm nature. For example, money is not evil and is not the cause of greed. It is the fault of the soul who perversely loves money more, or without a thought given to the omnipotent God.

"When we ask the cause of the evil angel's misery, we find that it is the just result of their turning away from Him who supremely is, and their turning towards themselves, who do not

*exists in that supreme degree. What other name is there for this fault than pride? The beginning of all sin is pride. Thus they refused to keep watch for Him who is their strength. They would have existed in a higher degree; but in preferring themselves to Him they chose a lower degree of existence."*⁷

"But how can this be?" Augustine asks himself. "How can a nature which is good, however changeable, before it has an evil will, be the cause of any evil, the cause, that is, of that evil will itself?"⁸

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In this next statement, Augustine finalizes and concludes the only possible explanation for these pressing questions.

"Those other angels were created good but have become evil by their own bad will; and this bad will did not originate from their nature, which was good. It came through the voluntary falling away from the good, so that evil is caused not by good, but by falling away from good."

*Either they received less grace of the divine love than did the others, who continued in that grace; or, if both were created equally good, the one sort fell through their evil will, while the others had greater help to enable them to attain to the fullness of bliss with the complete assurance that they will never fall away."*⁹

GOD'S PROVIDENCE THROUGH THE OPPOSITION OF CONTRARIES

Every Christian knows that no new “Devil” will ever come from the original body of good angels, in the same way they know that the Devil will never return to the fellowship of the good angels. Most Christians know that scripture identifies *Lucifer* as the name of the most glorious of the angels who became the Devil (Satan). When the Devil, who was good when God created him, became evil by his own choice, God caused him to be cast down to a lower station and turned Satan’s choice, and that of the rest of the angels who followed him, to good use.

Augustine explains that the Devil’s temptations are proven to exist for the benefit of God’s people, even though the Devil and his angels are just out to hurt them. God, by virtue of his foreknowledge, knew exactly how he would put these bad angels and the future of their evil state to good use in redemptive world history. He says that there is a kind of beauty in the way the world’s history is unfolding, which is derived from

the antithesis of contraries. *“Good confronts evil, life confronts death: so the sinner confronts the devout. And in this way you should observe all the works of the Most High; two by two; one confronting the other.”*¹⁰

CONCLUSION

I must confess that I regret having to end this article and the dissemination of some of the profound themes found in this tremendous volume; they are too many to mention here. I have only touched on two of its subjects. Perhaps you will agree that they were the most critical ones to understand about the origins of the inhabitants of the city of God, which was the overall theme of this great work.

What I hoped to clearly convey to the reader in this narrative, from my own understanding of Augustine’s writings, is that the eternal city of God consists of both men and angels. It should be obvious that most of the emphasis has been placed on the angels



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and more specifically the two classes of angels and their beginnings. I should also add that we should pay careful attention to the fact that the element of free choice, which was given to the angels, is supremely significant and not at all like our own freedom of choice.

Even the free choice given to the first humans, Adam and Eve, was unlike the free choice given to the angels, and more importantly, the freedom of choice we currently possess. Theirs was one intertwined with obedience to a direct command from God, which carried with it the penalty of eternal death if they chose to disobey. We all know they did. Furthermore, different from the angels, Adam and Eve had a *tempter*.

As to whether our freedom of choice is one of complete *free choice* as in that of the angels or *limited choice* is an entirely different debate and one that clearly divides Christendom to this day. But the one thing in which most Christians agree and understand is that every human born into the fallen world, beginning with Cain and Abel, is under the penalty of eternal death because of Adam and

Eve's disobedience.

I cannot write a better closing to point to man's only hope than to default again to Augustine of Hippo's own words:

“God speaks to the highest of man’s constituent elements, the element to which only God himself is superior. ... For man is rightly understood to be made in the image of God. ...And yet the mind of man, the natural seat of his reason and understanding, is itself weakened by longstanding faults, which darken it. ...And so the mind had to be trained and purified by faith; and in order to give man’s mind greater confidence in its journey towards the truth along the way of faith, God the Son of God, who is himself the Truth, took manhood without abandoning his godhead, and thus established and founded this faith, so that man might have a path to man’s God through the man who was God.

As it is there is one road, and one only, well secured against all possibility of going astray; and this road is provided by one who is himself both God and man. As God, he is the goal; as man, he is the way.”



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