

CONFESSING WITH SAINT AUGUSTINE

HPRS5094/6094

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5 — THE CITY OF GOD



OUTLINE

1. The City of God
2. Context and composition of City of God
3. How does Augustine attack pagan polytheism?
4. The significance of “the city”; Rome; the two cities and the meaning of history



THE CITY OF GOD - STRUCTURE

THE CITY OF GOD - *DE CIVITATE DEI*

Two cities: the heavenly city and the earthly city

Facets of this work:

- Christian apology or defence of Christianity against pagan objections (arguments against polytheism);
- Salvation history: the history of the two cities - their origin, development and end;
- Political aspect – although not a statement of political theory (Henry Chadwick), notions about the role of earthly government and Rome's institutions;
- Theological concepts inform Augustine's understanding of the two cities: the Fall, Christ as Mediator; the elect; divine providence; what constitutes blessedness and the right worship of God; heaven and hell; the Resurrection of the dead at the last Judgement; the role of angels and demons.





OVERVIEW

The culmination of the genre of Christian apology in the patristic tradition – a defence of Christianity against pagan objections in the Roman Empire.

Augustine explores the significance of events and society by distinguishing the city of God from the city of man.

- What is each city like?
- How do they develop throughout history?
- What does secular history have to do with salvation history?
- How do the two cities relate to one another?

COMPOSITION AND CONTEXT

Augustine: *Magnum opus et arduum* —“a large and arduous work”;

22 books composed from 412/413; completed in 427; writing as bishop of Hippo (the Pelagian and Donatist crises);

Historical context: Alaric's sack of Rome (410) and other invasions

Pillage and slaughter; Romans flee to North Africa

Broader question at the time: why this shift in Roman history?





MOTIVATION

A defence and response to pagan reactions to the invasion: pagans ascribed blame to the Christians for the disaster in Rome (on account of expelling the Roman gods)

Augustine argues for the acceptance of divine providence.

A request – Marcellinus (a Christian imperial commissioner at Carthage) suggests Augustine respond to objections to the Christian faith.

Volusianus (proconsul of Africa) objected that Christianity “undermined the Roman Empire.”

Volusianus also did not see how Christian doctrine was consistent with the rights of citizens. (Letter 136 from Marcellinus to Augustine)

Augustine to Marcellinus: “if the Lord help us, we may, by letters or by treatises, furnish an answer to all their objections.” (Augustine, Letter 138 to Marcellinus)

AUDIENCE AND INFLUENCE OF CITY OF GOD

Catholic Christians

Non-Christians

Pagan exiles; well-educated — writing with their views already in mind: literary allusions to pagan literature

A changing culture

Influence: immediate; read throughout the centuries; influential themes (the Empire's decline “at God's will”; the separation of the “mixed society” of saints and non-saints; theological questions about the elect, heaven, souls, angels)

Legacy for medieval theology and historiography in Western Europe





THE *APOLOGIA* GENRE

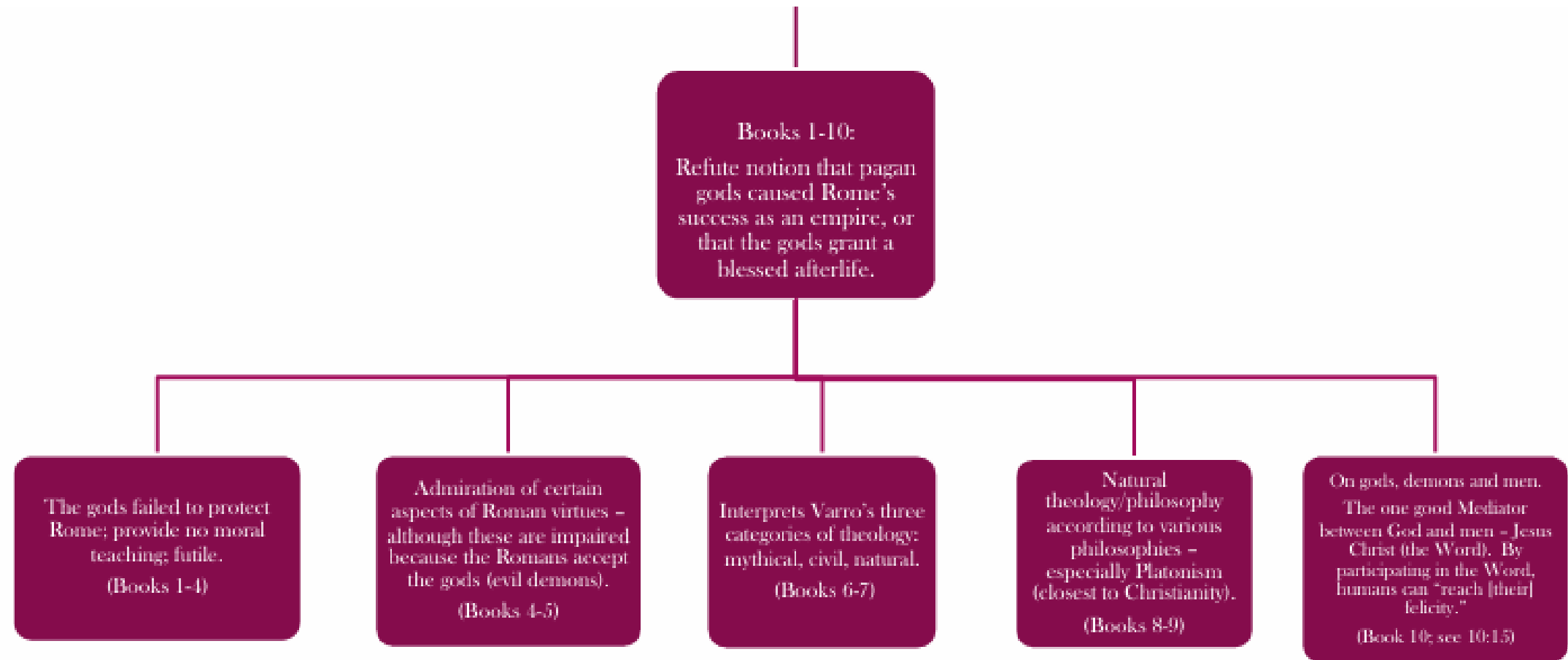
Apologia –“apology” or “defence”, particularly a defence against an accusation or justification of conduct

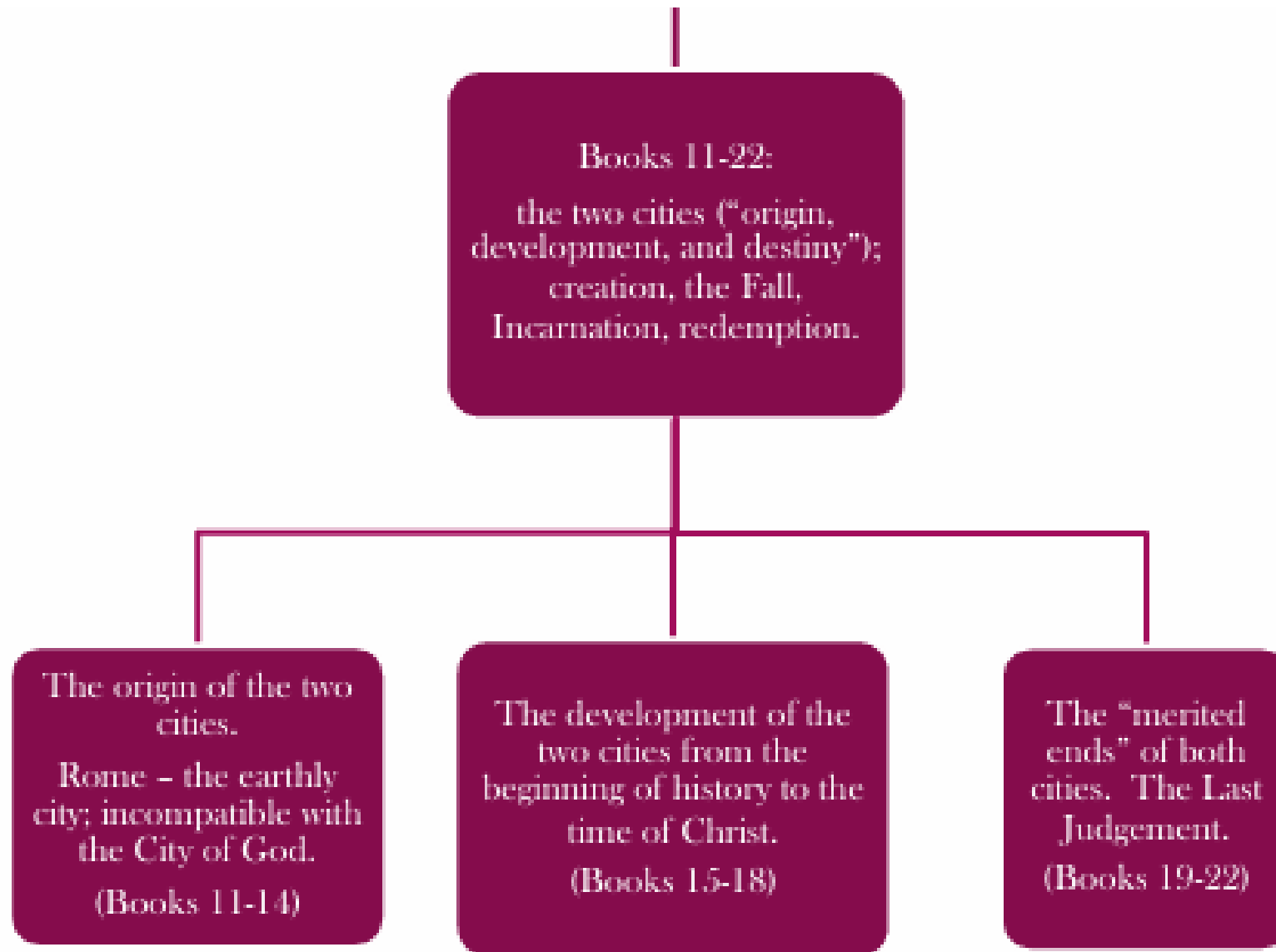
Apologetic literature – from the beginning of Christianity to the fall of the Roman Empire

Notable apologists: Justin Martyr, *Apology* (150AD); Tatian (*Discourse to the Greeks*, 160AD); Origen; Lactantius and others.

City of God: the “culmination” of this genre in the patristic tradition. (Walsh, Introduction, 3-4)

Types of argument: the reasonableness of Christian claims; the absurdity of Roman religion; disasters occurred before Christ (Augustine’s argument); God rewards leaders’ virtues with success; both the good and evil experience blessings and hardships.







THE CITY OF ROME

CITY OF GOD,
XIV:28

“The earthly city is formed by love of self, even to the contempt of God, while the heavenly city – by the love of God, even to the contempt of self.

One glories in itself, the other, in God.”

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CITY

Ancient cities: dominate the countryside; conquest; trade and production; independence; a “human achievement”; awareness of their human founder. (Eugene TeSelle, “The Civic Vision in Augustine’s ‘City of God,’” 270-271)

Augustine is thinking in terms of cities – not the modern state, tribe or nation.

Civitas (cf. De civitate Dei = The City of God) can refer to the physical aspects of the city and its citizenry: Augustine emphasises people rather than the physical city or its physical structures (urbs). (TeSelle, 269-271.)

Civitas as a type of human living – one city is godless (Babylon); the other – characterised by godliness, an “alien wanderer on this earth” (Jerusalem). (Meconi, 3.)



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CITY

Influenced by Tyconius' Seven Rules (The Book of Rules) (4th c. biblical theologian, North Africa):

- two cities, kingdoms and kings (Christ and the devil).
- True and false Christians.
- The good and evil mixed on earth. (William Frend, "Augustine and Orosius," 11-12.)

Augustine - a citizen of the Roman Empire; earthly kingdoms do end; Christians should set their hopes on eternal things.



VIRGIL, AENEID, I.
(1ST C. BC)

*“To these [the Romans] I give no
bounded times or power, but empire
without end.*

*Yea, even my Queen, Juno, who now
chastiseth land and sea with her dread
frown, will find a wiser way, and at my
sovereign side protect and bless the
Romans, masters of the whole round
world, who, clad in peaceful toga, judge
mankind.*

Such my decree!”

ATTITUDES TO ROME

Rome — a city of the pagans.

Even further — there was never a (true) Roman commonwealth. — Why?

Augustine addresses Cicero's definitions of a state or commonwealth (citing *On the Republic*):

- the people's good; must be maintained by justice
- Being a people means being united in a “common sense of right and community interest”; requires true justice (*iustitia*).

Augustine: But if justice is lacking — there is no right, no people, and thus “no republic” according to Cicero's definition. (*City of God*, 19:21.)



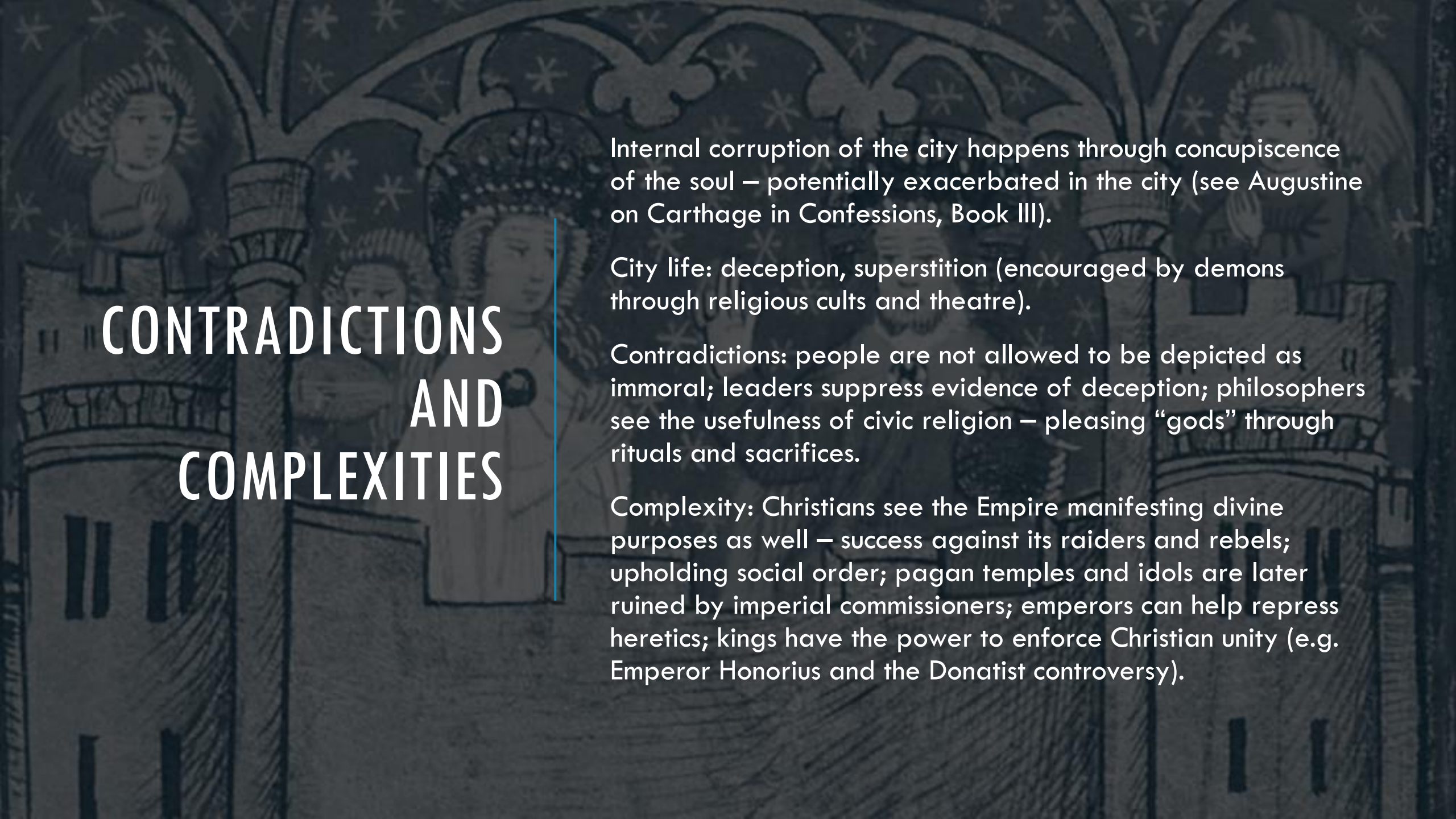
ATTITUDES TO ROME

Augustine: the true republic and true people are founded on justice – this is the city of God, ruled by Christ. (City of God, 2:21.)

Augustine: a state could be established perfectly only if God was “loved by all.” (Augustine, Letter 137 to Volusianus, AD 412)

Elsewhere, by “state” Augustine means a “multitude of men bound together by some bond of concord” (Augustine, Letter 138 to Marcellinus, AD 412)





CONTRADICTIONS AND COMPLEXITIES

Internal corruption of the city happens through concupiscence of the soul – potentially exacerbated in the city (see Augustine on Carthage in Confessions, Book III).

City life: deception, superstition (encouraged by demons through religious cults and theatre).

Contradictions: people are not allowed to be depicted as immoral; leaders suppress evidence of deception; philosophers see the usefulness of civic religion – pleasing “gods” through rituals and sacrifices.

Complexity: Christians see the Empire manifesting divine purposes as well – success against its raiders and rebels; upholding social order; pagan temples and idols are later ruined by imperial commissioners; emperors can help repress heretics; kings have the power to enforce Christian unity (e.g. Emperor Honorius and the Donatist controversy).



THE CITY OF GOD AND THE EARTHLY CITY

CONTRASTS AND COINCIDING ASPECTS

Contrasts: devout and godly versus godless; love of God versus love of self (citizenship depends on one's loves).

- Origins: “two classes of angels” or “societies” (City of God, 11:1; cf. 11:33) - “like the beginnings of the two communities of mankind.” (City of God, 11:34)
- Two kinds of life: that of the flesh versus that of the spirit – living by the standard of man versus the standard of God. (City of God, Book 14:4; 14:28.)
- Ends: Supreme Good versus Supreme Evil – eternal life versus eternal death. (City of God, 19:4)



CONTRASTS AND COINCIDING ASPECTS

Less clear distinctions:

The cities are “interwoven, [...] in this present transitory world, and mingled with one another.” (City of God, 11:1)

Certain overlapping goals — peace and justice. The earthly city provisionally provides some order or peace; citizens of the heavenly city await fulfilment of this.

The earthly city has some value: temporal peace enjoyed by citizens of both cities.

The Church on earth — mixture of good and bad members.



THE HISTORY OF THE TWO CITIES

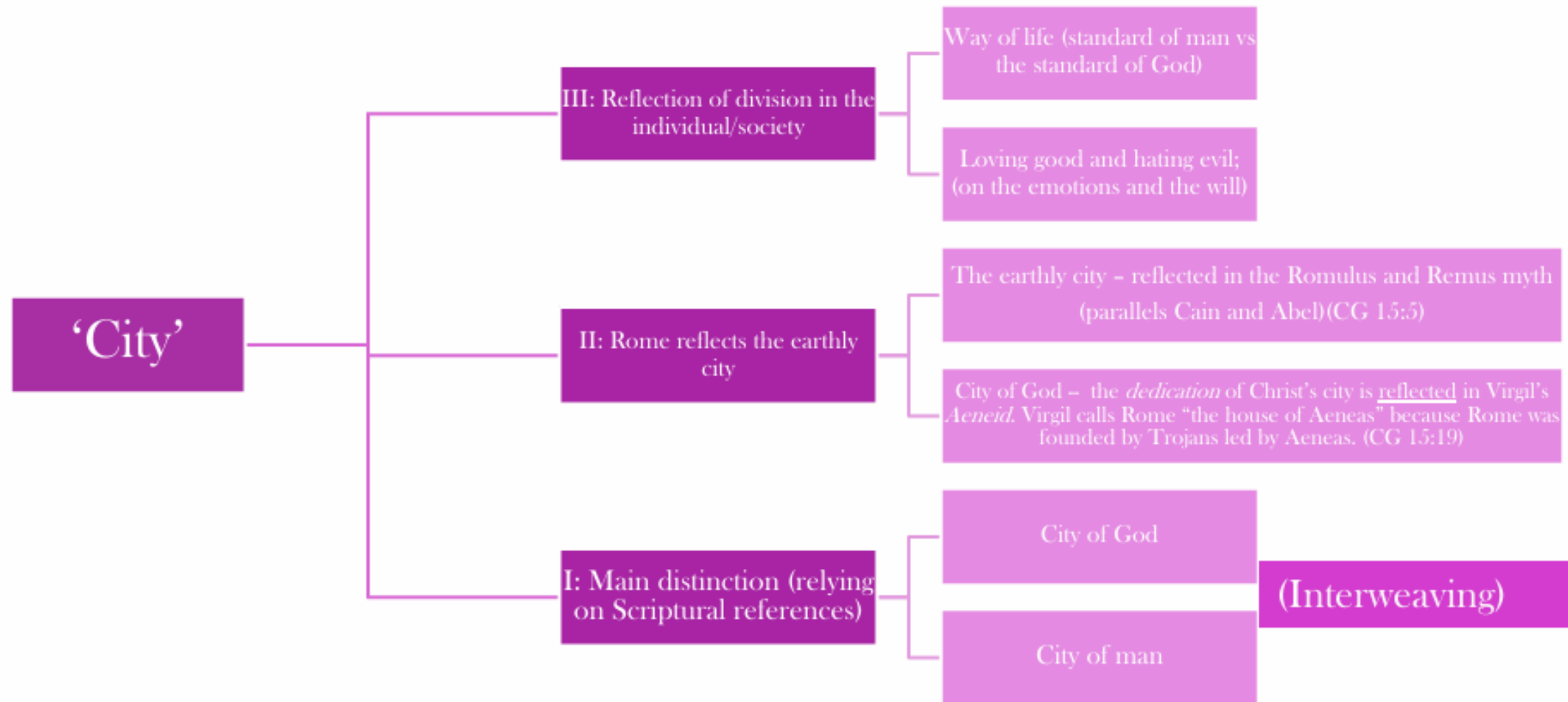
Genealogies of Cain and Abel / Seth (CG16-18)

The city of man – reflected in various empires
(CG16:4; 18:2; 18:22)

- Babylon
- Rome

The City of God – interwoven in the history of the earthly city.





THE MEANING OF HISTORY

A “philosophy of history” – the history of the two cities as the salvation history of mankind. (Frend, 3.)

A presence of the City of God throughout the world’s history.

Events have a historical meaning (the Flood); prophecies anticipate fulfilment; divine promises for building of the city of God

Ultimate meaning of human history – not in affairs of state, but through people living with Christ as citizens of the city of God. (Meconi, 6)



THE MEANING OF HISTORY

Questions that remain:

- interpreting Roman history (critic or patriot);
- the Empire's "religious character" (Freund, 3-4);

Questions that remain:

- reconciling Augustine as critic and "Roman patriot" (in his other writings);
- the empire - Church relation (Freund, 3-4);
- Augustine's Christian politics;
- the precise division of the two cities. (Wetzell, "A Tangle of Two Cities," 6-7).



READING

Confessions, Book IX

The City of God

- Book I (the sack of Rome and the problem of evil)
- Book V (divine providence and the Roman Empire)
- Book XI (the origin of the two cities)
- Book XIV (the two loves)
- Book XIX (peace, justice, and the two cities)

