



The Doctrine of the Two Cities by Saint Augustine: A Spiritual Compass for Times of Confusion

Introduction: When the World Divides, God Unites

We live in turbulent times: political polarization, moral confusion, spiritual rootlessness. In the midst of this chaos, the words of a 5th-century Church Father resound with astonishing prophetic force. Saint Augustine of Hippo, in his monumental work *The City of God*, offers a radical yet deeply realistic vision of the human drama: the entire history of the world can be reduced to the conflict between **two cities** — the City of God and the City of Man.

This doctrine is not just an ancient theory or philosophical meditation. It is a **theological key** that helps us interpret history, the present, and our own hearts. And above all, it is a concrete and demanding spiritual guide for those who wish to live with God in the midst of the world.

I. What Are the Two Cities?

Saint Augustine wrote *The City of God* in response to the sack of Rome by the Visigoths in the year 410. Many pagans blamed Christianity for the fall of the Roman Empire. Augustine, with lucid faith, replied that **true history** is not the history of empires, but that of **souls**.

1. The City of God

- Founded on the love of God carried to the contempt of self.
- Composed of the saints, both visible and invisible, present throughout history.
- Its goal is the glory of God and eternal life.
- Not an earthly city, but manifested in the Church and in the hearts of the just.

2. The City of Man (or Earthly City)

- Founded on the love of self carried to the contempt of God.
- Composed of those who live only for this world: power, pleasure, prestige.
- Its goal is self-glory and domination over others.
- Though it may appear strong or admirable, it is doomed to perish.



“Two loves have made two cities: love of God to the contempt of self, made the City of God; love of self to the contempt of God, made the earthly city.” (Saint Augustine, City of God, XIV, 28)

II. A Story in Tension: The Struggle Between the Two Cities

Saint Augustine does not propose a simplistic dualism. These cities **coexist in history**. They intertwine, battle, and coexist. Even within each of us, there is a constant tension between living according to God and living according to the world.

Augustine sees this battle reflected in the Bible from the very beginning:

- **Cain and Abel** (Gen 4): Cain, builder of cities, represents the man who seeks self-affirmation without God. Abel, a shepherd and victim, represents the righteous.
- **Babylon and Jerusalem**: Babylon, symbol of pride and oppression; Jerusalem, image of the heavenly city of the elect.
- **The two thieves on the cross**: One mocks, the other converts.

This struggle is not just historical. It is **spiritual and personal**. As Saint Paul writes:

*“For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh; they are in conflict with each other.”
(Galatians 5:17)*

III. Theological and Cultural Relevance Today

Why speak of this doctrine today?



1. Because it helps us understand the crisis of today's world

We are living a new Babel: globalization without a soul, isolating technologies, dehumanizing ideologies. The modern heart, disconnected from God, builds a dazzling but empty city. Is this not the very **earthly city** Augustine described?

2. Because it clarifies the Church's mission

The Church does not exist to govern like the kingdoms of this world, but to **form citizens of heaven**. She is, in the words of the Second Vatican Council, a *sacrament of salvation*, meaning the place where the City of God is forged in time.

3. Because it illuminates our personal vocation

Each one of us must decide daily to which city we belong. Saying "I'm a Christian" is not enough. It's about living according to the Spirit, not according to the flesh.

IV. Practical Applications: Living in the City of God

A. **Daily Discernment: Which City Do I Serve Today?**

Ask yourself this question every morning and evening:

| *"Am I living for the glory of God or for my own ego?"*

Spiritual Exercise: Review your intentions at work, on social media, in your relationships. Are they acts of love or of self-assertion?

B. **Prayer and Sacraments: The Architecture of the City of God**

The City of God is not built with bricks, but with **grace**. Every prayer, every confession, every Eucharist is an act of heavenly citizenship.



Practical Guide:

- Pray Psalm 122: "I rejoiced when they said to me: Let us go to the house of the Lord."
- Attend Sunday Mass as an act of resistance against the earthly city.
- Go to Confession as a demolition of ego and restoration of God's image.

C. Education and Culture: Sowing in the World Without Belonging to It

Augustine did not flee the world. He lived in it, enlightened it, transformed it. You too can do this through your profession, your family, your politics.

Suggestion: Read books that edify. Avoid the noise of empty entertainment. Share content that inspires.

D. Concrete Charity: The Law of the City of God Is Love

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples: if you love one another." (John 13:35)

The City of God is not proven with words but with acts of love. Help those in need. Be kind to those who think differently. Forgive. Give without expecting return.

V. Discern Without Judging, Live Without Dividing

Important: this doctrine is not a license to condemn those who think differently. Saint Augustine teaches that **only God knows the heart**. Many who appear holy live for themselves; others who seem lost love God in secret. Our task is not to classify people, but to **convert ourselves**.



VI. Eschatological Hope: The City of God Will Triumph

History is a drama with a happy ending. The City of God is already present, though hidden. And one day it will be fully revealed in glory:

“I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.” (Revelation 21:2)

This is our goal. We live between two cities, but we belong to only one: **the eternal one.**

Conclusion: Citizens of Heaven in the Midst of Earth

Saint Augustine invites us to look beyond the visible, to live with our hearts oriented upwards. In times of confusion, this doctrine is not an escape, but a **map for the soul**, a spiritual compass, and an act of Christian resistance.

Want to know which city you belong to?

Look at whom you love, how you love, and what you live for.

□ Final Pastoral Guide: How to Live According to the City of God

Action	City of God	City of Man
Motivation	Love of God	Love of self
Goal	Eternal life	Temporal success
Daily life	Service, humility, prayer	Competition, pride, distraction
Means	Sacraments, Scripture, community	Ego, pleasure, ideologies



Two Cities, One Destiny: To Live According to God or According to the World | 6

Action	City of God	City of Man
Result	Deep peace	Constant agitation
“You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in You.”		
— <i>Saint Augustine, Confessions I,1</i>		