

Civitas Terrena et Civitas Dei: Orosius and Augustine on Temporal Power, Roman Society, and Divine Will

My paper proposes to examine Paulus Orosius' *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII* in relation to Saint Augustine's *Civitas Dei*. Born in the year 385 CE, Orosius spent his early career as a presbyter in Bracara, Spain. Barbarian invasions forced him to seek refuge in Northern Africa, where he subsequently came under the guidance of Augustine. Despite the fact that Orosius composed his history at the request of his mentor, *The Seven Books* diverge from *City of God* on a number of key points. In contrast to Augustine's emphasis on the transience of temporal power, for instance, Orosius adheres to the notion of *aeternitas Romae*. Within this school of thought, Rome is the apex of civilization, preceded by the three lesser kingdoms of Babylon, Carthage, and Macedonia. Her rule is sanctified by God and her people are regarded as the anointed race. Orosius justifies his claims by illustrating the times in which God has intervened to rescue the State from peril, and by pointing out that Christ himself was Roman. Moreover, the pessimism that accompanies human affairs in *City of God* is no where to be found in *The Seven Books*. According to Orosius, for example, he and Augustine live in a period known as post-Incarnation. This era, which can be traced back to the birth of Christ and Augustus' assumption of power, is characterized by religious, political, and social "improvement." In order to prove his point, Orosius provides numerous examples of disasters which befell pagan, republican Rome. Among the more notable is the sack of Rome by the Celts in 386 BCE. The turmoil of Orosius' own day, such as Alaric's invasion of the city in 410, is largely glossed over or depicted as trivial by comparison with earlier misfortunes. Finally, whereas Augustine emphasizes the unpredictability of things, Orosius sees providence as the guiding force behind Roman affairs. In *City of God*, for instance, the fact that Julian the Apostate, a pagan and ardent opponent of Christianity, was able to assume power after the "pious" reign of Constantine is proof that God does not have a hand in the daily workings of the Empire. Orosius, on the other hand, asserts that God chooses certain emperors, such as Theodosius, to act on His behalf and defend the State during chaotic times. Thus, while Augustine's rhetoric is more in line with conventional Christian views regarding earthly existence, Orosius adopts an unorthodox view that is decidedly more hopeful and patriotic.

Works Cited

- Augustine. 1981. *Sancti Aurelii Augustini episcopi De civitate Dei libri XXII*. Ed. B. Dombart et al. Stuttgart: Teubner.
- Coffman, E. 2001. "In God's Country: Those who Believe that God Rewards Righteous Nations Have Orosius to Admire and Augustine to Dispute." *Christian History* 20.4: 13-15.
- Dyson, R. W. 1998. *The City of God against the Pagans*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Fear, A. 2005. "The Christian Optimism of Paulus Orosius," in D. Hook, ed., *Four Essays on Late Antique and Early Medieval Historiography of the Iberian Peninsula*. Bristol: HiPLAM. 1-16.
- Frend, W. H. C. 1968. "Augustine and the Classics." *The Classical Review* 18.3: 318-19.
- . 1969. "Paulinus of Nola and the Last Century of the Western Empire." *The Journal of Roman Studies* 59.1: 1-11.
- Hanson, R. P. C. 1972. "The Reaction of the Church to the Collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the Fifth Century." *Vigiliae Christianae* 26.4: 272-87.
- Marasco, G. 2003. *Greek and Roman Historiography in Late Antiquity: Fourth to Sixth Century A.D.* Leiden: Brill.
- Orosius. 1966. *Historiarum adversum paganos Libri VII*. Ed. K. Zangemeister. New York: Johnson Reprint Corp.
- Vergil. 1962. *Aeneid VI*. Ed. F. Fletcher. Oxford: Clarendon Press.