

# HUI216

# Italian Civilization

---

Andrea Fedi

# 19.0 Announcements

- <http://www.campo7.com/hui216/>
- The midterms will be returned after the Spring break
- Makeup midterms have been scheduled for the end of this week
- James O'Donnell's site on St. Augustine has moved to a new address
  - <http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/augustine/>

# 19.1 Augustine on grace and salvation, on the sack of Rome

- Often based on St. Paul's teachings
  - Central is the idea that without the grace of God one cannot be saved
    - Free will vs. predestination: see the following article from the Catholic encyclopedia:  
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06259a.htm>
    - Even Martin Luther belonged to the Augustinian order
- *De civitate Dei* (413-26): on God and the Roman empire
  - *The City of God* was written in the years following the sack of Rome by the Visigoths (410 CE)
  - St. Augustine decided to provide a systematic examination of Roman history
  - He explains how God intervened in the development of the Roman Empire (under which Jesus was to be born)

# 19.1 St. Augustine on God and the Roman Empire

- Romans were able, in his view, to maintain unity, peace and stability so that humankind would be ready to accept the gospel
- Augustine defends the Christian faith from the accusations of those who saw in the sack of Rome a sign of the weakness of the new God accepted by the Romans, a God who seemed unable or unwilling to protect the city and its inhabitants, in spite of the fact that the majority of them had converted to Christianity during the previous 100 years
- Augustine's ideas on the relationship between Roman and Christian history, and the pages he devoted to praising the virtues of the Romans, especially those from the age of the Republic, ended up promoting the acceptance of Greco-Roman civilization in medieval society/culture

## 19.2 How St. Augustine read the classics

- A passage that Prof. Donnell likes to quote often, shows how much Augustine believed in the fundamental harmony existing between Greco-Roman philosophy, specifically Platonism, and the Christian faith. It is a paragraph from the 7th book of the *Confessions*, in which Augustine explained how he found the words of the prologue to the gospel of St. John inside the book written by a disciple of Plato
  - 7.9.13 Thou procuredst for me...certain books of the Platonists, translated from Greek into Latin. And therein I read, not indeed in the very words, but to the very same purpose, enforced by many and diverse reasons, that In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...

## 19.2 How St. Augustine read the classics

- ...the Same was in the beginning with God: all things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made: that which was made by Him is life, and the life was the light of men, and the light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.
- And that the soul of man, though it bears witness to the light, yet itself is not that light; but the Word of God, being God, is that true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.
- ... But, that He came unto His own, and His own received Him not; but as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, as many as believed in His name; this I read not there.
  - <http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/augustine/Pusey/book07>

## 19.2 Why Augustine read and valued the classics

- It is undeniable that many of the Scriptures in the New Testament clearly show the influence that Greek culture already had on some of the authors of those texts, namely St. John, the apostle Paul and, to a certain extent, Luke
- Paul and Luke certainly had studied in schools and with teachers that were familiar with principles of Greek philosophy as well as of classical rhetoric
- In the case of John, very little we know for sure about his education, but that he had read books written by the disciples or followers of Plato or even those written by Plato himself there is no doubt, and biblical studies have pointed out that he was also a master in the use of rhetorical devices such as irony

## 19.2 Why Augustine read and valued the classics

- So it doesn't seem unreasonable that St. Augustine had recognized and that he valued the influence of classical philosophy on the Scriptures
- This discovery must have shown him the way to reconcile values and ideas of the Greeks and the Romans with the new Christian ideology, which was originally, by virtue of its roots, essentially different from anything ever conceived in Greek or Roman culture
- Finally we cannot overlook the fact that St. Augustine had been first a brilliant student and then for many years in teacher of rhetoric, one of the disciplines that really define classical culture

# 19.3 St. Augustine: metaphors that he popularized and that are still popular among Christians

- Life itself is like a book, or a divine scripture
  - everywhere we turn our eyes there are signs
  - the world can be read as an endless allegory
- Life is a journey, or a pilgrimage
  - the final destination (Heaven or Hell) is much more important than the single steps or the path taken to get there
- The city of God vs. the city of man
  - 1) the ideal community of the saints and believers
  - 2) the society of those overly concerned with earthly values, like the community created by Cain, the first biblical city, after he had killed his brother; or the one founded by Romulus, another who had murdered a sibling
  - heaven vs. earth = spirit vs. body



## 19.5 The Temporal Reward Which God Granted To The Romans (from St. Augustine's *The city of God*, 5.15)

- With regard to those to whom God did not intend to give eternal life with His holy angels in His own celestial city..., if He had also withheld from them the terrestrial glory of that most excellent empire, a reward would not have been rendered to their good arts, -- that is, their virtues, -- by which they sought to attain so great glory
  - Compare to the episode of Limbus in Dante's *Inferno*, in *The Divine Comedy*

## 19.5 Examples of the extraordinary virtues of the ancient Romans, from *The city of God*

- ...another Roman chief, Torquatus, slew his son, not because he fought against his country, but because, being challenged by an enemy, he through youthful impetuosity fought, though for his country, yet contrary to orders which his father had given as general;
- and this he did, notwithstanding that his son was victorious, lest there should be more evil in the example of authority despised, than good in the glory of slaying an enemy
- if, I say, Torquatus acted thus, wherefore should they boast themselves, who, for the laws of a celestial country, despise all earthly good things, which are loved far less than sons?

# 19.5 Examples of the virtues of the Romans: Mucius

- If Mucius, in order that peace might be made with King Porsenna, who was pressing the Romans with a most grievous war, when he did not succeed in slaying Porsenna, but slew another by mistake for him, reached forth his right hand and laid it on a red-hot altar, ...so that Porsenna, terrified at his daring, and at the thought of a conspiracy of such as he, without any delay recalled all his warlike purposes, and made peace
- if, I say, Mucius did this, who shall speak of his meritorious claims to the kingdom of heaven, if for it he may have given to the flames not one hand, but even his whole body, and that not by his own spontaneous act, but because he was persecuted by another?



19.6  
Ferdinand  
Bol, Titus  
Manlius  
Torquatus  
Beheading  
His Son  
(1661-63),  
Rijksmuseum  
Amsterdam



19.6 Rubens,  
Mucius Scaevola  
and Porsenna  
(1620, Budapest)



19.6  
Giambattista Tiepolo,  
Mucius Scaevola  
(1750-53),  
Würzburg

## 19.7 The virtues of the Romans, from *The city of God*

- These despised their own private affairs for the sake of the republic, and for its treasury resisted avarice, consulted for the good of their country with a spirit of freedom, addicted neither to... crime nor to lust
- By all these acts... they pressed forward to honors, power, and glory; they were honored among almost all nations; they imposed the laws of their empire upon many nations; and at this day, both in literature and history, they are glorious among almost all nations
- There is no reason why they should complain against the justice of the supreme and true God, they have received their reward

# 19.8 Christianity and Roman civilization

- The mission of the Roman empire in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*
- The Roman Republic in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*
  - when Dante, the protagonist of the Comedy, reaches the center of the earth, where Satan is, he finds there the three worst sinners in human history: while the first, Judas, is an obvious choice, the other two, Brutus and Cassius (who had conspired to kill Julius Caesar), can only be understood in the context of the deep appreciation of classical civilization by medieval intellectuals, appreciation which was shaped and fostered by scholars such as St. Augustine
- The preservation of Roman/Greek culture
  - architecture and terminology: *duomo* (dome), cathedral (<throne), basilica, curia, romanesque
  - the use of Latin by the Church

# 19.8 St. Augustine and medieval culture

- Augustine, with a few others, was instrumental in convincing the Christian community that Greco-Roman civilization, in its greatest manifestations, was largely compatible with Christian ideology
- Therefore Medieval society was based on the combination of the Roman heritage and Christian culture
- Original Greco-Roman elements found their ways in religious poems, such as those written by St. Francis of Assisi and by Dante
- Theology and classical philosophy
  - the philosophical theories of Aristotle and Plato were often used to confirm and explain, or even to provide the foundation of Christian theology

# 19.8 The Christian Church and Roman culture

- The Christian church borrowed ideas and practices from Roman culture
  - from the Roman arts and architecture, the typology and the terminology for different kinds of Churches
  - from the Roman government and administration, the attires of priests and bishops
    - just consider some of the mosaics in Ravenna, [http://www.hp.uab.edu/image\\_archive/ulj/uljc.html](http://www.hp.uab.edu/image_archive/ulj/uljc.html) [6th century CE]
    - in this image, [http://www.hp.uab.edu/image\\_archive/ulj/mosaic51.jpg](http://www.hp.uab.edu/image_archive/ulj/mosaic51.jpg), priests are on your right and members of the court are on your left: notice the many similarities

# 19.9 Conclusions

- By suggesting that the success of the Roman Empire was part of God's plan, and that it was not by chance that Jesus was born under Roman authority, Augustine established the premise for the preservation of Greek and Roman culture in an integrally Christian society such as that of the Middle Ages
- It is true that classical culture was at times and in different places ignored or misunderstood during the Middle Ages, but it is a fact that, among other things, the Church itself invested valuable resources in the construction and the maintenance of libraries that included scores of classical texts

# 19.9 Conclusions

- Medieval scholars and theologians may have at times attacked or rejected classical philosophers and pagan poets, but they seldom questioned their importance, a fact that seems almost natural now, but which was extraordinary in ancient times, considering how many civilizations have come and gone leaving so few traces (other than those rediscovered thanks to modern archeology)
- The fact that a poet like Dante, more than 800 years after the fall of the Roman Empire, could give so much relevance in his *Divine comedy* to its culture and its representatives is a real paradox, one that Augustine is at least partially responsible for
  - see for example the treatment of the Roman Empire in the sixth Canto of Paradise,  
<http://www.italianstudies.org/comedy/Paradiso6.htm>