

*Quando filii Dei acceperunt uxores filias hominum: Augustine's interpretation of Gen 6:1-4 in *De civitate Dei* and its implications for his theory of *ordo amoris**

RESUMEN

La exégesis que hace Agustín en su *De civitate Dei* de Gn 6,1-4, sobre el relato bíblico de los hijos de Dios que fueron seducidos por las hijas de los hombres y las tomaron como esposas, le lleva a considerar el orden del amor (*ordo amoris*) como la característica básica de la ciudad de Dios. Agustín expone una serie de criterios que debe cumplir cualquier forma de amor para que se considere ordenado. La ciudad de Dios (*civitas Dei*) y la ciudad terrenal (*civitas terrena*) coexisten en un ambiente mixto (*permixtio*), y la inobservancia del *ordo amoris* ha dado lugar a que algunos ciudadanos de la ciudad de Dios se asimilen a la ciudad terrenal (*confusio*). El relato de Gn 6,1-4 enseña, pues, una doble lección: en primer lugar, que el orden, y más concretamente el amor ordenado (*ordo amoris*), distingue a las dos ciudades, y, en segundo lugar, que existe una jerarquía del bien a la que debe atenerse quien quiera respetar el *ordo amoris*.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Agustín, *De civitate Dei*, Ciudad de Dios, *ordo amoris*, Gen 6.

ABSTRACT

Augustine's exegesis in his *De civitate Dei* of Gen 6:1-4, the biblical story about the sons of God who were seduced by the daughters of men and took them as wives, leads him to consider the right order of love (*ordo amoris*) as the city of God's basic characteristic. Augustine puts forward a number of criteria that any type of love must meet if it is to be considered ordered. The city of God (*civitas Dei*) and the earthly city (*civitas terrena*) co-exist in a mixed environment (*permixtio*), and failure to respect the *ordo amoris* has resulted in some citizens of the city of God being assimilated into the earthly city (*confusio*). The story of Gen 6:1-4 thus teaches a twofold lesson: first, that order, and more specifically ordered love (*ordo amoris*), distinguishes the cities, and second, that there is a hierarchy of goodness to which anyone who wishes to respect the *ordo amoris* must adhere.

KEYWORDS: Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, City of God, *ordo amoris*, Gen 6.

1. SITUATING GEN 6:1-4

1.1. Location of the text in the Bible and in *De civitate Dei*

Gen 6 contains a remarkable passage about the sons of God who were seduced by the beauty of the daughters of men and who then took those women as wives. The offspring of this union was the race of giants, which would be destroyed in the flood. In Genesis, this chapter follows Cain's fratricide (Gen 4:1-16), the account of Cain's descendants (Gen 4:17-24), and the list of Seth's descendants (Gen 4:25 – 5:32). Chapter 6 describes the run-up to the flood: both lines of humanity became depraved. Regretting that he had created humankind, God decided to destroy them all. Only righteous Noah was saved, together with his household.

Augustine treats this passage in book 15 of *De civitate Dei*, the first of four books on the evolution of the city of God (*civitas Dei*) and the earthly city (*civitas terrena*); this account of their evolution comes between their origin (books 11-14) and their final destination (books 19-22). Augustine has already briefly referred to this episode of Genesis at *De civ. Dei* 3.5, in his treatment of the semi-divine origin of Rome's founder Romulus and his ancestor Anchises. In the first chapters of book 15, Augustine deals with Cain's fratricide and the descendants of Adam. He relates how the descendants of Cain and his son Enoch were citizens of the earthly city, while the descendants of Seth and his son Enos were citizens of the city of God.

1.2. The search for the two cities

In examining the development of the two cities during the pre-flood period, Augustine focuses on the distinction between the descendants of Abel's brother Seth, who represent the city of God by virtue of their invoking the name of the Lord, and the descendants of Cain, who placed themselves in the earthly city through fratricide.

These things being so, I see that we must now consider and discuss how those two posterities, which by separate lines of descent indicate the two cities, the one of the earth-born, and the other of the reborn,

became afterwards so mingled and mixed together that the whole human race, except for eight persons, deserved to perish in the Flood ¹.

In the very next chapter (*De civ. Dei* 15.21), a fundamental distinction is drawn between the two cities, “the one trusting in the things of this world, and the other in the hope of God” ². Both cities originate from a common source, Adam, and from Adam comes mortality, to which humanity, as a punishment, has been deservedly condemned, Augustine states. Part of humanity is consigned to damnation; the other part is saved by God’s grace ³.

In *De civ. Dei* 15.20, Augustine does not give the two cities their traditional names but instead refers to the earthly city as the “city of the earth-born” (*civitas terrigenarum*), and to the heavenly city as the “city of the reborn” (*civitas regeneratorum*). Whereas Augustine generally uses words such as *commixtio* or *permixtio* to indicate that the citizens of either city live together in their earthly existence, here a new term, *confusio*, appears: the offspring of Cain and Seth are called a *progenies commixta atque confusa* ⁴. This phrase refers to what happened before the flood; the distinction between the two cities was lost when the city of God’s citizens made choices in accordance with earthly values and not in accordance with God. They took part in the earthly city’s wickedness, and thus a kind of fusion between the two cities

1 *De civ. Dei* 15.20 (English Translation: *Augustine, The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. Robert W. Dyson 1998 [Cambridge, 1998], 676-77); “His ita se habentibus video considerandum et commemorandum, ista utraque progenies, quae distinctis generationibus duas insinuat ciuitates, unam terrigenarum, alteram regeneratorum, quo modo postea sic commixta fuerit atque confusa, ut uniuersum genus humanum exceptis octo hominibus diluuiio perire mereretur” (CCSL 48: 435).

2 *De civ. Dei* 15.21 (Dyson 1998, 678).

3 See *De civ. Dei* 15.21.

4 See *De civ. Dei* 15.20. The expression *civitas terrigenarum* is also found in *De civ. Dei* 15.22. ‘Reborn’ may, according to Augustine, refer either to the salvation from death by God’s grace or to the name ‘Seth’, the first-mentioned citizen of the city of God. Seth was born to take the place of his brother Abel, who had been killed by Cain. Both Seth and Abel therefore prefigure Christ: Abel prefigures those who mourn Christ’s death, Seth his resurrection (*De civ. Dei* 15.19).

arose⁵. The term *permixtio*, then, refers to the coexistence of the two cities' citizens, and the term *confusio* to the loss of identity suffered by the city of God's citizens: they slipped down into the community of the earth-born's lifestyle and abandoned the piety they had previously practiced in the holy community⁶.

2. AUGUSTINE'S EXEGESIS OF GEN 6:1-4 IN *DE CIV. DEI* 15.23

In *De civ. Dei* 15.23, and partly in *De civ. Dei* 15.22 and 15.24, Augustine provides an explanation of Gen 6:1-4. The scriptural text, as given by Augustine in *De civ. Dei* 15.23, runs as follows:

And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and the daughters were born unto them, that the angels of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years. There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they begot children to themselves, the same became the giants which were of old, men of renown⁷.

2.1. Angels or sons of God

Those who had intercourse with the daughters of men are called “angels of God” (*angeli Dei*; v. 2), or “sons of God” (*filii Dei*; v. 4). Augustine indicates that in the Septuagint both ‘angels of God’ and ‘sons

⁵ See *De civ. Dei* 15.22: “they came to be sharers in iniquity, and thus, in a certain sense, the two were mixed together” (Dyson 1998, 679); “facta est permixtio et iniquitate participata quaedam utriusque confusio ciuitatis” (CCSL 48: 487).

⁶ See *De civ. Dei* 15.22: “they forsook the godliness which they had preserved in their holy fellowship and fell into the ways of the society of earth-born” (Dyson 1998, 679); “in mores societatis terrigenae defluxerunt, deserta pietate, quam in sancta societate seruabant” (CCSL 48: 487).

⁷ *De civ. Dei* 15.23 (Dyson 1998, 682), Augustine's literal (“cuius uerba ista sunt”) quotation of Gen 6:1-4.

of God' are used to render the same Hebrew phrase ⁸. *Angelus* (angel) is the Latin equivalent of the Greek word ἄγγελος, which means messenger; thus the angels of God are messengers of God. Although some understand these sons or angels of God to have been real angels who appeared in perceptible form, Augustine considers it impossible for real angels to have lowered themselves to something like this ⁹. So for Augustine the term 'angels' (*angeli*) certainly does not refer here to heavenly inhabitants who came to earth and had intercourse with earthly women. These *angeli* are not fallen angels ¹⁰.

Therefore the expressions 'angels of God' and 'sons of God' must refer to human beings ¹¹. Augustine derives support for this interpre-

⁸ See *De civ. Dei* 15.23: "In the Septuagint also they are certainly called both 'angels of God' and 'sons of God'; though not all the texts have this reading, for some of them have only 'sons of God'. But Aquila, whose translation the Jews place before all others, gives neither 'angels of God' nor 'sons of God', but 'sons of gods' " (Dyson 1998, 683). The passage quoted by Augustine has 'angels of God' (*angeli Dei*) (Gen 6:2) and sons of God (*filii Dei*) (Gen 6:4). The reading 'sons of God' in both places is found in the NRSV: "the sons of God saw that they were fair; [...] in those days—and also afterwards—when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them" (Gen 6:2.4a; NRSV).

⁹ See *De civ. Dei* 15.23. Augustine knew of stories about divine beings or demons who, in one form or another, were able to interact with people and in this way "have often behaved disgracefully towards women, lustng after them and contriving to lie with them" (*De civ. Dei* 15.23; Dyson 1998, 681). Something similar was found in the history of Rome, and Augustine refers to this episode at *De civ. Dei* 3.3. Romulus, Rome's founder, is said to have been born of the intercourse between the God Mars and Rhea Silvia, daughter of Numitor, king of Rome's neighbouring city Alba. Rome's ancestor Aeneas is supposed to have been the son of the Trojan Anchises and the goddess Venus. Augustine, however, does not believe these legends (see *De civ. Dei* 3.4).

¹⁰ See *De civ. Dei* 3.5, where Augustine notes the following: "For much the same question also arises in our own Scriptures: whether the fallen angels coupled with the daughters of men, as a result of which the earth was filled with giants; that is, exceedingly large and strong men" (*De civ. Dei* 3.5; Dyson 1998, 98). Augustine's answer in *De civ. Dei* 15.23 is decisive. These are not holy angels, for they could not have fallen so low. Nor can it be a question of fallen angels, for the fall of the angels happened at the very beginning of creation, and when Scripture mentions 'sinful angels', as in the second letter of Peter, this refers to the devil and those who fell together with the devil at the beginning of time (see *De civ. Dei* 15.23).

¹¹ See *De civ. Dei* 15.23: "It was indeed through God's spirit that they were made angels of God and sons of God; but in falling away to lower things they are called 'men', a name denoting their nature, not God's grace. They are also

tation from Gen 6:3, which refers to the individuals in question as *homines*¹². Scripture also uses the term ‘angels’ for ‘men of God’¹³. From the phrase ‘and they begot children to themselves’ in v. 4, Augustine deduces that the sons of God conceived children for themselves only then, and not before. The children that they had begotten before, according to Augustine, were begotten not for the sons of God themselves but for God and his city¹⁴. So before they took the daughters of men as wives, the angels of God, or men of God, were citizens of the city of God. Augustine explicitly indicates this understanding in *De civ. Dei* 15.22: the sons of God are “citizens of the other City, which is a pilgrim in this world”¹⁵.

The sons of God, the citizens of the city of God, are the descendants of Adam’s son Seth¹⁶, who replaced Abel, murdered by his brother Cain¹⁷. Abel prefigures both the city of God and those who would suffer persecution¹⁸. Abel and Seth together constitute a sign of

called ‘flesh’, because they forsook the spirit and, in forsaking it, were themselves forsaken” (Dyson 1998, 683).

12 See *De civ. Dei* 15.23: “And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh [Gen 6:3a]” (Dyson 1998, 682). The point is clearer in Augustine’s Latin: “Et dixit dominus Deus: non permanebit spiritus meus in hominibus his in aeternum, propter quod caro sunt” (CCSL 48: 690).

13 See *De civ. Dei* 15.23. Augustine gives the example of John the Baptist and the prophet Malachi.

14 See *De civ. Dei* 15.23.

15 See *De civ. Dei* 15.22: “filii Dei, ciues scilicet peregrinantis in hoc saeculo alterius ciuitatis” (CCSL 48: 487).

16 See *De civ. Dei* 15.23: “According to the canonical Scriptures, then, both Hebrew and Christian, there is no doubt that there were many giants before the Flood, and that these were citizens of the earth-born society of men, whereas the sons of God, who were of the lineage of Seth according to the flesh, fell down into this society when they forsook righteousness” (Dyson 1998, 684).

17 See *De civ. Dei* 15.15: Seth was “the son whom Adam begat to fill the place of the one slain by his brother, whom Adam called Seth, saying, as is written, ‘God hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew’ [Gen 4:25]” (Dyson 1998, 663).

18 See *De civ. Dei* 15.15: “Then came Abel, who was slain by his elder brother, thereby prefiguring, as it were, the pilgrim city of God. For it was first shown in him that the city of God was to suffer unjust persecution at the hands of the ungodly” (Dyson 1998, 662-63).

Christ's death and resurrection. In fact, the name 'Seth' means resurrection¹⁹. Seth's son Enos was the city of God's first earthly citizen²⁰. Because the city of God on earth was born out of faith in the resurrection of Christ²¹, such faith is fundamental for the pilgrim city of God on earth²². The sons of God, who were citizens in the city of God on earth, were by nature sons of men, descendants of Seth; by grace, however, they belonged to the city of God²³. The grace that will come to them is the resurrection in which they will share.

2.2. Daughters of Men

Rather, women who had been depraved in morals in the earthly city – that is, in the society of the earth-born – were loved for the beauty of their bodies by the sons of God, that is, by the citizens of the other City, which is a pilgrim in this world²⁴.

19 See *De civ. Dei* 15.18: "It is in hope, then that man lives as a 'son of resurrection'; it is in hope that the city of God lives while it is a pilgrim here, begotten of faith in the resurrection of Christ. For Abel's name means 'lamentation', and that of his brother Seth means 'resurrection'" (Dyson 1998, 670).

20 See *De civ. Dei* 15.21: The city of God on earth began "with a man who hoped to call upon the name of the Lord God" (Dyson 1998, 677-8). "For the supreme task, in this world, of the pilgrim city of God, its whole task during this mortal life, is to call upon God; and this fact is commended to us in the person of the one man who was certainly 'the son of the resurrection' of Abel, who was slain" (Dyson 1998, 678).

21 See *De civ. Dei* 15.18: "from this faith – that is, from the faith of a man who 'hoped to call upon the name of the Lord God' – is begotten the city of God here" (Dyson 1998, 670).

22 See *De civ. Dei* 15.18: "Here, indeed, is a testimony which cries the truth aloud. It is in hope, then, that man lives as a 'son of resurrection'; it is in hope that the city of God lives while it is a pilgrim here, begotten of faith in the resurrection of Christ" (Dyson 1998, 670).

23 See *De civ. Dei* 15.22: "It is not that the 'sons of God' were not the sons of men by nature; but they began to have another name by grace", namely, "angels of God" (Dyson 1998, 680).

24 *De civ. Dei* 15.22 (Dyson 1998, 679); "[S]ed ab initio quae prauis moribus fuerant in terrena ciuitate, id est in terrigenarum societate, amatae sunt a filiis Dei, ciuibus scilicet peregrinantibus in hoc saeculo alterius ciuitatis, propter pulchritudinem corporis" (CCSL 48: 487).

The women of the earthly city belong to the *terrena civitas*. The citizens of the earthly city are those who are not saved by God's grace and who remain bound by their earthly destiny. They are the descendants of Cain. The name Cain means 'acquisition of property'²⁵, which refers to earthly possessions²⁶, and thus to the earthly destiny of these people. Concerning the daughters of these people, the Bible says that they were good²⁷. 'Good', according to Augustine, is also used in the Bible to indicate beauty²⁸, and this meaning is the one that should be understood here²⁹. In other words, these women were not morally good; indeed, they were morally bad, "depraved in morals" from the very beginning³⁰.

2.3. Giants

As a result of the union between the sons of God and the daughters of men, giants were born³¹. For Augustine, the existence of giants may not have been anything special. He mentions, for example, a woman of his time who was of enormous stature, while her parents were short³². It is likely, says Augustine, that in the time that Gen 6 describes, there were more tall people than there are now³³. For Augustine

25 See *De civ. Dei* 15.17.

26 See *De civ. Dei* 15.21.

27 See Gen 6:2, in Augustine's rendering: "uidentes autem angeli Dei filias hominum, quia bonae sunt, sumpserunt sibi uxores ex omnibus quas elegerunt" (CCSL 48: 490).

28 See *De civ. Dei* 15.23: "For it is the custom of Scripture to use the word 'fair' to indicate bodily handsomeness also" (Dyson 1998, 682-3); "consuetudo quippe scripturae huius est, etiam speciosos corpore bonos uocare" (CCSL 48: 490). "Scripture" here refers to the books of the *Vetus Testamentum*.

29 Many modern translations of the Bible also choose the translation 'fair'. For example: "the sons of God saw that they were fair" (NRSV).

30 See *De civ. Dei* 15.22; "sed ab initio quae prauis moribus fuerant in terrena ciuitate" (CCSL 48: 447).

31 See Gen 6:4, quoted in *De civ. Dei* 15.23. See also *De civ. Dei* 3.5, quoted above, where Augustine questions whether the 'sons of God' or 'angels of God' mentioned in Gen 6:4 need to be interpreted as fallen angels.

32 See *De civ. Dei* 15.23.

33 See *De civ. Dei* 15.23.

this detail is mentioned in the Bible because of an underlying intention, namely, to indicate that the physical appearance of the giants, their strength and their size, as well as the beauty of the women, are only relative values, temporary and transient³⁴. The statement in Gen 6:3 that these sons of God are doomed is a sure indication of their transience³⁵.

2.4. Extermination within 120 years

The end of the sons of God who had intercourse with the daughters of men, and the end of their descendants, is announced in Gen 6:3: “My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years”³⁶. Augustine relates the 120 years to the period between the time of this statement –Noah was then 480 years old– and the flood, when Noah was 600 years old according to the Bible³⁷.

And so the prediction meant that men who were to perish in the Flood would live for another 120 years, at the end of which time they would be destroyed by the Flood³⁸.

The days assigned to the citizens of the earthly city are therefore limited, as are those assigned to the sons of God who have renounced their citizenship in the city of God by becoming involved with the

34 See *De civ. Dei* 15.23.

35 See *De civ. Dei* 15.23: “It pleased the Creator to create these in order to show once more that a wise man should not attach great importance either to beauty or to the size and strength of the body; for the wise man is blessed with far better and more certain goods than these: with spiritual and immortal goods, which are not the common property of good men and bad alike, but which belong only to the good” (Dyson 1998, 684-5).

36 See *De civ. Dei* 15.23 (Dyson 1998, 682).

37 See *De civ. Dei* 15.24. The Bible mentions that the flood occurred in the 600th year of Noah's life (Gen 7:11) and that Noah conceived three more sons at the age of 500 (Gen 5:32). Augustine understands the number 500 to have been rounded off, as sometimes occurs in the Bible's treatment of numbers (see *De civ. Dei* 15.24).

38 *De civ. Dei* 15.24 (Dyson 1998, 685).

earthly city. God's spirit will leave these people, and they will die ³⁹, For this is the outcome of their bodies, which had become mortal since Adam's original sin, but could still be saved by God's grace. The sequel to the Genesis passage indicates the causes of the flood: in the 120 years that follow, the earth would evolve more and more towards evil, until God decides to destroy the earth entirely. Only those who remained righteous –Noah and his wife, his sons and their wives– were saved ⁴⁰. The antithesis between the flesh of men and the spirit of God also reflects the difference between the citizens of the earthly city, who live according to the earthly life, and those of the city of God, who live according to the spirit.

3. THE CITY OF GOD AND AUGUSTINE'S INTERPRETATION OF GEN 6:1-4

Gen 6:1-4 describes events leading up to the flood, in particular the wrong choice (or love) by some members of the city of God, who were seduced by the beauty of the earthly women and so forfeited their citizenship in the city of God. The earth went from bad to worse until it was destroyed in the flood. In the following sections of this article, after presenting Augustine's interpretation of these verses, we discuss the contrasts and characteristics that define the two cities, the hierarchy of goodness as Augustine understands it, and finally his conceptualisation of the *ordo amoris*, the ordered love, which Augustine defines as a choice for what is best.

39 See *De civ. Dei* 15.23: “It was indeed through God's spirit that they were made angels of God and sons of God; but in falling away to lower things they are called ‘men’, a name denoting their nature, not God's grace. They are also called ‘flesh’, because they forsook the spirit and, in forsaking it, were themselves forsaken” (Dyson 1998, 683).

40 See Gen 6:5-8 and Augustine's treatment of this passage in *De civ. Dei* 15.24. According to Augustine, however, no citizens of the city of God died in the flood, since the flood was intended to punish the anger of the people (see *De civ. Dei* 15.24). So the citizens of the city of God who lived during the 120 years before the flood must have died in another way.

3.1. Augustine's interpretation of Gen 6:1-4

When the people of the earth grew in number, it happened that the citizens of the city of God were impressed by the beauty of the earthly city's women. The beauty of a creature is good, since all creatures were made by a good God, but creaturely beauty remains an inferior good. Physical goods, such as beauty, strength, and impressive stature, are only temporary, perishable goods and therefore of less value than spiritual goods. Seduced by the daughters of the earthly city, the citizens of the city of God made the wrong choice in having intercourse with these women: that choice was a move away from God. As a result, they lost the grace that God had bestowed on them. God's Spirit left them, and they were doomed. They would be lost in the flood, along with all humanity, except for Noah and his kind.

3.2. Civitas terrigenarum

Augustine generally uses the expressions *civitas Dei* and *terrena civitas* to describe those who are oriented towards God and those who are oriented towards earthly goods⁴¹. The *terrena civitas* finds its happiness in earthly values, while the *civitas Dei* finds eternal happiness in God. The genealogies of the descendants of Cain and Seth correspond to the two cities that Augustine discerns among people⁴². In book 15 of his *De civitate Dei*, Augustine uses a number of striking terms to refer to the cities, to their citizens, and to the relationship between them.

In this context, in order to indicate the earthly city Augustine introduces a special term, *terrigena*. In Augustine's oeuvre, forms of *terrigena* occur only in the *De civitate Dei* and in the *Enarrationes in Psal-*

41 See *De civ. Dei* 14.28: "Two cities, then, have been created by two loves: that is, the earthly by love of self extending even to contempt of God, and the heavenly by love of God extending to contempt of self" (Dyson 1998, 632).

42 See *De civ. Dei* 15.18: "Why, therefore, should a hope which is understood to be common to all godly men be attributed especially to Enos? Surely, this was done because he is recorded as the first offspring of the father who began the line which is set apart for the better destiny: that is, for the Heavenly City. It was for this reason fitting that there should be prefigured in him the man – that is, the society of men – who lives not according to man, in the felicity of things earthly, but according to God, in the hope of eternal felicity" (Dyson 1998, 670-1).

*mos*⁴³. The term, which is mainly used in contrast to the city of God and its inhabitants, can refer either to the people who belong to the earthly city or to the city itself, of which they are a citizen. The phrase *terrigena* (earth-born) describes “those who delight in their earthly origin and rejoice in the earthly felicity of the earthly city”⁴⁴. The *civitas terrigenarum*, “the city of the earth-born”, is “the society of men who live according to man”⁴⁵. This *civitas terrigenarum* and its inhabitants are characterised by ungodliness (impiety) and bad morals⁴⁶, and in fact belonging to the *civitas terrigenarum* corresponds to abandoning justice⁴⁷. Earthly empires that can be identified with the *civitas terrigenarum* are Sicyon, Egypt, and Assyria⁴⁸. In *De civ. Dei* 17.4, the “Israelites according to the flesh” are called “the earth-born citizens

43 Electronic searching with CAG3 [cag3.net; accessed 26/11/2020] yields a total of eight occurrences in *De civ. Dei*, four of which are in book 15, and three of which are in *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, namely, for psalms 48, 61, and 118. In addition to *De civ. Dei*, Augustine’s sermons on the Psalms contain elaborate reflections on the city of God.

44 *De civ. Dei* 15.15.

45 *De civ. Dei* 16.17.

46 For the city itself, see *De civ. Dei* 16.17: “In Assyria, then, the lordship of the ungodly city prevailed. Its capital was that Babylon whose name, ‘Confusion’, is most apt for the city of the earth-born” (Dyson 1998, 725). For the inhabitants, see *De civ. Dei* 15.15, where those who persecute the city of God are called “ungodly and, so to speak, earth-born”. For the bad morals of the women of the *civitas terrigenarum*, see *De civ. Dei* 15.22, where they are called “women who had been depraved in morals in the earthly city”. For the ungodliness (loss of piety) and participation in the evil way of life that characterise the *civitas terrigenarum*, see *De civ. Dei* 15.22: “in order to enjoy them as wives, they forsook the godliness which they had preserved in their holy fellowship and fell into the ways of the society of earth-born”.

47 See *De civ. Dei* 15.23: “the sons of God, who were of the lineage of Seth according to the flesh, fell down into this society when they forsook righteousness” and *De civ. Dei* 17.4: “These things are said to the adversaries of the city of God, who belong to Babylon: who presume upon their own strength and glory in themselves and not in the Lord. [...] These, as the apostle says, are ignorant of God’s righteousness (that is, of that which God, Who alone is just and justifies us, gives to men)”.

48 See *De civ. Dei* 16.17. The capital of this last empire was Babylon; this name, which means confusion, is a fitting one for the *civitas terrigenarum* (*ibid.*), since confusion (*confusio*) is a prominent feature of this *civitas terrigenarum*. Here Augustine also seems to allude to the disorderliness that characterised the Babylonian confusion of tongues.

(*ciues terrigenae*) of the earthly Jerusalem”⁴⁹. They wanted to establish their own form of righteousness instead of God’s, and so, through their pride, they became opposed to the city of God⁵⁰.

Augustine sets the *civitas terrigenarum* and its inhabitants against the city of God and its citizens. The city of God will suffer persecution at the hands of those who are attached to the earthly city, as Cain’s murder of Abel foreshadowed⁵¹. The mores of the *civitas terrigenarum* contrast with the holy devotion (*sancta pietas*) of the *civitas Dei*⁵². On earth Augustine distinguishes two cities; the first is the *civitas terrena* or *civitas terrigenarum*, and the second is that *civitas* to which the sons of God mentioned in Gen 6 belong. This is the city of God on earth, and therefore it is called the pilgrim city (*civitas peregrinans*)⁵³. The word *terrigena* contrasts with *regeneratus*. The first refers to earthly transience and the second to redemption by God’s grace and rebirth in Christ⁵⁴.

3.3. *Permixtio et confusio*

At the end of the first book of *De civitate Dei*, Augustine indicates his aim of describing the origin, evolution, and final destination of the two cities, showing how they are distinct yet intertwined in the world.

In this world (*saeculum*), the two cities are indeed entangled (*perplexae*) and mingled with one another (*permixtae*); and they will remain so until the last judgement shall separate them. Of their rise and progress and appointed end, then, I shall now speak, God being my

49 See *De civ. Dei* 17.4.

50 See *De civ. Dei* 17.4.

51 See *De civ. Dei* 15.15.

52 See *De civ. Dei* 15.22.

53 See *De civ. Dei* 15.22.

54 See *De civ. Dei* 15.20: “the two cities, the one of the earth-born, and the other of the reborn”. Forms of *regeneratus* occur five times in *De civ. Dei* (result obtained by electronic search via cag3.net; accessed 26/11/2020): once in *De civ. Dei* 15.20, to indicate the city of God; twice (in 20.7 and 21.24) to indicate rebirth in Christ (*in Christo regenerati*); in 16.27 the term refers to circumcision as a sign of rebirth; and in 16.30 it alludes to redemption by grace (*per gratiam regeneratus*).

helper. I shall do so as far as I judge it expedient to the glory of the city of God, which will shine all the more brightly when compared with the other city⁵⁵.

In his treatment of humankind's history up to the flood in book 15, Augustine indicates that the two cities became intermingled, and that part of the city of God lost its individuality and was assimilated into the earthly city⁵⁶. Mingling means that the citizens of either city live together in the same time and space. The words Augustine employs for this mingling are *permixtio* or *commixtio*. Not only did both cities make use of the same time and space, they also became fused together, at least in part. To refer to this fusion, Augustine uses the term *confusio*. This *confusio* is an evil (*malum*) that was brought about when the members of the city of God took part in the iniquity of the earthly city (*iniquitate participata*)⁵⁷. In this way they abandoned the piety and righteousness of the city of God⁵⁸, ceased to be its citizens, and became part of the earthly city⁵⁹. Because they forfeited grace and their citizenship in the city of God, their ultimate fate was to perish with the earthly city in the flood⁶⁰.

55 *De civ. Dei* 1.35: “Perplexae quippe sunt istae duae ciuitates in hoc saeculo inuicemque permixtae, donec ultimo iudicio dirimantur; de quarum exortu et proculsu et debitis finibus quod dicendum arbitror, quantum diuinitus adiuuabor, expediam propter gloriam ciuitatis dei, quae alienis a contrario comparatis clarius eminebit” (CCSL 47: 34). In *De civ. Dei* 10.35, almost identical wording is found.

56 See *De civ. Dei* 15.22, *initio*: “As the human race progresses and increased, then, it was this free choice of the will that brought about the mingling of the two cities; for they came to be sharers in iniquity, and thus, in a certain sense, the two were mixed together. This evil is again found to be due to the female sex”; “Hoc itaque libero uoluntatis arbitrio genere humano progrediente atque crescente facta est permixtio et iniquitate participata quaedam utriusque confusio ciuitatis. Quod malum a sexu femineo causam rursus inuenit” (CCSL 48: 487).

57 See *De civ. Dei* 15.22, quoted above.

58 See *De civ. Dei* 15.22: “in mores societatis terrigenae defluxerunt, deserta pietate quam in sancta ciuitate servabant” and *De civ. Dei* 15.23: “deserta iustitia”.

59 Augustine does not explicitly assert that they were no longer citizens of the city of God, but this result is implicit from their slippage into the morals of the earthly city (see *De civ. Dei* 15.22, “defluxerunt” and the passage with *deserta*, mentioned in the preceding note). Compare *De civ. Dei* 1.35, which discusses the members who seem to belong to the church but in the end will not share its destiny.

60 See *De civ. Dei* 15.20, quoted above.

3.4. When citizens of the city of God choose poorly

In *De civ. Dei* 15.22, Augustine quotes an earlier poem of his in praise of the Paschal candle:

These things are Yours. They are good things because You who are good created them. [...] We sin when order is neglected, when we love what was created by You instead of You⁶¹.

Augustine points out first of all that creation consists of good things and only good things. Even so, human beings make a wrong choice when they prefer a creature to God. When a person makes a wrong choice, it is not the chosen object that is wrong, but the choice itself⁶². In *De civ. Dei* 12.8, Augustine gives several examples of wrong choices. Greed (*avaritia*) is wrong because it neglects something good (justice) in favour of a lesser good (gold). Luxury (*luxuria*) is wrong because in it one chooses material beauty over spiritual and immortal beauty. As a result, moderation is neglected. Material beauty is a good, but spiritual beauty is a much greater good. Human praise is not necessarily bad, but boasting (*iactantia*), or the pursuit of human praise, is bad if it conflicts with one's conscience. In the case of a proud ruler, that ruler's power is not at fault, but the ruler's pride (*superbia*) is if it means that the power of someone greater is disregarded⁶³.

The human will has the freedom to choose and so can make right or wrong choices⁶⁴. A wrong choice is a choice against the order of

61 Augustine's so-called *Laus Cerei* in *De civ. Dei* 15.22: "Haec tua sunt, bona sunt, quia tu bonus ista creasti. Nil nostrum est in eis, nisi quod peccamus amantes ordine neglecto pro te, quod conditum abs te" (CCSL 48: 488; our translation).

62 See *De civ. Dei* 12.8: "For the defections of the will are not towards evil things, but are themselves evil: that is, they are not defections towards things which are evil by nature and in themselves; rather, it is the defection of the will itself which is evil, because against the order of nature. It is a turning away from that which has supreme being and towards that which has less" (Dyson 1998, 508). According to this interpretation of Augustine's, there is not a degree of goodness, but of being, and a choice is bad when a lesser (lower) degree of being is preferred to a higher one.

63 See *De civ. Dei* 12.8. When it comes to luxury (*luxuria*), boasting (*iactantia*), and pride (*superbia*), Augustine attributes the fault to the soul.

64 See *De civ. Dei* 15.22, *initio*.

goodness; it is to choose something less good instead of something better. In *De civ. Dei* 15.22, Augustine reprises some of these examples and explains a number of relevant criteria. Physical beauty is not something bad; greed is an inordinate love of gold or property if the pursuit of it runs counter to justice⁶⁵. The eternal ought to take precedence over the temporal, and an inner good is more important than a physical good⁶⁶. A good that is shared by both good and bad people is worth less than a good reserved for good people alone. Physical and temporal goods, such as physical beauty, strength, and stature, belong to the first category; spiritual and immortal goods belong to the second⁶⁷.

4. ORDO AMORIS

The fundamental moral error in Genesis 6 is that the sons of God made a wrong choice. It was, to be sure, a choice for something good (namely, beauty), but the choice itself was wrong because it neglected a greater good (namely, God). Augustine refers to such choices as loving in a good or bad way:

It is true of every created thing: though it is good, it can be loved well or ill; well when the proper order is observed, and ill when that order is disturbed⁶⁸.

Ordered love means loving God without reference to anything else, and not loving a creature instead of God⁶⁹. Ordered love is the

⁶⁵ See *De civ. Dei* 15.22. With these criteria, Augustine has thus reprise two of the examples from *De civ. Dei* 12.8: the love for physical beauty and the attachment to material objects. Boasting and pride are not addressed in *De civ. Dei* 15.22.

⁶⁶ See *De civ. Dei* 15.22. By preferring the beauty of the women of the earthly city and neglecting God in the process, the sons of God made the wrong choice.

⁶⁷ See *De civ. Dei* 15.23.

⁶⁸ *De civ. Dei* 15.22.

⁶⁹ See *De civ. Dei* 15.22; see also the text of the *Laus Cerei*, quoted above.

specific characteristic of the city of God. Augustine makes this quite explicit when he relates Song of Songs 2:4 to the city of God:

That is why, in the holy Song of Songs, Christ's bride, the city of God, sings, 'Set charity in order in me' [Song 2:4] ⁷⁰.

Wherever the creature is loved instead of, or more than, the Creator, the order of love (*ordo amoris*) is disturbed. Such disturbance characterises the earthly city and the 'sons of God' in Genesis 6:

Thus, it was because the order of charity – that is, of delight and love – was disturbed that the sons of God neglected God out of love for the daughters of men. These two names are enough to show the difference between the two cities. It is not that the 'sons of God' were not the sons of men by nature; but they began to have another name by grace ⁷¹.

So the designation 'sons of God' refers to the citizens of the city of God, and the 'sons of men' to the citizens of the earthly city. Citizenship in the city of God was a privilege that the 'sons of God' had obtained through God's grace, but they forfeited their citizenship by getting involved with the women of the earthly city. Ordered or disordered love is the criterion by which the city of God and the earthly city are distinguished. This criterion is also found in Augustine's basic definition of the two cities:

Certainly, this is the great difference that distinguishes the two cities of which we are speaking. The one is a fellowship of godly men, and the other of the ungodly; and each has its own angels belonging to it. In the one city, love of God has been given pride of place, and, in the other, love of self ⁷².

70 *De civ. Dei* 15.22; "[P]ropter quod in sancto cantico canticorum cantat sponsa Christi, ciuitas Dei: ordinate in me caritatem [Song 2:4]. Huius igitur caritatis, hoc est dilectionis et amoris, ordine perturbato Deum filii Dei neglexerunt et filias hominum dilexerunt" (CCSL 48: 488).

71 *De civ. Dei* 15.22 (Dyson 1998, 680).

72 *De civ. Dei* 14.13 (Dyson 1998, 609); "profecto ista est magna differentia, qua ciuitas, unde loquimur, utraque discernitur, una scilicet societas piorum

5. GEN 6:1-4 AS AN INVITATION TO ORDERED LOVE

Genesis 6 tells the story of the ‘sons of God’ who, tempted by the ‘daughters of men’, took these women as wives and had children with them. This choice ended in disaster, since humankind became evil and, except for eight people, all of humanity was eventually destroyed in the flood. In *De civ. Dei* 15.23, Augustine interprets this story in terms of the two cities that are the subject of his *magnum opus*. The ‘sons of God’ are the descendants of Adam who by God’s grace belonged to the city of God. They had become part of the earthly city due to their wrong choice, and together with evil humanity they perished in the flood. The ‘daughters of men’ represent the earthly city, the city of the earth-born (*civitas terrigenarum*), who were not redeemed by God’s grace. The citizens of both cities lived together (*permixtio*), but citizens of the city of God who made the wrong choice because of their love for the daughters of men merged (*confusio*) with the earthly city.

The ‘sons of God’ did not choose something bad as such; for everything created is good, since it was created by God, who is good. The choice itself, however, was flawed; while choosing something good, namely, the beauty of the earthly women, they neglected a greater good, namely, God himself, who is the supreme Good. There is a hierarchy of goodness, and it is on the basis of this hierarchy that Augustine defines the order of love (*ordo amoris*). Love is ordered when a higher good is loved more than a lesser good. Ordered love means loving God above everything else, the Creator above the creature, the eternal above the temporal, the inner above the external, the higher above the lower, a good that is reserved for good people above a good that is shared by good and bad people alike. The city of God’s love is ordered; disordered love is characteristic of the earthly city.

For Augustine, the right choice is a matter of ordered love, and Augustine’s criteria for the *ordo amoris* can be extended to other choices too. A choice for something good is not always good enough. A good choice must be ordered, and that order requires that the best alternative be chosen. A choice is disordered and bad if the best alterna-

hominum, altera impiorum, singula quaeque cum angelis ad se pertinentibus, in quibus praecessit hac amor Dei, hac amor sui” (CCSL 48: 435).

tive is neglected, and something of lesser value is chosen instead. Thus justice must take precedence over material possession, inner goodness over outer beauty. Augustine's *ordo amoris* requires a choice for the best alternative according to a hierarchy of goodness. In Gen 6:1-4, Augustine finds a clear attestation of the neglect of this *ordo amoris*. As such, this episode fits perfectly into his grand theological narrative of the two cities, and a difficult-to-understand passage from Genesis gains, according to the bishop of Hippo, a clear significance; it is an invitation to respect the hierarchy of love.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Dyson, Robert, ed. 1998. *Augustine. The City of God against the Pagans*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

KRISTIAAN VENKEN
ANTHONY DUPONT

