Politics and the Earthly City in Augustine’s *City of God*

In this volume, Veronica Roberts Ogle offers a new reading of Augustine’s political thought as it is presented in *City of God*. Focusing on the relationship between politics and the earthly city, she argues that a precise understanding of Augustine’s vision can only be reached through a careful consideration of the work’s rhetorical strategy and sacramental worldview. Ogle draws on Christian theology and political thought, moral philosophy, and semiotic theory to make her argument. Laying out Augustine’s understanding of the earthly city, she proceeds by tracing out his rhetorical strategy and concludes by articulating his sacramental vision and the place of politics within it. Ogle thus suggests a new way of determining the status of politics in Augustine’s thought. Her study clarifies seemingly contradictory passages in his text, highlights the nuance of his position, and captures the unity of his vision as presented in *City of God*.

Veronica Roberts Ogle is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Assumption University, Worcester, Massachusetts.
Politics and the Earthly City in Augustine’s *City of God*

VERONICA ROBERTS OGLE
*Assumption University*
For Nicholas and Peter
He refused to be subject to his Creator, and in his arrogance supposed that he wielded power as his own private possession and rejoiced in that power. And thus he was both deceived and deceiving because no one can escape the power of the Omnipotent. He has refused to accept reality and in his arrogant pride presumes to counterfeit an unreality.

Augustine, City of God 11.13
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledgments</th>
<th>page viii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Abbreviations</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 The Parodic City: Augustine’s Account of the Earthly City and Its Logic of Self-Love</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 The Sack of <em>Roma Aeterna</em>: Pride, Custom, and the Possibility of Cultural Renewal in Book 1</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Exposing the Worldly Worldviews of Empires, Patriots, and Philosophers: Augustine’s Psychagogic Strategy</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Roman History Retold: Situating Augustine’s Political Pessimism within His Psychagogic Argument</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 The Sacramental Worldview and Its Antisacramental Distortion: Exploring Augustine’s Theory of Signs and Its Implications for the Two Cities Doctrine</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 The Status of Politics: Rereading <em>City of God</em> 19 in Light of Augustine’s Sacramental Vision</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I would first like to thank Mary Keys for being a model of Augustinian humility and a trusted advisor far beyond the years of graduate school. She and Ashleen Menchaca Bagnulo were my first companions in the conversation with Augustine, and I continue to learn much from their insights, as well as those of so many Augustinian friends. I am also deeply indebted to John Cavadini for enriching my understanding of Augustine’s theological vision and to Peter Brown for the myriad of references and insights he provided me during my year at Princeton. I am grateful to both for comments made on early drafts of chapters.

This project would not have been possible without the financial support of Princeton’s James Madison Program, the University of Notre Dame, and Assumption University. Thanks go in particular to Michael Zuckert, whose invitation to return to Notre Dame for a postdoctoral fellowship was not only significant for my life path but also allowed me two years to work on the project with little distraction. Of course, the project would not have gone anywhere without a press. Therefore, I am particularly grateful to Beatrice Rehl at Cambridge University Press for taking an interest in the project, sending it to such thoughtful reviewers, and shepherding it though the entire process. To these anonymous reviewers, I also owe much.

Finally, significant thanks are due to my family: to my sister-in-law, Allison Ciraulo, for being a careful editor of the whole work; to my mother-in-law, Ellen Ogle, for providing such loving childcare in the project’s final days; and above all, to my husband, Nicholas Ogle, for his gracious criticism, loving patience, and steadfast encouragement. I could not have done it without him.

Deo Gratias.

viii
Abbreviations


**SERIES CONTAINING CRITICAL EDITIONS**

CCSL = *Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina*. Turnhout, 1959–

CSEL = *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*. Vienna, 1866–


**TEXTS**


ix
List of Abbreviations

doct. chr. = de doctrina christiana (CCSL 32). Teaching Christianity.


