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2. AUGUSTINE AND POLITICS

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AUGUSTINE AND POLITICS

Before one could conveniently speak about the political implication of Saint Augustine's thought, one needs to situate him in the context of the Ancient Christianity of which he was part.

So, before we could attempt to respond to the question about what Augustine thought, said or wrote about politics, it is worthwhile to take into consideration the attitude of the first Christians towards Politics.

Primitive Christianity was “a-political” precisely because it was “ultra-political”, in other words, it was predominantly preoccupied by the salvation of the soul and the affirmation of other spiritual values, to the extent that it tended to despise Politics as a contingent activity.

Thus, the fundamental distrust towards the “world” had as consequence a kind of **indifference to the temporal institutions.**

One could say the first Christians brought about **a revolutionary position, a radical subversion** of the criteria and political ideals hitherto valid in the world of their time.

We can all remember the passage of the *Philippians* 3:20 which says: “***But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.***”

It is however important to also point out that from the primitive Christian ideology of contempt for temporal institutions, there followed another attitude of submission, because for them, it was not good to rebel against authority. All authority, in fact, comes from God (Cf. *Romans* 13:1).

Paul's injunction justifies the **obligation of obeying established political powers** because such powers were willed by God **inasmuch as they do good**.

The Pauline position was reiterated **until the end of apostolic times** and then in the most difficult of times, even when the church was being persecuted.

So, to some extent, **Christians accepted the existing political order.** This acceptance was further supported by another very important consideration for early Christians:

Since the universe and history are sustained and governed by **Providence, to rebel against those who command, would mean to stand against the manifestation of the will of God** that permitted and favoured the constitution of the particular type of government that Christians find themselves under.

The words of 1 Peter (2:13-15.) “*Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people*”, are not far from this line of thought, finding their validity, however, on the level of love toward God and others.

John's position, which rejects the tacit agreement between faith and the political establishment together with the wicked "world," is different; even much clearer and negative is the position found in the book of Revelation.

However, historically, the first option prevailed in the early Christian communities.

Hence the first Christian political conception:
Authority comes from God and acts in the name of God.

The second Christian principle for favouring politics is this: **Original sin and the subsequent corruption of humankind** have made necessary a **coercive ordering** and the **formulation of laws** which weren't included in the original human condition.

As a consequence, if it is false to say that the **state and society** as such are only fruit of sin and are thus evil, it is right to acknowledge that they **are necessary and beneficial remedies** and form a guarantee for keeping of earthly peace. Tumultuous

In the human person, there is a **natural social instinct** that leads him to live with other human beings, but the form in which the human community realises itself today is the consequence of sin, and it imposes the **subjection of man that is not in conformity with the dignity of a creature of God**, even though this subjection is inevitable and precious **to counter the evil tendencies** in human heart.

Early Christianity, despite the conception made to the usefulness of Politics, **indicates some limits and draws out the purpose it should pursue.**

Politics has to **regulate itself according to justice** and will **remain legitimate insofar as it follows the law of God** without fighting for the interest of the governing class or for the advantage of some parts of the society to the detriment of the others.

Christianity introduced **a new criterion for evaluating Politics**. It gives the freedom to each person to decide the legitimacy of a given authority and gives room for protest in case of offense to their conscience or violation to their freedom. (Cf. *1Cor. 6:2 : Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases?*).

It is superfluous to mention the **consequences** that this principle gave rise to and the **abuses** it occasioned.

But it is equally important to note that the **ecclesiastical authority became** to some extent **the best judge in some cases and could become arbiter of the political power** in virtue of its religious authority and of its role of interpreter of the Word of God and administrator of the means of salvation.

In actual facts, even before Christianity, the revalidation of human value as a person, beyond the fact of being a citizen was already present in some philosophical conceptions.

For example, **brotherhood beyond national boundaries** was an idea that existed before the Christian religion.

But Christianity sublimated this idea together with other pre-Christian intuitions, and justified them on the basis of **the concept of the origin of all human beings from the One God who is the Father of all.**

Christianity has drawn important implications from that concept and it tremendously influenced the contemporary society and contributed to its renewal.

The action of Christians, however, was essentially interior, and moving from the interior and accepting the extent *de facto* condition, their action focussed on changing man's *animus*, more than the social institutions.

This fact is obviously very important for the evaluation of the political attitude of the first Christians. In other words, we can say that the evangelical message did not create a new political doctrine, but favoured the indispensable conditions for such a doctrine to affirm itself subsequently.

The lack of interest of Christians for politics was **a principle of spiritual order**. For that reason, we cannot transfer their attitude to the juridical sphere if we don't want to miss the point.

It is **predominantly among the heretics that we find the rise of juridical problems** (disobedience to the laws, rejection of military service, considering themselves outside the community), because they were literally awaiting the immediate return of Christ or they were thinking of the imminent establishment of "*the new heavens and the new earth*", understanding the promises in a materialistic way.

The true Christian faithful were not having those problems. For them, in theory, they saw an antithesis and no common ground between the Christian faith and the secular political order.

But in practice, from the end of the Second Century AD onward, Christians were mixed with others in common services and accepted the established order collaborating with others, recognising the value of such an order and even praying the authority.

Christianity, therefore, pointed people toward the simultaneous **path of obedience to God and to their public leaders**, provided that the latter did not **attribute to themselves** or the institutions they represented **absolute prerogatives or did not make idolatrous claims**, not recognizing that the justification for their existence came from above. One finds herein the originality of Christian political thought.

It precisely from this point of view that we should understand the words of Acts 5, 29:

“Peter and the other apostles replied: ‘We must obey God rather than human beings!’”

Whenever there seemed to be a contrasting imposition of what did tally with the faith their faith, Christians weren't ready to compromise. But fundamentally, they were disposed to collaborate with the established authorities.

Most especially, Christians tried to show their adversaries that the frank and integral **acceptance of the moral and social norms they preached** would have been an advantage for civil life because it **would simplify the educative task of the state** and **offer new means of persuasion to leaders.**

But the Ancient world was wary of novelties such as the Christian doctrine. They thought they needed more than prayers and good moral advice.

Since, from the beginning, Christianity was a collective organism, a Church, it so happened that beside the traditional society which had a religious-political conception in which all individuals are incorporated, there sprang up another reality (the Christian Church) of a different character acting from a different perspective, and also forming a universalistic body which urged those who adhered to it the dedication of their beings.

The historical evolution of the first centuries of our era led the Roman Empire to assume Christianity as the religion of the State. After this the various aspects of the Christian aspiration we mentioned above began to find fulfilment.

It is now important to consider the attitude of Christian writers toward the Empire since it is precisely the main political organisation with which the Christianity entered into dialogue.

The various authors of the first three centuries were substantially **all grounded on the Pauline theology**, laying emphasis on this or that aspects according to personal tendencies or to the necessities of momentary polemics.

- *Pope Clement of Rome (88-99AD)* (one of the first successors of St. Peter) prayed for the civil authorities (*1 Clement* 61)
- *Letter to Diognetus* 5, affirms the ordinary and normal life of Christians in the Empire.
- *Saint Justin the Martyr (1st Apology)* acknowledged that the aim of the State is good because it helped maintain peace that is so dear to all, and demonstrated that only Christianity can reinforce the Empire.

- Tertullian (c. 150- in his *Apologeticum* 2 stressed the contradictions and the irregularities of the Roma legal procedures. He suggested that Christians shouldn't give their hearts to the state. They
- Origen (185-253) in *Against Celsus* affirms that the birth of the Empire is providential (II, 38), and that Christians are more useful to the Patria than the other humans beings for all that they contribute to the progress of all (VIII, 75).

In February 313 AD, there was the emanation of an Edict (*Editum Mediolanense*) that constitutes the dividing line between the two parts of the history of the Early Christian political thought. This Edict was emanated by Constantine and Licinius as an agreement to treat Christians benevolently within the Roman Empire, in other words to allow them to freely profess their faith and practise their religion in the Empire.

Can we speak of the triumph of the Church with the Edict of Milan?

In actual fact there was no triumph. There arose a serious problem : The clear distinction of secular power from religious authority.

Before 313, this distinction was obvious but the Edict, it became a practical and doctrinal problem to solve

After Christianity became a licit religion following the conversion of Constantine, it became necessary to **safeguard the freedom of the Church so as to not to end up being subject to the will and whim of the secular authority.**

At the end, the Church declared that the Clergy must be independent and the Emperor must subject himself to the ecclesiastical discipline when it comes to matters of faith.

From the Emperor **Constantine** (ruled between 306 and 337 AD.) **to Gratian** (emperor from 367 to 383), there was a certain level of religious tolerance in the sense that the pagans still had the possibility and freedom to practise their religion.

From Gratian and Theodosius (emperor from 379 to 395 AD), the Empire adopted only one religion as official, that is Christianity, the Catholic faith professed by the Bishop of Rome.

The Emperor renounced his title of High Priest and the venerated symbols of Ancient Rome have been removed despite the opposition of the defenders of traditionalism.

However, many Fathers of the Church kept watch and forcefully insisted on the distinction of the secular power from the religious authority so as to avoid abuses of any kind.

Hence **Hosius of Corduba** (c. 256 – 359), **Lucifer of Cagliari** (d. May 20, 370 or 371),

Hilary of Poitiers (c. 310 – c. 367) sometimes referred to as the “**Hammer of the Arians**” (Latin: *Malleus Arianorum*) and the “**Athanasius of the West**”, **Athanasius of Alexandria**, **Gregory of Nazianzus**, **Theodore of Mopsuestia** and others constantly attacked political intrusions of Emperors in Church matters.

After the aforementioned Fathers came **some great figures** of which our Holy Father Augustine is part. About Saint Augustine there is a particularly important event that gave rise to his chef-d'oeuvre, *De civitate Dei contra paganos* and this event is the **Sack of Rome**.

This book, due to the abundance of information and to the height of thought contained therein, became a kind of code for the following centuries.

➤ In the *City of God* Augustine lays out on a vast canvas the themes of

- Christianity and paganism,

- providence and power,

- empire and church, and

- divine and human justice,

writing as a learned Christian apologist, an intellectual addressing his peers.

- It is easy to forget that he was also, and before all else, a Christian pastor. As a bishop, he struggled with the daily reality of political life in a society in which 'church' and 'state' had never been, and could not conceivably be, disentangled.

In this context, 'justice' referred not to the rise and fall of empires, but to the decision whether to punish or to pardon a Donatist thug who had beaten up one of his priests.

Donatism was a schism in the Church of Carthage from the fourth to the sixth centuries AD. Donatists argued that Christian clergy must be faultless for their ministry to be effective and their prayers and sacraments to be valid.

The exigencies of daily life raised large political questions:

- how can punishment be justified at all?
- Is the gentleness of Christ compatible with responsible government?

- Ought the force of law to be used to deter those tempted by heresy?

Augustine wrote about such matters, but not in the *City of God*.

As Prof. Robert Dodaro right noted, **to discover the everyday political thinking** that constituted both the background to and the outworking of the large-scale ideas of his *magnum opus*, **we need to turn to the occasional writings of the busy bishop.** In other words, we need to read **his letters and his sermons.**

In those pastoral works, we find Augustine reflecting on practical issues as they arise, as he answers a request, intercedes with an authority, debates with an opponent, or advises a friend. We also hear him encouraging, teaching and chastising his congregation from the pulpit in reaction to current events.

The bishop **is thinking on his feet**, and his answers are often *ad hoc* and *ad hominem*. He does not articulate grand theory in these documents.

Yet to read through them is to become aware of the way in which **fundamental ideas about God and humanity, filtered through Augustine's pastoral experience**, shaped a distinctive and challenging intellectual response to the problems of his society.

Very often, what we do not find in his most important treatise, we discover in his pastoral works. For example as H. Drobner accurately pointed out, in his corpus of sermons, Augustine shows that he was **a brilliant speaker**, skilled in stirring and gripping formulation, as well as **a very empathetic and lucid teacher**.

Whereas **in his polemical works** there is much that he sharply intensifies to the point of a **misleading one-sidedness** so as to heighten their persuasiveness, **in his sermons and catechetical writings the presentation is very balanced.**

Therefore, in order to obtain an accurate picture of Augustine's thoughts, it is never appropriate to ascertain it from his polemical works alone; they should always be augmented, completed and balanced by the pastoral writings.

It is important to **study whole texts rather than short extracts**, so that Augustine's ideas are not abstracted from the context in which they are embedded. We need **the theological context** in order to understand how the model of Christ and biblical exegesis shape Augustine's views.

We also need **the practical context** in order to grasp clearly both the precise issues at stake and the range of responses available to him.

Augustine's **pastoral writings do not include clear-cut and systematic political theory**, but they are underpinned by a consistent and coherent view of humanity and society.

The study of Augustine's political teaching has suffered from a history of misreadings both ancient and modern.

It is only of recent that the traditional lines of the so-called «**Augustinian pessimism**» have been opened to question.

So scholars have begun to explore the boarder lines of Augustine's political thought in his letters and sermons and thus have been able to place the classic text, the *City of God* in its proper context.

The City of God

Written at intermittent intervals **between 413 and 427**, the *City of God* is **Augustine's longest and most comprehensive work**. It is also one of the foundational books of patristic literature.

Its unique achievement is to have **clarified Christianity's ambiguous relationship to the temporal order and to have established its radical transcendence vis-à-vis the Roman Empire** and, indeed, all possible regimes or political dispensations.

Implied in Augustine's position on this issue is a rejection of the classical notion of the city or its equivalents as self-sufficient totalities capable of fulfilling all of one's basic needs and aspirations.

Without renouncing their citizenship in the temporal society to which they belong, **Christians form part of a universal, albeit invisible, society in which alone salvation can be attained.**

The title of the work is taken from *Psalm 87:3* (Vg. 86:3): “*Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God,*” and is intended as **an ironic reply to the slanderous accusations** that were being leveled at Christianity **by its pagan detractors**. The **twenty-two books** that it comprises fall into **two main parts**.

Augustine himself best describes the structure and content in his *Retractationes* (2.43):

*“The **first five of these books** refute those persons who would so view the prosperity of human affairs that they think that the worship of the many gods whom the pagans worship is necessary for this; they contend that these evils arise and abound because they are prohibited from doing so...*

The next five books, however, speak against those who admit that these evils have never been wanting and never will be wanting to mortals, and that these, at one time great, at another time slight, vary according to places, times, and persons; and yet they argue that the worship of many gods, whereby sacrifice is offered to them, is useful because of the life to come after death...

In these ten books, then, these two false beliefs, contrary to the Christian religion, are refuted.

But lest anyone charge that we have only argued against the beliefs of others, and have not stated our own, it is just this that the second part of this work, which consists of twelve books, accomplishes...

The first four of the following twelve books, then, deal with the origin of the two cities, one of which is of God, the other of this world; the next four books treat their growth or progress; but the third four books, which are also the last, deal with their destined ends.

Books 1-10 are a refutation of the “false teachings” (*vanitates*) of the pagans: first, those who worship the pagan gods for the sake of happiness in this life or the aggrandizement of the Roman Empire (bks. 1-5); and secondly, those who worship the same gods for the sake of happiness in the afterlife or the good of the soul (bks. 6-10).

In accordance with a classification that Augustine inherits from Varro, the different forms taken by pagan religion are dealt with in ascending order of importance under three headings:

- “mythical theology,” or the theology of the poets;
- “civil theology,” or the official theology of the city;
- “natural theology,” or the theology of the philosophers.

Books 11-22 are a “demonstration and defense” of the truth of the Christian faith and are presented as the positive counterpart of the negative critique carried out in the first ten books (retr. 2.43.2; *epistula ad Firmum*: BA 33:170). This section is divided into three parts dealing respectively with

- the origin, (Books 11-14)
- the development, (Books 15-18) and
- the end of the two cities (Books 19-22)

Augustine divides all of humanity into two cities:

- the “city of God,” symbolized by Jerusalem, and
- the “earthly city,” symbolized by Babylon and occasionally called the “city of the devil” (civ. Dei 17.20.2; 17.21.1).

Augustine’s tripartite scheme is inspired by the Bible and corresponds to what now often goes under the name of “salvation history.”

It should be noted that **the two cities in question are not empirical entities,** comparable to cities in the ordinary sense and identifiable by their geographical boundaries. **They are cities in a mystical sense — *mystice*** (15.1.1).

Citizenship in one or the other is determined, **not by the accidents of one's birth**, parental lineage, or place of residence, but **by the object of one's love** or the end to which all of one's actions are subordinated: in one case, "*the love of God to the contempt of oneself*"; in the other case, "*the love of oneself to the contempt of God*" (14.28).

That is why T.W. Smith is justified when he said that Augustine's treatment of Politics in the *City of God* must be considered in light of his pedagogy which is aimed at transforming his audience's loves.

A person whose **life** has been **reoriented by love of God** and neighbour uses political action as self-giving. Smith stresses that **Augustine thinks this reorientation characteristic of the City of God, is the basis for a just, peaceful political life in this world.**

However, **Augustine's thought has not understood or interpreted from this perspective along history.** Some distorted reading of his line of thought has led to enormous errors which fetched many criticisms especially from 19th Century on.

A particular trend linked with the medieval reading of Saint Augustine's political thought is the so-called the **“Political Augustinianism”**.

And this will be the focus of the following slides in this presentation, after we present his views on **City and Citizenship**.

THE IDEA OF CITY AND CITIZENSHIP AS A BASIC ELEMENT OF HIS POLITICAL THOUGHT.

One of the best-known political teachings of St. Augustine is that concerning **the tension between the “two cities,”** the City of God and the City of Man, and it is not merely coincidental that **this teaching is intimately linked with Augustine’s deeper theological concerns (civ. Dei 14.28); citizens of each city are fundamentally marked by the tendency of their wills, toward God or self.**

What distinguishes this conception of the citizen most notably from classical writers on this topic is precisely **the universality of citizenship in Augustine's view**, in contrast to the ancient view which intimately connected the citizen and the particular political order.

As Christianity had broken the horizons of the Roman political world by its rejection of the Roman gods, so **the differentiation between the two cities transcends considerations of political entities—Rome, whether in its republican or imperial form, is not the sole embodiment of the city of man, for the two cities are more boundless.**

Critical to Augustine's treatment of citizenship is the well-known encounter with Cicero's definition of the republic in *De republica* 1.39 (also 1.49.3.43), a discussion begun in *De civitate Dei* 2.21 and returned to in 19.21-24 (see also ep. 138.2.10). Here Augustine's reading of the nature of the Roman republic turns on the question of the existence of justice therein.

This leads him to argue that **Rome never was a republic**, as it never possessed true justice, for **it never granted God the proper measure of worship** (civ. Dei 19.21; also 2.17-18). Yet the idea of a **“people”** is salvaged, if it is described as an **assemblage of rational beings, united by a common acknowledgment about that which it loves (19.24).**

A proper assessment of the community can thus be done on the basis of what it loves.

“two loves have made two cities, love of self unto the contempt of God... love of God unto the contempt of self.”

“Love” does not mean the same thing depending on the end to which it is directed.

Loves that terminate in the self to the exclusion of others are concupiscent and private, and they can acknowledge others at best as sources of our own pleasure.

Loves that terminate in the love of God, however, are essentially friendships.

Even with the apparently disparaging attitude to politics (civ. Dei 4.4; 5.17), and the seeming indifference to the variety of political orders (2.21), **Augustine does not dismiss considerations of justice and political good**; his authorship of what has come to be known as the just-war theory evidences some concern for those issues.

Rather, in recognizing his concerns for **the necessity of war** (*c. Faust.* 22.74; *civ. Dei* 19.7; 19.15; 3.10; *ep.* 138.2.14), for **serving the public authorities** (*ep.* 138.2.15, commenting on *Luke* 3:14; *1 Pet.* 2:13-14), for **holding public offices** (*c. Faust.* 22.56-58; *ep.* 151.14; *civ. Dei* 19.6), and for **obeying the law** (*civ. Dei* 19.17, citing *Rom.* 13:1-2; *en. Ps.* 61.8; 65.14), one can see how **Augustine might be employed as a defender of the political order** (*ep.* 91.3; see also *vera rel.* 6.10-11).

Indeed, though Augustine is sometimes questioned by his correspondents about the compatibility of Christian teaching and public duty (ep. 136.2), he in fact argues that Christians indeed make the best citizens, precisely because of their understanding of the human condition and the role of political authority in human communities.

Christians are the best citizens because **they obey the law out of a religious duty** (*epp.* 137.5.17; 138.2.9-10). In numerous places Augustine argues that **the city would be much better off**, even in earthly terms, **if all the citizens were Christian** (*epp.* 91.6; 138.2.15; *civ. Dei* 2.19; *conf.* 3.8.15-16).

While the **polis** (in Aristotle, for example) is the representation of the best form of human community, and though never present in its perfected form but represented in a variety of forms, for Augustine the polis is now the city of God (*epp.* 91.1; 95; *en. Ps.* 61.6).

The community of the saints is the model to be followed, and thus the question of the best regime, perhaps the most significant political question for the Greeks, becomes relatively unimportant in the Augustinian scheme (civ. Dei 2.21; see 5.26 on Theodosius).

Human beings are seen first as fellow pilgrim members of the city of God, not as fellow citizens of a particular political order, and thus Augustine depreciates the ancient conception of the city, partially because of its own comprehensive claim on the lives of citizens.

And yet, though there is a new emphasis on the universality of human communities, Augustine's teaching does not prevent him from recognizing that **men can also expend more energy and care for those closest to them** than for those who are more distant (*civ. Dei* 19.14; *doc. Chr.* 1.28.29; see Gal. 6:10).

Augustine's apparent depreciation of the city, and thus of citizens and politics (as noted above), led some to develop a line of thought seemingly foreign to his designs; the establishment of a "political Augustinianism" led in some instances to one of two errors.

Either **Christianity** took on the qualities of a **national theology**, justifying political movements internally, or its success **was linked to the fortunes of the city**, as with Eusebius's adulation of Constantine (*De laudibus Constantini*), and thus **its aspirations were linked to the particular characteristics of the nature of the rule or ruler.**

Yet Augustine provides the antidote to these misinterpretations, first through his refutation of civil theology (see especially civ. Dei 6-7), and secondly in the manner in which he presents the divide between the two cities; it is not one of borders and boundaries, but of wills.

The eternal city reaches beyond all borders, among all races and nations (civ. Dei 19.17; 10.32; see Rev. 7:9); Jerusalem, at present, is “spread out over the earth in the faithful saints” (civ. Dei 20.21; the language of “intermingling” suffuses the text; e.g., 1.35; 10.32; 18.49, 51), and it does not scruple about matters of dress or manner of living, provided they do not contradict divine precepts (19.19).

POLITICAL AUGUSTINIANISM

The term *augustinisme politique*, or “political Augustinianism,” was coined by the French theologian Henri-Xavier Arquillière to refer to the tendency of medieval Christendom to obscure the distinction between the state and the church.

Due to the influence of Arquillière's thesis regarding the origins of medieval political thought, which was first articulated in 1934, the term has become rather commonplace in discussions of medieval politics, so much so that it is frequently used even by those who do not necessarily adhere to Arquillière's thesis in its entirety.

Arquillière understood himself to be following upon the conclusions of Mandonnet and Gilson, who had suggested that Augustine's thought lacked a careful distinction between the natural and the supernatural realms, or between the truth of reason and revealed truth.

From this starting point Arquillière argued that medieval political thinkers who looked to Augustine for guidance tended to absorb the natural order of the state within the supernatural order of the church. He thus viewed political Augustinianism as the logical extension of doctrinal Augustinianism.

Although he named the medieval tendency to absorb the state within the church after Augustine, Arquillière freely admits that Augustine did not himself subscribe to political Augustinianism.

Instead, he argues that Augustine, following the New Testament and the patristic tradition, granted that pagan rulers should be obeyed, and he is aware of Augustine's cautious attitude toward the conversion of the Roman emperors to the Christian cause.

However, Arquillière points out that Augustine's elevated rhetoric in some passages could, particularly if read in isolation, easily prompt improper interpretations by his less sophisticated medieval disciples.

More importantly, Arquillière's argument suggests that, even if Augustine's own conclusions about politics were appropriate, his obfuscation of the boundary between the natural and the supernatural did lend itself to the interpretations of those subsequent Christians who would be more rigorous in drawing out conclusions regarding the subordinate character of the political realm.

Arquillière thus implies that there is a sense in which “political Augustinianism” is something of a misnomer, and a sense in which it is not.

An Italian scholar named Paolo Brezzi questioned the assumptions of Arquillière and tore into pieces all the arguments of the French author by showing in an article published in 1985 that it is erroneous to read Augustine the way Arquillière did.

What was the actual doctrine of Saint Augustine?

Brezzi first made **an essential distinction** as premises in order **to understand the Augustinian position in political matters**:

Augustine used **two criteria of judgment** passing continuously from one to another and falling into apparent contradictions but preserving a “*concordia discors*”. That saved the underlying unity of his thought.

Sometimes Augustine **evaluated everything in relation to the ultimate end of man and history**, while on the other hand the **contingent reality was accepted and recognized**, therefore, in one case, one could deny legitimacy to the State because it was part of the transient world.

But in other circumstances Augustine appreciated the work done by those who exercised a power in view of order, peace, civil coexistence.

For St. Augustine, in fact, man is a social being who establishes a pact to live in security and discipline within the community (family, country, humanity); moreover, **after original sin**, the use of a coercive force became necessary provided this use is made with JUSTICE, which means: **giving each one his due (*suum cuique tribuere*) and in the first place to God, what is proper to him.**

This criterion could suggest, perhaps, that we must give everything to the Creator and Master of everything. However, through subtle reasonings and distinctions Augustine succeeded in establishing various degrees of obligations and, in finding a natural foundation to the justice referring to the "*lex gentium*" that other Fathers of the Church had already accepted and supported.

In short, the temporal activity, which could only appear to be the result of violence and oppression, ends up being redeemed and arrives at carrying out an ethical task, maintaining order, becoming an instrument for the exercise of civil virtues and re-entering in a providential saving design.

Another important theme is that of the **Roman Empire**: the criticisms, accusations, mockeries within all the various periods of ancient Roman history abound in the Augustinian pages, however, in conclusion, the Author not only accepted the reality he had under his eyes.

Augustine did not do an outright condemnation of the State, neither did he consider the empire 'decadent' or could imagine another world organization in its place - but he declared that the order had been arranged by Heaven for the advent of Christianity.

The Church which was considered the image of the celestial city, lived inside this order, while the worldly empires could, generally, portray the earthly city for the aggressive spirit that had always distinguished them.

Therefore, the only possibility he saw was what occurred in the behavior of citizens and in the state directives, an introduction of charity, the sense of public service, the morality of conduct.

As can be seen, we are on an ethical level, cohabitation became a matter of good conscience, that is we are in metapolitical, the hypothesis of the establishment of the kingdom of justice and peace in the name of the true God is presented, but not for this Augustine intended to disregard the autonomy of the state in temporal affairs;

He hoped that the Church, obeying public laws, would ask civil authorities nothing more than her freedom for the exercise of her religious mission. Therefore, St. Augustine did not ignore or exclude the notion of State, as he has not reduced to a minimum the political prerogatives that belong to it;

Obviously - and it was the least one could expect from a zealous priest like him - he warmly hoped for an infusion of the Christian spirit in the behavior of the heads of state, an adaptation of the legislation to the principles of the Gospel, but this did not exclude the awareness of a social temporality and civil.

In a bit trenchant terms it could be said that the Author has ended up falsifying (without wanting it, of course!) the "climate" of those centuries, and has not succeeded in grasping the mentality of an era.

He fell into this methodological error either because he overlooked some important and valid testimonies, or because he silenced some manifestations and aspects which instead he had to take in the due account.

He proceeded unilaterally along one road ending with being deviant in its formulations on the subject faced with so much enthusiasm and conviction. **Political Augustinianism** is an **unhappy historiographical concept** that **unfortunately has become widespread!**

There is **no identity of thought between the doctrine of St. Augustine and the medieval productions**, which were the result of personalities who did not have an exceptional vigor, but were willing and anxious of the public good.

Undoubtedly **there is a dependence of these from that**, but it is moreover extended to the whole patristic tradition, and even to the classical tradition, in the limits in which the latter was at that moment known;

Therefore it would be wrong to speak of a break between Christian Antiquity and the Middle Ages, but it is also wrong to see the linear continuity or the superficial and uncritical reception of a precious heritage;