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*The Dualistic Thought of Augustine of Hippo:**A Step towards the Contemporary Thought*

*The contemporary dualistic thought does not represent a new way of understanding. The actual problems have roots in the history. At the beginning of the fifth century, the bishop of Hippo, AUGUSTINE followed an old pattern and changed the entire perception of the contemporaries. Instead of speaking about a holy empire and an official Church, he promoted the idea of the two separate worlds: the city of earth and the city of heaven.*

**TWO CITIZENSHIPS**

Influenced by ARISTOTLE and PLATO, AUGUSTINE considered Christians to be aliens, pilgrims on the Earth, living in ephemeral earthly states and travelling to their real destination: the Kingdom of God. In his book, *De Civitate Dei (The City of God)*, he developed a philosophy of history, on two opposite worlds, which coexisted from the beginning of the creation.

The dramatic split began with the fall of the bad angels who formed two different groups. On earth, the two cities have two ancient fathers: Cain and Abel. Belonging to this world, Cain established a city, founded on a fratricide and self-love. Abel, as an alien sojourner within an enemy territory, did not found a city, because he knew that his citizenship was in heaven.

In book XV, AUGUSTINE speaks already about the two cities, "one consisting of those who live according to human, the other of those who live according to God. One is predestined to reign eternally with God and the other to

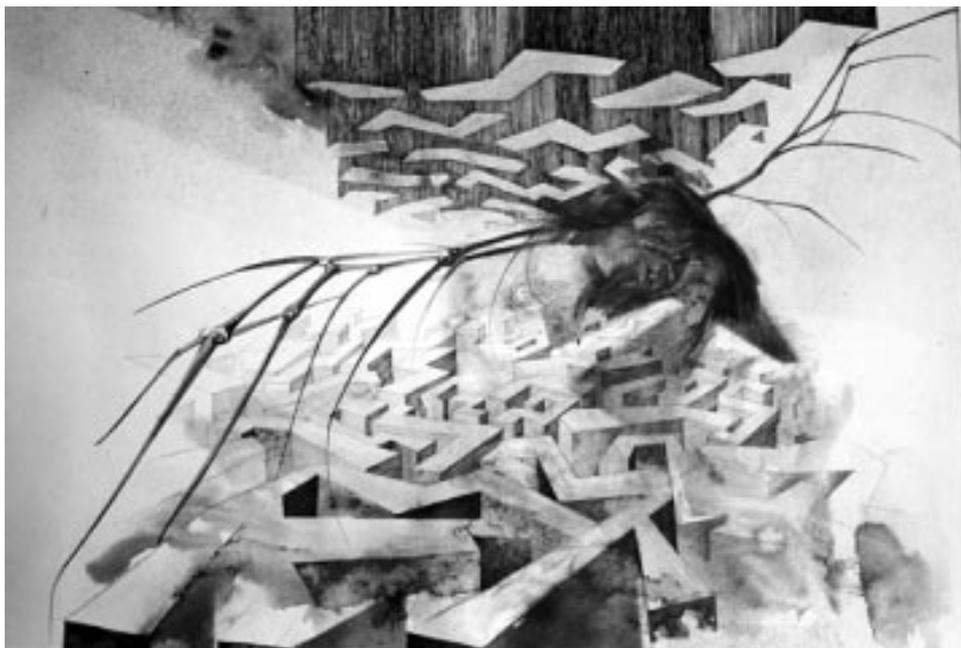
suffer eternal punishment with the devil." He divided human history, presenting in parallel the citizens of heaven and "massa perditionis" (crowd of lost people).

All the events succeed in an antithetical way. Isaac, born from a free woman, was a child of grace; Ishmael, the son of Hagar, was born according to the flesh. The children of humans built the tower of Babylon; Noah, Shem, Jacob, Judah and Moses were citizens of heaven. The earthly Jerusalem was just a shadow of the heavenly city and the temple of Solomon, a type for the Christian Church.

The children of the world established their cities. At the time of the Exodus, they instituted the games of Delphi, and Hercules was honoured in Tyre. When the Judges ruled the Israelites, they invented fables and legends, about Minotaur, Centaurs, Gorgon, Pegasus, Dedalus and Icarus. At the time of the Jewish captivity in Babylon, the natural philosophers, ANAXIMANDER, ANAXIMENES and XENOPHANES lived. Earthly kingdoms rose and fell in Assyria and Argos. The Roman Empire is just another state of this world: it is not a surprise that another Cain founded a city, which was destined to reign over many nations, to be the ruler of the earthly city.

**REAL JUSTICE AND TRUE LOVE**

AUGUSTINE considers that a first mark of a fallen society is the absence of true justice. He makes a clear distinction between the eternal law, identified with the will and wisdom of God, and the imperfect human law. The eternal



law does not suffer any change, but the temporal one has to be adapted to the changes of the society and its efficacy is related to the need of earthly goods.

They constitute a basis for two different cities, but while the former leads the people to the true Kingdom, the latter is just a concession to the human weakness, a deformed image of the true justice. The temporal law does not help the citizens to become virtuous but takes care of the body and its external needs.

AUGUSTINE believes that injustice is an unavoidable part of civil life: in human trials, corrupted judges often condemn the innocent and guilty persons live a happy life. No state could be called just, since his inhabitants are not just. For this reason, AUGUSTINE rejects CICERO's definition of the republic: the will of the people which forms an assembly associated by a common acknowledgement of right and by a community of interests. We cannot speak on earth about a true justice and where there is no justice, there is no right. So, there cannot be a common acknowledgement of right and therefore there is no people (*populus*) who can form a republic.

AUGUSTINE maintains that people are not united by law but by the common objects of their love. In order to discover the character of any people we only have to observe what they love. In fact, "civitas Dei" is governed by the love of God and "civitas terrena" is governed by self-love. The heavenly city is bound by a love that transcends time, race, nationality or institutions and the citizens do not need other laws except the law of love. They are governed by the principle "love and do whatever you want". The people of the earthly kingdom are possessed by love for material goods, which they do not want to share with others.

A person who followed the same principle founded Rome: Romulus never knew that love does not divide but multiply possession. Guided by this false love, the children of *saeculum* try to obtain the earthly values through egoistic ways. Injustice proceeds from disordered love. The love of the earth is blind while the heavenly one is conscious: "Rome made its founder Romulus a god because it loved him but the Church loved Christ because it believed Him to be God", said AUGUSTINE.

### CHRISTIANS AND THE STATE

For AUGUSTINE, the state is just a necessary evil that maintains an external peace and overcomes violence. Its purpose is not to promote a moral order but to force its citizens to avoid violent acts. The state is a non-natural institution. The law, the private property and the army are just marks of the sin and do not belong to the original plan of creation. AUGUSTINE compares the earthly kingdoms to bands of robbers. The only difference is that nobody can punish an emperor.

The state has to be considered, according to AUGUSTINE, a remedial instrument, which prevents greater evils. While EUSEBIUS adopted the assumption that the Christian Roman Empire could embrace the standards of the Gospel, AUGUSTINE stresses that the two cities cannot be united in a perfect Christian state. The real city does not need all the earthly institutions and it leads to the end of all the political structures.

The question could be raised about what attitude should be adopted by Christians, regarding the secular coercive instruments. Should they fight against them, try to transform it or better refuse any cooperation with it? The bishop of Hippo is convinced that Christians should not behave like the Donatists, who ran away from society in order to preserve their holiness. They have to coexist with the sinners as the wheat does with the tares and wait for the harvest.

The world is the space where Christians and non-Christians have to meet. The children of heaven, aliens on this earth, must respect the secular institution, considering them non-natural but necessary to overcome violence.

The leaderships can be unjust but God positions them with a special purpose, according to the divine economy. The heavenly people should not fight against them. It is impossible to change a fallen society and this is not a mission of Christians who have their own society. They have a heavenly life on earth, even though they respect the rules of the *saeculum*. They are humble before the rulers of this world not by fear or by conviction, but because God allowed these leaders to exist.

The secular state can have an educative role for the Christians in a negative way. Disgusted by the evils of the society they understand better how important the achievement of the real citizenship is. The state can also play a positive role by persecuting the heretics and helping the Christians to keep the true faith, as it happened with the Donatists. Here AUGUSTINE accepts an intervention of the secular power, but considers it an exception in order to eliminate the "dry branches".

AUGUSTINE considers that Christians can be officials of the state but that they should not forget their real citizenship and use their power for the sake of the people. The heavenly virtue and the political power can coexist occasionally in the person of a Christian emperor, without being mixed together. There have been examples of citizens of heaven ruling the earthly states. These emperors must take care of the material problems of the state but they should not forget their real kingdom and its requirements. Christian emperors continue to be pilgrims in a foreign and sinful society.

Rejecting Byzantine nationalism, AUGUSTINE thinks that Christians do not belong to a certain state, but rather transcend all temporary institutions: "This heavenly city while it sojourns on earth, calls citizens out of all nations and gathers together a society of pilgrims of all languages, not scrupling about diversities in the manners, laws and institutions whereby earthly peace is secured and maintained, but recognizing that, however various these are, they all tend to one and the same end of the earthly peace."

Another problem raised is whether the Christian Church should be identified with the city of God. It is obvious in *De Civitate Dei* that the Church as visible earthly institution cannot be identified with the city of God. Only the Church as a gathering of all just persons from all the ages and places can be called "Civitas Dei". Even this is not the final, perfect and everlasting kingdom; it contains the seeds and foretaste of this reality and is the bride of Christ, a "Queen City".

## THE ATTITUDE TOWARDS DOMINATION

Another feature that differentiates the citizens of the two cities is the desire for domination. Losing the contact with the very God, the children of flesh try to compensate this by dominating their fellows and the material goods. This is a false domination because in fact they become slaves of earthly goods. Adam wanted to rule without God, considering himself as a centre of earthly values.

The children of heaven replace this lust of domination with love, by using material goods because they are necessary for this life and are reminders of the Creator. They live with their fellow human beings in harmony and mutual love. For this reason "civitas terrena" has a history of wars and "civitas Dei" is a foretaste of the eternal peace.

AUGUSTINE rejects the idea of domination but accepts the hierarchy of the state as a necessary evil, which keeps under control the "libido dominandi", the sinister shadow on the love of God. By contrary, in the heavenly kingdom, the exercise of authority must be conceived as service. The dominion over fellows is considered non-natural, a regrettable consequence of the fall.

The children of earth love the lust of power but the children of heaven consider God their power. As long as we are not able to dominate the passions, we cannot claim complete self-determination and cannot lead the others. First we must be our own masters, then we can relate to our neighbours, not like masters, but like components of one body. Christians should act as organs of a body, by having different functions without dominating the others: "In the blessed city there shall be this great blessing, that no inferior shall envy any superior, as now the archangels are not envied by the angels...as in the body the finger does not seek to be the eye, though both members are harmoniously included in the complete structure of the body." For the same reason, slavery is a non-natural institution, a sign of the fall.

Possessed by the "libido dominandi", the sons of this world have been from the beginning kings and warriors, exercising their power by conquering and subduing. Sinners do not like to share and live in harmony like the redeemed, and for this reason the city of earth is divided into fragments that fight continuously. Therefore, the source of war is nothing less than perverted will and misdirected passion.

One of the main features of "civitas Dei" is the gift of peace as a foretaste of the everlasting heavenly peace. Christians should not use force or start wars even when they are persecuted. In contrast, the children of flesh break the external peace because they do not have peace

in their souls and cannot resolve the tension between spirit and flesh. Still, in a fallen condition they keep the idea of peace as a value: they do not start wars to provoke everlasting conflicts but to attain a favourable peace, a perverted peace, imposed by force.

The heavenly peace of communion and mutual love is important. This peace is not imposed but arises as a natural consequence. It is the perfectly ordered and harmonious enjoyment in God and of one another in God. Even "Pax Romana" will not last, as it is unnatural and imposed by force. An empire founded on a fratricide cannot find its peace. The Romans, ignoring real harmony, tried to establish their own harmony, based on self-control, military discipline and well-organized political institutions.

## THE CONTEMPORARY AUGUSTINE

Under the influence of Platonic philosophy, the relationship between Church and state lost the characteristics of the Byzantine symphony. The bishop of Hippo rejects the assumption of EUSEBIUS that the Roman Empire can become holy, embracing Christianity. The two "cities" are two distinct realities and the only common denominator is the short period, while the citizens of heaven are pilgrims on earth. All the institutions of the state are considered non-natural, but necessary to overcome greater conflicts.

This conception changed the entire history of Western Europe, and its echoes stood at the basis of the modern Western society. This dualistic thought is still present in our age. Many Christians consider the institutions of the state dangerous traps for their spiritual life and refuse to be involved in these structures.

Some Christians leave the crowded cities to live in peaceful places isolated from the "sinful" world. The Platonic perception, adopted by AUGUSTINE, is still alive. Maybe we live in a sinful world and there is a gap between

our real goal and the earthly issues. The history of the Byzantine Empire proved that it could be dangerous to mix "civitas Dei" and "civitas terrena".

Still I believe that the two worlds could be complementary. Good Christians have to live in the world and they have to influence it. Rejection is not a solution, because we received from God the important task to reshape and transform this world. We must be the good dough, involved in the secular state. Of course, we cannot make the state a Christian institution, but the citizens could become better Christians in their ways towards the everlasting kingdom.



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