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- *Politics and Controversy* -

*A Study of the Influence of the Donatist and  
Pelagian Controversies on the Political Thought of  
St Augustine of Hippo*

*By*

*Katherine Charnaud*

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- 8 AUG 2007

## *Introduction*

‘One can consider Saint Augustine as the first modern man.’<sup>1</sup> His works successfully bridged the chasm that emerged between two radically different worlds, the Christianised political thought of the Middle Ages and the classical world of antiquity’s optimistic politics of perfection. As a renowned bishop his extensive correspondence was widely read throughout the Latin-speaking world allowing his sermons, treatises and letters to reach a wide and socially varied audience. Accordingly his theological and philosophical light was shed from Africa across Christendom and beyond, exercising influence over thousands of lives. ‘To the men of his own time he uttered profitable words. He knew how to explain their own souls to them, to console them from the calamities of the world.’<sup>2</sup> Even after the attrition of several centuries his theological authority has not abated, in particular aspects he is a man whose work provides lessons for every age. Remarkably his work remains relevant and applicable to modern life while providing the political historian with dilemmas facing a theorist of Christian antiquity.

Despite his enduring influence Augustine’s life was not without difficulty. From a young age he was plagued by controversy and conflict, and it is this dimension of his life that forms the focus of this thesis. The controversies in which he was embroiled were fierce in character, demanding attention for long periods, and requiring Augustine to arm himself with the arsenal of all his intellectual and rhetorical strength. It is in his anti-heretical writings that Augustine reveals to the reader the power of what has been recognised as one of the greatest minds of Latin literature, and in which he leaves his indelible mark on Western theology, in particular that of the Middle Ages. Augustine initially fights controversy against himself and the human instincts that he holds to be the deadliest temptations that confront mankind, and which he articulates in his *Confessions*. In later years the controversies

<sup>1</sup> J.J.O’Meara, ‘The Immaterial and Material in Augustine’s Thought’ in J.Petruccione (ed.) *Nova & Vetera: Patristic Studies in Honour of Thomas Patrick Halton* (Washington D.C, The Catholic University of America Press, 1998) p.181

<sup>2</sup> Duchesne quoted in F.A.Wright, *Fathers of the Church: Tertullian, Cyprian, Arnobius, Lactantius, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine – A Selection from the Writings of the Latin Fathers* (London, George Routledge & Sons Ltd., 1928) p.270



changed course and were targeted against various forms of heresy, which went on to distract the Catholic Church throughout the fourth and fifth centuries.

It is two of the most pernicious of these heresies, Donatism and Pelagianism, that this thesis will investigate, evaluating the influence they had on Augustine's theology and subsequently his political 'doctrines'. These first of these two heresies was Donatism, whose adherents were strict puritans who believed that the efficacy of the Sacraments was dependent upon the purity of the ministrant. The second of the two heresies was Pelagianism, which to Augustine's mind was the most dangerous of all. The Pelagians, followers of the British monk Pelagius, maintained that Adam's sin was just that, Adam's, and had not contaminated humanity as a whole. Rather men are born into the world good with the freedom of choice in how they direct their lives.

This thesis will investigate Donatism and Pelagianism firstly by paying careful attention to the theological disputes at the heart of each controversy. It will then assess the influence they both exercised over the developmental process of Augustine's political philosophy. It is essential that they both be considered in this manner as Augustine was first and foremost a theological man, a bishop, with pastoral and devotional concerns. He was not a political theorist akin to Plato or Aristotle and any remarks or 'theories' he formulated on the nature and purpose of politics and society were expounded in a purely incidental manner. Therefore, to achieve an accurate analysis of the effects of controversy on Augustine's politics this thesis will consider Augustine's 'political theory' within its theological context, since it was the theological threat that inspired Augustine's reaction and what has become his 'political thought'.

'In the case of the Donatists he championed the cause of those who did not claim to be purists, and he even used forces, if only in the end, to overcome these opponents.'<sup>3</sup> The controversy saw him develop a theory of secular intervention in ecclesiastical affairs and define the roles of State and Church. Against the Pelagians, however, Augustine 'championed the cause of those who relied wholly on God's

<sup>3</sup> O'Meara, *The Immaterial and Material* p.193

grace since they accepted that they could merit nothing of themselves. The exercise of virtue did not attract that grace; the neglect of virtue did not repel it. Nevertheless, not to have been the object of God's unmerited grace in this life resulted in never-ending Hell.<sup>4</sup> It was during the Pelagian controversy that Augustine addressed the purpose and functions of the State in the light of mankind's sinful nature. His writings on the condition of mankind since the Fall saw him present a brutal and realist approach to the emergence of the State and the role it plays in the life of the individual and society.

These theoretical developments will form the subject of this thesis's investigation. In short, this thesis aims to follow the development of Augustinian 'political thought' through the eyes of controversy to track the theoretical evolution of doctrines that were shaped by the influence of the daily challenges Augustine faced while embroiled in two of the controversies that so dominated his episcopal life.

Chapter I will pay particular attention to the origins and causes of the Donatist controversy. It will also assess the divergence between the two sides' conceptions of the fundamental issue of the debate, the nature of the Church. Chapter II will firstly consider the effect the controversy had on Augustine's policy of religious coercion and his political theology as a whole. Secondly, it will consider the decline and disappearance of Donatism and whether Augustine actually succeeded in unifying the divisions of the Catholic Church. Chapter III will begin the analysis of the Pelagian controversy. It will look at the different branches of the Pelagian movement including Pelagius and Augustine's interaction with Julian of Eclanum, finally addressing the Semi-Pelagians. This chapter will concentrate on the theological foundations of each group with special consideration being devoted to the concepts of original sin and divine grace. Chapter IV will assess Augustine's position on these issues and the roots of the threat he believed Pelagianism embodied. This chapter will also consider the debates surrounding Augustine's ideal of free will, whether it is compatible with his theory of predestination and whether a just God could possibly be a predestinating God.

<sup>4</sup> O'Meara, *The Immaterial and Material* p.193

Finally, Chapter V will look at Augustine's conception of the State and why his theory of political organisation has seen him labelled as a staunch 'realist'. It is in this chapter that a picture of Augustine's 'political theology' will be painted while heeding the fact that Augustine was not a 'political theorist', and that in using such a tactic to construct a cohesive body of thought one is using an approach that was never taken by Augustine himself. The chapter will look predominantly, though not exclusively, at the role and purpose of the State. It will also consider other political institutions such as private property and slavery, as well as Augustine's distinctive concept of civil disobedience. Finally the chapter will acknowledge the influence Augustine's 'political theology' exercised over political thought throughout the Middle Ages.

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## *Chapter I*

### *Donatism – Disunity within the Catholic Church*

#### *Augustine and Donatism*

The essence of the problem posed by Donatism is one that has recurred throughout the history of the Christian Church: how to reconcile the holiness of the Church with the actual sinfulness of its earthly members.<sup>5</sup> It was through this controversy that Augustine was spurred into an exposition of the question of the relations between the Church and State, an issue that will be considered later in this thesis. That said, it is important firstly to understand the origins of this dispute and the nature of Augustine's involvement with Donatism. That is to say, whether the controversy was driven by theological, political or social concerns and what effects these multi-faceted motivations had on Augustine's theoretical development. In particular, the author must examine what set of circumstances forced the Catholic Church into the arms of the State, and led Augustine into a revision of his views on the intervention of secular power in ecclesiastical affairs. Between 395CE and 400CE it is possible to see the beginnings of Augustine's shift towards a position on the approval of state intervention, which had previously been something he had repudiated in favour of reasoned argument.

Donatism was the most serious and defiant division of the North African Church, lasting for a known existence of nearly three centuries<sup>6</sup> through repression by the authorities and the arguments of several influential Catholic writers, like St Augustine. This schism was among the principal anxieties that beset Augustine's episcopate: arguably this single controversy expended more of Augustine's energies during his bishopric than all the other controversies of his career combined. 'This schism came into existence after the great Diocletian Persecution, having

<sup>5</sup> G. Willis, *Saint Augustine* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999) p.xii

<sup>6</sup> W.H.C.Frend, *Donatist Church; A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1952) p.2

separated itself from the main body on the question of the Lapsed. In Africa the Donatists formed a strong party and kept up their organisation for a couple of centuries, holding Catholic doctrine, but refusing communion both with the Lapsed and those who had received the Lapsed.’<sup>7</sup> Hardly a year passed during Augustine’s engagement with the controversy when he did not produce some form of anti-Donatist work. Both the intrinsic importance of Donatism and the dominant position it assumed within Augustine’s career necessitate its pivotal place in any investigation into Augustine’s doctrinal development. It is the influences the controversy had on Augustinian doctrine that are the focus of this thesis, specifically his attitude towards religious coercion. This thesis will argue that Donatism, despite being essentially theological in its motivations, had a formative influence over the development of Augustine’s ‘political theology’. It will contend that Donatism was the major factor in the change of heart Augustine experienced regarding his approach to religious coercion. To such an extent that had Augustine never come up against the threat of the Donatist Church it is quite possible that he would have continued in his more liberal stance on the coercion of heretics.

‘When Augustine returned to his native Africa in 388, he came as a recent convert to a Church already venerable in its martyrs, a Church with a theological tradition dating back to Tertullian and Cyprian. It was also a Church deeply divided. The unity for which Cyprian had striven in the middle years of the third century had been disrupted by the bitter dispute over the Carthaginian See in the early years of the Constantinian peace.’<sup>8</sup> Thus, from the start of his presbyterate Augustine was faced with the menace of Donatism, which despite being confined to the African provinces was stronger and more widespread within that area than ever before. It had flourished under the leadership of Parmenian, who alongside Tyconius is largely responsible for the survival of the Donatist Church’s intellectual predominance in Africa until Augustine’s time.

<sup>7</sup> J.A. Robinson, *Texts and Studies: Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature Vol. III* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1895) p.xi

<sup>8</sup> W. Bright, *The Book of Rules of Tyconius: Its Purpose and Inner Logic* (Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p.19

It is in this context in which the controversy occurred that will form the focus of Chapter I. Through a thorough understanding of the background of the Donatist movement and the events surrounding the controversy a fuller picture of the environment in which Augustine was working as well as the practical concerns that stimulated such an impassioned response will be painted. This will place Augustine's 'political theology' within the context from which it originated and enable a more accurate assessment of the influence Donatism exercised on the development of Augustinian political doctrine. It is, therefore, important to consider the origins of this schismatic Church, where their theology stemmed from, and what it was that caused them to separate from the Catholic Church. It is only through gaining a full understanding of this that one can adequately appreciate the context in which Augustine's reaction to the schism was generated, and the effect Donatism had on his conception of the nature of the Church and his position on religious coercion.

### *The Causes and Origins of Donatism and the Donatist Church*

#### *(i) The foundations of the pure Church – Tertullian and Cyprian*

Tertullian can be attributed with the systematisation of the rigorist religion characterised by confession and martyrdom under the auspice of the Holy Spirit. Through his fusion of argument and scripture and his analysis and development of biblical concepts Tertullian liberated Christian thought from the Greek ties of its beginnings.<sup>9</sup> Although it is not possible to take into account his work in full, some influential aspects of Tertullian's religious thought will now be considered, with particular respect to the contribution they made to African theology, most importantly Donatism.

<sup>9</sup> E.Osborn, *Tertullian, First Theologian of the West* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997) p.xiii

Tertullian's religion was sectarian with an emphasis on the virtues of poverty and abstinence, asserting a church of the spirit through the membership of spirited individuals. He 'was a man in love with truth which he identified with a puritanical and martyr-directed Christianity ... all the time his wit, his exaggeration and malice were turned to one end, the vindication of Christianity against the Greco-Roman world in preparation for the millennium of the saints.'<sup>10</sup> He saw the Church as a sect of dedicated individuals and the Church as the dwelling of the Holy Spirit. This conviction in the involvement of the Holy Spirit prevented any form of cooperation between Christianity and pagan society and government. True service to Christ required turning one's back on secular institutions. Thus, Tertullian asserts 'what is more foreign to us than the State?' This was a question that was posed similarly by the Donatist Church during the fourth century. This drive for purity and unity is emphasised in several metaphors throughout Tertullian's ecclesiology. The most famous is that of the granary floor, later used by Cyprian and then Augustine, although for a different purpose. For Tertullian this analogy implied the separation of the wheat and chaff, the worthy from unworthy. It represented the purging of the unworthy from the Church through the temporal tests of heresy and persecution designed by God to refine His Church's flock into one of purity.

In Tertullian's time the Church was starting to divide between the rigorists' demands for purity, and those who held the Church as a 'mixed body' on earth and believed there was some scope for accommodating pagan society. The rigorists regarded the Church as an exclusive body comprised of the elect constantly waiting for the Last Days, with a sincere belief in the necessity of a pure membership. It was this ever more morally rigorist view of a Church of the pure which led Tertullian to join the Donatist sect. A direct result of his increasingly insatiable desire to rid the Church of sin and emancipate the pure, holy, and spiritual true Christians from the shackles of the hierarchical control of the Catholic Church.

A prominent theme originating with Tertullian, which was later developed by the Donatist ecclesiology, was the idea that the Church should be the spotless bride of

<sup>10</sup> W.H.C.Frend, *The Early Church: from the beginnings to 461*, (London, SCM Press, 1982) p.80

Christ, without wrinkle. This emerged alongside the idea of the Church of martyrs and both were ideas that Cyprian and Donatus would in turn sustain, although not to Tertullian's levels of zealotry. For Tertullian there was one true Church, since there was only one Christ and only one spouse of Christ. This notion of one true Church forms an important aspect of the Donatist theology. It was Tertullian who linked the Church as the Mother to baptism, making the Church the sole source of baptismal regeneration. Heretics, having cut themselves off from the communion of the one true Church cannot produce the spiritual effect of baptism, as they do not possess the baptism of Christ. Tertullian asserted that if the minister of a sacrament was outside the fold of the true Church, his sacraments could bear no efficacy, but are nullified by disunity. For Tertullian it was the sanctity of the minister that enables the effective invocation of God, which in turn gives spiritual efficacy to the water of baptism; without ministerial sanctity the baptismal water is profane.

Tertullian compares 'a human being, the creature of God, to a water-organ from which musical sounds can be educed by a touch of the hand, he argues that God is able to produce a sublime spiritual note in a human being, His organ, through the imposition of "holy hands."' <sup>11</sup> This implies that the minister who imparts the sanctity of baptism must possess sanctity, they must have 'holy hands', since no-one can confer sanctity if they do not possess it themselves. Tertullian firmly believed that without baptism no-one could be saved and that salvation could not be achieved outside the confines of the Church. His view of rebaptism was later reiterated and authoritatively sanctioned by Agrippinus at his Council. It was at this Council that Tertullian's rigorist attitude towards heretics and his total repudiation of the validity of their baptism informed the bishops of the day. The weight of his arguments can be credited with influencing Agrippinus' Council and impelling them towards their final decision on the practice of rebaptism. This Tertullianic teaching on the material concept of sacramental efficacy was one of the most pernicious legacies of African theology, motivating similar arguments within the Donatist Church, thus fuelling much of the debate between Augustine and the schismatics.

<sup>11</sup> C.B.Daly, *Tertullian the Puritan and his Influence* (Dublin, Four Courts Press, 1993) p.56

This brief assessment of Tertullian's work illustrates the significant impression his work left on the first centuries of Christianity and the notable influence he had on the formation his successors in the North African Church. 'The direction which Tertullian gave to the Church in the West has never been wholly lost. He was the father of Donatism, and ultimately, the ancestor of all puritan nonconformity. His was one of the formative minds of European civilisation.'<sup>12</sup>

In leaving Tertullian and moving on a generation one comes across the next important figure in the development of the Donatist Church, Cyprian, a wealthy former lawyer. Despite being no great speculative theologian<sup>13</sup> Cyprian's contribution to the theology of the Church and salvation through the Church was considerable. While he is widely considered to be the intellectual heir of Tertullian, drawing considerable influence from Tertullian's work, it is important to recognise his rejection of Tertullian's more puritanical ideas.

Cyprian was a convert to Christianity as an adult and never forgot the baptism that brought the forgiveness of his sins, and holiness through the holiness of the Holy Spirit. Although many changes had occurred in the African Church during the generation that separated Tertullian and Cyprian, the underlying rigorist tradition remained. Bonner draws attention to two particularly important episodes that must be considered when investigating the role Cyprian played in the evolution of the Donatist movement. Firstly, we must examine Cyprian's attitude towards the *lapsi*, those Christians who fell away from Faith by displaying weakness in the face of torture, who denied the Faith by sacrificing to the heathen gods or by other acts during the period of persecution under the rule of Decius and Valerian. The imperial edict that sought the extermination of Christianity required every Christian to perform an act of idolatry, one of the three capital sins entailing exclusion from the Church. A great number of the laity and even members of the clergy, when threatened with severe punishment or death, apostatised. Many flocked to the altars to offer incense to the genius of the emperor and heathen gods in an at-

<sup>12</sup> W.H.C.Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church; A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1965) p.366

<sup>13</sup> R.A.Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970) p.108

tempt to preserve themselves from persecution and protect their property, freedom, and lives. Many did not possess the courage to hold fast to their faith and proclaim its authority when confronted with the confiscation of material items and physical punishments. Following the end of the persecution this group begged for forgiveness and permission to once again receive the sacraments. It was this demand that began the division within the North African Church.

As Willis asserts, the severe disciplinary problem that culminated towards the end of every period of persecution gave force to the rigorist cause that developed within the Catholic Church. This faction of the Church believed there could be no pardon in this life for an individual who had forsaken their Christian baptism and effectively re-crucifying Christ. They believed a sinner of this severity deserved to lead a life of repentance and exclusion from the Church and its sacraments. Cyprian approached the issue with a combination of firmness and mildness. He believed the rigorist position that absolution could never be given in this life ‘as calculated to drive the penitent to despair.’<sup>14</sup> At a council of African bishops held in Carthage in 251 under Cyprian’s presidency, it was declared that the *libellatici*, those who had not sacrificed, but had deviously obtained certificates of sacrifice from the imperial officials, should be reconciled after penance. While the *thurificati*, who had offered sacrifices under persecution, and the *sacrificati*, who had made sacrifices to the idols, should do penance and only be readmitted if in danger of death. At a subsequent Carthaginian synod it was decided that all *lapsi* who had undergone public penance should be readmitted to full communion with the Church.

The second episode to consider is the controversy Cyprian was involved in with St Stephen, Bishop of Rome, in 256. This was the same year that Cyprian's views on baptism were endorsed by the African bishops. This debate concerned the issue of rebaptism, which was not welcomed by the Roman Church. Cyprian propounded that outside the Church there can be no valid ministry as there is no valid spirituality. Thus, there is only one baptism, that of the Catholic Church, and anyone coming to be cleansed and sanctified by the truth of saving water is not re-

<sup>14</sup> G.Bonner, *St Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies* (London, SCM Press, 1963) p.279

baptised, but truly baptised for the first time. Cyprian expressed his views in favour of rebaptism in a letter to Magnus regarding the rebaptism of converts from the Novotian schism. He believed that such rebaptism was 'the solemn moment of renunciation of the pagan world and all that it stood for. The Holy Spirit was in its waters. After emerging from the waters of the baptismal font, the Christian could count himself among those predestined to salvation.'<sup>15</sup> The African decision on this matter was not well received in Rome, partly as the Novotian schism, which had been relatively easy to crush in Africa, remained a sizeable problem in Rome. The Roman Church believed that penance followed by the laying on of hands was sufficient. The outcome of this event is unknown, as is whether St Stephen carried out his threat to excommunicate Cyprian. However, in 258 Cyprian was martyred and his thought and teaching sanctified, and he became a dominant influence on African religious doctrine. Certain aspects acquired a lasting fame in the Donatist movement, which is readily accepted as one of the most remarkable in the history of the Catholic Church.

It is important to recognise the dominant influence of Cyprianic doctrine in the theology of the Donatist controversy. Cyprian was not utilised by just one party, but both. The Catholics and the Donatists alike claimed him as an inspiration and made use of his life and works in support of their own radically different doctrines. To most of the African people Cyprian was a hero, the 'martyr-bishop' of Carthage, who was honoured not only in Africa, but in Rome and even as far the Christian east. Bonner asserts that Cyprian's influence was not derived so much from his writings, for he was far from the intellectual equal of Tertullian and Augustine, but from his personality and character. His concerns focused on the practical application of theological principles as opposed to speculation. This thesis will now look at how Cyprian's teachings were drawn on by both the Donatist and Catholic sides of the controversy.

The Donatist's use of Cyprianic doctrine as justification for their schism will be examined first. The aspects of Cyprian's teaching from which the Donatist Church drew their inspiration are different to those used by the Catholics. There is, how-

<sup>15</sup> W.C.H.Frend, *Saints and Sinners in the Early Church: Differing and Conflicting Traditions in the First Six Centuries* (London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985) p.101

ever, a Cyprianic declaration that defines the theological foundation upon which Donatism was built: 'the baptism of those outside the Church is a defilement which begets, not sons of God but children for the devil,' (*De Unitate*). For both Cyprian and the Donatists the validity of the sacraments was reliant on the worthiness of the minister administering them. One who has no grace cannot confer grace. Petilian of Constantine clearly articulated this principle:

'What we look for is the conscience of the giver, giving in holiness, to cleanse that of the recipient. For he who knowingly receives faith from the faithless receives not faith but guilt. For everything consists of an origin and root, and if it have not something for a head, it is nothing, nor does anything well receive second birth, unless it is born again of good seed.'<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, the Donatists made use of Cyprian's writings and teaching on the sacraments. They adhered to the Cyprianic belief that not only were sacraments administered outside the Church valueless, but were actively corrupting rather than sanctifying the recipient. This was grounded in the view that outside the one Church there was no Holy Spirit, thus no spiritual efficacy. To Cyprian the Church was the sole channel to grace and salvation. She alone is the possessor of all sanctification and author of the forgiveness of all sins. Therefore, forgiveness and sanctity can never be efficaciously conferred beyond Her confines. Cyprian taught that those baptised outside the Church require rebaptism on their reception into the true Catholic Church; since the remission of sins is only given within the fold of the Catholic Church, which alone can generate sons of God.<sup>17</sup> Cyprian believed baptism was the sole way that the sons of Christ were spiritually generated, and that this baptism could only be effective if administered within the unity of the Catholic Church. It is only through the spouse of Christ, who alone is bound in wedlock to Christ that such a spiritual generation can occur. Those not born

<sup>16</sup> *C. Litt. Pet.*, III,xx,23.

<sup>17</sup> W.J.Sparrow Simpson, *Saint Augustine and African Church Divisions* (London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1910) p.70

within the true Church cannot be the true sons of God, as the Church was not their Mother and God was not their Father.

The Donatists claimed the Catholics were directly descended from the *traditores*, and thus had passed outside the confines of the true Church; a result of remaining in communion with those infected with the guilt of *traditio*. The Donatists believed this rendered their sacraments invalid and anyone returning to the unity of the true church - that of Donatus - would necessarily require rebaptism. This was symbolised in the analogy of Noah's ark. This analogy states that just as no one outside the ark could be saved from the floods, no one outside the Church can be saved from damnation. It is only those that remain safely within the ark that are saved; similarly only those that remain within the confines of the Church are redeemed by the absolving waters of the Church's baptism. Augustine rejected this assertion on both doctrinal and historical grounds, asserting it to be one of the Donatist's gravest errors, rendering them not only schismatics but heretics as well.

In contrast Augustine asserted that every time the sacraments are administered the same minister is responsible, Christ. He makes a clear distinction between baptismal power, which is an act attributable to Christ alone, and the role played by the ministry, which is that of a human agent. Maintaining at all times that there is only one baptism for the remission of sins by the Church and that in every case it is Christ who baptises with the Holy Spirit. He alone is the sole giver of the Sacraments. On this principle Augustine asserts that the notion of a 'Donatist' baptism is false and that Christ's baptism can persist validly anywhere, even outside the confines of the Catholic Church. The minister, who acts as the human agent in the process, imparts nothing of his own to the Sacrament that he confers. Ministers cannot by their individual unworthiness corrupt Christ's sanctity through the conferral of His Sacraments. The institution itself remains objectively holy.

'The baptism which is now given is equally valid to those who receive it in spite of the unequal merit of those who give it, because it is the baptism of Christ, not of those by whom it is administered ... because it was Christ's, even though it was not

given to them by their equals, it was equally effective to those who received it.’<sup>18</sup>

In line with this thinking, Augustine maintains that the baptism of the Donatists is valid. It is not profitable and provides no advance towards salvation, but is valid nonetheless. ‘Between the baptism of Christ given by an Apostle and the baptism of Christ given by a heretic there is no difference.’<sup>19</sup> Augustine holds that although Christ’s Sacrament can be given as validly outside the Visible Church as within it, the salvific effects of the Sacrament are withheld for the duration of the recipients’ persistence in schism. For although the Sacrament’s objective work remains unscathed and constant its effectiveness relies upon an individual’s union with the Church. In the same way unbelief or impenitence obstructs the Sacrament’s effect on the soul until they are removed.

In rejecting the historical basis for this Donatist theory of rebaptism it was impossible for Augustine not to reject the teachings of Cyprian, who was widely admired as the greatest among prelates. However, Augustine managed this with both skill and delicacy. He expressed his greatest admiration of the sanctity and character of Cyprian while simultaneously distancing himself from Cyprian’s work. He did this by asserting that Cyprian was incorrect but that his mistake had been providentially permitted. Augustine shows how Agrippinus, Cyprian’s predecessor, was the first to go against the custom of the Church, with his innovative introduction of rebaptism at the Council of Agrippinus in 251. This, according to Augustine, went against the Scripture, the teaching of the universal Church, and the custom and principles of the ancients. However, Augustine possessed no solid proof that Agrippinus had initiated the practice, only that he was the first to officially sanction it. As was illustrated before, this suggests that it may have been Tertullian who initially laid the foundations for the theory of this distinctly African practice, when he asserted the doctrinal principle that necessitates the rebaptism of converts from heretical sects.

<sup>18</sup> *Epist. 93*

<sup>19</sup> *Epist. 93*

The ancient custom of the Church had been a refusal to reiterate baptism; it was the apostolic tradition. Therefore, the African practice of rebaptism was perceived as a corruption of this traditional observance. Although Cyprian's opponents advised him that his theory was in contradiction with ancient custom, their arguments were too feeble to influence Cyprian's strong-mindedness, who chose to stick to his own view of reason triumphing over custom following Tertullian's principle: 'Our Lord called himself Truth, not Custom.' What Augustine did in disallowing rebaptism was to appeal to a custom that had existed before Cyprian. He evoked an earlier custom and practice that he maintained should have been remained intact, firstly since it was the original practice and secondly, because it when it had been changed it was done so on a false premise. Even Cyprian had admitted that rebaptism was an innovative practice that had come into force as a result of his influence over a Carthaginian Council, and later continued to spread after his death.

'Rebaptism was an innovation as Cyprian himself admits. It came in through Cyprian's personal influence over the Carthaginian Council; and became widely extended in Africa during the interval of forty years between Cyprian's martyrdom and Diocletian's persecution.'<sup>20</sup>

Cyprian's influence was also utilised on the Catholic side of the controversy to emphasise the importance of ecclesiastical unity and the antithesis between the Catholic Church and heresy. His works and teachings can be seen to have exercised significant influence on the work of St Augustine. In *Contra Gaudentium II* Augustine quotes Cyprian directly using his definition of the Catholic doctrine against Puritanism, while in his attempts to 'demolish the puritan ecclesiology of the Donatists, he [Augustine] could find no better language in which to do so than the statements of St Cyprian.'<sup>21</sup> This was despite Augustine's necessary correction of Cyprian's erroneous limitation of spiritual efficacy to the confines of the one Church, a doctrine that had far reaching consequences for Cyprian's entire sacramental theology. Cyprian's views on Catholic unity, the tolerance of sinners within the Church, and the salvific function of the true Church, remained virtually

<sup>20</sup> Sparrow Simpson, *Saint Augustine*, p.84

<sup>21</sup> Daly, *Tertullian*, p.36

untouched by Augustine. Cyprian stood as a champion of traditional Catholic teaching against Puritanism, in its Monatist and Novatianist forms.

The concept of the oneness of the Church is axiomatic to Cyprian's theology. In his *De Unitate* Cyprian was particularly concerned with unity, seeing it as the essential characteristic of the Church. His doctrine of unity was founded upon one member of the apostolic college, St Peter, and heavily influenced by both Tertullianic and Pauline text: 'One body and one spirit – one Lord, one faith, one baptism' (Eph. 4:4-5), a text which was legitimately altered by Tertullian, replacing the 'one body' spoken of by St Paul to 'one Church.' 'God is one, Christ is one, and His Church is one, and the faith is one, and the people is joined together in a unity of substance by the cement of this concord.'<sup>22</sup> This view of unity is clearly echoed in the Catholics' attempts to reunify the Church following the separation of the Donatist schism. In his letter to Vincent, Augustine, states:

'Doubtless, you observe that this great man [Cyprian], this peace-loving bishop, this bravest of martyrs, accomplished his most active work in preventing the bond on unity from being broken...notice, moreover, the very point which he stresses against the impious separatists.'<sup>23</sup>

Cyprian perceived the Church of Christ as One Holy Catholic Church, an image which can be located in various Scriptural extracts; it is a seamless and indivisible garment woven throughout from top to bottom, it is one flock under the Good Shepherd.<sup>24</sup> Every Christian should hold to this unity of the Church, especially bishops, who should demonstrate it in a single and unified episcopate, protecting their flock from the heretical enemies of unity. Cyprian maintained that this unity is unimpaired by there being numerous bishops. He draws several analogies. The Church is like the sun, there is only one sun but from many rays shine forth. Similarly a tree may have several branches, but they all share one root. If you take away the rays of the sun or the branches of the tree, no light can shine forth, no

<sup>22</sup> Cyprian, *De Unitate* in Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, p.418

<sup>23</sup> *Epist.* 93

<sup>24</sup> Bonner, *Augustine*, p.280

fruit is borne. Likewise with the Church there is but one Head but through Her bishops, Her rays and branches, are enabled to spread world wide. Cyprian's life and teachings were one long campaign on behalf of the holiness and unity of the Catholic Church.

Cyprian viewed heresy as the disruption of Catholic unity, holding it to be the worst and only unforgivable sin. It is the formal and deliberate guilt of the 'enemies of Christ.' In Cyprianic doctrine heretics are perceived to have severed themselves from the house of God, abandoning the origin and source of truth and all that makes them Christian. Cyprian saw heresy as 'a rending of the members of Christ into sundered parts, a tearing apart and mutilating of the Body of the Church. Borrowing from Tertullian's language, he castigated heresy as an adulterous attack upon the virginal purity of the Spouse of Christ.'<sup>25</sup> He warns against the trickery of the enemy, who once took the shape of the serpent, who unsettled by the coming of Christ and checked by the spread of the Gospel embarked upon the trappings of heresy and schism upending faith, distorting truth and splitting the Church all with the intention of deceiving mankind.

Cyprian asserts that since Satan's fall, a result of his malevolent envy of mankind being made in God's image, he has sought to destroy man. Initially he caused man to fall from grace but with the coming of Christ the Devil was exposed. Thus he has had to devise new means of trickery and destruction of the Church of Christ, which have taken the form of schism and heresy, working from within the Church to divide and weaken the Church. 'There is more to fear, more care to be taken, with an enemy who creeps upon us secretly, tricks us with a show of peace and hides his approach by serpentine deviations, true to his name of serpent ... That is how he has tricked us and deceived us from the very beginning of the world.'<sup>26</sup> It was this view of heretics as the Antichrist that led Cyprian to reject the validity of their baptism. How can the heretic, whose heart is possessed by the Antichrist, the enemy of God, minister the divine and spiritual sacraments of baptism? This notion was refuted by Augustine, as shown above.

<sup>25</sup> Daly, *Tertullian*, p.20

<sup>26</sup> Cyprian in J.Daniélou, *The Origins of Latin Christianity* (London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1977) p.426

Augustine emphasised this aspect of unity in Cyprian's writings when stating the wickedness of the Donatists in making a schism, and drew on the same language as Cyprian when likening the Donatists to branches broken from the tree or shoots cut from the vine.

‘Why then, should we not labour together to be grain in the unity of the Lord’s threshing floor? Why should we not tolerate together the chaff? Why not, I ask you? What is the reason? For whose benefit? For what advantage? Tell me! Unity is put to flight so that people purchased by the blood of the one Lamb are fired up against one another by their opposing desires, and the sheep belonging to the head of the house are divided among us, as if they were our own.’<sup>27</sup>

Since the Donatists had also drawn on Cyprianic doctrine Augustine necessarily set about deciphering a new interpretation of the teachings, an interpretation demanded by the changed and schismatic conditions of the African Church. The Donatist view of the Church of Christ was a congregation of the saints, on earth as in heaven. They believed that it was the African Church alone that had broken off from the *traditores* during the persecutions, and thus were the true church, whereas the rest of the world were infected with the guilt of those who apostatised, and thus ceased to be a part of the Church. This accusation levelled by the Donatists lacks evidential support; in fact available records suggest the contrary. Throughout his involvement with the Donatist controversy Augustine asserts the Donatist’s account of the cause of the schism is false, and that historical fact and theological doctrine support this assertion. Augustine maintained that even if the Donatist’s accusations had been accurate, and the Catholics were descended from *traditores* and tainted by their sin, this would not be sufficient cause for the schismatic separation of the Church of Christ.

<sup>27</sup> *Epist. 108*

‘Stay a little longer on the letter of Cyprian, and you will see how little excuse he leaves to the one who, on the pretext of his own righteousness, tries to break away from the unity of the Church, which God promised and fulfilled to all nations.’<sup>28</sup> Augustine emphasises this aspect of Cyprianic doctrine, which the guilt of the schismatic is worse than that of one who has lapsed and now repents. The Donatists claimed that the holiness of their church was defined by the holiness of its members; the congregation of saints. Augustine rejected this claim outright. Several Donatists lived their lives in a manner far removed from that of a saint. Many were drunkards, had questionable morals, not to mention the savage violence of the Circumcellions. However, Augustine asserted ‘in the spirit of Cyprian ... even if their claims had been substantiated by holiness of living, such holiness would have been nullified by the sin of schism ... the schismatic is as one waging civil war against his brothers and must inevitably lack the Holy Spirit, which is the spirit of charity.’<sup>29</sup> It is this emphasis on the unity of the Catholic Church which makes it incredible that Cyprian should also have been invoked so fervently as the patron for the Donatist schism.

### *(ii) The events leading up to the division of the African Church*

The influence of Tertullian and Cyprian on the origins of the Donatist schism has been considered. It is now important to look at the events that culminated in the division of the North African Church in 311-312. Frend asserts that the situation arose directly out of the Great Persecution that broke out on 23 February 303 under the reign of the Emperor Diocletian. This influential period of persecution will now be investigated in more detail, so as to fully understand its importance in the evolution of the Donatist Church.

By the early fourth century Christianity had taken a strong hold in North Africa. The Church had endured the persecutions inflicted upon them by Severus, Decius and Valerian and was fast becoming a religion of all classes not just the poor mi-

<sup>28</sup> *Epist. 93*

<sup>29</sup> Bonner, *Augustine*, p.287

nority. The message of the Church was expanding to incorporate every Roman province in Africa.

A great deal of the character of the Great Persecution is revealed Eusebius and Lacantius' writings, both of whom were eyewitnesses of the events of the period. Diocletian had been emperor for nineteen years, during which Christians had been left in peace, while Diocletian had focused on reconstruction. Eusebius 'describes in glowing terms "the glory and the liberty with which the doctrine of piety was honoured", and ... he tells us that the rulers of the Church "were courted and honoured with the greatest subserviency by all the rulers and governors."'”<sup>30</sup> Eusebius speaks of the considerable increases in the number of adherents to Christianity during this period and the construction of splendid churches to replace the humble buildings of the earlier days of Christianity. It has been suggested that it was Diocletian's division of his responsibilities which ended this prosperous period and led to the persecutions of the early three hundreds.

On assuming power in 284 Diocletian split his responsibilities with a colleague, Maximian, who was to govern the Western provinces of the Empire with the aim of protecting what Diocletian saw as an unwieldy Empire vulnerable to external attack. In 293 each Emperor appointed a Caesar, a deputy, to assist him. Diocletian appointed Galerius, and Maximian appointed Constantius. Had Diocletian remained sole emperor, it is argued that the toleration of his early reign would have continued undisturbed. Instead 'conservative religious values and a desire to secure a minimum of conformity from the "whole race of the Romans" were clearly among the reasons that led Diocletian and his colleagues to try conclusions with the Christians.'<sup>31</sup> Initially it was the Manichees who were found to be foreign inspired religious innovations sapping the 'immemorial customs'. As such those found to be members of the sect were penalised and ordered to hand over their books to be burned.

The break with the Christians was gradual, probably a result of Diocletian being a reluctant persecutor, unlike his more vigorous Caesar, Galerius. In 298 Galerius

<sup>30</sup> Catholic Encyclopaedia, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05007b.htm> [19-10-2004]

<sup>31</sup> Frend, *Early Church*, p.115

became the hero of Rome against Persia; soon after this during 298-302 a number of events took place among the army of Syria and North Africa that began to sow seeds of doubt in Diocletian's mind about the dependability of the Christians. Although Lacantius' account of the motivation behind the persecutions is far from unbiased it does offer an insight into what may have caused a previously tolerant Emperor to be filled with unwonted persecuting zeal. Lacantius maintained that an old and weakened Diocletian was a victim of his own superstitions as well as the overbearing indolence of Galerius. Galerius played upon Diocletian's fears to the extent of setting the palace on fire and attributing the act to the Christians leading the Emperor to believe plots were being hatched against his life. The initial upshot of this was a purge of the army followed by posting of an edict in Nicomedia on 23 February 303. Although Diocletian upheld that there should be no bloodshed a Christian caught tearing down copies of the edict remarking 'more victories over the Goths and Samaritans,' was caught and burned alive.

This first edict was primarily aimed at the clergy. They were called upon to hand over the Scriptures to the Roman authorities and perform some act to honour the existence of the 'immortal gods' to whom the Roman world was committed.<sup>32</sup> It also ordered the destruction of Christian churches, the degrading of any honourable status held by Christians should they persevere in their loyalty to Christianity, and the cessation of any meetings with the intention of Christian worship. Throughout 303-304 three more edicts were published marking the increasing severity of the imperial persecution of Christians. The first ordered all clergy to be arrested and imprisoned. The second dictated that the clergy should be constrained and tortured by any means to force them to make sacrifices to the 'immortal gods'. While the prisons gradually emptied under this edict those who did not recant under interrogation were executed. The third moved on to include the Christian laity in the persecution along with the clergy.

In the spring of 304 the persecution worsened. Diocletian fell ill and effective government automatically transferred to Galerius, who knew no moderation. He ordered a day of general sacrifice throughout the Empire, with the penalty for dis-

<sup>32</sup> W.H.C.Frend, *Religion Popular and Unpopular in the Early Christian Centuries* (London, Variorum Reprints) p.144

obedience being death or the mines. On his recovery from illness Diocletian was persuaded to retire from governing, and he and Maximian, abdicated on 1 May 305. The persecutions began to flag towards the end of 304 with the last recorded trial of a Christian being held in December 304;<sup>33</sup> by 305 the Persecution had ended. However, this did not bring peace and unification to the Christian Church. Far from it, a considerable number of people, including the high ranking members of the clergy, were known to have made sacrifices thus ensuring the intensity of sentiments directed against these *traditores*.

The effects of the Great Persecution on the North African Church were profound. Africa had been under the jurisdiction of Maximian who, along with the city magistrates, did not hesitate in enforcing the dictates of the various edicts thoroughly. This caused the immediate reaction either of fleeing the towns or apostasy, with the giving up of the Scriptures as well as the moveable wealth of the Church. This cowardly behaviour was not universally well accepted, 'to many, the persecution was an opportunity for battle against the powers of evil, perhaps even of participating in the glories and horrors of the approaching end of the world.'<sup>34</sup> It was the Donatist Church that emerged to condemn the traitorous clergy, believing that to change the smallest detail of the Scriptures was a crime, but to destroy it in its entirety at the demand of the pagan imperial authorities was worthy of eternal damnation.

Although the end of the persecutions provided an opportunity for the Christians of North Africa gradually to resume a degree of normality, especially since the Great Persecution ended without causing a rift between Carthage and Numidia similar to that between Carthage and Rome. During the ensuing five years the seeds of permanent schism were slowly sown. 'Numerous conflicting interests are seen at work. Party spirit ran extremely high. But not one appears to understand that the whole course of African Church life would be permanently affected by their conduct at this hour ... the incident was no more than the election to the chief bishop-

<sup>33</sup> Frend, *Donatist Church*, p.10

<sup>34</sup> Frend, *Donatist Church*, p.6

ric in Africa. Yet the result was a division of the whole African Church for more than a hundred years.<sup>35</sup>

Following the end of the persecutions congregations became deeply divided 'between those who were prepared to accept the ministrations of clergy who had given way, and those who were not. Matters were brought to a head on the death of the Bishop of Carthage, Mensurius, in 311.'<sup>36</sup> Caecilian, Mensurius' archdeacon, was unanimously elected by the people, and consecrated as the new Bishop of Carthage by two bishops of Proconsular Africa and Felix Bishop of Aptunga, from Byzacenia. There was a considerable proportion within the Carthaginian Church that disapproved of this appointment because of their rigorist stance. During the persecutions Caecilian had been Archdeacon to Mensurius and was instrumental in the discouragement of attempts to seek martyrdom through the provocation of the authorities, refusing to honour men who rashly went uncalled to court risks and suffering. He was also alleged to have allowed a party of Christians from Abitina to starve to death in a Carthaginian prison, even preventing the faithful from bringing them food. Then following the end of the persecutions he had adopted a lenient policy towards those who had lapsed during the persecutions.

The rigorist faction of the Church set up in opposition to Caecilian's appointment was led by Botrus and Caelestius, who had aspired to the Carthaginian See, and was supported by a wealthy woman called Lucilla, who bore a grudge against Caecilian as he had forbidden her favourite superstition before communion; kissing the bone of a martyr of doubtful authenticity. Together they assembled a council led by Secundus Bishop of Tigisis and primate of Numidia, who was already offended at not having been invited to exercise his usual right to consecrate the Bishop of Carthage. At this council it was discovered that the consecration of Caecilian had been performed by only three bishops, rather than the usual twelve, one of who was Felix, Bishop of Aptunga. The accusation levelled was that Felix, Bishop of Aptunga, Caecilian's consecrator, was a *traditor*. This indirect attack appears of no consequence at first sight but was quite sufficient for the rigorists'

<sup>35</sup> Sparrow Simpson, *Saint Augustine*, p.10

<sup>36</sup> Frend, *Saints and Sinners*, pp.103-4

aims. They connected this charge with their dogmatic theory that no *traditor* was permitted to administer a valid sacrament; therefore, Caecilian had technically never been consecrated, as Felix's consecration was unable to render Caecilian a bishop.

The Council concluded that Caecilian's election was unconfirmed and his consecration had been invalid. He was unanimously condemned and Majorinus was elected in his place. They soon followed this with a circular to all African bishops denouncing Caecilian as an intruder, while declaring Majorinus to be the rightful Bishop of Carthage. This created two opposing parties within the Church. These were the moderate party of Caecilian that represented the repression of fanaticism and the discouragement of superstitions and extreme opinions, and the party of Majorinus that symbolised the extreme individualism and austere values relating to the toleration of sinners within the Church.

According to Optatus, 'one altar was set up against another,' as the dispute over Caecilian's consecration developed into a schism. When Majorinus died Donatus of Casae Nigrae was instantly chosen to take his place, giving the Donatists their name, and was to preside over his Church for more than forty years. This election set up the schismatic church, converting opposition within the North African Christianity into the division of two established camps. This was a state of affairs that would persist until the Arab invasion of the early seventh century, when Christianity succumbed to Islam.

### *(iii) The role of extra-religious considerations*

Recent studies of Roman African history have revealed that the Donatist movement cannot adequately be 'explained in purely religious terms as a 'superfluous dissension'; that a schism which began, ostensibly, as a quarrel between bishops on the application of a traditional penitential discipline to the see of Carthage,

grew into a nucleus of social and political discontent.<sup>37</sup> It has been increasingly acknowledged that the foundation of the Donatist Church, with its strict principle of 'purity' and devotion to the cult of the martyrs, was a movement of religious protest in North Africa. That it was a combination of several factors such as 'rigorism, provincial jealousy, nationalism and social unrest [that] all played their part in making Donatism what it became.'<sup>38</sup> The notion that this heresy could be entirely attributed to theological factors has been exposed as too simplistic to fully understand the nature of the ecclesiastical conflict that existed with the North African Church during the fourth and fifth centuries. 'For Africa, scholars have agreed to see in the Donatist Church of the 'just who suffer persecution and do not persecute', something more than the pungent caricature sketched with such art by Augustine; it can be accepted, and welcomed, as standing for some principle of protest against the shortcomings of an Empire whose demands were arbitrary and whose vaunted order was maintained by a penal code of quite appalling brutality.'<sup>39</sup>

By the end of the fourth century Donatism had become a formidable social force in Africa, drawing considerable support from the Berber population. In some areas, such as Numidia, its strength was even more concentrated and often more numerous than the Catholic Church. 'The puritan outlook of the Donatists went to great excesses, and affected personal life and relationships in African society very deeply. It also provided an effective rallying point for many who were not interested in the theological problems involved, but were disaffected for political and economic reasons against the Roman power.'<sup>40</sup> Donatism was particularly strong among country dwellers of the High Plains, least subject to the influences of Rome, as opposed to the towns that remained loyal to the Empire. The propaganda of the Donatists, and their use of Punic for preaching, had been successful among the Punic-speaking population and had provided an outlet for their anti-Roman sentiment. This established Donatism as a national African sect. The cult of the martyrs gave the Donatists the raucous feasts and celebrations they had en-

<sup>37</sup> P.L.R.Brown, 'Religious Dissent in the Later Roman Empire: The Case of North Africa', *History* Vol. 46 (1961) p.84

<sup>38</sup> S.L.Greenslade, *Schism in the Early Church* (London, SCM Press Ltd, 1956) p.47

<sup>39</sup> Brown, 'Religious Dissent', p.89

<sup>40</sup> Willis, *Augustine*, p.xiii

joyed in the pre-Christian era as well as a reason to pillage the possessions of the wealthy. By 392 the Catholic Church showed little power of attraction compared to the power of the Donatist Church, which by this stage was more than a heresy, it was an aberration that had hardened into custom.

Following Constantine's mysterious conversion to the Christian faith he set about championing the cause. It was during the dispute over Caecilian's consecration that this alliance between the Church and State forced the State to take sides in the dispute. Constantine allied the Empire with the Catholic Church, taking Caecilian's side and dropping the charges levelled against him. This biased position assumed by the Empire would have led to the Catholics being perceived as imperialists by any nationalist sentiments harboured on the Donatist side of the dispute. There was 'undoubtedly an anti-Roman and nationalist feeling which had deeper roots and an earlier origin than resentment at the protection afforded by the State to the ecclesiastical opponents of Donatism.'<sup>41</sup> These nationalistic attitudes were significantly stronger in Numidia, which became a Donatist stronghold, as opposed to the more urban and Romanised views held by Proconsular Africa. Although Donatism cannot be entirely attributed to the prevalence of nationalism, it was a significant factor in its evolution; and when Donatism emerged the Numidian nationalists were likely to have supported its cause, since returning to the fold of catholic unity would have compromised their patriotism. This relationship between nationalism<sup>42</sup> and Donatism was demonstrated in 372 and 398, when the Donatists supported the revolts led by Firmus and Gildo respectively.

This alliance between the State and the Catholic Church brought the issue of the autonomy of a local African tradition of Christianity from a universal and 'parasitic' Empire to the forefront of the controversy. The ensuing unpopularity of the imperial government in the African provinces is considered to have been partly responsible for the provocation of the strong Donatist reaction. This reaction resulted in a distinctly African movement, comprised of members determined to assert their independence from the Catholic Church and, in more subtle ways, from

<sup>41</sup> Greenslade, *Schism*, p.59

<sup>42</sup> The Donatists were not anti-imperialists from the outset, on the contrary they appealed to the Emperor against the Caecilianists. This was similarly seen during Julian's emperorship when Donatists gladly accepted imperial aid.

the power of the Roman Empire. The Donatist Church came to express the objectives of a local Christian Church and their struggle against an unfamiliar civilisation, manifesting a regional Christian tradition that asserted itself against, and in resistance to, the imperial establishment and the consensus of the European Churches.<sup>43</sup> This was in contrast to ‘Catholicism’, which was widely perceived to be the form of Christianity brought over to Africa, adhered to and propagated by the emperor, the army, and the wealthy.

The possibility of the influence of non-theological factors behind the schism was taken up by Wilhelm Thümmel in 1893. He suggested that Donatism was a separatist movement expressing the frustration and lasting hostility of the North African Berber people against their Roman overlords. Frend, in his *Donatist Church*, also set out to demonstrate that Donatism was a social and economic movement as much as one of religious protest, ‘centred in a well defined area of eastern and central Algeria ... [Frend] concentrated on the non-theological issues behind Donatism ... to show the reasons for the outbreak in terms of a Berber rural identity for Numidia in contrast to the more Romanised province of Proconsular Africa where the African Catholics formed the majority.’<sup>44</sup> Frend demonstrates how culture, geography, and economic circumstance all had a role to play in the dissent within African Christianity. Donatism was not merely a religious schism: it was part of a much wider revolution. In 311-12 when the Donatist schism broke out, the North African Church divided on far more than religious lines. The Church split over social, economic and provincial concerns resulting in many of the quarrels that had provided the impetus for the division impossible to cure. This revolutionary zeal was particularly well illustrated by the Circumcellions, who despite strictly speaking did not qualify as part of the rural church organisation, were a phenomenon attached to the Donatist Church, and were not always easy to control. ‘The detailed description given by Optatus of Milevis of their activities leaves no doubt that, apocalyptic hopes combined wild attacks on ‘the devil’ in

<sup>43</sup> R.A.Markus, *Gregory the Great and his World* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997) p.190

<sup>44</sup> W.H.C.Frend, *Archaeology and History in the Study of Early Christianity* (London, Variorum Reprints, 1988) XV p.73

the shape of landowners, inspired their religious and agrarian revolutionary fervour.<sup>45</sup>

The grievances that enraged the Circumcellions were often social and economic, especially focused on issues concerning debt, a common problem in agrarian communities with unpredictable climates. Their social revolt probably developed independently from Donatism; nonetheless, Greenslade asserts it cannot be separated from the previously mentioned nationalistic aspect. The Circumcellions expressed general dissatisfaction with the social, economic, and religious policies of Constantine and his successors, turning instead to a theology of martyrdom. Optatus of Milevis makes clear that Donatist grievances were motivated by sentiments of economic and social discontent as well as religious doctrine. 'In their neighbourhood the landlord could not rest easy in his possession nor had the creditor any hope of exacting payment for his debt. Such an aspect of Donatism will cause no surprise; the miserable conditions of life in the later Roman Empire were well calculated to encourage revolts in the unprivileged classes of society.'<sup>46</sup> Donatism was held to be the religion of the economically underprivileged, especially those who lived in rural areas detached from Romanised urban centres. Despite oppressive landowners and corrupt authorities, combined with the inflated rates of tax imposed upon villagers, their acts of terrorism were carried out in the name of religion.

However, Jones believes that the Circumcellions were primarily motivated by religious enthusiasm, targeting deserters of the Donatist Church or Catholics who had tried to seduce Donatists into renouncing their faith, as opposed to Catholic landlords. Jones asserts that nationalist and socialist theories put forward to explain the Donatist movement are based on a radical misapprehension of the mentality of the later Roman Empire. He explains this assertion by acknowledging that while today the concepts of nationalism and socialism are exceptionally powerful, often stirring up strong passions, religion is no longer, for the majority, a particularly emotive issue. He sees this situation as diametrically opposed to that

<sup>45</sup> W.H.C.Frend, *Orthodoxy, Paganism and Dissent in the Early Christian Centuries* (London, Variorum Reprints, 2002) VIII, p.619

<sup>46</sup> Bonner, *Augustine*, p.242

of the early fifth century, when religion provoked the most intense feelings, and the evidence of nationalist traditions was tenuous and has not come down to us. 'Modern historians are ... retrojecting into the past the sentiments of the present age when they argue that mere religious or doctrinal dissension cannot have generated such violent and enduring animosity as that evinced by the Donatists ... and that the real moving force behind these movements must have been national or class feeling.'<sup>47</sup> The interest in theology at the time was intense and prevalent, with many believing the future of the empire as well as individual salvation depended on correct theological doctrine. So it is unsurprising that so many felt so strongly on the issue, often arguing on doctrinal matters with considerable zest. This argument proffered by Jones goes some way towards explaining why the Donatists were never seen to pursue any political aims and why, although they may have appealed more to the Berber- or Punic-speaking peasantry, their followers included many Romanised Africans as well.

### *Nature of the Church*

Having looked at the origins of the Donatist Church it is evident that it was heavily influenced by the North African Church set up by Cyprian fifty years earlier, and the two generations of puritanical teaching that extended to Tertullian and beyond. Donatus was simply the heir to this rigorist tradition and its narrow view of salvation. It is now necessary to consider how these various origins of the Donatism manifested themselves, what caused the Donatists to separate themselves from the Catholic Church, and how these foundations led to the distinctly Donatist conception of the nature of the Church.

The importance of the Diocletianic persecution has already been discussed in detail as a contributory factor in the development of the Donatist schism. It was from this persecution that the original grievance of the Donatists emerged; the issue of the lapsed within the Church. The end of these persecutions, however, did not bring peace to the Church. The feelings towards those who had given in to

<sup>47</sup> A.H.M.Jones, 'Were ancient heresies national or social movements in disguise?' *Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol.10 (1959) p.295

human weakness in the face of persecution, those who had submitted to the demands of the imperial authorities, were intense and divisive. It was upon this dispute that the Donatists based their claims to be the true holy Church; the Church of saints from which all *traditores*, and those with whom they had communicated, were excluded.

‘Some bishops frequently handed over the Christians’ sacred texts to hostile imperial officials. And those same bishops retained authority after peace was restored. Some of their equally culpable fellow conspirators were named to succeed them. If innocent Christians continued to mix with these soiled bishops and with bishops and priests who they consecrated, the contagion would spread. To guard against contamination, Donatists insisted that the unsoiled separate themselves.’<sup>48</sup> It was this abhorrence of the lapsed that caused the division of the African Church, the emergence of the Donatist schism, and their purist conception of the Church. Donatists held that the African Church alone had separated itself from the sin of *traditio*, which had infected the remainder of the Church, causing them to fall irredeemably through their adherence to *traditores* like Caecilian. Such Christians who remained in communion with those guilty of irremissible sin against the Holy Ghost had forfeited their claim to catholicity by continuing in communion with African *traditores*.<sup>49</sup> It was the Donatist belief that genuine Christians could only exist within their Church.

The Donatists believed that in separating themselves from the *traditores*, and those tainted by the *traditores*’ sin through their continuation of communion with such sinners, they were creating a holy Church of the pure, the true Church of Christ. They believed the true Church consisted of the pure alone, therefore they believed that the validity of the sacraments depended on the purity of the ministrant. They claimed that they alone possessed the pure tradition, maintaining that it was their duty to defend the tradition. Therefore, they set about distancing themselves from the unclean hierarchy of the Church that they perceived to be in league with the *traditores*, cursing the Catholic sacraments and Eucharist as asso-

<sup>48</sup> P.I.Kaufman, ‘Redeeming Politics: Augustine’s City of God’ in D.Donnely, *The City of God: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New York, Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1995) p.82

<sup>49</sup> Bonner, *Augustine*, p.246

ciated with the workings of the Devil. They asserted that they alone were the pure Church and in no way implicated in the handing over of the Scriptures, unlike the Catholics who were the direct descendants of the *traditores*, and therefore the inheritors of the sin of *traditio* of those like Felix and Caecilian.<sup>50</sup>

The Donatist Church maintained they had kept themselves ‘pure’ from the *traditio* of the persecution refusing to concede to the requests of the Imperial guards. They were rigorists with a steadfast view of the purity of the Church of the saints believing the Church must remain ‘holy’ and that sacraments conferred by those tainted by *traditores* are rendered invalid. One Donatist drew a clear analogy of the Donatists’ perception of themselves. He claimed the Donatist Church was like the ark of Noah; keeping the good water of baptism within and the defiling waters of the rest of the world outside. This echoes the earlier metaphor of the ark used by Cyprian: within were the saved and without were the damned.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, the Donatists held that their Church was a congregation of saints, pure and holy, untainted by the sins of those who had lapsed under the threats of persecution. This elitist view saw them advocate themselves as the body of the Elect who as true Christians had separated themselves from the multitude of false Christians. There were no sinners accommodated within confines of the Donatist Church. They laid considerable emphasis on their ‘separateness’ from the world drawing a firm line around the Donatist Church. ‘This line enclosed the sphere of purity and holiness in a world of sin and pollution. The Church was a society alternative to the “world,” the refuge of the saints. Holiness was within.... There could be no overlap; “world” and “Church” were mutually exclusive.’<sup>52</sup> Figgis suggests that this insistence on the separateness of the ‘world’ and ‘Church’ rendered them ‘absolutists’, which led them to see the state as so irreverent that it was practically diabolical.

<sup>50</sup> Both these claims were untrue. The Donatists were not freed of involvement in the handing over of the Scriptures, e.g. Silvanus of Cirta, while both Felix and Caecilian were cleared of all accusations, with Caecilian being repeatedly acquitted by different councils. Nonetheless the Donatists refused to accept these rulings maintaining Caecilian’s participation in *traditio*.

<sup>51</sup> B.Manville, ‘Donatism and Augustine: The Confessions of a Fourth Century Bishop’ *Augustinian Studies*, Vol.8 (1977) p.130

<sup>52</sup> R.A.Markus, ‘Donatus, Donatism’ in A. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopaedia* (Michigan, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999) p.286

The final characteristic of the Donatist view of the nature of the true Church is their traditionally African interpretation of Christianity that recognises penance, suffering and martyrdom as predominant aspects of their faith. They believed that the true Church was composed of suffering and penance. Martyrdom was a key concept of the Donatist Church; they saw themselves as the heirs to the martyrs. This aspect of their Church was demonstrated by the Circumcellions who on failing to convince someone to kill them, used to commit suicide by throwing themselves off cliffs in a sort of pseudo-martyrdom.

The Donatist conception of the Church was resolutely refuted and radically different from that held by Augustine. ‘It has rightly been said of the Donatists ‘Perhaps no other movement in the history of the Church ... had such a low tolerance of human sinfulness.’<sup>53</sup> This clearly went against Augustine’s ideas of the holy and the wicked all rubbing shoulders within the one Church. Augustine regarded the Donatists as refusing to confront the persistence of evil in the world; rejecting sinners was a facet of their Church. Augustine, on the other hand, believed the Catholic Church had to pursue a more flexible relationship with mankind and learn a willingness to coexist with, reprimand and correct sinners. Augustine’s understanding of the nature of the Church was of a universal Church, far from restricted to the narrow confines of Northern Africa, comprised of both sinners and saints coexisting until the Second Coming of Christ. To this end Augustine questioned how the Donatists could be right when they stand against so many Churches across the world, asserting that the Donatists’ view that Christ allowed the entirety of His earthly Church to disappear, preserving only the Donatist Church, was highly unlikely.

In considering the Augustinian nature of the Church one cannot fail to recognise the influence of one particular individual, Tyconius. Tyconius was a Donatist layman of Proconsular Africa. He was one of the great theological minds of the fourth century, and certainly the greatest and most original genius among the Donatist writers. Tyconius was one of the most insightful thinkers of the African Church in the 470s and 80s writing an influential commentary on the Apocalypse

<sup>53</sup> G.Wills, *Saint Augustine* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1999) p.79

and also his *Book of Rules*; the first treatise on Scriptural interpretation in the Latin-speaking West. Although much of his work has been lost, through what remains (the notes of Gennadius and Augustine's references to his work) it has been possible to reconstruct the outlines of his thought, which has enabled his role in the Donatist Church and the extent of his influence on Augustine's political theology to be more fully understood. As Frend notes alongside Ambrose, Tyconius may have shared the honour of converting Augustine from Mani to Christ.

Tyconius was primarily concerned with the nature of the Church. However, it was his typological interpretation of the Bible that revealed inconsistencies that were irreconcilable with the notion that the Church was represented only by the Donatists, and led to his excommunication from the Donatist Church. 'He opposed the fundamental ecclesiology of the Donatist Church when he insisted that the Church was not the holy remnant of End Times waiting for its vindication in the glory of the Second Coming. It was a mixed society still graced with the word of God calling the sinner to repentance.'<sup>54</sup> Tyconius read many contradictory statements in the Scripture, such as something being blessed in one place and cursed in another, and the image of the Church being an 'unspotted bride' while simultaneously being a field containing 'both wheat and tares'. He asserts that these apparent contradictions are resolved when one recognises the inherent mystery to which the Scripture is alluding. The Scripture is indicating the 'bipartite' nature of the Church.

'The Bride of Christ in the Song of Solomon (i.5) was both 'black and comely', the seed of Abraham was both 'royal and servile', the Church existed not only 'in the south where the Lord made his flock to lie down', but also, figuratively, 'in the north', in the shadow.'<sup>55</sup> The Scripture was talking about the present reality of sin, and the evil at work within the Church, as opposed to the cataclysms of End Times that will be visible to all. The bipartite Church, the focus of Tyconius' second rule, is composed of sinners and saints involved in an eternal conflict until Judgement Day. The phrases 'in the midst' and 'from the midst' were to become the coordinating element of Tyconius' ecclesiology. When he argues that the

<sup>54</sup> Bright, *Book of Rules*, p.9

<sup>55</sup> Frend, *Donatist Church*, p.204

Church is 'bipartite,' he asserts that it is composed of both good and evil members. The evil is hidden 'in the midst' of the Church and will only be revealed at the coming of Christ, and the eventual division of good and evil will be actualised only when those united in Christ are taken 'from the midst' of impending ruin.

This image of the Antichrist enthroned 'in the midst' (2.Thess.2:7) of the Church led Tyconius to consider whether faithful Christians should separate themselves from the wicked. 'Here, Tyconius conceived an idea which was to be taken over by Augustine and developed in one of his most famous and influential works. The real division, said Tyconius, is not a division of churches but of two supernatural societies: the city of God and the city of the devil.'<sup>56</sup> The idea of these two communities was later developed in Augustine's *City of God*. It was here that Augustine defined them as being comprised of individuals whose membership is determined by the direction of their contrary wills, not by their temporal ecclesiastical allegiance, thus enabling the earthly Church to consist of a mixed following. He asserted the universal extension of the Church, as opposed to Donatist proclamations of a restricted number of faithful Donatists based in North Africa. As Bonner asserts the Scriptures make no reference to a prophecy that states that when sanctity departed Earth, Africa alone was unchanged, retaining sanctity. Thus, Augustine advocated of the concept of 'universality' and refusing to recognise the Donatist Church as the visible faithful remnant awaiting the return of Christ.

'So the Church, which increases among all nations, has been preserved with the Lord's grain and will be preserved to the end, until it includes all nations, even the barbarian ones. The Church is symbolised by the good seed, which the Son of Man sowed, and of which He foretold that it would grow, intermingled with cockle, until the harvest time. The field indeed is the world, and the harvest the end of the world.'<sup>57</sup>

Augustine asserted that since the Church was universal it must be comprised of the holy and the wicked; 'two parts' which must remain intermingled until their

<sup>56</sup> Bonner, *Augustine*, p.245

<sup>57</sup> *Epist.93*

final, eschatological separation at the Last Judgement. ‘Those fishes, of course, of which the Lord speaks in the gospel, good ones and bad ones within the same net, to which he compares the unity of the Church, all swim, mingled together in terms of their bodies, but separate in their morals, until the end of the world.’<sup>58</sup> This toleration of evil within the Body of Christ did not invalidate the holiness of the Church. Rather Augustine came to assert that man is unable to know or predict whom God will save, and it is improper for the Church to assume such a role of separating the wheat from the chaff before God. Until that time the Church must be understood as a mixed body of good and evil rubbing shoulders. In Sermon XLVII, preached during 410, on the shepherds of Ezekiel xxxiv, Augustine condemns the Donatists for doing just this, anticipating the Last Judgement of Christ. Augustine asserts that by confining the Church to one corner of the earth the Donatists were separating ‘the wheat from the tares before the harvest, and segregating sheep from goats before the Great Shepherd appears.’<sup>59</sup> He could not accept the Donatist’s equation of holiness with separation and their contrasting purity with treason. Instead Augustine advocated a Church defined by its universality and the mixed nature of its adherents.

Throughout this chapter I have tried to outline and identify the various contributory factors responsible for the emergence of the Donatist movement. I have highlighted some of the divergences between the Donatist and Catholic Churches articulating the differing standpoints on key theological matters that formed the basis for many of the disputes that embodied the controversy. This chapter has argued that the Donatist controversy is one of a primarily theological nature and that to see it as predominantly politically or socially motivated is to dangerously misunderstand the environment in which it took place. Religion was of the utmost cultural importance to all levels of society, pervading daily life in a way that is a foreign concept to modern-day society. To misunderstand the significance of theology at the time of the Donatist threat skews the nature of the controversy as a whole, which is why this thesis has spent considerable time paying tribute to the theological basis of the movement. By investigating the nature of the foundations of the controversy the reader should be equipped with a more comprehensive un-

<sup>58</sup> *Epist. 108*

<sup>59</sup> Willis, *Augustine*, p.69

derstanding of the setting and nature which surrounded the debate. This will enable Chapter II to build upon this basis, thus providing the reader with a more informed and perceptive analysis of the role Donatism played in the development of Augustine's 'political theory'.

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## *Chapter II*

### *The Effect of the Donatist Controversy on Saint Augustine's political theology*

Chapter I investigated in some detail the origins and importance of the Donatist controversy in the development of Augustine's theological principles and doctrines. Chapter II will attempt to consider the ways in which these events impacted upon the content of his 'political theory'. The Donatist controversy is often used as a means of highlighting the distinct roles of Church and State outlined in Augustine's thought. Although this thesis will concentrate on this distinction it will be more attuned to the specific matter of religious coercion and the intervention of the State in ecclesiastical affairs. Augustine's interaction with the Donatist movement was one of the significant factors that culminated in what is often perceived as a 'u-turn' in Augustinian doctrine. This chapter will argue that the notion of a 'u-turn' in Augustine's theology is a gross misinterpretation. It will put forward an argument that sees such an approach as a mischaracterisation of what was in fact a gradual change in attitude affected by the stimulus of the Donatist movement. Had this movement provided Augustine with a less violent adversary the theoretical outcomes might have differed. However, this thesis will maintain that the steady theoretical progression Augustine made from a liberal to a more severe position was the outcome of circumstances, but one that upheld the principle of love at its core throughout. I will, therefore, seek to provide an explanation for these changes in Augustine's approach to coercion and highlight the seminal role that the Donatist controversy had on the development of this aspect of Augustine's political thought.

*'The liquidation of schismatics through the severity of love' (Osborn)*

The main area in which Donatism exerted an influence over Saint Augustine's political theology was on the subject of toleration: the use of state coercion in re-

calling heretics to the unity of the Catholic Church. 'His belief on these questions was in part forged on the anvil of the Donatist controversy.... For the defeat of the schismatics Augustine and his fellow-bishops found themselves compelled to ask the support of the government, and we can trace clearly in his works a gradual hardening of his view on the coercion of religious dissidents by the authority of civil power.'<sup>60</sup> Initially Augustine had expressly repudiated the use of civil power in ecclesiastical matters, asserting the use of discussion and argument in persuading people to accept Christianity. By the end of his involvement with the Donatist Church and their Circumcellions Augustine held the view that if the State could legislate against poisoners and pagans, they could legislate against the sacrilege and sin of heretics like the Donatists. The Donatist controversy can, therefore, be seen as having compelled Augustine into an exposition of the relations between the Church and State and a discussion on the intervention of secular power in ecclesiastical affairs. These views and those on religious coercion have been recognised as having vast influence throughout the middle ages and beyond. It is this development and gradual formation of Augustine's doctrine on religious coercion that will now be considered.

The Catholic bishops of the African episcopate were by no means averse to the use of repressive measures against the pagans, to the extent that in 401 following the success of two years of repressive activity by the authorities, they advocated their intensification. Around 399-401 Augustine had no qualms about endorsing these policies of repressing paganism and heresy and the civil authorities' use of legislation in the enforcement of Catholic teaching and orthodoxy. At this time Augustine believed the Empire represented a vehicle of divine purpose in human history, and therefore warranted his endorsement. Augustine held a theology of the 'Christian times', he believed that the Roman Empire was the instrument of God, and was bringing about the Divine will as the prophets had foretold. This provided Augustine with a justification for the religious coercion of the time. 'For Augustine, the coercive legislation of the Emperors against heretics, Jews and pagans was a fulfilment of the Psalm that the Kings of the world should serve Christ ... ultimately the coercive legislation of the Emperors formed part of the

<sup>60</sup> Willis, *Augustine*, p.127

'*prophetica veritas*' of the expansion of the Church.<sup>61</sup> Theodosius and his successors were bringing the world to serve the name of God. However, the position of the Roman Empire as an instrument of divine purpose was rejected by Augustine around 410. Markus asserts that while it was probably used in Augustine's formation of a policy of repression directed against the pagans, it probably exerted no influence in the case of the Donatists.<sup>62</sup> However, at this stage of coercing the pagans to Christianity Augustine was in agreement with his fellow bishops, a consensus that was most likely due to their continued pursuit of peaceful means of conversion. This situation was to change within four years following the 405 Edict of Unity, which saw the Emperor assimilate the Donatists with other heresies on the grounds of their practice of rebaptism. This edict allowed the anti-heretical imperial laws to be applied to the Donatists, thus representing the inauguration of the government's sustained attempt to repress Donatism.

Although Augustine supported the repression of paganism, the increased violence of the struggle between the Catholic and Donatist Churches had seen his colleagues appeal to the government for similarly repressive measures against the Donatist Church. This appeal to government adopted by his fellows was a course of action that did not gain Augustine's support. Rather, Augustine thought no good could come from using methods of compulsion in matters of faith. Kirwan suggests that this early preference of a policy of toleration was due to the influence of the early Church, where the Christians were habituated to the role of victims as opposed to persecutors. 'This tradition, Augustine came to argue, was a consequence of the Church's having been born into an age in which the worldly powers, prefigured by Nebuchadnezzar, had not yet been made available as instruments for the destruction of those 'who speak against the true God.''<sup>63</sup> However, even when it became possible for the Christians to act as persecutors, the arguments in its favour did not sway Augustine into its support during his early episcopate, which may explain why, despite his conversion to a policy of state intervention, he maintained a lasting aversion to severity.

<sup>61</sup> P.L.R.Brown, 'Religious Coercion in the Later Roman Empire: The Case of North Africa', *History*, Vol.48 (1963) p.300

<sup>62</sup> Markus, *Saeculum*, p.145

<sup>63</sup> C.Kirwan, *Augustine* (London and New York, Routledge, 1989) p.213

Augustine preferred the approach of coherent argument as a means of persuading a person currently engaged in an erroneous faith to join the Catholic Church.

‘God, who sees the secrets of the human heart, knows that, as much as I desire peace among Christians, I am troubled by the sacrilegious actions of those who persevere in its disruption in an unworthy and impious fashion. God knows that this attitude of my mind is directed toward peace and that I am not trying to force anyone involuntarily into the Catholic communion, but to reveal that plain truth to all who are in error. Then, once our ministry has made it evident with God's help, the very truth may be enough to persuade them to embrace and follow her.’<sup>64</sup>

This opinion was largely influenced by his personal journey into the Catholic faith. In his *Confessions* Augustine recalls how he listened to the sermons of St Ambrose at Milan, initially to appreciate and learn from Ambrose’s oratory skills.

‘And to Milan I came, unto Ambrose the bishop, known to the whole world as among the best of men.... To him was I unknowingly led by Thee, that by him I might knowingly be led to Thee ... and I hung on his words intently.... I was delighted with the pleasantness of his speech ... the former [Ambrose] was teaching salvation most soundly. But “salvation is far from the wicked,” such as I then stood before him; and yet I was drawing nearer gradually and unconsciously.’<sup>65</sup>

Augustine soon began to appreciate the content of the sermons absorbing more of the Christian faith and was gradually led into a devout faith of Christianity. This led him to the view that for a person to become a good Christian that individual must accept the faith through his own free will, moved by persuasive argument not physical force. He thus rejected the use of force in favour of the power of ar-

<sup>64</sup> *Epist.34*

<sup>65</sup> *Confessions, V:XIII*

gument. This was a method that he had made successful use of against the Manichees and hoped would prove to be equally effective against the Donatists.

‘It was our part to choose the better course, that we might find a way to your correction, not by contention, strife, and persecutions, but by mild consolation, friendly exhortation, and quiet discussion, as it is written: *The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be mild towards all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness correcting those that think otherwise.*’<sup>66</sup>

It is necessary to acknowledge the reasoning behind Augustine’s rejection of the coercion of heretics by the secular authority. This position is made clear in his letter to Vincent, the Rogatist bishop of Cartenna:

‘I have, then, yielded to the facts suggested to me by my colleagues, although my first feeling about it was that no one was to be forced into the unity of Christ, but that we should act by speaking, fight by debating, and prevail by our reasoning, for fear of making pretend Catholics out of those whom we knew as open heretics.’<sup>67</sup>

This was one of Augustine’s primary concerns regarding the coercion of heretics into the Catholic Church and a key reason for his reluctance towards a policy of force. He feared that the use of such force would merely change sincere heretics into hypocritical Catholics resulting in Catholics whose conversion was no more than a superficial level of outward conformity, a scenario reminiscent of the feigned conversions of pagans during the early years of Christianity’s establishment as the Empire’s official religion. Augustine feared that a landslide of insincerely converted Donatists would only achieve a corruption of standards, which

<sup>66</sup> *C. Epist. Fund., i, 1*

<sup>67</sup> *Epist. 93*

would constitute a considerable pastoral problem to which Augustine had been particularly sensitive during the pagan conversions.<sup>68</sup>

Despite Augustine's good intentions, the power of persuasion and cogent argument did not bring about the results he had anticipated. The fanaticism of Augustine's Donatist adversaries was too great, rendering his arguments ineffective. By the 404 Council of Carthage the Catholic bishops were strongly in favour of appealing to the Emperor for more rigorous action to be taken against the Donatists. It was this Council that undertook the first formal step made by the African Catholic Church to the State for their protection against the Donatists. This move eventually led to the 411 *Collatio* at which the official condemnation of the Donatist Church was secured.

This changed position of the African episcopate was a result of the Donatists' rejection of the Catholics' summoning of the schismatics to take part in discussions throughout the African provinces. These meetings were designed with the intention of coming to some form of brotherly agreement on the issues under dispute. From 403 onwards the Catholics had adopted an approach of honest exchange of views between the two parties, even accommodating the Donatist refusal of all personal contact with the Catholics. The invitation and the Catholic bishop's attestation for his authority would be entered in a register, to which their schismatic counterpart could reply without incurring the risk of any personal encounters. However, it was Primian's response to this initiative that led the way for a uniform Donatist reaction. 'It would be shameful for the sons of the martyrs to meet with the race of *traditores*. They come up against us with the letters of many emperors, though we ourselves have nothing but the Gospel. The True Church is that which suffers persecution, not that which persecutes.'<sup>69</sup> Instead of sending the requested representatives the Donatists proceeded to intensify their violence, exer-

<sup>68</sup> Brown acknowledges the possibility that Augustine's conversion to a confident position regarding coercive methods was due to the Donatist controversy coinciding with the development of Augustine's understanding of grace and predestination. These were doctrines that were understood in light of the disparity of the discontinuity of human actions and the will of an omnipotent God. Augustine's conception of grace and predestination meant that to reject the Catholic Church's coercive policy would be tantamount to denying the omnipotence of God, who was perfectly capable of identifying His own among those who had conformed to the Catholic faith with bad grace.

<sup>69</sup> F. Van der Meer, *Augustine the bishop* (London, Sheed and Ward, 1961) p.87-8

cising a tyranny across the African provinces exposing Catholic clergy to the cruelties of the Donatist fanatics. The Catholic policy of peaceful reconciliation had failed. Nonetheless, Augustine remained opposed to an appeal to the secular power. Although a number of bishops at the synod of 404 expressed 'the opinion that unity could only be achieved by force and they cited the case of Tagaste...Augustine...would have none of this. In his view the normal protection by the State against those who disturbed public order was quite sufficient. The law of 392 against heretics covered this point.'<sup>70</sup>

Here one should note the circumstantial nature of the whole controversy and the pragmatic nature of Augustine in his approach to dealing with the heretics given the increased violence of the Donatist and Circumcellion campaign. It is through considering the Circumcellion activities that one becomes acutely aware of the extreme circumstances that eventually influenced Augustine's change in attitude to religious coercion as a justifiable course of action against heretics. However, it was not just Augustine who was forced to adopt such an adaptable approach to the circumstances. The whole controversy was pragmatic in nature, a fact that is further highlighted by the fickle character assumed by the Donatists. While they acceded to Julian and his disinterest in the unity of the Church, often welcoming his intervention, they adamantly repudiated State intervention under Constantine and Theodosius, questioning what the State has to do with the Church. It is very important to appreciate this circumstantial nature of the controversy as it helps to understand why Augustine, despite his enduring motivation of love, moved from a liberal to a more rigorist attitude. It is possible that had the controversy been of a different nature Augustine's theoretical outcome would have remained one of liberal persuasion not religious coercion.

However, Augustine did concede that a deputation could be sent to request the enforcement of the existing anti-heretical laws<sup>71</sup> against the Donatists, in an attempt to provide a degree of imperial protection for the Church and its ministers while they carried out the work of the Church. This approach was also intended to

<sup>70</sup> Van der Meer, *Augustine*, p. 88-9

<sup>71</sup> Anti-heretical laws were enacted in an edict issued by Theodosius I in June 392, which turned the civil power against all heretics, enforcing fines and confiscating places of worship.

enable those who desired to convert to the Catholic Church by their own volition to do so without the fear of being made targets of Circumcellion terrorism. For the ‘Donatist laity who would have responded to the arguments of the Catholic bishops dare[d] not so for fear of the Circumcellions, who had a special grudge against any Donatists who were converted. The work of the theological argument in bringing men to a right mind was being hindered.’<sup>72</sup> When the emissaries of the Council arrived at Rome, the Court had already decided to take drastic action as a result of the injuries sustained by the Bishop of Bagai and others at the hands of the Circumcellions. This action taken by the Court was far more severe than the suggestions made by the African bishops. An imperial response forbidding the schism had been achieved through the first imperial Edict of Unity, which ‘forbade rebaptism, under penalty of arrest and confiscation of goods; prohibited dissidents from receiving or making donations or legacies; decreed for the first time the assimilation of schismatics to heretics for legal purposes; and ordered all churches to be handed over to the Catholics.’<sup>73</sup>

Augustine’s lack of success in bringing his opponents round to his perspective and the pervasive levels of violence were the key factors that provoked his endorsement of his colleague’s appeals for imperial intervention and a more coercive policy against the Donatists. However, this changed opinion to the acceptance of coercion as a legitimate weapon was more gradual than is often depicted. Brown has asserted that the sources of Augustine’s changed attitude to coercion from 405 onwards can be traced back for ten years. This suggests that Augustine did not experience a sudden change of heart but that the entire process was one of contemplative and measured change, employing checks and balances rather as opposed to the rash application that is often alleged. His new understanding of the merits of coercion was carefully worked into the more mature body of Augustinian thought ensuring the maintenance of his works’ inner coherence and primary motivation of love. This highlights the argument that Augustine’s newly formed approach did not represent the total reversal of his views that is often claimed. In fact, when the circumstances of savage and incessant violence are considered such an alteration can hardly be condemned. Nonetheless, Augustine did change his

<sup>72</sup> Willis, *Augustine*, p.129

<sup>73</sup> Willis, *Augustine*, p.51

stance from being a staunch opponent to state intervention in 404 to an apologist and defender of it by 408.

It is in the lost work *Contra partem Donati* (397) that Augustine first considers the use of civil power as an avenue for defeating the Donatists, although following this work he rejected it as a viable course of action. Only a year later in his *Contra Epistulam Parmeniani* he again shows an inclination towards a concurrence with the tactic of state intervention.

‘Is it true, as the Donatists assert, that harmful and false religion is no concern of the civil power? That power proceeds against pagans on these grounds, and why, if it punishes poisoning and other works of the flesh mentioned in Galatians 5:19-21, should it not also punish and restrain hatred, violence, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions and heresies, all of which are mentioned in the same context?’<sup>74</sup>

Augustine maintains in his *Retractations* and in his correspondence with Julian of Eclanum, that it was the patently malicious intentions of the Donatist leaders and violent excesses of the Circumcellions’ bands that were largely responsible for his shift towards an approval of the intervention by the state in the Donatist controversy. The actions of these groups induced a fundamentally mild man to actively support, and demand the application of, the legislative enforcement of coercive measures and when they reaped success to confirm the imposition of the Faith as the lesser of two evils. Augustine’s initial hopes to conciliate the Donatists by reason alone were eradicated by the violent campaigns of the Circumcellions that were increasingly targeting bishops and the cruelties of Optatus of Thamugadi, leading to the conclusion that repression by the secular arm was inescapable.

The Circumcellions were aggressive marauding bands that came to characterise the physical violence and suicidal fanaticism of the Donatist movement. They often demanded death for themselves and on failing committed suicide with the goal

<sup>74</sup> *Contra Epistulam Parmeniani*, I.x.16

of pseudo-martyrdom by throwing themselves off cliffs, as well as attacking villages, causing chaos. They were both the private army of the Donatist Church, providing the force of arms to enable a bishop to defy imperial authorities, as well as often being a liability, regularly falling out of control causing the Donatist bishops to call for secular assistance. Augustine admits that he had rejected the policy of State intervention initially because he 'had not yet learnt from ... experience either how much wickedness they [the Circumcellions] could resort to if left unpunished, or how much they could benefit from the application of discipline.'<sup>75</sup>

It was this intensification of Circumcellion violence compounded with Augustine's positive experience of the coercive policy that finally convinced him of its suitability as a solution to the Donatist problem. The evidential proof provided by the success of the intrusion of the State in his own city of Hippo and others, where many Donatists had been converted to Catholicism by the fear of the imperial laws, provided 'the conclusive evidence of its practical utility.... The steady pressure of secular discipline, the emotion of fear, had induced the masses to view the Church in a far less prejudiced light. Many who desired to be Catholics had been hitherto restrained by fear of Circumcellion violence. They were now led into Catholicity by fear of the State.'<sup>76</sup> It was during the enforcement of the Edict of Unity of 405 that Augustine was able to reconcile himself and properly embrace a policy of coercion. It was in Hippo, his own city, that Augustine witnessed the success of the Edict's application and the gratitude expressed by those who received its guidance to the truth. It provided the necessary stimulus to multitudes of people allowing them to break free from the error to which they had clung so tightly through habit. This evidence of converts being brought over to the Catholic Church removed any of the doubts and inhibitions Augustine had previously harboured.

'Oh, if only I could show you, from the very ranks of the Circumcellions, how many now become active Catholics, condemn their former life and the wretched error which made

<sup>75</sup> *Retr.* II,5

<sup>76</sup> Sparrow Simpson, *Saint Augustine*, p.141

them think they were doing a service to the Church of God when they thus rashly disturbed the peace! Yet they would not have been brought to this state of health if they had not been restrained, like the fever-stricken, with the shackles of those laws.’<sup>77</sup>

However, as mentioned above, Augustine soon rejected the views he had earlier held about the Theodosian establishment as the primary justification for religious coercion. Instead he began to expand upon a new theology as the foundation for his theory of religious coercion. In attempting to understand this new justification for a policy of coercion it is essential to appreciate that Augustine’s ‘theory’ of coercion always formed part of a pastoral strategy. For unlike the coercion of the pagans which was a matter of forcing individuals to accept a truth to which they were blind, the Donatist case was a question of recalling individuals back to the fold from which they had strayed but rightfully belonged. The importance of this pastoral focus in the use of force is made clear in Letter 93 to Vincent.

‘Why in the world, then, should I begrudge them salvation, by recalling my colleagues from this sort of fatherly duty, when it is through this that we see man renouncing their former blindness?’<sup>78</sup>

This is the perspective Augustine adopts towards religious coercion, an approach that makes use of the polarity which is evident throughout the Scripture.<sup>79</sup> That ‘love mingled with severity is better than deceit with indulgence.’<sup>80</sup> Coercion is an act of love. ‘Surely, in whatever the true and legitimate mother does, even if it is felt to be harsh and stern, she is not rendering evil for evil, but is using the good effect of punishment to drive out the evil of wickedness, and she does it in order

<sup>77</sup> *Epist. 93*

<sup>78</sup> *Epist. 93*

<sup>79</sup> The use of the ‘*duae voces*’ (Brown) provides an example of the gradual and incidental development of Augustine’s doctrine of religious coercion, and his political theology as a whole. His defence of the polarity of the Scriptures, including the legitimacy of severity, was developed in reaction to the criticism levelled against the Church during the Manichean controversy.

<sup>80</sup> *Epist. 93*

to heal by love, not to injure by hatred.’<sup>81</sup> Augustine does not struggle to find Scriptural support for this position of the Church possessing the power of *correptio*<sup>82</sup> over its children. Throughout the Bible there are examples of punishment being administered as a remedy. There is the example of Sara afflicting her servant Hagar, which Augustine uses to draw a parallel with the severity of the Church with schismatics. He also turns to the Book of Proverbs, ‘with its advice not to spare the rod; he appeals to the violent measures taken to halt the steps of the persecutor Saul of Tarsus; he takes up the analogy of sheep who have strayed from the fold and need forcibly to be brought back; and finally he comes to the Parable of the Great Supper.’<sup>83</sup> It is from this parable of the Great Supper that the most notorious passage of Augustine’s anti-Donatist writings is contained.

‘Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come, for all things are now ready. And they all with one *consent* began to make excuse...the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, lord it is done as thou hast commanded and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled.’<sup>84</sup>

In this parable Augustine ‘finds material ready to his hand. For that parable represented the exact procedure which was being used against the Donatists, first a loving invitation, and then compulsion of the unwilling guests. The *compelle intrare* of the parable thus becomes the classic text of Saint Augustine at this time against the Donatists.’<sup>85</sup>

<sup>81</sup> *Epist. 93*

<sup>82</sup> The use of *correptio* is significant. Augustine uses *correptio*, ‘rebuke’, instead of *cohercitio* (the root of our word coercion) to emphasise a coercive policy as a positive process to correct the misguided, instead of an entirely punitive treatment.

<sup>83</sup> Battenhouse, *A Companion to the Study of Saint Augustine* (London, SCM Press, 1963) p.192

<sup>84</sup> Luke, 14:16-23

<sup>85</sup> Willis, *Augustine*, p.134

As well as providing biblical justification for his ‘theory’ of state intervention in ecclesiastical affairs, Augustine turns to the gratitude shown by ex-Donatists. He asserts their appreciation ‘for having imperial edicts to break them from their procrastination, to help them overcome the force of habit and prejudice, for having brought them to an unclouded vision of the truth previously obscured by rumour; for making them do, in short, what they would have wanted to do had they known better.’<sup>86</sup> He advocates that the use of coercion frees Donatists who were so out of convenience or upbringing. It provides them with a means of returning to the flock from which they had strayed. Proven facts provided Augustine with justification for this policy.

‘How many there are – as we know for a fact – who have been for a long time wishing to be Catholics, drawn by such manifest truth, but who kept delaying from day to day through fear of offending their families! And how many are held by the heavy bond of inveterate custom rather than by truth...How many thought that the sect of Donatus was the true Church because security made them too slothful, contemptuous, and unconcerned to acknowledge Catholic truth! How many believe that it makes no difference to what section of Christianity a man belongs, and remain in the Donatist sect because they were born there and no one forced them to leave it and come over to the Catholic faith!’<sup>87</sup>

Augustine, therefore, believes that a policy of religious coercion sets individuals free from the shackles and chains of schism and heresy, enabling them to discern the true Church and dispel the falsities of separatist Churches. He believes the facts of this case provide the evidence that the scripture can be rightly applied: ‘Give the wise man an opportunity, and he will be wiser.’<sup>88</sup> This ‘opportunity’ was coercion. Augustine had come to perceive the intrusion of the secular arm as

<sup>86</sup> Markus, *Saeculum*, p.142

<sup>87</sup> *Epist.* 93

<sup>88</sup> Prov. 9:9

a means of facilitating the schismatic or heretic's recognition of the obvious truth, and in turn releasing them from the force of habit. Thus, enabling them to return to the unity and peace of the Catholic Church, where there is 'One fold and one shepherd.'

It is, at this stage, important to recognise that within his sanctioning of religious coercion Augustine retained a merciful spirit of leniency and tolerance. He never incited officials towards severity, but always urged an attitude of moderation. Augustine believed those separated from the Church were rebellious and need of punishment, but also like the sick in need of a doctor's healing. 'They were men sick of a fever, who attacked their physicians in their delirium. Half of them were apparently dead, sick with a sleeping sickness, the other half were madmen. These last were wild and difficult to handle. The others were merely lazy and would not wake up properly.'<sup>89</sup> Therefore, Augustine's solemn desire was that the good within each man would be enabled to function healthily, a goal that could only be realised within the confines of the Church.

When it came to the use of force to bring unruly Circumcellions back into the fold, Augustine opposed brutality and rejected the death penalty as a means of punishment for even the gravest crimes, which undoubtedly shows his clement side. He was not the advocate of persecution that is often depicted. Rather he was 'the servant of Christ, anxious to mitigate the harshness of the law and, in its place, to extend the charity without which all other virtues are vain reminding those in authority that, since we are all sinners, we must never let our horror of the crime overcome our love for the sinner.'<sup>90</sup> This leniency is evidence of the centrality of love in Augustine's mind throughout the controversy. Although he did change from a liberal belief in the power of persuasion to a more severe commitment to coercive measures it was always love that formed the justification for his position. It was the pressures of circumstance and ineffectiveness of a liberal approach that saw Augustine adapt his concept of love to a stern coercive policy. However, one must recognise that ultimately the central feature of merciful love remains constant in both Augustine's standpoints. The centrality of love in

<sup>89</sup> Van der Meer, *Augustine*, p.97

<sup>90</sup> Bonner, *Augustine*, p.311

Augustine's latter position is demonstrated in Letter 133 written to Marcellinus, in which he appeals for Marcellinus' mercy in the punishment of two Circumcellions who killed Restitutus, a Catholic priest, and beat Innocent, another Catholic priest.

'Carry out, O Christian judge, the duty of a loving father. Be angry at the wickedness in such a way that you remember to be humane, and do not turn the desire for revenge upon the atrocities of sinners, but apply the will to heal the wounds of sinners.... Do not, now that the crime has been discovered, look for an executioner, since in its discovery you were unwilling to use a torturer.'<sup>91</sup>

In pursuing this theory of persecution against the Donatist heretics Augustine was faced with the 'Donatist argument that the very fact of being persecuted made their Church the chosen of the Lord.' Thus Augustine tells his readers in A.D. 402 that not every persecution is wrong, and meticulously highlights the need to be righteous as well as being persecuted; maintaining that only a member of the Catholic Church can be truly righteous. In considering these accusations levelled at the Catholic Church it is important to acknowledge that the appeals to the state were not seen solely on the Catholic side of this dispute. On the contrary, 'so far as the Donatist dispute was concerned, both sides were willing to appeal to the secular arm, and to enlist its services when they could.'<sup>92</sup> In fact the initial appeals to the State were made by the Donatists.

Firstly, the Donatists appealed to Constantine in the dispute over Caecilian's consecration to the bishopric of Carthage, appealing that they be officially recognised as the true Church. This episode represented a key moment in the history of the early Church. In appealing to the Christian Emperor schism was, for the first time, vulnerable to becoming an offence punishable by the law, placing the State at the disposal of whichever side could prove themselves orthodox. It was only after the rejection of this appeal that the Donatists started to express negative sentiments towards State intervention in ecclesiastical affairs, asserting that false religion was

<sup>91</sup> *Epist. 133*

<sup>92</sup> Bonner, *Augustine*, p.297

not of secular concern. The second occasion the schismatics appealed to the State was regarding a schism *within* the Donatist Church. During this episode they appealed to the Emperor to invoke imperial legislation against the Maximianist dissidents. This course of action demonstrates the Donatists' lack of scruples in using the State against their own schismatic members, which was effectively what the Catholics later did to them. In fact the picture the Donatists painted of themselves was far from an accurate depiction of the truth. The Donatists' derision of Catholic appeals to the State was openly contradicted by their willingness to appeal to the State if they felt it was to their advantage.

The Donatists exhibited a very fickle approach to the state. 'Under Julian the Apostate, who took a malicious delight in showing favour to anything that made for Christian disunity, they were firm supporters of the Government, while under Constantius and Honorius, who pursued a very different policy, they complained bitterly that their deputations were not received, and when the Government began to deal drastically with their excesses and even with the movement as such, they suddenly turned round and asked what the bishops had to do with the Court, or the Emperor with the Church.'<sup>93</sup> The Donatists' inconsistent approach towards the state was highly pragmatic and saw them attempt to gain secular support from any ruler that appeared sympathetic to their objectives. However, ultimately their approach worked against their chances of success in the controversy. By adopting such a fickle approach to the State the Donatists appeared in a hypocritical light, accepting and condemning intervention by the secular arm at their convenience. This was a problem that was compounded by their history of violence and cruelty through the activism of their Circumcellions. In his answer to Petilian, Augustine considers the right of the Church to appeal to secular rulers. Petilian asserted that the kings of this world are depicted as persecutors and murders in the Scripture, and have more recently persecuted the Christians. However, Augustine draws attention to their appeal to Julian the Apostate, and shows how the Scripture has also depicted rulers as the friends of the Church and Christians.

<sup>93</sup> Van der Meer, *Augustine*, p.81

Before concluding this investigation into Augustine's views on religious coercion it is necessary to acknowledge the approach of the State to the Donatist controversy. The State sought ecclesiastical unity, with the aim of minimising civil disturbances. This led them to support the cause of the Catholic Church for the two key reasons. Firstly, the Catholic Church was the more inclusive party of the two. They were motivated by the desire for ecclesiastical unity. If the State had supported the rigorism of the Donatist cause unity would never have been achieved, not without the complete surrender of the Catholic side. The second motivation for intervention was the violence of the Donatists, which made it impossible for the State to refrain from action. The right of the Catholics as citizens of the Roman Empire to protection by the State conferred a duty on the State to provide this protection. Had there been no violence the State may have been prevented from intervention. 'It is this consideration which prevents us from seeing in the African situation a pure laboratory experiment in working out the relations between Church and State.'<sup>94</sup>

As Augustine discovered, the most effective method used against the Donatists was not persuasive argument but force employed by the secular arm of government. This was because even when their historical and theological arguments had been disproved and controverted they remained a hostile force set against the Catholic Church. Having considered how Augustine drew this conclusion it is necessary to take into account how it affected the notion of 'political Augustinianism'. While this thesis would agree with Greenslade that it would be unfair to blame an essentially mild man who opposed the death penalty for many of the atrocities littering the pages of history, one cannot ignore the fact that many persecutors since Augustine have used his authority to defend their actions.<sup>95</sup> To fully understand the nature of the events that led to the downfall of the Donatist Church it is imperative that this thesis takes into account the 411 *Collatio*, since alongside the coercive policies adopted by the Church up until this point it represents a pivotal point in the defeat of the heresy. By considering the proceedings of the conference the holes in Donatism's theology and doctrine when compared with the strength of Augustine's arguments becomes vividly apparent, as well as going

<sup>94</sup> Greenslade, *Schism*, p.143

<sup>95</sup> Greenslade, *Schism*, p.145

some way to placing the Catholic victory and Donatist defeat within their historical context.

### *The 411 A.D. Conference at Carthage*

The Sack of Rome in 410 had been a disastrous period in Roman history and had seen the Roman government suspend its interest in the African Church and its enthusiasm in the campaign to repress Donatism. 'The Imperial laws against heretics were suspended. They could not be reimposed now, without some public gesture. For the Catholic Emperor, Honorius...only a full official enquiry into the origin of the Donatist schism would eclipse the vacillations of Imperial policy in the previous years.'<sup>96</sup> The controversy reached its epic climax in the Conference held at Carthage in June 411, ordered by the Emperor himself at the request of the Catholics. It had long been Augustine's great desire to hold a conference between the leaders of each Church, to meet in council rather than strife with the aim of securing ecclesiastical unity. However, the Donatists had been equally persistent in avoiding such an assembly, and had successfully frustrated all Catholic attempts to realise a conference. It was to be a *Collatio*, a 'comparison', of the claims of both Churches to the title of the true Catholic Church. Flavius Marcellinus was to preside over the Conference as *cognitor* and promised the Donatists his total impartiality and that he would 'restore their Churches to the schismatic bishops who agreed to attend, and as long as the cause should be *sub iudice*, to suspend all penalties and seizures of churches inflicted upon the schismatics.'<sup>97</sup>

The *Collatio* was welcomed by the Catholics as an official means of convincing the large numbers of half-convinced converts from Donatism that the Donatist cause was lost. Augustine did not expect the Conference to be a time for irenic negotiations. The Donatists had been the first to appeal to the Emperor Constantine to judge between themselves and Caecilian. Constantine had gone against the Donatists in declaring the party of Caecilian as the true Catholic Church, and all imperial policy against the Donatists since had stemmed from this ruling.

<sup>96</sup> P.L.R.Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London, Faber and Faber, 1967) p.330

<sup>97</sup> Willis, *Augustine*, p.71

The procedures for the conference were designed to promote peaceful and orderly discussion, and thus reduced the Conference to a manageable thirty-six people, with Augustine chosen as one of the *actores* for the Catholics. However, the Donatists demanded all their bishops be present, which resulted in there being 286 Catholic bishops present, 120 absent and 64 vacant sees and 279 Donatist bishops, and approximately the same number of absentees and vacant sees.<sup>98</sup>

The discussion eventually got round to the issue of Caecilian and his consecrator, Felix of Apthungi, as the root of the original schism. The Catholics had a considerable advantage: facts and documents were on their side. They contrived to have those related to the Donatist appeal to Constantine and its rejection read aloud. The climax of the proceedings was reached when Marcellinus requested the Donatists produce any documentation they had to oppose that put forward by the Catholics demonstrating the acquittal of Felix of Apthungi and Caecilian of their charges of *traditio*. The Donatists claimed the documents had been destroyed. The Donatists failed to prove that Caecilian was a *traditor*. Their arguments were undermined on both theological and historical grounds, which, compounded with their inability to bring forward any fresh evidence, led the Catholics to call for a judgement. It is clear from the report from the Conference that the Donatists were given every opportunity to present their case to the commissioner, who gave considerable latitude to their various hindrances. Marcellinus concluded that the Donatists had failed to sufficiently prove the guilt of Caecilianus, and that even if they had proved his guilt it would not have tainted the Church or justified the Donatists instigation of a schism against the Catholic Church. All Donatist conventicles were to be suppressed and all churches handed over to the Catholics, with the exception of the Donatist communities that as a whole came over to the Catholic faith. This ruling was confirmed in an Edict of Unity in 412 consolidating the laws of repression against the Donatists. Their theology became a crime punishable by a scale of fines and all their property was surrendered to the State and the clergy exiled.

<sup>98</sup> Willis, *Augustine*, p.71

Had the Catholics pursued a policy of reasoned argument and discussion, rather than appealing to the State, Donatism might have flourished for considerably longer, especially given the weakened imperial administration. In the *Retractiones* Augustine's doubts about the Catholic appeal to the civil power are evident. From the outset Augustine had sought to bring the erring Donatists back into the fold of the true Church through the persuasion of argument and power of love. However, it is also made clear that the enduring violence of the Circumcellions, which alongside the opinions of his colleagues, brought Augustine round to the use of State power. All of Africa was overrun with Donatist factions, which through incessant riots, aggressiveness, murders, and outbursts of fierce and reckless cruelty had made the preaching of the faith impossible and appeal to the secular power a matter of necessity. As Willis reminds us, Augustine set the aim of bringing all those in his charge out from the error of schism and into faith and agreement with God to toil for the salvation of their souls, and this objective remained at all times imprinted on a faithful pastor's mind.<sup>99</sup>

Augustine, realising that few would study the official and lengthy proceedings of the Conference wrote a summary *Breviculus Collationis*, followed by another appeal to the Donatists, *Ad Donatistas post Collationem*. This was designed to cover every aspect of the controversy and prevent further misrepresentations by Donatist leaders and concluded with a request.

‘The error which separated us has already been vanquished in the meeting with your bishops. May the time come when the devil in your hearts may be vanquished and Christ be favourable to His flock, gathered in peace as He has commanded.’<sup>100</sup>

This suggests that even with the State directed against them the Donatists were not returning to the Catholic Church in the volumes that had been expected. This was particularly the case in the stronghold of the schism in the High Plains in Numidia. Their continued strength was seen in the beheading of Marcellinus and his brother Apringius. They were both falsely implicated in Count Heraclian's bid

<sup>99</sup> Willis, *Augustine*, p.76

<sup>100</sup> *Ad Don. post Coll.*,xxxv.58

for imperial power. It was suspected that the Donatists were responsible for denouncing them as a means of removing a much-reviled enemy. This did not result in a change in the policy towards the Donatists. Instead two rescripts were issued reaffirming the anti-heretical legislation and a third later ordered the implementation of the Edict of Unity against schismatics. Augustine, however, was about to devote his time to a new opportunity for active controversy focused on the work of the British monk Pelagius.

This chapter has attempted to highlight the importance of the Donatist controversy on the ‘political’ aspects of Augustine’s thought. It has shown how Augustine’s interaction with the Donatists and how his strong desire to secure the salvation of their souls through the reunification of a divided Church drove him to the acceptance of a policy of coercion. It is this role of the secular authority in ecclesiastical affairs that interests this thesis, to determine the influence of controversy on the development of Augustine’s ‘political thought’, and specifically the manner in which such a policy of coercion goes some way to blurring the distinction of the jurisdictions of the two spheres of Church and State, an issue which became more pronounced in the political thought of the Middle Ages. It remains clear that the Donatist movement exercised undeniable influence on Augustine and his works. The deep divisions of the Catholic Church troubled him greatly spurring him into a period of great literary activity and theoretical development. This chapter has argued that it was the Donatist controversy that was predominantly responsible for Augustine’s change of heart regarding the means by which erring Christians should be brought back into the fold of the true Church. Despite Augustine’s conversion from a policy of persuasive discussion to one of secular intervention, one must always remember the motivation was the same: love. His move from a liberal position to one of increased severity is often misunderstood as a shift to a more rigorist standpoint, but this is incorrect. It was always love which drove Augustine into the arms of an approach that worked – the intervention of the State. It was the severity of love that Augustine finally adopted as an approach that effectively achieved his primary objective – recalling the errant to the love of Christ.

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## *Chapter III*

### *Pelagianism - the 'enemies of grace'*

#### *Augustine and Pelagianism – An Introduction*

The history of the Church has been plagued by the enduring disputes over the relationship between divine grace and human agency. The Pelagian controversy in the early fifth century and later the Semi-Pelagians during the fifth and sixth centuries are just two of the most famous examples of episodes that have engaged a debate for which the Church has failed to find a resolution. However, both Augustine and the Pelagians believed they had the solution to this age-old problem of the Church, and it is the dispute that surrounded their diametrically opposed solutions that interests the remaining chapters of this thesis.

The Pelagian controversy occupied Augustine's attention for the best part of his final fifteen years. It was the Pelagians' false sense of human self-sufficiency and their belief in the human capacity for perfectibility which he saw 'as a superficial and simplistic depiction of the human person, one rooted in a fundamental pridefulness, that assumes the possibility of some real moral rectitude, some achievable perfection in the human will.'<sup>101</sup> It was Augustine's decisive reaction to Pelagianism that resulted in some of his most interesting writings and is widely held responsible for the final formulation of his doctrines of grace and predestination, and the position he assumed as the honoured 'Doctor of Grace'.

Augustine believed Pelagius and his followers posed a considerable threat to Catholic theology. 'For Augustine, essential aspects of (African) theology were at stake like sin, original sin, the sinful desire, the central role of Christ as mediator between God and human beings, the primacy of grace over free will, God's omnipotence and the predestination that flows from it, to mention the most important

<sup>101</sup> C.T.Mathewes, 'The Career of the Pelagian controversy', *Augustinian Studies*, Vol.33 (2002) p.207

of them. He saw these important elements put in danger by the Pelagians.’<sup>102</sup> He identified Pelagius’ teaching as a perversion of the truth, dubbing Pelagius as an enemy to the grace of God who left the death of Christ on the cross to no effect, as well as holding him responsible for the introduction of a pernicious heresy into the Catholic Church. This has resulted in Pelagius remaining one of the most maligned characters in ecclesiastical history. Pelagius advocated a more self-deterministic view of human nature as opposed to the notion of humanity being divinely determined. It would be accurate to say that the continuing influence of Augustine in Christian theology has been largely responsible for the maintenance of the polemic against Pelagius.

It is the development of Augustine’s political theology in light of the influences exerted by Pelagianism that concerns the next three chapters of this thesis. They will investigate the degree to which the Pelagian controversy reveals something deep about Augustine and Augustinianism, whether it can provide the reader with an insight into what was intrinsically important to Augustine’s thought, or if it represented a philosophical challenge from which Augustine was never able to fully recover.

The author will seek to emphasise the formative influence of his engagement with the Pelagians, especially regarding the concepts of original sin, grace, and predestination. Particular attention will be devoted to the resultant revelation of the centrality and sovereignty of prevenient grace, as opposed to sin, in the body of Augustine’s thought, and the importance of this in understanding his theology as a whole.<sup>103</sup> Through this investigation it will become evident that ‘everything ...

<sup>102</sup> M.Lamberigts, ‘Pelagianism: From an Ethical Religious Movement to a Heresy and Back Again’, *Concilium*, 2003/3, p. 44

<sup>103</sup> The term ‘enemies of grace’, used by Augustine to denote his view of the Pelagians, was largely incorrect. The centrality that grace assumed within the discourse between the two parties was largely a result of Augustine’s involvement. It is more appropriate to use Jerome’s terminology of the Pelagians as the ‘preachers of sinlessness’, which was the core of their theology. Both Pelagius and Julian often protested against the charges of their denial of divine grace, unwilling to accept the title of being the ‘enemies of grace’. The Pelagians never denied grace or perceived their self-identity in terms of enmity to grace, they only refused to articulate grace in Augustinian terms. It was this difference in their understandings of grace, and their belief in human sinlessness, that formed the basis their dispute Augustine’s dispute, which has seen the Augustinian definition of Pelagianism triumph, with “Pelagian” and “enemy of grace” becoming synonymous in theological terminology. For more information on the centrality of sinlessness not grace in Pelagian doctrine see M.R.Rackett, ‘What’s wrong with Pelagianism?’ *Augustinian Studies*, Vol.33, p.236

hangs on grace for Augustine, and grace is the first and last word of his theology: the grace revealed in Christ, and delivered in and through his Church, is for Augustine the crux of the matter.’<sup>104</sup> Chapter V will then assess the impact these religious and theoretical developments had on Augustine’s understanding of the nature of the state and the role it plays in the life of the individual and society.

Before launching into the intricacies of the Pelagian controversy it is necessary to identify important differences between the Donatist and Pelagian movements, and their relevance. As discussed above, the roots of the Donatist movement are now widely appreciated to have considerable, although not exclusive, foundations in the Numidian Berber antagonism to the Roman Empire and its civilisation and the consequent social and economic discontents. Donatism was more practical and circumstantial in character, representing an actual threat to the unity of the Church. In contrast the Pelagian controversy was established on more doctrinal and theoretical grounds. It challenged the foundations of the Catholic Church mounting a philosophical attack that threatened to undermine the Church. The dispute emerged as a result of two divergent views on the roles of God and human initiative in the process of salvation, and it is this aspect of the controversy that will occupy this thesis. However, it is worth briefly highlighting that commentators have suggested that the Pelagian movement also had social aims. In his article ‘*Pelagius and the End of Roman Rule in Britain*’ J.N.L.Myers points out that the term “*gratia*”, used in the description of Pelagians as ‘*inimici gratiae*’, had a euphemistic meaning. This understanding of “*gratia*” implied ‘judicial corruption in the courts, or for official hanky panky of all kinds of public life’. And it was against this “*gratia*” in both secular administration and theology that the Pelagian Movement was thought to be directed.<sup>105</sup> However, this is a theory which has

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<sup>103</sup> *cont’d* and G. Bonner, ‘Pelagianism and Augustine’ *Augustinian Studies*, Vol.23, pp.33-51. However, T.F.Martin in ‘RESPONSE: Augustine and Augustinians Consultation on “Pelagianism”’ *Augustinian Studies*, Vol.33, pp.271-275 suggests terming Pelagians ‘enemies of grace’ was a strategic move within a polemic context, which forced the Pelagians to submit to Augustine’s terms. This emphasises our need to understand the nature of the polemical argument and context as the ancient world would have done in order to appreciate how the conclusions should be read.

<sup>104</sup> Mathewes, ‘Pelagian Controversy’ p.211

<sup>105</sup> The scope of this thesis restricts further consideration of these ideas. For more on this subject see J.N.L.Myers ‘Pelagius and the End of Roman Rule in Britain’, *Journal of Religious Studies*, (1960) pp.21-36 & W.Leibeschuetz ‘Did the Pelagian Movement have Social Aims?’, *Historia* (1963) pp.227-41

been criticised by others writing on the aims of the Pelagian Movement, often asserting that Pelagianism was concerned with religious, not social, reform.

In studying the Pelagian controversy it is important to recognise that much of what we know about Pelagius as an individual and the heresy to which he gave his name is from his enemies and references made to him in their letters and treatises. Essentially, much more information is required for any definitive judgements to be made about Pelagius or the heresy to which has taken his name. This does not mean that certain key aspects of Pelagian doctrine cannot be distilled from what is available to us. Pelagianism was more a collection of numerous opinions that emerged in an unsystematic and casual manner than a coherent and uniform theology, which made it considerably more complicated for the Catholics to identify a target at which they could direct their attacks. There is no evidence to suggest that Pelagianism was a mass movement like Donatism, and although a considerable quantity of Pelagian works have survived their authorships remain doubtful in many cases. And the mere existence of written works today provides no solid information regarding the readership that such works enjoyed in their day. Despite the existence of several pockets of Pelagianism in various areas such as Sicily, Constantinople and Rome, even in these areas there is little to inform us of their numerical strength, although the African bishops were convinced the Pelagians were very numerous in Africa. This again emphasises the divergence in the character of the two controversies, Pelagianism was theoretical in nature, it was not a body of thought that appealed to the masses in the way Donatism had done, but was a threat based on more profound philosophical principles that challenged the foundations of Augustine's Church.

It is similarly paramount, as Rackett asserts, to appreciate Pelagianism from the perspective of a Pelagian when assessing the key tenets of their doctrine. The major failure of so many commentaries on the Pelagian controversy is to neglect what the Pelagians affirmed as their primary interest, which was the possibility of sinlessness, not the denial of divine grace. As Bonner astutely observes, 'historians and theologians have too long tended to form their image of Pelagianism by

looking through Augustinian spectacles.’<sup>106</sup> This is a tendency that has resulted in the longstanding misconception that Pelagianism represented a heresy with the primary objective of refuting humanity’s need for divine assistance in achieving salvation. Far from this the Pelagians did not only accept the need for grace, although this was not concurrent with the Augustinian concept of grace, but their key objective was to promote the belief that all men possess the possibility of living a sinless life.<sup>107</sup> Thus, had Jerome had a more formidable influence on the discourse of the controversy it is quite probable that Pelagians would have been remembered as the ‘preachers of sinlessness’ rather than as the ‘enemies of grace’ that Augustine depicted. , The notion that humans are capable of living a sinless life on earth would arguably be a more accurate description of the theological principles that defined Pelagianism.

Nonetheless, sufficient knowledge exists of the theoretical principles that most concern this thesis, such as original sin and grace. Besides, it was not so much the numerical strength and presence of the Pelagians that posed the greatest threat to the teachings of the Catholic Church: it was their theology, which ‘went directly counter to their own. African concern, it may reasonably be suggested, arose from the conviction of their own rightness with regard to the doctrine of Original Sin, and a refusal to allow that there could ever be any compromise on this matter.’<sup>108</sup> It is the nature of this Pelagian doctrine, the perceived threat it represented to Catholicism, and the theoretical principles Augustine developed to counter the menace they posed to the foundations of his faith which will be considered in more detail in this chapter, before looking at the impact this had on Augustine’s political theology in Chapters IV and V.

<sup>106</sup> G.Bonner, ‘Pelagianism and Augustine’ *Augustinian Studies*, Vol.23 (1992) p.48

<sup>107</sup> In ‘RESPONSE: Augustine and Augustinians Consultation on “Pelagianism”’ Martin suggests that rather than altering the focus of Pelagian doctrine Augustine’s works and treatises address the ‘inevitable’ conclusion of the premises set forth by Pelagius and his followers. He suggests that arguing for the possibility of a sinless life ultimately undermines the ‘theological-spiritual foundation’ of a theology of grace, thus is tantamount to being ‘enemies of grace’.

<sup>108</sup> Bonner, ‘Pelagianism and Augustine’ p.37

## *Jerome and Augustine's early involvement*

Augustine did not enter the fray of the Pelagian controversy until his preoccupation with Donatism had eased. As we have seen this occupied most of his time up until 411 Council of Carthage, as he attempted to bring the Donatists back into the fold of the Church. However, the Pelagian controversy had been under way for some years before Augustine's contribution, even as early as 394, largely through the works of Jerome and his conflictual relationship with Pelagius. Jerome was acquainted with Pelagius in Rome while Augustine was embroiled in the dangers of the Donatist threat. Their adversarial relationship was reignited around 412 when Jerome, living in Bethlehem, found Pelagius had moved to Palestine. Jerome's role in the early stages of the dispute is often overlooked and dismissed outright, which Rackett suggests has something to do with Jerome's equation of Pelagianism with preceding heretics, most notably Origen.<sup>109</sup>

Jerome's opposition to Pelagianism was rooted in his opposition to their belief in the ability to live a sinless life, dubbing them 'preachers of sinlessness' and 'masters of heresy', as well as his objection to their concept of grace which meant nothing more than God's gift of free will and the Law. These views led Jerome into a blistering literary attack on these Pelagianism's assertion that people are able to live sinless lives, which is demonstrated in his Letter 133: an effective if controversial piece.

'[They] say we ought to thank Him for having created us such that of our own free will we can choose the good and avoid the evil. Nor do they see that in alleging this the devil uses their lips to hiss out an intolerable blasphemy.... Surely the man who says this is no ordinary blasphemer; the poison of his heresy is no common poison.'<sup>110</sup>

Jerome vigorously argued that Pelagians overestimated the power of free will and stood in firm opposition against their assertion of human perfectibility on earth,

<sup>109</sup> Rackett, 'What is wrong with Pelagianism?' p.228-9

<sup>110</sup> Jerome, *Letter 133*, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf206.v.CXXXIII.html> [17-07-05]

holding that true sinlessness exists only in Heaven when the Church will be spotless and without wrinkle.

In 412 Augustine involved himself in the controversy against Pelagianism, consequently embarking upon a period of theoretical transition in his views on grace, predestination and the State. Augustine believed the fatal flaw of Pelagian theology lay in their 'absence of an adequate understanding of grace as an active force in the pursuit of righteousness ... "the heart of the matter, which in this question is the sole or almost the sole point of contention that we have with these people," [is] namely the nature of God's grace.'<sup>111</sup> At this early stage the rift between the two theological standpoints was not too wide to bridge and Augustine offered a compromise to attempt reconciliation between the divisions within the Church and to prevent the violent rupture that was to come. He requested the Pelagians' confess a sufficient view of grace by which man can live without sin. However, in 415 the Synod of Diospolis came to represent a watershed in the Pelagian controversy ending any chances of peaceful resolution.

At this Synod Pelagius managed to maintain the possibility of living without sin, while anathematising the more controversial concepts associated with Pelagianism, including the assertion that anyone had lived a sinless life. The bishops accepted Pelagius' response and acquitted him of all heretical charges, effectively granting their tacit approval for Pelagianism's theoretical possibility of man living without sin by their labour and God's grace. This episode spurred Augustine into a period of literary responses to what he perceived as an utterly abhorrent theology. Although it would appear the compromise offered by Augustine had been met by Pelagius, Augustine was unconvinced. He had obtained a correspondence between Pelagius and a friend, in which Pelagius claimed God's commandments could be kept 'easily' while making no reference to the role of God's grace. Augustine doubted Pelagius' sincerity at the Conference, and did not honour the offer he had previously made. Instead Augustine intensified his attack on the Pelagians and their understanding of divine grace, believing that exposing their heretical conception of grace would lead to their ecclesiastical defeat. This thesis will now look at

<sup>111</sup> Rackett, 'What is wrong with Pelagianism?' p.232-233

Pelagian doctrine before assessing the impact it had on Augustine's political theology.

*'Be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect' (Matt. 5:48)*

### *Original Sin and Grace – The Pelagian view*

The problem of original sin is widely recognised as one of the most complex and sensitive themes of the Christian faith: the Pelagian controversy is no exception to this observation. The controversy was fundamentally oriented around the concept of divine grace, its necessity and sufficiency in man's quest for divine salvation. However, it is from Pelagius' and Augustine's differing conceptions of original sin, the nature of mankind following Adam's transgression and the consequent Fall of the human race, that their understandings of grace stem. Augustine has been perceived as the creator of the dogma of original sin, advocating the view that 'at the heart of the opaque problem of evil in general, evil of which human beings feel themselves to be partly innocent, there lies an evil which they do personally because they have the experience of a disorder within themselves and of an inability to do the good that they want to do and to avoid the evil that they do not want to do.'<sup>112</sup> Augustine saw original sin as designating the sin, not of Adam, but of all humanity. It is the condition contracted by all human beings by virtue of being born into humanity.

Before addressing Augustine's concept of Original Sin and grace this thesis will look at Pelagius' understanding of the human condition. Thus allowing the reader to appreciate the danger Augustine believed the Pelagian 'enemies of grace' posed to the omnipotence of God and the sovereignty of His grace, through their attribution of so much to human weakness; the crux of the controversy. Since it was this 'startling new reading of man's condition, powers, and dependence for salvation ... that broke like a thunderbolt upon the Western Church at the opening of the fifth century, and forced her to reconsider, from the foundations, her whole teach-

<sup>112</sup> B.Seboüé, 'The Theological Rationalisation of Original Sin', *Concilium*, 2004/1, p.11

ing as to man and his salvation.’<sup>113</sup> This examination of Pelagian doctrine will also highlight the developments the controversy initiated in Augustine’s doctrines, thus emphasising the distinct characteristics that became the quintessence of the Augustinian State.

‘At the heart of Pelagius’ teaching was the belief that, when God created man in his own image, he endowed him with an innate capacity to choose between good and evil according to the prompting of his conscience...It is this innate capacity to make our own free choice between good and evil that we inherit from Adam, not the tainted legacy of Original Sin, and the sole effect of Adam’s first sin upon us is that we habitually imitate him: it is not Adam’s concupiscence but his example in disobeying God’s command which turns us away from good to evil.’<sup>114</sup>

Consequently, Pelagius was not tolerant of a doctrine of original sin understood as the transmission of sin through procreation. He believed the doctrine of original sin impugned God’s goodness as creator and implied a dangerously Manichaean view of the human body as essentially evil. In opposition to this doctrine Pelagius held that man, as God’s creation, is essentially good and cannot be destroyed by sin. It is this belief in the perfectibility of mankind that distinguishes the two bodies of thought and essentially drives Augustine’s response to conclude in such a negative conception of the State.

The Pelagian outlook on original sin and mankind’s condition was largely coloured by Pelagius’ constant polemic against the determinism and dualism of the Manichaean religion. Pelagius’ attitude towards human nature is unmistakably informed by a need to refute Manichaeism, its central tenet of the two souls of man, one good and one evil, and their notion that all is matter essentially evil, including the human body. This opposition to Manichaeism forms two fundamental

<sup>113</sup> B.B.Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1930) p.299

<sup>114</sup> B.R.Rees, *The Letters of Pelagius and his Followers* (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 1988) p.7

considerations at the heart of Pelagius' rejection of the concept of original sin. The first is determinism. The Manichees were dualists who denied the goodness of matter, and since man was composed of matter and spirit it was a logical conclusion that man inevitably sins as a result of the material element of his nature. For the Pelagians any such talk of the transmission of sin and guilt makes sin an inevitable component of human existence, and therefore causes one to fall into the trap of Manichaeism. 'To make sin necessary would be to deny the nature of the will, whose only necessity lies in its capacity both to sin and not to sin.'<sup>115</sup> Pelagius was utterly opposed to making human weakness the measure of human achievement. He refused to put mankind in the position where they were made guilty of a deed they were not responsible for committing and threatened to strike at the root of human moral endeavour. This was because, 'if someone is told that he is capable of avoiding sin, he will be encouraged to make every effort to avoid it, with the result that, even if he does sin, his sins will be less frequent and less serious. The traducian theory of the physical transmission of Adam's primal sin seemed to the Pelagians a recipe for disaster.'<sup>116</sup> Given that making sin a condition of birth dissociates Adam's descendants from both the guilt and moral responsibility of sin, this provides men who do not want to live rightly with an excuse by asserting they have been unable to live well since God has withheld grace from them: thus they can only live ill.

It is important to appreciate how Augustine and Pelagius perceived sin, how they agree and where they differ. They both differ from Manichaeism, which sees sin as a substance. While they agree on the ontology of sin: that it is not a substance, they disagree on the effects, harmful or otherwise, sin has on man. For Augustine sin can hurt mankind, whereas for Pelagius it cannot. It is this 'anhypostatic' (Bonner) conception of evil that focuses on the idea of what sin is that forms the second reason for Pelagius' rejection of original sin. Pelagius maintained that sin was an action, a privation, a non-substantial thing, which was not able to damage man's nature. 'Likewise would a doctrine of transmitted sin seem to involve a view of sin as active in such a way as to cripple and transform man's created na-

<sup>115</sup> R.F.Evans, *Pelagius: Inquiries and Reappraisals* (London, Adam and Charles Black, 1968) p.97

<sup>116</sup> Bonner, 'Pelagianism and Augustine' p.35

ture; this crippling and transforming power would only be possible if there were a “substance” which had been created as an evil component of man’s nature.<sup>117</sup> Pelagius again believes such a position is equivalent to Manichaeism. This is not to say that Pelagius did not believe Adam was the first sinner and responsible for bringing sin into the world. On the contrary, Pelagius believed Adam’s disobedience has injured man’s existence through his example. This careful avoidance of anything slightly Manichaean resulted in Pelagius’ different understanding of the nature of sin and its effects on mankind’s condition since its inception.

The Pelagian suggestion that sin is unable to corrupt man because it is an action not a substance was particularly dangerous to Augustine as it negated Christ’s purpose. If true it would destroy Christ’s work, as Christ cannot not save man from sin if sin does not corrupt. Augustine countered this argument, drawing on an analogy of the abstention of food, for while this is also an action it too can damage the body and kill man. So while Augustine does not claim sin is a substance he asserts that the departure of the soul from God, sin, the only true sustenance of mankind, is equal to denying the body food. This disproves the Pelagian assertion that an action cannot corrupt mankind. The Pelagian assertion of sin not being a substance had another consequence. To maintain the Pelagians’ unqualified free will they advocated sin as a shadow, resting temporarily over the soul leaving no trace behind, thus removing the consequences of sin on the soul. This threatens the seriousness of sin, since its substance is the part that outlives the act itself, and its continuance is its existence. Therefore, to propose this image of sin is at the expense of moral standards.

This view of original sin meant that Pelagius, unlike Augustine, did not hold a high opinion of unfallen Adam, and did not believe the first sin had any great significance. Pelagius did not believe Adam was exempt from the maladies that trouble his progeny: he was mortal from the outset and would have died regardless of whether he had or had not sinned since if this were untrue God’s command to multiply would have been redundant. Pelagius believed the fratricide committed by

<sup>117</sup> Evans, *Inquiries*, p.97

Cain and the unnatural behaviour of the Sodomites were more grievous sins than Adam's transgression, and could not fathom why a just God would have punished the entire human race so disproportionately, or why the ensuing punishment for sin would weaken man so that he committed more sin. Pelagians maintained that Adam's disobedience of God's solitary commandment resulted in his injury alone. They 'denied the effects of Original Sin upon man. Adam's fall had been personal to himself; man was in any case mortal, and no man had been given immortal life through Christ's incarnation. Accordingly each man's destiny depended on himself ... and grace far from being the cause of merit, was its reward.'<sup>118</sup> Adam alone was punished for his sin. Mankind is affected by Adam's sin solely through the example of his behaviour. This bad example infects man from childhood, gradually bringing each individual increasingly under its power causing man to imitate this example, repeatedly sinning and disobeying the natural law of God.

Pelagius developed his entire doctrine of man's sinful nature on this basis of habit and example and through doing so avoided any attachment to the determinism he associated with Manichaeism. The universality of human sinfulness is explicable as the outcome of social habit stemming from Adam's disastrous example, far from being physically hereditary it is the outcome of bad teaching and example built up over generations. Pelagius consequently believed it was possible for all men to fulfil Christ's command 'Be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect' (Matt. 5:48), as God would not have commanded the impossible. Therefore, man is, without exception, perfectly capable of living a life without sin and adhering to the commandments of God. 'When will a man guilty of any crime or sin accept with a tranquil mind that his wickedness is a product of his own will, not of necessity, and allow what he now strives to attribute to nature to be ascribed to his own free choice? It affords endless comfort to transgressors of the divine law if they are able to believe that their failure to do something is due to inability rather than disinclination.'<sup>119</sup> Mankind consists of naturally rational beings with the ability to know God's will through the law of nature written into their hearts. Thus

<sup>118</sup> G. Leff, *Medieval Thought: Saint Augustine to Ockham* (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books Ltd., 1958) p. 53

<sup>119</sup> 'On the Possibility of not Sinning' in Rees, *The Letters of Pelagius*, p.167

man, a rational creature endowed with will, is capable of living in accordance with divine will and does not sin out of a necessity imposed from without.

It is this emphasis on the freedom of the human will within their understanding of grace that distinguishes the Pelagians from Augustine. This is to the extent that the Pelagians have frequently been accused of denying man's need for grace; an accusation that holds no water. 'On the contrary, Pelagius believed that mankind is created with the ultimate grace of freedom, and to it is added the grace of the divine commands in Scripture teaching us what we should do and sacramental release from past guilt in baptism.'<sup>120</sup> Far from sinning out of necessity Pelagians believed the turning away from God and the law of nature that characterises sin is a matter of the will. Though they affirm God's help they believe this help consists of man's free will, which in turn is guided through the provision of God's commandments and teachings that enable man to know how he is to direct his free will to seek and achieve the good. So while man needs God's commandments they do not need divine aid to assist them in fulfilling these commandments. The Pelagians' theoretical possibility for a man to become perfect by avoiding sin was viewed as an aspect of humanity that cannot be destroyed by conditions exterior to the will. Pelagius attributes this necessity of mankind's nature to have free will, and thus the capacity to be without sin, to God's grace.

'We put in the first place *posse*, power, in the second, *velle*, will, and in the third *esse*, realisation. The power we place in our nature, the volition in our will, and the realisation in accomplishment. The first of these faculties expressed in the term *posse* is especially assigned to God, who has bestowed it on his creature. The other two, indicated in the terms *velle* and *esse* must be referred to the human agent because they flow forth from the fountain of his will.'<sup>121</sup>

<sup>120</sup> S.G.Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church* (London, S.P.C.K., 1991) p.205

<sup>121</sup> Pelagius, cited by Augustine, *De Gratia Christi* 5, J.Stevenson (trans.) *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies* (London, S.P.C.K., 1989) p.217

This 'grace of creation' is one facet of the Pelagian conception of grace through which God bestows upon mankind the possibility of a life without sin. Grace is nature, it is the nature with which mankind was created with free will, and by that alone man is able to keep God's commandments and be righteous. 'The endowment of free will is a "capacity"; it is, because given by God in our making, a necessity of nature and not in man's power to have or not have. It is the right use of it only, which man has in his power.'<sup>122</sup> Pelagius accounts for the existence of sinless men in his three "times". During the time between Adam and Moses, the 'time of nature', he asserts that it was possible for man to be without sin, the coming of Christ was not necessary. He gives examples of these individuals who out of free choice lived in accordance with the law of nature, such as Noah, Abraham and Job.<sup>123</sup>

'Noah too was a righteous man, and we know what the merit of his righteousness brought for him, namely, that life was granted to him alone along with his family, after the whole world had been condemned by means of the Flood. Scripture bears witness to what Abraham gained by the merit of his faith and righteousness, in that he alone at that time on the earth was God's friend, being the only man who had been found to be righteous.'<sup>124</sup>

By the time of Moses, however, human nature had developed a layer of obstructive rust, which through moral corruption plunged mankind into ignorance and darkness. It was the Law of Moses that freed mankind from this ignorance and remedied the corrupt condition of mankind. The law was to act as a file, abrasively eroding the rust of ignorance to eventually reveal man's newly polished and immaculate nature. By redeeming mankind from this condition of ignorance they were once again able to obey the will of God and secure the end of eternal life.

<sup>122</sup> Warfield, *Tertullian*, p.331

<sup>123</sup> This assertion questioned the purpose of the Resurrection, Christ's death on the cross, and the atonement that it brought. Did these sacrifices serve any purpose if man already had the capacity to live without sin?

<sup>124</sup> Pelagius, 'On the Christian Life' in Rees, *Letters of Pelagius*, p.113-4

Nonetheless the power of habitual sin became too much for the Law of Moses. It is this power of successive sinning which paralyses the will to act in accordance with the law of nature. Sin surrounds man from the cradle to the grave, infecting infants with the habitual nature of sinning from their early childhood. ‘Pelagius can even write that habit holds the sinner “as if by a certain necessity of sinning” which he has prepared for himself, i.e. not one that is imposed upon him but the fact of his birth or by the mere constituents of which he is made. Sinful habit is productive of a condition of ignorance; our reason is lost in a cloud; the law of nature is in oblivion, buried.’<sup>125</sup> Therefore, man’s true nature and capability to live without sin, is restricted and obscured by the power of habitual sin and its effects, which man is both helpless and powerless to overcome. This is the third phase of Pelagius’ three “times”, and is called the “time of grace”.

It is essential in examining Pelagius’ thought to remember that even amidst this helpless condition of mankind the capability to live without sin remains. Man is not damaged by sin: he is merely restricted and prevented from a sinless life by the effects of repeatedly sinning. Man retains possession of the ability to live without sin but this ability remains an untapped resource as the impediments of sin place its realisation beyond man’s reach. Thus, despite the endurance of this ability habitual sinning renders mankind’s awareness of their empowering ability to live without sin obsolete. For Pelagius, ‘habit remained external to the personality: it was a rust, a rust that could be rubbed off ... habit could be broken; the past of a man could be sloughed off.... A man’s sinful behaviour, therefore, could be reversed: he was restricted by past habits that he could disown.... (Pelagius) could firmly believe that no irreversible Fall of man – only a thin wall of ‘corrupt manners’ – stood between the true Christian and the delightful innocence of man’s first state.’<sup>126</sup> In essence man throughout time has possessed the untapped capability of living a life free of sin and the effects of sin.

It is in this third “time” that Pelagius makes room for divine grace, excluding the initial grace of implanting the capability for sinlessness within each man. How-

<sup>125</sup> Evans, *Inquiries*, p.101

<sup>126</sup> P.L.R.Brown, ‘Pelagius and his Supporters: Aims and Environment’, *Journal of Theological Studies*, N.S., Vol.XIX (1968) p.104-5

ever, he maintains that while grace may freely discharge the sins of man it is only with the consent and choice of the sinner. Pelagius' conception of grace is very different to Augustine's. Pelagian grace makes men able to fulfil the commandments of God *more easily*. It illumines the mind so the ignorance and paralysis of sin are removed and mankind can once again know those things pertaining to their final salvation; the will of God. It is a three-fold concept; Christ is redeeming, revealing and exemplary. Christ is redeeming in that he died undeservedly on the cross for mankind, he was without sin and is Creator of the universe but nonetheless submitted to the curse of death. This redeeming nature of grace is received through the forgiveness of sins in the sacrament of baptism, which does cleanse individuals of original guilt, but secures their entrance to the kingdom of God.<sup>127</sup> This notion of baptism was very different to Augustine's, which advocated that while removing past sins baptism does not remove the weakness of mankind, concupiscence, due to original sin. Baptism cannot remedy man's damaged nature: the internal and prevenient grace of God alone does this. For Pelagius, however, in baptism 'bodily things are cleansed by bodily things, and spiritual by spiritual; the soul is seen to be washed by the word and water, the body by water only.'<sup>128</sup> Through the baptism of a Christian that individual is cleansed of past sins acquiring the means to live in conformity and obedience with the divine law as revealed in the Scriptures and Christ's example. From baptism onwards they are able to strive to resist temptation and to make the free choice to be responsible for their own future, and be judged accordingly by Christ at the Last Judgement.

The revealing aspect of grace refers to the 'teaching' of Christ; the teaching of the will of God through the 'law'. Pelagius perceives the New Testament as 'law' setting forth examples and commandments to follow. 'Grace is law, the New Testament as a whole is law. The Gospels are a *supplementum legis* in which "exam-

<sup>127</sup> Pelagius believed that through baptism all man's past sins were absolved, making the recipient righteous through God's forgiveness. However, to maintain the freedom of the human will, Pelagius asserted that forgiveness could only occur with the consent and will of the believer, whose soul must possess the intention of obedience to the divine law since grace cannot be imposed on man as it would violate free will. However, Pelagian grace required a rational will, which is only present in adults, not in infants. The need for the consent and will of the believer receiving baptism is essential to Pelagianism's maintenance of free will, but infants do not rationally exercise their free will. Pelagius nowhere indicates how his theology would adapt to enable its application to the remission of infants' sins, which was the orthodox sacramental practice of the Catholic Church.

<sup>128</sup> 'On the Divine Law' in Rees, *Letters of Pelagius*, p.90

ples and commandments for our living are most fully set down.”<sup>129</sup> This illumination of the mind through Christ’s teachings and the law of the Scripture enables man to acquire the knowledge of God’s will and of man’s true nature. By removing the cloud of ignorance that surrounds man’s nature, mankind is able to recover the clarity that permits the free will of men to function effectively. This illumination is similarly aided by the third aspect of Pelagian grace, example. This idea has been seen in Pelagius’ explanation for the sinfulness of humanity. The principle is the same in Pelagius’ notion of grace, except it is Christ’s example man follows. ‘In a general sense it means that Christ offered to men the one paradigm case needed in the time of grace of a man who consistently put to death sinful desire and thus revealed to men that of which their nature is capable.’ It is through the perfect example of Christ that man is stirred to maintain the avoidance of sin. Christ led man through his example to value the qualities of humility, obedience to God, and the rejection of worldly riches. Through these three aspects of grace Pelagians believed the layers of ignorance covering true human nature are penetrated and revived, thus affecting the liberation of mankind from the hindrances of sin enabling man to effectually assert their obedient nature.

Therefore, Pelagius’ understanding of grace can be neatly arranged in a simple formula, and one that rejects any inclusion of ‘internal’ grace. The redemption of sin by Christ, in the remission of sins through baptism, is followed by the illumination of Christ’s ‘teaching’ through the Scriptures and the inspiring example of Christ’s life, which culminates in the salvation from a sinful life by triumphing over the power of sinful habit through the unambiguous knowledge of divine law. This allows Pelagius to maintain the notion of free will since at no point is the will damaged by sin; it is merely restricted by habit while remaining unaltered and free in its essential nature. The essential difference this investigation into the Pelagian understanding of sin and grace has sought to make clear is that while man always has the capacity to be without sin, and that such a sinless condition is a possibility, man cannot attain salvation unaided. This is the crux of his argument and disagreement with Augustine who asserts that man since the Fall has forfeited the capacity to live without sin.

<sup>129</sup> Evans, *Inquiries*, p.106-7

The Pelagians' concept of grace led to a considerable degree of importance being placed on the need to perform good works in order to merit the eternal kingdom. This was so that after baptism and the remission of sins a Christian must be such in deed as well as name. Each Christian must strive for perfection, like their Church, through the study of and obedience to the divine law, by reading the Scriptures and following the commandments of Jesus in every particular. This clearly goes against Augustinian teachings of the gratuity of prevenient grace, which is the single reason that man is enabled to perform good works worthy of salvation. Before this man deserves nothing but condemnation for his multitude of sins, as any ounce of goodness is consumed by sin and pride. The notion that man can perform good works without divine grace was yet another dimension of the conflict between Pelagius and Augustine.

Therefore, the problems surrounding grace stem from the fact that although Pelagians spoke of "grace" 'they meant by this the primal endowment of man with free will, and the subsequent aid given him in order to its proper use by the revelation of the law and the teaching of the gospel, and above all, by the forgiveness of past sins in Christ and by Christ's holy example.'<sup>130</sup> This external notion of grace was in direct opposition to Augustine's concept of internal and prevenient grace, and the movement of the Holy Spirit within the sinner, by which their damaged nature is made good again. Augustine maintained that unless a man's will is freed by divine grace from the shackles of the servitude of sin it is impossible for man to live a righteous and pious life, for without divine grace man is unable to overcome the defects that sin has impressed upon his will. It was the Pelagians' assertion of free choice that Augustine believed left no space for the workings of divine grace, a denial which disturbed Augustine considerably since it undermined the existence of the Church and its teachings, and in particular the death of Christ on the cross rendering his atonement for mankind's sins superfluous.

<sup>130</sup> Warfield, *Tertullian*, p.293

### *Semi-Pelagianism – A middle ground?*

To some the far-reaching doctrine developed by Augustine in response to the Pelagian controversy, was too extreme and went too far in denying the role of man in his own destiny. A movement of opposition was begun by Vitalis of Carthage with his notion that the beginnings of faith spring from the free will: they are the outcome of a human decision, not the result of divine preparation. Soon after, around 426, the opposition to Augustinian grace spread to the monks of Hadrumetum. These monks believed Augustine's teachings on the gratuity of divine assistance severed the linkage between man's actions and his ultimate destiny, striking at the very foundations of the monastic life, since restoration becomes entirely dependent on God's grace and not remotely on human moral achievement. His teachings also questioned the efficaciousness of actions such as prayer, rebuke and exhortation, which Augustine asserts are only genuine if they originate from God.

This movement of opposition later spread to Southern Gaul where it gained strength among a body of monastic leaders who sought a middle ground between the Augustinian concept of grace and the Pelagian doctrine of self-determinism. These Semi-Pelagians were led by John of Cassian<sup>131</sup> of the monastery of St Victor at Marseilles, who was neither a Pelagian nor an Augustinian, and who rejected both the extreme view on free will that characterised the Pelagians and Augustine's teaching on predestination and concupiscence. Their opposition to these more severe elements of Pelagian and Augustinian doctrine became known as Semi-Pelagianism.<sup>132</sup>

The Semi-Pelagians' beliefs did not actually place them half way between Augustine and Pelagius as their name suggests. They praised the condemnation of Pelagianism at the Synod of Carthage (418) and many of Augustine's views, like

<sup>131</sup> For more on John of Cassian see W.S.Babcock 'Grace, Freedom and Justice: Augustine and the Christian Tradition', *Perkins Journal*, Vol.27 (1973) pp.1-15

<sup>132</sup> Augustine knew them as Massilians due to their association with Cassian and Marseilles. The name 'semi-Pelagians' was coined around 1590 to 1600 in connection with Molina's doctrine of grace, which some opponents believed exhibited similarities to the grace of the monks of Marseilles.

human debility after original sin and grace's healing role. However, they disliked his apparent exclusion of human initiative, believing Augustine's teachings on the necessity and gratuity of prevenient grace went too far. Their main departure from Augustine was their affirmation of the significance of human agency, and their consequent rejection of sovereign, predestinating grace. Their doctrine asserted that some good could originate from within mankind, before God comes to man's assistance through his supernatural grace. They sought to safeguard the relationship between human action and human destiny in the face of Augustine's doctrine of sovereign grace.

Semi-Pelagians did believe in original sin, that all men are sinners having derived their sinful condition from Adam's transgression. The representatives of this movement were ready to admit that man was lost in Adam and that all men require divine grace in order to achieve salvation. However, they did oppose the doctrine of a prevenient and irresistible grace, maintaining that not only can man resist grace but that merits also come into the salvific equation. They believed that although mankind cannot save himself entirely of his own free will, men can set in motion the process of their salvation by turning towards God. This saw them depart from Pelagianism's maximisation of the self-determinism attributable to humanity, asserting the necessity for God's assisting and gratuitous grace, given that mankind was unable to achieve salvation unaided. They did specify that turning towards God, away from sin, was initiated by man. Thus, they advocated a degree of human initiative, so as to avoid the Augustinian fatalism that they believed was contrary to the teachings of the Fathers of the Church as well as leading men into a condition of indifference.

The semi-Pelagians maintained the importance of divinely conferred grace on mankind, but that this gift was a response to an initial impulse of man. This ascribed some initiative to mankind in the process of their salvation. 'The human intellect had it in its power to follow the precepts of divine law, and if a man did so God rewarded him. What man initiated, God crowned. God's will was not the only cause of predestination, for in addition to those whom He had eternally

elected there were men who, by their own good deeds, could be chosen.’<sup>133</sup> Vincent of Lerins believed that to make God the author of the damnation of mankind, as Augustine had, was to deny God His traditional attributes of being the all-loving Father.

Augustine addressed these opponents as erring friends rather than heretics, and admits to them that he had earlier held to a “similar error”, a view of an initial human impulse to which God responded with grace.<sup>134</sup> However, by the end of writing Book X of his *Confessions* Augustine was certain that neither baptism nor free will were sufficient to triumph over the damages wreaked upon man nature by inherited sin. He resolved that such an accomplishment was reserved for the power of God's grace alone. It was in response to questions posed by Simplicianus in 396-7 that this change in attitude was made evident. Augustine declared that after struggling with the question of upholding the freedom of the will and divine grace, grace had prevailed. ‘Augustine pointed out that it was as a result of reading Cyprian that he had become aware of the inadequacy of his own position, for Cyprian, citing 1 Corinthians 4:7, had taught “that we must boast in nothing, since nothing is our own.”’<sup>135</sup>

He was converted to the entirely prevenient and gratuitous conception of grace to which he adhered during his controversy with both the Pelagians and the Semi-Pelagians. Augustine's doctrine asserts that God begins faith through the prevenience of His grace, and criticises the semi-Pelagians for sharing the Pelagians' arrogant boasting in man, maintaining that men are totally undeserving of grace, which remains a wholly unmerited gift from God.

The objections to Augustinianism continued to enjoy support until the final triumph of Augustine doctrine, all be it in a slightly diluted form, at the Council of

<sup>133</sup> Leff, *Medieval Thought*, p.53

<sup>134</sup> This conversion of Augustine will be considered in more detail in the section on grace.

<sup>135</sup> R.Harden Weaver, *Divine Grace and Human Agency: A Study of the Semi-Pelagian controversy* (Georgia, Mercer University Press, 1996) p.51. This approach to the controversy utilised a stratagem Augustine had employed against the Donatists. He identified his view with the writings an authoritative leader of the African Church, preventing his work from being branded as innovative. He portrayed his views as having been corrected by tradition, thereby making tradition the source of his reformed view.

Orange in 529, at which much of the Semi-Pelagian teaching was rejected. Augustine's teachings on grace were upheld and institutionalised as the basis for Catholic teaching throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>136</sup> The 'remainders of Pelagianism' were suppressed, following the various articles produced by the synod in favour of a weakened Augustinianism.<sup>137</sup> It is through the works pertinent to this controversy that we are shown Augustine's final position on the role of grace. This was a view that was concurrent with the letter he sent to Sixtus towards the end of the Pelagian controversy. In this he 'stressed his views regarding human nature and divine grace. He had insisted that the human condition as fallen in Adam is incapable of attaining merit on its own. Furthermore, he had argued that grace is utterly gratuitous; it is given totally apart from any human deserving to those whom it chooses.'<sup>138</sup>

This Chapter has paid considerable attention to the theological foundations of Pelagianism and the Pelagians' belief in the power of free will and human initiative in the process of mankind's salvation. In doing this it has sought to lay the foundations for the following two chapters by articulating a clear depiction of the very real threats that Augustine believed the Pelagian heresy embodied. It is important to explain why this thesis has not attempted to come down on either side of the controversy. The reason for this is purely that in doing so the paper would focus too much on the theological aspects of the debate detracting from the political focus of the paper. Although understanding context is of the utmost importance to successfully answering the question, to delve too deeply into theological matters is beyond the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, by clarifying the theological stimulus to which Augustine reacted so aggressively this thesis will be able to accurately assess the influence the controversy had on Augustine's theological beliefs, and more importantly for this thesis his political theology. Therefore,

<sup>136</sup> Markus does not see the outcome of the Council of Orange as a triumph of Augustinian doctrine. He suggests the faith of the Council of Orange was neither Augustinian nor Pelagian. It was the outcome of a century's worth of theological thought, debate, and preaching, influenced by the theological doctrines of both of these thinkers. For more on this see R.A. Markus, 'The Legacy of Pelagius: orthodoxy, heresy and conciliation' in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick*, R. Williams (ed.) pp.214-234

<sup>137</sup> This weakened Augustinianism accepted by the Council rejected Augustine's predestination theory, but accepted his teachings on grace and free will, which received general acceptance by the Church.

<sup>138</sup> Harden Weaver, *Divine Grace*, p.4

Chapter IV will turn directly to the influence Pelagianism's heretical doctrines had on Augustine's understanding of theological issues such as original sin, his conception of grace and doctrine of predestination. This will draw attention to the fundamental importance of the theological basis of Augustine's conception of political society and the State, as well as enabling an evaluation of the impact and doctrinal changes that Pelagianism affected in Augustine's theology and subsequently on his political theory of the State.

★ ★ ★

## *Chapter IV*

### *The influence of the Pelagian controversy on Augustinian politics*

Chapter IV will now take in hand the task of assessing the way in which the Pelagians' views represented a significant departure from the teaching of Saint Augustine and the Catholic Church. The Pelagian heresy had profound effects on the evolution of Augustine's theology, especially his understanding of the concepts of the Fall, original sin, grace, and predestination. Some of this developmental influence has already been mentioned incidentally through the articulation of the Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian standpoints. This section of the paper will attempt bring together the most important elements of Augustine's conception of original sin, grace and predestination, from the responses and treatises Augustine produced during this formative period of heretical controversy. By articulating these doctrines developed by Augustine, largely in response to the Pelagian stimulus, the theological foundations of Augustine's work will be established and a conception of the State will be more easily discerned from the vast number of works in which the subject was touched upon incidentally. Through a detailed analysis of the theological centre upon which Augustinian politics is based Chapter V will be placed within a clear contextual framework, providing a network of solid foundations to a political theology which represented such a radical departure from the politics of perfection that had dominated classical political thought.

#### *The Fall and Original Sin*

The Pelagians represented such a formidable threat to the African Church because of the Church's possession of a doctrine of original sin that was so firmly held and deeply embedded in its teachings. 'It was Tertullian who introduced the idea of the seminal transmission of sin and had coined the term *citium originis* to describe it; it was Cyprian who had stressed that baptism was essential to counteract the

contagion and that this cleansing process should be carried out as early as possible.... What Augustine did was to build original sin and its transmission, infant baptism, grace and predestination into a coherent theological system.’<sup>139</sup> Before this thesis can adequately understand the Augustinian concepts of grace and predestination it is essential to look at Augustine’s view of the Fall and original sin, the root of the affliction which defines the condition of mankind. By developing an understanding of Augustinian original sin it will be possible to appreciate from where the doctrines of grace and predestination originated.

The question one needs to ask of Augustine in order to grasp the very essence of his conception of original sin is: If God truly is the omnipotent, omniscient and omniscient all-loving father He is so often portrayed to be, how can one explain the extent of suffering and wickedness in our world? Augustine explains this by the Fall of mankind and the prevalence of self-love, since Adam’s sin brought death and disorder to the human condition mankind has been left to suffer the consequences of his disobedience: concupiscence. ‘I am torn asunder, fighting with myself in an interior warfare, while “the spirit lusteth against the flesh and the flesh against the spirit,”(Gal.5:71) and the law of my body under the law of sin fights against the law of my mind. (Rom.7:23).... The ancestral poison hardens in me, from Adam the father, who by his fall has undone the whole race.’<sup>140</sup> It is particularly within Romans 7 that Augustine finds the articulation of this interior turmoil and difficulty which he associates with the concupiscence afflicted by original sin.

‘For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.... Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin

<sup>139</sup> Rees, *Letters of Pelagius*, p.9-10

<sup>140</sup> *Epist. 186*

that dwelleth in me.... O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' (*Romans 7:15-24*)

The Fall and original sin, mediated through St Paul's biblical narrative, are the principal foundation for Augustine's political and social convictions. Augustine's interpretation of the Fall leads to his perception of the plight of mankind and the radically changed human condition. It was 'Adam's sin, which...breached and inverted God's order, infects all humans in the registers of life, leaving them morally impotent to pursue the great good.'<sup>141</sup> Ever since mankind has been rendered morally destitute and inherently sinful, to such an extent that he cannot resist his evil predispositions and is unable to avoid sin. This sees humanity, in their imperfection, fall away from God towards evil and Neoplatonist nothingness, but man does not pass totally out of all existence, for God, in His mercy, has kept man in being to make good come of evil.

When God made man He created him upright with a rightly ordered free will to live in a corporeal and spiritual paradise. Humanity existed in a state of supreme blessedness with the innate capacity to pursue a good and pious life free from the conflict that since sin has existed between the spirit and the flesh. It was necessary for mankind to have a free will so they could truly love God, because true love must be given freely, and because without it, it is not possible to live rightly and do good, whilst living in accordance with God's will. However, this utterly free will that grants mankind the capacity to choose to live rightly unavoidably carries with it the inherent possibility of sinning. Therefore, man was created with the capacity to sin, but not bound to do so, as the free will with which man was created was a gift of grace not an inalienable capacity of human nature. For Augustine sin could arise from nothing but the free choice of a free will. Therefore, when 'in paradise man stood in full ability: he had the *posse non peccare*, but not yet the *non posse peccare*; that is, he was endowed with a capacity for either part, and possessed the grace of God by which he was able to stand if he would, but also the power of free will by which he might fall if he would. By his fall he has suffered a change, is corrupt, and under the power of Satan; his will is

<sup>141</sup> S.J.Duffy, 'Will, Action, Freedom', *Augustine through the Ages*, 29

now injured, wounded, diseased, enslaved.’<sup>142</sup> Thus, Adam’s misuse of his free will brought about the Fall, which gave birth to sin and the curse of Adam, the burden of inherited sin that infects all mankind.

In using his free choice for sin Adam involved his whole race in his fall, corrupting all men and enslaving them to sin. Consequently man can only make sinful use of his free will. For although man’s free will remains indifferent, capable of being used however man should desire, man desires and cannot choose anything but evil. Adam’s sin secured mankind in a predicament where their choices and wills have been able only to avail for evil. Therefore, mankind has remained trapped by the constraints of sin leaving them able to use their will for good, unless initially freed by God’s grace.

### *The apostasy of pride, the beginning of sin*

Augustine held that the origin of Adam and Eve’s sin was pride, an act of free will, which was externalised in the disobedience of God. It was this self-severance from Him who truly suffices mankind that made man apostatise from God beginning the ceaseless intercourse with worldly things. Augustine believes that sin entered the world through man’s pride and self-love, a defect of man’s will that was a consequence of being made out of nothing, a central feature of Augustine’s perception of the human psychology.<sup>143</sup> ‘In trying to stand alone, to be independent of God, man lost the true centre of his life, he lost the principle of order and subordination in his nature. His nature became evil – is, inharmonious, disorderly –

<sup>142</sup> Warfield, *Tertullian*, p.403

<sup>143</sup> This idea of pride and sin arising from the non-existence from which God calls the soul is one that occurs in Plotinus’ *Enneads* and earlier. Plotinus made use of a dualistically conceived ‘non-being’ and some features of emanation thinking - the flowing of the universe from the essence of God. Through this approach he explained the ‘fall’ of the soul, to a range of levels, from the ‘Higher World’ from which it originates. Augustine uses strands of Plotinus’ work to derive his notion of *nihil* (‘all that flows’), akin to the Plotinian concept of *mê on*. Augustine’s notion of *superbia*, as the origin of the Fall, to Plotinus’ idea of the soul’s desire to be “its own” as the ultimate root of the fall also show clear similarities. For more on this topic see R.Penaskovic, ‘The Fall of the Soul in Saint Augustine: *A Quaestio Disputata*’, *Augustinian Studies*, Vol.17 (1986) pp.135-145

and disorder generated corruption and made man unfit for God.’<sup>144</sup> God has not ceased to love man, but man has become inadequate for the life of God and can no longer lift himself up to fellowship with God, as his life is beset with a false nature. This is the doctrine of the Fall of mankind, which has plagued man with the condition of original sin.

Augustine believed that this evil act of disobedience was preceded by an evil will. Adam and Eve had been secretly corrupted, and the origin of this evil will and corruption was pride. ‘As ignorance and infirmity come to stand more and more in his view for the fallen condition in which man suffers under the penal deprivation of his true liberty, so pride takes its place more distinctly as the ultimate origin of sin, the *radix omnium malorum*. Pride is itself the Fall, of man as of angels.’<sup>145</sup> This pride is the origin and cause of all sins, having cast down an angel turning him into the Devil, it set its sights on Adam and Eve sowing the seed of their disobedience; the eating of fruit from the tree of knowledge. Adam and Eve became pleased with themselves possessing ‘an appetite for a perverse kind of elevation,’<sup>146</sup> a desire to replace God with themselves, which Augustine calls ‘the love of one’s own excellence.’ Delighting in their own self-sufficiency they were diminished and fell away from He who truly suffices them, and what could be prouder than forsaking God through conceited self-confidence?

‘Pride is a perverted imitation of God. For pride hates a fellowship of equality under God, and wishes to impose its own dominion upon its equals, in place of God’s rule.’<sup>147</sup>

It was, in Augustine’s eyes, due to this arrogance of human pride that man fell away from God’s immutable good towards themselves and nothingness to follow their own pleasures, to be self-willed and ‘absolutize’ their flawed wills. Consequently man is consumed by sin and evil, resulting in his ‘neglect of eternal things, which the mind perceives, enjoys, loves, and cannot lose, and the pursuit

<sup>144</sup> C.Gore, ‘Our Lord’s Human Example’ *Church Quarterly Review*, Vol.XVI (1883) p.297

<sup>145</sup> J.Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St Augustine* (Norwich, The Canterbury Press, 1938) p.189

<sup>146</sup> *The City of God against the Pagans*, R.W.Dyson (ed.) (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998) XIV:13, p.608

<sup>147</sup> *City of God*, XIX:12, p.936

of temporal things, which are perceived by the body and can never be possessed with complete certainty.<sup>148</sup> This betrayal was an act of free will, in which Adam and Eve succumbed to temptation owing to their prideful fascination with the suggestion that their ‘eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.’ (Genesis 3:5)

As Mann points out Augustine sees these frailties as physical, involving no damage to man’s intrinsic abilities, such as the capacity to reason and will. However, their soul is restricted by ignorance (not innate stupidity) and difficulty (not impossibility) leaving mankind insufficient to live righteously, but not wholly shattered.<sup>149</sup> For although man still has a free will it is no longer truly free but enslaved by sin and vice. As Augustine astutely puts it ‘in doing evil every one is free from righteousness and a servant of sin, while in doing good no one can be free, unless he have been made free by Him.’<sup>150</sup> This self-propagating principle of disorder has taken hold of humanity and has set about instilling an inherent weakness and predisposition to evil within every human being. This has left man powerless to avoid sin, only able to choose between the multitudes of sin.

Man can no longer live righteously but is helpless, unable to overcome sin and do God’s will by his own powers. The retribution for this first sin may appear excessive, however, this free act of disobedience against God was worsened by two factors. Firstly, God had asked little of Adam and Eve: his commandment of abstinence had been a small burden to bear and easy to observe, especially whilst surrounded by the great abundance of other fruits. Secondly, the pride of the transgressors, who sought to blame Satan seeking refuge in excuses rather than appealing for pardon when their sins were clearly visible. This behaviour was more damnable than the transgression itself. So, God in his justice punished Adam, Eve and all mankind for this unrighteousness. Consequently, every member of mankind is born saddled with the burden of not just Adam’s mortality and concupiscent, but his guilt and original sin.

<sup>148</sup> W.L.Craig, ‘Augustine on Foreknowledge and Free Will’ *Augustinian Studies*, Vol.15 (1984) p.43

<sup>149</sup> W.E.Mann, in E.Stump & N.Kretzmann (eds) *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001) p.47

<sup>150</sup> *On Rebuke and Grace* 1:2

The African conception of original sin arose especially in connection with baptism. 'Africa had long practised infant baptism, and regarded it as essential if a little child was to be saved. Augustine rightly interprets this as implying that the child belongs to a lump of humanity that is all under God's condemnation: the child is born stained, and must be washed clean. Each is therefore, born guilty. What they are guilty of is Adam's sin.'<sup>151</sup>

Augustine believed that Adam's sin is transmitted through sexual reproduction, to all of Adam's progeny, to the extent that he perceived the guilt of new-born babies afflicted with the condition of original sin was more than theological argument, it was fact. This fact is founded upon the following explanation. A person can only be excluded from eternal life and condemned to punishment if guilty of a sin. Since an infant cannot be guilty of personal sin in this life the only conclusion, to Augustine's mind, was that the infant must have inherited Adam's sin. It is this sin that condemns the infant unless liberated from original sin in baptism. Augustine backed up this belief with Scriptural extracts: "*In sin did my mother conceive me*" (Ps. 51:5), and "*Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all man, for that all have sinned*"<sup>152</sup> (Rom. 5:12).

'Let them dare to argue and strive to convince those whom they can that a just God, with whom there is no injustice, would sentence to eternal death children innocent of actual sin if they were not bound by and involved in the sentence laid on Adam ... it certainly remains true that though they themselves have done nether good nor evil, the penalty of their death is just because they die in him in whom all have sinned, since

<sup>151</sup> Hall, *Doctrine*, p.207-8

<sup>152</sup> It is widely acknowledged that Augustine misinterpreted from the Latin Bible '*in quo*' from Paul in Romans 5:12, a mistake which formed a crucial point in Augustine's view of the Fall. Augustine was following the commentary on the epistle by Ambrosiaster, which also made reference to the idea of mankind sinning in Adam as a 'lump' or *massa*.

they are alive in Him alone by whom original sin could not be bequeathed or actual sin committed.<sup>153</sup>

It is through original sin that the whole human race has been condemned in its origin to a life which bears witness to a host of cruel ills and misery. Original sin was not a time-specific event but a condition imposed by divine will, inherited by every descendent of Adam ‘by propagation, not imitation.’ This condition changed the felicitous condition of mankind from a ‘tranquil avoidance of sin and ... no evil of any kind intruded ... to bring them sadness,’<sup>154</sup> to a state of ignorance and difficulty, without natural immortality and vulnerable to the affliction of physical pain, disease and bodily disorder, as well as being driven by lust. Before the Fall Adam and Eve were able to control their libido by reason: however, since the corruption of original sin the designated condign punishment has been the inability to command his libido. Augustine maintained that Adam and Eve have passed their guilt onto their posterity akin to some hereditary disease leaving their descendents to reap in damnation what they first sowed in wickedness.<sup>155</sup>

### *‘We were Adam’*

*‘Adam lived and in him we all lived. Adam perished  
and in him we all perished.’<sup>156</sup>*

The notion of inherited sin has attracted considerable scepticism and criticism. It is therefore important to consider why Augustine thinks, and justifies, that Adam’s sin was passed on to his progeny.<sup>157</sup> Quotes such as ‘God chose to make

<sup>153</sup> *Epist. 186*

<sup>154</sup> *City of God*, 14:10, p.603

<sup>155</sup> *City Of God*, XIV:11, p.603

<sup>156</sup> St. Ambrose quoted in E.Portalie, *Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine* (London, Burns & Oates, 1960) p.207-8

<sup>157</sup> Augustine’s justification for the transmission of original sin down generations was reached with difficulty. The problems of traducianism proved a stumbling block for his understanding of the transmission of original sin from Adam to posterity. He struggled to reconcile the creationist notion of every individual being created with a new soul and the idea of transmuted sin. He could not understand how the argument for transmitted original sin could be justified without maintaining Tertullian’s ‘traducian’ doctrine, in which the soul is passed from generation to generation. If Augustine did come to assert a concrete view it held that the taint occurs as the new soul joins the

the human race from one single man,'<sup>158</sup> make it likely that Augustine shared a widespread misconception of ancient times that animals grow from the semen of their father alone, while the mother is merely a receptacle and means of nourishment. Assuming Augustine did hold this view it would not be an implausible conclusion that each animal is already in its father's genitals. This argument allows Augustine to provide a feasible justification for the claim that God finished all his work on the sixth day of the creation, as He placed every subsequent man in Adam, making all mankind literally a part of Adam. In considering this misconception it is possible to see how Augustine thought that original sin had been inherited by all mankind, as they all sinned *in* Adam. Augustine 'thinks that we sinned 'in' Adam because we *were* in Adam, present in his *loins*, i.e. 'genitals.''<sup>159</sup> That to be in Adam is to be Adam.

'Man ... produced depraved and condemned children. For we were all in that one man, since we all were that one man who fell into sin through the woman who was made from him before they sinned ... the seminal nature from which we were to be propagated already existed. And his, when this was vitiated by sin and bound by the chain of death and justly condemned, man could not be born of man in any other condition.'<sup>160</sup>

Another reason explaining why Augustine believed all mankind sinned in Adam originates from Romans 9:21, 'Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?' This biblical extract portrays all mankind as a single lump of clay, 'the convicted lump of humanity', '*totius humani generis massa damnata*' [*Ench.* 27.8].

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body in the foetus. However, even in this possible position Augustine was accompanied by a degree of cautious ignorance, concluding matter as one on which God did not speak clearly in the Scriptures, therefore, it is better to remain cautious than make rash assumptions which he equates to the charge of sacrilege. Augustine asserts that sin is propagated from generation to generation, stretching back to the time of Adam to the present, but how this is achieved is left in the doubt that God chose to place it. For more see Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian*, p.362-374.

<sup>158</sup> *City of God*, XIV:1, p.581

<sup>159</sup> Kirwan, *Augustine*, p.139

<sup>160</sup> *City of God*, XIII:14, p.555-6

‘They are ‘vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction,’ let them impute this to themselves as something owed and paid to them, because they are made of the clay which God deservedly and justly condemned on account of the sin of one man, in whom all have sinned.’<sup>161</sup>

Augustine believed sin had tainted the physical stuff from which all men are made, vitiating nature. Leaving nature as if ‘a handsome Grecian urn with classic lines, but damaged and fragile, leaking the water that by right it ought to hold; an urn not shattered but fractured down one side and up the other – which only its potter can restore.’<sup>162</sup> The impurities introduced to this lump of clay by original sin had automatically made all men participants in Adam’s guilt. This suggests that humanity contracted their wickedness by means of their generation alone, both in the sense that we were made from the same ‘lump’ and that we were *in* Adam at the Fall of mankind.

There are, however, several problems for Augustinian thought thrown up by such a physical explanation for the transmission of original sin, which raise questions for the consistency of his argument. In order to qualify his entire doctrine of grace and salvation Augustine needs to explain the transmission of original sin. He does this by saying that mankind was *in* Adam when he fell from grace, and that the human race was physically present at the Fall. This is when the problem arises and Augustine is seen to be on the horns of a dilemma between dualism and transmission. Augustine goes to considerable lengths throughout his works to emphasise that it is the soul that sins not the physical stuff of which man is comprised. He painstakingly maintains the notion of a dualism between the soul and flesh, a principle that is paramount to his body of thought. Therefore, one would expect that if it is the soul that sins man is innocent irrespective of whether we were physically present at the time of the Fall and for Augustine to argue for the infection of the physical stuff of which man is made appears to go against the fundamental duality of body and soul. This leaves Augustine in an awkward posi-

<sup>161</sup> *Epist. 94*

<sup>162</sup> G.Walker, *Moral Foundations of Constitutional Thought* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990) p.109

tion from which he seems unable to escape since his assertion of physical presence simultaneously sees his unsanctioned departure from the banner of his dualist theology.

### *Problems with Original Sin*

Augustine's conception of original sin is not without problems, several of which lie in his unquestioning acceptance of the Scriptures and their testimony. This belief accords with his normal attitude which maintains that the 'Holy Scripture contains everything that is necessary for salvation. If the Bible leaves certain questions unanswered, this must be because it is not necessary to our salvation to know the answers.'<sup>163</sup>

Three problems arise from this view. Firstly, how could a merciful God punish man so severely? Surely He would forgive rather than condemn mankind to eternal suffering? This contradicts the Christian picture of God as the all-loving Father, making it hard to reconcile this forgiving image with Augustine's God who allows millions to suffer as a result of one transgression. Secondly, there is the problem of blame. If man can no longer choose non-sin, how, with such limited free will can he be blamed for his actions when he lacks the ability to avoid sin? Blame suggests an intention to do something wrong, but man has no other choice than sin. Surely to punish men for faults they cannot help but commit is contrary to the notion of justice? 'How can we be held responsible for our sins if we are slaves of sin and have no freedom whatsoever in the sense of autonomy, no ability to act of our own accord in the direction of escaping from the necessity of being evil?'<sup>164</sup> The third problem, and the most debated of all, centres on the hereditary nature of sin. How can man inherit the sin of his distant ancestors? How can anyone even be guilty of an act he did not commit himself, let alone be born guilty?

<sup>163</sup> R.W.Dyson, *The Pilgrim City: Social and Political Ideas in the writings of St Augustine of Hippo* (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2001) p.5

<sup>164</sup> J.M.Rist, 'Augustine on Free Will and Predestination', *Augustinian Studies*, Vol.XX (1969) p.425

That is, how can an infant that has not had the opportunity to commit sin be guilty of anything?

Having identified the problems of the debate one might be tempted to find on one side or the other. To do this is in my view artificial for the following reasons. Augustine always held that a philosophical understanding of the world could only be had with faith.

‘Do you want to understand? Believe. For God said through the prophet, “Unless you believe, you will not understand.” ... Therefore, seek not to understand so that you may believe, but believe so that you may understand; for “unless you believe, you will not understand.”’<sup>165</sup>

This principle is the foundation for Augustine’s theory of man’s predicament. Following this absolute acceptance of faith Augustine argues everything from Scripture, predominantly from Paul and Genesis, invoking Scripture in the place of the rational principles we would use today. It is at this point that the problem comes for us and not for Augustine. The three problems of transmission, blame and finite sins versus eternal damnation discussed above are only problems for someone with a less devout faith than that held by Augustine. For Augustine they were never problems, although he might have been aware of them he maintained that one cannot adhere to the Christian faith without subscribing to the doctrine of original sin, since to do this would imply Jesus’ death was pointless. Consequently for Augustine the ‘problems’ were always academic.

To criticise Augustine for such myopia is therefore illegitimate and neglects the necessary understanding of the theorist in conjunction with their theories. While it may seem that any reconciliation of these problems would be unconvincing for anyone less committed to the faith than Augustine one must consider context. It is in the light of the Augustinian context that one sees these criticisms in their true character, as devoid of the impact that they initially appear to boast. This fault is

<sup>165</sup> *In Ioann. evang.* 29:6

due to their failure to refute the principle of belief before understanding, the principle upon which Augustine's entire body of thought was built. For Augustine an unquestioning acceptance of faith renders these problem unproblematic. It is this that one must always bear in mind when considering his political theology, since to criticise Augustine's thought effectively one must first deal with the foundation of his thought, the principle of belief before understanding upon which his entire theory of grace and salvation stands and falls.

Augustine's views on the Pauline doctrine of original sin and the Fall have implications for Augustine's conception of politics and society. These will be clarified through an analysis of Augustine's views on predestination and grace before addressing the consequences they had for the state.

### *Divine foreknowledge and predestination*

Augustine's doctrine of predestination is founded in the principle of unearned election and the indisputable supremacy of divine sovereignty over man's will. God elects and predestines the few to glory. This snatching of the minority from the 'damned lump' of mankind takes its departure from the New Testament where there are many Scriptural statements that influenced Augustine in his concept of predestination: Matthew 20:23, "It is for those to whom it has already been assigned by my Father," and John 10:29, "No one can snatch them out of the Father's care." However the following passage had the most profound influence on his writings:

'And in everything, as we know, he co-operates for good with those who love God and are called according to his purpose. For God knew his own before ever they were, and also ordained that they should be shaped to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the eldest among a large family of brothers; and it is these, so fore-ordained, who he has also called, he has

justified, and to those whom he justified he has also give his splendour.’

*Eph. 1:3-14; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Cor. 4:7*

The condition of suffering and misery in which man persists is the penalty bestowed upon man by God as just punishment for Adam’s violation of the sole commandment set by God. This punishment, consigning man to suffering in this world and perdition in the next, is merely God acting in accordance with the imperatives justice. He forewarned Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of knowledge, ‘Hast though eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat’ [Genesis 3:11], and forewarned that breaking this commandment would result in punishment. ‘God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest ye die.’ [Genesis 3:3] Despite man’s disobedience God, in His mercy, has saved some of his creation. ‘‘He hath mercy on whom he will,’ not through justice but the mercy of grace; and ‘whom he will hardeneth,’ not through injustice but the truth of retribution. Nevertheless truth and mercy meet so harmoniously.’<sup>166</sup> A merciful God grants the elect new birth through predestination and the bestowal of grace. This is the glory of God.

Had man possessed the steadfastness of will to persist in the state of innocence with which he was created God would have preserved all mankind in a state of salvation, free from death and sin. God, however, stands outside of time and by His omniscience and foreknowledge knew man would misuse his free will, choosing those things below.

‘Because God foreknew everything, He therefore could not have been unaware that man would sin.... For by his foreknowledge, God foresaw both how evil the man would become whom He Himself had created good, and also what good He would nonetheless bring forth from that evil.’<sup>167</sup>

<sup>166</sup> *Epist. 194*

<sup>167</sup> *City of God*, XIV:11, p.604

In creating man with a free will man was created with the ability to sin, though not bound to do so, thus, when Adam and Eve did sin from that point on all humanity became infected with Adamic guilt and meriting the eternal punishment incurred in Adam. In knowing this before His creation of the world, God in accordance with his divine plan and mercy predestined some of the fallen mass of humanity for the City of God, calling them to grace and glory by the gift of perseverance through faith. 'God's predestination is his knowledge and preparation of the gifts which he will give and those to whom he will give them; his grace follows as the actual giving and the achievement.'<sup>168</sup>

It is essential to understand that God's choice is not based on his foreknowledge of a man's future deeds. It is based on a divine and autonomous decision that is beyond the realms of mankind's comprehension. Mankind cannot understand God's reasons for election or rejection; instead predestination remains a mystery beyond mortal comprehension, and for Augustine must be seen as an act of some hidden and divine justice.

'Since the judgments of God are exceedingly deep and incomprehensible and His ways unsearchable, let man meanwhile hold that there is not injustice with God; let him confess that as man he does not know with what justice God has mercy on whom His will and hardens whom He will. In virtue of the unshaken belief which he holds that there is no injustice with God, he knows that although no one is justified because of antecedent merits, so no one is hardened unless he deserves it.'<sup>169</sup>

God has chosen those who He knows 'will respond to his call and therefore preparing their wills by providing the motives that will enable them to choose the good they truly want.'<sup>170</sup> These chosen few are the 'blessed' who will enjoy eternal life with God. But 'who are the blessed? Not those in whom God has not found sin; for he has found it in all men. *For all have sinned and do need the*

<sup>168</sup> J.Patout Burns, *The Development of Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace* (Paris, *Études Augustiniennes*, 1980) p.176-7

<sup>169</sup> *Epist. 186*

<sup>170</sup> M.T.Clarke, *Augustine* (London, Continuum, 1994) p.51

*glory of God* [Rom. 3:23].<sup>171</sup> Since all men descend from Adam they have all inherited and share in his guilt: it is only those whose sins are forgiven that are blessed, whilst the majority of mankind continue to deserve eternal condemnation. Therefore, grace is not a reward for not sinning and predestination is not something earned by man or meritoriously deserved; salvation excludes independent and autonomous merit and is in no way dependent on man's cooperation with God. Grace is the free gift of God's mercy, for if everyone was given their due for their deeds everyone would be condemned: however, in the case of the elect it is through an undeserved grace that God repairs their wills restoring them through the divine workings of faith.

It is at this point important to recognise that while predestination to the Eternal City repairs man's will this is not to the same standard as that with which he was first created. Instead man is made truly free, created anew, not just as the men for whom God did this before, but as good men with a 'clean heart' [Ps. 50:12]. The grace that the elect receive is greater than that with which Adam was created; the wills of the predestined will be freer than they were in the beginning, totally relinquished from the burden imposed by sin. When the pilgrims of the Heavenly City are reunited with God they will be granted a perfect immortality, making it wholly impossible for man to sin, or even desire to sin.

### *(i) Divine Foreknowledge versus Free Will*

So far this thesis has looked at Augustine's approach to original sin, divine foreknowledge, and predestination. However, these doctrines have not gone without criticism. In fact it is quite the contrary: in advocating his belief in divine foreknowledge and predestination Augustine has frequently be accused of eroding the concept of free will and of creating an unjust God, who bases his choice of the elect on no form of differentiation. It is these two accusations levelled against Augustinian doctrines which will be discussed and hopefully clarify the confusion which so often surrounds Augustine and the notion of free will and justice.

<sup>171</sup> V.J.Bourke, *The Essential Augustine* (Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 1974) p.187

Augustine's insistence on divine foreknowledge has led to several commentators to assert its incompatibility with free will. Many hold that God's foreknowledge of Adam's sin means Adam could not have sinned voluntarily, as his sin was necessitated by God's foreknowledge. Therefore, either God did not foreknow Adam would sin, a blasphemous claim denying God's foreknowledge of mankind's future, or Adam's sin was not voluntary, for something is either within the power of our will or there is divine foreknowledge of the future.

Although Augustine asserts that God knows what men will do he is adamant that divine foreknowledge does not cause these things to happen, and that foreknowledge does not deny the existence of freedom. The crux of this debate surrounds Augustine's attempts to accept both foreknowledge and free will as truths, and that although nothing can happen that is not in accordance with divine foreknowledge it does not follow that man's acts of will occur without man willing it. Augustine deals with this problem, in *De libero arbitrio*, when confronted by Evodius' questioning on how man can possess free will if God foreknows all man does. Since if this is true surely man does these things out of inevitable necessity, not free will? For example, if God knew a man was going to sin, the sin would be committed out of necessity, rather than in accordance with the man's free will. How does Augustine escape this seemingly thorny predicament?

Augustine maintained that divine foreknowledge has as much effect on the future as memory has on the past. Foreknowing what man will freely will does not negate the freedom of will, since the relationship between God and the action is not causal: rather divine foreknowledge, for Augustine, remains distinct from divine causation. God's foreknowledge of actions does not necessitate them in any absolute way. His foreknowledge of an act like sin does not necessitate man to sin, rather he sins of his own free will, God just foreknows that this is how he will use his free will, just as he would have foreknown if man had chosen alternative action. This point, that simply knowing what will happen in the future does not force such an outcome to be, can be made clear through a simple analogy used by Konrad. Just because I know the sun will set this evening does not compel the sun

to set. My knowledge of this event has no bearing on its actual occurrence.<sup>172</sup> Thus, for Augustine, God's foreknowledge of Adam's transgression does not equate to God causing Adam to sin, since Adam's sin remained an act of free will, not of fixed necessity.

The important thing to note here is the disingenuousness of the critic of Augustine's term of foreknowledge. Augustine does not mean God to possess human but divine foreknowledge, and there is a clear distinction between the two. This distinction rests on the matter of time. God does not exist within the limitations of man's notion of time: God created time.

'God certainly made the world, and thus time began to be along with the creation that God made, and in this sense time is called eternal. Nonetheless, time is not eternal in the same way that God is eternal, because God who is the maker of time is before time.'<sup>173</sup>

Consequently, God does not experience factors of time but exists within his own unchanging eternity where he sees our past, present and future in a single glance. God is all at once and the categories of time He fashioned only have meaning for His creation. Therefore to say that God's foreknowledge necessitates man's actions is to misunderstand the key to Augustine's theory of divine foreknowledge. If Augustine did intend God to possess a human form of foreknowledge there would be a problem, but Augustine's clear articulation of the divine as opposed to the human notion of foreknowledge dispels any genuine confusion.

In fact, Augustine asserts nothing is so much within our power as willing. 'The act of willing is the most immediate and essential function of the faculty of the will. So that since the will moves of its own accord this way or that, the act of willing can be directed freely to alternative courses of action.'<sup>174</sup> Augustine asserts that if

<sup>172</sup> T.J.Kondoleon, 'Augustine and the Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will', *Augustinian Studies*, Vol.18 (1987) p.169. Kondoleon qualifies his analogy since the sun does not set freely but of necessity, as it is a necessary result of a physical law.

<sup>173</sup> *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 1:2

<sup>174</sup> Craig, 'Augustine on Foreknowledge' p.51

the will were not within our power it would not be will, and because it is within the power of man, the will is free. Therefore, God's foreknowledge of man's actions is not synonymous with the erosion of free will, man still wills freely as the very action of willing is inherently free. The fact that God foreknows our future acts does not eradicate their freedom. On the contrary God foreknows that they will be the result of our will and thus within our power.

‘The power, then, is not taken from me because of His foreknowledge, since this power will be mine all the most certainly because of the infallible foreknowledge of Him who foreknew that I would have it.’<sup>175</sup>

In Book V of *De Civitate Dei* Augustine asserts that God, as the highest being and author of all other beings, is the cause of the order of causes,<sup>176</sup> and that although a divine pattern of causation exists it does not follow that there is no room for the free choice of our will. In contrast free will is incorporated in God's foreknowledge of the pattern of causes, and forms an essential part in the causal series.<sup>177</sup>

‘Moreover, even if a certain order of causes does exist in the mind of God, it does not follow that nothing is left to the free choice of our will. For our wills are themselves included in the order of causes which is certain to God and contained within His foreknowledge. For the wills of men are causes of the deeds of men, and so He Who has foreseen the causes of all things clearly cannot have been ignorant of our wills among those causes, since he foresaw them to be the causes of our deeds.’<sup>178</sup>

<sup>175</sup> Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, 3.3.8 (Russell translation)

<sup>176</sup> Here Augustine reconciles divine foreknowledge and free will through his unquestioning acceptance of God's existence and his conviction in the free will of man. His belief that both free will and divine omniscience are truths means it is not possible for them to be incompatible. Instead Augustine argues that God is the cause of all causes and foreknows the cause of all actions. For more on this see Kondoleon, ‘Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will’ *Augustinian Studies*.

<sup>177</sup> For more see Craig, ‘Augustine on Foreknowledge’ pp.40-63

<sup>178</sup> *City of God*, V:9, p.201-2

It is Augustine's conception of God's foreknowledge being the foresight of the free choices man will make that ensures free will is maintained when divine foreknowledge is avowed. The way that He foresees is such that man's will remains within man's, not God's, power.

In the face of the accusations levelled against his work that he abolishes free will, Augustine similarly maintained that grace did not invalidate free will. On the contrary he asserted that grace acts on free will to liberate it from the bondage of sin. Before grace mankind has free choices: however this free choice is sufficient only for sin, it is not until assisted by grace that man fully enjoys freedom. So when Augustine says that fallen man is free he means he is devoid of virtue and *caritas* and the servant of vice and *cupiditas*. 'It is freedom from the necessity of sin. Thus we are brought to the view that, although our 'wills' and our 'choices' are free, in the sense that we alone are responsible for them ... without the intervention of God we are bound to an evil which we cannot escape.'<sup>179</sup> Therefore, when God, through grace, *liberates* the man that uses the free will he is longer enslaved by the lusts of the flesh but is able to use his free will to choose good. It is only through grace that the free will is enabled to act in the interests of good. Thus grace, far from hindering man's free will, assists it moving an individual from sin towards good enabling them to persevere in the good.

### *(ii) Is a predestinating God just?*

Augustine's insistence on gratuitous grace has also raised questions concerning the justice of God. Augustine permanently sought to defend Christ's position as man's sole means to salvation and human nature's consequent impotence in the face of their damnation, since to argue otherwise and to attribute man with the capacity to avoid sin and realise their own salvation would be to render Christ's corporeal existence and crucifixion redundant. If man could be saved by the power that remains in nature that is activated by law, then Christ would have died in vain and his cross would be rendered meaningless. Augustine was forced

<sup>179</sup> J.M.Rist, 'Free Will and Predestination' p.424



through his belief in Christ as the unique Saviour of humanity to draw the conclusion that man can be saved through the workings of divine grace and predestination alone. Augustine's own interpretations of Paul and subsequent reasoning caused the revision of his position and left him in a predicament where he was no longer able discern an answer to the question of how God's grace is compatible with God's justice or man's free will. Instead he was forced to resort to the impenetrable darkness of the "hidden equity" of God to explain why some are chosen for election and others are destined for reprobation.

Through making even faith a gift of God, Augustine removes the last vestiges of the concept of human merit from his understanding of the mechanisms of divine grace; a perspective which leaves Augustine questioning the justice of God and election. Augustine's doctrine of predestination was developed 'as a doctrine, in which every event was charged with a precise meaning as a deliberate act of God, of mercy for the elect, of judgement for the damned.'<sup>180</sup> It sought to emphasise the omnipotence, justice and mercy of the almighty Father in the light of the Fall of man from creational grace. Augustine upheld that God alone is responsible for shaping the destinies of men, through the workings of His timeless wisdom He determines who is fated for salvation and who will remain damned. The problem emerges when one considers why only some have their wills 'prepared' by God for election while the majority are destined to damnation.<sup>181</sup> If it remains true that God's choice bears no relation to the moral differentiation of men, but grace is given as an utterly free gift with no contingency on human merit, how can this election be just? How is election of the few just if not based on some form of dif-

<sup>180</sup> Brown, *Augustine*, p.406-7

<sup>181</sup> This is not a two-fold predestination theory (one of salvation and one of reprobation, as a result of divine foreknowledge and inaction); although commentators have suggested this e.g. Kirwan who suggested Augustine predestinated the damned to Hell. This thesis contends that irrespective of the problematic nature of the reprobation of sinners, the hope, compassion, and mercy within Augustinian predestination releases Augustine from this charge. This rejection is adhered to by Rist see 'Augustine on Free Will and Predestination' *Augustinian Studies*. Rist believes Augustine's doctrine sees the elect's souls as assisted by grace, and thus impelled to perform good acts, whereas the unsaved are not subject to God's positive impulse but remain part of the *massa damnata*. Augustine maintains damnation is a reward for sin, but not one impelled by God. God allows it to happen, which is different to positively willing it to happen. Therefore, God does not impel anyone to sin, but when they sin he predestines them to the just punishment, damnation. This is Augustine's doctrine of predestination, which is distinct from the two-fold doctrines often mis-attributed to Augustine.

ferentiation? If there is no moral difference between Jacob and Esau, how can the election of one and not of the other be just?

To solve this dilemma Augustine is left with no other option than to turn to the “certain hidden equity” of God to maintain His justice. ‘Under the impact of Paul’s text and in keeping with his own conviction that the movement from discerning the good to willing the good depends on divine grace rather than human action, Augustine has, in effect, sacrificed both man’s freedom and God’s justice on the altar of the sheer gratuity of God’s grace, unqualified by even a residual correlation with man’s merit. Why does God’s grace come to some and not to others?’<sup>182</sup> Augustine’s central concern became the clarification of what man cannot say or know about God’s redemptive workings, leading him to the conclusion that it was beyond human understanding to make sense of the inscrutable workings of God’s justice. ‘Thus it was only in some hidden standard, utterly beyond human scrutiny, that Augustine could find the righteousness of God’s election of some and rejection of others, the righteousness to be correlated with his new understanding of grace. In effect, he had allowed the bright gleam of God’s grace to throw the outlines of divine justice into a mysterious, theological darkness.’<sup>183</sup>

As Rigby acknowledges, several commentators believe that in turning to the mystery of God’s mercy Augustine lost his ‘intellectual nerve’ when attempting to solve the greatest challenge of his philosophical life. This view obscures the positive contribution that such a conclusion had to Augustine’s doctrine of predestination. Rigby draws attention away from this negative perception of Augustinian theory and towards Augustine’s comment, ‘Who are you that replies against God?’ and the theme of man’s learned ignorance that runs through his writings on this subject. According to Augustine this hidden wisdom of God teaches mankind to accept that our very nature renders us unable to penetrate that which God has chosen to keep secret. Our failure to respect these inscrutable dimensions of God’s methods leads us to misguidedly perceive justice and grace as incompatible and mercy as an arbitrarily distributed good irrespective of the workings of justice.

<sup>182</sup> W.S.Babcock, ‘Augustine’s Interpretation of Romans’ *Augustinian Studies* Vol.10 (1979) p.67

<sup>183</sup> Babcock, ‘Grace, Freedom and Justice’, p.9

‘O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord or who hath been his counsellor?’ (*Romans 11:33-34*)

Nonetheless, Augustine maintains that God is not unjust because his workings are hidden. God is just and righteous, always acts in mercy and truth, and despite the understanding of His workings being beyond the reach human discovery one must trust His eternal wisdom. It is wisdom that reduces Augustine to silence, since it is wisdom that forces man to admit his small measure and confess that God’s ways are beyond him. ‘Augustine’s silence is not an empty agnosticism, nor does he have recourse to an ethical discourse. His silence belongs to wisdom. In his silence he acknowledges, using words borrowed from *The Book of Wisdom* (11.21) and from Paul in *Romans* (11.33), an inscrutable measure beyond measure:

Only let us believe if we cannot grasp it, that he who made and fashioned the whole creation, spiritual and corporeal, disposes all things by number, weight and measure. But his judgements are inscrutable and his ways past finding out. Let us say Hallelujah and praise him altogether in song; and let us not say What is this? or Why is that? All things have been created each in its own time. (*Simpl. 1,2,22*)<sup>184</sup>

It is now necessary to turn our attention to the gift of grace bestowed on the predestined to absolve their sins, how Augustine believes it works and the effects it has on the sinner who is predestined for salvation and eternal life with God.

<sup>184</sup> P.Rigby, ‘The Role of God’s “Inscrutable Judgements” in Augustine’s Doctrine of Predestination’, *Augustinian Studies*, Vol.33 (2002) p.219

## *Augustine's concept of grace*

Grace is a divine gift that illuminates the mind of the sinner through the Truth of God and affects the human will by the love of God and the movement of the Holy Spirit. 'There was one conviction too deeply imprinted upon his heart ever to fade or alter – the conviction of the ineffableness of God's grace. Grace – man's absolute dependence of God as the source of all good – this was the common, nay, the *formative* element, in all stages of his doctrinal development, which was marked only by the ever growing consistency with which he built his theology around this central principle.'<sup>185</sup>

Augustine's thoughts on grace were radically historical, based on the words of Christ, interpretations of Paul and readings of Genesis. 'He developed an elaborate analogy between the history of humanity and the life of the individual – from creation and fall, through law and faith to grace and glory.'<sup>186</sup> Mankind, created with the desire to make divine truth their rest and happiness, were moved towards God by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. However, since the Fall men have turned from God to their own goodness in a drive to dominate each other and to use the corporeal realm to satisfy the wants of their mortal bodies. This renders sinners without the capacity to know and love the highest good, causing the sinful spirit to lose its coherence and manifest itself in unruly emotions and social conflict.

Interestingly Augustine's earlier views on grace and human initiative were not always concurrent with the substance of his final position. 'Previously he had been able to picture man's movement towards God as more or less a linear continuum, a steady progression from the recognition of God as the eternal good to the willing of God as one's own highest good.'<sup>187</sup> It was during the year 396, in response to a letter from Simplicianus that the climax to this change came about, which Barnaby termed the 'victory of God's grace'. The letter asked Augustine

<sup>185</sup> Warfield, *Tertullian*, p.307

<sup>186</sup> Patout Burns, 'Grace', *Augustine through the Ages*, p.396

<sup>187</sup> Babcock, 'Interpretation of Romans', pp.59

for his interpretation of certain complex passages of Scripture, in particular *Romans* 9, the election of Jacob and rejection of Esau by God.

‘As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then *it is* not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy...Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will *have mercy*, and whom he will he hardeneth.’ (*Romans 9:10-18*)

It was in answer to this mystery of election that Augustine was spurred into the formulation of a doctrine that was in direct opposition to anything that he had advocated before. However, one must be aware that Augustine’s preoccupation with this section of Paul was the final stage in a gradual process of evolution that Augustine had been slowly moving towards in the preceding years, and the importance that various Scriptural passages played in the final position Augustine adopted on grace and man’s role in his own salvation.<sup>188</sup> Nonetheless it represented a profound and permanent change in the foundations of Augustine’s theology, to the extent that he attributed it to more than human reasoning, asserting that the conclusion to his struggle was the result of a direct revelation from God.<sup>189</sup>

Prior to the Pelagian controversy Augustine’s view had been notably different to that with which he is famously associated.<sup>190</sup> He believed an individual was capable of desiring salvation and able to will the good through the residual power of human nature left over from the fall. He put the failure to achieve the good down to the absence of divine grace in assisting the human will. Thus, he justified the condemnation of men who were not chosen for election by God.<sup>191</sup>

<sup>188</sup> See Babcock, ‘Interpretation of Romans’ esp. pp.65-7

<sup>189</sup> Thirty years later Augustine equated this struggle to a battle between the human will and divine grace, where grace came out on top.

<sup>190</sup> For more on Augustine’s initial position on grace see ‘Semi-Pelagianism’ p.78

<sup>191</sup> See J.Patout Burns, ‘The Interpretation of Romans in the Pelagian Controversy’ *Augustinian Studies*, Vol.10 (1979) p.54

This development led Augustine to articulate an entirely new perspective. He came to see salvation as the result of an unfathomable choice made by God irrespective of human merits, concluding that all grace derives from God alone. This finally allowed Augustine to fully understand the meaning of *I Corinthians 4:7* as an absolute truth:

“What do you have that you did not receive?”

Following this ‘final conversion’ (Ferrari) Augustine held that *everything* from the very beginnings of grace came from God alone, and that nothing in the process of salvation could be rightly attributed to man or his preceding merits. Grace was an entirely gratuitous gift of God. However, it was not until the critical stage of the Pelagian debate, when Augustine was trying to convince the Italian Church that Pelagianism was contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church that Augustine focused his attention closely on the nature and gratuitous character of grace. ‘He had been arguing that human nature can do nothing good without the grace of God. Then he began to assert that no merits precede God's initiative and that grace causes good willing rather than assisting it. The teaching and exhortation which Pelagius proposed are fruitless, he argued, unless an interior grace moves the will to respond.’<sup>192</sup> This conversion of Augustine's theory of grace emphasises the difference between the Pelagian and Donatist controversies once again. Pelagianism exercised a more abstract influence on Augustine's philosophy, driven by Augustine's desire to find the truth of the matter in a way that reconciled Scripture with orthodox descriptions of God as just and omnipotent. Where Pelagianism was prompted by this desire for doctrinal consistency Donatism was responsible for Augustine's sacrifice of more theoretical compromises in order to achieve the practical objective of unifying the institutional Church.

It is this belief in the interior nature of grace that distinguishes Augustinian grace from the Pelagian conviction that grace is an external force acting upon man through the Law and example of Christ. Augustine was asserting that not only

<sup>192</sup> Patout Burns, ‘Interpretation of Romans’, p.52

were good acts attributable to God's grace, but so was the initial act of faith.<sup>193</sup> Thus, 'eternal life is *grace for grace*, a gift which crowns the gifts already given.'

'What merit, then, has man before grace which could make it possible for him to receive grace, when nothing but grace produces good merit in us; and what else does God crown when He crowns our merits?'<sup>194</sup>

For Augustine the Pelagian error was their claim that grace is given according to merit, a proud pretension of human glory and erroneous notion of self-generated merit. For Augustine, the opposite was true.

'No human merit precedes the grace of God, but grace itself merits and increase, and the increase merits perfection, with the will accompanying it, not going before it; following behind it, not pointing out the way. Thus, this very merit of man is a free gift, and no one deserves to receive anything from the Father of lights from whom every best gift comes down, except by receiving what he does not deserve.'<sup>195</sup>

The good will has nothing it has not received; grace is antecedent to all good and bestowed at the sole discretion of God. Grace is both a function, as a gift preceding the will's good merit, and a reward, after the will's achievement of merit. 'For who maketh thee to differ *from another*? And what hast thou that didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive *it*, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received *it*?' (1Cor.4:7) Thus, divine grace bestowed on the elect makes those previously condemned to reprobation vessels of mercy, while the rest of humanity remain destined to reprobation. Augustine maintained that denial of gratuitous grace is tantamount to concurrence with the Pelagians' arrogant claim of grace as

<sup>193</sup> This was not always Augustine's teaching. In earlier writings Augustine saw faith originating within individuals and through faith individuals would seek and obtain the divine gifts of a righteous life. He later attributed his theoretical evolution to Cyprian's influence. Cyprian quoted 1Cor.4.7 and it was to this and Paul's teachings that Augustine attributes his change of view to incorporate faith as a gift of God.

<sup>194</sup> *Epist. 194*

<sup>195</sup> *Epist. 186*

reward for merit. Good works come from grace, not grace from works, because 'faith that worketh by charity' would have no effect unless 'the charity of God were poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us.'<sup>196</sup> Such grace would be made void if not given freely but according to merit, it is its very nature of being a freely given gift of 'divine bounty' that makes grace what it is.

### *The three graces - Prevenient, cooperative and enabling grace*

As already mentioned above, Augustine's doctrine of grace developed over a long period and underwent many revisions. After reflecting on Jesus' words, 'Without me you can do nothing' (John 15:5) and 'No one can come to me unless he is drawn by the Father who sent me' (John 6:44), Augustine fashioned his theory of prevenient grace. This grace comes before any good act and sees God giving those unwilling to believe the power to believe. This frees and prepares the will making it possible for man to repent of his own free will. Augustine assigns the conversion to belief to the Holy Spirit and through this spirit of faith and charity God prepares our wills to choose good over evil. Augustine interpreted that 'the grace of faith was an interior movement of the elect's will which adapts his dispositions to the preaching of the gospel and thereby produces the positive response God intends.'<sup>197</sup> Through this God works within the hearts of the chosen to illumine their blindness assisting them to have faith in Christ, hence stimulating the human will to perform good acts.

Firstly, God bestows prevenient grace on the elect, which causes its recipients to will or choose a right, therefore affecting their will by actually bringing it about. God affects the ability to believe and so stimulates the will to perform acts worthy of salvation, along with cooperative grace. 'Salvation lies not in the initiative of free choice, but in the gratuitous and efficacious grace which first makes one good and then works the good willing and performance which God finally crowns with eternal life.'<sup>198</sup> Both these graces enlighten the mind and strengthen the will al-

<sup>196</sup> *Epist. 186*

<sup>197</sup> Patout Burns, *Operative Grace*, p.186

<sup>198</sup> Patout Burns, *Operative Grace*, p.165-6

lowing the individual to perform acts meritorious of salvation. Cooperative grace comes from Paul, 'And in everything, as we know, he co-operates for good with those who love God,' (Rom.8:28). It helps its recipients succeed in their endeavours do to right, so that 'the gap between endeavour and achievement is bridged by God.'<sup>199</sup> Unlike prevenient grace, cooperative grace affects success in effecting one's will. God, by strengthening man's will in charity, helps the recipient to effect their will and assists man in accomplishing the good they are trying to perform, making grace an exterior as well as interior energy. In *De gratia Christi* Augustine offers an analogy of God's operation of human perseverance in willing and performance, that God not only makes a tree, but then cooperates in the tree's 'bearing of fruit by exterior cultivation and interior increase.'<sup>200</sup>

It is this interior operation of the Holy Spirit that makes the reordering of a man's will effective. Every creature's heart lies in God's hands, and God turns their hearts where He will, softening their hearts to the preaching of the gospel and securing the response of faith, so that divine mercy alone is credited for the ensuing salvation. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit and divine love changes the dispositions the elect so they no longer love God and the good He commands from fear of punishment or hope of reward, but love them for their own sake.

The third grace is what Kirwan termed enabling grace. This is the power or ability to will and act rightly, to effect one's choices, and is the grace that Pelagianism agreed with, while denying man's general need for cooperative grace. This grace works on the premise that since the Fall, no human can have a power without grace, and no one can exercise a power without having it. Hence no one can exercise a power without enabling grace. This suggests that if a good deed requires cooperative grace it will also require enabling grace, for enabling grace provides the ability to do things without ensuring or even aiding the doing of them, suggesting that without this favour from God humans would be paralysed. In *De Peccatorum Meritis* Augustine likens God to the eye, without which man is unable to see; therefore God enables us to see. At many points it appears that Augustine is content with such a mild doctrine of grace and that the doctrine of enabling grace

<sup>199</sup> Kirwan, *Augustine*, p.109

<sup>200</sup> Patout Burns, *Operative Grace*, p.169

is sufficient for good deeds. However many of his texts go further than this assertion of the need for prevenient and cooperative graces to redeem mankind from sin. Therefore, the question surrounding Augustine's doctrine of grace is whether mankind needs the gift of causing the good will and the good choice as well as enabling grace's power to will. This is something that he seems to suggest when he talks of 'preparing' man's will that appears to go beyond mere enablement.

This grace does not fully restore the elect but places them between the grace originally given to Adam and ultimate beatitude. Augustine is keen to assert that the self-love and lusts of fallen man are not totally supplanted by the first gratuitous grace. By allowing man to continue experiencing his weaknesses the chances of Adam's pride resurging are minimised and the dependence on divine grace is recognised as they battle against sin. A less comprehensive grace is bestowed so that a greater sin is averted. Man continues good 'willing and working' until death, aided by the gift of perseverance and the Holy Spirit, so that eventually they enter the heavenly kingdom not by their autonomous efforts but by God's mercy, and only here does the final grace render sin impossible. 'The restored, healthy self is not the ancients' moral self, nor is it Adam's self before the Fall. Augustine describes it as a better self, a likeness of Christ ... with a will that is free from a delight in sin, immovably fixed in a delight in not sinning, and capable only of choosing the good.'<sup>201</sup> It is only in heaven that mankind's wills are properly reordered to love God and such a fullness of grace is bestowed on man that sin and failure are made impossible. This shows the process of human salvation as wholly gratuitous.

With divine grace being the sole means to salvation it is reasonable to assume that although living a good life on earth is not worthless it has no bearing on what is truly important. For Augustine believed that man's true destiny, which lies beyond human history in the realms of the two cities of salvation or damnation, that is important. It is not the earthly period of the soul's existence that matters but what comes at the final judgement when the two eschatological communities divide into separate realities. The grace God bestows on the elect merely helps them

<sup>201</sup> J. Coleman, *A History of Political Thought from Ancient Greece to Early Christianity* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2000) p.322

to endure their present misfortunes and earthly hardships with a constancy that is proportioned to their faith. The ordeals of this life train and test the righteousness of the elect during their earthly pilgrimage towards the heavenly city, preparing them for the wondrous destiny that lies ahead.

This chapter has looked at Augustine's theological evolution in light of the Pelagian controversy. It has sought to identify the principles that form the foundations of his theological works, and thus his political theology. It is through this investigation into Augustinian theological doctrine that one is enabled to paint a more comprehensive picture of what is known as Augustinian politics. This is because only by establishing the epicentre of Augustine's theology is one able to discern the political from the multitude of his theological works. It is this very task that forms the objective of Chapter V, which will endeavour to extract the political from the theological. Using the theological foundations of Augustine's doctrines of original sin, predestination and grace that have been set out and explored in Chapter IV this thesis will attempt to bring a degree of cohesion to a political theology which is strewn throughout numerous works of a chiefly theological nature. Hopefully Chapters III and IV will have equipped the reader with a sufficiently clear theological basis of the Augustinian doctrines arising from the Pelagian controversy to ensure that the objectives of Chapter V, to identify the nature of the State and political organisation, form as natural progression from the theological to the political as possible.

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## *Chapter V*

### *Inescapable tensions and endemic insecurities – Augustine’s epitome of social living, the State and his dissociation from the ‘politics of perfection’*

*‘The sea here is used as an image of this world, bitter with salt, troubled with storms, where men of perverse and depraved desires have become like fish devouring one another.... See how men oppress one another! See how those who are able to do so devour others!’<sup>202</sup>*

#### *Augustine the ‘political theorist’?*

So what makes Augustinian theology of interest to the political theorist? It is this final chapter that will attempt answer this question and to pull together the disparate elements of Augustine’s ‘political doctrine’. By working within the theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapters on Pelagianism and Augustine’s theological response to their challenge to the orthodoxy of the Catholic Church this chapter aims to extract the political doctrine inferred in Augustine’s writings. It is also necessary to bear in mind the Donatist controversy throughout this chapter. The Donatist Church stimulated a powerful response from Augustine resulting in his transition to the policy of religious coercion that was discussed in detail in Chapter II. One must avoid the temptation to see these controversies as two separate and self-contained influences on Augustine’s political theology. They ran back to back. No sooner had Augustine completed his fight against the Donatists than he was fully embroiled in the Pelagian threat. Both of these controversies represent the gradual development of Augustinian doctrines. Therefore, throughout this final chapter one must be wary not adopt an isolationist approach but to consider Augustine’s view on the role of the State as much more than the result of

<sup>202</sup> *Enarrationes in psalmos* 64.9 in Dyson, *Pilgrim City*, p.111

his anti-Pelagian expositions alone. The Donatist controversy also contributed to the final doctrine informing Augustine greatly on the roles of the Church and State in society. It is imperative, therefore, that Augustine's political theory is appreciated for what it truly represents; the cumulative result of years spent defending the Catholic orthodoxy against the dangers of heretical doctrine.

When studying what Augustine wrote on the State it is important to bear in mind a point made by P.R.L. Brown. Augustine never treated the state in isolation, it was not so much that he sought to give meaning to the state, but to the saeculum, the all-embracing and inescapable 'sum total of human existence,'<sup>203</sup> from the Fall until the Last Judgement. It is, therefore, through his writings on the saeculum that we understand his views on the state, for Augustine regards the entire saeculum, not just the state, as a penal existence pervaded by misery and suffering from the beginning to the end of this world.

Another important point to bear in mind is observed by Figgis. Augustine never sought to produce a theory of the State as such. The very nature of his concerns meant he made no effort to discuss the intrinsic worth of different constitutions or forms of government in a manner reminiscent of Aristotle. His concerns were not philosophical but practical and immediate in their focus, and predominantly theological not political. Augustine was not a 'political theorist' and never produced a systematic political theory; he was a theologian. Thus 'technically precise descriptions of governmental institutions and detailed comparisons of constitutional forms are conspicuously absent from his pages. Yet it by no means follows that we must ... deny him a political theory.'<sup>204</sup>

On the contrary Augustine is accredited with an interest in the concept of the 'state' as a result of the remarks he made on Rome and the Roman Empire. However, one must exercise caution when inferring Augustine's interest and meaning from these comments. This is because while it may seem a logical method of determining Augustine's attitude to the State, when read back to him the conclusion is nothing short of a historical anachronism as themes of political philosophy were

<sup>203</sup> P.L.R. Brown 'Augustine' in B. Smalley (ed.) *Trends in Medieval Political Thought* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1965) p.11

<sup>204</sup> Paolucci, *Political Writings*, p.viii

never central objects of his contemplation. Despite not aiming to provide guidelines to establish a political entity, a theory of the State and political implications have been discerned from Augustine's work. Throughout Augustine's sermons, letters and treatises, none of which were intended to be principally political, aspects of a political theory have been extracted and fused together in a way Augustine never sought to accomplish. Therefore, in recognising the manner in which Augustinian politics has been composed one must heed Brown's warning that attempting to extract a rigid system of political ideas from Augustine's work is like 'trying to square a circle'. It is essential to appreciate that any synthesis of these disparate fragments of unintentionally political remarks will cause Augustine to appear far more systematic as a political theorist than he actually ever was.

Nonetheless, Augustine's thought still provides interest to political historians for several reasons. Firstly, he was the founding father of medieval political thought. 'The changed attitudes to political thought brought about by early Christianity is most strikingly illustrated in the writings of St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430). Augustine's whole theology is an extended commentary on the antithesis between the redeemed Christian soul, predestined to salvation, and the corrupt and fallen society of unredeemed mankind.'<sup>205</sup> This represents a profound change and departure from the politics of perfection that characterised classical antiquity, with Augustine signifying the start of the gulf between classical and medieval Christianised political thought. Secondly, his *City of God* was a merciless critique of the Roman Empire and her long-held vision of being the eternal empire, which in itself marks an historic event in political discourse. Thirdly, Augustine's work shaped the political thought of the Middle Ages, triggering the debate over the roles of Church and State in secular affairs. This is a debate which, despite distorting and misinterpreting Augustine's meaning, raged for many years.

This thesis is concerned with the distinct political doctrine that has been derived from the underlying thematic coherence of Augustine's works, which were in turn informed by the Donatist and Pelagian controversies that have formed the focus of

<sup>205</sup> J.B.Morrall, *Political Thought in Medieval Times* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1980) p.20

this thesis. Both of these controversies exercised influence over Augustine's theological understanding and consequently his conception of politics and the state. The political doctrine Augustine established is fundamentally based on the distorting effects sin exercised over man's relationship with God and the consequences this has for man as an individual and a member of society.<sup>206</sup> It provides a radically different role for the state to that previously advocated by classical political theorists like Plato and Aristotle. For Augustine the state occupies a humbler position than in classical antiquity, the ruler under which a man lives out his earthly life is of no consequence so long as he is not coerced into acts of irreverent wickedness. It is this 'political theology', emphasising the importance of theological concerns in political organisation and the lack of ethical significance attributed to the State for mankind that will be looked at in more detail. In doing this, greater depth should be given to the comments made in Chapter II regarding the State, thus, enhancing an overall understanding of Augustinian politics.

### *The State – A necessary evil*

When considering Augustine's 'theory' of the state it is necessary to emphasise the considerable departure it represents from the 'creative politics' (Cochrane) of classicism when the notion of the *polis* was the environment within which mankind could develop to the full and realise his full potential. In classical conceptions of politics thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle, believed that the city could and should function as a development-centre for human excellence, and that man is by nature a creature whose growth can best be nourished in the right kind of political environment – which is to be identified with a more or less idealised version of the city-state.<sup>207</sup> The state was a moral community, the natural condition of mankind, like the hive is for bees, and only within this state can man achieve the morally good life. 'The political framework of human life was the chief means of achieving human perfection. Life in a city-state was an education of virtue, a

<sup>206</sup> Dyson, *Pilgrim City*, p.211

<sup>207</sup> J.M.Rist, *Augustine: ancient thought baptised* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994) p.207

fully human life, the good life.'<sup>208</sup> In stark contrast to this picture, Augustine attributes no moral or ethical significance to the state; he rejects the aspiration of the state to provide human fulfilment and thus denies that securing perfection is within the reach of human achievement.

Augustine has little or no confidence that the state is able to morally support man or exercise any beneficial influence over the formation of individuals as upright citizens. Instead he asserts that the only way in which 'moral choice in the full sense is available to us, if at all ... (is) through the prevenient grace of God.'<sup>209</sup> Asserting that man alone cannot achieve moral good, within or without the state, and that it is purely man's membership of the City of God or the Earthly City that refers to the ethical status of an individual. This gives rise to an entirely new conception of the state, in which the state makes no attempt to affect man's morals. It does not seek to make man virtuous but is concerned with his outward actions, attempting to restrain the destructive nature of its citizens and prevent the harmful acts they carry out. This Augustinian conception of the state and politics, as the mark of fallen society, will now be analysed in more detail alongside Augustine's subsequent downgrading of society to the position in which 'human beings are incapable of permanently establishing a system of human relations on this earth such as can go on indefinitely without resort to violence in some form or another.'<sup>210</sup>

Although Augustine provides no systematic theory of the State he did purport a clear view of the nature of the State. He sees the theory of the two 'loves' as a psychological setting for all social and political life, and it is from this foundation that Augustine derives the flaws that are discernable from every political society. All forms of government are motivated by the same enduring perversion of love in favour of the self and man's arrogant disregard for God's superiority and his own subordination. It was Augustine's formulation of the earthly City characterised by *cupiditas*, a wrongheaded and coveted love of self that forms the basis for an understanding of the plight of mankind on earth. It is God who has permitted

<sup>208</sup> Markus, *Saeculum*, p.73

<sup>209</sup> Dyson, *Pilgrim City*, p.46

<sup>210</sup> H.Butterfield in R.A.Markus, *Conversion and Disenchantment in Augustine's Spiritual Career*, Saint Augustine Lecture 1984 (Villanova, Villanova University Press, 1989) p.39

the state to come into existence to exercise some degree of control over the sinful vices of fallen man. Augustine's 'purpose is not ... like Machiavelli's, to provide a manual of politically useful maxims for a new "founding father." He means to show how, with all the sweat, blood, and tears, with all the class struggles, ideological arguments, elaborate schemes for insuring domestic tranquillity, providing for the common defense, and promoting the general welfare, at home, by means of law and education, abroad, by means of trade, diplomacy, and was, it is nevertheless not the will of men, but the will of God that is accomplished in history.'<sup>211</sup>

To Augustine the State is no more than an order of coercion, domination and repression, which sees the law use the instilment of fear as its primary means of commanding obedience and preventing men from carrying out the ruinous acts that are in accordance with their sinful nature. This use of fear lies in the central principle of Augustine's psychological analysis, in which he holds that the majority of the State is comprised of members of the earthly city, defined by their love of the earth and earthly things which they value as the highest good. Due to this love they fear being deprived of anything defined by law as 'ours', our possessions; and since the law works on the principle of punishment by depriving man of these 'possessions' (property, liberty and life) mankind's sinful nature of valuing the temporal above the eternal ironically supplies its own remedy.

Augustine roots the necessity for political power, a purely human phenomenon, in human sinfulness associating it with tension and strife. He depicts its fundamental connection to humanity's fallen nature - man's consumption by aggressive, destructive and selfish impulses and their love of glory, praise and temporal wealth. Thus, all 'political regimes - whether they be tiny city states or world governments - are able to maintain a semblance of peace and order in the world only by using coercive force, veiled or naked, to restrain coercive force. If the responsible few in public office fail to hold on to the power concentrated in their hands, or neglect to use it effectively when necessary, it will inevitably drain back into the hands of the many. And these, giving vent to their passions, private aims, and self-

<sup>211</sup> Paolucci, *Political Writings*, p.xiii

ish desires, will gradually be reduced to a condition of complete unrestraint.<sup>212</sup> Following the identification of sin as the state's origin Dyson suggests a threefold characterisation accounting for the state's purpose which 'is a matrix shaping the whole of his [Augustine's] political and social thought.'<sup>213</sup> The state is firstly a consequence of sin, arising out of the Fall of mankind; secondly, it is a means of minimising and alleviating some of the material damage caused by sin; thirdly, it is a form of divine discipline, punishing the wicked and testing the righteousness of the virtuous. It is three categorisations that will provide the format for the following discussion of the State.

The State is a consequence and expression of sin: this conception recognises that Augustine saw the State as a wholly unnatural supervention on the created order; Augustine does not perceive the State as a natural institution in human life, rather sin is entirely responsible for the emergence of human society and the state as we know it. It is here that one is first able to see the influence of the Pelagian controversy on Augustine's political theory. It was the threat embodied by Pelagianism that provoked Augustine into the formulation of his concepts of sin and salvation, which in turn informed Augustine's politics. Augustine reasoned that the emergence of the state can be attributed directly to man's sinfulness, a conclusion at which he arrived largely as a result of the challenges thrown up by the Pelagians and their firm belief in the possibility of a sinless life and man's realisation of his own salvation. For Augustine 'the relations of dependence, subordination and superiority which obtain here are not 'natural ... no such foundation of 'natural' superiority can be found in the case of ruler and ruled ... political subordination cannot be assimilated with natural subordination.'<sup>214</sup> Augustine thinks man is fundamentally a sociable, not solitary, being; man was created in God's image and defined by human relationships, a trait that was soon corrupted by sin. Augustine highlights this aspect of mankind in God's creation by comparing it to His creation of the animals. God chose to make some animals inclined towards solitude, some gregarious preferring to live in company, but none of them were created from a single individual like man, they all came into being at once. The whole of man-

<sup>212</sup> Paolucci, *Political Writings*, p.xvii

<sup>213</sup> Dyson, *Normative Theories of Society and Government in Five Medieval Thinkers* (Lewiston, Edwin Mellen Press, 2003) p.23

<sup>214</sup> Markus, *Saeculum*, p.92

kind, however, has sprung forth from a single individual created from the dust of the earth, so as to formulate a universal social bond between all mankind.

‘God therefore created only one single man: not, certainly, that he might be alone and bereft of human society, but that, by this means, the unity of society and the bond of concord might be commended to him more forcefully, mankind being bound together not only by similarity of nature, but by the affection of kinship. Indeed, God did not even create the woman who was to be united with the man in the same way as He created man. Rather it pleased Him to create her out of the man, so that the human race might derive entirely from the one man.’<sup>215</sup>

Thus had man avoided sin the ‘universal fellowship of mankind’ would have continued in harmonious felicity. Instead man’s sociability has been vitiated by pride and sin and ‘human affairs are everywhere full of such undoubted evils: of injuries, suspicions, hostilities and war.’<sup>216</sup> The natural sociability of mankind is further enhanced by Augustine’s assertion of the law of nature, written into our hearts by God. This law works on the principle of ‘do as you would be done by’, again emphasising the cooperative and peaceful human relations initially intended by God. Therefore, man can be seen as naturally sociable, but Augustine never pronounces him naturally political. ‘Life in politically organised societies, in subjection to rulers and coercive institutions is – like slavery and other forms of inequality – the result of man’s sinful state, and its object is to deal with the conflict and disorder attendant upon it.’<sup>217</sup> Augustine stresses the state as a necessary evil that has arisen because of sin’s divisive effect on humankind. If man had not sinned Augustine believes mankind would live in peace and harmony, and in accordance with the natural law ascribed to us by God, which has since been rendered impotent by sin giving rise to the selfish impulses that make coercive government such a deplorable necessity.

<sup>215</sup> *City of God*, XII:22, p.533

<sup>216</sup> *City of God*, XIX:5, p.925

<sup>217</sup> R.A.Markus, *Sacred and Secular: Studies on Augustine and Latin Christianity* (Aldershot, Variorum, 1994) p.110

‘Why are so many different threats needed to restrain the folly of even little children? Why are there pedagogues, masters, the rod, the strap, the cane, the discipline which Holy Scripture says must be given to a beloved child, ‘beating him on the sides lest he wax stubborn’, lest he become so wild and hardened that it is hardly possible, or perhaps impossible, to subdue him? Why are all these painful things necessary, if not to overcome ignorance and bridle wicked desires: the evils with which we come into this world.’<sup>218</sup>

This again highlights the important departure Augustinian politics represents from the naturally ‘polis-dwelling’ man that Aristotle described. Augustine, unlike Aristotle, believes that political relationships of were never part of God’s divine creation, and the origins of this view are found in *Genesis* 1:28:

‘And God blessed them, and God said unto them. Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over everything that moveth upon the earth.’

God gave man dominion over non-rational creatures, birds and beasts, but not over his fellow men. The dominion of man over man is the result of an insufferable pride that sees mankind unable to accept the natural equality of their kind, where God alone is superior to man, and mankind shares a common possession of the earth. Instead sin has seen man assume a perverted imitation of God, and conventional political institutions have been laid over man’s natural condition. ‘Man, therefore, has exceeded his proper measure. In his greed, he who was made to be over the beasts wishes to be over other men also.’<sup>219</sup>

It is this radical dislocation of our world and the inherent condition of mankind that leaves men motivated by a condition of greed, what Augustine calls *libido dominandi*, a desire for mastery, power, and subjugation over other men. This lust

<sup>218</sup> *City of God*, XXII:22, p.1154

<sup>219</sup> *Tractatus in Ioannis epistulam* 8:6-8

for power and dominance has emerged from the infection of sin and rendered man the servant of a perverse self-love and destructive emotions. The state is largely a manifestation of these destructive and base impulses of pride, arrogance and greed, with the aim of acquiring and maintaining those objectives sinful man desires. Augustine uses the examples of Cain, a man who became so consumed by envy he killed his own brother and later founded the first city Enoch, and Romulus, who killed his brother Remus to secure all the glory of founding Rome. Augustine believes that they are prime examples of the motivations of earthly 'heroes' and political institutions. Augustine maintains that the state is symptomatic of a disease whose roots stretch deeply into the history of mankind, back to the disobedient fall of the Angels from heaven, the ascendance of pride and *libido dominandi* in man's motivations and the subsequent derangement of God's created order.

However, despite this disobedience against God, by both Angels and then by Adam, in his mercy 'the Divine governance does not wholly forsake those whom it condemns, nor does God shut up His tender mercies in anger; and, for this reason, His prohibition and instruction stand guard over the senses of the human race and repel those forces of darkness to which we were born subject. But such prohibition and instruction are themselves full of toil and sorrow.'<sup>220</sup> Thus for Augustine this earthly realm, characterised by permanent tension, strife and disorder, all features 'endemic to any society of fallen humans infected from conception by sin's contagion,'<sup>221</sup> has been brought about by divine providence to control the consequences of Adam's transgression. And since this condition is only eschatologically resolved in the meantime man and society remain entrenched within this disordered and discordant saeculum.

As mentioned briefly above a substantial amount of what Augustine had to say about the nature and role of the state was said in the context of his understanding of Rome, especially in his *De civitate Dei*. This masterpiece was written as a fierce defence of the Catholic faith in response to the pagan accusations levelled against the Church following the Sack of Rome (410). However, the work soon grew into

<sup>220</sup> *City of God*, XXII:22, p.1154

<sup>221</sup> S.J.Duffy, 'Will, Action, Freedom', *Augustine through the Ages*, p.29

'a comprehensive critique of the whole literary, religious, political and military heritage of pagan Rome,'<sup>222</sup> including the important political concept of justice. Justice and the claims States make of possessing it form an important part of Augustine's political thought, distinguishing his work from other prominent political theorists as well as stimulating significant debates among medieval political controversialists. When Augustine talks of 'earthly' justice he compares it to that of the heavenly city, which reveals its imperfect and instrumental role in a political environment. Augustine approaches the issue of justice by asserting that the Roman commonwealth never really existed, and he does this by making use of Cicero's authority and his *De republica*. For Cicero justice is the essence of a commonwealth, without justice a commonwealth cannot exist.

'But when the king is unjust ... or the highest men are unjust ... or the people itself is unjust ... then the commonwealth is not merely flawed.... Rather, as the conclusions entailed by Scipio's definitions would indicate, it entirely ceases to be.'<sup>223</sup>

For Cicero a commonwealth belonged to a people, a *populus*, but this *populus* was not merely a collection of disparate individuals, it was a people united in their understanding of justice, 'united in fellowship by common agreement as to what is right and by a community of interest' (*De republica*, 1,25,39). However, Augustine made use of these theoretical principles asserting that Rome never possessed true justice, Cicero's sole requirement, thus never warranted the title of a commonwealth. 'No such commonwealth ever existed, because true justice was never present in it. There was of course, according to a more practicable definition, a commonwealth of a sort.... True justice, however, does not exist other than in that commonwealth whose Founder and Ruler is Christ.'<sup>224</sup> Augustinian justice is based on the notion of 'do as you would be done by', therefore, the Romans who have been taken away from the true God and have worshipped false and pagan gods, and in doing so have failed to recognise what was due to God and conse-

<sup>222</sup> Kaufman, 'Redeeming Politics', p.78

<sup>223</sup> *City of God*, II:21, p.78

<sup>224</sup> *City of God*, II:21, p.80

quently do not possess true justice since 'without such recognition there could be no real justice, for justice is to render each his due.'<sup>225</sup>

Augustine proposes that rather than defining a commonwealth on the basis of a people united in their understanding of justice a commonwealth should be defined by the unity of the object of their love. This sees Rome as an unworthy commonwealth, united by their love and worship of pagan gods, while emphasising Augustine's ultimate point that the only true commonwealth is the City of God, since its citizens alone are bound by their love of God. Augustine's judgement of the Roman commonwealth is not restricted to Rome but it is applicable of all states.

'It must be understood, however, that what I have said of the Roman people and commonwealth I also say and think of the Athenians and any other Greeks, of the Egyptians, of the ancient Babylon of the Assyrians, and of every other nation, great or small, which has exercised its sway over commonwealths.'<sup>226</sup>

This extension of Augustine's perception of Rome is rooted in his theory of predestination, the saved and the damned. All States are comprised of a mixture of mankind, some of whom belong to the earthly city and others who belong to the City of God. No *populus* can be united in what it thinks is right or just as their souls are subject to different forces. The elect are subject to the true God whereas the reprobate remain subject to sin and vice, and consequently are unable to will rightly. It is only when the soul serves God that

'the soul rule[s] the body rightly; and, in the soul itself, when the reason is subject to God as its Lord, it rightly governs the desires and other such things. That being so, however, what justice can we suppose there to be in a man who does not serve

<sup>225</sup> C.H.McIlwain, *The Growth of Political Thought in the West* (New York, Macmillan, 1932) p.158

<sup>226</sup> *City of God*, XIX:24, p.960

God? For if the soul does not serve God it cannot by any means govern the body justly, no can human reason govern the vices. And if there is no justice in such a man, then it is beyond doubt that there is no justice in a collection of men consisting of this kind.’<sup>227</sup>

This intermingled character attributed to all earthly states as ‘mixed bodies’, *corpus permixtum*, means it is impossible for any State to possess true justice, *vera iustitia*, as the citizens of a State are never united in the object of their love. For while the minority are driven by a selfless love of God the majority are consumed and motivated by a self-love to the exclusion of God, which sees them place their love in worldly possessions leading to the unceasing struggle for material riches. Nonetheless, this does not render earthly justice futile or false. On the contrary, temporal justice performs an important and instrumental role providing a degree of security and order in an otherwise avaricious and dangerous world.

It is necessary at this stage to heed the controversial comments Augustine made in Book IV of his *City of God*. ‘Justice removed, then, what are kingdoms but great bands of robbers? What are bands of robbers themselves but little kingdoms?’<sup>228</sup> It is here that Augustine makes several comparisons between kingdoms and robber bands, that through authority and clearly defined rules both are able to maintain a level of order among their ranks, and even a degree of justice. Most alarmingly, however, it is the way in which the kingdom and robber band are distinguished from one another. Augustine asserts that it is their size alone that makes one a kingdom and the other a robber band.

‘If, by the constant addition of desperate men, this scourge grows to such a size that it acquires territory, establishes a seat of government, occupies cities and subjugates peoples, it assumes the name of kingdom more openly. For this name is now

<sup>227</sup> *City of God*, XIX:23, p.952

<sup>228</sup> *City of God*, IV:4, p.147

manifestly conferred upon it not by the removal of greed, but by the addition of impunity.<sup>229</sup>

Therefore, it is evident that Augustine does not hold justice as the distinguishing feature between the two associations, as is made clear at the end of Chapter IV, and Augustine's use of Cicero's anecdote of the pirate captured by Alexander the Great. When the pirate was asked why he infested the sea he replied 'the same as you do when you infest the whole world; but because I do it with a little ship I am called a robber, and because you do it with a great fleet, you are an emperor.'<sup>230</sup> He does not believe this is the sole prerogative of the kingdom, but believes both the kingdom and robber band possess a form of justice. It is merely the exalted position of a ruler and size of his kingdom that differentiates him from the robber band and its leader.

Therefore, it becomes apparent that Augustine does not consider justice necessary to the State. Unlike Cicero, Augustine does not believe that an unjust State ceases to be a State. As all rulers have to deal with wicked and sinful subjects, making a truly just political order unachievable; thus the State deals solely with the outward behaviour of its citizens not their inward motivations. In fact as the third purpose of the State will reveal Augustine held that man was subject to any ruler even if they were tyrannical, which by its very nature is unjust. Although Augustine does accord great importance to justice as a political ideal, maintaining that justice alone can unite men to form a true commonwealth, it is possible to make 'the confident assertion that St Augustine practically alone of all medieval thinkers dispensed with the need of justice in a commonwealth.'<sup>231</sup>

This dimension of Augustinian politics presents a perfect example of the Platonist influence on his work, specifically the Theory of the Forms. In this instance the true 'form' of justice is located in heaven, while on earth an imperfect approximation of this ideal is achieved through its participation in the heavenly form. This incomplete temporal justice is understood as a gift from God intended to make life

<sup>229</sup> *City of God*, IV:4, p.148

<sup>230</sup> Cicero, *City of God*, IV:4, p.148

<sup>231</sup> McIlwain, *Political Thought*, p.158

on earth more bearable, making earthly justice a good in a sinful world. It is important at this stage to appreciate that Augustine does not believe a Christian State is any more able to achieve true justice than a pagan State, although they may be able to realise a better form of imperfect justice and will facilitate the work of the Church. Essentially, true justice is found in one place, the City of God, which will only be realised eschatologically.

The state has been seen as a consequence of the Fall and is fundamentally associated with sin and the changes that this brought about in humanity. For these reasons the structures of the state apparatus are 'remedial institutions' (Deane), which minimise disorder and ameliorate some of the inevitable tensions of human society, whilst providing an imperfect image of peace and security. This characteristic can be linked to the influence of the Pelagian controversy and the helplessness of mankind in their own achieving salvation. Here again mankind is rendered powerless to affect his own environment and is wholly dependent upon God's intervention for peace and order. It is the divinely appointed political institutions by which man's destructive and evil impulses can be kept in check, preventing the total disintegration of human society, with the only alternative being the inherent tendency towards anarchy and chaos of every avaricious, self-centred, and power-hungry man seeking his own self-aggrandisement. 'This is a state of life so miserable that it is like hell on earth; and there is no escape from it other than through the grace of Christ, our Saviour, God and Lord.'<sup>232</sup> Until then the state is at best a race towards death, the earthly condition of mankind, 'originating, like the Roman Empire itself, from the aggressive desire of fallen men to dominate their fellows, its *raison d'être* in the providential designs of God is to act as curb to the excesses of a sinful humanity and, at the best, to make the world safe for Christianity by co-operating wholeheartedly with the Church.'<sup>233</sup>

The state and political culture may not have been God's initial intention but in his ineffable mercy He has allowed 'the State to come into existence as a means of imposing limits upon man's self-destructive capacities'. It 'coerces even sinners

<sup>232</sup> *City of God*, XXII:23, p.1156

<sup>233</sup> Morrall, *Political Thought*, p.21

into the bond of its earthly peace.’<sup>234</sup> The State is the only means by which the wicked can be kept from destroying each other when their competing egos clash as they compete for glory and earthly goods. It is through the State’s dreadful instruments of repression and punishment that man is restrained and some semblance of peace and order is achieved. Therefore, the purpose and scope of human legislation is to secure public order. It offers no moral contribution to man, thus cannot and does not seek to make man good, but rather provides security and avoids conflict maintaining earthly peace, providing some form amelioration against the material damage that is the inevitable outcome of sin. The State’s role is purely instrumental.

It is important to acknowledge that for Augustine the State and its laws are remedial only in a temporal and limited sense, with the only true remedy being the grace of God. However, by remedying some of the tensions impeding human happiness they ensure that the endless struggle of earthly life is made tolerable for man. The State is merely an external solution to the material damage arising from sin. The State institutes threats of punishments and consequences for breaking laws by no means does it attempt to make man good as ‘no one is good through dread of punishment but through love of righteousness.’<sup>235</sup> This is also true of the Christian State, which despite aiding the work of the Church and achieving the closest approximation to true peace and justice, has no bearing on our inner lives and cannot make us good.

The final of the three purposes of the State is divine discipline, which takes two forms depending on the love of the person. The State has been allowed to come into existence, by God, as a means of punishment for the wicked and to test the fidelity of the righteous whilst they make their earthly pilgrimage before reaching the City of God.

‘In the same fire, gold glows but chaff smokes, and under the same flail straw is crushed and grain purified; nor is the oil of the olive mingled with the lees because extracted under the

<sup>234</sup> Dyson, *Pilgrim City*, p.57

<sup>235</sup> Augustine, *Exposition on Psalm 68*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1801068.htm> [21-05-05]

weight of the same press. By the same token, when one and the same force falls upon the good and wicked, the former are purged and purified but the latter damned, ruined and destroyed.<sup>236</sup>

For Augustine this life serves merely as ‘the anteroom to eternal life, a place of suffering and punishment for sin and a testing ground for the virtues of the faithful.’<sup>237</sup> Asserting the Pauline view that all political power has descended from God, ‘there is no power but of God, the powers that be are ordained of God’ [Rom.13:1], Augustine maintains that being ruled by a wicked tyrant is no more severe a punishment than man deserves, and that in sending such a ruler God is merely acting in His justice.

‘He Who gave power to Marius also gave it to Gaius Caesar; He Who gave it to Augustus also gave it to Nero; He Who gave it to the Vespasii, father and son, the gentlest of emperors, also gave it to Domitian, the cruellest.’<sup>238</sup>

Thus it is the mere fortune for man if their rulers happen to be pious and virtuous individuals, as God’s plans have seen Him grant dominion and the power to both good and wicked rulers.

Kaufman asserts that Augustine saw the Fall of Rome as a test of the Christians, ‘patient Christians, for whom tribulation was training (*exercitatio*), proved themselves pious pilgrims by relinquishing their political ambitions and by clinging tenaciously to God’s promises of eternal rewards.’<sup>239</sup> However, alongside these trials faced by the virtuous, the state also provides the space for the elect to exercise their virtue, allowing them to live a life less disturbed by the sinful actions of others. Nonetheless, come good or bad ruler the State must be recognised as an inherently punitive institution, a necessary evil that benefits the whole. A fact symbolised by the imperfections of the State, the temporal law, the hangman and the executioner. Since it is not just tyrannical rulers that are sent to discipline

<sup>236</sup> *City of God*, I:8, p.12

<sup>237</sup> H.E.Deane, *Social and Political Ideas of St Augustine* (London & New York, Columbia University Press, 1963), p.151

<sup>238</sup> *City of God*, V:21, p.228

<sup>239</sup> Kaufman, ‘*Redeeming Politics*’, p.78

mankind, the entire political structure forms part of the divine disciplinary scheme.

‘Surely, it is not without purpose that we have the institution of the power of kings, the death penalty of the judge, the barbed hooks of the executioner, the weapons of the soldier, the right of punishment of the overlord, even the severity of the good father.... While these are feared, the wicked are kept within bounds and the good live more peacefully among the wicked.’<sup>240</sup>

Therefore, the State, irrespective of the disposition of its ruler, achieves its purposes through violence and fear to overcome the sinful and devastating tendencies of mankind. This thesis has now looked in detail at the three categorisations of the State, as initially set out by R.W. Dyson. It has identified the State as a consequence of sin, a means of easing the consequences of sin, and a form of divine discipline, as well as addressing Augustine’s theory of justice. Although these three facets of the State provide a considerable insight into Augustine’s understanding of the political organisation of the temporal world they do not provide a comprehensive picture of Augustinian political doctrine. Therefore, this thesis will move on to consider other issues that occupied Augustine’s attention in the formation of his political theory, such as war and peace, as well as his unique understanding of political obligation.

### *War and Peace*

Augustine had a great deal to say on war. This is unsurprising given that ‘he is engaged throughout *De Civitate Dei* in a critique of a culture which prided itself on its military accomplishments; he is steeped in biblical imagery of strife and battle; most significantly, perhaps, his lifetime coincided with the invasion of the Roman Empire.’<sup>241</sup> Although Augustine drew heavily on Cicero’s and Ambrose’s work

<sup>240</sup> *Epist. 153*

<sup>241</sup> Dyson, *Pilgrim City*, p.131

when condoning Christian participation in 'just' war, it is Augustine who is often credited as the innovator and first Christian just war theorist; the grandfather of the just war tradition. It is possible to see Donatism and Augustine's subsequent adoption of a policy of religious coercion as an influence on Augustine's approach to a just war theory. It was during this controversy that Augustine started to see the merits in the use of physical force to bring the errant back into the fold. This approach can similarly be applied to the case of war, where methods of persuasion and discussion are fruitless providing sufficient justification for more coercive and effective methods of correction. Therefore, by reflecting on the arguments put forward in Chapter II and our knowledge of Augustine's acquiescence with a policy of coercion one can draw parallels in Augustine's thought and go some way to understanding why he rejected the teaching of the early Christian fathers in favour of a just war theory.

Augustine is famous for his account of human history, defined by periods of shaky peace punctuated by the misery of war. War is perceived as 'a consequence of sin; it is also a means of limiting the damage arising from sin; and it is an instrument of the divine discipline by which mankind is both punished and refined.'<sup>242</sup> Inspired by the Old Testament he argued that by divine judgement war punished people for sins, even those unrelated to the war. This view derives from Augustine's conception that war is inextricably linked to original sin and man's Fall. It also emerges from the notion that since mankind turned away from God towards himself they have been subject to an 'anti-creation' (Elshtain), a desire for destruction of which war is just one aspect. War is part and parcel of human existence and the conflict that exists between the flesh and spirit of every man. Since each man is motivated by *libido dominandi*; a lust for mastery and domination, the earthly city can never be free of war, bloodshed, and sedition, mankind are inescapably driven by avarice and the sinful desire to subdue others to their will.<sup>243</sup> However, in his predestination view of history Augustine also contemplates war not only as the punitive condition God has inflicted on mankind, but as a divine means of bringing about peace and a well ordered State.

<sup>242</sup> Dyson, *Pilgrim City*, p.132

<sup>243</sup> J.B.Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics* (Notre Dame, Indiana University of Notre Dame Press, 1995) p.111

War, being an expression of sin, is never morally desirable, but is sometimes a necessary evil to prevent a greater evil. 'Always, Augustine's central point is the same – war is evil and dreadful, and yet, like the work of the jailer and the hangman in any society, it is sometimes necessary if wrongdoing and rank injustice are not to be permitted to flourish.'<sup>244</sup> In none of Augustine's writings is there evidence of militarism or glorification of war, instead there is bitter sorrow for the suffering and misery war brings in its wake, especially for its innocent victims. Despite his regret for this condition Augustine does believe some wars are just and defensible.

The irony comes when Augustine asserts that peace is the goal of all wars. Peace is the ultimate goal of humankind, and paradoxically it is through warfare that it is achieved. Here once again one can see the Donatist influence. In the case of Donatism Augustine's aim was to achieve unity, or peace, within a divided Church and it was through the use of force that such a goal was realised. The parallel with Augustine's concept of war is clear: in order to achieve the ultimate goal of peace one is often forced to make use of coercive methods. In Augustine's own words 'peace is so great a good that, even in the sphere of earthly and mortal affairs, we hear no word more thankfully, and nothing is desired with greater longing: in short it is not possible to find anything better.'<sup>245</sup> Thus, in all conflict the ultimate goal is always the same, and far from a desire for power or the promotion of national interest and security, that goal is peace.

'Wars themselves, then, are conducted with the intention of peace, even when they are conducted by those who are concerned to exercise their martial prowess in command and battle. Hence it is clear that peace is the desired end of war. For every man seeks peace, even in making war.'<sup>246</sup>

<sup>244</sup> Deane, *Social and Political*, p.161

<sup>245</sup> *City of God*, XIX:11, p.933

<sup>246</sup> *City of God*, XIX:12, p.934

It is through the violence and aggression of war that peace is maintained on earth, however truncated a form that peace assumes. Although quite often this desire to be at peace is a prideful desire to impose one's will on others, which subsequently turns to more conflict. 'No one should be mistaken about the lust to dominate that is so hopelessly intermingled with the yearning for peace. That is why we must be ever vigilant about the yearning for peace and whether what we seek is the quiet of destruction: *Carthago delenda est* as the solution to our woes.'<sup>247</sup> Consequently, earthly peace must be recognised for what it is. Similarly to temporal justice it is an imperfect earthly imitation of the heavenly reality, for it is only God's grace mediated through Christ that can remedy the harm caused by sin and secure perfection of mankind. Earthly peace is, when compared to the true peace of the Eternal City, an imperfect peace.

Although mankind 'have among them some tranquillity of order, and therefore some peace ... they are still wretched, simply because, although they are to some extent serene and free from pain, they are not in that place where they would be wholly serene and free from pain.'<sup>248</sup> Thus the earthly city, driven and captivated by the use of temporal goods is directed towards the realisation of an earthly peace. While the Heavenly City is directed towards the eternal and perfect peace of both body and soul, using earthly things like pilgrims in their passage of progress to God. So, while the peace enforced by earthly rulers is a genuine good, a good that despite being frequently secured through war provides a safe and ordered environment in which man can live. It remains 'a good of the sort that results when the violently insane are bound in straitjackets to prevent from destroying one another.'<sup>249</sup> Thus, it is essential for man's continued existence that both temporal peace and justice are maintained by a political and legal system furnished with the mechanisms of coercive power to protect the order and security necessary to check mankind's avaricious struggle for self-aggrandisement in this life.<sup>250</sup>

<sup>247</sup> Elshtain, *Limits of Politics*, p.109

<sup>248</sup> *City of God*, XIX:13, p.938

<sup>249</sup> Paolucci, *Political Writings*, p. xix-xx

<sup>250</sup> Deane, *Social and Political*, p.117-8

## *Political obligation and civil disobedience*

Augustine does not have a specific doctrine of 'political obligation' as the expression is usually understood. However, he does have a very strict doctrine of obligation, although it is more religious than political in nature. Augustine maintains that all Christians are bound by a religious obligation to cooperate with the earthly city and its efforts to check man's violence with that of the State, not because Christians require the restraints of government for their own discipline but for others. Every state exists to control the destructive impulses of the wicked. Therefore the shaky peace they uphold must be respected by Christians as a construct of good even though it is a temporal peace that merely deals with the superficial violence of sinful men and fails to achieve the security of true peace.

Augustine asserts that most men obey governors and the State out of self-interest as opposed to a sense of duty. Their obedience stems from either the fear of the consequences of disobedience or the glory and riches that their obedience secures. This makes their relationship a prudential one motivated by self-love. However, for Christians the temporal institutions within which they spend their earthly pilgrimage *en route* to the City of God are of little consequence given that they live as citizens of the City of God. However, it is Christians that are bound to recognise their religious obligation to obey the political regime regardless of its nature.<sup>251</sup> 'And it is, he says finally, through just such dutiful tolerance – imitating Christ's tolerance of Pilate's power – that true Christians may hope to enter the republic of heaven, where God's will is the only law.'<sup>252</sup>

Christians are compelled to obey rulers because all power is descended from God, therefore every soul should recognise that they are subject to his command and the governing powers He has put in place. God has turned the necessary evil of the State to good use in an attempt to bring some good from the evil of sin. Thus

<sup>251</sup> This is one reason why Augustine does not make comparisons of constitutions and forms of government organisation in the way that Plato and Aristotle had done. They have little place in his understanding of political doctrine, in which political regimes have minimal significance. For Augustine, the State's character is determined by those who compose the State, and even then only two 'cities' bear any significance to the individual - the Eternal and the Earthly City.

<sup>252</sup> Paolucci, *Political Writings*, p.xxi

the State is part of God's divine plan and as such should be obeyed by all Christians. Rulers are set above citizens by God, whether good or evil, pagan or Christian, to bring about a degree of peace and order in chaotic world, and it is this divine empowerment of rulers that enables them to command obedience. 'The king or prince is established by God, no matter how wicked or unjust he may be and Augustine allows no scope for any limitations of his power by his subjects or for any disobedience or resistance to his commands.'<sup>253</sup> Therefore, to disobey a ruler whether they are just or unjust runs against God's divine plan and the religious duty of a Christian.

Augustine's unquestioning acceptance of rulers and their laws sees his body of thought provide grounds for a positivist understanding of the law. Augustine was in part an unyielding legal positivist, asserting the almost unrestricted freedom of the State. He maintained that Christians must obey the laws of the State, rendering under Caesar those things that are Caesar's, with one exception that in doing so Christians are not in violation of their faith. Unlike Plato and Aristotle, he does not believe that because a law is unjust it is no longer valid. He recognises the difference between good and bad laws, but holds that such a distinction should have no bearing on the obligation of subjects. Human law does not rely upon its moral content for its validity, on the contrary its obligatory force stems from the sovereign who rules over man as part of God's overarching plan. Making man rightfully subject to any ruler, irrespective of the quality of their laws, and just because a law might be tyrannical man is not relieved of his obligation to obey the law. Since the State can never make man good, a task reserved solely for the workings of grace, the moral content of human law is unimportant. What is important is that the law maintains peace and order thus controlling the destructive impulses of mankind. Therefore, the wicked ruler and his laws must exercise the same legitimacy as those of the good ruler, meaning 'the goodness or badness, piety or impiety, justice or injustice of the ruler has nothing at all to do with the title to rule and to be obeyed.'<sup>254</sup> By using an institution flawed through sin God has brought good from evil, He has produced a degree of peace and order. This is the Divine plan

<sup>253</sup> Deane, *Social and Political*, p.143

<sup>254</sup> Deane, *Social and Political*, p.134

and hence Christians must acknowledge and conform to it as a facet of their religious duty.

Augustine does however sanction one instance in which disobedience is permitted. This exception is civil disobedience, a theory that was influenced by the Donatist controversy and the persecution of Christians in pagan Rome.<sup>255</sup> Although this was no longer a practical problem, Augustine identified the correct way in which a Christian should deal with the situation. However, his theory of civil disobedience is very limited and specific in the scope of its application. Augustine allows Christians to decline politely, with an explanation, if requested to comply with a ruler's command if in doing so the individual would violate the known will of God. However, in refusing to accord with the request of the ruler the Christian must willingly suffer any consequences, including death. 'For unless the rulers interfere in ecclesiastical matters and religious belief, they may be assumed to be governing ... in accordance with some approximation to the divine will,'<sup>256</sup> and granted that their mandate of power and dominion is from God rulers should be obeyed in all they do unless this conflicts with Christian practice and belief.

'Julian was an unbelieving emperor: an apostate, a wicked man, an idolater. There were Christian soldiers in the service of the unbelieving emperor. When they came to the cause of Christ, they acknowledged Him alone Who is in heaven. If at any time the emperor said to them, 'Worship idols,' or 'Offer incense,' they put God before him. Nevertheless, whenever he said to them, 'Form a line of battle,' or 'March against this people or that,' they obeyed at once. They distinguished their eternal Lord from their temporal lord; yet, for the sake of their eternal Lord, they were obedient to their temporal lord also.'<sup>257</sup>

<sup>255</sup> Chapter I provides a more detailed account of Christian persecution. Essentially, Christians were forced to formally submit to Rome's pagan gods so demonstrating their loyalty to the Empire; however the offerings violated the first two Commandments of Christianity.

<sup>256</sup> Rist, *Augustine*, p.208

<sup>257</sup> *Enarrationes in psalmos.*, 124:7

Thus a Christian's obedience to the State is entirely religious and governed by their allegiance to God, and disobeying a ruler is not to deny their authority, but to acknowledge the superior authority of God. This does not, however, provide the grounds for rebellion or any attempt to overthrow the established order: it only permits polite disobedience in a specific instance.

This disobedience stems from Augustine's belief that man is both body and soul and as long as man is on earth in respect of his body he must be subject to the governance of temporal rulers. However, the soul should always be concerned with eternal laws and salvation and hence be subject to God, "render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" [Matthew 22:21]. This suggests that if the two conflict God's laws must always take precedence over those of earthly rulers, for like all men kings and princes are 'dying men', creatures of a brief moment in time and subject to human frailty, and so should also be humble before God.

### *Political Institutions*

#### • *Private Property*

Augustine's 'theory of property is ... developed somewhat incidentally in his defence of the confiscation of the churches and other possessions of the Donatists in Africa by the Imperial Government.'<sup>258</sup> If the Fall had not occurred the law of nature that God wrote into our hearts would have been sufficient to guide human life and the world would have remained the common possession of mankind. 'Under the divine law ... the earth and its fullness are God's. The divine law, which man's fallen condition makes it impossible for him to live by in practice, prescribes that we should enjoy the fruits of the earth without owning the earth itself.'<sup>259</sup> Therefore, private property is a consequence of sin, expressing the greed (*cupiditas*), which like *libido dominandi* is a universal drive implanted in man by

<sup>258</sup> R.W.Carlyle & A.J.Carlyle, *A History of Medieval Political Theory* (London & Edinburgh, William Blackwood, 1903) p.139-40

<sup>259</sup> Dyson, *Pilgrim City*, p.105

sin: by consuming fallen man this has led to the expropriation of the world by avaricious individuals. This sees property as a necessary institution for fallen social life, belonging to human law and the conventions of society, rather than the natural conditions of humanity. A consequence of this is that human law can change and confiscate what it provides, hence no inalienable, God-given, natural right to property exists: rather it is subject to the authority's control.

Property also serves as a punishment and remedy for sin, forming part of the temporal order that 'preserves external peace and sustains ... earthly justice which is a vestige of God's true and immutable justice.'<sup>260</sup> The final function of private property is as source of human suffering (Dyson), bringing no true security or happiness to man. Since the Fall man has turned away from God and towards himself, consequently he longs for possessions precisely because the sole Possession that truly fulfils humanity, God, who is lost. It is because of our own pride and disobedience that we have fallen away from Him and now desire a multitude of things, in a futile attempt to be satisfied.

### • *Slavery*

This issue emphasises the departure that Augustine's thought represents from classical times. Augustine's understanding of the concept of slavery saw him undo and discard the theoretical foundations upon which the ancient world had justified the existence of slavery within society. Whereas Aristotle thought some individuals were slaves by nature as they lacked the capacity to reason, Augustine states that slavery is a necessary part of the temporal order, a result of sin and form of collective retribution for humanity's sinfulness. 'The first cause of servitude, therefore, is sin, by which man was placed under man in a condition of bondage.'<sup>261</sup> The Fall has disqualified men from enjoying the equality God initially intended and has subjected mankind to the penal institution of slavery, which is a wholly unnatural arrangement. Slavery can also be seen as a consequence of *libido dominandi*, the desire for dominion and mastery over one's fellows. How-

<sup>260</sup> Deane, *Social and Political*, p.104

<sup>261</sup> *City of God* XIX:15, p.943

ever slavery, like the state, is ameliorative, maintaining the remnants of the natural order that was disrupted by sin, and disciplinary, testing the virtuous and punishing the wicked. Slavery is just one other way in which mankind's condition has been affected by Adam's original transgression.

This chapter has sought to reveal the decidedly realist approach Augustine adopted towards the role of the state on a national and international level, the role of the State for the citizen and society, and the purpose of war. He 'had no illusions about the secular and often brutal nature of the state, the earthly city which finds itself in "a chronic condition of civil war" and thus unable to establish a true commonwealth based upon a genuine conception of justice.'<sup>262</sup> Depicting the temporal state as merely an instrument of repression and violence, to which the only alternative is total anarchy. The State is quite simply a harsh necessity and remedy for man's sinful struggles. However, before concluding this chapter it is important to recognise a final facet to Augustine's political thought and his conception of the State and the Saeculum as a whole; the influence his writings had on the thinkers that followed in his wake.

### *Augustine's influence on Medieval political thought*

This thesis has devoted considerable attention to Augustine's political theology and it is at this stage that one must acknowledge the medieval distortions Augustine's understanding of the two spheres of Church and State suffered at the hands of the medieval papalists and what has subsequently become the 'Augustinian' political tradition. This trend of medieval political theory can be understood as 'political values ... no more be[ing] conceived or represented as a purely human concern. They involve the deepest religious implications. Obedience has ceased to be a merely political problem; authority has assumed a sacred character.... Medieval political thought is deeply involved in these issues. It is thoroughly imbued with the idea that authority and obedience are at bottom not

<sup>262</sup> G.J.Lavere, 'The Influence of Saint Augustine on Early Medieval Political Theory', *Augustinian Studies*, Vol.12 (1981) p.1

merely a political, but a religious concern.<sup>263</sup> This problem of blurring of religious and secular authority is ultimately underpinned by the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity and subsequently complex and ill-defined relationships between ecclesiastical and political powers.

Although the nature and extent of Augustine's influence over the development the political thought of the Middle Ages is disputed, the degree of his influence is undeniable. Firstly, medieval theorists drew on Augustine's conception of man's inherent sinfulness and political association as symptomatic of this condition. Secondly, they latched onto the two cities, often misunderstanding their purpose as the twofold division of the universe into two cosmological societies. They were never intended as temporal institutions associated with a specific political order, but as all-encompassing moral communities transcending time and space, incorporating the past, present and future of humanity. Although one must acknowledge that, as is always the case regarding politics, Augustine did not express his position systematically. His remarks on the relationship between Church and State were made incidentally during Augustine's more practical concerns, and were often unintended for the purposes for which they were later used; a factor which may explain the extent of their misinterpretation. During the Middle Ages theorists came to associate the *civitas Dei* with the institutional Church and the *civitas terrena* with the State. This association led theorists, like Giles of Rome, to conclude the sole means of achieving true justice and a moral community on earth as submitting to the authority of the Church, making the pope the highest authority of the Church and head of all earthly power.

Augustine, however, held a clear position of separateness, asserting a clear line distinguishing Church and State and their specific roles, a position founded on Matthew 22:21 'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.'<sup>264</sup> The Church was concerned with spiritual matters, the

<sup>263</sup> A.P.D'Entrèves, *The Medieval Contribution to Political Thought* (New York, The Humanities Press, 1959) p.9

<sup>264</sup> Augustine's Christian Platonism became problematic as a possible cause of the medieval superiority of ecclesiastical power. His beliefs meant Augustine had to place spiritual matters above temporal. His perception of the State as a necessary evil to control man's sinfulness, in conjunction with his ultimate concern being the salvation of souls permitted no conclusion apart from the

State with temporal ones, thus no conflict of interests should emerge. However, medieval papalist thinkers tended to draw the Church and State together, eroding the divisions that Augustine had erected, to the point that some totally absorbed the powers of the state into the Church's jurisdiction; Pope Gelasius I was one such theorist. Although he did demarcate the two spheres of power, secular power attributed to the ruler and the priestly power to the Pope, he maintained that all secular rulers, as members of the Church are subject to the authority of its visible head, the Pope, since his power is spiritual thus greater than secular power. Despite the theoretical distinctions made in this approach the two spheres of power remain virtually helpless in the prevention of their entanglement, which usually resulted in the disadvantage of the secular ruler. This tactic was later developed by Pope Gregory I, who emphasised the Augustinian principle of all political power deriving from God, which is thus sacred, which caused considerable confusion between the two spheres of power. This approach led to Gregory resolving 'conflicts by invoking the traditional doctrine governing relationship between Church and state – the power of the keys with the threat of excommunication to the recalcitrant ruler ... but more to the point, he drew closer the centre of political power into an inextricable amalgamation with ecclesiastical power.'<sup>265</sup>

This confusion of what had been two theoretically distinct spheres of power culminated in to two very blurred spheres in practice, to the extent that the secular ruler became subservient to the papal power, a political bondsman, in the name of salvation. Lavere suggested that elements of Augustine's thought make this medieval interpretation justifiable and true to original Augustinian principles. He makes use of the Donatist controversy and Augustine's reconciliation to a policy of State intervention and coercion for religious purposes, where Augustine questioned why the State should not punish heretics if it punished poisoners. Lavere says from this approach a principle can be discerned, that all wrongdoing concerns the State, which in turn derives its authority from God. Irrespective of the inscrutable nature of God's workings it is indisputable that God is involved in temporal affairs at every level. Take the example of the divine intention of all

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Church assuming a more authoritative role in an individual's life. However, Augustine never viewed the State as the executive arm of the Church.

<sup>265</sup> Lavere, 'Influence of Saint Augustine', p.3-4

secular rulers; the good and the wicked the just and the unjust have been put on earth by God and permitted to suffer defeat and prosper alike.<sup>266</sup> This perspective is enhanced by Augustine's insistence that the Christian ruler is obliged to serve the Church like any other Christian, and should always seek to extend the reach of Christianity's message. A Christian ruler should place the mechanisms of the state at the disposal of the Church, as the ruler's objectives should be synonymous with those of the Church. Does this argument hold water? Did Augustine provide the foundations for the medieval misinterpretation of his doctrine?

It is possible that the ambiguity of Augustine's incidental remarks on the subject alongside his downgrading of politics as a whole provided ammunition for theorists of the Middle Ages, thus fuelling the whole debate. However, this thesis contends that Augustine's work was ultimately misinterpreted. Although Augustine believed a Christian ruler should use the mechanisms of the State to further the work of the Catholic Church; he believed that a pagan ruler would act the same way. This does not mean the ruler is subject to ecclesiastical command in temporal affairs as many papalists misinterpreted.<sup>267</sup> Essentially the State is a morally neutral institution taking its direction from the incumbent ruler not the Church, and throughout its history it has been utilised for pagan and Christian ends. 'To make the State more or less than this would ignore the Biblical distinction between the sacred and the secular, as well as long-standing tradition, and the evidence of world history.'<sup>268</sup> Therefore, although the various medieval theorists in question did base their theoretical principles on Augustinian precedent they omitted a fundamental feature of Augustinian doctrine: a political realism based upon a secular State.

This final chapter has sought to articulate a body of thought that was never designed or intended to be seen in a cohesive and unified light. Augustine was a practical man with practical concerns, who responded to challenges as they arose: therefore any remarks he made on the nature and functions of the State were made

<sup>266</sup> Lavere, 'Influence of Saint Augustine', p.7

<sup>267</sup> Papalists also utilised the incident of Theodosius I's public penance following his execution of riotous mob of Christians and Ambrose's refusal to celebrate the Eucharist in his presence. Augustine does not believe this event had any bearing on Theodosius' political authority and the act of penance was not necessary to secure his position as Emperor.

<sup>268</sup> Lavere, 'Influence of Saint Augustine', p.9

incidentally in works intended to resolve or dispute an issue of a pastoral or theological nature. However, hopefully this thesis has made sense of two of the most important episodes of Augustine's doctrinal evolution, emphasising the considerable extent of the formative role that both Donatism and Pelagianism played in his theological and academic life and works.

The chapter in particular has tried to bring together, in the light of the contentious circumstances, the multitude of incidental comments made throughout Augustine's collection of works enabling the reader to more fully understand what is implied when talking about Augustinian political doctrine. Augustine's influence is indisputable, and stretches as far as the political eye can see: 'his political reflections remain undeniably striking by contrast to ancient competitors – and to modern ones ... he avoids all "idealism" about human nature and politics. He has a kind of hard headed "realism."'”<sup>269</sup> The magnitude of this influence has seen so many medieval political theorists following in his footsteps each in turn playing their part in the etching of the indelible mark of Augustinian politics throughout Middle Ages. In his time Augustine was nothing short of a theological giant and in time he became a political giant as well, changing the landscape of political thought beyond all recognition. He disposed of the politics of perfection replacing it with a stark and modern genre of realism, upending classical political science through his adoption of such a brutal concept of the State. This was tantamount to a seismic shift in the development in political thought, altering its course beyond all recognition. This was a change that simply may not have transpired with such force and intensity if Augustine had not be subject to the influential pressures that inspired him to defend Christianity and respond to the pernicious threats embodied by Donatism and Pelagianism.

<sup>269</sup> Walker, *Moral Foundations*, p.111

## *Conclusion*

This thesis has attempted to highlight the centrality of the influence exercised by the Donatist and Pelagian controversies over Augustine's writings, most specifically the development his 'political thought'. The investigation into both of these controversies has hopefully emphasised the significance of theological concerns in Augustine's politics, the way in which faith and the Scriptures infiltrated every aspect of his life and work, to the extent that it would be fair to say that no body of political ideas has been more informed by the Holy Bible and its teachings. The entirety of Augustine's works are conscientiously fashioned and influenced by God with Augustine always finding scriptural justifications for his stance, or change of it there after. This thesis has tried to highlight the fact that Augustine's political philosophy cannot be separated from its religious foundations, and any attempts to do so would render his 'political theory' vacuous and wholly misunderstood. Through investigating the religious dimensions that stimulated the disputes of the Donatist and Pelagian controversies it has been possible to fully appreciate the gradual evolutionary process of Augustine's political discourse within the context in which it was and always should be framed. It is only through an investigation that respects the theological in conjunction with the political that one can fully appreciate the extent of the influence controversy exercised over Augustinian political thought.

Through a synthesis of theological and political perspectives this thesis has sought to clarify Augustine's interaction with Donatism and Pelagianism and through doing so provide an insight into Augustinian politics. Emphasising the distinctly Augustinian role attributed to the State, either in the case of religious heretics in need of correction from their erroneous faith, or in the discipline and restraint of selfish, avaricious and destructive human beings. It is true that to see Augustine's various treatises, letters and sermons as a statement of political theory would be to treat them incorrectly, as it would also be to interpret them as containing a series of philosophical principles by which we would be enabled to discern an understanding of the course of human history in the light of God's eternal plan. Throughout his work Augustine provides no discussion on the best form of gov-

ernment or the most suitable constitution for the state. He 'does not offer a program or plan. He strenuously repudiates utopian possibilities'<sup>270</sup> that seek to 'cure' the social order of its inherent conflicts and divisions, giving man no idealist assurances. Instead he offers a '*via negativa*', a negative ideology attuned to the here and now and the real limits of mankind and the temporal world, and while accepting change refutes any notion of a continuing transformation towards some preformed earthly ideal.

When considering the Donatist case it is clear that Augustine maintained a clear distinction between the Church and State. Augustine believes the State 'has no proper role in the personal salvation of individuals or in the function of the formal instrument of salvation – the Church. Conversely, the Church has no claim to political power. Following the explicit division made by Christ, Church and State are separate entities, each autonomous and dominant in its own sphere of operation.'<sup>271</sup> Augustine does, however, accept the need for State intervention in ecclesiastical affairs in specific instances and ensures that he always has biblical support for the positions he assumes. It is also necessary to highlight the essential motivation of love in Augustine's approach to the controversy, he maintained at all times a stance of Christian generosity avoiding any sense of severity and brutality. He was merely using the most effective method of bringing the errant back into the fold of the Catholic Church, the assistance of the coercive State.

The Pelagian controversy offers a considerable insight into the development of Augustine's views on sin, fallen man's moral helplessness, the subsequent need for divine grace and most importantly the State. Augustine's developments in these areas throughout the duration of the controversy make it possible to 'recover a distinctive set of political views from Augustine's texts ... that constitute ... a loose-jointed and heavily theological body of political thought.'<sup>272</sup> This political theology advocates that irrespective of the symptomatic nature of political activity and the sinful origins that account for the emergence of political organisation, these institutions do have a positive role to play. Political authority, an outcome of

<sup>270</sup> Elshstain, *Limits of Politics*, p.90

<sup>271</sup> Lavere, 'Influence of Saint Augustine', p.2

<sup>272</sup> P.Weithman 'Augustine's Political Philosophy', *Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, p.234

sin, has been ordained by God as a punishment and remedy for sin, making the penal conditions under which we live a facet of divine justice and retribution. Given that politics is part of God's divine and over-arching plan for mankind Augustine does not seek to undermine or challenge any political institutions. Rather he accepts them as an undeniable aspect of humanity's earthly existence. Therefore, attempts to provide an ideal form of government for earthly rule that would enable mankind to flourish and fulfil their innate potential are unimportant to Augustine, as such a goal remains untenable on earth. His belief in the deficiency of earthly states dooms the quest for perfection and happiness through politics representing a considerable break from the classical political morality associated with Plato and Aristotle, which focused so intently upon informing mankind how to realise their individual potential.

So can the influences of the Donatist and Pelagian controversies on the development of Augustine's social and political ideas be summed up in the remaining paragraphs of this thesis? There is one aspect of Augustine's theoretical development that must be highlighted: its gradual nature. Augustine is often accused of performing theoretical 'u-turns' and of making dramatic philosophical shifts in his stance. If this thesis has sought to emphasise anything about the actual process of Augustine's development it has been to show how Augustine's theoretical development was one of measure consideration in the face of pernicious and pejorative controversies.

In attempting to sum up the influence the controversies had on Augustinian thought one must be wary not to give a false sense of cohesion to what is largely a disparate body of thought. It is, however, possible to summarise some of the philosophical principles that grew out of Augustine's interaction with these two controversies and they positions these doctrines have assumed at the heart of Augustinian political thought. Augustine never sought to improve man's current political situation or recommend an ideal state. To his mind all states are inherently imperfect and form part of the penal condition under which man serves out his earthly existence. The State can never be anything else given that it is the designated mechanism of regulating an imperfect world disordered by sin. It is this impossibility of realising true justice and peace that make the state a regrettable necessity,

for if true peace and justice could exist on earth the State would be unnecessary and would in effect 'wither away'. Augustine believes it is only at the end of time that the need for human authority and the total obedience of subjects will no longer be requisite for man. 'Only then will the Church "be delivered from the confusion of this world" and pass over from this world with its sufferings and its coercive, remedial order to the heavenly kingdom of perfect bliss and an order based upon perfect freedom and perfect love. In the meantime, all men must give absolute obedience to God's ministers, the kings and rulers of this earth, no matter how impious or wicked they may be.'<sup>273</sup>

Given man's fallen and sinful nature, Augustine avoids the provision of a utopian solution to temporal conflicts instead devoting his attention to a critique that 'goes beyond any historical possibility'<sup>274</sup>. He outlines what people should live in hope for, stressing the importance of what lies beyond our temporal existence for, provided the political conditions under which we live do not jeopardise our faith and religious duty, political forms are of no real ethical significance. It is for this reason that Augustine went to such great lengths and pains to bring the Donatists back into the fold of the true Church. It is the salvation of souls and the next world that forms the predominant concern of Augustine's work, and since the State has no bearing on this the manner in which it controls man's base impulses and the methods it employs are of little, if any, concern to Augustine's philosophy. Man's ethical status is related purely to their membership of one of the two eschatological cities not the State.

At all times the reader of Augustine must keep at the forefront of their mind the fact that Augustine 'was continually compelled to concern himself with contemporary issues.'<sup>275</sup> His thought and teachings are a product of the age in which he lived and the influences of this unstable period of the Church, the Empire, and European history as a whole. Without the threats imposed upon Augustine by the Donatists and Pelagians it is quite possible that Augustine's political theology could have veered in a direction almost unrecognisable from that which has

<sup>273</sup> Deane, *Social and Political*, p.145

<sup>274</sup> Dyson, *Pilgrim City*, p.212

<sup>275</sup> Bonner, *Augustine*, p.13

formed the backbone of this thesis. It is the period and influences through which he lived that define his theological and political doctrine, making it unsurprising that his whole philosophy takes the form of an enquiry into ultimate salvation, and the true peace, justice and security that lie beyond this disordered and threatening world in the City of God. Hopefully, through the vehicle of controversy this thesis has demonstrated how for Augustine politics is the quite simply the unavoidable condition inflicted by sin and suffered by man throughout his temporal existence. Salvation is man's total exoneration from this affliction, a goal which is realised through his liberation from the political, economic and psychological structures that since the Fall have symbolised the *saeculum* and gone so far as to wholly dominate mankind's life on earth.

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