

The Christian Realist Perspective:

The Political Theology of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Reinhold Niebuhr

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ABSTRACT

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Christian political theology deals with the problems of the ultimate questions: the existence of God and the application of His law in the realm of human relations. Through exploring the political theology of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Reinhold Niebuhr, this study discusses the great issues of war and peace, the character of human nature, the necessity of political responsibility, the importance of moral choices, the functions of authority, and the meaning of history and progress. It argues that Christian realism withstands the serious critiques leveled against it, provided that the complementary strengths and weaknesses of these three figures is taken into account.

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INTRODUCTION

Christian Realism is a very complex set of ideas that do not conform easily to a short and simple definition. Perhaps this explains why Reinhold Niebuhr, who is most closely associated with this theological and political perspective, was "reluctant" to use the term "Christian Realism" as a "proper name."¹ Christian Realism, as Robin Lovin notes, is a "variety of realisms"—moral, political, metaphysical, etc. It is a Christian philosophy of history, a system of principles and ideas "related in a complex whole."² It is also a return to "Orthodoxy." Roger Epp rightly describes the second half of the twentieth century, the time when Christian Realism began to influence public debate, politics, and academic research, as an "Augustinian moment."³ Christian Realism is a twentieth century interpretation of political realities, international and domestic, based largely on the fifth century insights of Saint Augustine. It is a theological and philosophical perspective with deep intellectual roots. It is a revival of the old Christian wisdom that deals with politics and social order, a bold response to the ambitions of the secular ideologies to explain and rule the world and to the challenge of the political cataclysms of the twentieth century. The Christian Realist perspective is, of course, a religious perspective. It is a political theology in the Christian tradition. It is built on three Biblical presumptions—the

¹ Robin Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) p.2

² Ibid., 3. In another book on Christian realism, Lovin writes, "Christian realism belongs to no single author, nor can it be reduced to a single system of ideas. What connects these variations on the realist theme is that they unite political realism, moral realism, and theological realism. The meaning of "realism" is different in each of these uses, and the relationship between them is one of mutual qualification, rather than tight logical implication. They interpret and explain one another..." (Robin Lovin, *The Christian Realism and the New Realities*, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p.6)

³ Eric Paterson, "Christianity and Power Politics: Themes and Issues" in *Christianity and Power Politics Today*, ed. Eric Patterson (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) p.3. See Roger Epp, "The "Augustinian Moment" in *International Politics: Niebuhr, Butterfield, Wight, and the Reclaiming of a Tradition* (Research Paper no. 10, Department of International Politics, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, 1991).

sinfulness of man, the freedom of man (or man's "self-transcendence"), and the validity and seriousness of the Great Commandment.

The Christian realist understands reality and history through the prism of Scripture and faith. As a man of faith, he believes that the dynamics of history "are driven by the human capacity always to imagine life beyond existing limitations."⁴ The Christian realist does not find a final meaning in immanent causes and goals. He knows their temporal character; he knows that man is never content, will never be content, with his situation. The Christian realist does not belong to a particular ideological clique or party. He is aware of "the limits within which all political choices are made."⁵ He does not believe in the achievement of perfect society and order on earth, and does not trust the utopian promises of politicians and ideologues. Yet the Christian realist is convinced that faith expands man's capacity for goodness and righteousness. He understands human being as both limited and free, as nature and spirit, as great and miserable. Man, according to the Christian Realist perspective, has the free will to act in accordance with the ethical requirements of the Gospel or to choose his private interest. Man, according to the realist view, cannot create a perfect society, because he is never able to overcome completely his self-interest and anxieties, the sources of his sin. Yet man still lives in society because, according to the Christian view, he was created good and because his most natural state and desire is to love and be loved.

It must be noted that the phrase "Christian Realism" consists of two equally important terms, "Christianity" and "realism." Describing Christian Realism, Roger L. Shinn writes,

⁴ Lovin 1995, 1.

⁵ Robin Lovin, "Christian Realism for the Twenty-First Century," *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Dec., 2009), pp. 669-682

"The ethic was Christian in its serious appropriation of biblical motifs and classical doctrines: the uniqueness of biblical revelation, the sinfulness of man and society, the judging and redeeming activity of God, the faith in justification by a divine grace that produces works worthy of repentance, the distinctive quality of Christian love. It was realistic in its criticism of naïve idealism or utopianism and its confrontation with the brute facts and power struggles of the contemporary world. This Christian realism, at least at its best, was not an artificial combination of two unrelated motifs. It was realistic in its appropriation of Christian faith, and it was Christian—often recovering orthodox traditions neglected in the modern church—in its realism. It was alert both to the Word of God and to the latest news from European and Asiatic battlefronts, and it constantly sought the relation between the good news of the gospel and the daily news of the world."⁶

Shinn offers an excellent image of what "Christian Realism" means as a political and theological perspective.

The word "realism" is often loaded with negative meaning. It suggests the presence of cynicism, it is associated with uncompromising "hard-line" political behaviour and it gives the impression of political attitude that does not respect any ideals or norms, it is considered as "cold" pragmatism related exclusively to the will-to-power. But Christian realism is the exact opposite to this. Realism in the Christian political perspective is based on principles, it resolves the immediate and contingent problems of daily politics through the application of Christian ethics; it is also a perspective of compromise and common good, a political temper that respects and permits the diversity of interests. Christian "realism" is pragmatic, yet not inspired by the will-to-power. The only inspiration that the Christian realist has is God; that is the Truth. We should stress here that the truth is what makes the Christian perspective realistic. It is the quest for truth; it is the intellectual and ethical integrity possible only if we see the world, as Niebuhr

⁶ I take this long quote from Eric Paterson, "Christianity and Power Politics: Themes and Issues" in Patterson 2008, 3. See Roger L. Shinn, "Theological Ethics: Retrospect and Prospect," in *Theology and Church in Times of Change: Essays in Honor of John Coleman Bennett*, ed. Edward LeRoy Long, Jr., and Robert T. Handy (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982).

says, from the standpoint of God. The most common explanation of the term "realism" in the phrase "Christian Realism" is the concept of the "sinfulness of man." But the central place of the concept of sin, it should be noted, does not make the Christian Realist view "pessimistic" or obsessed with "the problem of evil." Eric Paterson rightly observes, "What makes the Christian realists feel that their perspective on human nature and political phenomena was 'realistic' was not pessimism, but faith in the biblical doctrine of sin and the Fall."⁷ The realists in the Christian tradition are people of hope; they are religious optimists who have a relatively unbiased judgement on human nature.

For this work I have chosen to discuss the ideas of three authors—Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas, and Reinhold Niebuhr. If Augustine and Niebuhr are the undisputed "Christian realists," Aquinas seems not to belong to this group. We cannot miss the fact that Reinhold Niebuhr was critical of Aquinas' over-reliance on human reason and natural law. But I hope to show in the next pages that Saint Thomas has a place among the "realists." After all, he was a student of Aristotle and Augustine. In this work, Aquinas is used as an important link between the political theologies of Augustine and Niebuhr. I believe that with the inclusion of Saint Thomas in the discussion, I have been able to draw a better picture of the Christian Realist perspective.

The reader will also notice the regular references to "secular" authors such as Hobbes, Rousseau, Kant, etc., and would probably ask why I "dilute" the narrative with thinkers, concepts, and ideas seemingly marginal to the central topic. I would immediately answer that so-called "secular" ("humanistic") political philosophy, in my view, is intrinsically related to Christian political theology. In the same way as the City of Man and the City of God are

⁷ Patterson, 3.

intermingled in this present life, as Augustine argues, political philosophy and political theology are mixed together in an inseparable whole. If we divide them, we commit intellectual error. The one cannot exist without the other, and both grow together in a dialogue and confrontation. Thus, the involvement of "secular" ideas in a discussion on political theology often clarifies and confirms the truth in the theological concepts. Moreover, the theological language and ideas when discussed along with secular concepts become more comprehensible for those who are not used to them, or who do not believe in God. And even when secular political philosophy serves as a contra-point to the theological views, the conflict between the two positions still suggests that each perspective can be a valuable and important alternative. As a Christian concerned with the problems of politics and ethics, I do not believe in the so-called "great separation" of secular and theological political philosophies. I do not want to silence either one of both perspectives. I am convinced that if I disrespect the right for existence of one of them, I do nothing but impoverish my own vision and understanding.

This work consists of three chapters and a short concluding part. I will offer in the next few pages a concise description of the contents of the chapters. I hope that this would help the reader to understand better the meaning of the parts and the connections between them. If one feels lost in the diversity of concepts and ideas while reading the main text, he or she could easily consult these summaries for additional help and clarification.

1. Augustine's Realism

1.1. The Christian Realist Approach to History: In this section, I introduce the reader to the Christian realism as a philosophy of history that deals with the concrete problems of war, politics, and conflict. I argue that the Christian Realist approach to history and conflict (this

implies that I consider history is a sequence of conflicts) is philosophical, moral, and theological, yet dealing with concrete historical actors and events; it is also complex and holistic, keeping together the particularity and universality of historical phenomena. Its "final distinctions"⁸ are not between good and evil (like in ethics), beautiful and ugly (like in aesthetics), profitable and unprofitable (like in economics), friend and enemy (like in politics), but between reality and illusion (like in philosophy).

1.2. *The Reasons for War*: Augustine's *City of God* is a *philosophy of history* in which Rome is presented as an image of the commonwealth (the state). In the *City of God*, Rome is a symbol of every earthly kingdom. The wars of Rome are the wars of man; they can be explained not only with the specifics of the Roman mentality, politics, and culture, but also with the character of human nature. Wars, according to Augustine, are the unintended consequences of sin and the corruption of morals. Every party involved in a conflict is responsible for its outbreak; even those who fight on the side of justice are not free of sin. On the other hand, men, who refuse to take responsibility and avoid conflict despite the need for justice, are also guilty. Augustine is especially critical of the people, who present themselves as "pacifists," or peace lovers, but who do not truly act to preserve peace because of their egoism and vanity. This subject will be fully developed in the last chapter, when we discuss Niebuhr's critique of the pacifist utopianism.

1.3. *Fear and the Dangers of Absolute Victory*: Augustine believes that prosperity brings a particular kind of anxiety (or fear) that is related to greed and moral degradation. The anxiety of the powerful always leads to war and self-destruction. The only means against the corruption

⁸ For these distinctions, I use Carl Schmitt's "dichotomies" in *The Concept of Political*. See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of Political*, (The University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 26.

of morals, caused by the wealth and the excessive growth of influence, is the balance of power. The balance of power is a configuration of mutually constrained forces, which prevents the rise of a dominant power. If there is no opposition to the prosperous man and society (or state), the powerful are inevitably tempted through their anxieties, pride, and greed to annihilate anyone and everything that they consider as a potential or actual enemy or as an easy prey. Unchecked power, therefore, is always accompanied by moral corruption, greed, and war that lead eventually to its own decline and fall. This is what happened with Rome, according to Augustine. This is what happens with every dominant secular power. The pagans, however, believed that the reason for the Roman decline was Christianity and the abolition of the old gods.

1.4. *The Reasons for the Roman Decline*: Augustine does not reject Christianity as a "revolutionary" force that changes the temporal structures of power. Yet, he does not also argue that it is the reason for the decline of Rome. For him, Christianity is a "saving force": the good that the secular power and wisdom fail to deliver or preserve, is brought or saved through the Christian faith. Augustine contends that the root of evil is in man himself, and the seed of destruction is in the human will. People, he says, call the natural disasters and wars "evil," but the only true evil, according to him, is the one that makes man sinful. The problem of evil is therefore a moral problem. The Romans failed to see that the collapse of their empire was related to their culture of pride and idolatry and to the decline of their moral standards. The true enemy of the Roman state was Rome itself. They didn't understand that their pride and will-to-power (*libido dominandi*), the hegemonic position of their empire, led them to destruction.

1.5. *The Visible and the Invisible*: There are two cities, the City of Man and the City of God. The *civitas terrena* is visible through its earthly institutions, the *civitate Dei* is a hidden spiritual realm. There are also two citizenships, two belongings, two loves, as Augustine calls

them. One may guess to which city he and his fellow men belong, if he explores his own soul and will. This knowledge, however, cannot be perfect; a people's citizenship will be finally revealed in the end of times. Yet, if we know ourselves from the standpoint of God, we would have a realistic notion about the nature of man and his political institutions. Thomas Hobbes is often regarded as the first political philosopher who explores invisible human nature in order to understand the nature of the visible political institutions. But we have seen that Augustine's approach to politics and history was already "Hobbesian" in that limited sense. So, Hobbes is not the first one who discovered the value of political anthropology and psychology, and he did not make a revolution in political philosophy, liberating it, as some authors argue, from the metaphysics of political theology. According to Augustine and Hobbes, we can achieve the most realistic understanding of political and social order if we know the hidden passions and desires of human heart. When we discover them, we inevitably judge them as morally good or bad. Ethics is the science of self-exploration; it supplies us with moral definitions and rules. If Hobbes, through exploring human nature, agrees with Augustine's realism that man is capable of moral evil, Kant, on the other hand, confirms Augustine's Christian faith that man is also capable of love through his natural sense for rightness and value (dignity). Love, in the Augustinian (and Niebuhrian) theological ethics, is a transcendent truth that nothing visible can contain, something seen only by the "eye of the heart." Thus, Augustine's theological ethics unites the opposing poles of the Hobbesian realism and Kantian idealism. Augustine believes that the "two cities," the visible and the invisible, and their citizens with their two wills, are intermingled together. Despite their mixture and common existence, these two realms have their own "destined ends"—the visible always changes and dies, because it is temporal; the invisible is constant and alive, because it is eternal. The end of the visible is nothingness, the end of the invisible, fulfilment. In

these concepts, we discover the traces of the Platonic cosmology in Augustine's theology. The practical benefit of theological ethics is the knowledge of the transitory character of all visible things, including the state; this knowledge makes us political realists.

1.6. *Jerusalem: "Vision of Peace"*: The discussion on peace is the culmination of Augustine's *City of God*. Augustine argues that peace is the final goal of all political ambitions and wars. The problem is that the pagans cannot achieve peaceful coexistence because they do not have a proper concept and understanding of the final good. The pagan wisdom does not put in its center the love commandment and thus it permits the creation of social order susceptible to wars and conflicts. Pagans believe in self-assertion, their moral truths are partial. If the love commandment is not respected as the highest norm of behavior then the entire order of values is confused. This leads to chaos and conflicting wills. On the contrary, the Christian vision of love is a "vision of peace." The Christian ideal of love and respect to human dignity imagines the natural state of creation, the state without sin, as a "harmonious unity in plurality"; it is a creation in the image of the Holy Trinity. Augustine says that among all earthly institutions, the family is the one most closely resembling the Christian ideal for natural and peaceful social order. This is so because the family members are united through the bond of love.

2. *Thomas Aquinas' Realism*

2.1. *Realism and Final Good*: Yet, Christian realists, Augustine among them, do not believe that a political regime can achieve the ideal of family organization. Unlike many ideologies that propagate the possible creation of "perfect society," Christian realism argues that man and society have natural limits. The achievement of perfectly just and based on love social organization is impossible. That is why Saint Thomas' political theology is more concerned with

the formulation of political principles instead of describing the form of good government. When we speak about principles and final good, we must note that any political subject must conform, as far as it is possible, to three basic requirements in order to be considered as a real authority. First, it must be mature. Secondly, it must be morally mature, i.e., it must have a sense of what is finally good. And thirdly, it must be experienced in order to know how to deliver public goods. In politics, the final good is the attainment of the common good. The common good, in political theology, is a preliminary stage to the achievement of the final good, which is, according to Aquinas, the happiness of the absolute knowledge (and power) afterlife. This implies the realistic admission that in the temporal realm of politics there is no perfect happiness and justice.

2.2. *Government and Authority*: For Aquinas, every society is organized and directed by a center. Society (the "body") is impossible to exist without the presence of a central governing power (the "head"). The features and the specifics of political organization and structure, however, are not of primary importance for him. Aquinas' political theology suggests that the quality of a political regime should not be judged merely according to its formal constitution. A better means for judging a political power or authority is the analysis of its intentions and the practical effects of its actions. If the men in power act according to the principle "*Good must be done, and evil avoided*," they certainly pursue the good of the community, i.e., they aim at the common good. In Thomistic political philosophy, authority must never be in a conflict with the freedoms of the governed. Authority and liberty are not natural opposites. If the rulers and the ruled live, as much as they can, according to the requirements of the love commandment, they would be able to create a society of equals, most closely resembling the Christian ideal of Trinitarian peace and harmony.

2.3. *Realism in Natural Law Theory*: The natural law theory is realistic and even pragmatic because it provides every political action with meaning and direction. The natural law, according to Aquinas' theory of law, brings every part of creation together in the direction of its natural end, which is God. Saint Thomas understands the natural law as reason, because reason has the ability to comprehend and contain in itself every part of creation. Reason can be synonymous with law. Human reason, however, although similar to the Divine reason, is not equal to Him. Human reason cannot function without an aim and its final aim is to bring the parts of creation in order and final unity. Divine reason, on the other hand, has no other aim but Himself. The common good in politics is a part of the greater good of the universal unity. Every politics, therefore, must aim at the common good, in order to be properly called "good politics." The politics of Thomistic Christian realism is one that discovers the ends of the things according to the general principles of natural law. The first precept of natural law, Aquinas says, is "*Good ought to be done and pursued, and evil avoided.*" The good is the harmonious unity between all individual parts. Hence, the pursuit of private interest at the expense of the interest of others is a politics that works against natural law and is therefore doomed to end in failure.

3. *Reinhold Niebuhr's Realism*

3.1. *The Dangers of Legalism*: But Aquinas' theory of natural law has been challenged. One of its critics is Reinhold Niebuhr. Niebuhr's main objection or rather warning is the danger of making human reason infallible. The overreliance on the ability of reason to judge rightly and legislate in accordance to the will of God is precarious. It opens the possibility for sin through pride. Often throughout history, positive and temporal concepts of justice were mistaken or defended on the ground of natural law. Thus, Niebuhr proposes that men must follow one only command, that is indisputably divine, the command to love God and neighbor as ourselves.

3.2. *The Nature of Man: Classical, Biblical, and Modern Views*: Niebuhr's realism, his political theology, is in fact a theological anthropology. The Biblical concept of the sinfulness of man has a central place in his anthropological views. Niebuhr describes human beings as capable of both evil and good. Man transcends everything in God's creation, even himself. In the words of Niebuhr, "He stands outside nature, life, himself, his reason and world." That is why man's actions, will, and potential are unpredictable. The Biblical perspective is the only one that permits human beings to judge themselves and their world impartially. This is so, because they judge from the standpoint of God, i.e., from an outer position. This impartiality, however, has been lost with the demise of religion and the appearance of the modern political and social ideologies that rejected both the existence of God and the sinfulness of man.

3.3. *The Illusions of Political Utopias*: This rejection led to the ascent of the modern utopias and their respective political regimes. The modern "secular" ideologies appropriated and distorted the Christian idea of the linear time. Their belief in human progress merged with their faith in the goodness of man and the possibility for the creation of an "immanent paradise." Niebuhr argues against these utopian beliefs explaining that humanity progresses in good and bad, which is the reason for the impossibility of setting a "perfect society" on earth. Technological and scientific progress, the increase of human power, is accompanied by a growth of the risks and responsibilities—this could be truly appreciated only if the moral limits of man and his partial interests are honestly admitted.

3.4. *The Christian Realist Perspective*: The political solution that Niebuhr proposes against the limitless egoism of man is the "balance of powers." Niebuhr is convinced that only an external force can check man's *libido dominandi*. Like Augustine, he does not trust in the autonomous capacity for good will. The Christian, therefore, is personally responsible to deter

every hegemonic ambition and to act on behalf of the weak and the "lowly." If the Christian refuses to take this responsibility because he believes in peace and non-violence, he fails to earn the name of a "child of God," i.e., he cannot be properly called "a peacemaker." (Matt. 5-9) The Christian realist, therefore, is a politically engaged person; the participation in worldly politics, with all its risks and failures, is his duty. Getting involved in politics, the Christian realist must follow, as far as he can, one highest commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." (Luke 10:27)

CHAPTER ONE: AUGUSTINE'S REALISM

I. THE CHRISTIAN REALIST APPROACH TO HISTORY

In order to know the reasons for war and conflict, which are the common expressions of political ambition,⁹ we normally turn to historical analysis. But there are different types of historical inquiry. There is history that tries to reconstruct past events in order to find the logic and direction of historical action, and there is history that is not only concerned with human relations, but also with man's state of mind. The history that collects, relates, and interprets "empirical data," is called "historical positivism."¹⁰ The historical analysis that explores the "spirit" and the mores of time could be described as "moral (or normative) historicism."¹¹ The Christian Realist view, which is the center of our discussion, employs both historical positivism¹² and moral historicism, yet it judges human actions chiefly through the prism of ethical categories and religious "truths."¹³ The Christian Realist perspective is therefore not "purely" historical; it is

⁹ In *The Just War: Force and Political Responsibility*, the 20th century Christian ethicist Paul Ramsey writes, "The use of power and possibly the use of force, is of the *esse* of politics. By this I mean it belongs to politics' very *act of being* politics. You never have politics without the use of power, possibly armed force. At the same time the use of power, and possibly the use of force, is inseparable from the *bene esse* of politics. By this I mean that it is inseparable from politics' *proper* act of being politics, inseparable from the well-being of politics, inseparable from the human pursuit of the national or international common good by political means. You never have good politics without the use of power, possibly armed force." (Paul Ramsey, *The Just War: Force and Political Responsibility*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2002, p.5)

¹⁰ See as an example the work of Leopold von Ranke and its nineteenth and early twentieth century applications (and interpretations).

¹¹ I use the word "historicism" without its 20th century negative connotation found, for instance, in the work of Karl Popper (Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Routledge 1954). In the context of Christian Realism, the term should be understood more like (but not identical) Milbank's "post-modern historicism," where the Christian ethics plays *principal* role. (See for more clarifications Ian Markham's "Postmodern Christian Traditionalism?" in *First Things*, January 1992)

¹² It uses the example of historical events and actors in support of its metaphysical argument. Paul Weithman writes, "Augustine is sometimes labeled a '*positivist*' about politics or, more commonly, a '*political realist*'". (Paul Weithman, "Augustine's Political Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. E. Stump and Norman Kretzmann, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 242.)

¹³ As Benard Lonergan explains in *The Origins of Christian Realism*, "Now what is the origin of that Christian realism, the realism of the true affirmation? Clearly, it is the scriptural word of God. It is the word of God as a

rather philosophical (and theological). The most significant difference between historical positivism and moral historicism, to which Christian Realism seems to belong, is their attitude to values. The historical positivist claims, or at least tries, to be "value-free" and "objective,"¹⁴ while the moral historicist openly admits "ideological" preferences¹⁵; the former strives to employ objective scientific methods (it is "descriptive"), the latter is intentionally subjectivist and philosophical (i.e. "normative"). Being subjective, Christian realism is also inevitably political. But in it, instead of Schmitt's political dichotomy of friend and foe,¹⁶ we find the philosophical antagonism of truth-untruth, reality-illusion.

The first great philosopher of history is Augustine, the last one, Hegel.¹⁷ Augustine is considered as a realist,¹⁸ while Hegel is better known as an idealist. It is not a question for our discussion to explain how a realist and idealist can share authority in a common space. Rather, we must answer how a Christian thinker could be a "realist." How a "metaphysician," so to

command in the Law." (*Philosophical and Theological Papers, 1958-1964*, University of Toronto Press, 2005, p. 93)

¹⁴ For a penetrating commentary on historical positivism and historicism, see Leo Strauss's *Natural Right and History* (University of Chicago Press, 1953)

¹⁵ Reinhold Niebuhr was convinced, "Judgments in the field of history are ultimately value judgments [...] that seek to give guidance on the desirable." (*Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics: His Political Philosophy and Its Application to Our Age as Expressed in His Writings*, ed. Harry D. Davis and Robert C. Good, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960, p.61-62). This means that according to Niebuhr the interest in history, if it is a genuine interest, is always related to the need for resolving (or understanding) some *present* problem and for the achievement of a desired *future end*. Wherever we have an end, we have also a value.

¹⁶ See Schmitt, *The Concept of Political*.

¹⁷ Here I follow Jacques Maritain's opinion in his *On the Philosophy of History* (ed. Joseph Evans, Scribner, 1957) p.3. Hegel is in fact the thinker who introduced the philosophy of history as a particular field of knowledge; he is normally regarded not as the last but as the first *great* philosopher of history. Marx is another big name representing the so-called "historical materialism" (his "historicism" was the object of critique in Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies*) John Neville Figgis quotes Archdeacon Cunningham, "[Augustine] sets before us a philosophy of history—the continuous evolution of the Divine Purpose in human society" and contra-poses H. Schmidt's opinion that Augustine "reduces history to a nullity." As we will see later, both claims are correct. Figgis concludes, "What is certain is that Saint Augustine was historically minded [...] No one who takes the Incarnation seriously can avoid some kind of philosophy of history." (John N. Figgis, *The Political Aspects of St Augustine's City of God*, II. The Philosophy of History, 1921)

¹⁸ "Augustine was, by general consent, the first great "realist" in Western history." (Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses*, ed. Robert McAfee, Yale University Press, 1987, p. 124)

speak, could answer the concrete questions about the reasons for war and conflict? Is it possible for one to find truth in the past, observing the ephemeral human nature? Who could know the mind of distant generations? And what is the alternative? Is it possible for one to find and explain historical truth only by collecting "empirical data," avoiding personal judgment as modern historians try to do? What makes the positivist sure that his selection of facts from the infinitely divisible flow of experience is the right one? Is not the choice of facts already a violation of the positivist's ideal of scientific objectivity?

While not disregarding the importance of material evidence, when judging past events and discussing future possibilities, the Christian realist respects two meta-premises. First, in contrast to the idealist he believes that history is unpredictable in its concrete manifestations because it is dependent on both the free will of man and on providence: free will makes human action uneven, while providence is beyond human control and imagination.¹⁹ Secondly, the Christian realist knows that in history we cannot find, as Montaigne observed, a completely similar situation, nor a completely different one.²⁰ Thus, he is equally aware of the particularity of historical events and of the universality of their general trend. Now, saying all this, we can conclude that the Christian Realist approach to history is philosophical, moral, and theological, yet dealing with concrete historical actors and events; it is also complex and holistic, keeping together the particularity and universality of historical phenomena.²¹ If I use Schmitt's theoretical

¹⁹ See Reinhold Niebuhr, "Coherence, Incoherence, and Christian Faith," *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 31, no.3, (Jul. 1951) pp. 156-168.

²⁰ "As no event and no shape is entirely like another, so also is there none entirely different from another... If there were no similarity in our faces, we could not distinguish man from beast; if there were no dissimilarity, we could not distinguish one man from another." (*The Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, ed. and tr. J. Zeitlin, Knopf, 1936, p. 270)

²¹ The "holistic" nature of realism is explained by R. Niebuhr in the following way, "In political and moral theory "realism" denotes the disposition to take *all* factors in a social and political situation, which offer resistance to established norms (i.e. taking the individual will and peculiarity of cases seriously), particularly the factors of self-interest and power." (Niebuhr 1987, 123) John Milbank explains, "[I]n Augustine, theology is in some sense the

creativity, its final distinctions are not between good and evil (like in ethics), beautiful and ugly (like in aesthetics), profitable and unprofitable (like in economics), friend and enemy (like in politics), but between reality and illusion (like in philosophy).²² We find this Christian Realist approach to history not so much in the work of Hegel, the idealist, but in Augustine and more concretely in his *De civitate Dei*.

II. THE REASONS FOR WAR

De civitate Dei is an unusual book. As J.G.A. Pocock notes, it is sometimes wrongly numbered among the works dealing with the "decline and fall" of Rome. *De civitate Dei*, says Pocock, contains "philosophy of history but not history itself."²³ Augustine does not aim to explain, chronologically, why and how Alaric sacked Rome, why the Roman Empire declined; he had a more general goal, a goal corresponding to the aims of the philosopher of history. Moreover, it seems he did not think that the Empire was declining or crumbling under the invasions of barbarians. Discussing the particularities of Roman history, Augustine was rather aiming to expose the universal features of human secular history. "For Gibbon, Tacitus and other historians," Pocock writes, "what matters is the disintegration of a political system from causes contained within its own structure. Augustine recounts the fate of the city founded on false values and false gods..."²⁴ Everything that happens in Rome—the expulsion of the Tarquins, the republican order, the conquests, the social wars, the imperial *Pax Romana*—everything for

third term that links the *philosophical* elaboration of a general ontology with the *historical* interpretation of particular events." (John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, Blackwell, 2006, p. XXIII).

²² See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of Political*, (The University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 26. Niebuhr rightly directs our attention to Machiavelli, "In the words of a notorious "realist," Machiavelli, the purpose of the realist is "to follow the truth of the matter rather than the imagination of it [...] This definition of realism implies that idealists are subject of illusions about social realities, which indeed they are." (Niebuhr 1987, 123)

²³ J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion: The First Decline and Fall*. Vol. 3 (Cambridge University Press, 2003) p.90. This conclusion leads us to the just mentioned dichotomy of true and false.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

Augustine was a string of "episodes" in the human, not simply Roman history. Rome's "own structure," in Augustine's writing, is representative of the structure of the secular kingdom in general. The wars of Rome are the wars of man; their causes could be explained not simply with the specifics of the Roman political system, but with the nature of human will, beliefs, and situation.

Augustine responds to the question of war at the very beginning of *The City of God*. In his answer, we find the Christian meta-premise of the role of providence. God's providence, he says, "constantly uses war to correct and chasten the corrupt morals of mankind, as it also uses affliction to train men in righteousness and laudable way of life."²⁵ War, therefore, is not a purely human decision. It arises from man's choices and behavior, man is responsible for it, but as a historical fact, it is also a reflection of something beyond the individual will. War, according to the Augustinian interpretation, is an ultimately unintended result of human actions and will. And as we will see in the next pages, man is never looking for a conflict, but rather striving for peace even when making war. In the particular case of Rome, we have the fact documented in ancient sources that Alaric, the barbarian, was not happy to attack and sack the "Eternal City." We even know through Zosimus, the pagan historian and contemporary of Augustine, that before the final blow there were peace talks, initiated by the Goths (themselves victims of foreign aggression and displacement), for a just settlement of the conflict. The barbarians sent Christian bishops to negotiate the peace with "fair and prudent proposals," but Jovius, and those who had the greatest authority after the emperor, declared that the Goths' demands were "impossible" because "everyone in office sworn not to make peace with Alaric."²⁶ The refusal does not mean that the

²⁵ Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, I:1. From now on with disambiguation "CD"

²⁶ Zosimas, *New History*, v. xxxvi-vi-vi. xiii, tr. R.T. Ridley, in *Roman Civilization, Vol.II*, ed. N. Lewis and M. Reinhold. (Columbia University Press, 1990), pp.625-626.

Romans wished for war; it rather means that they obviously hoped for a peace settled on even better terms, however absurd these terms might be in reality.

War corrects and chastens corrupt morals, Augustine says; it is the unintended result of the corruption of morals in society. God's providence or, if one prefers, the "unintended effect" of human actions is finally directed to recovering the balance of power in society of men and nations, i.e., it is the natural end result of the distortions in the political, social or international system; distortions that must be corrected in the name of mutual survival. War is therefore an attempt for the return of what is true and right; it is an effort for the return to a firmer state of peace, of the *status quo*, to use the language of international relations theory.²⁷ Its "chastising" power re-sets the equilibrium in political order and evokes nation-wide (or multi-national) analysis and contemplation of the reasons for the conflict; war, in short, renews the genuine desire for peace that rests on justice. However, as we will see in the next pages, this positive outcome is not always the rule.

Almost everyone is responsible for the outbreak of war, even the "righteous," Augustine argues. And everyone suffers its effects, including the truly innocent. The suffering of the "righteous" is to awake their sense of duty, the suffering of the innocent is to induce humility and guilt in the hearts of those who permitted the undeserved punishment. The suffering of the innocent is, in fact, the true sacrifice that societies perform in time of war. War's innocent victims stain with blood even the hands of those who are on the side of truth and justice. If we blame the "sinful" for their stubborn and wicked lust for power or for their fanaticism, we must equally hold responsible for the outbreak of war the "righteous" who do not act in time against

²⁷ See Hans Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1966) pp.38-43.

the foolishness of the aggressors and so permit the evil to grow undisturbed. This argument can be proven with the example of the policy of "appeasement" of the Western democracies that permitted Hitler's opportunistic politics to end in a worldwide tragedy.²⁸ The German society was no less responsible: it nurtured the National Socialist movement and failed to stop Hitler's political ascent and crimes.²⁹

Augustine is very critical of those who love peace but do not truly act to preserve it. Their inaction is because they lack courage, he thinks. They fear because any action against evil requires some kind of sacrifice, and the reluctance to sacrifice is a sign of egoism. "Although the good dislike the way of life of the wicked," he says, "they are tender towards [their] damnable sins [...], and thus fall into sin through fear of such people."³⁰ Many "good" men, he continues, "are eager to acquire many of this world's temporal goods, and grieve to lose them, and for that reason they have not the heart to offend men whose lives of shame and crime they detest."³¹ These people, therefore, are not "pacifists" but hypocritical egoists, who sincerely value the blessings of peace, but for the wrong reasons. Some of them may call themselves Christians, but they are not, because the "witness of Christ" does not stay idle watching crime and injustice. These pacifists, Christian or not, says Augustine, put their "reputation" and "safety" before the duties of justice and truth; they "delight in flattery and popularity," while in fact their behavior is "constrained by self-interest, not by obligations of charity."³²

²⁸ See A.J.P Taylor's *The Origins of the Second World War* (Hamish Hamilton, 1961, Penguin, 1963)

²⁹ See, for example, Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution* (Yale University Press, 2008), who famously said, "The road to Auschwitz was built by hate, but paved with indifference."

³⁰ CD I:9

³¹ CD I:9

³² CD I:9

III. FEAR AND THE DANGERS OF ABSOLUTE VICTORY

Self-interest is often related to prosperity, and prosperity is often connected with greed.³³ Prosperity, the growth of economic and political power, does not destroy fear. On the contrary, and perhaps paradoxically, fear is growing along with success. What changes with the growth of security is not the disappearance of anxiety but anxiety's object and quality. Affluence and security do not necessarily bring refinement of morals, nor do they make society stronger. The seeds of social and political decline seem to be sowed with the achievement of high levels of comfort. Augustine noticed this paradox, and history has proven it. Relying on the account of Sallust, one of the most original interpreters of Roman history, Augustine wrote that after the destruction of Rome's imperial rival Carthage, when the Romans finally achieved international security, "there came the highest pitch of discord, greed, ambition, and all the evils, which generally spring up in times of prosperity."³⁴ With the unprovoked demolition of Carthage in 146 BC, fear did not disappear from Rome, nor did the terror of war end. Rather the stage of the conflict moved from the international scene to the domestic. Rome became an imperial power with the radical change of the *status quo* that made her secure from foreign threat. But with the creation of the empire, for the first time since the beginning of the republic, peace in Rome itself was seriously disturbed by civil wars and ferocious factionalism. The absolute success of Rome on the international scene produced domestically "a moral corruption far worse than all the fury of an [external] enemy."³⁵

³³ St. Thomas writes, following Aristotle, "...for it is only the virtuous man that conducts himself well in the midst of prosperity, as the Philosopher observes." (*Medieval Thought: Augustine and Thomas Aquinas*, ed. N. Cantor and P. Klein, Blaisdell, 1969, p. 154)

³⁴ CD II:18

³⁵ CD I:30

Without restoring the international and domestic balance of power, which is the only guarantee for the achievement of some kind of justice, the unintended effect of war would always be negative, not positive as it has been said above. The return to *status quo*, or the pre-war peace, where the political actors are mutually constrained, the return to a firmer state of peace, as we have called it, resting on acceptable levels of justice, would be impossible, if the victor completely destroys the vanquished. The complete destruction of the external enemy has the effect of putting the winner in a new situation that changes the nature of both its domestic politics and its international engagements. In the case of Rome, internally the far-reaching consequence of the destruction of Carthage was the gradual transformation of the republic into autocracy and externally into imperial power. The new *status quo* that replaces the pre-war peace and the former system of relatively equal in capacity states with an order under the sway of one dominant power is simply defined as imperialism. That is why the 20th century political realist Hans Morgenthau gives as examples for imperialistic policy the "Carthaginian Peace" and the Treaty of Versailles. It is imperialistic, Morgenthau argued, because it tried "to replace the pre-war *status quo* [...] with a post-war *status quo* where the victor becomes the permanent master of the vanquished."³⁶

Every state that finds itself alone as a dominant power, i.e. as a unit marked by prosperity and unmatched success, is immediately put at risk of decline. To paraphrase a famous observation, as the light of the star shines most brightly when it ceases to exist, so the state seems most secure before it falls into decline.³⁷ Augustine reminds us of the realism and wisdom of

³⁶ Morgenthau, 54.

³⁷ I paraphrase Thomas Mann who compared the hidden inner decay of Buddenbrook family with the light of dead stars. George F. Kennan, the Christian realist and diplomat, used this metaphor in *The Sources of Soviet Conduct* (Foreign Affairs, July, 1947): "[W]ho can say with assurance that the strong light still cast by the Kremlin on the

pontifex maximus Scipio, who tried to prevent Rome from becoming an imperial power. Scipio opposed and resisted Cato's proposal for the destruction of Carthage. "He was afraid of security," Augustine writes, "as being a danger to weak characters [...] the event proved right. The abolition of Carthage certainly removed a fearful threat to the State of Rome; and the extinction of that threat was immediately followed by disasters arising from prosperity."³⁸ The "removal of great and wealthy state" aggravated the vices and lust for power in Rome. Scipio, says Augustine, "did not think that a city is fortunate when its walls are standing, while its morals are in ruins."³⁹

The pagans did not explain the sack of Rome with the decline of morals and the high position of Rome. Augustine's non-Christian contemporaries, against whom he wrote *The City of God*, believed that the evils of war and decline have nothing to do with wrong politics, corrupted morals and unjust political institutions. They argued that Rome was falling apart because it abandoned its old gods, beliefs, and traditions, because it became a "Christian Empire." To this, Augustine exclaimed, "If only the weak understanding of the ordinary man did not stubbornly resist the plain evidence of logic and truth!"⁴⁰ "Why did [your] gods refuse to take the trouble to prevent the degeneration of morality?"⁴¹ he asked. "I challenge [the pagans] then to read our Scriptures and to find [...] those uniquely impressive warnings against greed and self-indulgence, given everywhere to the people assembled to hear them, in a tone resembling not the chatter of philosophical debates, but the thunder of oracles from the clouds of God."⁴² The idols of imperial Rome did not teach morality, they served human greed; they were superstitions born of anxieties

dissatisfied peoples of the western world is not the powerful afterglow of a constellation which is in actuality on the wane?"

³⁸ CD I:30

³⁹ CD I:33

⁴⁰ CD II:1

⁴¹ CD II:4

⁴² CD II:19

and sinful desires. When Sulla prepared for a civil war and sacrificed to Mars, Augustine reminds us, a man "cried in a prophetic frenzy: Sulla, victory is yours! [...] Yet he did not cry out, 'Sulla, refrain from crimes!' and Sulla committed monstrous crimes there..."⁴³

IV. THE REASONS FOR ROMAN DECLINE

It seems easy to explain why the pagans blamed Christianity for the fall of Rome. The 20th century realist political theory in international relations argues that while military imperialism is able to conquer without the support of "nonmilitary methods," no "dominion" can last, if it is founded "upon nothing but military force." The conqueror, according to the realist political theory, perpetuates his imperial dominance through controlling the "minds" and "livelihoods" of the conquered.⁴⁴ Economic and cultural supremacy are the two pillars, in addition to military power that keep empires stable, undisturbed by internal contradictions, and long lasting. In the case of Rome, Christianity seemed to undermine and replace the cultural foundations of the Roman super-state. As a matter of fact, as we mentioned above describing Augustine's philosophy of history as a critique of the "earthly" state in general, Christianity seems to undermine every cultural foundation that is in service of a secular, immanent power. The Christian Gospel, the "ecclesia," if I use John Milbank's term, as an alternative to the worldly wisdom and the secular political order, is easily seen as a revolutionary force that erodes and re-directs the structures of temporal. Perhaps, the above quoted pagan historian Zosimus and the most prominent historian on the decline and fall of Rome, Edward Gibbon, were right to "blame" Christianity for the decay of Rome, since they seem right to argue that the Christian religion weakened the empire replacing the dominant Greco-Roman culture with a foreign

⁴³ CD II:24

⁴⁴ Morgenthau, 63.

"Eastern" (Asiatic) spirit. The Romans tried to put Christianity in service for the goals of imperial dominance. Constantine's religious paternalism and the promotion of Christian religion to official status by Theodosius I were attempts to profit from the success of a cultural phenomenon that was still outside the emperor's sphere of influence. The secular power tried to use Christianity to reinforce its "second pillar," the cultural dominance, first through appropriating the new faith from the exclusive control of bishops, and then imposing it as a state regulated ideological matrix over the "minds" of the empire's subjects. But the attempt, according to Gibbon, was unsuccessful—instead of helping the power of the Caesars, the engagement with the new religion distracted them from the more immediate tasks of military defense and governance.⁴⁵

Augustine's explanation of the troubles of the Roman state and the role of Christianity in its historical development is different. His is the Christian Realist version of interpreting the events. This version does not reject the notion that Christianity was a revolutionary force, "foreign" to the Greco-Roman culture, but it does not also argue that it caused the decline of Rome. For Augustine, Christianity is a revolutionary force, the Gospel *is* an alternative to the pagan wisdom, it challenges and re-directs the wills of men and the structures of secular order, and yet, it is not the reason for the corruption of political and social organization. According to the Christian view, the Gospel can be only a positive force. In the beginning of book one of *The City of God*, Augustine is clear: Christianity preserves what is true and good in the upheaval of

⁴⁵ "As the happiness of a *future* life is a great object of religion, we may hear without surprise or scandal, that the introduction, or at least the abuse, of Christianity, had some influence on the decline and fall of the Roman empire [...] Faith, zeal, curiosity, and the more earthly passions of malice and ambition, the church and even the state were distracted by religious factions, whose conflicts were sometimes bloody, an always implacable; the attention of the emperors was diverted from camps to synods; the Roman world was oppressed by a new species of tyranny; and the persecuted sects became the secret enemies of their country..." See the full text in Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of Rome*, Vol.4, (Henry Bohn, 1854) pp.235-236.

destruction; it saves the civilization from the corrosion of political power and the rage of barbarians; the Churches, not without a reason, served as sanctuaries during the sack of Rome.⁴⁶ For Augustine, Christianity is a saving, not a destructive force. The revolutionary in Christianity is entirely positive. The revolutionary in the Christian message is different from the modern notions of revolution as a nihilistic revolt. Its primary goal is not to "deconstruct" the ancient faiths and social structures; its chief task is to reveal God to humanity, not to demolish political orders.⁴⁷ Its political principle is "Then give back to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (Luke 20:25)⁴⁸ The Christian revolution is not a "creative destruction," to use Schumpeter's well-known term describing the nature of capitalist progress. The Christian revolution is the success of the "remnant,"⁴⁹ it is the perspective that understands what is good *and* bad in the temporal, that discovers the true reasons for the individual and social desolation and points to where we should look for hope. In other words, the "revolutionary"

⁴⁶ "[...] the most capacious churches were chosen and set aside by them [the barbarians] to be filled with the people who were spared. These churches were places in which no man was to be smitten, whence no man was to be dragged, into which many were led by their merciful enemies in order to be set free, and whence none were led away into captivity by cruel foes. Whoever does not see that this is to be attributed to the name of Christ and to the Christian age is blind." (CD I:7)

⁴⁷ Aquinas writes, "...the order of justice requires that subjects obey their superiors. Hence faith in Christ does not excuse the faithful from obligations of obeying secular powers." Also, "Man is bound to obey secular in so far as this is required by the order of justice." (*Summa Theologica* in *Medieval Thought: Augustine and Thomas Aquinas*, 170-171.)

⁴⁸ The reader should note that the acceptance of secular power by Christianity is rooted exactly in this principle. Robert Markus's reading of Augustine and his contribution to the theory of secularism revolves around the basic notion of the validity of state power notwithstanding its imperfections. State is "necessary" as an institution imposing order; its coercive function is legitimate in a world of sinners. On the other hand, in Augustinian conception of *saeculum*, Markus states, "the Church makes no claim to dominating or exerting power over civil society; indeed it can repudiate such claims as incompatible with the nature of its relationship to earthly powers. The Gospel is to be mediated through preaching its message and sustained public debate, without threatening the autonomy of the secular order." (Robert Markus, "Political Order as Response to the Church's Mission," *Political Theology* 9, no.3, July 2008, 321) See also Michael Bruno, "Disputing the Saeculum" in *Political Augustinianism: Modern Interpretations of Augustine's Political Thought*, Augsburg Fortress, 2014, pp. 119-169.

⁴⁹ Here the "remnant" is not simply "what is left of a [particular] community after it undergoes a catastrophe," (*Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Doubleday, 1992, 5:669) but of humanity and creation as a whole after the catastrophes of history; the "remnant" is the *success* and victory of life itself.

element of Christianity is in the "miracle" of survival; the good that the secular power and wisdom fail to preserve is saved through the Christian faith. Rome had fallen, but through Christianity Rome embarked on a new mission, far more splendid than the one it had before its political collapse.

We can understand Augustine's critique of the Roman state and culture, his critique of *Civitas* in general, only through keeping in mind this Christian perspective: the conviction that the secular and the pagan, left on their own, are always insufficient for sustaining the survival and flourishing of society.

Augustine discovers the root of evil in the individual and society in the perverse understanding of reality and things. He begins his exegesis of the history of Rome, its greatness and poverty, and its final collapse, with a judgment: people are not careful enough to discern between good and evil. They mistake natural disasters and other calamities, including war, with evil, when, in fact, these disasters are not evil itself.⁵⁰ They bring suffering and unhappiness, but they are not wicked in nature. True evil is what corrupts human soul and understanding, it is what makes man worship fantasies and perform wicked deeds. "Moral evils," Augustine says, "should be reckoned the only real evils or at least the worst of evils..."⁵¹ And the tragedy is when the moral evils are "accepted not merely with patience, but with delight."⁵² True evil, therefore, is invisible; it is an error of perception, it has spiritual, bodiless nature. For Augustine, the problem of evil is a moral problem, not natural; it is a problem of mind, not of matter. He was convinced that Rome was unable to think its history through the perspective of morality. Even its

⁵⁰ CD. III:1

⁵¹ CD. IV:2

⁵² Ibid.

"moral historians" like Sallust, who did not know Scripture, were unable to comprehend fully the true source of Roman greatness and especially of its woes.

Augustine argues that imperial expansion was neither "felicity," nor "necessity," as some believed, but misfortune. It brought glory, not peace or happiness. In fact, peace was a rare thing in Rome and when Romans enjoyed it, Augustine says, it was not due to the benevolence of the pagan gods, it was a result of favorable circumstances. For example, the longest period of peace that Rome had seen was during the reign of Numa, the second monarch after Romulus, and the reason for this peace, according to Augustine, was the lack of provocation from the neighboring nations. Undisturbed by foreign threats, Numa had the chance to implement and codify the religious system of the new nation.⁵³ Yet after his death, the new gods did not assure the prosperity that Rome had enjoyed during his reign.⁵⁴ On the contrary, all subsequent kings waged wars until the end of monarchy, and despite them, the city expanded only a few miles.

The "grandeur" of Rome came with the creation of the republic and Augustine explains the Roman success with a rare insight and sense of realism. The political organization of the Roman republic was superior to its neighbors; its domestic laws and foreign policy were far more prudent and just than those of the surrounding nations. Yet, Rome expanded, not because of its qualities, Augustine says. Its system of government and politics were better compared to the others', but not perfect. Rome's prosperity was due to the *weakness* of its neighbors; lacking true qualities, it was not prepared to sustain "psychologically" (or "spiritually") the burden of its

⁵³ "Then Numa Popilius was elected king. He, it is true, waged no wars, but was no less beneficial to the state than Romulus for he established laws and customs for the Romans, who because of the frequency of their battles were already regarded as brigands and semi-civilized [...] and he established at Rome an endless number of religious rites and temples." (Eutropius, "Compendium of Roman History" I. i-viii, in *Roman Civilization, Vol.I*, 59-60.) See also, Livy, *History of Rome* I, xix. 4-xx.7. in *Roman Civilization, Vol.I*, 72-73.

⁵⁴ CD. III:11

own success. Rome was not safe from the evil of pride—an evil that Hobbes, the "secular" realist, described in *Leviathan* as "madness."⁵⁵ The success of the early republic resembled the initial advance of the early Hebrew kingdom. God warned the prospering Israelite nation, "It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land, but on account of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is going to drive them out before you... Understand, then, it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord, your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people." (Deut. 9:5-6) The same prophesy could serve well the Roman people, if they knew it or were incline to believe it. Like the ancient Jews, the young Roman nation was politically organized in a republic, with a system of councils and balancing powers.⁵⁶ Moreover, it had a proper law for starting a war; through their *ius fetiale*, Romans had the habit to attack only after long deliberations, numerous warnings, and attempts for peaceful resolution, and when they started an offensive, they acted only in help to a weaker neighbour, never in alliance with a stronger state. Republican Rome did not "bandwagon" against weak states. In her early foreign policy, she was always on the side of the weaker, supporting him against the threat of the aggressor.⁵⁷ This policy helped the Roman state to grow in influence and territory, building alliances with friendly nations indebted to her and destroying in "just wars" the potential enemies before they become too strong and reach her

⁵⁵ See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, (Penguin, 1985), Part I, Ch. 8, "Of the virtues commonly called intellectual; and their contrary defects," pp. 139-140.

⁵⁶ For the early Hebrew "republic," see Spinoza's classical text "*A Theological-Political Treatise*" (ed. Jonathan Israel, Cambridge University Press, 2007) and Eric Nelson's excellent study "*The Hebrew Republic*" (Harvard University Press, 2008)

⁵⁷ Romans had a well-developed concept of just war. For example, here what Dionisius of Halicarnassus writes about the *fetial* laws: "It is their duty that the Romans do not enter upon an unjust war against any city in alliance with them, and if others begin the violation of treaties against them, to go as ambassadors and first make formal demand for justice, and if the others refuse to comply with their demands, to sanction war." (Dionisius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, II, lxxii, 4-9, in *Roman Civilization, Vol.I*, 144; see also Livy, *History of Rome I*, xxxii; or *Roman Civilization, Vol I*, 145.) For the system of early alliances, see *Roman Civilization, Vol.I*, 88-89.

"sacred" boundaries. That is why Augustine says, "With the support of these two Goddesses, "Foreign Injustice" and Victory, the Empire grew, even when Jupiter took a holiday."⁵⁸

Augustine rightly notices that the moral superiority of Romans, and their unusual, unmatched love for liberty, made them a great nation, yet, as we have said, the secular is always limited, and the political organization of a kingdom, however excellent and balanced it might be, is always exposed to the evils of moral corruption. Romans did not know God's warning against pride, nor would have accepted it even if they had known it. The good institutions melted with the advance of the Roman success and power. Romans worshiped "delusions" and "demons" and this had a "disastrous effect on Roman morality."⁵⁹ One of these fantasies was the national pride that was inciting more and more ruthless ambition. Behind the laws and the order and the balance of powers and the greatness of military organization there was simple human ambition, pride, and insatiable greed for expansion, and this made Augustine exclaim, "Remove justice, and what are kingdoms but gangs of criminals on a large scale?"⁶⁰

As a Christian realist, Augustine was sceptical of the idealistic interpretations of the Roman past and beginnings. He agrees with Sallust that in early times "it was the love of liberty that led to great achievements; later it was the love of domination, the greed for prize and glory."⁶¹ He concurred with the historian: Rome was in a better state when she was still humble and small. And corrected him: but the civic virtues of its citizens, at any time of its history, were neither so common, nor excellent.

⁵⁸ CD, IV:15

⁵⁹ CD, IV:2

⁶⁰ CD, IV:4

⁶¹ CD, V:12

"[I]t was by a mere handful of men," Augustine says, "good men in their way, that the great interests [of the state] were managed; and it was thanks to the foresight of these few that those domestic ills were rendered tolerable and all eviated, and thus the country advanced to greatness."⁶² Despite their exceptional political qualities, these men were not "saints." They performed their civic duties led by "desire for human prize and glory," and this was their fault.⁶³

V. THE VISIBLE AND THE INVISIBLE

We have discussed so far some of the aspects of the City of Man; now, let us approach the "pilgrim city of Christ the King"⁶⁴—the most important theme in Augustine's political theology.⁶⁵ I will not bore the reader by repeating the well-known interpretations of *De civitate Dei*. I will approach the topic with a simple question: What is the most crucial difference between the City of God and the City of Man that is also the most "problematic"? It is that one of the kingdoms is already visible, and the other still invisible.⁶⁶ All commentaries that try to

⁶² CD V:12

⁶³ CD V:13. See also Augustine's *Letter 138 to Marcellinus*, "[...] This exhorts us to voluntary poverty, to restraint, to benevolence, justice and peace, and to *true piety*, and to other splendid and powerful virtues. It doesn't do this only for the sake of living this life honourably, or only to provide a peaceful community for the earthly city [...] The first Romans indeed used their virtues to establish and enlarge the commonwealth, even if they failed to show the sort of *true piety* for the true God." (*Augustine's Political Writings*, ed. E.M. Atkins and R.J. Dodaro, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p.40)

⁶⁴ CD I:35

⁶⁵ This should be the most proper order of exposition since Augustine himself begins with a critique of the pagan institutions and wisdom before he proceeds with description of the Heavenly City. "Augustine himself," G. Ladner writes, "explains in *Retractationes* that, whereas the first ten books of *De civitate Dei* are chiefly a refutation of pagan Rome, the last twelve are an exposition of Christian doctrine in its own right." (E.M. Atkins and R.J. Dodaro, 179)

⁶⁶ I should clarify that many authors (Matthias Riedl, Ellen Muehlberger, Sergey Trostayskiy, etc) explain that Augustine describes both cities as invisible, and they are right as far as we speak about their citizens. The evil and the good are equally hidden in the heart of man, and what makes one a citizen of the Heavenly or of the earthly city is the object of his love, not his participation in politics, his social position, or vocation. Moreover, Augustine believes that the final separation is still expected and no one yet knows who belongs to the *Civitate Dei* and *Cvitate terrena*. What these authors do not often explicate clearly is that *civitas terrena* is already visible through its imperfect institutions, while *civitas Dei* is not even represented in the Church institution. The Church in Augustine's vision, R.A. Markus observes (from his reading of Augustine's *Confessions*), is a "sign," a "sacrament" of what is

explain Augustine's theory of the two cities must first attempt to resolve the problem of perception. Otherwise, how can a theory that speaks about the invisible be taken seriously? What could be its practical application and rationale? If the problem of the invisibility of *civitate Dei* is not settled in advance, any theory that deals with Augustine's concept of the two cities would be neither pragmatic nor comprehensible, i.e. it would have no "positive" value, and its discussion would look more like literary criticism or pure speculation than political realism and philosophy. One of the keys that could give us access to the theory of the two cities as a *serious* political theory could be found on the "secular" ground of political science and more concretely in the writings of its "founding father," Thomas Hobbes.

At the beginning of *Leviathan*, Hobbes admits to his friend Francis Godolphin, to whom the book was dedicated, that he is convinced in the truthfulness of his observations and opinion. Where does Hobbes's confidence come from? It comes from his method: *Nosce te ipsum, Read thy self.*⁶⁷ Turn to yourself and explore your passions, your will and choices, be strong and fair, and see what nobody can see.⁶⁸ Explore your heart with your spirit. This is the key to the

expected to come. "As *res* (thing) the Church is lost in the "world"; as *signum* (sign) it has distinct being as the world's pointer to the Kingdom." (See Markus, 185). In addition, John Neville Figgis explains: "First of all there is the main gist of the book—this is to depress the *Civitas terrena*. Of that there is no doubt; and if the *Civitas terrena* is to be identified with the civil State, as such, *cadit quaestio*. But the *Civitas terrena* is above all the society of the reprobate, a union largely unconscious and no less invisible than the invisible body of the elect. Only in so far as this society is represented by the State does it come in for condemnation. What is condemned is the World in Creighton's definition of it: 'human society organising itself apart from God.' (Figgis, 1921)

⁶⁷ Hobbes, 82. Hobbes, of course, is not the inventor of the anthropological method. This saying is ascribed to Epictetus, but what is more important, the wisdom in the words "Know thyself" has found its most powerful expression in the early Christian theology and philosophy. Henry de Lubac rightly notes, "'Man, know thyself!' Taking up, after Epictetus, the Socratic *gnothi seauton*, the Church transformed and deepened it so that what had been chiefly a piece of moral advice became an exhortation to form a metaphysical judgment." See Henry de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, (Ignatius Press, 1998), pp.19-26.

⁶⁸ This is what Augustine did and recorded in his *Confessions*. James Schall rightly locates the source of Augustine's practical insight about evil, "[Augustine] saw with a cold eye what most men actually did. He knew of these things because he could *see himself*, could see the reality and power of his *own will and choices*." (James Schall, "The realism of St. Augustine's Political Realism" in *The Mind That is Catholic*, The Catholic University Press, 2008 p.200)

invisible. Apostle Paul writes, "...for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God." (1 Cor. 2:10-11) Which means that the *City of God* is not so much about God, but about man. No one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. But everyone could be conscious of his own thoughts and passions and of the minds and passions of his fellow men that are not so different in kind. And I will remind the reader what we have said at the beginning of this work: that the Christian Realist approach embraces the empirical positivism and then goes beyond it. Through its *catholicism* (to use Milbank's terminology, again)⁶⁹ it takes into account for its analysis of reality both the visible (historical events, actors, and political institutions) and the hidden (the nature of man and the will of Providence). Those who say, like Prof. Lilla and others, that Hobbes has made a radical breakthrough in political philosophy and theory taking for the first time into consideration "human nature" are wrong or at least exaggerating.⁷⁰ Hobbes did not make a breakthrough; he was simply honest and punctual in recording and "demonstrating" what he sees in himself and around. And what is more important for the goals of our study and argument, his method and conclusions were not very different from Augustine's.

Thomas Hobbes sees the state as a body of men. It is a *Leviathan*, because many people compose it and its "technology" of function resembles a biological organism; it is a beast, not simply because of its character, tossed by the sway of collective passions, but because of its

⁶⁹ Catholicism means here "universalism." See Milbank 2006. "While I recommend, " Milbank says, "Catholic Christianity as the one final and universal truth, I quite clearly envisage Catholicism in 'liberal' terms, if by 'liberal' one connotes the generous, open minded and all inclusive." (Milbank, XXIII)

⁷⁰ See Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West*. Vintage, 2007

immense power to reward and harm without being kept truly responsible.⁷¹ Augustine argues almost the same. As we have seen, when he speaks about the earthly city, he speaks about psychology: individual and collective passions. And like Hobbes he argues that all men desire, fear, and hope, only the objects of their desires, fears, and hopes are different (we will see in the next section how important this conclusion is and that there is at least one thing that all men desire).⁷² What makes Augustine's analysis different from Hobbes's analysis is that he is not interested in the particulars of the technology of governance; as we have said in the beginning quoting Pocock, he is primarily concerned with the "false values and gods."⁷³ In addition, Augustine is frank to admit that psychology, or the knowledge of human soul, is not exact science.⁷⁴ It is not exact because, as we will discuss with Niebuhr in the next pages, the human soul is entitled to freedom of will and from time to time, this free will is directed to the good. Saying this, I should immediately note that the "free will" in the mind of Augustine differs from the "free will" in the perspective of Pelagius.

Let us summarize before we proceed: we have two cities, two realities, visible and invisible; so far, we discussed the visible, using historical examples and political theory (secular

⁷¹ Immune to real pain and harm, yet having passions and active will, the state can be the insensible creature described in Job 41. James Schall is correct in reminding us, "States are not saved. Persons are." (James Schall, *Christianity and Politics*, St. Paul's Editions, 1981, p.9) In fact, Hobbes's opinion about state power is much more positive, "But yet, me thinks, the endeavour to advance the Civill Power, should not be by the Civill Power condemned..." (Hobbes, 75) And Augustine himself is not completely critical to it seeing in state's coercive function a positive role. The difference between Hobbes and Augustine is, as Niebuhr observes, in the level of realistic expectations: Hobbes "had an unqualified endorsement of state power," but that was because "he was not *realistic enough*." (R. Niebuhr, "Augustine's Political Realism," in *An Eerdmans Reader in Contemporary Political Theology*, Eerdmans, p.228)

⁷² "I say the similitude of Passions, which are the same in all men, desire, fear, hope, etc; not the similitude of the objects of the Passions, which are the things desired, feared, hoped, etc." (Hobbes, 82)

⁷³ See also Paul Weitman, "Augustine's Political Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. E. Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge University Press, 2001) p. 238.

⁷⁴ "Augustine [...] makes no simplifying assumptions. His [rationalist] scepticism [to human rationality] is grounded in the claim that the human psychology is complex." Michael Loriaux, "The Realists and Saint Augustine: Scepticism, Psychology, and Moral Action in International Relations Thought," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Dec.,1992) pp.401-420

and theological), now we will explore the invisible mixing ethics with theology and politics; from now on, I will not offer concrete instances from the Roman history. We are in the field of speculative ethics and theology. I suggested that there is not much difference between Hobbes and Augustine when we speak about political philosophy: both are rightly described as "realists," and both still have significant presence in the modern political thought and theory. What connects them and makes them important for the political theorists today is their exploration of human nature and will-to-power. If I paraphrase C.B. Macpherson, in the first half of the twentieth first century we are still reading Hobbes and Augustine, because our world is obsessed with problems of man and power, and Hobbes and Augustine were analysts of man and power.⁷⁵

It is not enough to know one's own thoughts and the thoughts of one's fellows. Knowledge without judgement is useless. And knowledge without love is evil.⁷⁶ Human nature is not the nature of animals. What makes human like "angel," no matter whether we say this metaphorically or theologically, is his ability to discern good from evil. It is his potential to move from "is" (visible) to "ought" (invisible), from *empirical* to *ideal*, from *descriptive* to *prescriptive*, from *actual* to *potential*. This journey does not make man an idealist. And this journey is practiced by every rational creature. The "pilgrimage" from visible to invisible, and the reverse—from *invisible* to *visible* (i.e. from potential to actual concerning man and from hidden to revealed concerning God)—is in fact the creative or dynamic relation between individual and universal, particular and common, man and God. But more importantly, it makes the world dynamic and teleologically directed, measured with timeless ethical categories, not

⁷⁵ Hobbes, 9.

⁷⁶ The Greek word "daimon," says Augustine, comes from "knowledge," but the Apostle "under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says, "Knowledge inflates, but love edifies." (1 Cor. 8:1) The only correct interpretation of this saying is that knowledge is valuable when charity informs it. Without charity, knowledge inflates; that is, it exalts man to arrogance which is nothing but a kind of windy emptiness..." (CD IX:20)

with transitory material substances. Thus, to be full, the knowledge of human nature, in fact, of everything that exists, requires ethics (and religion).

And here we reach another aspect of the invisible: How do we know what is good and evil? I refer to Immanuel Kant, whose moral philosophy has a lot in common with Augustine's thought. The good is self-evident, the aim of everything is natural, and because of this intelligible for the human mind.⁷⁷ This is what Plato and medieval scholars such as Aquinas call "synderesis."⁷⁸ If we observe well and if we are honest enough, we do not need a proof, evidence, for the rectitude of our thoughts and actions. The visible is a limited criterion for the rightness of a will, argument, or action. In other words, human beings are blessed, in contrast to animals, with the "faculty" of faith, which is a natural ability for moral judgement. Every conviction based on the lack of proof, is called "belief." We believe that our will is good when it is, and that the admonitions of Scripture are good beyond proof. We know the rightness of the categorical imperative: "I ought never to conduct myself except so that I could also will that my maxim become a universal law [...] therefore, every rational being must so act as if he were through his maxim always a legislating member in the universal kingdom of ends."⁷⁹ Or, in the language of Heavens, "You shall love your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself." (Luke, 10:27)⁸⁰ Particular and universal in a non-dialectical relation! Visible and invisible reconciled.

⁷⁷ "[I]t needs no science and philosophy to know what one has to do in order to be honest and good, or indeed, even wise and virtuous." Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* 4:403. We will return to this in the next chapter when discussing Aquinas' concept of natural law.

⁷⁸ The word that Plato uses is *anamnesis* or "remembering," see Plato's dialogue *Meno*.

⁷⁹ Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:401

⁸⁰ See my essay *The Greatest Commandment: A Reading of Kant's Ethics*, in which I explain Kant's categorical imperative and its relation to the Christian commandment "You shall love, your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself." (http://www.themontrealreview.com/2009/Kant_Ethics.php)

Knowledge and judgement (justice) united through love! Who, then, could argue that faith has no place in realism? Moreover, who can say that one is able to discover reality without the help of self-evident moral (or religious) norms? Is it good to steal from greed? Even the thief will say, "No, it is not." Augustine writes, "My task is to discuss, to the best of my power, the rise of the development and the destined ends of the two cities, the earthly (visible) and the heavenly (invisible), the cities which we find, as I have said, interwoven, as it were in this present transitory world (*saeculum*), and mingled with one another."⁸¹ Who can argue against Augustine that visible and invisible is a fiction, that they do not exist in one another, having their proper ends, and that we have no access to what we cannot touch, hear, see, or smell? Do we always need: "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing"? (John 20:27) The positivist phenomenology collapses here. "The existence of the world," Augustine continues, "is a matter of observation, and the existence of God (of Good) is a matter of belief."⁸² Yes, it is. And the super-realist, the Christian realist, is not disturbed, but empowered by the fact of faith.

Augustine says that his task is to find the "destined ends of the two cities," the teleological direction of creation and its composing parts. Clearly, the end of the Earthly is in its end, and the end of the Heavenly is in its eternity. The earthly is finite: the Roman Empire collapsed, and with it, its political and social divisions. The lies and the delusions of the pagan mythology and civil religion ceased.⁸³ There is no more imperial Rome; Jove, the "king of the Gods," the highest deity of the Roman state, became one of the gods from the textbooks—an

⁸¹ CD XI:1

⁸² CD XI:4

⁸³ For Augustine's discussion of the tripartite pagan wisdom (fabulous, natural, and civil), see books VI and VIII of *De civitate Dei*.

object of research by "disinterested" academics and a burden for indifferent students;⁸⁴ from places of worship his ruined temples are now tourist attractions. Jove is an artefact, an object that has no power to do either good or bad. Jove's place today is Jove's proper place: in the pantheon of human illusions. Roman institutions, too, are archaic, an object of interest for scholars and dilettante historians; the hopes of the generals and the passions of the proconsuls, the disturbance and the terror they inflicted, are long forgotten. The "splendid" Roman system of governance is antiquated, it ended, and no one believes in its "second coming." This is the end of every earthly city, explained in a comprehensible and simple way. This is what Augustine meant with *De civitate Dei*: everything in front of our eyes, everything that is visible will change (1 Cor. 15:51) or pass, but the invisible truth in our heart will last forever. (Mt 24:1-25) The history of human institutions, illuminated⁸⁵ by the light of the "city that cannot be hidden," (Matthew 5:14) is flat, if not meaningless.⁸⁶ We know its transitory character not from the "chatter of philosophical debates," but from "the thunder of oracles from the clouds of God."⁸⁷ This is, in fact, the kernel in Augustine's philosophy of history and political theology.

⁸⁴ This is what some prematurely expect to happen with Christianity and Christ.

⁸⁵ Note here the word "illuminated." In his book *The Stillborn God*, Mark Lilla is appealing for switching off the light of revelation. His controversial book ends with the following words: "We have chosen to keep our politics unilluminated by the light of revelation. If our experiment is to work, we must rely on our own lucidity." The question is, Can we really rely on our "own lucidity" without dangerous consequences? Lilla is careful not to answer definitively. (See Lilla, 313)

⁸⁶ "That there is another, the purely other-worldly, which threatens as *null* all earthly activities including the State, is not to be denied on any fair reading [of Augustine]. The world-renouncing and the world-accepting temper both meet in S. Augustine, as they do in the Christian Church and its most eminent representatives, S. Paul, S. Anselm, S. Francis de Sales, Fenelon, Newman." (Figgis, 1921) R. Markus reminds Augustine's commentary in Sermons 105.6.8 "Did God promise permanence to things such as social institutions and political arrangements? Are we to prize God when things go well and blaspheme him in adversity?" (Markus, 39)

⁸⁷ CD II:19

VI. JERUSALEM: "VISION OF PEACE"

It is surprising that many of the great expounders of Augustine's political thought, except perhaps Jean Bethke Elshtain, do not recognize the blessing of peace as a central theme and culmination of the *City of God*.⁸⁸ We have all sorts of discussion on the meaning of *saeculum*, the "two loves," the Church, the state, on virtues and the concept of sin, but we rarely find a discourse particularly interested in Augustine's "vision of peace," as he translates the word "Jerusalem" in *De civitate Dei*.

We have started this chapter claiming in the very first sentence that war and conflict are the common expressions of political ambition, and we have tried to find the reasons for their existence. Our discussion would be incomplete, if we did not finish with another kind of political ambition, namely man's effort to achieve peace and sustain it. We should note that this is a fair order of exposition since Augustine himself began his narrative with the problem of war and ended with a theology of peace.

Following Varro, the learned Roman encyclopaedist, Augustine explains that three major types of philosophy rule the Earthly city: the mythical (or the "fabulous") that is presented in the popular culture through the work of poets and on the stage of theaters; the physical (or natural), which is the "science" of philosophers; and the civil philosophy, which is the ideology of the pagan priests and politicians. According to Augustine, all these teachings are in one way or another a human invention, as the difference between them is in the degree of untruth they

⁸⁸ This section can be best elucidated by Jean Bethke Elshtain's article "Why Augustine? Why Now?" published in *Theology Today* (55, April, 1998. pp.5-14; also in *Catholic University Law Review*, Vol. 52, Issue 2, 2003) Another author, who discusses the importance of peace in the form of "harmonic order" in Augustine's political theology, is Miikka Roukanen. See Miikka Roukanen, *Theology of Social Life in Augustine's De Civitate Dei* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993) See also, Johannes Brachtendorf "Augustine: Peace Ethics and Peace Policy" in *From Just War to Modern Peace Ethics*, ed. Heinz-Gerhard Justenhoven, William A. Barbieri, Jr (Walter de Gruyter, 2012)

possess and in their object of interest. The fabulous and the civil theology are concerned with things created by humans—the theater and the city; while natural philosophy is interested in the workings of the world, which is not a human creation. Hence, the teachings of the "fabulous" and the "civil" philosophy, Augustine says, "must yield place to the doctrine of the Platonists, for the Platonists assert that the true God is the author of the universe."⁸⁹ The natural philosophers, he notes, recognize that "no material object" and nothing "changeable" can be God.⁹⁰ In addition, they prefer the "intelligible," that can be "recognized by mind's eye," instead of the "sensible," that can be "apprehended [...] by sight and touch."⁹¹ His conclusion is that the wisdom of the pagans would be full, their philosophy without any degree of untruth, their ethics and politics excellent, only if they had a better understanding of the final good. The failure to apprehend what is finally good is the crack from which the evil arouses; it is a small gap in understanding, only a jot in the sea of knowledge to which human mind is capable, but with crucial and fateful consequences. The failure to respect the greatest commandment, the one that is grasped, as we have said above, with the "eye of the heart," is to keep marching on the "broad roads of destruction." (Matt. 7:13) I will bring up again Augustine's warning, "Without charity, knowledge inflates; that is, it exalts man to arrogance, which is nothing, but a kind of emptiness."⁹²

Note here the words "kind of emptiness." It begs the question: Is it not true that all man's thoughts, actions, knowledge, work, and striving would be pitiful empty vanity, if they were inspired by wrong motives and aims? Can we call happy or wise or blessed the man who tries to achieve something that simply does not exist, or even if it exists, its price is inflated beyond its

⁸⁹ CD VIII:5

⁹⁰ CD VIII:6

⁹¹ CD VIII:7

⁹² CD IX:20

true value? The Apostle says, "So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air." (1 Cor. 9:26) Can we call man's will "good," if it lacks love and true concern for his neighbour, i.e., if he lacks understanding of what is finally good? These questions require a realistic and honest answer. What is more disturbing is that if man's efforts and striving and work and knowledge are empty, because of their lack of proper direction, if man's will is "chasing the wind," (Eccl. 1:14) they must be *evil*. They must be such, because evil, as J.B. Elshtain writes, is what "signifies nothing... *Nill, Nihil*."⁹³ All actions that confuse means with ends are futile; they naturally finish as nothingness. To admit the truthfulness of this observation we need only to recall the fate of the splendid Roman Empire built on the futile search for glory and on the lust for power.

The failure to grasp the final end of things in this "universe of ends" is a failure for us to consciously participate in the City of God, it is a failure, so to say, to exercise our natural right to be citizens of the Heavenly Kingdom. It is a debasement of our own dignity. Paradoxically, it is not even a "self-love."⁹⁴ "If a man knows how to love himself," Augustine writes, "the commandment to love his neighbour bids him to bring his neighbour to love God."⁹⁵ God's worship is the worthy pursuit; the final end is hidden in this command: love God and neighbour as yourself. This is the only and sole command, the only paragraph in the Constitution of the Heavenly Kingdom. It makes its citizen not a passive observer of politics and the world—"Christian love" is not so "otherworldly" as "Augustine's faithful daughter"⁹⁶ Hannah Arendt was prone to thinking—but an active member of human community who behaves in the right way in most situations. He acts rightly, first, because he knows how to love himself; secondly, because

⁹³ Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), p.76.

⁹⁴ For an excellent discussion on "self-love" in Augustinian theology, see Oliver O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in Augustine*, (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006)

⁹⁵ CD X:3

⁹⁶ Elshtain 1995, 76.

his self-love demands love to his fellow man; and thirdly, because he understands that neither he, nor his neighbor, are able to love and live in peace with each other without loving the wisdom of God's commandment.⁹⁷ The commandment is, we should note, written not on tablets or in Scripture, but seated, deeply in our heart, by the Creator.

Because of the fact of the freedom of will, the human race is "at once social by nature (i.e. good) and quarrelsome by perversion."⁹⁸ Augustine says that we are created as good and loving creatures, naturally disposed to sympathy, compassion, and social interaction. Left in its natural state,⁹⁹ not disturbed by wrong aims, bad habits, and illusions, human society could be as the Holy Trinity—a "harmonious unity in plurality."¹⁰⁰ This harmonious unity, however, is destroyed. Because of their freedom to scorn God's law, men live in this transitory world (*saeculum*) in two cities, according to two loyalties: one of true love and plurality and another of *amor-sui* and imposed uniformity. The harmonious unity of the first city is "linked by the bond

⁹⁷ In *De Trinitate*, Augustine writes, "There are three, lover and what is being loved, and love." (DT VIII.14). In this formula, the "lover" could be the man, and the loved—his neighbour, and God must be the love, the "middle term" so to say, that creates the *relation* between the extremes. In another place in the same treatise, Augustine says, "For love is not loved unless it is already loving something, because where nothing is loved there is no love." (DT IX:2) This explains the necessity to love God's command. The command is to love your neighbour; this is to have already God (Love) in your heart, mind, will. When you stop loving your neighbour, you lose God and his command. Man can love himself, without loving others, but this is not love in the proper sense, because this does not reflect God's command. True love is in the *active and lively relations* between things and souls, and this is the requirement of the command. Love is also the harmony between the individual and universal, it is a *communio*.

⁹⁸ CD XII:28

⁹⁹ "There is no such entity in nature as 'evil,' 'evil' is merely the name for the privation of good" (CD XXI:22) and also, "Wickedness is not natural, sin being due to an *act of will*, not to nature as created." (CD XI:17); that's why "evil is contrary to nature" (ibid.)

¹⁰⁰ CD XII:28. Jean Bethke Elshtain writes, "The importance of plurality, of the many, emerging from a unique one, cannot be underestimated in Augustine's work. From one creates a fragile but real ontology of peace, or relative peacefulness. Bonds of affection tied human beings from the start. Bonds of kinship and affection bond them further. The more these relationships are dispersed, finally encompassing the entire globe, and in light of the confusion and confounding of human languages, the more difficult it is to repair this fundamental kinship or sociality in order to strike a blow for peace and against war." (Elshtain 1995, 101) See also the work of Michael Novak and especially his politico-theological concept of communion. For a short introduction to Novak's ideas, see Michael Novak, "Trinity as Communio," *First Things*, Nov. 13, 2014, (www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2014/10/trinity-as-communio; accessed on 24 July, 2015)

of peace," the coerced unity of the second city is kept by the chain of power. The citizens of the first city live by the standard of spirit and truth ("For it is God who had said 'I am the truth' (John 14:6))¹⁰¹, and the citizens of the second by the standard of flesh.¹⁰²

However divided in their loyalty and various dispositions, all men, in these two cities, have one, final, common desire: to find peace. The earthly city, often unconsciously, desires peace, but tries to attain it without God's commandment, so it believes in war and self-assertion.¹⁰³ And here Augustine reveals a fundamental principle of political reality: "The wicked fight among themselves; and likewise the wicked fight against the good and the good against the wicked. But the good, if they have reached perfect goodness, cannot fight among themselves."¹⁰⁴ Leaving aside the fact that democracies, the best political regimes established so far, the ones that succeed to get closer to the natural state of "unity in plurality," are not fighting against each other.¹⁰⁵ We see here, in this principle, that the righteous could be and are often involved in war, despite or because of their will. Good men, according to Augustine, fight against the "wickedness," against the wrong ideas and perceptions of their lost brothers to liberate them and their victims from the chain of sin and oppression. There is no peace on earth, and there would never be, as far as the last wicked man is left uncorrected. Thus, peace becomes the highest good and the end of history, for all—wicked and good. And for Augustine the hope for its achievement is in God's grace and power.

The Final Good, Augustine explains, is final perfection and fulfillment. For the Christian "the eternal life is the Supreme Good and the eternal death (i.e. nothingness) is the Supreme Evil,

¹⁰¹ CD XIV:1

¹⁰² CD XIV:1

¹⁰³ CD XV:4

¹⁰⁴ CD XV:6

¹⁰⁵ Kant and Tocqueville are among the first who described democracies as "peaceful" in "nature."

and to achieve the one and escape the other," Augustine says, "we must live rightly."¹⁰⁶ We must be "keepers" and performers of God's commandment.¹⁰⁷ The Final Good is not a "thing" that has price, or value, that would lead us to the achievement of another, higher end; it is the end of all "ends" desired for "its own sake."¹⁰⁸ Peace is such an end. "It follows," Augustine writes, "that we could say of peace, as we have said of eternal life, that it is the final fulfillment of all our goods [...] In fact, the name of the City itself has a mystic significance, for Jerusalem [...] means 'Vision of Peace.'¹⁰⁹ Peace is the most desired good on earth,¹¹⁰ "even wars are waged with peace as their object [...] hence, it is an established fact that peace is the desired end of war."¹¹¹

If we follow God's command, we would be "at peace with all men," even when we wage war against their misconceptions. We would be restorers (or rather keepers) of the natural harmonic order, and our political principle will be, Augustine says, "First, do not do harm to anyone (war inspired by love and justice is not harming, but rather helping the sinner), and secondly, help everyone whenever possible."¹¹² We will see in the next chapter how Thomas Aquinas, another Christian realist, appropriates this same principle in order to make it a central feature of his political philosophy.

But before we turn to Aquinas' political theology and realism, I wish to direct the reader's attention to one last thing—Augustine's view on governance. We have said that Augustine is not interested in the subject or "technology" of governing,¹¹³ however, he still has a strong opinion

¹⁰⁶ CD XIX:4

¹⁰⁷ CD XX:3

¹⁰⁸ CD XIX:1

¹⁰⁹ CD XIX:12

¹¹⁰ CD XIX:11

¹¹¹ CD XIX:12

¹¹² CD XIX:14

¹¹³ The lack of interest was due, as Robert Markus notes, to Augustine's disbelief that the "institutions of society and governance" can be "agencies concerned with helping men to achieve the right order in the world. Their task was

about the principles of *good* rule.¹¹⁴ Augustine says that the earthly peace starts in family; he regards family as the most natural social institution. We could learn the principles of good governance, he believes, from observation of family relations. Domestic peace, he says, starts with "giving and obeying orders among those who live in the same house. For the orders (laws) are given by those, who are concerned for the interests of others."¹¹⁵ In the household, he says, "even those who give orders are the servants of those whom they appear to command," because they rule not of desire for glory, nor of lust for domination, but led by "dutiful concern for the interests of those, whom they love."¹¹⁶ This understanding of politics and governance is best developed in the political philosophy and theology of Thomas Aquinas, whom we are going to discuss in the next pages.

CHAPTER TWO: THOMAS AQUINAS' REALISM

I. REALISM AND FINAL GOOD

More than a thousand years after the writing of *De civitate Dei*, Jean Jacques Rousseau, the "intellectual father" of the French Revolution, wrote in his seminal work, *The Social Contract*, that the family is the most ancient of all human societies and the most natural. According to Rousseau, family is a result of love and, above all, of necessity. Its main function is self-preservation and procreation. The father, acting from love, feels naturally obliged to care for the survival of his children, and the children, weak and innocent, are naturally depending on their parents' care and support. From the moment when the children are ready or feel capable to care

[...] to minimize disorder." "This is the meaning," Markus continues, "of Augustine's insistence that political authority is not natural to man, but a result of his sinful condition." (Markus, 84)

¹¹⁴ See for example his description of the Christian ruler in CD V:24.

¹¹⁵ CD XIX:14

¹¹⁶ CD XIX:14

for themselves, they leave the family. This is a natural decision. It is natural, Rousseau says, because all men are born free and independence is their proper and desired state of existence.¹¹⁷ The children who continue to stay with their parents after reaching maturity, do this, normally, by choice; they remain in the family voluntarily and thus they enter in a different kind of relations with the other members of the group that are not anymore natural, but contractual. Then Rousseau makes the same observation that we have seen in Augustine, and that can be found in one form or another in the writings of Aristotle, Aquinas, and in almost all great treatises on politics and government. "The family, then," he says, "is, if you will, the first model of political society: the leader is the image of the father, and the people the image of the children; all being born equal and free, give up their liberty for their advantage. The only difference is that in the family the father's love for his children repays him for his care for them, while in the state the pleasure of command takes the place of love that the leader does not have for his people."¹¹⁸

The real question, therefore, is, Is it possible to have a political power that is not as "natural" as the family, i.e. not based on love but on contract or something else, and yet that can be as just and good in intention as the power of the parent? Can we insist or expect that a government or a ruler should have the same concern for their people as the father to his children? And would the nation feel the same love and attachment to its ruler or government that we find in children and parents? The answer is, No, we cannot have such high expectations. Augustine,

¹¹⁷ The Thomist perspective of this claim is well described by Yves R. Simon, "Consider, indeed, that every being, inasmuch as it *is*, enjoys some amount of autonomy. The basic statement that every nature is the realization of an idea implies that every nature has within itself a law of activity, which is its own law. Let us recall the Thomistic definition of nature, *ratio artis divinae, indita rebus, qua muvenus ad fines*, an idea of the divine art, which is incorporated into things and by which things are directed to their ends. The more a being is elevated in the hierarchy of things, that is, the more perfectly it participates in the idea of being, the greater is the amount of autonomy it enjoys [...] Autonomy is the glory, the splendor of being." (Yves R. Simon, *Nature and Functioning of Authority*, Marquette University Press, 1948, p. 42)

¹¹⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "On the Social Contract, or, Principles of Political Right" in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Essential Writings*, ed. Leo Damrosch, (Random House, 2013) p.94

himself, while giving the family as an example for good governance, does not argue that this type of primitive political organization can be applied to the city. Moreover, he notes that there are dissensions within the family as well, i.e. we cannot hope that a perfect society, no matter whether small or large, can be fully achieved on earth. So, when discussing government and politics, the Christian realist, unlike many advocates of the "perfect society," Rousseau among them, starts with this initial presumption that man and society have natural limits that prevent the creation and sustaining of a just, based on love socio-political order. It is important to note this before we begin our discussion of Aquinas' theory of government, because it seems that St. Thomas accepts the legitimacy of a particular political organization and believes that it is possible for a political regime, the monarchy in his case,¹¹⁹ to resemble in qualities the patriarch's rule in the family. But we should not regard Aquinas' political philosophy as ideologically obstinate. Aquinas does not argue that perfectly good governance is achievable in practice. What he argues is that the principles of the good rule are unchangeable and constant, and that every political choice and action must be directed according to these principles, despite the limitations of human will, power, and situation. So, Aquinas is not concerned with the description of good rule, but with the explanation of the principles of good governance; his political writings are not an endorsement of a particular form of government, they are rather affirmation of principles that should be sought for the goals of peace, unity, and well-being of community. As MacIntyre rightly observes, Aquinas' political philosophy is primarily concerned with the formulation of

¹¹⁹ "A kingdom is the best form of government of the people," says Aquinas and immediately clarifies, "so long as it is not corrupt." (*Summa Theologica* in *Medieval Thought: Augustine and Thomas Aquinas*, 157)

"the first principles," the things that explain and give meaning to politics as action and branch of science.¹²⁰

In his *Ethics*, Aristotle writes that studying politics requires a mature mind and experience in life. "[A] young man," he says, "is not a proper hearer of lectures on political science; for he is inexperienced in the actions that occur in life [...] since he tends to follow his passions, his study will be vain and unprofitable, because the end aimed at is not knowledge but action."¹²¹ Politics, Aristotle believes (and Aquinas agrees), is a practical science. It would be incomplete, if what is known were not applied in practice for the achievement of a certain goal. Politics must be lived, and in order to bring good (which is politics proper aim, as Aristotle and Aquinas argue), it requires life experience and maturity of mind. The people who have "minds of children" are unprepared for hearing the lectures of political science and for practicing politics and governing; they are not ready to exercise authority (or to challenge the authority) because their passions or naïveté prevent them from judging rightly the truth in the arguments they listen to and from resolving the problems they face. As it is written in Scripture, "Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning!" (Eccl. 10:16)

The argument for the absolute necessity of maturity of the political actor is clear: first, politics, as we have said at the beginning of this chapter, is for "autonomous" people, for persons

¹²⁰ See Alasdair MacIntyre, *First Principles, Final Ends and Contemporary Philosophical Issues*. (Marquette University Press, 1990)

¹²¹ Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1095A,1. It is interesting to note here that the same is valid for the lectures on theology. Maimonides, for instance, argues that an immature person cannot master theological metaphysics (i.e. the science of final good). In *The Guide for the Perplexed*, he explains that in order to master the "science" of metaphysics the young "must [first] have become moderate and settled, humble in their hearts, and subdued their temperament; only then they will be able to arrive at the highest degree of the perception of God." And he continues describing the "good teacher" or "orator" of metaphysics as "intelligent and clear-sighted, able to convey complicated ideas in concise and well-chosen language." Another requirement is that one must reach a certain age and to have less material obligations in order to become a theologian. For details on the five reasons for why metaphysics is for mature people, see Maimonides, *The Guide for The Perplexed*, On the Study of Metaphysics, Ch. XXXIV (Routledge & Sons, 1910)

who are able to govern and take responsibility for the wellbeing of others and for themselves. Every society, according to Aquinas, is necessarily composed of ruler and ruled. The rulers are responsible for the survival and well-being of the ruled and the quality of their governance depends on the maturity of their experience and mind. Secondly, politics requires knowledge of the "final good" (theology); and not simply knowledge, but belief in it (i.e. faith). The inexperienced and immature minds do not know, by heart, what is finally good. Their passions and personal ambitions lead them into wrong directions and secondary aims; they often mistake the "utile," i.e. the means, with the "good," i.e. the aims. And thirdly, even knowing the "final good," the inexperienced person, does not know how to achieve it, and instead of moving towards it with his decisions and actions, he goes either astray or in the opposite direction. In short, as a practical science, politics needs realism that is 1) the knowledge of what is "finally good," 2) the faith in the existence of good, and 3) the life experience necessary for its achievement.

We should note that Aquinas' political philosophy is not identical with Aristotle's. It is important to say that Aquinas' realism comes from Christian premises not present in the pagan political philosophy or in the teachings of the secular ideologies. Aquinas argues, concurring with Aristotle, that we all naturally desire happiness and that happiness is the final good, which is simply the cessation of this desire. Happiness, he says, is peace, its "necessary condition" is "rest and stability";¹²² but full happiness and peace are impossible on earth, therefore "no man [can be] happy in this life."¹²³ The realistic element here is the understanding and the conclusion that both the pagan political philosophy and the modern political utopias fail to demonstrate or admit: that the ultimate happiness, the imminent "paradise" on earth, is a fiction. And the super-

¹²² *Summa Contra Gentiles* in *Medieval Thought: Augustine and Thomas Aquinas*, 126

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 127

realist element in Aquinas' reasoning is that his "pessimism" does not degenerate into cynicism or nihilism, but upholds an exalted hope for the final achievement of good. The "natural desire [to happiness]," he writes, "cannot be void; since nature does nothing in vain. But nature's desire would be void, if it would never be fulfilled. Therefore, man's natural desire can be fulfilled. But not in this life [...] Therefore it must be fulfilled after this life. Therefore man's ultimate happiness is after this life."¹²⁴

As a Christian thinker, Aquinas promotes the idea that in order to achieve the highest good, i.e. the "ultimate happiness after life," man and society need to progress in their earthly existence through pursuing and acquiring the lesser, "incomplete" (to use Aristotle's expression) goods, among which is the aim of politics, namely the "common good." The lesser goods are the utilities that should be pursued in our "pilgrimage" from the actuality of the present life to the potentiality of the heavenly kingdom. In other words, the true peace and happiness cannot be acquired without first aiming and working for the achievement of the "partial" goods of the earthly peace and "gladness." This "aiming" and "working" is a journey and education, a constant failure and a growing success, life and experience, a test and knowledge; it is a process of "coming to age." Perfect knowledge, i.e. the complete understanding of the final good, the means and the power for its fulfilment, is what must be expected after life. "Hence, our Lord," Aquinas concludes, "promises us a 'reward...in heaven' (Matt. v, 12) and (Matt. xxii, 30) states that the saints 'shall be as the angels' who always see God in heaven. (Matt. xviii, 10)."¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Ibid., 128

¹²⁵ Ibid., 129

II. GOVERNMENT AND AUTHORITY

We have begun this chapter with the ideal of family as an exemplary political organization, and have said that the good governance rests on love and true concern for the well-being of governed. We noted that such a love and concern are impossible to achieve beyond family relations. We also said that the ruled cannot obey their superiors as children do, nor could respect them as they respect and love their parents. So, what does Aquinas say about governance and authority?

First, he is convinced that society cannot exist without being organized and directed by a center. This means that Aquinas disapproves any form of anarchy. For him, the governing center is like the human mind controlling the body; its function is to care for the management and well-being of the whole.¹²⁶ The best and most natural political regime, he says, following Aristotle, is the monarchy.¹²⁷ He expresses this opinion in *De Regno*, but not without the warning (in the *Summa*) that monarchy can easily become "*dominium super servus*," i.e. a tyrannical regime aiming at the private good.¹²⁸ So, as an "ideal type,"¹²⁹ monarchy is the best regime, but since there are no perfect rulers, monarchy must be organized as a mixed government that resembles

¹²⁶ His argument is that "every multitude is derived from unity" and in every unity there is one part that moves and others that are moved. (*De Regno* in Thomas Aquinas, *Political Writings*, ed. R. W. Dyson, Cambridge, 2002, p.11)

¹²⁷ "Government by one [...] is more advantageous than government by several [...] in nature government is always by one." (*De Regno* in Aquinas 2002, 11)

¹²⁸ In *De Regno* he also says, "Among the forms of unjust rule [...] democracy is the most tolerable and tyranny is the worst." (*De Regno* in Aquinas 2002, 13)

¹²⁹ I use here Max Weber's concept of "ideal types," i.e. the words "monarchy," "democracy," etc., are taken in their general (abstract) sense as formulated and categorized in Aristotle's *Politics* and St Thomas' *De Regno*, not as descriptions of *concrete*, i.e., historical regimes. For Weber's concept of the "ideal types," see "Objectivity of Social Science and Social Policy" in Max Weber, *Methodology of Social Sciences*, (Transaction Publishers, 2011), pp.49-113.

the modern Presidential republic.¹³⁰ "For this is the best form of polity," Aquinas writes in *Summa Theologica*, "being partly kingdom, since there is one at the head of all; partly aristocracy, in so far as a number of persons are set in authority; partly democracy, i.e., government by the people, in so far as the rulers are chosen from the people and the people have the right to chose their rulers."¹³¹

Secondly, for Aquinas the form of government is not of primary importance. For him, the criterion for good or bad rule is not in the form of political organization, as we are used to thinking, but in the actual effects and achievements of the ruling power. He says, "...the good and wellbeing of a community of fellowship lies in the preservation of its unity. This is called peace and when it is removed and the community is divided against itself, social life loses its advantage and instead becomes a burden."¹³² This means that Aquinas does not judge a political regime starting with some ideological criteria, i.e. whether it is a monarchy, democracy, mixed government, etc., but with asking the question: Does the concrete political regime preserve the unity and peace in community or not? Thus, unity and peace, in his view, are of the highest importance. Therefore, we may say that for a "Thomist" Christian realist, a communist regime, or a capitalist democracy, or autocracy, or any other form of political organization is good or bad as far as it is good or bad for the society at a specific moment of its development. The Christian realist would not assume that if the political system is elective the regime is necessarily good or legitimate or the best for all times and conditions.¹³³ The elections might be corrupted, or the

¹³⁰ And not only mixed government, but also the elective, limited in time, and local one. "Experience [...] seems to show that a single city governed by rulers who hold office for one year only can sometimes accomplish more than a king can even if he has three or four cities..." (*De Regno* in Aquinas 2002, 15)

¹³¹ *Medieval Thought: Augustine and Thomas Aquinas*, 156

¹³² Aquinas 2002, 9

¹³³ The Thomist Jacques Maritain writes, "...it is obvious that Christianity and Christian faith can neither be made subservient to democracy as a philosophy of human and political life nor to any political form whatsoever. That is a

people might be unable to choose the right leaders.¹³⁴ For example, from a liberal point of view the Weimar republic would be always a good political regime. From a realist point of view, it would always be a bad political regime because Germany seemed unprepared for democracy in the 1920s; the democratic political system did not unite the German nation at that time, it rather aggravated its partisan divisions, which eventually led to the disasters of Nazism, the Holocaust, and the Second World War. Yet, the realist does not argue that democracy is bad or that Germany could have escaped its fate even if it had had another type of political organization after the Great War. On the contrary, the Christian realist, as we have said, believes in the importance of the balance of power (which is best achieved in democracy) that prevents the corruption of morals and abuse of power, and takes into account in his analysis the general trend of historical process, the unpredictability of human actions, and the role of Providence. Hence, he would argue that only under certain conditions and as an "ideal type" of political order, democracy (or mixed government) is the best political regime. And, if we take the case with Germany, he would explain, having in mind the role of Providence, that the devastating wars and the catastrophic effects of the domestic divisions seemed to be the only possible way for the proud and warlike Germans (and their European neighbours) to learn how to live peacefully and prudently. It is not a coincidence that after the war, the Federal Republic became a flourishing democracy and chief initiator, along with its former enemy France, of the creation of the future European Union. In fact, the validity of Augustine's formula that war teaches nations how to live

result of the fundamental distinction introduced by Christ between the things that are Caesar's and the things that are God's, a distinction which has been unfolding throughout our history in the midst of accidents of all kinds and which frees religion from all temporal enslavements by stripping the state of all sacred pretensions; in other words, by giving the State secular standing. [...] One can be a Christian and achieves one's salvation while defending a political philosophy other than the democratic philosophy..." (Jacques Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy*, Ignatius Press, 1986; pp. 27-28).

¹³⁴ For the "fake democracies," see Paul Collier's *Wars, Guns, and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places* (Vintage, 2010)

in peace and Aquinas' formula that unity and peace are the main criteria for judging the quality of a political regime has been proved in European history after the Second World War, a period of geopolitical stability properly called *Pax Europeana*.

The recent developments in the Middle East could serve as another confirmation of the rightness of the argument that the results achieved by the political system are a better measure for judging its qualities than its form of organization or formal description. After the war in Iraq and the Arab Spring, it became clear that autocracy is perhaps a *better* regime for some of the peoples in this region, since the attempts for adopting or imposing democracy led to divisions, civil wars, and state disintegration (especially in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Egypt).¹³⁵ The United States, on the other hand, has perhaps learnt that the "export of democracy" and successful state-building is not always possible—post-war Germany and Japan were rather exceptions—and that the problems of security cannot be resolved with ideological presumptions and imaginations.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Aquinas' realism concerning the qualities of a regime and the risks of its change is particularly clear in the following excerpt from *De Regno*. "If [...] the tyranny is not excessive," he writes, "it is more advantageous to tolerate a degree of tyranny for the time being than to take action against the tyrant and so incur many perils more grievous than the tyranny itself. For it may happen that those who take such action prove unable to prevail against the tyrant, and succeed only in provoking the tyrant to even greater savagery. (This is what has happened in Syria) Even when those who take action against a tyrant are able to overthrow him, this fact may in itself give rise to many very grave dissensions in the populace, either during the rebellion against the tyrant or because, after the tyrant has been removed, the community is divided into factions over the question of what the new ruling order should be (This is what has happened in Libya, Iraq, and Egypt) Again, it sometimes happens that a community expels a tyrant with the help of some other ruler who, having achieved power, snatches at tyranny himself and, fearing to suffer at the hands of another what he has himself done to another, forces his subjects into a slavery even more grievous than before..." (*De regimine principum* in Aquinas 2002, 18)

¹³⁶ In fact, 20th century Christian realists such as George Kennan were openly critical to the American ambitions to dominate the world militarily, unilaterally, and morally. Kennan, as many others, was a proponent of the doctrine of containment, which was the policy of preventing the expansion of the Soviet imperialism. At the same time, he did not support the American policy of "extension," mentorship, and imposition of Western values on foreign nations. "I should make it clear," he says, "that I am wholly and emphatically rejecting any and all messianic concepts of America's role in the world: rejecting, that is, the image of ourselves as teachers and redeemers to the rest of humanity, rejecting the illusions of unique and superior virtue on our part, the prattle about Manifest Destiny or the "American Century" —all those visions that have so richly commended themselves to Americans of all generations since, and even before, the foundation of our country. We are, for the love of God, only human beings, the descendants of human beings, the bearers, like our ancestors, of all the usual human frailties... no divine hand has

Aquinas, himself, does not quickly approve any attempt for change of the political *status quo*, even if it is aimed against an autocratic or tyrannical regime.¹³⁷ He argues that the insurgence against a ruler, the change of a political regime, must always be initiated by his own people and by the entire nation, since it is a public, not a private matter. However, it is a "private matter" internationally, and that is why a foreign power has no right to meddle in the internal affairs of another state. This, on the other hand, does not mean that there are no situations when war against a state is not a valuable option. If a regime behaves aggressively beyond its borders, its behaviour is not anymore a "domestic problem," it becomes an international issue. In such cases, other states have the responsibility to stop and punish the aggressor. Following Augustine, Aquinas explains in *Summa Theologica* in what conditions a foreign nation has the right and responsibility to oppose militarily another nation.¹³⁸ And finally, Aquinas advises that any change of the *status quo* must be done with moderate expectations for the future order. In *De Regno*, he reminds of cases when the deposition of a tyrant led to an even worse tyranny.¹³⁹ The

ever reached down to make us, as a national community, anything more than what we are, or to elevate us in that capacity over the remainder of mankind... if there were any qualities that lie within our ability to cultivate that might set us off from the rest of the world, these would be the virtues of modesty and humility; and of these we have never exhibited any exceptional abundance." (George Kennan, *Around the Cragged Hill*, Norton, 1993, pp. 182-183). See also Alberto R. Coll, "The Relevance of the Christian Realism" in Patterson, *Christianity and Power Politics Today*.

¹³⁷ But he is convinced that the dominion of tyranny "cannot endure for long because it is hated by the community" and "sustained by fear alone." Fear, Aquinas says, is a "weak foundation" for government and power. (Aquinas 2002, 32-33).

¹³⁸ Aquinas writes, "As Augustine says, one should always be prepared not to resist or not to defend himself if need be. But it is sometimes necessary to act otherwise than this for the common good; even, indeed, for the good of those against whom one is fighting." Three things are required for starting a "just war," according to Aquinas: it must be initiated under authority of a public power (i.e. the state sovereign); it must be against wrongdoers, nations that conquered or sized unjustly a territory; and finally, "those who wage war should have righteous intent: that is they should intend either to promote a good cause or avert an evil." The *intent* is crucial, because the war may be initiated by "a legitimate authority" and for "a just cause," and yet its intent to be "wicked." That is despite the goal of the military action to be an opportunity for conquest (as Romans did), not liberation of a victim and punishment of an aggressor. See *Summa Theologica* in Aquinas 2002, 285-286.

¹³⁹ "It is often true in cases of tyranny that a subsequent tyrant proves to be worse than his predecessor; for, while not undoing any of the troubles inflicted by his predecessor, he devises new ones of his own, out of the malice of his own heart. Thus, at a time when all the people of Syracuse desired the death of Dionysius, a certain old woman continually prayed that he would remain safe and sound and might outlive her. When the tyrant came to know of

adequacy of his cautiousness has been proven in history many times: the French Revolution, for example, ended in terror, and the Bolshevik revolution was a replacement of one autocratic regime with another, totalitarian one.

The necessity to use "ideal types" for describing political regimes and formal categories that do not conform completely to the actual expressions of the particular governments, and that we must necessarily observe the effects from the actions of political power in order to judge properly its character, makes the discussion of politics and political regimes difficult and exasperating. This is quite normal. Leo Strauss says "'history' meant throughout the ages primarily political history."¹⁴⁰ And history, as we know, is in a constant flux, change is its essence—one and the same result, one and the same government or political system, can seem good and without alternative today and bad tomorrow. So, we need a better indicator that can give us some assurance that what we judge as true and good today will not expire as everything in history. Truth is always the same and, as we said at the beginning, the main task of the Christian realist is to discern true from false.

One possible landmark for judging a political action or regime is intention. If a political power had genuinely tried to achieve unity, peace, and well-being for the community, but failed to deliver them, it does not mean that this power was corrupted or bad. We should look for the results of its actions, but we should also inspect the motivations and the reasons for failure. As Augustine, Aquinas, and Kant would all agree, good intention is the only absolute good at a direct disposal to human being. There is no failure in the good will. The Christian realist knows

this, he asked her why she did it. She said to him: 'When I was a girl, we suffered the oppression of a tyrant, and I longed for his death. Then he was slain, but his successor was even harsher, and I thought it a great thing when his rule came to an end. But then we began to have a third ruler who was even more savage: you. And if you were to be taken from us, someone still worse would come instead.'" (Aquinas, *De regimine principum* in Aquinas 2002, 18)

¹⁴⁰ Strauss 1953, p.34

that action, despite its intention, often fails to achieve the desired end. It is hard to predict the contingencies of reality. Moreover, both Augustine and Aquinas are convinced that perfect wisdom, happiness, or any kind of excellence is impossible to acquire in this life. Thus, we have control only over our intentions, and the rest is in the hands of Providence. "Man proposes, God disposes," as Thomas à Kempis famously said.¹⁴¹ Or as it is written, "The plans of the heart belong to man, But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD... The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps." (Proverbs 16:1, 16:9) Thus, Aquinas says that man in power should be led by one basic principle, the principle already stated by Augustine: "*Good must be done, and evil avoided.*" In deciding and acting, the political actor should know, as a mature and autonomous person, what is good and what is evil. He must love God and neighbor and care for God's creation (which is *amor mundi, love to the world*). The "love command" clarifies the meaning of the words in Genesis, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Gen 1:28) Dominion here means not "*dominium super servus*" (dominium of servitude), but "*dominium super liberus*" (dominium of freedom). It means authority over something that does not belong to man and that is given to him as a gift for enjoyment and care. Dominion here also means a rule over nature, not over man.¹⁴² Good government does not dominate over the citizens. It serves them. We cannot expect from a government to have the love of the father, yet we should require from the people in government to have faith in God's commandment, to appreciate their high position, to understand the importance of their responsibilities, and to rule with gladness, according to the principles of

¹⁴¹ See Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (Ignatius Press, 2005)

¹⁴² For the dominion over nature, see Pope Francis recently published encyclical letter *On Care for Our Common Home* (http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_encyclica-laudato-si_en.pdf)

faith, aiming at the ends of peace and unity. Men in power may not love the nation they rule in the same way as the fathers love their children, however, they certainly can have the will to achieve the common good in order to reach the blessing of the final good.

The meaning of authority is well described by the twentieth century Thomist political thinker Yves Simon. In *Nature and Functions of Authority*, Simon says, "Radical anarchists excepted, no social thinker ever questioned the fact that social happiness is based upon a felicitous combination of authority and liberty."¹⁴³ Relying on Aquinas' Christian realism, Simon explains that authority and liberty are not antinomic. Authority and liberty, he says, are complementary. Power, in its natural state, is not contradictory to freedom. And freedom, if it is a true freedom, is not against power. So the true authority has nothing to do with coercion.

There are many instances in the Gospel that say that under the law of God man is free. We read, for example, in Galatians 5:13-14, "You my brothers are called to be free. But do not use to indulge the sinful nature; rather serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbour as yourself." All are free—ruled and rulers, as far as all are bound by the command of love. With this command, power and liberty enter in a "love" relation, in a harmonic unity. It makes all men simultaneously servants and masters. If this is the command that rules the soul of every member of society, notwithstanding his social status and political position, we would not have authorities that become tyrannies, nor would we have a liberty that transforms into abusive license.

Yves Simon rightly observes, following Aquinas, that we have "two great kinds of dominions"¹⁴⁴—the *dominium super servus* and the *dominium super liberos*, i.e. the rule of

¹⁴³ Simon 1948, 1

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 32

servitude and the rule of freedom. The basic difference between these two kinds of authority is, again, the Augustinian concept of the direction of the wills. These are the "two cities": one of conflicting private interests, and the other of harmonic unity; one, in which power and liberty are in conflict; and another, where all differences hold together in peace.

III. REALISM IN NATURAL LAW THEORY

The main criticism against the concept of natural law (a central concept in Aquinas' political theology) is that it requires faith in general (or "transcendent") principles whose validity cannot be proved empirically and whose place in the system of law seems rather symbolic than practical. The attack against natural law theory comes mostly from the milieu of the positivist school and its main argument is that general principles do not really help resolving the manifold problems arising from the particularities of real life. Another criticism is that the belief in principles, as with any belief, leads to rigidity of opinion and ideological partisanship. Faith, according to positivists, contradicts prudence and pragmatic action; moreover, it distorts or at least imperils the understanding and application of justice. 20th century totalitarian regimes, for instance, were built and legitimized by ideologies that used for their criminal actions concepts borrowed from the natural law theory—they all claimed that they pursue the "common good" (either of the "working class" or "the nation"), all were "people's" republics, and all used, or rather abused, the words "peace" and "freedom" in their politics and constitutions.¹⁴⁵ The totalitarian "plaque," the positivists assume, wouldn't happen if there were not a long tradition of natural law jurisprudence and practice that fed for centuries the mistaken belief in the practical usefulness of transcendent ideals. Positivism does not permit such an abuse of principles simply

¹⁴⁵ The irony is that the 20th century totalitarian regimes used the positivist philosophy of A. Comte, Nietzsche, and Marx, for their ideological basis. For a powerful (in my opinion) critique of the 19th century positive philosophy, see Lubac 1998.

because it tries not to use them. Thus, it seems that positivism is more close to realism than any natural law theory.

So, how can we explain the fact that most political realist theories employ generously the concepts of natural law? It can be explained with the simple proposition that any action, if we want to make it sensible or adequate, needs an aim, or a direction. The simple solution of problems of justice and action would not be a solution at all if it were not aimed at the achievement of some general good or goal. For example, the criminal is punished, not because he has stolen the money of one particular person, but because he causes harm to a human being. Justice is administered on behalf of everyone, no matter whether the victim is a woman or a man, a foreigner or a citizen. What is considered as a "crime" according to the law is always something that works against the interest of the whole, because law is always about the whole. Natural law theory gives a direction of the particular solutions of the positive law, and the realist, especially the Christian realist, contends that without high principles there is no direction or security in the contingencies of life. Thus, in this section, I argue that Aquinas' natural law theory is a realist theory applicable to the diverse situations of life and politics. I also re-confirm my initial claim that we must read Aquinas' political theology as a theory dealing above all with principles, not with prescriptions for particular forms and techniques of government.

We cannot think of law if we do not understand its first principle. This first principle is not justice, it is not action, it is not even command or prohibition; the first principle of law is unity.¹⁴⁶ Justice, action, command and prohibition, are all either functions or expressions of law,

¹⁴⁶ In the *Summa*, Aquinas writes that reason is the "first principle" of human action, and reason itself has its own principle: it is to bring human life to the final end of "happiness" or "blessedness." Then he says that "law" (which as we will see after awhile is equal to reason) must therefore attend especially to the ordering of things towards blessedness." Blessedness here means a complete communion, *unity* with the Divine reason. Then he says that in

these are means for the achievement of the aim of the "common good," i.e. the aim of unity. Nothing can be left outside the law, it is the law that keeps the universe united, and it is the power of law that forces the parts of the world to stick together.

The function of law, Aquinas says, is to command and prohibit, and this function, he adds, pertains to reason.¹⁴⁷ So, law is also reason. What is reason? Aquinas says that reason is like "the unity in the genus of numbers."¹⁴⁸ Reason is law; it is the principle of law. If the principle of law is unity, as we have said, and if reason is the faculty to grasp everything, moreover, to grasp, animate, and direct everything to a certain end (because reason never acts without aim), then reason is synonymous or equal to law. And this precisely is Aquinas' opinion. That is why he sometimes uses the words "Eternal law" and "Divine reason" interchangeably. The ability and function of reason to perceive and connect everything without exception, i.e., to serve as a "container" of all things, to be a kind of "middle term" to everything, and the power of reason to move and animate what is not reason towards a goal, makes reason both the everything perceived and a guiding principle of all that exists.¹⁴⁹

In *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas describes four kinds of law situated in a hierarchical order: the Eternal law, which is the Divine Reason,¹⁵⁰ the Natural law, which is the expression

practical, political matters, the function of reason, or law, is to look "first and foremost to the common good." Common good is, again, an expression of *unity*. (See Aquinas 2002, 78-81)

¹⁴⁷ Aquinas 2002, 77

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ I am aware that this is a very complex idea "squeezed" in a single sentence; it needs a detailed clarification, which, unfortunately, cannot be made here without going beyond the limits of our topic.

¹⁵⁰ Aquinas explains that the universe is governed by the Divine reason, which is the Eternal law. Perhaps, the most specific characteristic of Eternal law that makes it different from all other kinds of law is that it has no other end but itself. "The end of the Divine government is God himself, nor is His law something other than Himself. Hence the *Eternal law is not directed to any other end.*" (italics mine) (Aquinas 2002, 85)

and the workings of the Eternal law in nature;¹⁵¹ the Positive law, which is the law of man that deals with man's activity in the particular situations of life;¹⁵² and finally (but not last in the "hierarchy"), the Divine law, which is the law of Revelation, found in Scripture.¹⁵³ If the Eternal law is Reason, i.e. the absolute ability to know, animate, and exist in everything through perception and power, then everything in creation participates in the Divine Reason through the acts of its commands. So, Aquinas says, "Any inclination that arises from law can be called a law (i.e. the creation is part of Divine Reason through the natural law), not essentially (i.e. the creation is not reason), but as it were by participation."¹⁵⁴ This means that everything that participates, or is a subject of law, belongs to law not as reason (essence), but through participation. Human reason, on the other hand, finds itself within the created world and has the function to understand the participation of nature in Divine reason. Therefore, human reason is not a lawgiver (God is the lawgiver), but a servant of God's commands, whose main function is

¹⁵¹ The Natural law is not a written law; it is the law of the "heart" or "reason." It is also the movement of creation towards its natural end, which is God. We discussed in chapter 1.4. "The Visible and the Invisible" that God's law is "deeply seated" in the hearts and minds of all men, and that there are truths, moral truths, that have no need for evidence to be considered as valid. These truths can be found in the so-called "principles" of natural law. Aquinas quotes Apostle Paul, "Gentiles who have not the law, do by nature those things that are of the law..." (Rom. 2:14) "Although they have no written law, they nonetheless have the natural law, by which each man understands what is good and what is evil, and is aware of it for himself." (Aquinas 2002, 85) The short definition of Natural law, offered by Aquinas, is "[T]he natural law is nothing but the rational creature's participation in the eternal law." (Ibid., 86)

¹⁵² The source of positive law, i.e. human law, is natural law. Natural law serves the positive law through its principles. The positive law is a set of particular rules, applicable to certain situations. These rules can be changed according to the circumstances, but they should always reflect the principles of natural law, in order to be valid and properly called "laws." "Every human law," Aquinas writes, "has the nature of law in so far as it is derived from the law of nature. But if it is in any respect at odds with the law of nature, it will then no longer be law, but corruption of law." (Ibid., 130)

¹⁵³ The Divine law is God's law written in Scripture. Its goal is to supplant our understanding of natural law. Aquinas says that the Divine law judges "the inward acts," while the human law judges the "outward acts."

¹⁵⁴ Aquinas 2002, 77

to perceive "intellectually," move and channel the things in nature according to the principles of Divine reason.¹⁵⁵

Human reason, thus, is the only "part" in creation that is both a participant and a bearer of some of the essence of the Eternal law. The human mind grasps the natural mechanisms of God's creation and, (this is very important), has the ability to direct and animate them to a certain end. What end? If the human mind is a form of law, then the end is necessarily the common good. What is "common good"? As we have said above, the common good, according to Aquinas, is the requisite step, here on earth, to the achievement of happiness in the final blessedness. What is this final blessedness? It is, as we have noted, the absolute knowledge, this mystical power of total perception and ability, the fulfillment of the idea of complete unity. We have to stop here with the metaphysical speculations, and return to the field of politics, now, armored with understanding what is the general principle of law and how it is related to the final good.

Politics is *nihil*, nothing, sin, if it is not used for the achievement of the common good. No political action aiming at something different from the common interest would have lasting success. This is the opinion of the Christian realist who believes in the validity of Aquinas' theory of natural law. This theory teaches that every digression from the natural order through an act of wrongdoing is always corrected and punished. Punishment here does not necessarily mean an immediate physical penalty; it simply means vanity, nothingness, withering. We have seen in Augustine that sin is the absence of good, it is nothingness, and the end of sinfulness is non-existence (its final end is "eternal death"). In natural law theory, we have the same Augustinian understanding of evil as deficiency of good. Applied to politics, this means that every decision

¹⁵⁵ "Human reason is not the rule of things; but the principles in which nature has implanted in it are general rules and measures of all things relating to human activity." (Aquinas 2002, 88)

that fails to perceive the principles of natural law and does not act in accordance with them is wrong and doomed to failure. Thus, the politics of Thomistic Christian realism is a politics concerned with the discovery of the ends of things according to the general principles of natural law. The issues that must be resolved in each particular situation are approached with a description and analysis of the facts, the search for solutions, and finally, measuring the possible solutions according to what is naturally right. Solutions that are taken without consideration of the nature of things are not solutions at all; moreover, they are sin if their intention was consciously evil, and for that reason fruitless. It is written, "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." (Matt. 7:19) The leading principle in political action, as we have said, is also the first principle of natural law: "*Good must be done, and evil avoided.*" In the *Summa*, Aquinas writes, the first percept of natural law is that "good ought to be done and pursued, and evil avoided." "All other percepts of natural law," he says, "are based upon this."¹⁵⁶ Therefore, good here means the effort and the will for the achievement of what is good for all. There is no nihilism and evil in politics that consciously pursues the achievement of the common interest.

Here we must note that the common good is not the good of the whole against the individual interest. The idea that the interest of society is superior to the individual interests of its particular members is a totalitarian idea; it is a *perversion* of the concepts of natural law that has been rightly criticized by the positivist school of thought. In *The Rights of Man and Natural Law*, the Thomist thinker Jacques Maritain notes that every person is a whole as every society is a whole. But neither the persons, nor the societies are entities independent of their surroundings.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Aquinas 2002, 117

¹⁵⁷ "The person is a whole," writes Maritain, "but he is not a closed whole, he is an *open* whole. He is not a little god without doors or windows, like Leibniz's monad, or an idol which sees not, hears not, speaks not. He tends by his

A basic Christian principle is the belief that we all depend on something else, ultimately on God's grace—men depend on other men, and society, whose primary function is to serve the interest of every single person in it, is a communion of men for men. There is no society without members as there is no sum without parts. Thus, we (under "we" I mean individuals and different societies) are all, as Maritain says, "open entities," and our natural behavior is not the destruction of the connections and of the unity of the parts, but in sustaining their harmony and wellbeing within the living organism of the entire creation. We come to this world thanks to something else, we live this life in communion (society) with others, and we die with the dear hope (if we are believers) that we will not be left alone in the abyss of nothingness, that we will not be segregated from the whole to which we belong—that the whole, which although greater than us, exists precisely for each one of us. I will bring up again Aquinas' conviction that we are social animals, our natural state is to live in community, and our natural desire to be in *community* forever will be fulfilled. Naturally, man and community are not created to be in a conflict, but in love, (Eve was given to Adam as a friend and a helper) and as far as man exists, there will be also a community for him.

The idea of the unity of the parts in the universe has a central place in the political philosophy of both Augustine and Aquinas, and as we have said in the first chapter, the good society, the society that is natural, is the one that resembles the unity of the Holy Trinity—namely, a perfect unity in plurality. So, we may say that the pursuit of the common good by politicians and lawmakers, by rulers and ruled, is the effort to achieve the good life for the whole

very nature to social life and to communion. This is true not only because of the needs and the intelligence of human nature, by reason of which each one of us has need of others for his material, intellectual and moral life, but also because of the radical generosity inscribed within the very being of the person..." (Maritain 1986, 91)

and for the parts. To use Maritain's expression, it is the politics of "redistribution"¹⁵⁸ of goods among all persons in society, redistribution directed and overseen by authorities and, not less importantly, by the autonomous individuals themselves. We call this redistribution justice.

No law that works against the common good, i.e. against justice, is a true law. And no law that destroys the dignity and wellbeing of even one member of society can be properly called law. The realism in this seemingly speculative (and "wishful")¹⁵⁹ reasoning is the seriousness of the truth in it. Whoever thinks—no matter whether a politician, an individual, a party, a company, a nation, or any other entity—that he may work for his own private interest unpunished against the interest of all, is wrong. The individual has power to bring (consciously or unconsciously) his will and desires to fruition only in harmony and alliance with the universal. Every attempt for domination, for pursuit private interest at the expense of the common, is "foolishness" and "imprudence," it ends in nothingness.¹⁶⁰ As Aquinas, following Augustine says, we are all subjects to the Eternal law, there is no escape from its rules and as law, the Eternal law is the absolute unity against which nothing partial stands. We are all born with natural knowledge of what is good and evil, with a moral sense. We all know by nature that unity is better than decay. Where the knowledge (or the consciousness) of these truths is insufficient, where reason fails to deliver the principles of the Eternal law, there is Scripture, a Divine law, that teaches us what we still do not understand. And where neither reason nor Scripture help us

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 94

¹⁵⁹ "Wishful" and "speculative" because there is no positive law that conforms to the requirements of the ideal of absolute justice.

¹⁶⁰ Note here that one can and even should pursue his private interest, but this must never be done against the interest of others. This, therefore, means that Adam Smith's theory of "the invisible hand" does not contradict the rules of natural law as far as the private interest of individual tradesmen works, thanks to the mechanisms of free market, for the satisfaction of the common interest (and needs). A business that delivers goods needed by the community, without exploiting its resources, but receiving a fair reward for its services, is a good business, no matter whether self-interest, or profit, was involved in its economic motivations.

to follow voluntarily the commands of the Eternal law, we learn about law's existence and its seriousness through our personal experience, through having the freedom to "act" and through being "acted upon," through reaping the consequences of our choices and actions. That is why Scripture advises: "Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you." (Psalm 32:9) So, the Christian Realist wisdom appeals: do follow, as far as you can, the principles of natural law, trust in the rightness and practical usefulness of the Greatest Commandment, don't be stiff-necked, but use your intelligence; why should you learn through punishment and pain?!

CHAPTER THREE: REINHOLD NIEBUHR'S REALISM

I. THE DANGERS OF LEGALISM

The name of Reinhold Niebuhr is the one most commonly associated with the "realist" school in Christian thought. It is sometimes even argued that Christian realism is exclusively "Niebuhrianism," there are no other Christian thinkers that can be properly called "realists." As we have seen, such an opinion is not correct. Not only two of the greatest Christian theologians, St Augustine and St Thomas, were realists, but Christianity itself as a system of faith, thought, and perception is genuinely realistic. And the realism of Christianity comes, to a certain extent, from its sublime ability to accommodate and assimilate within itself different worldviews without destroying their autonomy of "particular truths." Christianity has this amazing quality to stay both in the center and in the margins of everything, and to contain within itself different perspectives without abandoning its own foundational principles, without risking becoming pantheism. Christianity is ecumenical in nature. It is a religion of "open entities," of harmonies, and inclusiveness. The idea of Trinity itself, the very essence of Christian faith, confirms its

pluralistic character. Christianity is the religion most inclined to create and support a pluralistic social world that reflects the natural diversity in creation. Its intrinsic permissiveness and flexibility, its always-expanding boundaries, its ceaseless historical development resting on a solid set of unchangeable truths, throws it often on the brink of a crisis, makes it constantly threatened by destruction, and leads it, finally and without exception, to a triumph and renewal. Christianity is the religion of the Apostle, who writes, "[...] in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything." (2 Cor. 6:3-10) Is there a more complex person and faith than the Christian one?!

I make this long introduction because Niebuhr is well-known as a critic of the Catholic theory of natural law and it seems that the realism of the medieval thinker Aquinas contradicts the realism of the twentieth century American theologian. How do we explain this plurality of views? In this section, I will argue that Niebuhr not only does not challenge the basic idea of natural law theory, namely the law of love in the Greatest Commandment, but clarifies it, making it even more concrete and thus less vulnerable to ideological abuses. The possibility to synchronize Niebuhr's critical opinion on the usage and application of natural law theory and yet to confirm, through Niebuhr's criticism, the validity of both theories is more evidence of the amazing quality of Christian faith, theology, and philosophy to keep diverse perspectives united for the goals of truth and justice.

Niebuhr demonstrates a similar to Aquinas understanding of the hierarchical order in creation. He says that there is one high principle of love, which is also a moral principle, the moral sense that is in the heart of man. Then, he explains that there are lesser principles, which

are the general political norms and the multitude of respective positive laws. Then, there are political institutions, which aim to facilitate the application of law, and finally, there are human wills and concrete actions that either follow or do not follow the commandments of the eternal law in the reality of life. In short, Niebuhr discovers a descending scale of ideal and actual goods in which the command of love is gradually dissolved (or corrupted). He calls this process of corruption "relativity." He is convinced that justice and the ideal of love cannot be fully achieved, apart from God's grace, in the actuality of our individual and common life. That is why he criticises the "blind trust" of scholastic Catholicism in the abilities of reason to work for the common good, and warns about the dangers of legalism that makes from the positive laws substitutes of the natural law. He likens the Catholic "idealization" of reason to the Stoic belief in the possibility of moral perfectibility. And he is both right and wrong to argue all this.

Niebuhr is wrong to interpret the Catholic natural law theory as an absolutist theory that is open or even willing to accept certain forms of government or rules of behaviour as ultimately good. The true natural law theory, as we have shown above, does not suggest the possibility for an earthly blessedness. It speaks, as we have said, of principles, not of perfect forms of government; it aims at the common good, but thinks of it as a "partial good" on earth, and does not formulate a fixed definition of it. Niebuhr says, "Undue confidence in human reason, as the seat and source of natural law, makes this very concept of law into a vehicle of human sin."¹⁶¹ But we have seen that Aquinas is far from arguing that human reason is a "lawgiver." On the contrary, according to the natural law theory reason finds itself as a part of creation, neither above, nor below it. Yes, human reason is a particular part, a "container" of creation; as a reflection of the Divine reason, having similar functions, it possesses some of the qualities and

¹⁶¹ Niebuhr 1960, 167

the essence of the Eternal law, but it is not in any way equal to God. I have not found any textual evidence in Aquinas' writings that supports the idea that human reason is able to achieve something finally good alone and in this life. Furthermore, I do know that Aquinas is convinced that reason needs faith to make man complete, and precisely the insufficiency of faith makes man wretched, never fully knowing, and sinful. We said on numerous occasions, especially in relation to the workings of Providence, that man has at his direct disposal only good will, and a good will, although perfect in itself, is nowhere close to perfect knowledge or reason. We also noted that Aquinas describes happiness and final blessedness as absolute knowledge, as a complete union with the Divine reason, possible only after life.

However, Niebuhr is right to criticise or rather to bring our attention to the pitfalls of the *usage* of natural law theory. He is right to awaken us to the reality of the danger of equating the eternal principles of God's Reason with the historical contingences of human world, to dogmatize the partial truths of material entities making them either principles of natural law or expressions of it. An example of such an abuse, he says, was the subtle ideological defence of the political (and economic) power of clergy and landed aristocracy in the feudal society. Natural law theory was also used for a defence of monarchical regimes and "bourgeois" interests when these regimes and interests were clearly outdated or corrupted. So, Niebuhr appeals for vigilance to not forget the limits of man and his rational laws, to not forget the mimicry of sin hidden behind dogmatic legalistic theories and ideologies of "pure logic."

The limitations of Catholic natural law theories, Niebuhr says, are revealed with "equal clarity" when applied in the field of international relations. "The Catholic theory of war is a case

in point," he says.¹⁶² It argues that it is possible to assume with confidence, following a certain set of definitions, what is "just" and "unjust" and to distinguish between "defence" and "aggression." We cannot do this, Niebuhr insists, because our judgements are never free of passions and interests, and "even the most obvious case of aggression can be made to appear a necessity of defence."¹⁶³ In addition, we cannot do this because our reason is incapable to grasp the full truth in any particular situation or object. Reason, however excellent, is always insufficient and the natural law theorists tend to support the dogmatist's illusion that there are objective definitions of truth that can be made and applied as positive laws. He brings to our attention something not clearly stated in the previous section: that the positive law and natural law should not be mixed; that the positive law must always reflect the principles and the commands of the Divine reason, but this reflection, we must remember, is inevitably and in all cases partial and open for improvement. This means that if we create a law regulating human relations in the direction of the common good and interest, we must be prepared to change or improve it in future; we must have a sense of its temporality and incompleteness. Niebuhr warns, "The proponents of 'natural law' invariably introduce some historically contingent norm or social structure into what they regard as God's inflexible norm."¹⁶⁴ The danger is therefore in the lack of true "appreciation" of the "finiteness of man's reason and its involvement in the flux of the temporal world."¹⁶⁵ To minimize sin and delusion, we must act in life with the consciousness that we are still finite beings, with finite rationality and understanding.

But Niebuhr's "pessimism" does not destroy the concept of natural law. It simply puts the typical Niebuhrian (and Augustinian) limitation over any human ambition, including the

¹⁶² Ibid., 168

¹⁶³ Ibid., 169

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 170

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 171

ambition of man to know absolutely and apply without error the law seated in man's own heart. That is why in a chapter, entitled "*A Limited Natural Law*," in Niebuhr's collected works on politics and philosophy, we find him arguing, "While it is important to reject the errors of the natural law theorists, it is just as important to disavow the opposite error of the moral relativists, who deny every validity of general norms."¹⁶⁶ He says that every society, without exception, "does have something like natural law concept,"¹⁶⁷ and explains that the principles of natural law, by which justice is defined, are "not so much fixed standards of reason as they are rational efforts to apply the moral obligations implied in the love commandment to the complexities of life and the fact of sin; that is, to the situation created by the inclination of men to take advantage of each other."¹⁶⁸ With this quote, our cycle of argumentation is full. We have returned to the Greatest Commandment that we introduced with Augustine, refined with Aquinas, and clarified with Niebuhr. We have returned to our basic conclusion that the goal of law is to preserve the *unity* within the plurality of universe, to oppose the encroachment of private interests, and to do this with the help of the "heavenly" command of love.

II. THE NATURE OF MAN: CLASSICAL, BIBLICAL, AND MODERN VIEWS

Niebuhr's awareness of the realities of human ambition, his almost pessimistic opinion on the practical application of natural law theory, can be explained on the basis of his understanding of human nature, an understanding born from the mixture of theological insights and traumatic experiences. Niebuhr, we must emphasize, was a contemporary of two of the

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 172

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 173

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 173. In another place, he writes, "Thus Christian morality, inspired by the spirit of the New Testament, must be as ready to challenge legalism as relativism. Against relativists, it must insist that no man or nation, no age or culture can arbitrarily define its own law. Against legalists, it must insist that there is no virtue in law as such (Romans 7:7-25)... All genuine obedience to law is derived from the grace of love, which is more than law." (Ibid., 179)

greatest wars in history, a witness of the most devastating economic crisis in modern times, a political adviser to policy-makers on the issues of the bipolar world, a man who perhaps felt, like most of his Western contemporaries, the bitter disappointment from the failed hopes in the technological and social progress, hopes that had reached their summit in the decade before the outbreak of the First World War. He lived in a tragic and still virgin world that was destined to learn the full meaning of the words: "The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding." (Proverbs, 4:7)¹⁶⁹

Niebuhr's Christian realism is, in fact, a moral anthropology. If we know his theory of man, we would know the better part of his theology.¹⁷⁰ The very first sentence of his 1938-1940 Gifford Lectures, published under the title *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, reveals the central issue of the troubled world: "Man has always been his most vexing problem."¹⁷¹ Man is a "problem," because, according to Niebuhr, he is a complex being, the most complex of all God's

¹⁶⁹ There is something hidden and deeply disturbing in this sentence "*Though it cost all you have, get understanding.*" It is the prophesy that salvation comes always through fire; it is the truth that we get full wisdom and understanding through the full experience of life, which is often, if not inevitably, painful. Pain, it seems, is the price that we pay for our wisdom.

¹⁷⁰ Niebuhr's deep engagement with human nature attracted the criticism of many theologians, including Stanley Hauerwas, the most consistent and influential among them. (See Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe*, Brazos Press, 2002). Niebuhr is suspected of crafting theology from a humanistic or even secular standpoint. The question "Is Niebuhr a Christian?" seems a constantly lingering one. (See Gabriel Fackre's *Was Reinhold Niebuhr a Christian?* in *First Things* (October 2002)). He was criticised for not developing an adequate or at least sufficient Christology and ecclesiology to support the conclusions of his "theological anthropology." (For an overview of a number of critiques and interpretations on Niebuhr's work, see Stephen Platten, in *Reinhold Niebuhr and Contemporary Politics: God and Power*, ed. R. Harries and S. Platten, Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 234-249) Moreover, while his intellectual influence is still strong among politicians and political theorists, his work is continuously attacked by theologians, even those, whose ideas seem close to his own (especially through the application of Augustine's political theology). For instance, Kevin M. Carnahan writes, "At a recent conference on Christian Realism, William Cavanaugh expressed his own disappointment in the recent renovation of Niebuhr studies. Niebuhr, he suggested, held a heterodox Christology, and it was better for Christians to spend their time reflecting on orthodox theologians. This was not a new line of attack against Niebuhr. Some of Niebuhr's most trenchant critics in recent years have been theologians who read Niebuhr as holding an insufficiently distinct, or even heretical, vision of doctrine and Christian life." (Kevin M. Carnahan, "Recent Work on Reinhold Niebuhr," *Religion Compass* 5/8 (2011): 365–375)

¹⁷¹ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, (Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1949), p.1

creatures. Man is complex, because he transcends himself. He is the sum of the unity between nature and spirit, he, in his entirety, is a kind of "surplus value" that goes beyond the control and scope of the single entities of nature and spirit. Being greater than himself, through the sum of his parts, he has the faculty to observe and judge himself and is capable to confess, finally, from the depths of his soul and from the reaches of his stature, "In your eyes I have become a problem to myself, and that is my sickness."¹⁷²

In the previous chapter, we said that we humans share through our reason something of the essence of the Divine Spirit; this "something" is "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil." (Gen. 3:22) We must note the difference—man did not become "one of us," i.e. God, but *like* God, *like* "one of us." To become God man had perhaps to "be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." (Gen. 3:22) With Jesus, with God's Son, the Son of Man, we have been allowed to reach out and receive the promised inheritance, we have been invited to cross the "flaming sword" and discover, now, as free and autonomous people that life can be eternal, that the full unity with God is possible. This time Jesus, not the Serpent, but God himself, invited us to leap out and taste the fruit of the tree of life. This time it was not a temptation, but an example and appeal for courage: the courage of honest self-exploration (*Read thy self*), the courage to say along with Niebuhr and Augustine that the source of human tragedy and suffering, the pain from the "lost paradise," were caused by our own will and choices. It was a call to humanity to admit that human beings are tempted, that we are constantly tempted by something outside us, but it is our own will that makes the evil real.

¹⁷² Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), Book 10, chapter 33, p. 208. Following Augustine and Luther, Niebuhr argues that man is "most free when he realises that he is not free," when he comprehends both the existence of God and the limits of his situation. This comprehension makes man something greater than a single spirit or a single nature.

This idea of the responsibility of man for his actions, of his ability to transcend himself through self-observation and freedom to will and act, is the central point in Niebuhr's anthropology: the "evils" that happen in human history should not be attributed to the effects of "social" and "historical" conditions, i.e. to something outside man. We act wickedly not because we are victims of the trappings of bad circumstances, because we were tempted to baseness by the whip of poverty, to hatred by other people's wrongdoings, to stealing by inflicted on us misery, to crimes by wrong advices, or to sin by nature. No, we are evil and miserable, because we excuse our crimes with something beyond us, and continue to do wrong, because we fear to trust God, our hearts, and because we prefer the illusory and easy rewards of pride, greed, and sensuality. Both Niebuhr and Augustine believe that we choose not to follow God's invitation, that we are afraid of the "flaming sword," and prefer to leave unpracticed the Greatest Commandment. We do all this, because it seems hard to love, to do good and forgive. In his "theological anthropology," Niebuhr tries to explain exactly the fact of man's unwillingness to admit his sins and moral responsibility.

Historically, Niebuhr says, there are two fundamental ancient views on human nature that have not lost completely their power to this day: the Classical Greek and the Biblical. In the epoch of Internet and high technologies, in the time of Mars rovers and cosmic missions, a philosophical theory of man seems a bit outdated. Yet, we hear debaters who try to explain why young people, "born and raised in our democracies," go for foreign lands to fight and die for the ambitions of a band of criminals having no respect to human life and dignity. We also follow on the news the developments of a new war on the peripheries of Europe, and witness a *deja vu* of a boiling conflict between Russia and the West. We see on multiple digital screens images and reports of bloodshed and cruelty, of waves of refugees fleeing from war. We are suffering mad

terrorist attacks. And we patiently bear the pinches of economic and political orders that permit the greed of a few to go unchecked on the expense of the common good. Furthermore, we see the destruction of natural environment, the piles of waste and dirt, the poisoned rivers and oceans, and refuse to take our own share of personal responsibility. It does not seem that human civilization is on its way of returning to the "lost paradise." These are not the signs of an actual progress.

The debaters, who try to explain the persistence of evil in the world, do not do this with the pure language of science—biology, chemistry, physics—but use in their argumentation political, ideological, ethical, and religious concepts. It is clear, although rarely openly admitted: we may know all "technical" or "natural" causes for each of the crises we face, and we seem to be able to deal with every single crisis once understood, but we fail to explain, fix, and control the wicked human will—the basic source of evil, according to Augustine and Niebuhr. As a society and individuals, we have no power over the will and choices of our lost brothers and sisters. It often happens that we lose control over our own wills too. That is why we need to constantly consider and re-consider our understanding of man and his nature. It seems that the last problem that humanity would be able to resolve, and for that reason the most crucial one, is the problem of man itself.¹⁷³ Therefore, it is realistic to deal with the problems of the world always having in mind a correct concept of man's nature and freedom. It is mandatory not to forget that the answers and the solutions we find in the collected data of empirical evidences cannot bring, as we hope, a radical change in human progress to goodness and knowledge without first having a progression in man's good will, without expanding, so to say, the citizenship of the Heavenly Kingdom. Thus, the classical, the Biblical, and the modern views of

¹⁷³ It would be resolved, we should note, only with the help of God.

man, however speculative and useless they might seem from a scientific and technological point of view, are still valid and worthy subjects of discussion. There is nothing "outdated" in a good philosophy and theology of man.

How does Niebuhr describe and interpret the historically dominant anthropological views? And why exactly are they so important for human life and destiny? First, we should say that perception and self-perception is what makes us what we are as individuals and society. We can find in the heart of every ideology and politics a certain form of self-perception; self-perception, we could argue, is the fundamental determinant of our choices and actions, of our behavior and relations with the world. And this perception is never realistic enough. If we observe the history of human self-perception throughout the ages, we would notice that whenever a civilization collapses it is due to some erroneous self-estimation of its qualities, capabilities, and aims. The Greco-Roman world failed, as we have seen in the first chapter of this work, because the culture of the ancient Hellenic civilization permitted the development of an unrealistic, even idolatrous understanding of man and society. The divinisation of Caesar and the reliance on glory and power for the achievement of immortality were examples of Roman inability to estimate man and the world realistically.

Niebuhr reminds us that the ancient Greeks believed that through reason man shares with the Olympic gods a status similar to the divine.¹⁷⁴ They knew and accepted the mortality of man, yet they considered as divine the qualities of human reason and will. Man is mortal, they argued, but through glory and the acts of heroism, he could hope for an immortal name. In this ancient classical concept of man as a rational being, we also find, Niebuhr says, the "dualistic"

¹⁷⁴ Hannah Arendt offers one of the best interpretations of the Hellenic concepts of man in her masterpiece *The Human Condition*. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Doubleday, 1959).

understanding of man composed of body and reason, of two parts in hierarchical relation: one evil, being a source of mortality, and one good, being a means of immortality. On the other hand, we have the Biblical view, the anthropological concept of the Christian faith. There is nothing of "a good mind and an evil body" in the Bible, Niebuhr says.¹⁷⁵ On the contrary, the Christian realist perception of man implies, he contends, that man is a "child of nature, subject of its vicissitudes, compelled by its necessities, driven by its impulses" and, less obviously, but not less importantly, "a spirit who stands outside nature, life, himself, his reason and the world."¹⁷⁶ This is, we must say, the "self-transcending" creature, the one invited, as we have noted, through the self-sacrificing act of Jesus to "to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." (Gen. 3:22)

As we see, the Classical view is not as broad as the Christian one; it is, indeed, a limited view that is able to think of man from the standpoint of human reason alone. On the contrary, the Biblical view is offering this particular vision of man as a spiritual being that goes beyond everything—nature, reason, the world, and even itself—and so having the opportunity of self-understanding, based on both reason and faith. The Biblical view is, we must say, the absolutely good perspective possible, the perspective that permits one to judge and observe oneself and the world shielded from the failures of individual biases and interests. The Judeo-Christian view, Niebuhr says, understands man "primarily from the standpoint of God, rather than the uniqueness of his rational faculties or his relation to nature."¹⁷⁷ (*italics mine*). "This essential homelessness of the human spirit," Niebuhr continues, "is the ground of all religion; for the self that stands

¹⁷⁵ Niebuhr 1949, 7

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 3

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 12

outside itself and the world cannot find the meaning of life in itself or the world."¹⁷⁸ That is, again, the human spirit stripped from all biases and temporal interests, a spirit of freedom that "reaches out," the only spiritual being that is capable to observe the reality of things with divine "disinterestedness," to use Bernard Lonergan's term.¹⁷⁹

The Judeo-Christian view is therefore more realistic than the classical one. It is more realistic than the views of modernity as well. The realism of Christianity comes from its exceptional position to judge impartially from the standpoint of God. God for Christians, and His command, is what the secular theory of justice would call "a veil of ignorance"—this ideal state of disinterested judgement.¹⁸⁰ And the judgement of God that man is asked to accept is that man is sinful. From the standpoint of God, and only from it, we can make the otherwise impossible admission that we are full of biases, that we, as individuals (and as social entities), have personal, i.e., limited interests, that our "justice" cannot go beyond our limited understanding, without the help of a higher justice, of a greater perspective, namely the perspective of the Christian Gospel. Or as Niebuhr explains, man is able to know himself truly only confronted by God. "Only in that confrontation does he become aware of his full stature and freedom and of the evil in him,"¹⁸¹ and only through that confrontation he has the chance to think the world impartially.

This is exactly the place where both the classical and modern views fail. They cannot think of man as limited, they always stress on the importance of human authority and independence and doing this they cannot truly liberate man from the dictate of his egoism and partiality. The self-perception of the pagan and modern man makes him if not an autocrat then a

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 14

¹⁷⁹ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, (Toronto University Press, 1990).

¹⁸⁰ See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press, 1971)

¹⁸¹ Niebuhr 1949, 131

nihilist. Man lacking God's perspective is a person either unconsciously autocratic or nihilistic, i.e., having no inclination to respect authority above his own will and desires. And this is dangerous. In the previous chapter, we have seen that a good social order needs authority as it needs freedom. But the fragile balance between authority and freedom is quickly destroyed, if people are taught to believe that they are entitled with a limitless freedom of will and granted with a limited responsibility, if they are educated, as radical liberalism teaches, that personal conscience is sacred and infallible, because man is intrinsically good.

The modern view of man that encourages freedom of will on the expense of personal responsibility is a "confused view," Niebuhr argues. It was formed in the intellectual ferment of the Enlightenment (or "Renaissance," as he prefers to call the period of human "emancipation" from the "fetters" of medieval Catholicity). It is a confused view because it aroused from the relatively uncomplicated Classical and Biblical anthropological notions, and broke apart into two, often conflicting, secular dogmas: that man is a natural being, and that man is a rational being. What was common in these two dominant views was that man was perceived as good. So, both preached an "easy conscience." Or as Niebuhr writes, "The final certainty of modern anthropology is its optimistic treatment of the problem of evil. Modern man has an essentially easy conscience."¹⁸² This lack of self-criticism in the culture of the Western man, combined with an excessive propensity to criticism of what is outside individual interest and domain,¹⁸³ had thrown the Western civilization into the fire of the twentieth century apocalypse.

¹⁸² Ibid., 23

¹⁸³ This attitude is deeply un-Christian. Criticism is often a result of lack of understanding or perverse interpretation of other people's thoughts and arguments. The problem is really serious when criticism becomes an end in itself; we are encouraged to think "critically," but rarely reminded that we should also synthesize and find what is common and supplementary in the different views and perspectives.

How did this over-reliance in man's ability to judge autonomously happen? It happened with the Christian Gospel becoming useless, it happened through making Christianity a myth, a symbol, a means of the achievement of something different from final blessedness.¹⁸⁴ "The idea that man is sinful at the very center of his personality, that is in his will, is universally rejected," says Niebuhr. "It is this rejection which has seemed to make the Christian Gospel simply irrelevant to modern man."¹⁸⁵ This rejection began with the Renaissance, as we have said, with the re-formulation of the concept of man as an "image of God." It also began unconsciously, with subsequent corrections of the concepts of the Biblical and Classical views. The Scottish Enlightenment, for instance, was by no means secular; it was genuinely theistic. The Scottish moral thinkers were Christians who sincerely believed that politics and society could be successfully reformed through separation of the good conduct and the living Christian conscience from the dogmas of the official Church, group loyalty, and religious sectarianism.¹⁸⁶ Thus, from the seventeenth century onward,¹⁸⁷ man has gradually found himself on a "pilgrimage" towards moral autonomy. Once started, this journey inevitably led to a reformulation of the

¹⁸⁴ I do not choose the word "useless" without a reason. In modern times, what is good is thought to be what is *useful* or *utile*. The philosophy of *utilitarianism* is marked of this lack of understanding that the concept of utile in fact legitimates the egoistic impulses.

¹⁸⁵ Niebuhr 1949, 23

¹⁸⁶ Thomas Ahnert observes, "The historian Blair Worden has described a tendency of this kind in English thought of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, suggesting that religious attitudes softened, and theological doctrine gave way to a religion of works. "The test of Christianity," he writes, "became good conduct, not right belief." Although this development was not universally welcomed, it was, he says, an increasing trend. The philosopher Charles Taylor has recently advanced a similar interpretation of eighteenth-century religion in his history of secularization in the West. The emphasis on conduct rather than doctrine does not represent a complete secularization of moral thought, but once religion is justified in terms of its moral, this-worldly effect, it seems to require only a small step to conclude that morality no longer needs a religious foundation at all. Secularization, it is believed, may not have been the intended outcome of these ideas, but it was implicit in them, as a logical, if extreme conclusion that was only waiting to be fully developed." (Thomas Ahnert, *The Moral Culture of the Scottish Enlightenment*, 1690-1805, Yale University Press, 2014, p.3)

¹⁸⁷ Actually, even earlier. Niebuhr offers a telling quote about human emancipation from the fifteen century Renaissance philosopher Pico della Mirandola, "[God says to man] I have placed you in the center of the world [...] I created you a creature neither earthly nor heavenly, neither mortal nor immortal, so that you could be *your own creator* and choose whatever form you may assume for yourself." (Niebuhr 1949, 21-22)

Greatest Commandment. Now, the commandment was reduced through a kind of "Ockham's razor" into the simple and clear phrase "Love your neighbour as yourself."¹⁸⁸ God suddenly became irrelevant. Moreover, He was seen as a source of trouble and conflict. "Love God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind," became an unnecessary complication of the love commandment. Since we cannot reach agreement about Him, the Enlightenment thinkers reasoned, moreover, since we cannot even describe Him with the capacity of language and observation, let us then not to talk about Him, let us be silent about His existence. God, the Lawgiver, has gradually vanished from the public debate, and with this, from the human perception of reality. He disappeared as a motivating force for good, and He conveniently was called the invisible *Deus Ex Machina*, the mystical *Watchmaker*. With God's "exile," a huge void has opened that has been swiftly filled with new ideologies and natural theories. Man's self-perception has changed; the temporal has taken the space of the sacral.

The new culture quickly produced its own spiritual authorities and prophets. One of them was the above mentioned Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the most influential, according to Frank M. Turner, social philosopher of modern age.¹⁸⁹ Rousseau openly condemned the hypocrisy of European civilization,¹⁹⁰ preached new forms of education,¹⁹¹ and a return to nature and "natural goodness." Man, he believed, is good; the evil must be sought in the failures of social organization. Rousseau was convinced that the evil could be cured with proper education and fairly organized political institutions. It is true, despite its secular solutions ("education" and

¹⁸⁸ In fact, this is the short version of the law in Galatians 5:13-14

¹⁸⁹ "Jean-Jacques Rousseau stands at the fountainhead of modern European thought," argues Frank M. Turner. "He is not the only figure about whom one could make this contention, but he is the one for whom the strongest case could be made." (Frank M. Turner, *European Intellectual History: From Rousseau to Nietzsche*, Yale University Press, 2014)

¹⁹⁰ See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "A Discourse of the Moral Effect of Arts and Sciences," in *The Major Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, tr. and ed. John T. Scott (University of Chicago Press, 2012)

¹⁹¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile: Or, On Education*, tr. Alan Bloom, (Basic Books, 1979)

"general will"), in his reasoning God was still present; the spirit of Christianity still secretly nourished his social ethics. Then, about hundred years later, Nietzsche appeared.

Nietzsche, in contrast to all previous thinkers, clearly sensed the direction and the character of modern man's self-perception. He acquired from the heights and the pains of his spiritual and physical solitude wisdom that permitted him to glimpse into the cataclysms of the near future. "The concept of politics," he exclaimed in his last book, "will then be completely taken up with spiritual warfare, all power structures of the old society will be blown sky high—they all rest on lies: *there will be wars like never before on earth.*"¹⁹² Four years after the publication of these words, the Great War exploded.¹⁹³ Nietzsche was not a Biblical prophet; he was rather the voice of modern man's arrogance. He believed that he is the first one having the courage to openly accuse Christian ethics as spiritually enslaving, as an enemy of human greatness and progress.¹⁹⁴ He proclaimed the god of modernity, Dionysius, the man himself, with his interests, biases, wild passions, and will-to-power. Nietzsche predicted that humanity is on the verge of a choice between the nihilism and autocracy of the *Urbemensch* and the Christian

¹⁹² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes what One Is*. (Algora Publishing, 2004), p.90

¹⁹³ *Ecce Homo* was written in 1888 and published not until 1908.

¹⁹⁴ Nearly at the same time, on the other side of the La Manche, in England, John Stuart Mill began a similar attack against Christian ethics dressed, however, in a more moderate language. In his masterpiece *On Liberty*, he wrote that "Christian morality" began as a reaction against paganism. Unfortunately, this reaction, he argued, did not bring true liberation, because, as he said, "Its ideal is negative rather than positive; passive rather than active; innocence rather than Nobleness; Abstinence from Evil, rather than energetic pursuit of Good; in its precepts 'Thou shall not' predominates unduly over 'Thou shall.'" Mill's opinion was that Christianity with its ethics was "falling far below the best of the ancients" and its doctrine was essentially "a doctrine of passive obedience." We have shown in this work that Mill's interpretation (and Nietzsche's for that matter) is wrong. We have seen that Christianity does not preach "passive obedience" as it does not preach also disobedience; it is much more complex. As a liberal and humanist, Mill concludes that the Christian truth is a "partial truth" and that whatever "exists of magnimity, high-mindedness, personal dignity, even the sense of honor, is derived from the purely human, not the religious part of education, and never could have grown out of a standard of ethics in which only worth, professedly recognized, is that of obedience." (J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, in *Essential Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. Max Lerner, Bantam Books, 1961, pp. 299-300)

meeekness. He finished his prophetic *Ecce Homo* with the enigmatic words: "Have I myself understood?—*Dionysus versus Crucified...*"¹⁹⁵

But Nietzsche was not alone in this century. There was a Pleiades of ideologues of the new culture, the most influential among them Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels. The nineteenth century swelled into a wave of spiritual revolts and intellectual turbulences that would prepare the soil for the next century's political and economic ideologies and policies: socialism, communism, fascism, liberal democracy, Nazism, nationalism, and capitalism. The nineteenth century was a time of an open "revolt," as Niebuhr calls it, against God and traditional culture, against what was thought to be the "dependence on mythology" and the slavery under the dominance of the "privileged classes."

Feuerbach, a "shadowy figure," as de Lubac describes him,¹⁹⁶ between Hegel and Marx, explained in his magnum opus of modern humanism, *The Essence of Christianity*, using a rarely clear philosophical language, that Jesus was an ideal, a necessity in the "dialectical" progress of human spirit towards perfectibility. Religion with its high ideals, Feuerbach argued, was an invention of human mind; it will disappear, he was convinced, and man will become the incarnation of the religious ideal itself. There will be no need for God, because man will grow up one day to the level of his divine status, he will become what he now thinks to be an impossible ideal of God-man. Jesus, in Feuerbach's theory, was the pure image of man's self-perception. Being theologically trained, Feuerbach still had a genuine respect for the transformative and positive power of faith, but Marx, one of his many students, decided that the time of getting rid

¹⁹⁵ Nietzsche 2004, p.98

¹⁹⁶ Lubac 1998, 27.

of religion had already come, he declared that the sublime "ideal" of man's mind had been used for too long as "opium for the masses."¹⁹⁷

Marx abandoned altogether the metaphysics and romanticism of his predecessors and contemporaries, and created a vast body of positive philosophy "pregnant" with "anti-theistic"¹⁹⁸ notions and messianic optimism in social progress. He offered a philosophy of history based on "materialistic" understanding of human culture (and nature). Marxism attempted to appropriate both the traditional lot of Christian ethics and the insights of the emerging social science. It is an irony that Christians and social philosophers were easily attracted to the ideological power of Marxism, and became its most enthusiastic preachers. They have fallen under the spell of a powerful idealism, hidden behind the facade of the so-called "scientific materialism" and the language of social justice.¹⁹⁹ They seemed to be blind to the arbitrary division of society of good and bad "classes" and to the belligerent spirit of this secular in character philosophy. Niebuhr, we should note, was one of the many victims of the Marxist ideology; yet, he was quickly

¹⁹⁷ Of course, Marx considered himself a realist. He wrote, "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo..." (Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Cambridge University Press, 1977, p.131)

¹⁹⁸ Note here the word "anti-theistic." It aims to suggest that the nineteenth-century positive philosophy, although secular and supposedly "scientific," was not "atheistic" in character. On the contrary, its faith in progress, its utopian expectations, and moral admonitions were equal to religious belief and zealotry. See, again, Lubac 1998, and Robert Flint, *Anti-Theistic Theories*, (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1880).

¹⁹⁹ Pope John Paul II calls the indiscriminate mixture of Christianity and Marxism a "deviation" that "damages" the Christian faith. He criticises the liberation theology for its inability to clearly distinguish between liberation from sin and liberation from poverty. "Liberation is first and foremost liberation from the radical slavery of sin," he says. However, some Christians are "tempted to emphasize, unilaterally, the liberation from servitude of an earthly and temporal kind." Doing this they seem to "put liberation from sin in second place, and so fail to give it the primary importance it is due." John Paul II, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation,"* Pretoria, South Africa: Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference, 1984.

disillusioned, thanks to his experience as a priest among the workers in Detroit, and of course, thanks to his faith in the Christian Gospel.

We can continue to describe the withering of God in all directions and compartments of the Western life from the seventeenth-century onward, but the conclusion will be one and the same: the modern man has began to imagine himself as a center and master of universe. He has committed the sin of pride.²⁰⁰

III. THE ILLUSIONS OF POLITICAL UTOPIAS

The emancipation of man from the authority of religion and the constraints of nature (through the development of science and technologies) has resulted in the emergence of new political ideologies marked with utopian beliefs in progress. Even the cataclysms in the first half of the twentieth century did not destroy the faith in the ability of man to grow in goodness and greatness. Because of his pride, interests, and self-confidence the modern man, according to Niebuhr, was unable to understand that the progress in history was "a progress of all human potencies, both for good and for evil."²⁰¹ The modern ideologies, based on an exalted trust in human goodness and potential, missed the realism of the old Christian view that considered history as a process of simultaneous growth in good and evil. They were lacking the wisdom of the Augustinian concept of the two cities that move together, intermingled, toward their final ends, as neither one having the power to completely overcome the other. The idea that human history is equally flat and linear became incomprehensible, illogical for the modern mind. The modern mind was incapable to imagine growth without progress; the absence of God's

²⁰⁰ "Sin," Niebuhr writes, "is the unwillingness of man to acknowledge his creaturelessness and dependence on God [...] The sin of man is to make himself God." (Niebuhr 1949, 138-140)

²⁰¹ "Christianity and Power Politics" in Niebuhr 1960, 8

counterpoint made its perception one-dimensional, its logic far less complex than the world it was hoping to control.

Modern utopianism was not a united and coordinated revolt against religion and traditional political order. To exist, modern ideologies depended, as we have said, on their critical and distinct understanding of the world. Their initial function was to attack and demolish what they considered as unjust. They were born as reactions against something, as critical theories and revolutionary movements. Their spirit and logic was definitely Hegelian. The modern man, the man of pride, could not imagine an existence devoid of conflict; moreover, he could not imagine progress and development without dialectical antagonisms,²⁰² without a clash of theses and anti-theses, without, let's say it straightly, war.²⁰³ The harmonious co-existence, the Trinitarian vision, was a concept foreign to his belligerent spirit. So, the secular religions, the "immanent ideologies" as Eric Voegelin called them,²⁰⁴ could not be satisfied with the simple destruction of the idea of God. Disobedience and emancipation from authority were the reasons for their existence, absolute victory, the total destruction of every opposition was their goal, and hence, their proponents were naturally disposed to search for enemies even if there were no more enemies left. Therefore, it is not surprising that after the defeat of Nazism in the Second World

²⁰² Discussing Marxism, Niebuhr notes, "A 'dialectical' process becomes surrogate for the absent God." "Faith and History" in Niebuhr 1960, 27.

²⁰³ This is exactly what Stanley Hauerwas argues in his long essay *Should War be Eliminated?* He explains that non-Christian understanding of history is one without the Christian God; moreover, it is an understanding of one that blindly appropriates God's power for one's own interest and so destroys the "dialectics" between man and God replacing it, tragically, with a dialectics between man and man and so perpetuating the earthly war. He says, "[William] James rightly saw that the essential problem for the elimination of war lies in our imagination. Under the power of the history created by war we cannot morally imagine a world without war." (Stanley Hauerwas, *Should War be Eliminated? A Thought Experiment*, in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. S. Hauerwas, J. Berkman, M. Cartwright, Duke University Press, 2001, p.422) The question "Should war be eliminated?," he says, is a false question that reflects man's incapability (or lack of imagination) to understand that war has already been eliminated with the crucifixion of Christ.

²⁰⁴ See for example Eric Voegelin, "The Origins of Totalitarianism" and "The Oxford Political Philosophers" in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (University of Missouri Press, 2000)

War, the world broke apart, once again, into two hostile camps, the communist totalitarianism and the liberal democratic capitalism, each pretending to be the only and final bearer of progress and truth.

Niebuhr differentiates the qualities of liberalism and Marxism and its totalitarian sibling Nazism without becoming a defender of one of these political ideologies. He believed that democracy is the best possible political regime,²⁰⁵ but his Christian realism, as we have explained in the chapter on Aquinas, could not permit him to endorse unconditionally a particular political system and ideology. He classifies the two dominant systems of the twentieth century, liberalism and communism, as "soft" and "hard" utopias.²⁰⁶ Liberal democracies, he explains, were legitimized by a "soft" ideology because they were not convinced in the perfectness of their political order; they were even inclined to admit that democracy has shortcomings. Yet their ideologues naively believed that liberal and democratic capitalism would eventually lead to a perfect society. They had the illusion that if the "spontaneous order"²⁰⁷ of the "competing egoisms" were left to develop undisturbed by bureaucratic interferences or central power it would result in a social and economic harmony.²⁰⁸ In the liberal political dogma, the Christian concept (and principle) of common good, directed from a morally and religiously inspired center, was an "anathema."²⁰⁹ Liberals perceived central government, the strong state, as

²⁰⁵ "Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary" is among Niebuhr's most quoted insights (See Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, The University of Chicago Press, 2011, 1st edition 1944)

²⁰⁶ See Niebuhr 1960, 12-36.

²⁰⁷ For the idea of the "spontaneous order," see Friedrich Hayek's political economy and philosophy: F.A. Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism* (The University of Chicago Press, 1991) and especially *Law, Legislation, and Liberty* (University of Chicago Press, 1978).

²⁰⁸ Niebuhr 1960, 16

²⁰⁹ However, British classical liberalism, which is represented now by the British conservatives, is an exception. The political "ideology" of the Conservative party under Thatcher and Cameron, although not "officially" Christian, is legitimized by a complex moral philosophy and Christian principles. See *From Thatcher to Cameron: The Journey*

a totalitarian threat. And, we must admit, they had the right and the reason not to trust central power and to doubt the ability of bureaucrats to manage economy. But they failed to grasp that the competing egoisms, and history in general, do not lead to progress. They were also unable to see that the evil is not simply in the intrusions of the central power or in the economic distortions caused by monopolies of close to government cronies, but in human will itself. They were mistaken to believe that through freedom and education, evil in society would gradually disappear. Representing the interests of "bourgeoisie" and capital owners, of the economically active segment of society, the liberal ideologues were unable to admit that their criticism was disproportionately directed against the evils of political power and much less against the abuse of economic power.²¹⁰ Another illusion of the soft-utopians, Niebuhr continues, echoing Augustine, was their irresponsibility and patience to the actions of the totalitarian regimes. They were wrong to hope that "kindness would convert the heart of tyrants."²¹¹ In the 1930s, both Liberals and Christians preached a policy of appeasement and non-resistance against a totalitarian regime, whose ambitions were clearly exceeding the borders of Germany. The foreign policy of Hitler was an international issue, and the liberal democracies refused to take responsibility to join efforts and resolve it. The Second World War, it is rarely emphasized, like the First World War, was a result of the egoistic behaviour and shortsighted policy of all great powers.

One of the greatest faults in the liberal soft utopianism is its propensity to inaction. Soft utopianism, for instance, is mild against human greed, and slow to act in defence of social justice. It represents a socially passive individualism that is often incapable to promote a genuine

to Compassionate Conservatism: the Collected Wilberforce Addresses 1997-2009, ed. Kay Carter, with a foreword by David Cameron (Biteback, 2010), also Joshua Hordern, *One Nation but Two Cities: Christianity and the Conservative Party*, Bible Society, 2010

²¹⁰ "Faith and History" in Niebuhr 1960, 35

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 23

policy of common good. It demonstrates a certain lack of engagement and certitude in the ideals it professes. The hard utopianism has the opposite qualities. It is overly active, confident, and determined to push the society in the direction of its ideological and political goals. In contrast to liberalism, Marxism and its vulgar sibling Nazism tend to impose the "collective will," represented and "formulated" by a political elite, or a "revolutionary vanguard," and are ready and quick to punish every individual ambition that seems to contradict the authority and the dogmas of the central power. "The hard Utopian creates a fighting community," Niebuhr writes, "which regards itself as the embodiment and champion of an ideal commonwealth of perfect justice or perfect love, for which it is ready to do battle against all enemies."²¹² Hard utopianism, Niebuhr is convinced, is much more dangerous than the soft one, because it claims an excessive moral superiority that serves as justification for violence.²¹³ It is an incarnation of man's pride in the body of political power and collective will; it is the Leviathan of the totalitarian state.

It is not true, Niebuhr argues, that Nazism was a "reversion to barbarism," that the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century were "a return to a primitive past."²¹⁴ Rather, the political regimes of the hard utopias were made possible by the advance of technology and science. The massive nationalist and communist propaganda and the subsequent organization and mobilization of society under the will of a centralized political power were possible only in a technologically advanced environment. Technological progress in fact revealed that nothing from the "primitive past" was lost with the Enlightenment and with the teachings of the new political and social philosophies. The warlike spirit of man, the pride, and the will-to-power of the Romans that we have discussed in the chapter on Augustine, were untouched by history, they

²¹² Ibid., 26

²¹³ Reinhold Niebuhr, "Two Forms of Utopianism" in Niebuhr 1960, 13

²¹⁴ Niebuhr, "Christianity and Power Politics" in Niebuhr 1960, 24

were as strong and as active as in the time of Caesar. There was no return to "primitivism," because the *sin* was still *in us*. That is why Niebuhr, the Christian realist, argues that there is no progress in human history. The scientific development is inevitably accompanied with a development of the capacity of man to pursue his private (and group) interest on the expense of the common good.

With the growth of power and freedom from nature, the risks for a greater apocalypse grow proportionally. Technology "furnishes" man's will with more opportunities for expression, and man's will can be good and bad. The moral choice, the Christian realist warns, is always with us, and the impact of its consequences would always be greater with the growth of man's power. As far as we have choice between good and evil, which means as far as we are creatures entitled to freedom and moral autonomy, progress as a process of qualitative growth towards goodness and greatness would be an illusion. It is so, because, while we may argue, as Steven Pinker did in a recent study, that the number of international conflicts and wars has diminished since the Second World War,²¹⁵ the capability of man to destroy has in fact increased with the achievements of science. So the lesser number of international conflicts could not be a sign of improvement of man's actual capability to destroy and act wickedly. We have historical examples that show that Pinker's kind of optimism and confidence in the social, political, and moral progress should not be taken too seriously. The nineteenth century, for instance, was marked by an unusually long period of peace that had started after the Napoleonic Wars with the Congress of Vienna and that ended, in the first half of the twentieth century, with the bloodshed of the greatest and most devastating wars in human history.

²¹⁵ Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, (Penguin, 2011)

IV. THE CHRISTIAN REALIST PERSPECTIVE

In this final section, we will discuss how the Christian Realist perspective interprets society and politics, how it differs from the immanent ideologies that we just described. We will also show that there are differences within the Christian perspective itself: it is the conflict or rather the tension between the contradictory claims of Christian idealism and realism.

Niebuhr points that some form of power governs all communities, without exception. Power is within the organization of every order and every interpretation of politics must begin with the admission of its existence and influence. There are two elements of communal life, Niebuhr says, "the central organizing power and the equilibrium of power."²¹⁶ Whatever the ideologues or the critics of a regime say about the qualities of the governing body, the truth, according to Niebuhr, must be searched in the configuration of these two elements. If the central organizing power is insufficiently balanced (or hindered) by other centers of force, it would inevitably tend to absolute dominance; on the other hand, if "centrifugal" forces weaken the center of power, the society would be always on the verge of anarchy and disintegration. "The principle of the balance of power is always pregnant with the possibility of anarchy," Niebuhr contends, and the principle of central power could always degenerate into tyranny.²¹⁷ These two dangers have been already pointed in the chapter on Aquinas. What the modern ideologues fail to see or to admit is that the quality of a regime rests not so much on the expressed values of the government, i.e. on its official ideology, but on the well functioning system of real checks and balances. Therefore, a communist or a socialist regime could not claim that its politics is the best and the most just one, if its center of power is not properly controlled or limited by other forces.

²¹⁶ Niebuhr 1960, 105

²¹⁷ "Human Destiny" in Niebuhr 1960, 106

This applies to the liberal democracies too—they may express attachment to freedom, but they could easily turn into "facade democracies" if the electoral system serves as a cover for the power and interests of oligarchic circles, or if the will of majority works against the dignity and the rights of the minorities. Neither communism nor democracy can be ideal regimes, there are, in fact, no ideal or final political regimes and powers, and Niebuhr advises that it is important for us to keep in mind that "the twin perils of tyranny and anarchy can never be completely overcome in any political achievement."²¹⁸ This means that we cannot expect in real politics an ideal balance of powers, as we cannot have a regime that lives up to its ideals.

Political configurations always fluctuate and the effort to achieve justice within the state always brings limited results. The belief that the state power and justice can be "neutral" is an illusion. The Christian realist judgement on state power is that there is no such thing as "neutrality" in the earthly kingdom. "Neutrality" is not a human quality, and therefore, it could not be a quality of human institutions. Every claim about the achievement of absolute justice is sinful because it does not admit the limits of human law and perspective. Rousseau's contract theory is an example for the delusion that a society, organized in a state, can create a perfect, neutral, i.e. just, political order. "The political theory of Rousseau," Niebuhr says, "contains the conception of a 'general will' which is supposedly the final harmony of conflicting individual wills." "This conception obscured the fact," Niebuhr continues, "that there is a conflict of wills in every living community, and that the victorious will (*italics are mine*) is at least partially fashioned and crystallized by the ruling oligarchy, which has the instruments to express it." "Rousseauistic conception leads," Niebuhr concludes, "to constitutional forms which offer

²¹⁸ Niebuhr 1960, 107

inadequate safeguards to the minority."²¹⁹ Marxism is "strikingly similar" to Rousseau's concepts, he adds, because "it fails to anticipate the rise of a ruling group in a socialist society."²²⁰ People who lived in the former communist countries would now fully agree with Niebuhr's observation, because they would know from personal experience the extent of power that the so-called "*nomenklatura*" had in their supposedly "equal" societies.

Niebuhr is right to ask the Augustinian question, "One wonders whether men are capable of self-restraint, when the social restraints of power no longer operate."²²¹ Is there a situation, or a man, or a government who can do the right thing if their will is not restrained by some outer, opposing force? This question brings us to the Christian perspective, perhaps best expressed in the twentieth century by Karl Barth in his *Commentary on Romans*: that the Christian is a friend and ally of all who are lowly, wretched, suffering, and weak. The Christian should play the role of an outer force on behalf of the weakest members of society, of everyone and everything that has no power to defend against the encroachments of the individual and group egoism. Christianity, according to Barth, does not "busy itself to support those many 'ideals' by which men are deeply moved—individualism, collectivism, nationalism, internationalism, humanitarianism, ecclesiasticism." "Christianity," he says, "detects [...] the menace of idolatry."²²² The Christian is asked by the command of God, the confronting all particularities absolute power, to attune his attention to the presence of the weakest in society, to see the invisible among us, to hear the voice of the poor, to notice the existence of the stranger. The lowly are the prophets who have been given the right to judge the world.²²³ Barth says that Christianity's

²¹⁹ Ibid., 117

²²⁰ Ibid.,

²²¹ Ibid., 118

²²² Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (Oxford University Press, 1963), p.463

²²³ What they lack however is "coercive" power. Interestingly, from the moment they acquire the ability to defend themselves, which means to impose their will, they lose some of the quality of their judgement. That is why there is

"purpose remains always the same. It acts always in accordance with the same rule. *Opposing what is high, it befriends what is lowly.*"²²⁴ In other words, Christianity is the necessary balancing force against every power on earth, the force that takes into consideration the rights of those who the world does not count as important or as even existing.

Niebuhr's Christian realism, the realism that is against everything high and proud, corresponds to the Barthian definition of the Christian purpose. Niebuhr says that those holding economic and political power are "more guilty of pride against God and of injustice against the weak."²²⁵ "Whether the fortunes of nature, the accidents of history or even the virtues of the possessors of power, endow an individual or a group with power, social prestige, intellectual eminence or moral approval above their fellows, there an ego is allowed to expand."²²⁶ The destitute, Niebuhr says, show us what really happens in society; through the poor, through the lowly, and only through them, we can discern the limits of justice, the pride of success, and the illusion of neutrality. The poor may speak with a few and simple words, they may look incomprehensible, strange, foreign, but in order to understand the realities of political power, our attention, the Christian realist would insist, must be concentrated on them. One has to give

need for a will and power that is disengaged with the interest of its bearer and that acts *only* in defence of those who cannot fight for their own interest but possess the right *judgement*. The political engagement of Christians on behalf of the "lowly" is the action of the "word" without spoiling the purity of the bearer of the "word." This is how, in my opinion, the old question of justice and coercion could be resolved. Oliver O'Donovan rightly noted in his excellent lecture *The Ways of Judgement* that the question, "Are we given to renew the life of human communities by a word of truth (i.e. only through persuasion), or it is an unattainable ideal (and politics is needed)?" was a source of the century old division between "idealists" and "realists." Discussing Marsilius of Padua's theo-political reflections, O'Donovan describes the realist involvement in power politics as a "voiceless complement to an otherwise impotent word." It is true, coercion is needed when the persuasion does not work, but coercion will be justified if it is done out of individual self-interest (including self-defence) on behalf of people having no power to defend themselves. See Oliver O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgement: The Bampton Lectures, 2003* (Eerdmans, 2005), pp.13-14. And I should note here that although I use Barth for developing my argument, I do not say that he was in favor of any coercive politics. On the contrary, Barth, following Paul's criticism against self-righteousness in *Romans*, was utterly suspicious to every attempt of taking the "scepter" from the hands of God.

²²⁴ Barth 1963, 465

²²⁵ Niebuhr 1960, 119

²²⁶ *Ibid.*,

thanks to God, Niebuhr exclaims, for democracy "which gives the ignorant man just as much power of suffrage as the educated man," and to thank God "also for the wisdom which resides in a hungry belly than a sophisticated mind."²²⁷ He says, "blessed the poor" whose unsatisfied needs become a "source for justice."²²⁸

This makes us return to the question of the Christian responsibility to the world. How does a Christian ally with the lowly? How does he act to make their situation better? Does he bless them and send them on their way with "empty hands"? Does he say, "Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything." (Luke, 11:7)

First of all, the Christian realist makes an admission. It is the confession that he cannot act like Jesus, he cannot be like his teacher, even if he wants to be like Him with all his heart and will. "The ethical demands made by Jesus," Niebuhr writes, "are impossible of fulfilment in the present existence of man." "Their final fulfilment," he says, "is possible only when God transmutes the present chaos of this world into its final unity."²²⁹ The law of love is not given to us to perform it. We are unable to self-sacrifice as God did. We are not able to live without failure. We cannot say about ourselves that we receive God's Spirit "without measure." (John 3:34) The law of love is given to us as a guiding light that expands infinitely the horizons of our potential. The law of love is not "simple possibility," Niebuhr says, that can be achieved in the Christian life. It is in front of us, we see it, we feel it with our heart, but it is always out of reach and devoted practice. The only thing we can do with the law of love is to take it seriously and to bend our will in accordance to its requirements. Doing this we must humbly admit that the

²²⁷ Ibid., 124

²²⁸ Ibid.,

²²⁹ "An Interpretation of Christian Ethics" in Niebuhr 1960, 135

human imagination, the Spirit of God in us, is "too limited to see and understand the interests of the other as vividly as those of the self."²³⁰ Therefore, before we start making politics, before we start acting on behalf of the lowly, we must admit that there is no "historic structure of justice, which can fulfill the law of love."²³¹ We must accept God's judgement and rejoice in God's grace. If we do not do this, if we do not accept our sinfulness, we blindly take the "scepter of God," to use Barth's expression, and turn ourselves into what we are not, namely into gods.

Making this initial admission, we confess our sins. We do not fall into the illusion that we are righteous, because we fight on the side of good, that we do not make mistakes and our love shields us from sin. We are never enough good, and we never have the full knowledge and will that would make us truly good. Thus, we understand that we must limit our expectations and hopes for this world and for ourselves. This is not pessimism, because as Christians we are still inspired by love and hope. We just know, as Niebuhr says, that being involved in the trials of this world we do not have "the chance between war and perfect peace, but only between war and the uneasy peace of some fairly decent and stable equilibrium of social forces. We cannot choose between violence and non-violence, but only between violence and a statesmanship which seeks to adjust social forces without violence but cannot guarantee immunity from clashes."²³² In short,

²³⁰ Niebuhr 1960, 136

²³¹ Ibid.,

²³² Ibid., 137. John Howard Yoder would probably see the "shortcomings" of this way of thinking pointing that in its effort to limit war and conflict, it actually *legitimizes* them. In *Nevertheless: The Varieties and the Shortcomings of Religious Pacifism* he writes: "Bishops in the Middle Ages sought to limit war to certain times and certain places. This legitimized feudal war backhandedly in the course of efforts to limit it..." (John Howard Yoder, *Nevertheless: The Varieties and the Shortcomings of Religious Pacifism*, Herald Press, 1992, p.19) Both Yoder and Hauerwas argue that the Christian must stop thinking with the concepts of "this world." He must begin imagining the possibility of a world without violence following the example of Jesus and respecting, in every possible situation, the command "You shall not kill." However, this opposition of opinion between Christian pacifists like Yoder and Hauerwas and Christian realists like Niebuhr is ill stated. Christian realism does not advise murdering of other human beings, nor is it lacking religious imagination. *On the contrary*, the Christian realist *political* responsibility is centered on the *effort to prevent* and *stop* killing, violence, and destruction with the clear understanding that this is not always possible, because we still live in a world of sinners, not of saints.

we know that our work on behalf of the lowly does not make us final winners, does not prevent us from doing wrong, and does not make the world truly peaceful and non-violent. There is not a "pure application" in life of the command of love. We cannot avoid some form of violence and egoism in present life; what we can do is to will, to work, and to believe in a world of a Trinitarian harmony, to aspire to achieve it now and here as much as our power permits.

Now, we can understand Augustine and Niebuhr's criticism against the so-called "pacifists."²³³ Note here that the word "pacifist" is a bit different from the word "peacemaker," which we know from the Gospel ("Blessed are the peacemakers, for they would be called children of God," Matt. 5:9). The "pacifist" is an ideologue of the idea of peace. The "peacemaker" is a fighter for peace; he is an active man, who takes the risks to fail morally involving himself in a conflict, who decides to taint himself with the dirt of war and confrontation, and who seemingly appropriates "God's scepter."

Niebuhr spares no critical words against the pacifists. The pacifists are "just as guilty," he says, "of deluding the ethic of Jesus for the purpose of justifying their position."²³⁴ What is their position? It is the convenient "non-resistance." Non-resistance is the highest act of self-sacrifice when personal interests are held in contempt, when somebody decides not to fight in defense of his own interest. Self-sacrifice is a sublime act of will. Self-defense is an ordinary act of will. However, if a Christian cares for the lowly and decides not to act in their defense, because he does not believe in violence, he is betraying the command of love. He does not use the chance to self-sacrifice even with the price of guilt.

²³³ For a good and balanced discussion on Niebuhr's critical to pacifism realism, written by a "Mennonite feminist," see Malinda Elizabeth Berry's doctoral dissertation, *"This Mark of a Standing Human Figure Poised to Embrace": A Constructive Theology of Social Responsibility, Nonviolence & Nonconformity*, Union Theological Seminary, New York City, 2013.

²³⁴ Niebuhr 1960, 140

"Pacifists," Niebuhr writes, "say that Christians must accept suffering instead of inflicting it. This is quite true, so far as personal relations are concerned. But the moral issues of war seldom present in such simple form."²³⁵ And he asks, "Whose duty is to protect the lives and liberties of others?" Is it the duty of the egoist, of the soulless state bureaucrat, or of the politician and the partisan, who may believe or not in their utopian political religions? Or it is the duty of the Christian, of each single individual? What kind of sacrifice does one do when permitting the evil to go unchecked in front of their eyes? The very act of sacrificial love is violated by the act of non-violence and non-resistance against evil that causes harm to the innocent and defenceless. To witness injustice against others and not act is to refuse to perform the love commandment.

If a Christian abandons his social and political responsibility, his faith gives no more fruit. His choice is to do nothing. To be safe of guilt. For sure, there is no such a thing as "just" war or conflict. And Niebuhr, the Christian realist, pointed this out on many occasions, especially with his criticism on the "just war theory." We are all responsible, in one way or another, for any war and conflict, in which we participate. It is so, because we are all sinful. But sinfulness or the hope for perfectibility is not an excuse for abandoning our responsibility, especially when we have the means and the power to prevent a crime. There are Christian pacifists, who advise non-involvement in state affairs, who try to avoid situations and social roles that can put them in the center of a conflict.²³⁶ They insist that the Christian's job is to proclaim

²³⁵ Ibid.,

²³⁶ John Howard Yoder, for instance, argues that the state is a partly "Christian institution" as far as its social institutions (hospitals, schools, etc.) have Christian origins. But the state is also a non-Christian institution as an instrument for coercion and control. The modern state, he explains, has two basic functions, one "violent," and one "non-violent": to organize and provide services and to execute authoritative power. The Christians, Yoder advises, must participate in the provision of services and avoid governing and politics. The Christian should not involve himself in coercive actions. He argues that Jesus refused to act as a political warrior, as a rebel, as Judas Iscariot

the Word of God from the sidelines of the battlefield, to bring the Good News,²³⁷ to advertise the happiness of prudent life, to show others the profit of non-involvement, the success of the quietly pursued interest. They imagine the Christian as a "witness," instead of a "bearer" of the cross. But in order to be a true witness man must live and experience his failures, must suffer his sins and disappointments, and spend this life of pilgrimage with the Passion of Christ. His day is Friday, not Sunday. The Christian realism suggests that as Christians we cannot leave the state to be the sole "guarantor of order."²³⁸ We cannot abdicate from our responsibility to govern and obey, to revolt and serve. We cannot hope to find a shelter, and stay there untainted by the world until the day of the Second Coming. It is written, "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God." (Mark 2:17) The Christian cannot be "in the world" when there is peace, and "not of the world" when violence and coercion begin.²³⁹ Led by the command of love, he must serve Caesar and God, according to the situation and the requirements of the love commandment. The Christian, Niebuhr says, is "obliged to act responsibly in society at all times, and not merely when the state is at peace."²⁴⁰

Egoistically inspired pacifism, therefore, destroys the concept of love as justice. It ruptures the unity of the Christian wisdom that puts everything in a harmonic relation: authority and liberty, obedience and freedom, love and justice, particular and universal, God and man.

perhaps expected. He did not cause "violent revolution"; he was both "highly political in his kingdom message" and "non-political in his rejection of the most readily available political means." See John Howard Yoder, *Discipleship as Political Responsibility* (Herald Press, 2003)

²³⁷ In his essay "Why the Christian Church Is Not Pacifist," Niebuhr writes, "The good news of the gospel is not the law that we ought to love one another. The good news of the gospel is that there is a resource of divine mercy which is able to overcome a contradiction within our souls, which we cannot ourselves overcome. This contradiction is that, though we know we ought to love our neighbor as ourself, there is a "law in our members which wars against the law that is in our mind" (Rom. 7:23), so that, in fact, we love ourselves more than our neighbor." See Reinhold Niebuhr, "Why the Christian Church Is Not Pacifist," in Niebuhr 1986, 102–3

²³⁸ Niebuhr 1960, 142

²³⁹ Ibid, 143

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 143 Italics mine.

Niebuhr describes what he believes is the "non-hegemonic" hierarchy between love, justice, and power. These are not contradictory terms, he argues. "Justice may be servant of love," he says, "and power may be servant of justice." As we have concluded in the chapter on Aquinas, now we re-confirm with Niebuhr: power "is not evil"; it "may be put in service of good ends."²⁴¹

Augustine argued, as we have seen, that pacifism is often an expression of hypocrisy and self-love; Niebuhr, on the other hand, believes that non-engagement of Christians in politics is a result of ideological blindness. The Christian Utopians, he says, "do not realize that the law of love stands on the edge of history and not in history, that it represents an ultimate and not immediate possibility."²⁴² They do not understand human nature. While they divide love from justice, they fail to discern the existence of both good and evil in man. "They do not see," Niebuhr writes, "that sin introduces an element of conflict into the world and that even the most loving relations are not free of it."²⁴³

Niebuhr is convinced that most modern forms of Christian pacifism are "heretical." They are "presumably inspired by the Christian Gospel" while in fact they have "absorbed the Renaissance faith in the goodness of man." The Christian Utopians, he argues, "reject the Christian doctrine of original sin,"²⁴⁴ and insists that the "modern pacifism" is the final fruit of the Renaissance spirit that interprets history as a story of progress in goodness, of gradual "ascent to the Kingdom of God" thanks to man's own efforts. But the New Testament, Niebuhr reminds, "does not envisage a simple triumph of good over evil in history. It sees human history

²⁴¹ Ibid., 143

²⁴² Ibid., 145

²⁴³ Ibid., 147

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 148

involved in the contradictions of sin to the end."²⁴⁵ Not man, but God "alone" overcomes "the judgement which sin deserves."²⁴⁶

This does not mean that Niebuhr is an unconditional critic of pacifism. As we have said, peacemaking is what the Christian Gospel requires. Religiously inspired will for peace is the most sincere effort of man to overcome the conflict of egoistic interests, the anxieties of fear and hatred, and the desire for retribution. The religiously inspired will for peace, which is the perspective that judges everything from the standpoint of God, transcends "all particular and social situations" and asks the Christian to "share the burdens of establishing peace, of achieving justice, and of perfecting justice in the spirit of love."²⁴⁷ In Christian peacemaking, the love commandment is the guiding rule to follow.²⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

The main topic of this thesis was not simply the realism in the political and theological perspectives of Augustine, Aquinas, and Niebuhr, but the consistent argumentation in favour of the Greatest Commandment. The Christian realism, let say it straightly, as presented in this work, is an "apology" for the Christian faith and way of life. Christian realism, I have argued, is not simply a pragmatic realism or prudence, it is not in any way pessimism, and it is not a political program or strategy for the achievement of particular political goals. It is a philosophy of life, a religiously inspired wisdom. It is a set of principles for the vicissitudes of life. The realist, according to this philosophy, must be, before all, a Christian. I argue that the realist is a Christian. He is a person who has a sense for his own sinfulness and possesses a clear vision of

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 148

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 148

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 153

²⁴⁸ Ibid.,

human sinfulness. He is also an optimist. The Christian realist trusts in God, in His grace and providence, in His promise and invitation, and as Niebuhr says, he also trusts his fellow man, because man is capable of love and only among the creatures of God's creation has the freedom to act like God. Moreover, the most desired thing in creation is love. In love are the life, the peace, the fruit, and the future. The name of the Tree of Life is Love. "God is love." (1 John 4:16) As a loving person, the Christian realist is a peacemaker, a lawgiver and under law, a sinner and redeemed, fallen and blessed, both with authority and under judgement. He is a citizen of the Heavenly Kingdom.

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