

The Political Relevance of St. Augustine

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I

IT IS SURPRISING THAT contemporary political thinking has paid relatively scant attention to St. Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo. It may be true, as some say, that we live in the post-Christian era. It certainly cannot be gainsaid that we live in an age of pervasive secularism in which a name such as Augustine seems remote and "irrelevant." To use the vernacular, he is difficult to "identify with." Yet, I am arguing that it is Augustine's perspective which, when set against the modern political mind, affords us an incisive and genuinely critical political science not afforded by the behavioral and ideological approaches which have come to dominate contemporary political science. Behavioralism, preoccupied with method, "science," and quantification, has confined itself to the study of the changing patterns of surface events, while ideology confines itself to a sterile world of utopian abstractions and attempts to coerce reality into conforming to that world. Neither of these approaches will facilitate or support a critical political

science reflecting in depth on the whole human experience.¹

Are there not "Christian Realists" other than St. Augustine who would better assist in this task of critical evaluation? For example, on the Catholic side there is John Henry Newman and on the Protestant there is Reinhold Niebuhr, and other lesser names could be mentioned. In the final analysis, it must be remembered that the Newmans and the Niebuhrs owe and have acknowledged their debt to Augustine. In the words of one Augustinian scholar, ". . . theology in western Christianity has been a series of footnotes to Augustine."²

Augustine's most serious competitor would be St. Thomas Aquinas. Indeed, in modern times, since the Encyclical *Aeterni Patris* issued by Pope Leo XIII in 1879, St. Thomas Aquinas has been the preeminent figure of the theology of the Catholic Church. The Pope commended the study of Aquinas in Catholic seminaries and universities, and he stressed the "singular" and "incomparable" stature of St. Thomas. The Pope concluded that the Saint ". . . is rightly and deservedly esteemed the special

bulwark and glory of the Catholic faith.”³

Aeterni Patris is the foundation document of neo-Thomism, and it is noteworthy that its author is also the writer of the famous social Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* promulgated in 1891. This latter Encyclical is considered the touchstone of modern, liberal, Catholic economic and social thought, which reached its peak in Pope John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra* in 1961, and has been reflected in more modest forms in the pontificate of Paul VI in the 1967 Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, and in the apostolic letter of May, 1971.⁴

To put the matter bluntly, modern liberal Catholicism, and its non-Catholic associates, have preferred Aquinas over Augustine. Leo XIII set the tone in *Aeterni Patris*. He acknowledged the greatness of Augustine, but indicated that this early Saint is a stepping stone on the way to the summit, which is Aquinas. As Aquinas showed that faith and reason are compatible, the Pope contended his philosophy would serve as a bridgebuilder to the secular rationalists.⁵ Aquinas' reliance upon "reason" has great appeal to modern liberals; however, the matter broadens beyond that, for Aquinas leads to Aristotle, while Augustine points to Plato, and within liberal thinking the former two are preferred.

Aristotle suggests dependence upon reason and nature. Man is a social creature, and the state is a natural institution with the responsibility for taking a positive and active role in promoting the common good. In the Aristotelian tradition, there is room for optimism, progressivism, and cosmopolitanism. Aquinas and Aristotle become entwined and inseparable to modern Christian and secular liberals. Basic is the Thomistic scheme of things in which there is symmetry and hierarchy, from the lowest being to God, and from human law,

through natural and divine law, to the eternal law. Life is rooted in reason, nature, and order, and man must arrange his institutions, including political ones, accordingly.

If to the liberal mind, Aquinas and Aristotle point to the modern liberal state and culture, Augustine and Plato lead to unpleasant visions of reaction. In their pursuit of the Perfect, the Good, the One, and the Truth, Plato and Augustine are otherworldly. Aquinas and Aristotle are of the "tough-minded" tradition; Plato and Augustine are of the "tenderminded." Weighted down by the orthodoxy of The Fall and original sin, the Augustinian legacy is pessimistic, fundamentalist, even primitivist. Where Aquinas leads to facts, liberalism, change, and modernity, Augustine suggests obscurantism, conservatism, traditionalism, and medievalism.

II

JACQUES MARITAIN and Etienne Gilson stand as the preeminent spokesmen for modern Thomism; however, of these two it is Maritain who has been principally occupied with contemporary applications of Thomistic thought, and he is the crucial figure in understanding how modern Christian and non-Christian liberals have come to prefer the tradition of Aquinas over that of Augustine.

In domestic as well as in international politics, Maritain's political orientation is left of center. In 1938 in his classic work, *True Humanism*, he wrote: "The social and political philosophy implied by integral humanism calls for radical changes . . . a substantial transformation . . . the inauguration of new social structures and a new scheme of social life succeeding that of capitalism. . ."⁶ More specifically, in 1947 he stated that everyone has ". . . the right to a just wage. The right to work.

And wherever an associative system can be substituted for the wage system, the right to the joint ownership and joint management of the enterprise . . . the right to relief, unemployment insurance, sick benefits and social security—the right to have a part, *free of charge*, depending on the possibilities of the community, in the elementary goods, both material and spiritual, of civilization.” The “spirit of capitalism” is wrong, for it is rooted in “contempt for the poor,” and “bourgeois individualism” is rejected because it is based upon “. . . the absolute liberty of property, of commerce and the pleasures of life. . .”⁸

In 1968 Maritain lamented, “. . . the hope for the advent of a Christian politics . . . has been completely frustrated . . . I see in the Western World no more than three revolutionaries worthy of the name—Eduardo Frei in Chile, Saul Alinsky in America . . . and myself in France, who am not worth beans, since my call as a philosopher has obliterated my possibilities as an agitator. . .”⁹ In summing up, he observed, “A healthy Christian politics . . . would undoubtedly seem to go pretty far to the left as regards certain technical solutions . . . and in its demands for the transformation of the present economic regime.”¹⁰

Citing with praise the works of non-Catholic Thomists Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler, Maritain has contended that world government “. . . perfectly squares with the basic principles of Thomas Aquinas’ political philosophy.”¹¹ Reaching back through Aquinas to Aristotle, Maritain agreed with Hutchins and Adler that the pivotal point is Aristotle’s notion of the “perfect” state being based upon “self-sufficiency.” In Aristotle’s day that meant the city state, while in the modern era, argues Maritain, this means world government because with the interrelatedness of earthly life only a world state

would meet the Aristotelian test of “self-sufficiency.”¹²

In bringing about the creation of this world political organization, Maritain argued there is needed a “kind of moral heroism” on the part of “occidental nations,” for there will have to be “. . . a serious lowering of . . . standards of life, in order to provide people on the other side . . . with an equivalent raising of their standards of life.”¹³ Similarly, Hutchins has warned, “In any world state that could be organized in our time, Europe, the West, and Christendom would be out-numbered . . . Nor does it seem consonant with the missionary tradition of the Church to feel overwhelmed by the numbers of the unfaithful.”¹⁴ Moreover, Hutchins has contended that “. . . the Catholic tradition . . . points clearly toward the necessity of world government . . . Catholics have, then, always been virtually for world government.”¹⁵ As with Maritain, Hutchins rested his case with the conclusion, “According to the mind of St. Thomas, only the world state can now be the perfect community.”¹⁶

Maritain’s attitude on Martin Luther, and the latter’s impact on conservative Protestantism, affords additional evidence of the contemporary liberal Catholic’s preference for the tradition of Aquinas over that of Augustine. In the orthodoxy of the Augustinian tradition they see, as Maritain has stated it, the seed corn of “. . . the pure pessimism of primitive Protestantism.”¹⁷ According to Maritain, the legacy of Augustine “. . . seems to annihilate the creature. As a result of original sin man is taken to be *essentially corrupt*: that is the doctrine of Luther, of Calvin, of Jansenius. . . . Is not this the purest pessimism? . . . Such is the . . . tragedy of the Protestant conscience . . . the creature declares its nothingness.”¹⁸

Furthermore, Luther’s well-known criticisms of Aristotle and Aquinas for their

emphasis on "reason," repels Maritain. He finds then not only excessive pessimism and crushing despair in Luther, the Augustinian monk, but in addition, because of Luther's rejection of "reason," he finds a corrosive "anti-intellectualism."¹⁹

It is not to say that liberal Christians of Maritain's genre have renounced St. Augustine as one of the great Fathers of Christendom. As Pope Leo XIII did in *Aeterni Patris*, they give him his due, yet one discerns they consider him quaint and dated, in the tradition of things "medieval."²⁰ From their vantage point, it is the legacy of St. Thomas Aquinas, steeped in the classical philosophy of Aristotle, exuding confidence in human reason, as well as in faith, that leads unerringly to modernity.²¹

III

THE LATE Reinhold Niebuhr has pointedly stated:

It is in fact something of a mystery how the Christian insights into human nature and history, expressed by Augustine, could have been subordinated to classical thought with so little sense of the conflict between them in the formulations of Thomas Aquinas; and how they could have become so authoritative in Roman Catholicism without more debate between Augustinian and Thomistic emphases.²²

In some small measure, it is hoped this essay might contribute to a reopening of such a debate.

First, on the matters of propagating the faith and ecumenism, it is unclear why the Roman Catholic Church would find Aquinas more useful in "bridgebuilding" than Augustine. As noted, Pope Leo XIII set the tone for the preference of Aquinas over Augustine in the Encyclical *Aeterni*

Patris in 1879. He contended nonbelieving rationalists would more likely be converted to the faith if the emphasis were placed upon Aquinas, for then the secular rationalists would see the compatibility of faith and reason. In the modern era, generally speaking the liberal strains of Catholicism and Protestantism have followed the tack suggested by Leo XIII. That is, for Christendom to maintain its vitality and viability it must accommodate itself to the perspectives and values of the nonbelievers of the modern liberal culture. It seems appropriate to inquire as to whether Christian and non-Christian liberals have not done a disservice to Aquinas by separating his fusion of faith and reason through becoming overwhelmingly preoccupied with "reason" in the name of wooing the nonbeliever. In brief, it is unclear as to who has converted whom.

Furthermore, it seems reasonable to ask if the Catholic Church has not been overly attentive to nonbelievers, and neglectful of believers. Today the Roman Catholic Church may be in a unique historical position to move effectively in the direction of a genuinely *believing* ecumenism by standing firm against the corrosive effects of modern liberalism, Christian and non-Christian. As dominant Protestant leadership moves leftward to accommodate itself to the world of the nonbelieving, it is losing its believing membership at an accelerated rate. If the Catholic Church should insist upon following this course, the *believing* faithful are left relatively leaderless and isolated.

To build a *bona fide believing* ecumenism, the Church will need to rely more upon the Augustinian perspective, and less on the Thomistic. Augustine is basic in the Catholic and Protestant traditions of Christianity, and he would have no peers as a point of departure in building a philosophical unity of all Christian be-

lievers. It is curious that Thomists should find universalism in Aquinas and provincialism or particularism in Augustine.²³ The facts seem otherwise, for if you are talking about *Christian* universalism, it is Augustine who has the universalist appeal, while Aquinas has become the unique property of the Catholic Church and liberal ecumenists.

Moreover, Augustine lived in a period more akin to our own era than did Aquinas, and this enhances his relevance. Augustine lived in a period of great trauma. The Roman Empire was disintegrating and the barbarians were leveling civilization. At the time of his death in 430 A.D., Augustine's home city of Hippo was under siege by the Vandals, and it was destroyed shortly after his death. Forged in a period of convulsive change and despair, Augustinian philosophy has depth, power, and profundity. In contrast, Aquinas lived in a period of comparative tranquility and stability. Life seemed to have an all-encompassing rationality about it; there were symmetry and natural order that appeared discernible to the human mind. The scholastic philosophy of Aquinas reflects the relative serenity of his time, and as a result ". . . perhaps he lacked the tragic sense."²⁴

Aquinas' most ardent supporters, such as Maritain, prefer him to Augustine, for they see in him a rational system building, which represents the summit of human intelligence, while they see in the more fundamentalist and primordial Augustinian perspective a stunted, less mature, and less realistic philosophy. On this score, if the twentieth century is any guide, the Thomists by their own standards should have shifted to an Augustinian emphasis. That is, if the standards by which a philosophy is preferred are those of maturity and realism, it is the humble fundamentalism of Augustine which seems more

relevant to our irrational, traumatic, and convulsive age, than the shallow, fatuous, and simplistic system building of modern Christian and secular rationalists, who claim to follow in the tradition of Aquinas.

Augustine is a "fundamentalist" in the best sense of the word. He drives us relentlessly to the ultimate first principle—to the mystery of transcendence. Nothing is allowed to distract us from that pursuit, whereas in classical thinking, later medieval scholastic thought, and in dominant ideas of the modern era, the distractions of the secularists and rationalists are infinite, and perhaps ultimately fatal.

There is much in the prevailing modern mind that Augustine can assist us in critically evaluating: secularism, scientism, rationalism, positivism, materialism, hedonism, utilitarianism, Marxism, pragmatism, utopianism, and the other "isms" that are the principal components of the contemporary mind. There are common denominators underlying these "isms" which can be subsumed under two broader categories.

First, with differing emphases, each "ism" contributes to the utopian or gnostic temper of the modern mind; the notion that man is the center and measure of all things; and that man with perfected human knowledge can be as God. No one exceeds Augustine in helping to critically evaluate this temper, whether it is reflected in twentieth-century "liberal" or totalitarian forms.

Secondly, each "ism" tends in its way to view man primarily as a sentient, rationalist, and perfectible mechanism, whose inadequacies are attributable to environmental rather than personal moral deficiencies; consequently, there is no need for inner moral authority of a transcendent nature within the individual. Augustine is invaluable in critically assessing that premise.

IV

FEW THINGS plague modern man more than the utopian quest, that compulsive, insatiable urge to reorder human nature and the human condition to conform to the utopian's mind's eye of what the perfected earthly good life should be. The erroneous nature and tragic impact of utopianism have absorbed the energies and talents of some of our keenest analysts. For example, although differing in emphasis and insight, it is the utopian mania to which Reinhold Niebuhr, Thomas Molnar, and Eric Voegelin refer in their respect analyses of "redemptive history," the "perennial heresy," and "Gnosticism."²⁵

Characterized by a strident secularism, the utopian impulse assumes man can create his paradise here on earth. From this perspective, according to Voegelin, political philosophy ceases to be a ". . . love of being . . . man's loving endeavor to perceive the order of being and attune himself to it . . ."; rather, philosophy can become the brittle dogma of the utopian mind that seeks to gain "dominion over being."²⁶ Men become as gods; they seek to create their own "new reality." Moreover, they become anguished and embittered at a world that refuses to conform to their personal visions of utopia, and as a result nihilism and fanaticism always lie close at hand.

Whether reflected in the fanatical forms of fascism and communism or the more genteel forms of contemporary liberalism, St. Augustine is unsurpassed as an antidote to this powerful force. Throughout his extensive writings, which include some three hundred and fifty treatises, five hundred sermons, and two hundred extant letters, Augustine reflects the fundamental Judaic-Christian view which teaches us there are moral absolutes even though they may be dimly perceived by finite, fallible man. It instructs us that man is not the center and

measure of all things, but rather God is. In contrast to his Creator, man is, in addition to being finite and fallible, characterized by a nature that has its "evil" side. Because of these limitations of man there will always be imperfections in the world *regardless of the structure of human institutions*. Out of this perspective springs the realization that men will never be as gods, and that some tragedy is inherent in the human condition. Armed with such realism, there is an acceptance of what Miguel de Unamuno called "the tragic sense of life." Man cannot wholly eliminate the storms and vicissitudes of this earthly life as the utopians would do. At best he can alter a portion of them, through faith endure the balance, and by the act of endurance ultimately prevail. To the utopian mind this is all baffling and perhaps even humorous. But to those who accept this perspective, it is "realistic" and "relevant," for it explains and accounts for more of the human condition than shallow secularism does.

Augustine commences with the insight that "the path of virtue starts from humility," while "pride is the beginning of all sin."²⁷ Humility to Augustine is not hatred of the self; rather, it means acceptance of man's incapacity to comprehend from his provincial and finite perspective the fullness of God's design. Man is the creature, not the Creator, and "Those who think that the supreme good and evil are to be found in this life are mistaken. . . . It is in vain that men look for beatitude on earth or in human nature."²⁸ Augustine admonished, ". . . how foolish man is to be violent and impatient with the lot of man," and "It is because the philosophers will not believe in this beatitude [eternal life] which they cannot see that they go on trying to fabricate here below an utterly fraudulent felicity built on virtue filled with pride and bound to fail them in the end."²⁹

From the Augustinian view the primary function of government is to maintain the internal good order of society, to protect against external enemies, and thereby enable men to order their own lives with tranquillity and predictability. In maintaining this uneasy and earthly "peace of Babylon," governments must resist the ever present temptation to be the promoter and provider of the good life, for that inexorably means government will become the hard taskmaster of the utopians. On this crucial point Augustine is at odds with the utopian builders of the classical and modern states.

Some have questioned Augustine's consistency on the role of the state, for on the one hand he assigns it the limited negative role of maintaining the "peace of Babylon," without a positive responsibility of promoting the good life, while on the other hand ultimately he came reluctantly to the conclusion that the coercive power of the state could be employed against certain religious schismatics.³⁰ There is not necessarily an inconsistency. Augustine's theories on government were honed out of the political conflicts and realities of his day. For example, as is well known, *The City of God* was written in response to the charge that Christianity was responsible for the fall of Rome which had occurred in Augustine's time. Likewise his attitude on the use of state power against the heretic was not spun from *a priori* theorizing; rather, this attitude was a reluctant conclusion he reached when confronted with the fanaticism and terrorism against the Church by the Donatist sect in North Africa. The Donatists in their frenzied opposition to the established church resorted to arson, pillage, and physical assaults, including murder.³¹ These circumstances drove Augustine to accept the power of the state, and in view of the violent nature of Donatist tactics, it is probably less a case

of coercing religious conformity than a case of the state fulfilling its primary function of maintaining public order.

In any case, Augustine approved of coercion against the Donatists in a spirit of love. He hoped after halting their fanatical outrages, they would mend their ways, and be enticed back into the traditional Christian fold. He specifically demanded that neither brutality nor torture be employed against the Donatists, and he strongly recommended that no capital punishment be used against them even when they had committed murder.

Augustine never prescribed a particular form of government, rather the pervasive theme throughout his works is that whatever form it took its primary function was to insure domestic tranquillity, and to protect against external enemies, in order that individuals would be free to order their own lives.³² Even the unfortunate interlude with the Donatists does not appear to be a genuine departure from that basic commitment.

Finally, Augustine not only cautions regarding the limitations of earthly government, he is uniquely relevant in reminding us that because of the transcendent moral worth of each person in the eyes of God *no* government can demand complete submission of body and soul, for governments are not God. This makes for an indispensable inoculant against modern statism, fascist, communist, or liberal.

V

IN ASSESSING the potential for "world government," the Augustinian perspective is invaluable. As noted, modern Thomists such as Maritain, Hutchins, and Adler, have found in the thinking of Aquinas the rationale for a comprehensive world state. In contrast, those moderns, Reinhold Niebuhr and Hans Morgenthau, for example,

who draw their nourishment more from the Augustinian than the Thomistic tradition, come to different conclusions.³³The latter borrow from the following insight offered by Augustine:

After the city comes the world community. This is the third stage in the hierarchy of human associations. First, we have the home; then the city; finally, the globe. And, of course, *as with the perils of the ocean, the bigger the community, the fuller it is of misfortunes.* . . .

It will be answered that the Roman Empire, in the interests of peaceful collaboration, imposes on nations it has conquered the yoke of both law and language . . . True enough. But at what cost! There is one war after another, havoc everywhere, tremendous slaughterings of men.

All this for peace.³⁴

It is the Thomists who are likely to think of world government as a matter of form, structure, mechanics, and legalisms to be rationally constructed and directed from above, while the Augustinians will argue that all government, including world government, is not an abstraction imposed by edict; rather, it must be the product of a sense of community arising from organic forces, rooted in living, evolving social tissue. Armed with such realism, the student of Augustine has no illusions about the utopia of the world state. He is prudent, cautious, and restrained. As with Augustine, he is braced for the interminable conflicts of world politics, for pressure, tension, and "power politics" are inherent in the nature of things human, and no panacea of human construction, including world government, can eliminate those realities. Indeed, utopian schemes of universal world government, by being constructed on illusions regarding the nature of man and the realities of politics, create false hopes and expecta-

tions, and thereby exacerbate, rather than ameliorate, international tensions and conflicts.

Moreover, the Augustinian would be deeply skeptical of a war to end all wars, and he might even question whether a "generation of peace" could be fully attained. The incisive and critical realism of Augustine may well be at its best in his analysis of the problem of war, and in this present age of utopian peacemakers and mindless pacificism, his comments seem strikingly apropos. As evil, sin, and tragedy are inherent in the human condition, Augustine contended that war would be also—realism will allow no other conclusion. Augustine observed, "To begin with, there never has been, nor, is there today, any absence of hostile foreign powers to provoke war."³⁵ Evil men lusting after power—aggressors—are endemic to human history, and noted Augustine, "When they go to war what they want is to make, if they can, their enemies their own, and then to impose on them the victor's will and call it peace."³⁶ These are primordial facts of international relations, and maudlin pacificism and dogmatic antimilitarism, secular or religious, cannot alter them. In Augustine's thinking, war was the fruit of evil, and it remained a canker incapable of being eradicated. It is essential to face that unyielding reality, and thereby be better equipped to minimize its impact.

Augustine detested war, but there were worse things—barbarism, cruelty, injustice, to mention a few. In brief, aggressors could be resisted and the Augustinian concept of the defensive "just war" emerged. Arresting is Augustine's contention that in overcoming aggression not only are the victims aided, but the aggressor himself is benefited, "For the person from whom is taken away the freedom which he abuses in doing wrong is vanquished with benefit to himself; since nothing is more truly a

misfortune than that good fortune of offenders . . . is strengthened."³⁷ When he learns that his evil conduct is not rewarded, a chastised aggressor will hopefully be diverted to more virtuous pursuits to the great benefit of himself and his neighbors.

There could also be offensive "just wars" where grievous wrongs remained unremedied by an offending state; however, Augustine severely limits this option by allowing it only in rare and compelling circumstances. When required to engage in a "just war," the Augustinian fights not in a spirit of punitiveness nor bloodlust, but in a spirit of love to achieve peace and the restoration of justice. Yet, these goals will be realized only temporarily, for evil men will inevitably emerge to disturb the delicate balance. The "peace of Babylon" is a fragile, impermanent thing, utopian visions to the contrary notwithstanding.

VI

AUGUSTINE knew that "freedom" alone was not enough. Without inner moral authority, and resulting self-mastery, there could not be a well-ordered society, regardless of what form it might take. In Augustine's words, there is the need for "right order within man himself."³⁸ The great tradition of politics since Plato has reminded us that society is man writ large, and that the good order and well being of society rests upon the inner moral authority of its individual members. As Willmoore Kendall and George W. Carey have stated it, "The people will be virtuous only to the extent that the souls of its individual components are rightly ordered . . ."³⁹ Augustine may be the most moving spokesman of this basic tenet of Western thought which has been badly eroded in the modern era.

Augustine wrote, ". . . for the happiness of the state has no other source than the

happiness of man, since the state is merely a unified group of men."⁴⁰ The search for "the happiness of man" commences, as do all searches for wisdom in the Augustinian scheme of things, with humility. As noted in discussing Augustine as an antidote to the utopian mind, the ". . . path of virtue starts with humility." Man understands and accepts his limited role in the total scheme of things. Augustine showed he was free of the *hybris*, characteristic of the modern utopians, with such eloquence as, "We can never sufficiently thank him for the gifts of nature; that we exist and are alive, that we have a reasoning mind by which we can seek Him who has made all of these things."⁴¹ Similarly, we must avoid being "blown up with the wind of self-reliance," and:

If the beauty of this order fails to delight us, it is because we ourselves, by reason of our mortality, are so enmeshed in this corner of the cosmos that we fail to perceive the beauty of a total pattern in which the particular parts, which seems ugly to us, blend in so harmonious and beautiful a way. That is why, in those situations where it is beyond our power to understand the providence of God, we are rightly commended to make an act of faith rather than allow the rashness of human vanity to criticize even a minute detail in the masterpiece of the Creator.⁴²

It is not difficult to see that Augustine was, in the words of Maurice Blondel, the "experienced master of the inner life."⁴³

In the search for "happiness" through inner moral authority, humility then is the first step. It affords that cosmic perspective from which man, and hence society, can commence to find the "right order" of things. It is Augustine's "four cardinal virtues" that assist in furthering the quest.

"Justice" seems the most fundamental of the four virtues, for it, similar to

humility, gives man perspective as to his position in the cosmic plan. As explained by Augustine, "Its task is to see that to each is given what belongs to each. And this holds for *the right order within man himself*, so that it is just for the soul to be subordinate to God, and the body to the soul, and thus for the body and soul taken together to be subject to God."⁴⁴ The other virtues assist us in the achievement of that end. "Temperance" requires of us that we ". . . must bridle our fleshly lusts if they are not to drag our will to consent to abominations of every sort For there lives no man perfected in wisdom as not to have some conflict with excessive desires," while "prudence" teaches us ". . . to distinguish what is good from what is evil So it bears witness to the fact that we are surrounded by evil and have evil within us. This virtue teaches that it is evil to consent to desires leading to sin and good to resist them."⁴⁵

Finally, Augustine instructs us, "Look, now, at the great virtue called fortitude. Is not its very function—to bear patiently with misfortune—overwhelming evidence that human life is beset with unhappiness, however wise a man may be? . . . So stultifying is Stoic pride that, all evidence to the contrary, these men still pretend to find the ultimate good in this life and to hold that they are themselves the source of their own happiness."⁴⁶

"Temperance," "prudence," and "fortitude" are not foundations for a dour puritanism. In fact, they are insurance against that. They are not ends in themselves, but instead assist us to the healthful and joyful ultimate end of man's right relationship with God, that is, to "Justice." As Augustine spoke to the Manichean temper of his time, he speaks to its modern counterparts. He does not deny nor hate life; he affirms and loves it; and seeks to give it meaning and direction.

"Humility," "justice," "temperance," "prudence," "fortitude," "right order within man himself," "master of the inner life"—it all sounds so alien to modern ears. Humility has given way to the rankest forms of *hybris*. Justice, which in Augustine's world required the body to submit to the soul and both of those to God, has fallen prey to the utopian claims that Man is the center and measure of all things. There is no God nor soul; there is only Man. Augustine's ideas of temperance have yielded to the earthly city's notions that the only restraints upon the cravings of a man are the size of his appetites. Prudence, which taught us to distinguish between "good" and "evil," has become irrelevant to much of modern thought, for all values are relative in a secular world in which there is no transcendent morality. Finally, fortitude, which instructed us to bear patiently the inescapable sorrows and trials of life, has often been replaced by the violent tantrums of the alienated souls who lash out in a fit of rage at a complex world that refuses to conform to their tortured visions of utopia.

Because modern man has come to honor the false counterparts of the Augustinian virtues, he has lost the capacity to develop "right order within man himself," and to become "master of the inner life." He increasingly drifts into neoterism, confusion, degeneracy, alienation, nihilism, and fanaticism. "Babylon" reigns. Modern man seeks personal escape by intensifying his perversion of the virtues, but this merely contributes further to the compounding and escalation of his despair. In the field of public policy, he searches for correctives in "bold" and "innovative" programs, but when the programs fail he is not deterred. He presses on for ever greater "boldness" and "innovation," for he cannot perceive that the principal sources of the malaise lie not in defective public planning, but rather they lie in the imperfectibility of the hu-

man condition and in the absence of inner moral authority *within* the *individuals* who compose society.

It is not intended here to recreate the "Chartres theme" of Henry Adams. However, if it is agreed that in our time we need to regain inner moral authority for the individual, and thereby contribute to the good order of society as a whole, the modern mind may have something to learn from the Middle Ages. An age that produces internationally, Hitlers and Stalins, and on a more personalized scale, Jerry Rubins and Abbie Hoffmans, might well profit from reflecting on an age which over its span is characterized by such as St. Augustine, St. Francis, and St. Thomas à Kempis. (I find it an intriguing thesis that outside of St. Augustine's *City of God*, St. Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ* may speak more cogently and eloquently to the social and political disorders of our time, with their origins in utopianism and the absence of inner moral authority, than any other classic of Western thought.) These figures, as "masters of the inner life," displayed humility, grace, love, peace, joy, patience, a contemplative mind, discipline, and civility. In contrast, with our modern utopian fanatics, and their more genteel imitators, these qualities are superseded respectively by arrogance, alienation, hate, violence, despair, compulsiveness, mindlessness, license, and boorishness.

In the words of Etienne Gilson, "Let us admit that the Christian virtues are useful to the good order and prosperity of the commonwealth . . ." ⁴⁷

VII

Kenneth Clark in his best-selling book, *Civilisation*, concluded with the observation, ". . . it is lack of confidence, more than anything else, that kills civilisation.

We can destroy ourselves by cynicism and disillusion. . . . The trouble is that there is still no centre. The moral and intellectual failure of Marxism has left us with no alternative to heroic materialism, and that isn't enough."⁴⁸ Similarly, columnist Tom Wicker has written, "What has really got us in its grip today in my judgment is the general concern . . . with the breakdown of American life, because life doesn't work anymore."⁴⁹ Likewise, in a July 6, 1971 speech at Kansas City, Missouri, President Nixon spoke of a "crisis of confidence" in an America plagued with ". . . drugs, defeatism, negativism and alienation." The President stated, "The great civilizations of the past—as they have become wealthy, as they have lost their will to live, to improve—they have become subject to the decadence that has destroyed civilization. The United States is now reaching that point."

Every age weeps over its alleged disintegration, and to contend this is unique to the modern age is to show symptoms of suffering from contemporaneity, the disease where historical and philosophical perspectives are absent. Nevertheless, Clark, Wicker, and the President are touching a responsive cord with many in suggesting a quickening and deepening of the feeling that our civilization has lost its "confidence," its "centre," and that ". . . life doesn't work anymore."

It must be a particularly bitter disappointment to the secularists and rationalists to see their own children deeply alienated and rebelling in a period of unprecedented affluence. The radical student movements and the "counterculture" youth of Consciousness III are primarily the children of the affluent, and they fly in the face of the liberal culture's major operating premise that with health and wealth human anxiety will cease, and the secular utopia is close at hand. One senses the relevance

of Augustine's stricture, "Depraved by prosperity and unchastened by adversity, you desire, in your security, not the peace of the state but liberty for license . . . (N) of a peaceful life, but undisturbed wickedness."⁵⁰

Something has gone awry. Even in the midst of unparalleled prosperity and well-being, life is no longer fulfilling or satisfying. The political system seems to be a part of the problem rather than a part of the solution. It responds to the deepening malaise, but still in the old styles and forms. Unconsciously the political actors are captives of the liberal culture. They attempt to outdo each other in promising greater material and physical well-being—they will end the war, eliminate poverty, pollution, ignorance, and disease. They over promise, and arouse false expectations, which all contributes to compounding the intense restlessness. Yet, one senses even if the political actors could fulfill their promises, the malaise would not disappear, for it is with the off-spring of the affluent, where the disease is primarily centered, and for the most part, they are spared the real impact of the war, poverty, pollution, ignorance, and disease.

To put it bluntly, the problem seems spiritual and not material. There is a deep spiritual longing with the radical young and the counterculture, and they seek to satisfy it through things as differing as the permissive world of the drug culture and the hardened, disciplined world of the radical revolutionary. Radical leader Tom Hayden expresses this longing for things spiritual in contending, "Radicalism presumes a willingness to continually press forward the query: Why?" Hayden sees the "contours of a generation consciously drifting," and he issues the challenge for ". . . finding a *moral meaning* in life that is direct and authentic for the self." With pathetic despair, Hayden demands to know

why today we are ". . . alienated, valueless, the apathetic pawns of circumstance . . . so rootless."⁵¹ Similarly, the Port Huron statement of the Students for a Democratic Society, which Hayden assisted in founding, betrays this spiritual longing when it refers plaintively to people ". . . feeling the press of complexity upon *the emptiness of life* . . ." and when it laments, "Loneliness, estrangement, isolation describe the vast distance between man and man today."⁵² As several commentators sympathetic to the radicals have found, the restless young are searching "for something to affirm"; they want to know "What is it all for?"; they are ". . . ferreting for basics, roots."⁵³ Even Herbert Marcuse has emphasized that his "Great Refusal" is a "*moral rebellion*" in which the driving force is to find the "authenticity" of life.⁵⁴

The great enigma of contemporary radicalism or of the mind of Consciousness III is that spiritual satisfaction should be sought in such hedonistic figures as the Janis Joplins and the Jimi Hendrixes, or on the other hand, in such hardened, puritanical, utopian fanatics as Mao, Ché, Ho, and Malcolm X. In the words of St. Augustine, this is "*pell mell confusion*." As disparate as these figures are, the one common philosophical thread is their rejection of the religious heritage of the West. Despair and alienation would seem to be the inevitably bitter fruit of seeking "moral meaning" or "authenticity" from sources that have themselves rejected that portion of the Western tradition capable of fulfilling those needs.

Reinhold Niebuhr has cut to the heart of the matter by warning, "A generation which finds its communities imperiled and in decay from the smallest and most primordial community, the family, to the largest and most recent, the potential world community, might well take counsel of Augustine in solving its perplexities."⁵⁵

Some may still question if it is really necessary to turn to a religious figure whose impact is identified with "medievalism" and not "modern man." It is a question that cannot be answered to everyone's satisfaction. I agree with Kendall and Carey that our loss of religious moorings and a sense of transcendence ". . . represents a very fundamental derailment [of the American political tradition] and *the most dangerous one*."⁵⁶ Similarly, I agree with Will Herberg that ". . . the problem of the social order is a problem that in essence is theological and metaphysical. It is the theological and metaphysical tradition that has provided the sustaining armature of Western culture."⁵⁷ Or as Russell Kirk succinctly puts it, "At bottom, the difference of Burke from the revolutionaries—like all large differences of opinion—was theological . . ."⁵⁸ If Kendall, Carey, Herberg, and Kirk are correct, then Augustine's position should be secure and preeminent.

In our pervasively secular age, which

seeks understanding and offers explanation only in "political," "social," and "economic" terms, a great religious mind, if it does nothing else, can afford us perspective, and thereby contribute to a genuinely comprehensive and critical *epistèmè politiké*. Few have stated it more movingly than John Henry Newman:

People say to me that it is but a dream to suppose that Christianity should regain the organic power in human society which once it possessed. I cannot help that; I never said it could. I am not a politician; I am proposing no measures, but exposing a fallacy and resisting a pretence The ascendancy of faith may be impractical, but the reign of knowledge is incomprehensible. The problem for statesmen of this age is how to educate the masses, and literature and science cannot give the solution⁵⁹

I am indebted to George W. Carey and Francis G. Wilson for their invaluable suggestions in the preparation of this essay.

⁵⁶On the general need for the recovery of a comprehensive and critical political science, see Dante Germino, *Beyond Ideology: The Revival of Political Theory* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

⁵⁷Roy W. Battenhouse (ed.), *Companion to the Study of St. Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 4. For agreement, see Crane Brinton, *Ideas and Men: The Story of Western Thought* (2nd ed.; Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 145.

⁵⁸Pope Leo XIII, *The Great Encyclical Letters of Pope Leo XIII* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1903), p. 48.

⁵⁹In *Rerum Novarum* the Pope strongly scored "the callousness of employers and the greed of unrestrained competition"; however, it is noteworthy that, among other things, he extolled the work ethic, spoke of "the inviolability of private property," was critical of "leveling down," condemned "revolutionary change," warned against

excessive taxation, and he considered socialism "futile" and "unjust." Indeed, by contemporary standards the Encyclical is "conservative" in tone. The Encyclical can be found in *Ibid.*, pp. 208-248.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁶⁰Jacques Maritain, *True Humanism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), p. 82.

⁶¹Jacques Maritain, *The Rights of Man and Natural Law* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), pp. 113-114.

⁶²Maritain, *True Humanism*, p. 108; Jacques Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1941), p. 78.

⁶³Jacques Maritain, *The Peasant of Garonne* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968), p. 22.

⁶⁴*Ibid.* One writer has found strong similarities in the political thinking of Maritain and John Kenneth Galbraith. See Charles O'Donnell's analysis, "Jacques Maritain—Political Philosopher," in

Joseph W. Evans (ed.), *Jacques Maritain: The Man and His Achievement* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963), p. 175.

²¹Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 197. For the relevant works of Adler and Hutchins, see Mortimer Adler, *How to Think About War and Peace* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1944); Robert M. Hutchins, *St. Thomas and the World State* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1949).

²²Maritain, *Man and the State*, p. 197. For a similar rationale also see, Hutchins, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

²³Maritain, *Man and the State*, p. 208.

²⁴Hutchins, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 39.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁷Maritain, *True Humanism*, p. 63.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁹Jacques Maritain, *St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1958), p. 96. For Maritain's most scathing treatment of Luther, see Chapter 1 of his *Three Reformers: Luther, Descartes, and Rousseau* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950). For another noted admirer of St. Thomas who takes a similar tack on Luther, see G. K. Chesterton, *St. Thomas Aquinas* (Garden City: Image Books, Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1956), in particular, pp. 194-196.

³⁰Maritain biographer Charles A. Fecher has recorded, "Nothing irritates Maritain more than to be accused of reaction or medievalism . . ." See, *The Philosophy of Jacques Maritain* (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1953), p. 228.

³¹In addition to the previously cited works, for a sampling of other writings that reveal the modern liberal preference for the tradition of Aquinas over that of Augustine, see, Vernon J. Bourke, *Aquinas' Search for Wisdom* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1964); M. D. Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1964); M. C. D'Arcy, *Thomas Aquinas* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1930); Thomas Gilby, *The Political Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Ralph M. McNerny, *Thomism in an Age of Renewal* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1966); L. H. Petitot, *The Life and Spirit of Thomas Aquinas* (Chicago: The Priory Press, 1966); Josef Pieper, *Guide to Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Mentor-Omega Book, The New American Library, 1964).

³²Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 134.

³³For example, see Maritain, *St. Thomas Aquinas*.

³⁴Gilby, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

³⁵Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and The Children of Darkness* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944); Thomas Molnar, *Utopia: The Perennial Heresy* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967); Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1968).

³⁶Voegelin, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

³⁷St. Augustine, *The City of God*, Book II, Ch. 7; Book XIV, Ch. 13. In my references to *The City of God* I am quoting from the Image Books edition, published in 1958 by Doubleday & Co., Inc. Compared with other minor and major editions of Augustine's works, I found the Image Books edition superior in felicity of style and readability. To facilitate reference to any edition of *The City of God*, I have cited the relevant Book and Chapter. This method is employed in all subsequent references.

³⁸*The City of God*, Book XIX, Ch. 4.

³⁹St. Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, Book IV, Ch. 7. (This particular quote is from the Mentor-Omega Book edition, The New American Library, 1963, p. 77.); *The City of God*, Book XIX, Ch. 4.

⁴⁰For example, this question is raised in Herbert A. Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), pp. 216, 220.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 193. Also see M. C. D'Arcy, *et al.*, *St. Augustine* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, World Publishing Company, 1957), p. 97.

⁴²Deane, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

⁴³For example, see Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932); Hans Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1946).

Although displaying affinities for St. Augustine at the philosophical level, often on contemporary policy questions Niebuhr and Morgenthau have followed more secular, liberal, and rationalistic traditions.

⁴⁴*The City of God*, Book XIX, Ch. 7. (Italics added.)

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, Book XIX, Ch. 12.

⁴⁷St. Augustine's letter to Marcellinus in Philip Schaff (ed.), *A Select Library of the Nicene and*

Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), Vol. I, p. 485.

³⁸*The City of God*, Book XIX, Ch. 4.

³⁹Willmoore Kendall and George W. Carey, *The Basic Symbols of the American Political Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), p. 58.

⁴⁰Henry Paolucci (ed.), *The Political Writings of St. Augustine* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1962), p. 269.

⁴¹*The City of God*, Book VII, Ch. 31.

⁴²*Ibid.*, Book XIX, Ch. 27; Book XII, Ch. 4.

⁴³D'Arcy, et al., *St. Augustine*, p. 352.

⁴⁴*The City of God*, Book XIX, Ch. 4. (Italics added.)

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁶*Ibid.* For a concise discussion of the virtues, see Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine* (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1967), p. 131.

⁴⁷In the Foreword to St. Augustine, *The City of God* (Garden City: Image Books, Doubleday and Co., 1958), p. 19.

⁴⁸Kenneth Clark, *Civilisation* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969), p. 347.

⁴⁹Tom Wicker, "The Politics Before Us," *New York Review of Books*, (February 11, 1971), p. 15.

⁵⁰*The City of God*, Book I, Ch. 33; Book II, Ch. 29.

⁵¹Mitchell Cohen and Dennis Hale (eds.), *The New Student Left* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), pp. 6, 280, 283, 284. (Italics added.)

⁵²*Ibid.*, pp. 10, 13. (Italics added.)

⁵³*Ibid.*, pp. xxix, xxx, 6, 312.

⁵⁴Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), *passim*.

⁵⁵Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems*, p. 146.

⁵⁶Kendall and Carey, *op. cit.*, p. 145. (Italics added.)

⁵⁷Will Herberg, "Modern Man in a Metaphysical Wasteland," *The Intercollegiate Review*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Winter, 1968-69), p. 79.

⁵⁸Russell Kirk, *Edmund Burke: A Genius Reconsidered* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1967), p. 167.

⁵⁹Geoffrey Tilloston (ed.), *Newman: Prose and Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 100.