Introduction

I. *Status Quaestionis*

Augustine's consideration of faith, politics, and society has largely been rendered synonymous with his work *De Civitate Dei*. This work, written at the beginning of the fifth century c.e., is among the most theologically and historically influential works in the history of Christianity. However, this identification has led to an often generic reduction of Augustine's social and political thought to what is often called the theory of "two cities." This simplified notion attributed to Augustine presents an obfuscation of the true theological foundations of Augustine's insight, and is typically summarized as a patristic antecedent of modern conceptions of Church and state. Unfortunately, many political scientists, philosophers, and even theologians see in this reduction a fair summary of the contributions of St. Augustine to Western political and social thought, and fail to plumb the depths of his ideas, which have remained the object of study and debate since his death in the fifth century. In this present study of contemporary Augustinian interpretations, it is my hope that, at the very least, the complexity and implications of Augustine's thought will become clearer, and that my work will aid in a more nuanced and informed consideration of the Bishop of Hippo in various halls of the contemporary academy.

It must be stated at the outset that the scope of Augustine's work normally cited in the consideration of his political and social thought, especially his *City of God* and a number of his letters and sermons, was not directly political. As we will see throughout this study, Augustine's focus in general remained directly on the journey of the pilgrim soul in the *saeculum*.[1] The discovery of political and social implications to Augustine's work has been, therefore, the work of interpreters both contemporary to Augustine himself and those that emerged after his death. As R. W. Dyson explains, "Insofar as the elements of Augustine's political, social and historical thought are represented in the *City of God*, they are present, if one may so express it, in much the way that the fragments of a pot might be present at an archaeological site. They have to be identified, sorted out from large masses of other material, and assembled."[2] Such a task was deemed necessary in order to clarify the relationship of the Church and the Roman Empire, and later the Church and the Gothic kingdoms, in the wake of the imperial collapse of Rome. As John Rist has synthesized:

> There can be good Christian emperors, but there is no guarantee that a Christian government will behave in a Christian fashion, and after a brief period of hesitation Augustine resolutely refused the Constantinian option—leading towards Caesaropapism—of any 'sacralization' of the state. Yet he spelled out no clear political alternative and the key problem of 'political Augustinianism' was not yet on the table: that is, whether the 'fullness of (secular) power' should reside with the Church (in practice the pope), with the Empire or its successors, however desacralized they might become, or with neither.[3]

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1. Joanna Scott, "Contemporary Influence of Augustine's Political Thought," in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan Fitzgerald, O. S. A., (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Co., 2002), 658. For an extensive treatment of this theme, see Miles Hollingworth, *The Pilgrim City: St. Augustine of Hippo and his Innovation in Political Thought* (London: T&T Clark, 2010).
2. *CG*, xv.

The question of the rightful placement of power seemed a natural one to examine within Augustine's work. Therefore, Dyson has identified four significant points in *City of God*, all of which have been important to subsequent interpreters and which will aid our study here as well. First, Augustine asserted that earthly government though necessarily flawed remained "indispensable" to the securing of peace and order in human society.[4] Second, Augustine had acknowledged that political community existed according to the divine will, and was endowed with limited authority and power from God, the source of all power.[5] Third, Augustine recognized the heroic deeds and natural virtues of many celebrated heroes of Rome, all the while pointing out the misguided love and transient nature of their virtue.[6] Finally, Augustine recognized that the imperfect Christian state, though sinful and earthly, "can nonetheless provide a milieu within which the Church can do her work effectively and the Christian life can be lived by its citizens."[7]

The debate over the role of secular authority and its relationship to the Church during the Middle Ages made reference to these basic concepts in Augustine's thought.[8] Indeed, as the Church asserted its authority over secular matters, it cited the Bishop of Hippo. This connection would lead to the thesis of Henri-Xavier Arquillière,

3. John Rist, *What is Truth? From the Academy to the Vatican* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 258.

4. *CG*, xxiv. We will discuss throughout this work the significance of that earthly peace and the limitations of human government in obtaining it. My discussion of Robert Markus will build upon this point as well.

5. *CG*, xxv. This observation will be significant in the work of Arquillière and Combès, who identify the importance assigned to this point throughout the Middle Ages.

6. *CG*, xxvi. This will be an important point in Robert Dodaro's distinction of Augustine's view of pagan and Christian virtue.

7. *CG*, xxvii. This argument will be of significance in the considerations of John Milbank, Charles Mathewes, and others.

8. *CG*, xxix.

often called "political Augustinianism."[9] Rist clarifies the link between Augustine and this movement:

> Insofar as political Augustinianism has a theoretical basis—and in this resides much of its claim to be Augustinian—it is that politics is a branch of morality, that in politics as in private life all decisions are going to affect the state of one's immortal soul . . . the leading politician, whether king or emperor, is no different from the ordinary man; he can and should be told when he sins.[10]

This debate evolved, however, with the disconnect introduced by Marsilius of Padua and later William Ockham between political authority and morality, as politics was reduced to functionality and "utility."[11] As Rist notes, this turn in the debate was inevitably "pointing towards the emergence of an independent secular authority."[12] This latter concept of secular authority and the rise of the modern state created new debates in Augustinian interpretation. It will become evident that the last century in particular has been a fertile period for such interpretations, ranging from questions of Augustinian hermeneutics to applications of Augustine's thought in the contemporary public square. We turn now, therefore, to the task at hand and seek to clarify the various interpretations that have emerged, their historical development, and potential movements forward.

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9. This theme will be discussed at length, as well as the progression of this theme.
10. Rist, *What is Truth?*, 259. Rist agrees with Robert Dodaro's assessment that Augustine's concern was not the relationship of the Church and government, but the attitude and disposition of the Christian in political office.
11. Ibid., 266.
12. Ibid.

II. The Question of Augustine's Political and Social Vision

During his address to the Federal Parliament of Germany in 2011, Pope Benedict XVI sought to reflect upon the role and duty of the politician in light of contemporary challenges. To do so, Pope Benedict cited Book XIX of St. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, noting:

> Naturally a politician will seek success, without which he would have no opportunity for effective political action at all. Yet success is subordinated to the criterion of justice, to the will to do what is right, and to the understanding of what is right. Success can also be seductive and thus can open up the path towards the falsification of what is right, towards the destruction of justice. "Without justice–what else is the State but a great band of robbers?," as Saint Augustine once said.[13]

This reference to Augustine's *City of God*, madein a speech to the German Parliament, points to a now century-old trend of interpreting and analyzing the thought of St. Augustine on issues related to both society and politics. The distinction between these two realms is important to keep in mind throughout this work. The political realm in this context implies those institutions which focus on governing and the obligations such governance brings upon citizens, e.g., taxes, military service, and other civic activities. The social realm here refers to the association of human beings in general, namely the various non–political communities in which each human being is a member. While the political elements of Augustine's thought are often commented on, it is important to remember that he focused on these social groupings as well, especially the family and the local community created by multiple families. While political life is necessarily social, it remains true that not every form of social life is political in nature. However, both realms would be of concern

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13. Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Federal Parliament in Berlin's Reichstag Building: Politics at the Service of Rights and Justice, September 24, 2011. Original German text in *AAS* 103 (2011): 663-669; official English translation in *L'Osservatore Romano*, September 28, 2011, 7.

to Augustine of Hippo, inasmuch as the Christian must navigate through both on this earthly pilgrimage.

Furthermore, Augustine's work offers what can be called a "systematic" approach to the various questions surrounding these distinct realms of human community. Such a systematic response points to the fact that Augustine consistently addressed these concerns in reference to his larger theological concepts and the pressing theological challenges presented to him by Stoicism, Pelagianism, and Donatism. Therefore, the systematic nature of Augustine's thought on human society and political life cannot be understood in a modern sense, but rather as the integral connection of Augustine's social and political views in relation to his historical context and theology. Augustine's responses to social and political questions, many of which continue to emerge today, were not formed in a vacuum, but rather were formulated in light of the larger questions he grappled with, namely Christ and Revelation, nature and grace, sin and redemption, history and its fulfillment, and the Church and imperial rule.[14] Necessarily, Augustine's systematic response to political and social questions also conveys the components of a Christian ethic for particular circumstances, especially when the Christian is called upon to participate in social and political activities. However, this ethic, like his views on social and political issues, is not programmatic, but rather integral with his theological and pastoral concerns. While Augustine's systematic approach and the ethical principles that he developed in social and political matters have been debated for nearly a century, as we will see in this discussion, they continue to spark new interpretations and raise new points of debate.

14. While I am singling out political and social questions in this thesis, I will attempt to integrally present these questions within the larger arguments of the scholars who have participated in this debate.

Augustinian interpretation of political and social issues developed and evolved over the course of the twentieth century. In 1921, the Anglican priest and theologian John Neville Figgis, who had been a leader in the Christian Socialist Movement in England, surveyed both the physical and ideological devastation caused by World War I and turned to St. Augustine. Eugene McCarraher has commented on what might have drawn Figgis to Augustine, "Figgis wrote, like Augustine, in the smoky twilight of a civilization racked by war and despair."[15] Figgis built his work upon that of Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923), especially Troeltsch's *Augustin, die christliche Antike und die Mittelalter*, where he argued that the Bishop of Hippo established a "Christian cultural ethic" centered in the human pursuit of the *summum bonum* and fraternal charity.[16] Figgis embraced this idea and advocated for Augustine's relevance by demonstrating the possibilities of this "Christian cultural ethic" in post-war Europe. He argued, therefore, that Augustine's *City of God* remained essential for the student of political thought and was a relevant study for modernity in general.[17]

While Figgis wrote immediately after World War I, the discussion of Augustine's political and social thought became synonymous both positively and negatively with another author, namely H. X. Arquillière and his 1933 work, *L'Augustinisme Politique*. Arquillière's work, its immediate influences, and the responses it provoked, form the initial scope of this work. In fact, the English rendering of Arquillière's title, namely "Political Augustinianism," will refer

15. Eugene McCarraher, "Enchanted City of Man: The State and the Market in Augustinian Perspective," in *Augustine and Politics*, ed. John Doody, K. Hughes & K. Paffenroth (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 267. McCarraher sees a direct link between Figgis and the Radical Orthodoxy Movement. See *Augustine and Politics*, 269–271.

16. Eric Saak, *Highway to Heaven: The Augustinian Platform Between Reform and Reformation, 1292-1524* (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2002), 6.

17. John Neville Figgis, *The Political Aspects of S. Augustine's 'City of God'*, 2nd ed. (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1963), 115.

throughout this project to Arquillière's specific argument and also to the trend he has spurred in Augustinian interpretation. It is of no surprise that the center of this discussion remains Augustine's concept of two cities, the city of God and the city of man. The nature of these two cities, as well as their rapport, if any, is the question which lies at the core of most of the works we will discuss. However, as we will later see, the entire question around Augustine's two cities would be transformed in 1955 by the proposal of Henri-Irénée Marrou of a *tertium quid*, a point of encounter between the two cities. Marrou's assertion is transformative, as it paved the way for new approaches in Augustinian interpretation. Among these new approaches would be that of Robert Markus and his work, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine.*

From the very beginning of this debate, therefore, it is clear that interpreting Augustine's political and social thought has also implied an attempt at drawing "Augustinian" social and political principles, which can be applied to the contemporary situation of the interpreter. Therefore, the authors we will discuss and the debates that have emerged between them are focused not only on the nature of Augustine's ideas themselves, but also the relevance his principles hold for the relationship of the Church and civil society and the role of the Christian in a secular state. These attempts in applying Augustine's principles, while at times derided by historians and classicists, have been influenced by the context and challenges of the era of each author who has taken up this task. For example, in the aftermath of both World Wars, Augustine's ideas were reflected upon anew and various interpretations emerged. In recent years, Augustine's vision has once again played an important role in the discussions of war, terrorism, and even the evolution of European identity. In the United States, for example, Augustine's name still emerges most frequently during wartime, as debates over the

meaning of "just war" immediately recall the thought and legacy of the Bishop of Hippo. It is important, therefore, to recognize that the contemporary discussion of Augustine's social and political vision has been influenced by the history of contemporary theology and the history of the twentieth century in general.

The French voice, for instance, which dominated the beginning of this endeavor, largely gives way to the thought and influence of Reinhold Niebuhr and other Anglo-American thinkers after World War II. Even within the English-speaking world, however, Niebuhr's "realist" interpretation would not be the last word. Robert Markus's concept of *saeculum* in Augustine provoked further discussion, and subsequently led to numerous responses from various authors, including John Milbank and the Radical Orthodoxy movement. Furthermore, a new effort has emerged to recapture the theological context and nature of Augustine's vision of two cities. While this effort was taken up initially by writers such as Ernest Fortin and James Schall, it has more recently been advanced at the turn of the twenty-first century by others like Peter Iver Kaufman and Robert Dodaro. As this study will attempt to show, the discussion of Augustine's political and social thought has been a fruitful area of patristic, theological, and philosophical debate over the past century. This work, therefore, seeks to offer a new systematic presentation of the insights, challenges, and applications that have emerged from this century-long discussion.

III. Purpose and Method

The nature of this study by necessity is both expository and analytical, as it seeks to present systematically the various interpretations of Augustine on issues of social and political life and examine the hermeneutical and contextual questions that undergird such

interpretations. This project, therefore, has a threefold purpose. Firstly, it is our goal to critically review a substantial and representative part of the literature of twentieth and twenty-first century applications of Augustine's political and social thought. Furthermore, we will evaluate the positions taken by the scholars in question by relating them critically. This will allow a demonstration of the contrasts both in interpretation and application of Augustine's principles on issues of social and political life. By comparing their interpretations, we also enter the hermeneutical dimension of this discussion, one that allows us to examine which hermeneutics have been utilized and how deftly they have been applied. Finally, throughout this discussion we will discuss the historiography of the political Augustinian debate as a whole, in order to shed light on its origins, its development, and its current status. Here, we will address the question of why this discussion has experienced a "continental drift" primarily from the French towards the Anglo-American academy, and also why Marrou's *tertium quid* sparked so much interest in the English-speaking world. Also, this last question of historiography will bring us to the current attempt of recent thinkers to capture an "authentic" Augustinian hermeneutic towards political and social questions.

Such a historical evaluation of these Augustinian interpretations is in itself a systematic process, requiring both the synthesis and analysis of numerous works. While one might initially separate the historical and systematic tasks, in reality, the evaluations here attempt to employ both tasks integrally. What is presented here, therefore, is not simply another voice in the debate itself, but a systematic view of the discussion of Augustine's political thought and its progression from the turn of the twentieth century until the present. I have sought to present the thought of various scholars, demonstrate points of interconnectedness and conflict, and analyze both the substance

of each argument and its relationship to the debate in general. The first four chapters, therefore, will present the interpretations of Augustine's social and political thought from Arquillière's initial "political Augustinian" project to recent efforts in the new millennium. In the first chapter, focusing on the concept of "l'augustinisme politique," we will discuss the influence of Étienne Gilson, the concept's introduction by Arquillière, and subsequent responses by Combès and Marrou, especially his *tertium quid*. Subsequently, in chapter two we will move to the early American engagement of Augustine's thought, which remained for several decades largely overshadowed by the realism of Reinhold Niebuhr and the responses that emerged to his approach.

After discussing the post–World War II shifts in this debate, we will observe in chapter three and chapter four the emergence of a contemporary Anglo-American contribution, led initially by Robert Markus and his introduction of an Augustinian *saeculum*. We will examine also the significant responses to this theory offered by other authors. Among these respondents are John Milbank, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Peter Iver Kaufman, Robert Dodaro, Charles Mathewes, and other important contemporary voices. Also examined among these authors will be the voices of Joseph Ratzinger and Rowan Williams, both of whom examined this topic as theologians and have in fact returned to it in recent years. Finally, having laid out the origins of this discussion, its first major advancements, and the contemporary debate it has inspired, the last chapter will focus upon the hermeneutical questions that pervade this area of Augustinian interpretation and will explore some important contemporary applications of Augustine's thought. In this last chapter as well, the contemporary theological discussion of Augustine's ideas will be connected to some significant Magisterial texts which focus upon the relationship of the Church and the Christian to civil society.

IV. Clarifications

Before going any further, it is important to note that the scope of this study has prevented entrance into certain related discussions in Augustinian scholarship. First, the focus of this project relates directly to the "political Augustinian" movement initiated by Arquillière's work. As a result, interpretations of Augustine connected to the early twentieth century shifts in the German theological school, especially in the work of Otto Gierke, Albrecht Ritschl, and Adolf von Harnack, are outside of the scope of this work. While those authors are influential on the work of Figgis and others, they are not widely engaged in Arquillière's *L'Augustinisme Politique*.[18] Also, these works and much of the late-nineteenth-century scholarship on Augustine were largely "archaeological," and generally did not apply principles of Augustine's thought on contemporary challenges. While certainly deserving of a comprehensive treatment of their theological contributions, such a study is simply outside of the goals of this project. Also, in reading this work, it must be remembered that as the discussion advances, the distinctions among authors will become increasingly evident and points of debate will emerge with greater clarity.

Also, Augustine's concepts of just war and original sin are themes that I have attempted to engage respectfully and integrally where necessary. However, I remain conscious that the debate around them remains far beyond what can be possibly included in this work. These concepts have their own collections of literature and their own independent historiographies, which cannot be adequately recounted

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18. Arquillière references Gierke and Harnack in his bibliography, but only once does he cite Harnack in the text of his work. See *Henri-Xavier Arquillière, L'augustinisme politique: Essai sur la formation des théories politiques du Moyen Âge* (Paris: J. VRIN, 1955), 131.

in this work. Therefore, where relevant, these themes and others have been included and discussed, but in no way does their inclusion constitute an exhaustive study. Also, it must be noted that this work seeks to be a systematic theological discussion; it is not a patristic study of Augustine. As a result, our focus remains the course of Augustinian interpretation and the application of Augustine's work in contemporary theology over the course of the last century. From this perspective, I believe it can safely be argued that the future prospects of Augustinian interpretation and the application of Augustine's social and political vision are assured. Finally, throughout the literature of this debate, many authors use the term "state" to describe the human political community within the earthly city. However, it must be noted that Augustine did not share a modern conception of state, but rather experienced the political reality of the Roman Empire. As a result, in the application of Augustine's ideas, the use of the term state is not meant to be anachronistic, but rather part of an attempt at applying Augustine's principles to contemporary political realities.