

THE POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF
AUGUSTINE, THOMAS AQUINAS, AND
REINHOLD NIEBUHR

ESSAYS IN POLITICAL THEOLOGY AND CHRISTIAN
REALISM



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CONTENTS

| | |
|--|------------|
| INTRODUCTION..... | 3 |
| CHAPTER ONE: AUGUSTINE'S REALISM | 18 |
| I. THE CHRISTIAN REALIST APPROACH TO HISTORY | 18 |
| II. THE REASONS FOR WAR | 23 |
| III. FEAR AND THE DANGERS OF ABSOLUTE VICTORY | 28 |
| IV. THE REASONS FOR ROMAN DECLINE..... | 32 |
| V. THE VISIBLE AND THE INVISIBLE..... | 41 |
| VI. JERUSALEM: "VISION OF PEACE" | 51 |
| CHAPTER TWO: THOMAS AQUINAS' REALISM | 60 |
| I. REALISM AND FINAL GOOD | 60 |
| II. GOVERNMENT AND AUTHORITY | 67 |
| III. REALISM IN NATURAL LAW THEORY | 78 |
| CHAPTER THREE: REINHOLD NIEBUHR'S REALISM..... | 88 |
| I. THE DANGERS OF LEGALISM | 88 |
| II. THE NATURE OF MAN: CLASSICAL, BIBLICAL, AND MODERN VIEWS..... | 95 |
| III. THE ILLUSIONS OF POLITICAL UTOPIAS..... | 112 |
| IV. THE CHRISTIAN REALIST PERSPECTIVE..... | 119 |
| CONCLUSION | 132 |
| ESSAYS IN POLITICAL THEOLOGY..... | 135 |
| WHAT IS CHRISTIAN POLITICS?..... | 137 |
| MARTIN LUTHER'S POLITICAL THEOLOGY: FREEDOM IS OBEDIENCE, JUSTICE IS LOVE | 173 |
| RUSSIA AND THE WEST: FYODOR TYUTCHEV ON RUSSIAN EXCEPTIONALISM..... | 198 |
| STATE AND IDEOLOGY. NOTES ON NIEBUHR AND VOGELIN..... | 245 |

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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

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).

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 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

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

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,

"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 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

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).

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 intermingled in this present life, as Augustine argues, political philosophy and political theology are mixed

⁷ Patterson, 3.

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.

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.

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 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

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).

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 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

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 *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*

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."

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)

How a "metaphysician," so to 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

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)

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 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*.

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 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)

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 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;

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.

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

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

with Alaric."²⁶ The refusal does not mean that the 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

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.

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

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 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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³⁵ CD I:30

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 *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

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 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

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 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

⁴⁰ CD II:1

⁴¹ CD II:4

⁴² CD II:19

⁴³ CD II:24

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

⁴⁴ Morgenthau, 63.

a foreign "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

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 Eduard Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of Rome*, Vol.4, (Henry Bohn, 1854) pp.235-236.

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 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

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.)

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" 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

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.

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 "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

⁵⁰ CD. III:1

⁵¹ CD. IV:2

⁵² Ibid.

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;

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

lacking true qualities, it was not prepared to sustain "psychologically" (or "spiritually") the burden of its 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

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)

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 "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

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.

⁵⁸ CD, IV:15

⁵⁹ CD, IV:2

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.

"[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

⁶⁰ CD, IV:4

⁶¹ CD, V:12

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

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

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 Trostayanskiy, 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 *Civitate 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 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

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,

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

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 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,

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)

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)

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 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

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

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)

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 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.

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

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

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)

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 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

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*.

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. 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

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)

⁸¹ CD XI:1

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 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

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*.

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

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.

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

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)

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 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

⁸⁹ CD VIII:5

⁹⁰ CD VIII:6

⁹¹ CD VIII:7

"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 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

⁹² CD IX:20

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

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 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

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.

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

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

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 *communion*.

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)

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 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

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."

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, 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

¹⁰⁶ CD XIX:4

¹⁰⁷ CD XX:3

¹⁰⁸ CD XIX:1

¹⁰⁹ CD XIX:12

¹¹⁰ CD XIX:11

¹¹¹ CD XIX:12

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 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

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 [...] 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

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.

¹¹⁶ CD XIX:14

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 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

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)

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, himself, while giving the family as an example for good governance, does not argue that this type of primitive political

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

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

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)

formulation of "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

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)

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 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 wellbeing 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-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

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

126

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 127

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 128

"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

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

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

rulers, monarchy must be organized as a mixed government that resembles 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

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.

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

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 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,

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 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)

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 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 Aquinas, himself, does not quickly

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

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

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 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

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 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

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 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)

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 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.

¹⁴⁰ Strauss 1953, p.34

"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_enciclica-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

¹⁴³ Simon 1948, 1

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 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.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 32

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

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.

in the practical usefulness of transcendent ideals. Positivism does not permit such an abuse of principles simply 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, 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

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 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.

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 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

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)

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,

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 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

"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

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)

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 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

¹⁵⁶ Aquinas 2002, 117

surroundings.¹⁵⁷ 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.

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 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)

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 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

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 94

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

"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 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?!

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.

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

¹⁶¹ Niebuhr 1960, 167

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 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'

¹⁶² Ibid., 168

¹⁶³ Ibid., 169

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 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

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 170

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 171

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

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.

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)

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 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,

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

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 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,

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

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

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

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 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" 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)

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).

¹⁷⁵ Niebuhr 1949, 7

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 3

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 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

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 12

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 14

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

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 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

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

¹⁸¹ Niebuhr 1949, 131

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.

How did this over-reliance in man's ability to judge autonomously happen? It happened with the Christian Gospel becoming

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.

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 seventeen century

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

onward,¹⁸⁷ man has gradually found himself on a "pilgrimage" towards moral autonomy. Once started, this journey inevitably led to a reformulation of the 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.

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)

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

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 "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

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)

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 *Übermensch* and the

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 percepts '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)

Christian meekness. 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-

¹⁹⁵ Nietzsche 2004, p.98

¹⁹⁶ Lubac 1998, 27.

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 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

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).

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 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

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.

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)

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 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

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

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

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)

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 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

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).

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." Liberals perceived central government, the strong state, as 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 disproportionally directed against the evils of political power and much less against the abuse of economic power.²⁰⁹ 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."²¹⁰ 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

²⁰⁸ Niebuhr 1960, 16

²⁰⁹ "Faith and History" in Niebuhr 1960, 35

²¹⁰ Ibid., 23

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 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."²¹¹ 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.²¹² 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.

²¹¹ Ibid., 26

²¹² Reinhold Niebuhr, "Two Forms of Utopianism" in Niebuhr 1960, 13

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."²¹³ 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 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

²¹³ Niebuhr, "Christianity and Power Politics" in Niebuhr 1960, 24

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,²¹⁴ 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.

²¹⁴ 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."²¹⁵ 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.²¹⁶ These two dangers have been already pointed in the chapter on Aquinas.

²¹⁵ Niebuhr 1960, 105

²¹⁶ "Human Destiny" in Niebuhr 1960, 106

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. 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."²¹⁷ 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

²¹⁷ Niebuhr 1960, 107

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 inadequate safeguards to the minority."²¹⁸ 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."²¹⁹ 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."²²⁰ 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

²¹⁸ Ibid., 117

²¹⁹ Ibid.,

²²⁰ Ibid., 118

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."²²¹ 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.²²² Barth says that Christianity's "purpose remains always the

²²¹ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (Oxford University Press, 1963), p.463

²²² 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 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 theological 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,

same. It acts always in accordance with the same rule. *Opposing what is high, it befriends what is lowly.*"²²³ 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."²²⁴ "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."²²⁵ 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 thanks to God,

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.

²²³ Barth 1963, 465

²²⁴ Niebuhr 1960, 119

²²⁵ Ibid.,

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."²²⁶ He says, "blessed the poor" whose unsatisfied needs become a "source for justice."²²⁷

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."²²⁸ 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

²²⁶ Ibid., 124

²²⁷ Ibid.,

²²⁸ "An Interpretation of Christian Ethics" in Niebuhr 1960, 135

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 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."²²⁹ 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."²³⁰ 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

²²⁹ Niebuhr 1960, 136

²³⁰ Ibid.,

immunity from clashes."²³¹ In short, 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."²³² Note here that the word "pacifist" is a bit different from the word "peacemaker," which we know from the

²³¹ 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 advice 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.

²³² 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.

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."²³³ 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.

"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."²³⁴ 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

²³³ Niebuhr 1960, 140

²³⁴ Ibid.,

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.²³⁵ They insist that the Christian's job is to proclaim the Word of God from the sidelines of the battlefield, to bring

²³⁵ 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 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)

the Good News,²³⁶ 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."²³⁷ 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.²³⁸ 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

²³⁶ 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

²³⁷ Niebuhr 1960, 142

²³⁸ Ibid, 143

"obliged to act responsibly in society at all times, and not merely when the state is at peace."²³⁹

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. 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."²⁴⁰

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."²⁴¹ 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."²⁴²

²³⁹ Ibid, 143 *Italics mine.*

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 143

²⁴¹ Ibid., 145

²⁴² Ibid., 147

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,"²⁴³ 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 involved in the contradictions of sin to the end."²⁴⁴ Not man, but God "alone" overcomes "the judgment which sin deserves."²⁴⁵

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."²⁴⁶ In

²⁴³ Ibid., 148

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 148

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 148

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 153

Christian peacemaking, the love commandment is the guiding rule to follow.²⁴⁷

CONCLUSION

The main topic of this essay 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 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

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

under law, a sinner and redeemed, fallen and blessed, both with authority and under judgment. He is a citizen of the Heavenly Kingdom.

(Montreal, 2015)

ESSAYS IN POLITICAL THEOLOGY

WHAT IS CHRISTIAN POLITICS?

"For to see your face is like seeing the face of God."

(Gen. 33:10)

Christianity is political, but does not have a "political program." It is revolutionary, but does not call for a change of political regimes. Christian politics is not the secular politics, the politics of power competition and fight for rights and privileges. It is "unconventional" by the standards of contemporary political theory and practice. The Christian understanding of politics is neither paradoxical nor perplexing, yet many fail to admit the adequacy of its concepts and prescriptions, many would argue that to be political means to have a political program, and to be revolutionary means to strive for a change of the political order and power. These are the arguments of those that have no clear sense of the nature of politics and that have no knowledge of the nature of Christianity as the most political and revolutionary teaching in human history.

Jesus advised, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." (Matt. 22:21) What is the meaning of these words? The secular mind would quickly interpret them as a command for obedience to State and Church, as an example of the Christian social and political conservatism. This command, many have argued, asks the people to have a slavish, *apolitical* behavior; it legitimizes the autocracy of kings and priests. We find this interpretation in the works of great political minds like Mill, Nietzsche, and Marx, but

this does not mean that we should accept it uncritically. Because, as it has been said, if Christianity is the most political and revolutionary teaching in history, then, it cannot ask for slavish obedience nor it can legitimize a regime, temporal or spiritual, that is against the freedom of personal conscience.

So, what is the meaning of Jesus' advice, according to the Christian interpretation? First of all, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" means that man should respect *authority*. What is authority? Authority is the power that serves the *common good*. As power serving the common good, the *authority should respect man*. The authority has the same obligation as the man (or people) under authority. It should "render unto Man (or people) the things that are man's, and unto God the things that are God's." As authorities, both God and Caesar, who *is* a man, are *servants* of man.²⁴⁸ The authority has no other goal but to promote justice. Authority is authority only as an act of justice. Authority without justice is *autocracy*—the rule, the will, and the *individual* good of *autos kratos* (self-power). Autocracy is not authority because it does not care for the common good. It is a despotic self-containment and self-sufficiency. Justice, as Aristotle says, is always about the "other," it always includes more than one person. It is about common good. Justice is possible only in *society*, under *authority*, not under *autocracy*. Justice, *in authority*, has no other goal but to promote the equity in human society. And equity has no other goal but to defend the *dignity* of *each* person in society. The dignity of each person is nothing but the authority and the

²⁴⁸ Mark 10:45; John 13:8; Acts 17:25; Psalm 50:15

value of *each* person in the eyes of others and the capacity of each person to act justly under his or her own free will, i.e., to act autonomously *with* authority. Dignity is *dignitas*, the "worth" that comes with the love and the respect of others and the freedom to act justly, i.e. with love and respect, in society; *dignitas* means to be free and worthy, i.e. to have the authority to judge, in yourself, your neighbour—"Why don't you judge for yourself what is right?" (Luke 12:57)—not in a court, but in your very *heart* ("Make every effort to reconcile with your adversary while you are on your way to the magistrate." Luke 12:57). So, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" means that each man should respect the dignity and authority of each man and of God. Each individual man is a Caesar for his neighbour as each neighbour is a Caesar for his brethren. Each man should say, as Jacob had said to his brother Esau, "For to see your face is like seeing the face of God." (Gen. 33:10)

If human authority, *my* authority and *your* authority, the authority of the Caesars, fails to respect the dignity of each human being, of each "Caesar," then God Himself will bring justice, because God serves man even crucified. In his sin and injustice, man kills God and Caesar only to discover that God is alive for Caesar, and that Caesar is alive for God, if not for the sinful man. In his justice, the "living" God asks the firstborn Cain, the first autocrat and founder of the temporal *city*, "Cain, where is thy brother Abel?" and Cain replies "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9) That is, "Am I my brother's authority?" Yes, Cain is his brother's "keeper." As firstborn, he is obliged to render unto Abel the things that are Abel's, and to God the things that are

God's. He had the *autonomy* to judge *freely* in the society of his brother and God, but did not use his *authority* to judge *rightly*. That's why, at the end of history, when all equity is restored, God will ask, as Berdyaev rightly observed, "Abel, where is thy brother Cain?"²⁴⁹ Cain, Adam and Eve's firstborn, failed to respect the authority of his little brother, and challenged the authority of God; in this sinful act, he served nobody but himself, he employed *self-power*, he acted as an *autocrat*, not as an authority. That is why God will finally ask, "Abel, where is thy brother Cain?" Because Abel, not Cain, was the one who had his authority intact, although losing his temporal autonomy. Abel's autonomy might have been destroyed by the criminal act of Cain, but Abel's authority, and dignity, were still alive in the mind of God. Cain wasn't punished with death by God. But he punished himself with hell, making his life a desert. Killing his brother was killing his own self, because, as the classical Aristotelian theory teaches, man is a man only in society. Cain was excommunicated, living in the east of Eden, in the land of Nod (which means "to wander"). Man, as Aristotle says, should be either god or a beast to survive in the desert, so to preserve his life Cain finally took a wife and built his own society, the first earthly *city*, Enoch. This biblical story tells us that the act of autocracy, of self-love, condemns man to the hell of social nihilism. "Hell," Berdyaev wrote, "is the state of the soul powerless to come out of itself, absolute self-centredness, dark and evil isolation, i.e. the final inability to love."²⁵⁰

What is, then, Christian politics? Theological and moral speculations with little practical significance? To paraphrase the Kantian

²⁴⁹ Berdyaev Nikolai. 1948. *The Destiny of Man*. 3D ed. London: G. Bles. p.277

²⁵⁰ *ibid.*

question: Is this all that we could take from the speculative thinking of the pure and religious mind: a simple maxim that says that one should respect God and neighbour as oneself? ²⁵¹ Yes, this is all that we should take. We should also remember that *not* the "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" is the supreme command of Christian politics, but "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' and 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (Mark 12:30-31) This maxim, according to the Christian dogma, is the firm foundation for every good politics and act, the foundation on which the entire law rests. With this command, one is asked to see in the face of each human being the face of God. "For to see your face," as Jacob said to his brother Esau, "is like seeing the face of God." But how practical is this command? Could it be applied at all in reality and how it could be used for the aims of political theory and praxis?

In the beginning of a lecture, entitled *Social Teaching in Modern Russian Orthodoxy* (1934), Fr. Sergius Bulgakov argued that the early church neglected the question of social organization and economic order. ²⁵² This is a widespread opinion today as well. He explained this neglect with the "apocalyptic" character of the early Christianity. The early Christians, he argued, did not expect the world to last too long, so they did not consider the social and political questions as important. This, however, is not the entire truth. It is true that the early Christians expected the end of the world, but they knew, as the Gospel and the

²⁵¹ Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A831/B 859

²⁵² In Bulgakov Sergii, and Rowan Williams. 1999. *Towards a Russian Political Theology*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.

Apostles had taught them, that only God knows the end of time, and that this end will come when nobody expects. It is also true that the early Christians *were* in fact engaged with social, economic, and political questions. There are plenty of evidences for this. One just has to look at the social function of the early Church, its organisation and praxis, or to read the letters and the writings of the first bishops and learn about their well informed opinion on the functions of state power and society. Almost all of the so-called Church fathers, from Justin to Ambrose and Augustine, were as much engaged with social and political questions as with theological. The thing that prevents us, the modern people, to see and understand the politics and social engagement of early Christianity, is our perverted perception of politics as exclusively related to something that we call a "political program," i.e., a specific ideology and plan for action that supports a particular political and social order. Today, politics means elections, coup d'états, parties, competing for rights and privileges groups and individuals, political regimes, political and social programs promoting special interests. Politics for us is not about authority, as explained above, but about belonging to a group with a particular political, social, and economic interest. Christianity is also about belonging, but not on the basis of shared *interest*, but on the "rock" of shared *faith*; its political engagement is not about gaining political power, but about teaching how political power should be used, what is its proper function and aim. So Christianity is not, and should not be, concerned with the support (or opposition) of political regimes and groups. It may support (or oppose) one or another policy as beneficial (or not) for society in general, but it does not support (or

oppose) the specific *group* with its *particular interest* that promotes this policy.

The main political function of Christianity is education. This function was realised early in Church history. The third century author Lactantius, who served as an adviser of Emperor Constantine, was, for example, one of the most eloquent proponents of Christian mass education. With the growth and influence of the Church, a huge number of bishops advised and educated emperors and rulers in the art of governance. Instead of telling them how to rule, they taught them how to perceive rightly the office of kingly service, trying to instill in them a sense of duty towards people and God. Through education, Christianity aims to correct the autocratic, *monist* tendencies in the political process, and through education, it finds itself both far from the active political life and close to it as a reforming power working from "within." In other words, the genuine Christianity is politically "neutral," it does not support liberals, conservatives, socialists, nationalists, monarchists or democrats, and yet, it is politically engaged, trying to show these same liberals, conservatives, socialists, nationalist, monarchists and democrats, that each human person has an intrinsic value that surmounts any group or private interest. It does this mainly through presenting to their individual conscience the *universal* truth of the Christian gospel. It should be noted that the early Christianity did not aim to destroy or undermine the foundations of the empire, as it does not want to destroy the modern state and political order today; it did not have a political program that promoted a specific political and social order. Its only activity was the conversion of society and the emperor into Christianity, so the society and the emperor could better resist the

temptation of autocracy and direct their will towards God, "neighbour," and justice. In this sense, Christianity was a truly revolutionary force: having no political program and goals, but nevertheless transforming the structure and the character of the empire from within.

Fr. Bulgakov spoke about the "traditional" Christian disengagement with the affairs of the world not to encourage social asceticism, but on the contrary, to convince and inspire the modern Christians to participate more actively in political life as educators. In his article *Heroism and the Spiritual Struggle* (1909),²⁵³ published in the legendary now collection of essays in social criticism *Vekhy* ("Landmarks"), Bulgakov argued that there is need for an "ecclesial intelligentsia" uniting the "authentic Christianity" with the "enlightened and clear grasp of the cultural and historical" tasks of current time.²⁵⁴ In his appeal, the apocalyptic spirit of the apostolic Church was not lost as it was not lost the Church's specific way of social and political action. Borrowing from Dostoevsky's *Devils*, Bulgakov presented the importance of Christian education as a roadblock against the spiritual evil that took root in pre-revolutionary Russia. "A legion of evil spirits," he wrote, "has entered the massive frame of Russia, shaking it with convulsions, torturing it and maiming it. Only by spiritual struggle, invisible but of great proportions, is it possible for it to be healed and set free from this legion."²⁵⁵ Now, a century later, we may say that such an "ecclesial intelligentsia" was formed in Russia, and despite being

²⁵³ *Geroism i Podvijnichestvo*.

²⁵⁴ Bulgakov Sergii, and Rowan Williams. 1999. *Towards a Russian Political Theology*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark. p.109

²⁵⁵ *ibid.* p.111

suppressed and abused, socially and politically marginalized, imprisoned in the camps of Siberia, or exiled, its prophetic and educative work, although *invisible* on the public square, succeeded to win over totalitarianism, and continues to struggle against the new "evil spirits" of modernity.

As Berdyaev said in the aftermath of the Bolshevik *coup d'état*, Christianity, considered from the perspective of politics, is a "philosophy of inequality."²⁵⁶ This claim, again, should not sound "perplexing" or "paradoxical." St. Paul's advice "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called" (1 Cor. 7:20) means that every man should be "a good slave for the sake of God, or a good lord for the sake of God."²⁵⁷ Hearing such an advice, stripped from its context,²⁵⁸ or worse, such an *interpretation*, put in the social context of modernity, many would be appalled or shocked by the word "slave" and would probably fail to

²⁵⁶ See Nikolai Berdyaev, 2015. *The Philosophy of Inequality*. frsj Publications

²⁵⁷ Bulgakov Sergii, and Rowan Williams. 1999. *Towards a Russian Political Theology*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark. p.276

²⁵⁸ And here is the context: "[...] 17 Regardless, each one should lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is what I prescribe in all the churches. 18 Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man still uncircumcised when called? He should not be circumcised. 19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commandments is what matters. 20 Each one should remain in the situation he was in when he was called. 21 Were you a slave when you were called? Do not let it concern you, but if you can gain your freedom, take the opportunity. 22 For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman. Conversely, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave. 23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. 24 Brothers, each one should remain in the situation he was in when God called him." (1 Cor. 7:17-24)

notice the importance and significance of the word "good." So they would probably conclude that St. Paul, or Christians in general, are just accepting the anti-humanistic philosophy of ancient paganism, especially the Aristotelian theory of "natural inequality." This would surely be a rash conclusion and judgment. First of all, in this sentence, St. Paul does not discuss directly the problem of inequality. The emphasis is on *calling*. And second, this sentence, as it was grasped and explained most eloquently by Luther,²⁵⁹ is about *freedom in service*. One, thus, may ask: What *calling*? And what *freedom in service*?

Max Weber explained in his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, that the calling of man is his *profession*, given, as the pious Protestants believed, by God; it is what man *professes* in life through his appointed by Providence labor and service. We are all called to do something in life and society. And our calling is best revealed in our natural *talent* that should also be accepted as our *profession*, or *service*. The natural profession, or calling, is service because if followed, it is done without expectation for an earthly reward; as far as it is natural, it is given, and as far as given it has no other meaning but to be consumed. In consuming our calling we are acting, *working*, and since this is a gift, it should not cause hardship, but only enjoyment; the aim of the gift is not to be sold for another gift but consumed with content and thankfulness. With the consummation of our calling, we serve others, and we do this with gusto and freedom, because we expect from them neither reward nor thankfulness. In the calling is vested the reason and meaning of life, its unique joy and happiness, and the callings, the

²⁵⁹ See Martin Luther's *On the Freedom of a Christian*

talents, the joys are as many and diverse as the people are. Paul advises that everyone should accept and abide in the calling that God had entrusted on him. He advises so, because he knows that the source of greatest unhappiness for individual man is not to accept his natural inclination or to be constantly troubled by his momentary situation.

Modern people, generally speaking, are confused about their calling and situation, they sometimes think that they do not know what they want, their needs and desires shift constantly, as most often they know only what they *do not want*, and the thing that they do not want is precisely their situation and calling. We would understand that their confusion is complete and disastrous, if we take into account the influence of society, in which they are reared and brought up. Modern society is so organized that it does not usually help individual person to find and accept his or her calling and situation with contentment. It is not a new problem, we should admit: society distorts human wills and suppresses people's true callings from the age of the "fallen Adam." It is not without a reason that Plato, in his *Republic*, argued that the greatest evil for the city is the confusion of duties and roles among citizens and especially the rule of the naturally *unfit* for the office monarch.²⁶⁰ The

²⁶⁰ In the *Republic*, Plato argued that if "someone who *belongs by nature* [the emphasis is mine] to the class of artisans and businessmen is puffed up by wealth or popular support or political strength [...] and tries to do the Auxiliary's job [i.e. soldier's job] [...] tries to take on the functions of a Ruler [...] or if a single individual tries to do all these jobs at the same time [...] spells destruction of our state [city, community] [...] Interference by the three classes with each other's jobs does the greatest harm to our state." The confusion of duties, the change of duties, Plato believed, was "injustice." But "when each of our three classes [Artisans and Tradesmen, Auxiliaries, and Guardians or Rulers] does its own job and minds its own business, that, by contrast, is justice and makes our

Bible says, "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child and thy princes feast in the morning!" (Eccl. 10:16) But if we speak of today, we should admit that nothing has changed for better and everyone is exposed and distracted by values, social roles and models, coming from an outer, miracle-making "Leviathan"—the utilitarian "market" society.

The modern man (again, generally speaking) is a wanderer, like the exiled Cain, in the land of Nod, trying to achieve these exasperating "common standards" for "good" and "successful life." He is depressed and perpetually anxious, pushed in competition against his own true self and against his no less wretched "brothers." In his life, he feels constantly punished and rewarded, not according to his true merits, as he often believes, but according to some invisible and powerful force that has two names—"gain" and "utility." Modern social environment is a perversion of truth. So instead of "gifts," this environment promises "gains"; instead of "common good," it aims at "private utility"; instead of "service," it offers "servitude." Men are taught today, by this new Leviathan, who aspires to capture the educative function of the Church, that the man's profession has worth only, and above all, as a "gain," not as "service," and that it should be earned with toil, not received as a joyful gift. It teaches that each man is a consumer, gain, and utility for each other man. Man is lured to consume foggy dreams, not real gifts. Leviathan's spell is a perfect circle—a labyrinth with manifold turns and twists, doors and levels of "success," that always lead to the dead end of an ever repeating beginning. There is no Caesar in this land of Nod, only Sisyphus; no

city just." See for short commentary T.S. Tsonchev, *Discourses on Rights*, ¶ 219-221

Authority, only autonomy; no Freedom, only choices; no Good, only goods. This world makes of human being an unhappy, anonymous, half-conscious, mechanized, always daring puppet: a fruit and product of abstract numbers, schemes, and calculations. In the 21th century, it seems that there is only one social class left, the *consumerist* class, the class of the universal "*have nots*." It is the class of the international *spiritual pauperism*.²⁶¹ A class produced not of evil capitalists, multinational companies, or financial lords, but of a weakened Christian education, of Christianity cut of its political function. The Marxist theory of class society is now obsolete. The society is classless; after the 19th and 20th century war of social classes, a fourth player towered above aristocracy, bourgeoisie, and the workers—the class of the international *consumer*. Consumerism united and pacified the world. Now all are invited to live in a constantly regenerated utopia. Berdyaev has predicted this result, the appearance of this classless world, arguing in many of his

²⁶¹ Visheslavtsev is right to notice, almost hundred years ago, that in an "irreligious capitalist civilization man inevitably becomes an economic materialist" and that his culture consists *only* in the exhaustion of his needs, life, and *world*. "In its critique of irreligious capitalism with its banks, markets, newspapers, parliaments, parties, the Christian conscience and Christian consciousness go farther and deeper than the socialist critique. It denounces this order not because some have and others have not (which, of course, is unjust and unloving), but because all people thirst only for possessing, only for satisfaction of their needs, and as much they bog down in their exhaustion as much they extinguish the spirit and as much the connection with the primary sources of being relinquish. And, at the end, from the depth of the spirit questions arise: Why? For what? In the name of what? The irreligious capitalist civilization does not have any great "in the name of" as it is with the irreligious socialist civilization as well." (Visheslavtsev, Boris. 1924. *Religia i Bezreligioznost* (Religion and Atheism) in *Problemoi Russkago Religioznago Soznania* (Problems of Russian Religious Consciousness). YMCA Press, p. 37); my translation.

works, that there is no essential difference between capitalism and socialism, between "bourgeoisie" and "workers," because both were fighting for the same "material bread," both served and fought for their "stomachs," both wanted to consume not their natural gifts, but, as Cain and his father Adam, to till a barren land for meager fruits ("When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth." Gen. 4:12). Berdyaev intuitively predicted that socialism will fall back again in the cradle of liberal capitalism. So now, after the end of the bi-polar world, it seems that there is no other vibrant ideology, no other political and economic system, except the system of economic gain. Consumerism, today, has no class enemy. There is a universal human agreement, shared by poor and rich, that to possess and consume *more* is better than to have *less* and *be content*. We live in apocalyptic peace. That's why Christianity should act as a "prophet" in the world, should voice its gospel from the "Leviathan's belly," to use Darko Suvin's expression. It should say loudly: it does not matter today whether you are a "worker," a "bourgeois," a "professional," a "capital owner" or a "nobleman," if you are unconscious of your gift as service, if you are not content with your natural inclinations and the reality of Creation, you are in the rank of the "*have nots*," in the rank and the class of the ever daring, dissatisfied, unhappy Consumers, who devour each other along with themselves.

The modern man is not very different as a human being from the Corinthian that received Paul's letter. His environment and social role, however, have changed immensely. For that reason, Paul's admonition is more urgent for him than for the Corinthian. If the Corinthian lived with fixed social status and proper social role in the

patriarchic and intimate society of Greco-Roman civilization, if his mind was not distracted by dreams of success and prosperity, if his debts were paid with the work of his hands, and not with his soul, then the modern man, in contrast, is a phantom with shifting social roles, inflated (or deflated) self-esteem, expectations, and disappointments amidst the riches of his material prosperity. In contrast to the Corinthian, the modern man considers upward "social mobility" as an absolute value and good. It is true: to move in order to set yourself on the path of your proper calling is good. Paul says, "Were you a slave when you were called? Do not let it concern you, but if you can gain your freedom, take the opportunity." However, to make of "social and economic *success*" a *Dream* is to open the field for every crime that presents itself as virtue.

The *dream of success* is the narcotic of modern age and when its dazzling effect disappears a spiritual devastation follows. We speak about personal "success" and "national." There is no essential difference between these two. Both "successes" require sacrifices for the achievement of an imaginary goal, as the greatest and most troublesome of all is the sacrifice of morality. Morality is tightly connected with Christianity and natural inclinations (the moral sense in the "heart" of man or the so-called natural law). When Christianity disappears from politics and social relations, and only "success" is left, the competition and striving follow. Moved by desire for success and corrupted sense for competition, Cain killed his brother. Disappointed by the "success" of Abel and by his supposed "failure," Cain committed the greatest crime. God asked him, "Why are you so angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you refuse to do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; you are its object of desire,

but you must master it." (Gen. 4:6) Cain should not be angry, because the success of Abel was a result of his natural inclination, of a gift through which he serves the society of men and God. Cain should do what is right, that is, should accept his situation, as Paul advises, and respect the dignity of God and his brother, and continue to abide in his calling. His service would be certainly accepted, as God tells him, and it would be accepted even with a greater favor, because he would pass the test of time, and would prove that his service is perfect, that he is not under the power of sin, but masters it with his profession of "fruit—giving." But he did not abide. He separated himself from what is *right*, and fell under the power of sin.

"A complete separation of morality and politics constitutes one of the prevalent errors and evils of our century," Vladimir Soloviev writes in his introduction to the *National Question in Russia* (1891).²⁶² From Christian point of view, the domain of morality and the domain of politics should be connected, Soloviev argues. He says that "in the common life of humanity, the kingdom of Evil and discord is a fact; but the goal is the kingdom of God, and towards this goal the intermediate transition from ugly reality is called Christian politics."²⁶³ Soloviev points out that there is a constant confusion in the understanding of the word "national interest." If the national interest is considered as "supremacy," "outward might," "wealth," upward "mobility" on the international stage, if it is related with the *Dream* for individual national success, then this understanding would "justify," as it has been noted,

²⁶² Soloviev, Vladimir. *Morality and Politics in Politics, Law, Morality: Essays by V.S.Soloviev*, ed. and tr. Vladimir Woznik, p.6

²⁶³ *ibid.* p.7

"all sorts of crimes." As a Christian, Soloviev insists that "national interest" as upward mobility towards supremacy is not the *goal* of state politics. He explains that "true patriotism" must be in accordance not with the greed for power and influence, not with the competitive spirit for world dominance, but with "Christian conscience." When the Satan took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world with their glory, and told him, "All this I will give you, if you fall down and worship me," how did Jesus answer? "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: worship the Lord your God and serve Him only." (Matt. 4:8-10) Jesus abode in his situation and calling, and he listened to his conscience. He did not revolt against the *authority* of God. Christian conscience is the collective inner feeling that makes the nation abide in its service, respectful to the authority of other nations and to the will of God, and that tells the nation (or the person) what its true mission, calling, and aim are. Therefore, the interest of the truly Christian nation "does not require and absolutely does not permit international cannibalism."²⁶⁴ The slogan "*My nation first!*"—a cry for dominance and individual national success—is a result, basically, of daemonic

²⁶⁴ *ibid.* p.8 In his excellent *Three Essays on the Russian Icon*, Soloviev's follower Prince Evgenii Trubetskoy writes, "When on the world stage appears a nation-predator that exhaust all of its power on the technique of annihilation, all others in their self-defence are forced to imitate the predator [...] All are concerned to acquire greater, not smaller, jaw than the opponent. In higher or lesser degree, all are forced to take for themselves the image of the beast [...] Living nations devour each other, armored for universal annihilation—this is the ideal that periodically triumphs in history." (Trubetskoy, Evgenii. 1917 *Umozrenye v Kraskah: Tri Ocherka o Russkoi Icone, Contemplation in Colors: Three Essays on the Russian Icon*); *my translation.*

temptation that would end, inevitably, in a ruin. This has been proved time and again in history.

Often, the "national interest" as "international cannibalism" is hidden behind the sense of cultural superiority and civilizational mission. The sense of cultural, spiritual superiority is nothing but a sign of an utmost corruption of national soul. Now, a nation finds itself so deceptively strong, so independent, so high on the "mountain" of its pride and success, so drunk of "abominations" (Rev. 17:4) that it wants to devour not simply the "body" of other nations, but their very "souls." This is the complete and final stage of national corruption. After this stage, normally comes the collapse. Pride and greed are the two cardinal vices that revolt against all authority and service. No one serves out of pride as no one gives out of greed; no one teaches out of pride as no one helps out of greed. High culture humbles its bearer, as the good teacher is generous to the point of self-sacrifice. But the "national interest" that takes the missionary role to convert other peoples into the image and likeness of the dominant state, only to cement its supremacy, is neither humble nor generous. It is, in fact, an attempt for usurpation of God's image that is impressed on all people and nations. "The claims of one nation for a privileged position in humankind," says Soloviev, "exclude the same claims of another nation."²⁶⁵ The nationalistic exceptionalism of one nation is refusal to admit the exceptionality of another nation. And we have many examples of poorly conceived national exceptionalism. Political theorists and historians such as George Kennan and Eric Foner warned about the temptations of the ideology of

²⁶⁵ *ibid.* p.9

exceptionalism. Even Augustine explained the fall of Rome with its corrupted sense of self-importance, and Saint Paul, himself, warned the Jews, in his *Epistle to the Romans*, for the pitfalls of self-righteousness. There is only one kind of good and truthful exceptionalism and it is the exceptionalism in one's personal and unique calling and service.

Evil, as Aquinas says (following Dionysius and Augustine), has no being, it is a privation of good.²⁶⁶ So, in this essay, one may notice that every term that we use has one true and good meaning, and many wrong and corrupted interpretations. Let's take the last example, the concept of national *exceptionality*. To be an exceptional, special, and unique nation, is *good*. All nations are exceptional, according to the Christian truth of equality in diversity. But the claim for the existence of an exclusive national exceptionalism that disrespects the uniqueness of all other nations is a corruption of the idea of national uniqueness. Moreover, from a Christian point of view, it would be equally wrong to argue that there are no exceptional people and nations, that all are equally wretched and lost in their sin. Now, it should be clearly noted that Christianity is a positive religion, despite its prophetic function. It starts from the good, that is the truth. A state (or a nation) is good as far as it serves its unique mission, and is "bad" as far as it fails to perform its appointed aim. If a nation exists, it is good by the power of its very existence. It becomes bad or evil when its existence is severed from its mission and its action loses its proper, "co-natural," to use Aquinas' expression, end. Thus, for Christianity, there are no "good" or "bad" nations, or, in contrast to arguments found in political theories from

²⁶⁶ Aquinas, Thomas. *The Summa Contra Gentiles*, in *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, Vol. II, ed. Anton C. Pegis, Random House, 1945.

antiquity to the present, there are no "good" or "bad" political regimes. It is senseless from a genuinely Christian point of view to argue in favour of one or another political regime (or nation). All political regimes are essentially good as far as the people who make them are essentially good, i.e., acting according to their proper end, that is, their proper calling and service. Therefore, we may conclude that monarchy is good, if it has a good monarch; democracy and liberalism are good, if the people are good and vote for good political representatives; even "anarchy" is good, if it is the anarchy of Christians, who love God and their neighbors. Socialism would not be essentially different from capitalism as "good" economic order, if the economic agents in socialism and capitalism considered their economic surplus as common good and spent their capital and energy according to their natural inclinations and needs. One might be sure that the most natural human inclination is friendship. So, to conclude, genuine Christianity does not enter into partisan battle against a particular political or economic order, it fights not the positive qualities of all social orders, but their specific corruptions. Christianity is concerned not with the value of democracy as a political system, or the value of conservative authoritarianism, but with the values of the people, who make democracy, or with the values of the political "autocrat," (here I use the Russian expression for the Tsar, "*samoderjets*," that is charged with a rather positive meaning) who rules the country. Both regimes could be positive in a given situation, but there could be *nothing* positive in a corrupted moral sense in people and rulers.²⁶⁷ So we return again to Paul's advice that says that the

²⁶⁷ For a good discussion on this question, see Semyon L. Frank's *The Debacle of*

situation, or the regime, should not concern us, what finally matters is whether we perform, as persons or a nation, our calling and service.

I have mentioned Aquinas, and already have begun to speak about good and evil, so it would be right to explain in a few lines the Thomistic concept of evil. It could give us a better understanding of Christian politics as moral action. According to St. Thomas, every agent acts for a good end and if the good end is natural for the agent, i.e., if the good corresponds to the fitness of the agent to achieve it and brings him improvement and peace, then the end of the agent (that he pursues with his will and actions) is never evil. If the agent fails to achieve some end

Idols (Krushenie Kumirov). In this short book, based on lectures for the society of the Russian Christian Students (1923, Berlin), Frank writes, "In any concrete [political] order there is neither absolute good nor absolute evil [...] I cannot live for any political or social order. I do not believe anymore that I can find in it absolute good and absolute truth. On the contrary, I see and I know that [...] all who believed in monarchy or republic, in socialism or private property, state power or anarchy, in aristocracy and democracy as absolute good and absolute value—all of them, desiring good, created evil, searching for truth, found injustice and untruth." (Ch. 2, *The Idol of Politics*); my translation. One may notice that Frank's view, that is genuinely Christian, is slightly different from Aristotle's opinion in Book 2:1 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In his *Ethics*, Aristotle argues that the "legislators make the citizens good by forming habits in them, and this is the wish of every legislator, and those who do not effect it miss the mark, and it is in this that a good constitution differs from a bad one." Here Aristotle is right to argue that the legislator (and state order in general) has for its aim to produce lawfulness, if not true virtue, among wicked citizens (subjects), but it should be clearly stated that this aim could not be achieved, if the legislator himself—a monarch or a parliament—is not good. In other words, the legislator needs, as much as the citizens, an education in "good habits" and this could become possible only if he follows another, even higher source of authority. This source, in our argument, is the non-coercive Christian teaching.

for which he was not appointed, this also cannot be described, from a general point of view, as evil, although the agent might consider it as such. The reason an agent to have an "appetite" or desire to achieve an end that is not fit for him is, as it has been said, a result of temptation and illusion, a result of corrupted or not properly directed will. So the agent, who is full of desires, and follows unnatural *for him* ends, as is the case with the modern "consumer," whose will is constantly moved and tossed by temptations, would feel always unhappy from not receiving what he aims. He would not have peace, because he does not accept the advice of Paul that teaches contentment with the given situation and abiding in the natural service and direction of will. The evil, on personal level, is "always incidental to things beside the intention of an agent," says Aquinas. This is so, because the result of an action differs from the intention of the agent. So, Aquinas concludes that "evil happens without intention." The agent considers a failed achievement as evil because it did not bring the expected result. This result could not be evil in itself and is certainly not evil, if the expectation and direction of will was wrong, it is rather natural, but from agent's point of view, it is always evil as failure. One is certain, that evil, although caused without intention, should be always voluntary, that is, evil is always a result of free will that was wrongly directed. That's why evil is a moral problem. It is a moral problem because the agent is capable to inspect his natural inclinations, through his intuition and right reason, and act accordingly, and yet he fails to do so. In other words, he chooses a lie instead of truth, something unnatural or unfit for him, and he makes this voluntarily, often under the weakness of habit or external temptation. So, following Aristotle, Aquinas concludes that "evil

is [...] nothing else but the privation of what is connatural and due to everyone" as this privation is not an *essence*, "but is the non existence of something in substance." This simply means that evil is a "*lack*" that does not improve the natural being of something, or, in other words, evil is the missing part in a whole that might be otherwise perfect. Good, on the other hand, is what expands the completeness of a whole, *adding* to it something that was still lacking. Thus, if an agent finds his missing "part," that is always fitting, i.e. completing his being, this is good; but if the agent fails to find what is missing in him, and distracts his attention and energy with "goods" that are not naturally fit for him and do not work for his improvement, this, for the agent, is something evil, although, generally speaking, his failure wouldn't be an evil in itself, since it would reflect the truth and natural order of things. It is clear that the bottom of the problem is in agent's confused judgment: the agent confuses unnatural for natural, unfit for fit, *nothing* (evil) for *something* (good), and then acts in direction for its achievement, full of hope and desire and yet blind for the fact that the pursued "good" is *not* good *for* him. The agent is real, he has an *essence* as being, and as such, he has a natural direction, a natural "movement," so to say, that, if followed, makes him complete, or perfect. He just needs to accept it *voluntarily* and abide in it. This, we should say, is a positive, optimistic Aristotelian and Christian philosophy. It suggests that reality, or any agent as part of it, has a God given teleological direction towards God, i.e., good. And that also argues that all created, i.e., all *existing*, has a share in good, and *is* good. That's why it has been said in the preceding paragraph, that every political regime, as far as it is *real*, is good in itself, and has some particular, naturally good function. What makes of a

political regime evil is its direction to nothingness, i.e., its failure to perform its natural function that is bringing justice and facilitating people's communion.

Evil has no essence; it is always a privation. And as such, it is not natural to anyone and anything, since anyone and anything is naturally directed to fulfillment in good. That is precisely why the evil is evil for the agent: not because it is in the agent *by nature*, but because it impedes the process of its natural fulfillment. It is not natural for an authority not to perform its duty, but this does not make of authority an evil thing in itself. As it is not natural for autonomy to aim at imaginary goods, but this does not make of autonomy something evil in itself.

Aquinas says, and here I simultaneously agree and do not agree with him, that the good end depends on the approval of reason, and the evil end, or evil, depends on the discord of reason. I agree with this conclusion as far as we speak about the *right* reason (*orthos logos*), the *reason that has discovered* the good, and I do not agree, as far as I think that reason alone and by itself is not capable to formulate the good and natural end, it needs the help of *intuition*. The right reason, for me, is namely the reason acting *along with* intuition. Intuition and reason are complementary: where the intuition fails, reason must come, and where the reason fails, intuition must act. But it is certain, at least for me (and for Semyon Frank as well²⁶⁸), that intuition has a better and more direct

²⁶⁸ "Frank explains the possibility for intuition pointing out that individual being is rooted in Absolute as "All-unity," which puts every object in immediate contact with us before any [positive] knowledge, "since we are merged with it not through conscience but in our very being." The abstract logical knowledge is possible only because of our intuition in this All-encompassing Unity." N.O.Lossky, *Istoria Russkoi Filosofii* (History of Russian Philosophy),

access to natural ends (truth) than reason, and on this, we are agreement with Aquinas, who says at one place that angels "know" God by intuition only, i.e., directly and unfailingly, and not by reason (deliberation) and intuition as it is with humans.²⁶⁹

So, in conclusion, we must say that "evil," according to the Christian Thomistic view, is not caused except by a good, i.e., by something existing; that evil lacks "being," and therefore cannot cause anything; that only good can cause evil, but it causes it "accidentally," i.e. unintentionally, yet voluntarily under the influence of wrong judgment; and that good, even as reason for evil, continues to abide in its goodness, and moves naturally to a greater good, along with the entire Creation, returning to itself and expanding, despite all "evil" deviations. Aquinas finishes with the optimistic argument that evil, as *nothing*, cannot be a "supreme evil." We find a similar understanding in Visheslavitsev, who, speaking about irreligion, says that there is "absolute health, but there is *no absolute* sickness." It is so, because the "limit of sickness is death, as the limit of irreligion is nothing; if everything is mortal, temporal, unimportant, phenomenal, illusory, then

Akademicheskii Proekt, 2011. p.352. See also S.L.Frank *Predmet Znanii. Ob Osnovakh i Predelakh Otvrachennogo Znanii*.

²⁶⁹ "[...] the cognitive acts of the angels are uniform: for they receive the knowledge of truth from one fount of truth; namely, God. Their cognition is also immutable, because they see directly the pure truth about things by a simple intuition, not by a discursive movement from effects to their causes or the reverse. It is even incapable of defect, since they directly intuit the very natures, or quiddities, of things, and understanding cannot err in regard to such objects, just as sense cannot err in regard to proper sensibles. We, however, make guesses as to the quiddities of things from their accidents and effects. Therefore, our intellectual knowledge must be regulated by means of the angels' knowledge." Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Ch. 91:5

the nature of everything is *nothing*."²⁷⁰ But we know that good is not "void," or "emptiness," and that nature, in order to be properly called *nature*, is what "is." There is no a supreme, *self-sustaining* evil. That's why Christ often appeals "Take courage! Do not be afraid!" Only good could be a "supreme good." It is so because it *exists* in itself, by itself, for itself.²⁷¹

If we apply this understanding of the "metaphysics of evil" to the practice of national politics, we would conclude that there is nothing wrong, for example, in the idea and pursuit of national interest, but only if this interest is well understood and in accordance to the specific inclination and calling of the nation. National interest is not in the search for dominance or supremacy, but in the fulfillment of the nation as a community within the community of other nations. Supremacy that is so cherished in secular politics is not the natural end for a nation. It is community that is natural for every people and person. It was hinted above that the most natural human inclination is friendship, and the nation is a kind of friendship and as any collective of friends, of people capable and disposed to communion, the nation should naturally expand its interaction with the world, and yet never lose its specific character and calling. Self-concealment, isolation, is not divine, i.e., perfect, thus it could not be a feature of the teleological character of any existing good.

²⁷⁰ Visheslavtsev, Boris. *Religia i Bezreligioznost (Religion and Irreligion) in Problemoi Russkago Religioznago Soznania (Problems of Russian Religious Consciousness)*. 1924. YMCA Press p.12

²⁷¹ Consult Aquinas' arguments in *The Summa Contra Gentiles*, Ch II., (pp.5-18) in *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, Vol. II, ed. Anton C. Pegis, Random House, 1945.

"For the nation as for the individual," Soloviev writes, "the [misdirected] elevation of one's own interest, one's own self-importance, to a higher principle means legalizing and perpetuating the difference and the struggle, which tear humanity apart."²⁷² In other words, the egoistic national interest and sense of self-importance do not fulfill the goal of collective spirit that tends naturally, at every level of its development, to an ever greater unity.

How serious is the failure of national egoism is revealed in the gospel with the conviction of Jesus in the name of the people. Soloviev reminds the argument of the High Priest, "If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him and then the Romans will come and take away both our peace and our nation... For it is better that one man die for the people than the all nation perish." (John 11:48) This logic is completely wrong because no one should *die* for a wrongly conceived national interest; the nation is not an organism that spares its individual parts, or members, for an imagined survival of the whole. On the contrary, in its ideal state, the nation cares for each member equally. To cut a member of an organic body is, *ultimately*, never good for the health and survival of the body. To cure it, is right; to correct it, is right; but to severe and destroy it completely, without hope for restoration, is to make the body eternally crippled. It is to prolong its life, but never to save it completely, excellently, and wholly. It is even worse when the nation destroys its *conscience*, its *spirit* (although, we may note, conscience is always the first victim of misguided will). But as it has been said, a particular evil, the evil that happened accidentally to a

²⁷² Soloviev, Vladimir. *Morality and Politics in Politics, Law, Morality: Essays by V.S.Soloviev*, ed. and tr. Vladimir Woznik, p. 10

particular agent, could never be an evil *in general*, i.e., could never be a "supreme" evil of fatal proportions, because whatever the particular agent does accidentally, this could not change the universal natural order that melts all accidents into the "furnace" of "pure gold." So, Jesus was convicted to death, Jewish people were destroyed, but not completely, as the death of Jesus for Jews has turned, eventually, and *super-naturally*, into a life of Christ for *all*. "Destroyed by the patriotism of one nation," Soloviev says, "Christ is risen for all nations and commanded His disciples, "Go and take disciples of all nations."²⁷³ This is nothing but a great example of the Divine natural order that brings all agents and societies to one natural for them state of all-unity.

"So? Does Christianity abolish nationality?" Soloviev asks. "No," he says, "rather, it preserves it. Nationality is not abolished, but nationalism is."²⁷⁴ Nationality forms the parts in the organism of humanity. Different nationalities perform different functions in this "organism." "Christianity, abolishing nationalism, saves nations, for supra-national does not mean sous-national." And Soloviev explains that it is said "Only he, who lays down his life will preserve it, and he who saves his life will lose it," (Matt. 16:25) so a nation that desires to preserve its life through a "narrow and exclusive nationalism," will lose it, and "only by laying all its life [that is by accepting its calling of service] into the supra-national cause of Christ will a nation preserve it."²⁷⁵ The "supra-national cause of Christ" is the natural direction of

²⁷³ *ibid.*p.11

²⁷⁴ *ibid.*

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

every living organism towards fulfillment into an ever expanding unity and co-naturality.

"In the basis of any society," Semyon Frank writes in his *Religious Foundations of Society* (1925), "lays the elementary fact, or principle, of solidarity, the immanent unity of many, the co-belonging of individual people to a single 'we.'"²⁷⁶ "We," Frank argues, is the ultimate source of every relation between "I" and "Thou." In life, if there is no "we," there won't be any communication, any sociality, any "I" and "Thou." In order to have "I" and "Thou," there should be, necessarily, "We," there should be some common sense of co-belonging, of unity and equality between individuals. All theories that promote any form of communion on the basis of individualistic egoistic will, Frank says, are "fallacies." "Solidarity," that is what we call "we," is absolutely necessary for the existence of communion, of sociality. Every communion presupposes some understanding that my fate is somehow related to your fate, that my action somehow reflects, changes, and impacts your action and life. Sociality presupposes the existence and consciousness of an organic inter-dependence.

But Frank says that solidarity is not the only principle of sociality. The communion is based also on another, in a certain sense opposite principle: the principle of personal freedom and independence of the individual "I." This individual "I," Frank argues, is the "sole motor of social life," it is so because social life depends on the will and actions

²⁷⁶ Frank, Semyon. 1925. *Religioznie Osnovii Obshchestvennosti* (*Religious Foundations of Society*), Ch.1. See also Frank's *The Spiritual Foundations of Society* (Ohio University Press, 1987)

of individual "Person," the "I." There is no sociality or communion in a state of slavery or under the coercive power of an autocratic order. There are no "persons" in slavery and coercion. Whatever the arguments for the "necessary" coercion are, "discipline" or "pressure" are of ever lesser degree in value and social effectiveness than the "spontaneous source of power that is coming from the depths of human spirit."²⁷⁷ Man is an "image and likeness of God" (Gen. 1:27) and cannot be treated or transformed into a "thing or mechanical power." That's why socialism, Frank says, that tries to "replace" the individual will with an abstract "collective will," and so to make every person a part of an uniform collective "mass," is a "senseless" and stupid idea. Socialism has this "insane and sacrilegious dream" to force man to reject his freedom, his unique "I," and become "a screw in the social machine."²⁷⁸ It is clear that if man is stripped off of his human image, the image of divine freedom, he could not and would never be a real member and participant in the life of society; he would rather be a "domesticated animal." Frank concludes that socialism, as every similar to it regime that tries to make people abandon their freedom and identity for the good of some abstract collectivity, is doomed to failure.

All this leads us to another conclusion—that every society should somehow rely on both "solidarity" and "freedom of individual 'I'."²⁷⁹ "We" and "I," Frank says, are primary principles and despite that, or precisely because of that, since they are two but not one, there is tension between them. From this tension arises the constant conflict

²⁷⁷ Ch.2

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid. Ch.3

between "solidarity and freedom," between "sociality and personality." The principle of sociality, although impossible without the respect to human person and ultimately depending on the social individual action, "feels" individual freedom as a threat to itself, while the principle of freedom "feels" unification under a social whole as a danger for the preservation of the self. This is the source of the constant conflict between "despotism and anarchy," a conflict that Niebuhr wanted to resolve with his "Christian realist" political philosophy.²⁸⁰

But the conflict is a result not so much of some error or paradox in the nature of society, but of the "falsehood" in political conceptions such as the "liberal" and "democratic" theories of society. Neither the "rights of man" nor the "will of people" nor any other secular political concept could serve as a basis of human society. It is so because the one contradicts the other: the "rights of human person" as a principle of society, if not religiously grasped, contradicts the fundamental primacy of the principle of social unity, while the "will of people," as an absolute social and political imperative, as an expression and confirmation of sovereign power, rejects the primacy of the principle of personality. Frank's solution to this tension, that is the Christian solution, is in his argument of the necessity and existence of a "third" fundamental principle, the first and most basic *one* that affirms the value of "all human life—personal and social."²⁸¹ This principle is found and expressed in the command "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." (Matt. 22:37)

²⁸⁰ See for example his masterpiece *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (1941).

²⁸¹ Frank, Semyon. 1925. *Religioznie Osnovii Obshchestvennosti* (*Religious Foundations of Society*), Ch.3

The tragedy, especially the tragedy of modern time, is that man thinks that this first principle and command is not really necessary for the construction of social life. However, Franks says, the reality established by God "does not ask what man thinks of it, and what man imagine for himself."²⁸² The "actual basis of social life," Frank concludes, is the service of God; it is to perform one's moral duty of service, which is practically the equal consideration of both personality and society.

How exactly this "consideration" is possible? From the point of view of personal freedom, only self-constraint could preserve social life. Self-constraint means not the constraint of man's natural inclinations, but the limitation of man's egoistic phantasms that blur the significance of others, that do not permit respect to any authority except the dominion of the self. Duty is practically doing what ought to be done naturally, according to the social nature of man. Thus man has no any other "natural right" except the right to fulfil his social duty, to be social, an image of a Trinitarian God. It is written, "Let *us* make mankind in *our* image, in *our* likeness," (Gen. 1:26) that is, that man is not a reflection of a monistic, autocratic whole; he is rather an image of *us*, of some mystical "we," of a communion. The destruction of communion, therefore, means a destruction of man. And the formula of communion has always three basic elements: in the Divine, it is Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit; in the human society in general, it is God, myself, and my neighbour; in the family, it is husband, wife, and a child; in political society, it is people, church, and government; in political and social

²⁸² Ibid.

theory, it is the triad freedom, duty, and rights; and finally, in the Church, it is Christ, I, and we, together in flesh and spirit.

The first duty of man, according to Frank, is his duty to God. The duty to God is, as it has been said, the service in truth, acting both consciously and led by intuition according to the true nature of self and humanity. Society, therefore, should not ask man to sacrifice himself or perform his duty under the authority of some abstract "will of people." On the contrary, Christianity, through its teaching, should remind individuals and society that they are not alone, that there is a third principle that consists of them both in itself, and this *one* principle is God, whose will, being universal and all-encompassing, is sovereign, and that this will was revealed in a law that says that each man should love God and neighbour as yourself, and that each action should be in conformity to this law in order to be a truthful and just action.

The consciousness that social life is built not on "autocratic arbitrariness of men," but "on agreement with the superhuman, divine principle of genuine Truth," leads necessarily to the sense of respect to authority.²⁸³ All social power, Frank argues, should rest on "voluntary concession in service." It should be understood, with mind and intuition, that the service is different for different people. That not all could be teachers, or rulers, or masters, but all could teach themselves, rule themselves, or master only through their natural, God-given talent, and that the true dominion and power do not have anything to do with the autocratic dominance over others. All power rests on authority, but it should be clear that power "is not authority because it is power," but is

²⁸³ Ibid. Ch.5

power "*because it is authority.*" And we have already explained at the beginning of this essay what authority means. Thus, the final task and justification of every political order, of every constitution, Frank asserts, is not the "free manifestation" of the autocratic will of people, of permitting them to live "as they like," but in this that it provides a genuine, fruitful, and skillful governance that places "every man on his right (natural) place."²⁸⁴ This means, as we have already said, an order built on respect to the natural hierarchy. And Frank is convinced that as much the political order reflects the natural hierarchy of human social organism as many people would have the opportunity to follow their true calling and service. Aristotle didn't give a clear answer to the goal of politics except the most general aim of happiness. But happiness is difficult to define, Aristotle admitted. But Christianity has a definition: in social order and politics, happiness, or blessedness, is everyone to receive the chance to follow his God given talent and vocation and flourish.

Like Berdyaev, Frank defends the "principle of aristocratism," of nobility.²⁸⁵ He is a realist, and he understands that every "majority" is ruled by minority, that there is no a living organism without a ruling part having the specific function (and service) to keep the whole intact and just, to prevent the collapse of unity and order. Human "masses" are by nature chaotic and passive, they could spontaneously arise and spontaneously disintegrate, if left completely on themselves; but in social matters, Christianity is in accordance with the Aristotelian teleological hylomorphism, which does not accept the blind rule of

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid. Ch.6

chance and the caprices of the aimless spontaneity. The rule of one, Frank says, is natural; hierarchy is natural, and the aristocratic principle of minority, of the "I," if you like, is rooted in the very principle of authority.

Authority and hierarchy do not contradict the idea of equality. The only equality, Frank notes, is the equality under God.²⁸⁶ United under the Divine principle, solidarity and freedom, society and person, are in balance, equal and in complete harmony, as the person is primary to society, but impossible *without* it. There are two types of human equality, Frank says, 1) equality under God, where all are equal in weakness and humility, and 2) equality in dignity and duty, where all are elected for service. All are elected for free service and participation in the work of God, no one is excluded from his or her particular and unique place in Creation, even the stillborn or severely ill have their dignity and supreme aim and value. Through our equal dignity, best revealed in our proper calling, we are part of the hierarchy of being. And every one should be convinced that he, himself, as existing immanently in himself, then in the world, and ultimately in God, is the one and primary principle of all existence, but existence always in communion, never in isolation. Everyone should know, and, in fact, knows it intuitively, that if *he is not now*, at this very moment, *then no one is*, and that *once being born*, everyone becomes *first*, *first* even before that that was *before* him, and this makes him understand, again intuitively, that *if no one is*, *then he would not be, too*. That's why nobody should grumble against the right, dignity and primacy of each living, individual person,

²⁸⁶ Ibid. Ch.7

because it is written, "So the last will be first, and the first will be last." (Matt. 20:16) Through our being and vocation, through our creation and fact of existence, God made of us authority, made us forever primary to all and to everything, even to Himself, that's why He died for us, to show us this great truth, and in this truth is our greatest dignity: that if we die and perish, all will die and perish along with us, even God Himself. Christian faith is the bearer of this truth, the truth of the inviolable dignity of human person, and it brings it to all spheres of life, including politics.

(Montreal, 2018)

MARTIN LUTHER'S POLITICAL THEOLOGY: FREEDOM IS OBEDIENCE, JUSTICE IS LOVE

I.

For Luther, we find ourselves on a cross-road between two directions, and in our situation, before we take one of them, we are still innocent but not *sinless*. We have the commands and the promises; we have the history, the *origin* from which we have sprouted out, and the future to which we are destined to move on. One of the roads in front of us is righteousness, salvation. The other is unrighteousness, damnation. We didn't choose these two roads, nor we have built them, and we don't have the chance to take a third one, or to create one by ourselves.²⁸⁷ It is not our *free will* that has brought us there; yet we are born for decision. In Luther's mind, as we find from reading his *Two Kinds of Righteousness*, our task, the chief task in human life, is to decide which road to take; to take it not physically, through works and toil and effort, but spiritually, in a moment of *revelation*, of *answer* to a *calling*. The decision is *ours*, yet the *call* is God's. The chief event in man's life is what man will choose to like, to desire. And the right choice would be made under the power of Spirit.²⁸⁸ As Augustine, one of Luther's best teachers, would say, in life man should find his *proper object of love*.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁷ In *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther writes: "There is not a third group of people somewhere in between believers and unbelievers: a group capable of saving themselves." (Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, Grace Publication Trust, 1984, p.3)

²⁸⁸ See Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Grace Publication Trust, 1984)

²⁸⁹ See Augustine, *Literal Commentary on Genesis*, XI, 15,20

Then, what is the good road? What is the right choice, the object that has worth? How this choice shapes human life? How it brings man from the innocence of primal "ignorance,"²⁹⁰ of the *inherited* sin, to the goodness of *righteousness*?

There are two kinds of righteousness, Luther says, two "wheels" on the path of salvation. One "alien,"²⁹¹ that comes from without, and one personal that comes from within. The alien righteousness is the righteousness that we find in the message of the Gospel, in the *example* of self-sacrificial love. We have the fortune to hear the story of a good man, of a truly good man, who died for us, promising us salvation from the burdens of temporal life. The seed of this knowledge, of this story, falls in the soil of our soul and it either grows or dies there (Mark 4:8, Matt. 13:8, Luke 8:15). We either respond to this *call* or not. We either believe or not in the story of God, the Son of Man, we either find a sense in it or not, we are either impressed by the "Word" or not, we either rejoice by the "treasure" (Matt. 13:44) we find or not. Here, in this moment of *attention* and *response*, we make a *decision*. "I know your doings—you are neither cold nor hot [...] Behold, I stand at the door and knock..." (Rev. 3:15-20) Will the Spirit will open our heart or not, will we "feast" with Him or not? (Rev. 3:15-20) We, Luther preaches, are presented with a case of an "alien righteousness," we are witnesses, and we are asked to judge (under the Spirit) and proclaim, to take a *side*. We are asked to pronounce a verdict, but not as

²⁹⁰ "Every time people are converted, it is because God has come to them and overcome their ignorance by showing the Gospel to them." (Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, Grace Publication Trust, 1984, p.3)

²⁹¹ Martin Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," tr. L.J. Satre, *Luther's Works* (Concordia Publishing House, 1955-1986) Vol. 31 ed. Harold J. Grimm, pp. 297.

judges who decide *the fate* of *others*, but as *free* men, who *judge for themselves* (Luke 12:57): should we believe (and accept the *gift of righteousness and salvation*) or not, would we recognize the good and the truth in the trial of God, would we recognize the greatness of this "alien" for the sinner *righteousness*, would we discover the *seriousness* of the "casus," or would look at it sceptically, lightly, as if we are hearing a fictitious story for children. (cf. Matt. 18:3)

Luther is convinced that he who trusts Christ's promise, who is *blessed* to accept His *gift of grace*, he, who believes in the message of the Gospel, in the *seriousness* of the *call*, starts to "exist in Christ," and his inherited sin, his human weakness and *origin*, does not matter anymore. He takes the road, the good road, with the same "flesh," the same limbs, body, and eyes, but with a different *mind*. The believing man is still sinful, still weak, and in his "flesh," he will always be a "sinner," but once God's "alien righteousness" is recognized, the *right object* chosen, all his good or bad work on earth becomes *useless* for the achievement of his salvation. What matters is that man *has taken the road*. In his "pilgrimage" on the road to Good, his body wears out, his mistakes and faults grow in number, his sufferings increase, but his mind renews, his soul ascends, his *conviction* in the rightness of his decision strengthens, and along with all this his (his!) *own* righteousness expands.

Now, we have introduced the source and the meaning of the "second righteousness" in Luther's formula. The "second righteousness" is *our own* righteousness, the fruit of our faith in Christ's goodness and example. "This [second] righteousness follows the example of Christ"

and we are "transformed into his likeness."²⁹² But we are not proud of it. We do good and we continue to sin, but we are neither proud of our goodness, nor ashamed of our weakness. In fact, we do not care for ourselves; we are free from all concern about what we have inherited as children of Adam and Eve and what we *will* win as children of God. Indeed, in the moment of recognition of God's righteousness, we have *already won* and were justified, *forgiven*, and our present concern is neither salvation, nor damnation, but the *other*, our neighbour to whom we turn our sight and affection. The faith in Christ, Christ's righteousness that is the sublime example of generosity and self-giving love, makes us calm, free from our own *selves*. Like Christ, we empty ourselves, forgetting our "honour, health, and power,"²⁹³ our fears, dreams, and illusions. Our souls, free from both guilt and pride, "seek only the welfare of others,"²⁹⁴ of those who still don't know the blessing of a life free from anxiety and competition. In fact, if we follow Luther's logic, we can reach the conclusion that man, once taking the decision to live without thinking of past and future, sin and reward, becomes truly *existent*, truly *present* within the world; in losing himself in Christ, man finds his true being. "Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it." (Matt. 10:3) Man, therefore, is not anymore part of history, nor part of future; he becomes "*I am*," "transformed" in the image of Christ, of God.

But many do not understand faith and righteousness in this way. Many, according to Luther, are still under the bondage of pride and

²⁹² Ibid. p. 300

²⁹³ Ibid. p. 303

²⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 300

anxiety. They think that their object is Christ, their road is salvation, and their righteousness valid, but their hope is not in Him, it is rather in *their work*, in their *own, autonomous righteousness*. They make the mistake to put the "stream" before the "source," to make the "primary" secondary. They think, "Through our righteousness we reach the righteousness of Christ," they believe that their freedom, will, and deeds will make them truthful, and forget that Christ, only Christ "the Truth," "shall make them free."²⁹⁵ (John 8:32) And they measure their advance, their righteousness, not with the measure of the Gospel, as Barth would say,²⁹⁶ but with the "scales" of human judgement. Their excellence in virtue is their proof, their medicine from the sickness of guilt. If they grow in excellence, in *virtue*, if they surpass others in goodness and deeds, they think, as the Pharisees did before them, that they are worthy of salvation. They don't understand that in the recognition of Christ's righteousness that sets man on the road of goodness, there is no *competition*, no virtue, nor excellence or exaltation. They forget the words of Jesus that "blessed" are the "poor in spirit," the "meek," the "mourning," the "poor" and the "hungry." (Matt 5:5) Salvation, in Luther's theology, is a gift: you believe, you fall in love with the object of your faith, and the "kingdom" is yours. "[A]ll of us who believe in Christ," he says, "are priests and kings in Christ."²⁹⁷ That is why Luther

²⁹⁵ For more on the inversion of truth and freedom, i.e. what is primary and what secondary, see Douglas Farrow, *Ascension Theology*, (T&T Clark, 2001) p.105. Also in relation to rights, D. Farrow, *Desiring a Better Country: Forays in Political Theology* (McGill & Queen's University Press, 2015) p.10, p.20

²⁹⁶ See Karl Barth's *Commentary on Romans*.

²⁹⁷ Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," ed. Timothy F. Lull, in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Fortress Press, 1989), p.606

compares to marriage the miracle of salvation, righteousness, and justification; Christ *comes* to us through the Word (John 1:1), as the Word, and says, "I am yours," we hear and reply, "I am yours."²⁹⁸ There is no need for any effort to win God's love and attention; and there is no reason to "boast" with them after we have them. Because the freedom and the true "excellence" that we receive from God are *gifts*, not prizes in a game of competition with others.

We see, Luther's theology is a kind of a *theology of freedom*—freedom from pride, works, and anxiety, from competition, worldly passions and toils. And precisely because it is a theology of freedom, it is also a *revolutionary* teaching. But Luther's revolution is not political, it is not like Rousseau's revolution, for example, who began his "socio-political gospel" with the words "Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains."²⁹⁹ Luther's vision of man's freedom is not pessimistic, or as political theory would call it, "negative"; it does not start with a concept of freedom transformed into bondage. It is not also teleology of gradual liberation from the "chains" of external oppression. The freedom of the Christian, in Luther's thought, the Christian's path to liberty, is not a recovery of a lost paradise that must be re-conquered through a revolt and disobedience; it is not a war against an oppressor. It is rather an *awakening* of the mind for the truth that there is no oppressor, that we

²⁹⁸ Martin Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," tr. L.J. Satre, in *Luther's Works* (Concordia Publishing House, 1955-1986) Vol. 31 ed. Harold J. Grimm, p.300.

²⁹⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* in *The Social Contract and The First and Second Discourses*, ed. Susan Dunn (Yale University Press, 2002) p.156. The quoted opening sentence of Rousseau's *The Social Contract* is directed mostly against the Aristotelian notion that some people are naturally born to be slaves. See Aristotle's *Politics*, 1253b-1255a.

have been born free and that we have always been free. To use Isaiah Berlin's now classical differentiation,³⁰⁰ Christian freedom in Luther's theology is not so much *from* something, i.e. *against* something, but *for* something. It is not liberty *from* bondage; it is rather liberty (and power) *to do* what your will wants to be done. This is the reason why Luther's revolution is not political in the way that political revolutions from modern age are. It is a revolution of mind, it happens in man's *inner* world. It is a *spiritual* revolution.

Luther writes, "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none," and then adds, "A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."³⁰¹ This second sentence reveals *for what* is the Christian freedom, *to do what*. It is *for* the neighbor. We must emphasize here, the freedom of the Christian is not *from* his neighbor's tyranny, as we usually understand freedom, it is *for* his, not for Christian's, but *for* his neighbor's good and well-being. This freedom is for others, for those who need Christian's generosity, who profit from the wealth of his kingdom, the kingdom that he has received in Christ. In Luther's theology, the Christian, therefore, does not fight against servitude, against anyone and anything, in order to keep or win his liberty; on the contrary, *in* his freedom, that is spiritual, he *serves* everyone. His freedom, his righteousness that comes as a gift from the "alien" source of God, as we have explained, makes him a "dutiful servant." In his service, he is completely free, because, as Aristotle would say, "he does

³⁰⁰ See Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty" in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford University Press, 1969)

³⁰¹ Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," p.596

nothing against his will."³⁰² So in Luther we have a concept of freedom that is obedience without contradiction, we have a "collapse" of the simple human notion that freedom is always the opposite of submission.³⁰³ In Luther, we have freedom resulting in obedience; in his theology, in his *revolution*, there is no fight against coercion. On the contrary, for him the Christian freedom is unthinkable without obedience; obedience is freedom's actual expression, its practical effect, it is the *sign* for the existence of liberty.

Nothing can beat or suppress this Christian freedom because it comes as a gift, i.e. without a price or responsibilities attached, and because it does not depend on material or temporal things. Once kindled in the soul and the mind of man, it is unalienable. The only care that the Christian must have, according to Luther, is to expand it, to make it greater; this, however, is a "light burden," ("For my yoke is easy and my burden is light," Matt. 11:30) because the expansion of liberty happens not through works but, as we have said, through *faith*. Luther says, "[...] it ought to be the first concern of every Christian to lay aside all confidence in works and increasingly to straighten faith alone and through faith to grow in the knowledge"³⁰⁴ and freedom.

³⁰² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1134a25

³⁰³ We have this classical Christian understanding in the work of Augustine as well. For example, he writes about the slaves in the *City of God*, XIX:15: "If their masters do not free them, they can make their servitude a form of freedom on their own, by serving with loyalty and love, rather than craven fear, till injustice pass away and every human principality and power be brought to nothing, so that God shall be all in all."

³⁰⁴ Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," p.599

The commands in the Old Testament, Luther says, "teach man to know himself, that through them he may recognize his inability to do good and may despair of his own ability."³⁰⁵ The Old Testament commands, therefore, reveal two things: that we cannot reach the standard of goodness through our own effort, i.e. through works, our "carnal" body does not permit this, and second, that the standard of goodness would not really matter, if our attention and hope were directed to God's *promise*. God's promise is fully revealed in the New Testament, and there we find the two commandments on which all the law hangs on. The achievement of these two commandments is within our reach, because, again, we do not need the effort of our carnal body to perform them. How so?, one would ask.

Luther's answer is simple. First and foremost we must be ready to *accept* the First Commandment, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind" (Luke 10:27) The First Commandment is a *spiritual* one. It does not ask us to do this or that *action* in order to keep it. It speaks about "heart," "soul," "strength" (or will), and "mind." It does not require any external act. God is not pleased by sacrifices. (Psalm 51:16) According to Luther, the First Commandment is performed when we recognize with our heart, soul, will, and mind, God's righteousness. If we don't do this, he says, we "make God liar,"³⁰⁶ we despise his *promise*, and refuse the gift of freedom. The awakening of the mind to freedom, the opening of our eyes, so to say, happens through this *inner* acceptance and trust in the reality of God's promise. The First

³⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 600

³⁰⁶ Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," p. 602

Commandment asks from us only one thing—to believe, to have faith in God's Word and love, not to be anxious for our lives, what shall we eat, drink, or wear, (Matt. 6:31) not to worry for tomorrow, (6:34) but to live today, in this very moment, with "heart that is glad" and "tongue that rejoices" (Psalm 16:9). As we have said, it makes us "*I am*," truly present, truly *immanent* in the image of a *transcendent* God.³⁰⁷ Faith gives us the *power* of conviction, Luther says, that all works for our good, it gives us the courage to say, "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?"³⁰⁸ (I Cor. 15:55) "You see," Luther says, "that the First Commandment [...] is fulfilled by faith alone."³⁰⁹

The Second Commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself," is spiritual *and* moral (i.e. practical). In the Second Commandment, the *inner* man reveals himself *outwardly*. Like with the "two kinds of righteousness," the First Commandment bears an actual fruit in our *willingness* to perform, in practice, the Second Commandment. We cannot do anything for God, but we can do everything for our neighbor. And we cannot love our neighbor and yet do nothing for his well-being. In other words, the inner freedom that we receive through faith results naturally in an outer obedience in the form of *deeds*. "This is the place," Luther says, "to assert [...] that a Christian is the servant of all and made subject to all. Insofar as he is free he does not works, but in so far as he is a servant he does all kind of works."³¹⁰ Faith without works is nothing, and Luther had never argued against the virtue of works. If faith does

³⁰⁷ This is what Kierkegaard calls "*infinite resignation*" in his great work *Fear and Trembling*.

³⁰⁸ Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," p.609

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 604

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.610

not produce works, deeds, this means that it is nonexistent. If the first righteousness, the righteousness of Christ, does not result in man's individual (second) righteousness, then either Christ's righteousness is fictitious or man's faith in it is not sincere.

The whole point in Luther's spiritual revolution is the (re-)discovery of the right order of things, of the "natural order" in God's creation. The knowledge of the "*right order*"—this is the essence of Luther's *reformation*. Luther succeeds to communicate convincingly a perspective of "*reversed*" teleology where the end, the good or the happiness, the chief concern of the classical and modern political and social philosophy, is *achieved through faith*. He argues against the conviction of the entire Aristotelian and, from here, Western tradition that virtues, deeds, and actions, are not *means* for the achievement of the end, but the end's wonderful *effects*. Once the *end*, that is the existence of man's unalienable freedom and salvation, is grasped, accepted as a *fact*, once we believe that the Kingdom is at "hand," (Mark 1:15; Matt. 3:2; 10:7) then and only then, according to Luther, man has the *power* to act truly virtuously. In other words, Luther points out what the right beginning is, what the right order of things is: that nothing begins with the visible, the matter, the flesh, or with political and practical; the beginning of everything is in the Spirit, which is invisible. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." (Rev. 22:13) Human spirit can be renewed only through faith; the works are temporal, the matter in flux, it cannot serve, as the Marxists, the utilitarians, and other political reformers believed, as a basis, as a starting point for happiness, or salvation.

The understanding of the proper order of things is important not only for the individual persons, but for the society as well. In order to make a society good a reform of its constitution and institutions is not enough. And yet, all social reformers, all political revolutionaries begin the implementation of their vision exactly with modification of the external. They change the regime, the political form, but they certainly fail to transform the *essence*, the "soul" of the collective body, of society. They believe, and this is precisely Rousseau's political project, that if they change the social and political environment, the "rules of the game," so to say, they will make the society just and the people good as they are by *nature*. This is an illusion, and this is one of the reasons why Luther did not trust political reformers and radicals. He was convinced that the reform would happen naturally only if it starts with a "Christianization" of the rulers *and* the people. Luther's political theology leads us to the conclusion that any positive "outward" change must first begin with an "inward" reformation of the "collective mind," of the *moi commun* (the "*common self*"), to use Rousseau's terminology,³¹¹ towards good. As Luther says, "Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works [...]. Consequently it is always necessary a person to be good before there can be any good works."³¹² The same with society: not the good and fair institutions make a society just, but the goodness of the collective spirit of society produces good and fair institutions; consequently, it is always necessary

³¹¹ See more on the "*common self*" or "*common unity*" Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile: Or on Education*, (Basic Books, 1979) pp.39-40

³¹² Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," p. 613

the people and their leaders to be good before they can create any good (or just) political and social order.

III

We entered the ground of politics, and this is the right moment to turn towards our second question, namely how justice is love.

Luther was an Augustinian monk and his thought, inevitably, was shaped by Augustinian theologico-political concepts. As we have seen, Luther is a dualist, a "dialectical" thinker, but of a special kind. In his dialectics, there are no contraries or opposites. It is a typical Christian dialectics, as we have said at the beginning of this essay, where the parts do not contradict each other but rather complement each other. Thus, discussing the *outer* world, the world of politics and human action, Luther divides social order into two realms, one spiritual, and one earthly. In an Augustinian manner, he argues that the spiritual realm depends entirely on *the end*, on the *object of love*, of those who belong to it. And in a rather less Augustinian way, he makes the "worldly kingdom" a kind of a servant of the spiritual realm. I say "less Augustinian," because Augustine also accepts the idea that the state officials, the magistrates, while performing their duties, *can* belong to the heavenly kingdom; their participation in temporal power does not make them citizens of the kingdom of Man as far as their object of love is God. But in Augustine this idea of the Christian magistrate, of the ruler who belongs to the heavenly kingdom, is more obscure and undefined than it is in Luther. In Luther, we find a much more systematic and *positive* vision of the function of state power. According to his politico-theological theory the "temporal sword" promotes the well-being of community, yet not through an active fostering of the

virtues of the citizens (as it is explicitly suggested in the work of Aristotle or Calvin), but simply through *punishing* the wrongdoers (as it is in Augustine's political theology).

Therefore, we discover in Luther's political theology some "paradoxes" and complexities. First, for Luther the earthly kingdom is not necessarily opposite to the spiritual kingdom, it is not an antipode of the kingdom of God. The temporal power is simply a different kind of realm with its proper and necessary functions. Secondly, the earthly kingdom is *beneficial* for the promotion of citizens' virtues, but not in the same way as the spiritual kingdom is; i.e. the "temporal sword," the state, has an indisputably *positive* function.³¹³ And thirdly, according to Luther's vision, the state performs its positive function in a clearly *negative* manner—not through education and rewarding man's good conduct, for example, but first and foremost through punishing and coercing those who do not belong to the spiritual realm. In Luther's understanding, the "worldly kingdom" does not reward virtue and does not have the duty to educate, because the virtuous citizens, i.e. the Christians, as we have said, are *already rewarded* through their faith, and *already educated* through their knowledge of the commands and promises in the Holy Scriptures. Or as Luther says, those who belong to the kingdom of God, "need no temporal law or sword."³¹⁴ They "are

³¹³ In book XIX of the City of God, Augustine writes, "So the heavenly city makes use of the earthly peace on its pilgrimage here; as far as true religion and piety allow, it supports and encourages the community of interest in resources for human mortal existence. It relates this earthly peace to that heavenly peace..."

³¹⁴ Martin Luther, "Temporal Authority: to what extent it should be obeyed," tr. J.J.Schindel, in *Luther's Works* (Concordia Publishing House, 1955-1986) Vol. 35 ed. Walter Brandt, p. 89

subject of the governing authorities" and are "ready to do every good work, not that they shall in this way be justified, since they already are righteous through faith, but that in the liberty of Spirit" they "serve others and the authorities [...] and obey their will freely and out of love."³¹⁵

Here we should say something that we have missed to note clearly while explaining the dualism in Luther's political theology. There is another element in this conceptual division of earthly and spiritual realms. Mankind, according to Luther, is divided between spiritual and worldly men; the worldly ones are the "wicked" who do not believe in Christ, whose decision and *object of love* is the temporal, the transitory, (here we discover again Augustine's influence³¹⁶) these are the people who make the state and the law a "necessity," as Aristotle would say.³¹⁷ The state, the earthly kingdom, exists precisely because of them, to prevent them from sinning. Because, as Luther says, "if all the world was of real Christians, that is true believers, there will be no need for or benefits from prince, king, lord, sword, or law."³¹⁸ On the contrary, the men who do not have the consciousness about the law in their hearts, who are still "blind" for the gift of freedom, need to be constrained from doing harm to themselves and to others. They *need* to be ruled. "The unrighteous," Luther says, "do nothing that the law demands; therefore

³¹⁵ Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," p.621

³¹⁶ cf. Augustine, *City of God*, XIV:1

³¹⁷ All societies, Aristotle says, that are "governed by law" are just, while all law "exists for men between whom there is injustice." (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1134a25)

³¹⁸ Luther, "Temporal Authority," p.89

they need the law to instruct, constrain, and compel them to do good."³¹⁹ Theologically, Luther defends the rationale of secular power in this way, "God has ordained two governments: the spiritual, by which the Holy Spirit produces Christians and righteous people under Christ; and the temporal, which restrains the un-Christian and wicked so that [...] they are obliged to keep still and to maintain an outward peace."³²⁰

From this theological argument comes Luther's conviction that the attempts to "abolish all temporal law and sword" by those who consider themselves "spiritual," are dangerous; these "Christians," he thinks (having in mind the Anabaptists), "abuse" the "evangelical freedom."³²¹ His recognition of the necessity and goodness of temporal power, of the state, reveals his *political realism*. Luther is a *political realist*, and because of that, he is sometimes labeled and criticized for being a social and political "conservative." He was convinced that we can never "accomplish" a "rule in a Christian and evangelical manner," i.e. a rule where the law is nullified and the sword left idle by the readiness of all citizens to serve each other generously in the Spirit of Christ.³²² He was anti-utopian both as a political thinker, who does not believe in the

³¹⁹ Ibid. p.89

³²⁰ Ibid. p.91

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² We find similar realism in Augustine's words: "The wicked fight among themselves; and likewise the wicked fight against the good and the good against the wicked. But good if they have reached perfect goodness, cannot fight among themselves." (Augustine, *City of God*, XV:6) In the first and the second case, all fight against one another; while in the third case there is peace that may exist among the members of small groups, or even among democracies, but as far as there is one "wicked man" (or one "rough" state) every earthly peace, even the peace of the "righteous," is provisional.

effectiveness of institutional reforms unbacked by a spiritual reform of public mind, and as a Christian, who does not believe that the reform of public mind could ever be achieved in a *complete* and *universal* way. On one hand, Luther is against institutional reformers, on the other, he does not share the hope of Christians who expect to convert the world completely with their actions, preaching, and political strategies. He believes, as Augustine did before him, that the true renewal of humanity is in the power of God alone. He is convinced that forced separation of the earthly and heavenly kingdoms is not within man's power; moreover, it is not man's prerogative. In his view, mankind must exist as it is now: in a state of good and evil, material and spiritual, visible and invisible "mingled" in the *whole* of *temporality*. We should not expect, Luther says, that a "common Christian government over the whole world, or indeed over a single country or any considerable body of people" could ever be created; the "wicked," he is convinced, "will always outnumber the good."³²³ And he continues that we must accept the existence of two governments, "both must be permitted to remain: the one [the government of the Holy Spirit] to produce righteousness, the other [the temporal government] to bring about external peace and prevent evil deeds."³²⁴ "Neither one is sufficient in the world without the other."³²⁵

And here comes the question: if Christians are "dutiful servants" to all, including to the governing authorities, could they be part of the governing authority *themselves*? Should they only obey and

³²³ Luther, "Temporal Authority," p.91

³²⁴ Ibid. p.92

³²⁵ Ibid.

serve? Or they are also permitted to rule over those whom they serve? Luther's answer is unambiguous: "The sword and authority, as a particular service of God, belong more appropriately to Christians than to any other man on earth."³²⁶ It is so, because the Christian ruler does not work for his "advantage," for "himself," nor for his "property or honor," but only for the good of his neighbor.³²⁷

Temporal sword, however, no matter whether it is in the hands of a Christian or of an unbeliever, must know its *limits* in order to bring justice as service and love. One of the areas where the sword of the magistrate has no legitimacy and becomes an evil is the realm of "human conscience." Temporal power, according to Luther, has the responsibility to punish the wicked and to care for the peace in society, but it should always *abstain* from "educating" or imposing beliefs on the people that are under its authority. Temporal power should be careful in punishment, generous in its judgments, and should never "prescribe laws for the soul," because in this way it "encroaches upon God's government and only misleads the souls and destroys them."³²⁸ Even the Church should abstain from joining the state in promoting Christian faith and values. Luther is convinced that temporal authorities, along or with the help of the Church, should not "impose commands in an area [namely, God's kingdom and human soul] where they have no authority whatsoever."³²⁹ Yet, he says, "our emperor and [...] princes are doing just that today." "They are allowing pope, bishop, and sophists to lead

³²⁶ Ibid. p.100

³²⁷ Ibid. p.96

³²⁸ Ibid. p.105

³²⁹ Ibid. p. 106

them on [...] to command their subjects to believe, without God's word, whatever they please."³³⁰ This is not only against God, against the truth; this is also imprudent, against reason. Luther's realism is revealed, once again, in the following statement, "It is futile and impossible," he says, "to command or compel anyone by force to believe this or that. How he believes or disbelieves is a matter for the conscience of each individual."³³¹ And he explains that faith is "a *free* act to which no one can be forced [...] it is a work of God in the spirit, not something which outward authority should compel or create."³³² To impose the knowledge of freedom onto a free man in a coercive way is an absurdity, a contradiction of terms. Freedom cannot be coercively promoted. We cannot violently twist the mind of others and expect good results. This, by the way, has often happened throughout history, when political liberators changed political regimes and systems, and then tried to impose *their* ideology of "liberation." Surely, a change of a *regime* can succeed through coercive action, but a change of mind can never happen through violence either physical or psychological. Luther knew this truth very well. And he knew it, because he was a Christian. The ultimate power of Christianity is not in the "sword;" it is in the power of the "Word," of the *loving word*.

The duty of the magistrate, according to Luther, is performed when he complies with four requirements. First, the prince (or the governing authority) must be a man (or men) who takes seriously the First Commandment, who believes in God. Secondly, he must keep the

³³⁰ Ibid. p.107

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Ibid. 108

Second Commandment, i.e., he must love and serve his people. Thirdly, "with respect to his councilors and officials he must maintain an untrammelled reason and unfettered judgment."³³³ And lastly, "with respect to evildoers, he must manifest a restrained severity and firmness."³³⁴

Here, we are approaching the final part of our discussion. The magistrate is *called* to bring justice.³³⁵ For Luther, justice is the highest and most important function of "temporal sword." Justice, we must add here, is an act of intellect (or mind) and of will, and as such, it belongs to both the so-called *forum internum* and *forum externum*. It is an act of mind as far as it begins as judgment, i.e., before the *deed* the agent must discern *intellectually* between true and false, good and evil. And also an *act* of will as far as the agent has the power to pronounce, publicly and with *consequences*, a verdict. As an act of will, justice belongs to the *forum externum*. It belongs to the *outer world* not only because of the *pronouncement* of a verdict, but because the *object of judgment* is always *another* man. As Aristotle says, justice is the only virtue that is concerned with *another's good*,³³⁶ with our neighbor's good and interest, and as such, it is the "crown of virtues." Even if someone is punished by the judgment of the "temporal sword," he suffers the consequences from his actions and the burden of king's verdict for his *own* good, not only for the good of those who he wronged.

³³³ Ibid. p. 126

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ See my essay, *On Judgment*

³³⁶ "[J]ustice," Aristotle says, "alone of the virtues, is thought to be 'another's good,' because it is related to our neighbor." (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1130a5)

Luther understands justice as a prerogative of public power because only the public power has the ability to apply *effectively* its decisions on all without discrimination. With this power of *effective* judgment, the "temporal sword" (and those who represent it) is entitled with a greater responsibility before God and men, and therefore the question of "conscience" is central for it. This is the reason why Luther starts his *Whether Soldiers Too, Can be Saved* with the question of conscience.³³⁷ When we speak about the conscience of magistrates and soldiers in Luther's political theology, we should not forget how he understands the role of temporal power—it is *positive*, bringing peace and order in a *punitive* or *negative* manner. Coercion often seems as taking the prerogatives of God's justice, but this is not always the case. If the temporal power judges questions of conscience, as we have seen, then it *abuses* its authority and thus "robs" God of His "majesty"; but if the magistrate judges the *acts* (not the *thoughts*) of the wicked, then he performs dutifully the task for which his office was created. Thus, the magistrate and the soldier must "fight" against the wicked "with a good and well-instructed conscience."³³⁸ Luther contends that rulers, soldiers, and public officials must appreciate the positive function of their profession. They should be aware of the "dignity" of their office, of their occupation, and they must perform their duties firmly, free of doubts. God Himself said to Joshua, the judge who was destined to bring Israel into the Promised Land, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and

³³⁷ Martin Luther, "Whether Soldiers too can be Saved," tr. Charles Jacobs, *Luther's Works* (Concordia Publishing House, 1955-1986) Vol. 46 ed. R. C. Schultz, p.93

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9) Even when involved in war, magistrates and soldiers should not feel troubled by the thought that they have to kill people. Because, Luther says, "what else is war but the punishment of wrong and evil? Why does anyone go to war, except he desires peace and obedience?"³³⁹ This justification of war is definitely Augustinian.³⁴⁰ Luther's argument is that war is "only a very brief lack of peace that prevents an everlasting and immeasurable lack of peace, a small misfortune that prevents a great misfortune."³⁴¹

Instead of being timid and hesitant in time when firm action is required, the rulers must remember that they are "guardians of justice," having responsibilities and duties given to them by God Himself for the sake of *temporal* peace. On the other hand, the magistrates, Luther says, should not forget that every man is "involved in justice and injustice" and that "God alone is lord over justice and injustice, and God alone passes judgment and administers justice."³⁴² This means that rulers must know that they are part of a hierarchy, and their position in it, although high, is still under God's authority. Both the magistrates and the citizens should be aware of the existence and necessity of hierarchy and of their duties within the divinely ordained order. Without hierarchy and without everyone performing willingly his profession, calling, and service, there will be constant chaos and war. "The servant will strike his master, the maid her mistress, the children the parents, the pupils

³³⁹ Ibid. p.95

³⁴⁰ See, for example, Augustine's *City of God*, Book XIX:12

³⁴¹ Martin Luther, "Whether Soldiers too can be Saved," p.96

³⁴² Ibid. p. 114

the teacher."³⁴³ For Luther, we are all *subjects* to someone or something no matter what is our rank or social status. Princes are subjects to God and their disobedience would be punished in the same way as they would punish the disobedience of their subjects. If they were timid at war that requires bravery and courage for the defense of their people, they would be defeated and deposed; if they were cruel and tyrannical, they would incite a rebellion or would finish, sooner or later, destroyed by an opposing force. "God has punished the rebellious lords and nobles," Luther says, giving an example, "through the rebellious peasants, one scoundrel with another."³⁴⁴

Discussing war and justice, Luther is convinced that although having the right to wage a war, the prince should never provoke a conflict, should never begin an offensive without having a good reason or only led by suspicion.³⁴⁵ He says, "Whoever starts a war is wrong."³⁴⁶ And concludes that those "who have started wars have lost them, and those who fought in self-defense have only seldom been defeated."³⁴⁷ Luther, we may say without hesitation, is *against rebellion in general*; he is not only against the insurgence of people against their rulers, he does not also approve the disobedience of princes to God's law. He reminds that the "worldly government has not been instituted by God to break

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 116

³⁴⁵ Here we notice the influence of St. Thomas' concepts of judgment and justice. See, for example, Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologicae*, the section dealing with judgment.

³⁴⁶ Martin Luther, "Whether Soldiers too can be Saved," p. 118

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

the peace and start war, but to maintain peace and avoid war."³⁴⁸ We must repeat once again, peace and justice, not only for Luther, but also for Augustine, Hobbes, and many other political thinkers, are the chief reasons for the existence of temporal power. So, Luther advises that in their judgment, the magistrates should make the "broadest possible distinction between what [they] want to do and what [they] ought to do, between desire and necessity, between lust for war and willingness to fight."³⁴⁹

Finally, Luther says that no matter whether a man keeps an office or serves a master, he must always act according to God's commandments. He is convinced that in our service we must be humble as Christ was. We should never perform our duties for the approval and praises of people. If we do this, we lack faith; we search for something that we have not yet received. "Greed for money and greed for honor are both greed," says Luther, "the one is as wrong as the other."³⁵⁰ As we have said at the beginning, for him, *pride* is man's greatest sin; it is man's righteousness placed before the righteousness of God, man's work done before the work of Spirit. "Seeking one's own honor is one of the greatest sins," it is "nothing less than [...] robbery of the divine majesty."³⁵¹ Luther says these words in his discourses on temporal power because he knows that the magistrate, the "guardian of justice," and his soldiers, are the ones most directly exposed to the temptation of

³⁴⁸ Ibid. Luther was criticized by Francesco de Vitoria as "heresy" in *On the Law of War* (Question 1. Article 1), but here we see that both de Vitoria and Luther have the same opinion on the fundamental principles of just war.

³⁴⁹ Martin Luther, "Whether Soldiers too can be Saved," 118

³⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 132

³⁵¹ Ibid.

pride. That is why the man in power must remember that justice as *love*, i.e. the true justice, is possible only for the *humble* ones. We may conclude this essay with Luther's appeal, "Let others, therefore, boast and seek honor; you [servant or/and prince] be obedient and quiet, and your honor will find you [...] for the Christian faith is not a joke, nor is a little thing, but as Christ says in the Gospel, "It can do all things'."³⁵²

(*Montreal, 2015*)

³⁵² Ibid. p. 133, p. 136

RUSSIA AND THE WEST: FYODOR TYUTCHEV ON RUSSIAN EXCEPTIONALISM

For Dostoevsky, Fyodor Ivanovich Tyutchev (1803-1873) was equal to Pushkin as a "poet-philosopher." And Tolstoy once said that "no one should live without Tyutchev." The Slavophil Alexei Khomiakov argued that Tyutchev was the first Russian author who saw the differences between Russia and the West through the prism of religion. Ivan Aksakov, the 19th century Russian intellectual (and Tyutchev's son-of-law), believed that in Tyutchev's political letters, Europe heard for the first time the "strong and masculine voice of the Russian public opinion."

Tyutchev, who spent almost half of his life in Germany as a diplomat and was married first to a German countess, then, after her death, to a German baroness, was a veritable Russian patriot; he loved Russia and believed in her cultural and spiritual superiority. In his political essays, he fiercely opposed the European critics of the Russian absolutism and skillfully argued against the "Russophobic demagoguery" of the Western intellectuals and politicians.

Being a poet, Tyutchev had an intuition for the spiritual currents of his time and warned his compatriots about the threat coming from the "revolutionary and atheistic West". History proved that his concerns were legitimate. In the 20th century, Russia was defeated and transformed from within with the power of ideas that were not her own: first was the fall of monarchy, whose legitimacy was gradually

undermined by the influence of Western liberalism, then the communist revolution, fueled by Marxist and anarchist dreams.

Tyutchev was a passionate "apologist" of the Russian moral exceptionalism, although he did not want to be depicted as such. In one of his essays, written in French in response to an unfavorable to Russia article published in *Allgemeine Zeitung*, the diplomat-poet exclaimed: "Apology of Russia!...My God...The true defender of Russia is history that in the course of three centuries resolves all litigations," in which the Russian people had "plunged."³⁵³ In another letter to the editor, entitled *Zapiska* (A Note),³⁵⁴ Tyutchev expressed his indignation from the claim, published in the same German newspaper, that "Russia occupies a great place in the world, yet it is only a material power, and nothing more."³⁵⁵ Namely the Western perceptions and arguments about the Russian cultural and spiritual inferiority led Tyutchev to an open and public engagement with questions of international politics and culture. He was not able to endure the moral and intellectual pride of the West that he sensed as a foreigner living in Munich. And the Russians, on the other hand, were not able to resist his message, feeling equally foreign in character and way of life to their European neighbors. But Tyutchev was not a political theorist. He had always been a poet, and the inexactitude,

³⁵³ *Россия и Германия. Письмо доктору Густаву Кольбу, редактору "Всеобщей газеты"* in Федор Тютчев, *Россия и Запад* (Институт Русской Цивилизации, 2011, Москва) (*Russia and Germany. A letter to Doctor Gustav Kolbe, editor of All-common Newspaper, in Fyodor Tyutchev, Russia and the West*, Institute Russian Civilization, 2011, Moscow), p. 37

³⁵⁴ *Записка* in Федор Тютчев, *Россия и Запад* (Институт Русской Цивилизации, 2011, Москва) (*A Note, in Fyodor Tyutchev, Russia and the West*, Institute Russian Civilization, 2011, Moscow)

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 54

the passion, and the metaphor had always dominated his thinking and expression. His political writings were full of emotion and sometimes self-contradictory. His logic was attractive and adequate but only from the Russian point of view. It could not be taken lightly in the West and he never became popular with his political writings beyond the borders of Russia. The language and the skill he used to present his ideas and to impose his views were more than impressive, yet this was the language and the skill of a poet, never of a historian, and certainly not of a professional diplomat. In Tyutchev's political letters, one finds the Old Testament prophet and the lay theologian, the national apologist and the political visionary.

The work of the great men of arts is always a reflection of the epoch and the historical environment in which they live. Tyutchev, as one of the "great *troyka*" of Russian poets—Pushkin and Lermontov are the other two—was not an exception. His poetry and essays reflected the soul and the feelings of his countrymen. Tyutchev wrote in the beginning of an epoch of a religious and national awakening for the Russian people. This was the epoch of the 18th and 19th century "feudal" Russia that was both deeply impressed and deeply repulsed by the European Enlightenment and by the democratic revolutions in the West. Witnessing the political and spiritual dynamics on the European continent, the 18th and the 19th century Russia felt excluded from the flow of history and, at the same time, saved from its turbulences. The revolutions and the intellectual boiling of Europe were both a curse and a blessing for the cultural and political development of the Christian Orthodox Empire. It was a curse because it forced Russia to re-consider her place in the world, and so burdened her with doubts for her own

capacities and national character; and a blessing because it pushed her to develop a national self-consciousness through the incitement of internal political, social, and intellectual debates that would eventually result in her becoming of a center of a thriving culture and military power, moved by messianic hopes.

The accelerated in Europe formation of national identities and new forms of governance compelled and helped the 19th century Russians to define themselves as a sovereign nation and unique "civilization." In this process of self-determination *vis-a-vis* Europe, the intellectual life of Russia was divided, generally speaking, into two opposing ideological camps: the Slavophiles who insisted on the exceptionality and superiority of Russia, and the Westernizers, the "pro-Western" liberals, who lamented the autocracy and the backwardness of the Russian society. Tyutchev belonged to the Slavophil camp. He never idealized the West and never criticised, at least not openly, the Tsar.³⁵⁶ His criticism was directed against Europe and his goal was to awake the Russians for self-respect and dignity.

³⁵⁶ Some commentators argue that Tyutchev wrote a critical to the Tsar verse after the shock and disappointment from the Crimean War. The epigram, found after his death, reads as follows:

YOU NEITHER SERVED THE LORD NOR RUSSIA'S GLORY,

You served your vanity indeed,

And all the deeds of yours, both good and evil, gory, -

All was a lie in you, the hollow phantoms' story:

You weren't a czar, but hypocrite.

НЕ БОГУ ТЫ СЛУЖИЛ И НЕ РОССИИ,

Служил лишь суете своей,

И все дела твои, и добрые и злые, —

Все было ложь в тебе, все призраки пустые:

Ты был не царь, а лицедей.

Tyutchev argued that both the Europeans and the Russians were ignorant about the political and spiritual significance of the East and of Russia as its "soul" and "moving power."³⁵⁷ The West, he believed, was shaped for centuries by errors, egoism, and greed. For the Western nations, there was only one Europe—the Western Europe.³⁵⁸ But there had always been another Europe, he argued, the Slavic East with Russia as its spiritual center. In *Zapiska*, he appealed to his Western readers to rediscover Russia as the forgotten Eastern Empire—the still living and legitimate successor of the old Christian "Caesar." The Russian Tsar, he argued, in contrast to the divided and troubled by revolutions Western monarchs, was the only sovereign left on earth, bearing its "own principle of power," sanctioned and approved only by the ancient Eastern Church, the precious remnant of the Apostolic Church and the keeper of the ancient Christian traditions. If the Russian tsar was the still living representative of the Christian Roman emperor, the Eastern Church, for Tyutchev, was the living Universal Church that the Latin West betrayed centuries ago with the institution of papacy and the schism.

For Tyutchev, Russia represented the living tradition. It seems that the living tradition for him was nothing but the living truth. Truth exists and survives by itself, it depends on nothing. In Russia, Caesar and Church were one. In her, there was no division of power as it was in the West. And as one, the Caesar and the Church depended on truth that was Christ. Russia was a Christian empire, built on Christian principles, and therefore unshakable and enduring. If the Russian empire was the

³⁵⁷ *Россия и Германия. (Russia and Germany)* p. 42

³⁵⁸ *Записка. (A Note)* p.64

image and manifestation of the sovereign principle of power sanctioned by the universal faith, i.e. if Russia was the living expression of the temporal authority sanctioned by the spiritual universality, then it was eternal and all-powerful. Eternity and all-power united is the end of everything, she is a mystical unity. But one must believe in this mystical unity in order to see it. Russia was this unity of power and spirit. This is the meaning of Tyutchev's, perhaps most well-known in the West, verse:

You cannot grasp Russia with your mind
Or judge her by any common measure,
Russia is one of a special kind –
You can only *believe* in her.³⁵⁹

In this kind of mystical perception, Russia had no need for apology; her true defender was history. All apologetics was simply confirmation, through human words, of what was intuitively perceived as deep reality. Those, who had intuition for truth, did not need persuasion; and those, who defended the truth, did not need to worry, because the truth defends itself in history, in time. Russia, as the embodiment of Caesar and the Universal Church, was the history in its metaphysical form, purified from the elements of temporality. She lives, changes, and will always *be*. This "*be*" was Russia itself in itself. She was not the *is*, i.e., how she *is* and how she is perceived in the given moment

³⁵⁹ Умом Россию не понять,
Аршином общим не измерить:
У ней особенная стать –
В Россию можно только *верить*.
(28 ноября 1866)

of time, but rather the *be*: the absolute of being, of existence, the life itself that surmounts and endures *in itself* every temporal, momentary *is*. Tyutchev's perception of Russia was the perception of a "believer" for whom the material and the temporal was always second after the spiritual and the eternal. This explains his aggravation against the view that Russia was only a "material power." To see in Russia simply the material power, its size and raw force, was to miss her true essence and dignity. It was to despise her unique quality and fate. The blindness of the West for the greatness of the East was, for Tyutchev, a proof that the West was sinful; it was like the Gospel verse that says "And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." (John 1:5)

In Tyutchev's vision, Russia was the metaphysical history. It was the history in its wholeness, where the beginning and the end are already here—revealed. She was the keeper of the Christian rupture of the world history. Whatever happens in history after this rupture was just a confirmation of what had already happened. The West, through its godlessness, was defeated within history. It seems that in Tyutchev's mind the West was the representative of the lie in history. As many of his Russian contemporaries, moral relativism and the sense for complexity were not part of his ways of thinking and interpretation. On the contrary, he judged the world in radically dualistic terms. His worldview was not so much an example of Hegelianism, but rather of a modern form of Manichaeism, peculiar and necessary for the formation of the national sense. In the nationalistic ideology, there is necessarily a conflict between "us" and "them," it is the politics in the Schmittian sense, not in the Hegelian, in which the inclusive, synthetic element

dominates the exclusive. Tyutchev's patriotic thinking was built upon the underlying conviction that there was a massive conflict between truth and untruth, good and evil. His Manichean dualism was represented in his idea of the fight between the two opposites: Russia, the good, and the West, the evil; Russia, the truth and the tradition, and the West, the lie and the progressive corruption. He believed that history was created in this conflict; he was convinced that the struggle will grow stronger, will "flare up."³⁶⁰ But there was, as we have said, a difference between history and history. There was a history as a conflict in time between good and evil, truth and lie, eternal and temporal, a conflict that will intensify and lead to apocalypse, and there was another, *eschatological* history that was good without evil, that was truth without lie, and that was eternal without the temporal. Despite being involved in the temporal conflict between good and evil, Russia was the manifestation of the eschatological history.

The primary enemy of the East, according to Tyutchev, had always been the Latin Church. And against this enemy, he believed, Russia had one weapon—"her history and her past."³⁶¹ Russia served as a savior of Europe against the advances of the Mongols, the Turks, against the Western ungodly conquerors, like Napoleon, against the lying prophets of revolution and anarchy, and finally against the corruption of the Christian faith that had happened in the heart of the Western Christianity—Rome. Tyutchev also believed that Russia, as representative of truth and eternity, preserved what the Ottomans and the Western Crusaders aimed to destroy—Byzantium, the Orthodox

³⁶⁰ Ibid. 55

³⁶¹ Ibid.

Christian Empire. "But what did Rome?" he asked. "How did Rome acquire its power?" Not through preservation of the Christian faith and rule, he judged, but through an attempt for appropriation of the "rights" and "duties" of the Universal Church.³⁶²

Tyutchev believed that Rome had led half of Europe into "heresy," and the heresy, in turn, led the West to "atheism." He was convinced that Rome rebelled against the Universal Church, and her rebellion led others to rebel against her. This was, for him, a punishment from God. The divisions within the Western Church were divisions among heretics. As the "dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench," (Eccl. 10:1) so the sanctity of truth was corrupted by the errors of the Latin Church.

Nobody argues against the right of Rome, Tyutchev wrote, it had always been the "root of the Western world."³⁶³ But this root was a "bitter" one. It gave rise to the political problems of Europe; instead to spiritually unite the people, it caused disunity, national divisions, and political instability.³⁶⁴ Its corrupting power had reached Eastern Europe as well; it began to destroy the Slavic people, undermining the "moral spirit" of Poland.³⁶⁵ But Russia, Tyutchev believed, had prevented Rome's advance and corrupting effect. Russia was capable to do so, because she was united, there was no weakness in her: the Caesar and the Church were one. "In Catholicism," he said, "is contained the whole

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ *Римский Вопрос*, Федор Тютчев, *Россия и Запад* (Институт Русской Цивилизации, 2011, Москва) (*The Roman Question in Fyodor Tyutchev, Russia and the West*, Institute Russian Civilization, 2011, Moscow) p.83

³⁶⁴ *Занука*. (A Note), 57

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

power of papacy, as in papacy is contained the whole weakness of Catholicism."³⁶⁶ And concluded: "Power without weakness is only possible in the Universal Church."

Tyutchev saw in Rome and the West only a form without spiritual essence, rationality without moral direction, intellectual sophistry and cold legalism, an empty "political mechanism."³⁶⁷ The external form and political mechanism had become the "last religion of the West,"³⁶⁸ he judged. The Roman Church, he argued, lost her genuine Christian character. The Western Church "ceased to be a society of faithful, freely united in spirit and truth under Christ."³⁶⁹ The Church became a "political" institution, a "state within the state." This development of the Church "attached" her to the "earthly interests" and predetermined her to a "fatal end." "The embodiment of divine element," he wrote in the *Roman Question*, "in a frail and mortal body is making it related to all diseases and lusts of the flesh."³⁷⁰ The involvement of the Church with the affairs of the world, her attempt to monopolize the political power, brought on her, as punishment, the spirit of nihilism, and created the conflict between the State and Church. There had never been a united Church in the West, he said. The Western spiritual unity under the head of Papacy was imaginary, and this was revealed, according to him, by the Reformation that was a reaction

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ *Римский Вопрос*, Федор Тютчев, *Россия и Запад* (Институт Русской Цивилизации, 2011, Москва) (*Roman Question in Fyodor Tyutchev, Russia and the West*, Institute Russian Civilization, 2011, Moscow). p. 83

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ibid. 86

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

against the political Church. But the Reformation and Protestantism, he argued, did not bring healing and recovery. On the contrary, they were the final "rejection of the [spiritual] authority of the Church" that resulted into rejection of the "principle of authority" itself. The Reformation was an "unconscious" nihilistic revolt against the principle of authority.³⁷¹

The destruction of the principle of authority, according to Tyutchev, was in essence the rebellion of the "I". It was the human egoism unleashed. And it had created its own ideological narrative: the ideology of "human rights."³⁷² The 1789 French Revolution, Tyutchev believed, will be remembered by the future generations because it put the "anti-Christian ideas" on the "throne of state governance." Its fundamental "dogma," he said, was the "sovereign power of the people." But what was the sovereignty of the people, he asked, if not the "dominance of the human 'I' *multiplied*" and clothed in power. The Revolution revealed its true nature and attitude to Christianity in the principle of neutrality that stated: "The State as such has no religion." This meant that the state should not have a "soul," that it should be a godless mechanism. Religious "neutrality" also meant, according to Tyutchev, "impartiality," or justice, without Christianity. In the "neutral" state, one should abandon his Christian conscience and accept the mechanical justice of the "impartial" legalistic rule. This, according to Tyutchev, was a rejection of any "aspiration" to "moral authority,"³⁷³ it was also, in effect, a rejection of religious freedom. Thus, the Western

³⁷¹ Ibid. 87

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Ibid. 88

State had taken the role of a policeman and of nothing more, emptying itself of any "moral idea." But this was another paradox and a lie, because the neutral state had, in fact, a religion, and this religion was, as it has been noted, the nihilism, the "religion of revolution." The "policeman" then defended nothing but the post-revolutionary *status quo* that legitimized the individual greed and the will to power, both hidden behind the idea of popular sovereignty.

In his essay *Russia and the Revolution*, Tyutchev returns to his Manichaeism, or, if you like, "prophetic" dualistic views of straightforward and uncompromising judgement. In it, he argued that there are now "two actual powers in Europe": "Revolution and Russia."³⁷⁴ No "agreement and contracts" were possible between them. The life of the one meant the death of the other. The entire political and religious future of humanity, he believed, depended on the result of this struggle.

He asked, What is the greatest difference between Russia and Revolution? "Above all, Russia is a Christian state," he explained, and the Russian people are Christians capable of "self-sacrifice" and "self-denial." Egoism and individualism were not traits of their national character. Self-sacrifice was rooted in the moral nature of the Russian people. The Revolution, in contrast, was not about self-sacrifice. It was about self-assertion. It was about neutrality and atheism. It was against Christianity. Tyutchev was convinced that the Revolution was an enemy of Christianity, having the spirit of anti-Christ. In the Revolution, he

³⁷⁴ *Россия и Революция*, Федор Тютчев, *Россия и Запад* (Институт Русской Цивилизации, 2011, Москва) (*Russia and the Revolution in Fyodor Tyutchev, Russia and the West*, Institute Russian Civilization, 2011, Moscow) p.67

repeated in this essay, the human "I" depends on itself and do not admit other law except its own will. The self-sufficient "I" replaces God. This was a form of unity, a monism, but of a special kind. It was not the unity and self-dependence of the two mutually supportive principles of authority in Russia: the Caesar and the Church. The rebellious egoism was not a new phenomenon, Tyutchev noted. Human egoism and greed were part of the sinful human nature. The new, he argued, was that with the Revolution, the "I" had found an expression in the "political and social right." The "I," the nihilistic individualism, tried to present itself as a right and to impose its individual right on the entire world. This "innovation," Tyutchev insisted, was brought out by the 1789 Revolution in France.

Political revolutions and secularism were the empty shells of corrupted religious feeling. For Tyutchev, political secularism was ossification of the spirit and transformation of the social and political life into a dead, mechanical legalism. It parasitized on religious ideas, took over their "language," emptied this language of its original meaning, and filled the void with abstract ideas and norms that aimed to hide deeper motivations such as the will to power. So, the Revolution, according to Tyutchev, copied the Christian slogan of "brotherhood" and even tried to convince the world that the French republic was created in order to "realize the Evangelical law" on earth.³⁷⁵ But what was this "brotherhood" that was not animated by the Christian spirit of humility and self-denial? How brotherhood did arise from the spirit of "pride and exaltation"?

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

The Revolution had a "narcotic" effect; the exaltation could not be limited or managed with "constitutional incantations." Its nihilistic spirit and terrible energy could not be curbed by abstract legal formulas. The Revolution, and the West, had no defence against their own self-destructive forces. And Tyutchev believed that on their path to destruction they could face resistance, and salvation, only by one, untouched by their madness, monarchy—the Russian Tsardom. In a moment of apocalyptic vision, he predicted, that the Revolution will begin a "crusade" against Russia.³⁷⁶ In this, history proved him right and wrong: for a century, Russia and the Russian "idea" was attacked and defeated by the revolutionary crusaders.

Tyutchev finished his *Zapiska* with the hope that Russia had the capacity to influence the public opinion in Europe. This hope was not based on "poetic" intuition or "patriotic" faith, but on facts. He observed that in the West there was a "fragmentation" of "opinions and interests." Russia's advantage, he argued, was her "great and significant unity." The unity that Russia demonstrated, he added, could help the promotion of the Russian "idea," of the Byzantine Christian-Orthodox political order, and to attract the minds of many. The problem however, he finally admitted, was that it was probably easier to convince the Westerners in the salvific power of the East than to make the Russians believe in their own exceptionality and greatness.³⁷⁷

(*Montreal, 2018*)

³⁷⁶ Ibid. 70

³⁷⁷ *Занука. (A Note)*, 65

ON JUDGMENT

I

"Judgment" is a term with manifold meanings and usages. The Webster Dictionary enumerates at least four common applications of the term. It is worth to note that the editors of the dictionary placed the word not as a separate entry, but as a part of the definition of "judge." Judgment, according to Webster, is the "act of *deciding* or passing decision on something," the "faculty" of judging "*wisely*," good sense, discernment, understanding, *opinion* formed by judging or considering, comparing ideas, actions, concepts, etc. Judgment is also related to *law*. It is the "sentence pronounced in a cause by the judge or court by which it is tried." And finally, judgment is a Biblical term that signifies the punishment of sinners, "the final trial of the human race." All these definitions can be placed under four general groups: judgment as *act*, as *reasoning*, as *court verdict*, and as *divine justice*.

If we leave aside the dictionary definitions and turn to other, more complex interpretations of the word, we can find authors like Oliver O'Donovan, who rightly note the "ambivalence" of the term. O'Donovan says that "philologically" the word judgment suggests "an activity undertaken by a public official."³⁷⁸ As in Webster, he derives its meaning from the "higher" in the hierarchy of language verb "to judge." "To judge" is the root of the act of passing judgment. To judge means to do something *publicly*, something that concerns not only us but *others*

³⁷⁸ Oliver O'Donovan, "*Judge not' and 'Judge for Yourself'*", paper presented at Symposium on Judgment at Duke University, Oct. 4-5, 3013. p.1

as well. The significance of this conclusion will be fully revealed in the next section when we discuss in detail Aristotle's interpretation of "just" and "justice." Now, we should agree with O'Donovan that judgment seems to have two fundamental "dimensions": one internal (a *property of mind*, as it was noted above), and one external (an *act of public pronouncing of a verdict*). We see here that the ambivalence of the term arises from its double nature. It is simultaneously a *property of mind*—we cannot properly say an *act of mind* while it is still *in the mind*—and an *act of will* in the moment when it is publicly *pronounced*. In other words, judgment has a contemplative and practical nature, and as such, it belongs to both the speculative and practical reasoning. We may argue with certainty that it is *always* both a property of mind and an act of will. It cannot be only an act of will, nor simply a property of mind. It has to be both rational thought and act of will.³⁷⁹ If a judgment does not have for its basis the *rational* discernment between parts or objects, or if this rational discernment is left without *practical* expression, it cannot be properly called "judgment."

If judgment is a property of reason and an act of will, we may conclude that no judgment is possible without the existence of some kind of authority behind it, of some form of *freedom to impose* a verdict

³⁷⁹ The internal order of these two functions is the following: judgement consists *first* of an act of reason and *then* of an act of will. It is so because, as Pope Leo XIII explains, "[...] the will cannot proceed to act until it is enlightened by the knowledge possessed by the intellect." When Leo specifies in the same encyclical that judgement is "an act of reason, not of the will," he does not exclude absolutely the will from the act of judgement, he rather emphasises its proper place. That is why he calls it later "a *rational will*." Clearly, the "rational will" is the one that produces judgement in "conformity with reason." (See Leo XIII, *On the Nature of Human Liberty*, Section 5)

over objects of decision. The authority in the act of judgment makes this act publicly significant and, as it seems, a mean for changing or sustaining the order in the world. Both authority and reason are phenomena directly connected to *universality*. There are no such things as "private" authority and "particular" reason. Both authority and reason have the genera of *universals*. Authority draws its meaning from its *public* function, aims, and power, while reason is possible only as the *center of unity*, as a "container," so to say, of *all* things existing in the world. As connected to universal, authority and reason are forms of *law*. For that same reason, as consisting in itself reason *and* will (or authority), judgment is related to law or have the nature of law in itself.

Based on what we have said so far, we can formulate a preliminary definition of the act of judgment: *The act of judgment is a rational discernment between things and its public expression and as such, it is a function of law*. Oliver O'Donovan offers another definition, but not so different in essence; he says that judgment is an "*act of moral discrimination that pronounces upon a preceding act or existing state of affairs to establish a new public context*."³⁸⁰ The only significant difference between our definition and O'Donovan's is his claim that the judgment "*establishes a new public context*." At this point, we cannot say whether every judgment establishes a qualitatively "new public context" or simply restores some more fundamental *status quo*. But he is certainly right when arguing that every judgment pronounces upon a preceding act or existing state of affairs. It is so because, as we have said, every judgment is a function of reason, and reason can act only as a

³⁸⁰ Oliver O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment*, (Eerdmans, 2005), p.7

reflection of or in response to something. Reason has this particular quality to apprehend the *is* of things and to find their *ought*, it has, so to say, a re-active, a *reflective* nature (hence, we sometimes use the word "reflect" instead of "think"), and left on its own, cut from its objects, like, for example, when we are asleep and have dreams, it knows neither coherence, nor direction. Reason is *bound* to things outside of itself. So, in order to judge, one has to have a reason, i.e., an object, a *casus*, like a preceding act or some state of affairs. The first part of O'Donovan's definition—judgment as *moral discrimination*—implies that every judgment aims to divide between right and wrong, i.e. between good and evil. This argument seems to bring something new in our discussion, but in fact, it does not. The moral aspect of judgment has already been revealed, at least implicitly, in our observation that judgment is a *property of reason*, an *act of will*, and a *function of law*. Reason, as we will see later, especially when we discuss Aquinas, is *naturally* directed to good, the act of will is the effort for the achievement of good, and the function of law is to prevent evil, which, as Augustine would say, is a kind of *privation* of good.

"To pronounce a judgment is always to speak about something that already is the case,"³⁸¹ says O'Donovan. This inevitably leads us to the problem of truth. We have a case, we have something that is already existing, when reason becomes involved. If we have something that precedes our judgment, we inevitably must find its "ontological" reality, which is its truth. In judgment, the reason does not create the truth, but the reason is asked to discern the truth in a situation. Truth is not in the

³⁸¹ O'Donovan 2005, p.8

reason, but in *the case itself*.³⁸² And the function of reason, and from here, of judgment, is to discern and decide. Reason can easily deceive itself that the judgment it produces, the verdict it pronounces through the act of will, is *the truth*. It *will be* the truth, but only if the understanding of reason corresponds completely to the truth in the case. That's why O'Donovan contends that "an act of judgment may therefore be assessed by the success of its outcome, as well as by the truth of its pronouncement"³⁸³ and that every judgment has a "retrospective" and "prospective" aspect.³⁸⁴ Retrospective (finding the *is*) because it is bound to a reality that precedes it, and "prospective" (finding the *ought*) because it is brought out as an act of will that aims to manifest the good, i.e. the truth, in the world. This does not mean to say that reason brings good from itself, and creates its own order. No, not at all. It means that judgment, which is a property of reason, aims to *recover* the truth lost, but still present, in the obscurity of case. That's why I said in the above paragraph that when judging, we do not create, properly speaking, a "qualitatively new public context." No, we simply *recover* something that has been lost from visible, but is nevertheless present.

O'Donovan concludes that for a good judgment there must be fulfilled two criteria: truth and effectiveness. He says, "judgment [is] subject to criteria of truth, on the one hand, and to criteria of effectiveness on the other."³⁸⁵ "Success on one front," he continues,

³⁸² See Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order* (Appolos, 1994) pp.190-203

³⁸³ O'Donovan 2005, p.8

³⁸⁴ Ibid. p.9

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

"cannot compensate for failure on the other."³⁸⁶ This is so, because "a well-made judgment is a statement that is true, and as such a deed that is effective."³⁸⁷ Again, this is so, because the good judgment does not produce anything from itself, but coincides with the truth without, and the deed that the will produces does not bring more obscurity and confusion, but resolves the problem, abolishing what was "deficient" of truth (or of good) and asserting what is true, right, good, and *real*.

Bringing the subject of truth into our analysis, we need to take a second look at our preliminary definition of judgment. We have said, *The act of judgment is a rational discernment between things and its public expression and as such, it is a function of law*. Now, after all we have said, this definition needs a slight revision. Why? Because, as it was noted, human reason is not the creator of truth, it is only its "discoverer," yet not an absolute one (it needs the help of faith); it is also not the creator of good, because good is already in the world, within every particular case. This leads us directly to the question of *obedience*. In the act of judgment, human reason must find the truth, and *obey* it through an act of will. Every judgment, in order to be deemed "well-made", a truthful one, and just, must comply with the truth outside the judging mind. So we must reverse the order in our definition, we should say that the act of judgment is *first* and *foremost* a function of law (but not simply of human law or the law of mind) and *then* a discernment between things and its public expression. We need this emphasis on the primacy of law, because law is something beyond any particular interest, including mind's own interest, something *universal* that aims at and

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

sustains the existence of common interest, which is nothing but the sum of all individual interests considered *equally*. The authority of law does not rest in the human mind; it is in the *will* of the Lawmaker, which is the truth behind the created order where everything, including human mind, finds itself. That is why human judgment and obedience are two necessarily related terms.

II

Aristotle describes justice as "that kind of state of character which makes people disposed to do what is just and makes them act justly."³⁸⁸ Injustice, he says, is simply the opposite of justice, viz. the state of character that makes people inclined to do what is unjust and makes them act unjustly. The first thing that makes an impression in Aristotle's definition is the word "character." It immediately evokes the question, Could it be true that every just or unjust act depends on man's character, i.e. on something given? Is it enough for one to be born with a good character, or educated and living in a good environment, and so to act justly in his entire life? And what can we say about those who had the misfortune to be raised in bad conditions, taught wrong habits, or those who by temperament are passionate and unrestrained? Can we blame such people for their folly, stubbornness, for their lack of temperance and good inclination? Aristotle tries to answer these questions at the end of Book V and we will discuss them later. I suspect that he left the subject of the role of character for the end of his discourse because it seems the most problematic part in his definition of justice.

³⁸⁸ Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1129a5

After this rather vague description of justice, Aristotle continues arguing that the quality of a condition and of a thing is conceived and found in two basic forms: as existing within the thing (or the condition) itself and through its antipode, hence through discernment. For example, we know that the sun is hot and the moon cold, because, first, the sun *is* hot, and the moon cold, and second, because *we have* a sense of hot and cold. However, we would never know either hot or cold, and from here, the physical condition of the sun and the moon and their differences, if we had never *experienced* hot and cold as *contraries*. The one defines the other; this is the necessary dialectics in human perception and knowledge. Similarly, "if a good condition is known, bad condition is also known."³⁸⁹ Goodness and badness become evident not only through juxtaposition of two contrary (according to our mind and senses) entities (*ontics*), but also from the things itself. In order to judge, therefore, between good and bad, we must have some *initial* knowledge or idea of good and bad, and then, things and actions with inherent qualities that *we perceive* as antagonistic. I say "*we perceive*," because they may appear as contraries according to our *particular* understanding, while in fact they could be mutually complementing one another, hierarchically related, different in kind (i.e. incompatible), or in harmony instead of being in conflict.

So, who is the just man and who is unjust? In order to answer this question, we must start, as we have said, with some planted in us natural or acquired primitive knowledge of the just man and his antipode; we must have as objects two mutually revealing, *opposite*

³⁸⁹ 1129a20

kinds of people. The just man, Aristotle says, is the "fair" and "law-abiding" person; the unjust is the "unfair" and "lawless" individual.³⁹⁰ I think, everyone would agree with this formulation. Yet, this formula is not enough. We need to say something more.

The unjust man is also the "grasping man," Aristotle says. He is the one who is covetous, greedy, avaricious. And here a paradox! The covetous man is the man who is "concerned with goods,"³⁹¹ he desires what is good. Can an unjust individual be concerned with good at all? Yes, he can, because, as Aristotle says, all men "pray for" and "pursue" the things that are good, all desire prosperity or *happiness*. "But they should not [do this]," he immediately adds, and clarifies, "They should pray that the things that are good absolutely may also be good for them, and should choose the things that are good for them."³⁹² So, if we follow Aristotle's logic, we cannot say, as we normally do, that the *just* man is simply the one who pursues good. We also cannot say that the *unjust* man, in his desire for prosperity, is the one who thinks, properly speaking, of his own good. We can say, however, that the unjust man is greedy and concerned with acquiring goods *without discrimination* and also the one who does not love or does not know how to love himself. The unjust man is not simply the one who, in his greed, robs others; he is a man who becomes his own enemy, being unable to judge rightly his own good, and so punishes himself with anxiety, toil, war, and empty ambition. The unjust, grasping man seeks neither the good of others, nor his own good; he knows neither the common nor the private good.

³⁹⁰ 1129a30

³⁹¹ 1129a30

³⁹² 1129b5

No man can be just, if he does not know what is good for him and for others. Anyone who does not pursue common good, which, in its absolute form, is, as we have said above, nothing but the sum of all private interests taken into consideration *equally*, is an unlawful man. He is unlawful, because law, like reason and authority, has universal nature; law is concerned with the achievement and sustaining of the common good, which is the measure for justice. That's why Aristotle says that the "lawless" man is "seen to be unjust" and the "law-abiding" just, because all lawful acts are "in a sense just acts."³⁹³ They are just, because the laws "aim at the common advantage (i.e. the good) either of all or the best or those who hold power."³⁹⁴

With this last quote, we depart, so to say, from the world of metaphysics and go into practical reasoning. We do not anymore speak about law in its absolute sense, but about laws, about *forms* of law that do not differ in direction (since all seek "common advantage"), but in scope. Laws, says Aristotle, aim at the common advantage *of all or the best or those who hold power*. Laws that aim at the common advantage of all, a Christian would say, are the *divine laws*,³⁹⁵ including the so-called natural law that is rational creatures' participation in eternal law; the laws that aim at the common advantage of the "best," whoever they may be, and of those "who hold power", are the *positive laws*, the laws of political society. The just person, therefore, is the one who behaves in such a way that his acts "produce and preserve happiness and its

³⁹³ 1129b10

³⁹⁴ 1129b15

³⁹⁵ Under "divine laws", I mean the eternal law, the natural law, and the divine law (the law of Scripture) taken together.

components for the political society."³⁹⁶ Political society, for Aristotle, is the community based on law, supported by the practice of virtues, and created for the advance of common welfare.

The unjust man, the grasping man, is the unlawful man; he is the individual who disregards the law of community, the existence of the rights and interests of *others*. Aristotle says that the form of justice that rests on law is "complete *virtue*, but not absolutely, but in *relation to our neighbor*"³⁹⁷ (italics are mine). Which means that to be just is to consider the common interest. Those who practice justice, who are just, exercise their virtue not only for themselves, as it could be with temperance, for example, but also towards their neighbors. "[J]ustice," Aristotle says, "alone of the virtues, is thought to be 'another's good,' because it is related to our neighbor."³⁹⁸ Or as Francisco de Vitoria notes, "Justice can only be exercised in a multitude."³⁹⁹ There are four cardinal virtues in Greek moral philosophy: "prudence," "temperance," "fortitude," and "justice." Only justice is the virtue that is concerned with the good of others. So, not only the grasping man could be unjust, but also the prudent one, who could use his "wisdom" to acquire wealth without discrimination, or the temperate man, who could use his temperance to achieve great honor, or the man of fortitude, who can use his courage to gain power and enjoy carnal pleasures. As Aquinas says, the goods of

³⁹⁶ 1129b15

³⁹⁷ 1129b25

³⁹⁸ 1130a5

³⁹⁹ Francesco de Vitoria, *On Civil Power. Political Writings*, ed. Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrence. Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 8.

this world are external wealth, carnal pleasures, and honor,⁴⁰⁰ and those who have them are the rich, the proud, and the powerful. The man who practice justice could not be rich, if others are poor, could not be proud, if others are humble, and would not use his courage and power for carnal pleasures and domination. I will repeat, only justice, among all virtues, is "complete," because it cannot be practiced without considering others. As such, the virtue of justice is the highest among all virtues; it is the "sword" of law, the foundation of community, the "queen" of virtues. The best man, Aristotle says, "is not he who exercises his virtue towards himself, but he who exercises it towards another."⁴⁰¹ The best man, therefore, is the *just* man.

In the same way as there are many kinds of virtues and one only that deals with the good of others, namely the virtue of justice, there are also many kinds of wickedness, and one only related to injustice. The act that aims to take what belongs to others is an act of injustice. Man, says Aristotle, who makes "gain" at the expense of others is unjust. But what about the lack of fairness? We have said that the unfair, like the unlawful man, is an unjust man. "All that is unfair," Aristotle states, "is unlawful, but not all that is unlawful, is unfair."⁴⁰² How so? Here we return to a rather perplexing part of our exposition that we left without consideration. We have said above that there are a

⁴⁰⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1-2.107, article 4. The evangelical council in the New Law (the New Testament), Aquinas says, is against these three: riches, carnal pleasures, pride. "[R]iches," he writes, "are renounced by poverty; carnal pleasures by perpetual chastity; and the pride of life by the bondage of obedience."

⁴⁰¹ 1130a5

⁴⁰² 1130b10

few kinds of law: divine (laws that direct all, without exception, to the end of good), and positive or political laws (rules that aim at the wellbeing of *the best* or of those *who hold power*). The divine laws are above the positive, and the positive laws do not always reflect the principles of the divine. The reason for this is that the positive laws are insufficient in nature; they are practical laws that resolve particular cases for the goals of particular communities, they have no *universal* application, they are bound to time and space, open to amendments, change, or even abolition. For that reason, the positive laws are inherently *limited*. Moreover, as Aristotle says, they either aim at the interest of the best, i.e. of those who, according to some criteria, have merits, or of those who hold power. The "justice" of positive law is limited in time, political scope, and space, and liable to error. Thus, an act might be unlawful according to the positive law of the state because of deficiency in the state law itself, and yet *fair* according to divine law, which is the law of Truth under which all are equal in everything, including the *sinner*s. "He, who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). There is no deficiency in God's law, no justice based on merit or power. That is why we may agree with the Philosopher, "all that is unfair (according to eternal law) is unlawful, but not all that is unlawful (according to positive law), is unfair." Fairness as justice is found not simply in the law of political community, but also, and above all, in the commands of the divine Truth.

An act is fair when it gives to all what they deserve or have by right. The fair act is found in equal distribution, in equality. Aristotle says, "[...] both the unjust man and the unjust act are unfair or

unequal."⁴⁰³ Between two unequals there is one intermediate, which is equal. In any kind of action, Aristotle says, "in which there is more and less there is also what is equal." So, "if then, the unjust is unequal, the just is equal [...] and since the equal is intermediate, the just will be an intermediate."⁴⁰⁴

Equality, according to Aristotle, implies at least two things: it must be both intermediate and equal (relative to persons and things), and it consists of four basic terms: two persons (or groups, or parties) and two distributed objects or things. All four are related, hence "*relative*". If the distribution of things in this relation is unequal to all, there will be, Aristotle says, "conflict and quarrels." The unequal distribution is the *source of war*; the "origin of quarrels and complaints" is "when either equals have and awarded unequal shares or unequals equal shares." This is what inflames the hearts of men: when they see a distribution of goods that is unjust concerning either *merit* or *quantity*.

It seems, Aristotle says, that in order to be just a distribution of goods should take into account the merits of the parties. The difficulty in this is that not all agree on questions of merit, not all specify "the same sort of merit." As we have said above, some positive laws aim at the good of the best, of those who *deserve*. But who are the people who deserve more than others? If these are the prudent, then we consider the proportion of their material success as just and so we encourage excessive wealth and material inequality. If these are the temperate, then we stimulate the vice of pride and self-righteousness. If these are the courageous, then we support the competition, and so we accept a

⁴⁰³ 1131a10

⁴⁰⁴ 1131a10-15

class of men with disproportionate power. If the best are the just, then who exactly are they? Can we see them? They must be neither poor nor rich, neither temperate nor dissolute, neither powerful nor weak, neither clever nor imprudent... Who are the just? How can we find them in order to enthrone them as "the best" and most deserving among all citizens? Would they accept such an honor and continue to be just? Should we call them *good*? "Why do you call me good," Jesus said, "No one is good—except God alone." (Lk 18:19)

As we have said at the beginning, we know through discerning antagonisms. And the truly just man escapes our perception because he cannot be compared through categories of wealth, virtue, and status. After all, Jesus was not recognized as *good* and so he was crucified! The state, the sovereign and the people, did not perceive him as the *best* among men. Moreover, he was judged as a criminal! His moral excellence remained unknown for the world until his death... The just are those who judge rightly according to the truth. Although difficult to be imagined as real men (so faith is needed here), they must be people who know "proportion." They must be men who do not seek *the best* in the scale of temporal values and goods. The just, Aristotle says, is a species of the proportionate, and justice, properly speaking, does not use for its measures some general or particular *criteria of merit*. The divine law, the law of Truth, treats all equally, including the sinners; and the positive law, if it is a true reflection of the divine law, must distribute between parties and things according to the case, not according to the *merits* of the involved in it. That is why Aristotle says, "a good man" (according to some criteria of merit) can defraud a bad man (a sinner) or a bad man a good man. The merits of men do not matter in resolving

cases of fraud. "The law looks only to *the distinctive character of the injury*, and treats the parties as *equal*."⁴⁰⁵ (Emphasis is mine)

The reader perhaps notices that the judge appears when an injury is done, when there is a conflict regarding distribution of goods (and rights); the judge is the one who is regarded as just and asked to pronounce a verdict according to the character of the injury. At the beginning of this essay, we said that every judgment arises in response to something, and that its goal is to recover a lost balance, i.e., to bring justice and manifest the truth. Justice and the act of judgment, as we have said, are required in order to recover or sustain some fundamental *status quo* of balance and equal distribution. The judge "tries to equalize things by means of the penalty, taking away from the gain of the assailant."⁴⁰⁶ The unjust man is the one who, for personal gain, destroys with his actions the *status quo*, the natural order of things. I have said above that man, who profits from the loss of others, is unjust. Between "gain" and "loss" is the equal, so the intermediate must be the just. "This is why," Aristotle says, "when people dispute [...] they seek the judge as an intermediate, and in some states they call judges mediators, on the assumption that if they get what is intermediate they will get what is just."⁴⁰⁷ And concludes, "The just, then, is an intermediate."⁴⁰⁸ Now, we have the just as "proportion," "intermediate," and "equality." And we ask the question again: Who are the just? The just are those who know "proportion" (not geometrical), who can act as mediators, and who

⁴⁰⁵ 1132a5

⁴⁰⁶ 1132a10

⁴⁰⁷ 1132a10-20

⁴⁰⁸ 1132a20

respect equality. These are men, who sustain or recover the balance of things according to the truth. In the language of Scripture, the just are the "*peacemakers*." It is written, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Mat 5:9) The just are those who resolve "conflicts and quarrels."

Proportion, mediation, equality. What about *reciprocity*? Is not reciprocity part of this trinity? It is written, "[...] life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand..." (Exod. 21:24-5) And yet there is another perspective, "You have heard that it was said 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist an evil person..." (Mt 5:38-9) Reciprocity is not part of justice. Both the New Testament and Aristotle agree that reciprocity (an idea promoted by Pythagoreans) cannot be attributed to justice. Reciprocity is neither distributive nor rectificatory justice. Aristotle demonstrates this conclusion with the following example: "If one official has inflicted a wound, he should not be wounded in return, and if someone has wounded an official, he ought not to be wounded only but punished in addition."⁴⁰⁹ Besides, there is difference between voluntary and involuntary acts. We cannot judge and convict someone to pay the same price for a harm caused by accident. Moreover, at the end of Book V, Aristotle notes that the virtuous man tends to take less than his share. The noble man is generous and reciprocity is something that he never seeks. Generosity, as virtue, cannot be practiced as an act of mutual favor; it cannot even be practiced with expectations for gratitude in return. We read in Scripture, "If you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even

⁴⁰⁹ 1132b30

the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" (Mt 5:46-7)

But the noble and generous men are a rarity; they are exceptional, that's why they are called *nobilis*. Men in general, Aristotle says, "seek to return either evil for evil—and if they cannot do so, think their position mere slavery—or good for good—and if they cannot do so, there is no exchange, but it is by exchange that they hold together."⁴¹⁰ Here we reach an interesting part of Aristotle's treatment of justice. This part could sound quite familiar to the contemporary reader because it reveals the "contractual" nature of modern ("bourgeois," if I use Marxist terminology) society. In this part of the book, Aristotle offers a primitive theory of the "capitalist" order, of a social order based on *demand*, *exchange*, and *money*. Note here that he first excluded reciprocity from the concept of justice and then, as we have said, finished Book V with the generosity of the virtuous man, in between, however, he points out the existence, the *possibility for* existence, of society based on *reciprocity*. It is clear, if reciprocity is not part of justice, this society could not be just. It could not be "generous" as well. It must be composed of people doing good to each other only at a price. If based on mutual favors, this society must also be free. It is neither aristocratic nor tyrannical. In this society, virtues such as honor, self-sacrifice, and courage have only secondary importance, and the unchecked power is feared and despised. It is also pragmatic and peaceful; in addition, it must necessarily rest on a sophisticated and well-functioning *legal*

⁴¹⁰ 1133a5

system that guarantees the proper execution of contracts and the low level of transaction costs (the costs related to the risks of exchange). This society *resembles* very much a just society. Yet, since it is based *primarily* on reciprocity, it falls short of the ideal of just order.

The problem of this, let's call it, "reciprocal" society, is that its goal is not justice, not even the common good, but the achievement of perfect *equality* in transactions (the "*just price*") and the satisfaction of needs. The presence of "satisfaction of needs" reminds us about the good of self-sufficiency, which, according to Aristotle, is one of the primary goals of political society. Self-sufficiency (*autarky*) in such society, however, is impossible; moreover, it is contrary to its very nature. This society becomes possible only because of the existence of unsatisfied needs and desires; it is born, so to speak, under the spell of poverty. The reciprocal society arises from the shallow roots of human need; shallow because human needs constantly change and men are quickly satisfied. If today two people come together, i.e., form a kind of social bond, *only* because they need each other and have the opportunity to exchange services, skills, or goods, tomorrow, once the mutual benefit is consumed, they would separate and forget about their relations as they have never met. Society based on mutual *profit* lasts as far as the need dictates. It resembles in character a friendship based on utility or pleasure—despite its momentary goodness, it can never have the *sublimity* and longevity of friendship based on love.⁴¹¹

⁴¹¹ For more on friendship see Aristotle's *Ethics*, Book 7. We must add here that Aristotle regards friendship as one of the primary and most important constituents of state. A long quote from *Politics* could be useful for the better understanding of our discussion: "But a state," Aristotle says, "exists for the sake

The "reciprocal society" can be metaphorically described as a world existing under the "third seal"⁴¹² in Revelation: "'Come.' I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand... A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine..." (Rev 6:5-6) It is in a way daemonic, since the world of scarcity does not tolerate uselessness: everything should have a price, everything is judged according to its *immanent utility*, including the human being (born or even *unborn*), and things that have no price have no existence, they have *no right* for existence. It is a Darwinian, or rather Spenserian world, where the demand regulates the system, and where the fittest outlive the unfit, i.e. the "useless."

The underlying *medium* of this social system of mutual favors and calculated good is money. Money's function is to balance between the extremes of supply and demand. In a sense, money is the *verdict*, the *judgment*, the final pronouncement in the market of goods. Some call it, using the language of Scripture, "the common whore of people and

of a good life, and not for the sake of life only; if life only were the object, slaves and brute animals might form a state, but they cannot, for they have not share in happiness or in life of free choice. Nor does the state exists for the sake of *alliance* and *security* from *injustice*, nor yet for the sake of *exchange* and *mutual intercourse* [...] the will to live together is *friendship*. The end of the state is the good life, and these are the means towards it. And the state is union of families and villages in a perfect and *self-sufficing* life, by which we mean a happy and honorable life." (Italics are mine) Aristotle, *Politics*, 1280a30-40.

⁴¹² The seal of "scarcity in the midst of prosperity" as some Biblical commentators interpret it. In his commentary on Revelation of John William Barclay writes, "In the Old Testament, the phrase to eat bread by weight indicates the greatest scarcity." (William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Vol. II, Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, p.8)

nations."⁴¹³ Money is not a *natural* medium, Aristotle says, it is a creation of the "human law" and it is in man's power "to change it and make it useless."⁴¹⁴ This is an important observation, not for the goals of monetary theory and politics, but because it reveals the fundamental truth that reciprocal society seems to function without the need of divine laws; in this society, the highest authority is the capricious will of *demand*, the "sacrality" of *human contracts*, and the verdicts of *numerical signs*. As we have said, the demand brings people together and the excess pulls them apart, it builds cities and creates unions, it shapes nations and brings empires down. As Aristotle says, "[...] demand holds things together as a single unit"⁴¹⁵ and when the need is satisfied men stop to exchange, and the "single unit" collapses. As far as there is need of exchange, there will be also "association of man with man"⁴¹⁶ and things with a "price."

We must note that there is no purely reciprocal society. The described above system of social relations is to a certain degree fictional. It is fictional, because there are families and people who love each other, and there is faith and sympathy in the world. This however does not eliminate the fact that modern society, especially the capitalist liberal order, is reciprocal in nature and from here limited in justice. The liberal democracies seem as the best societies ever achieved in human history, they are peaceful, pragmatic, and free, with complex and functioning

⁴¹³ See Karl Marx, "The Power of Money" in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. See also Revelation 17.

⁴¹⁴ 1133a30. For trade and money, see *Politics*, 1257.

⁴¹⁵ 1122b5

⁴¹⁶ 1133b15

legal systems, yet they are far from perfect exactly because the existence, in their very foundation, of reciprocity based on mutual *profit* and need.

All societies, Aristotle says, that are "governed by law" are just, while all law "exists for men between whom there is injustice."⁴¹⁷ This should mean, first, that the law is a necessity, and secondly, and perhaps more importantly, that men do not make the society just, it is the law that delivers justice.⁴¹⁸ This is so because if all men were just, they would not need a law to live in community, and if all men were unjust, they would not be able to live with each other at all. But men are social creatures, and just and unjust are mixed, and in order to stay together, i.e., in order to preserve their *humanity*, they must be in society;⁴¹⁹ law, therefore, is what keeps them united, preventing the wicked from doing evil, and permitting the good to share their goodness.

"Of political justice part is natural, part legal,"⁴²⁰ Aristotle explains. The presence of the natural shows that political justice does not solely depend on human will, while the existence of the legal means that human will still plays a role in it. He differentiates, however, the political from the household justice. "The justice of a master," Aristotle says, "and that of a father are not the same as the justice of citizens."⁴²¹ In the household, the father or the master is the lawgiver; he produces

⁴¹⁷ 1134a25

⁴¹⁸ "For man when perfected, is the best of animals, but, when separated from law and justice, he is the worst of all..." (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a30)

⁴¹⁹ "Man is by nature political animal [...] But he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god; he is not part of a state." (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a5, 1253a25)

⁴²⁰ 1134b10

⁴²¹ 1134b5. For more on household management, see *Politics*, 1259; for citizen's rights and state power and rule, *Politics*, 1275, 1276.

his laws from feelings of love and sense of ownership, and there is no concern for reciprocity in it. The father is the head of the family, his children and wife are not equal to him, but nonetheless he serves them as he would *serve* himself. Moreover, although higher in the hierarchy of power, the father, if there is need, would sacrifice his own interest, or even life, for the good of his loved ones. We cannot have such relations in political society. In a normal political community, the citizens are equals, sacrifice uncommon, reciprocity respected (but only as a mean for the application of law) and desired. The "magistrate" in such a society should not be the lawgiver (like the father in the family), but the "guardian of justice."⁴²² He must care for the "equality" among citizens; he must be a "disinterested" mediator with distributive power. As a "guardian of justice," the magistrate would be obliged to follow universal principles and disregard his private interest and individual will. "That is why," Aristotle says, "we do not allow men to rule, but rational principle (*logos*)."⁴²³ The "rational principle" does not belong to one man or to one thing alone.

We finish this part of our discussion with two important questions. How should we treat those people who act unjustly because of bad character, poor education, or lack of experience and wisdom? And is the virtuous man unjust, at least to himself, when he gives his share to others? These two questions, in my opinion, lead us again to the subject of generosity and from here to the act of forgiveness and mercy. I think that everyone would agree that no society could survive without personal sacrifices and mutual forgiveness. Self-denial and the ability to

⁴²² 1134a30

⁴²³ 1134a30

forgive are qualities that all of us possess by nature and that all of us practice, from time to time and to a certain degree, in our social relations. These qualities, if I use a Kantian language, are the *sublime* expressions of justice; they make justice a function of love. The "best counselor of kings," the appointed of God judges on earth, "and the surest of the kingly throne," Calvin says, is "clemency—which by a certain writer of antiquity was truly called the chief gift of princes."⁴²⁴ Self-denial *without* forgiveness is duty, self-sacrifice as forgiveness and mercy is love. In fact, forgiveness, and this was most clearly recognized as a social rule by the Anabaptist Christians, is the most *radical* act of breaking the cycle of wrongs and retributions known from Greek philosophy. That is why we must not be surprised to see that Aristotle ends Book V with the tyranny of character and ignorance, and with the generosity of the virtuous man. The end, as we know, is the most important part of all things. "The end of a matter," the wisdom teaches, "is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride." (Eccl. 7:8)

In the last sections of Book V, Aristotle writes, "Men think that acting unjustly is in their power, and therefore that being just is easy. But it is not..."⁴²⁵ And he adds, "Similarly, to know what is just and what is unjust requires, men think, no great wisdom."⁴²⁶ We, according to Aristotle, must not deceive ourselves that the act of judgment is simple, and that to be just is easy. Jesus advises, "Judge not so that you will not

⁴²⁴ Jean Calvin, "*Institutes of Christian Religion*," Ch XX.10, Civil Government, (Westminster Press, 1960) pp.1498-1499

⁴²⁵ 1137a5

⁴²⁶ 1137a10

be judged." Take your judgment, your *justice*, with upmost seriousness. We are all slaves of our character, of our weakness, and sin. There is no man, no "king" on earth, who can say, "I am righteous," "I am knowledgeable," "I am just," without pride. And no pride can compete with humility for the crown of justice. We must forgive each other; we must know that in our freedom to judge, we are not free from being judged. In *Politics*, Aristotle says, "Most people are bad judges of their own case,"⁴²⁷ and he is right. The full truth, however, is that most people are bad judges of other people's cases, too. We are neither righteous nor we have all the truth and knowledge to judge a sinner without a mistake. To be just, to be impartial, one has to look from afar, to be "disinterested," to go somehow out of himself, out of his world and origin.

For right judgment, conscience does not help either. Liberal philosophy that elevates personal conscience to the heights of deity is a delusion. And how can someone put conscience before judgment as both, judgment and conscience, have, as we have said following O'Donovan, an initial "*retrospective*" function? Conscience is the judge of wrong judgment; it cannot precede *acts* of will, it can only follow them.⁴²⁸ For good judgment, conscience is useful only if it brings us *out of ourselves*, and this happens only after the fact of *pronouncement*, i.e. after the *deed*. But even this would not be possible, if the source of conscience is our own, autonomous reasoning. To judge others and then to judge our own judgment with good conscience, we must necessarily

⁴²⁷ 1280a15

⁴²⁸ For more on conscience, see O'Donovan's *The Ways of Judgment*, (Eerdmans, 2005), pp.301-308

have a higher standpoint than our individual human condition, intellect, and morality. If I use the language of Barth, to judge right in accordance to the right conscience, man should forget the "*I am*," man has to outgrow what he *is*. Man has to be lost in *non-being*, as a neo-Platonist would say. However, the pagan wisdom does not know "the way, the truth, and the life," (John 14:6) and the most it can offer is to promote the virtue of generosity, friendship, and *noble action*.⁴²⁹ The virtuous man "forgets" himself (here I use the language of Nietzsche⁴³⁰), he knows that there is no wrong in giving; there is no injustice in nobleness, because the one who gives willingly from his own suffers "nothing contrary from his own will."⁴³¹ "The virtuous man tends to take less than his share," Aristotle says.⁴³² But the pagan wisdom does not clarify why. Why should one give from his own to the others? And what is the source of the good spirit of generosity and mercy?⁴³³

Yet, the pagan philosophy is still wisdom; it touches with blind hands the essence of justice and law. The man who refuses to keep his share, Aristotle says, is the one that acts *outside the law*. As a giver, one is not anymore under law, he is free, justice does not apply to his case, it

⁴²⁹ In *Politics*, Aristotle says that human society united in a state is not about companionship, but about *noble action*.

⁴³⁰ Describing the "noble man" in his characteristically paradoxical way, Nietzsche gives as an example Mirabeau, "who was only incapable of forgiving because he forgot [...]" it is only in characters like these [Mirabeau's, i.e. generous to the point of forgetfulness] that we see the possibility [...] of the real 'love of one's enemies.'" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Courier Corporation, 2012, p.108)

⁴³¹ 1136b20

⁴³² 1126b20

⁴³³ I answer to these questions in another essay, entitled *Freedom is Obedience, Justice is Love*.

is not *necessary*.⁴³⁴ Unlike Cain, the generous man accepts the judgment of the "only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy" (James 4:12). He knows the seriousness of the question: "But who are you who judge your neighbor?" (James 4:12) The giver does not compete; when his gifts are unappreciated, his actions reproved, or even when he is unjustly punished, his face is not "downcast." (Gen 4:4) In his freedom from all material concern, the noble man becomes the law itself. But the pagan wisdom does not reach that far in its conclusions. It is Christianity that argues that emptying himself from what he *is*, i.e. from his being, man becomes the law itself, the measure of all things, the Truth, as we know it revealed through the Gospel. Being the law, he is *not a judge*; through his sacrifice and self-giving love, he becomes the judgment *itself*. The pagan wisdom, the human wisdom, cannot comprehend this. It says, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" (John 6:60) And Christ answers, "What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing..." (John 6:63)

We do not speak anymore simply about judgement and justice, but about *obedience*. The right understanding of what it means to obey and yet to stay free, to judge and yet to obey (and love), can be found

⁴³⁴ "Christians," Calvin writes, "ought indeed so to conduct themselves that they always prefer to yield their own right rather than go into court, from which they can scarcely get away without heart stirred and kindled to hatred to their brother. [...] To sum up [...] love will give every man the best counsel [in case of loss]. Everything undertaken apart from love and all disputes that go beyond it, we regard as incontrovertibly unjust and impious." (Jean Calvin, "*Institutes of Christian Religion*," Vol. 20, Ch XX.21, Civil Government, Westminster Press, pp.1509)

only in Christianity.⁴³⁵ So, let us now finish our discussion on justice and judgement with St. Thomas.

III

"Judgment," Aquinas says, "denotes the act of a judge in judging."⁴³⁶ The judge is a magistrate, someone who has power and right to pronounce a verdict. There are no self-appointed judges; the judge is *called* to declare what is right in a case. As "called," or appointed, the judge necessarily stays above the parties in the case, he stays above his own interest, too; so he receives by the power of his impartiality and "disinterestedness," a right and authority greater than the rights and authorities of any of the conflicting sides.

Judgment is a "definition or determination of the just or the right,"⁴³⁷ and as such it reflects the truth. For the right judgment we need two things, Aquinas says, *reason* and *disposition* (or will). Reason, because "it belongs to the reason to pronounce or define," and will, because the "*capacity*" of man to judge rightly, to *utter* the truth, depends on good will.⁴³⁸ "It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh profits nothing." (John 6:63) So, Aquinas contends, "The spiritual man, from the fact that he has the habit of charity (or love), has an inclination (or will) to judge all things rightly according to Divine rules."⁴³⁹ The "spiritual man" is free from all material concern and in his freedom from the "flesh," he rises above the case, becoming a true authority. The

⁴³⁵ For more, again, see my essay, *Freedom is Obedience, Justice is Love*.

⁴³⁶ Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Theologiae" in Thomas Aquinas, *Political Writings*, ed. R.W.Dyson (Cambridge 2002) p. 193

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

true authority, therefore, is possible only if there is freedom from necessity and desire for good. That is why, when judging, man has to think about the object of decision, i.e. the case, as something that does not concern him personally. He should not judge for reward or for profit, nor according to his own mind; his decision should reflect only the truth in the case. He has no authority over the truth. He has no permanent authority over the parties that ask him to pronounce a verdict and impose justice. His dignity is valid only as an arm of truth, as a bearer of justice in the case where his verdict is needed. Beyond that, he is equal to all. When the case is resolved and peace achieved, the judge disappears, his authority ceases, and his office abolished. The magistrate should not be usurper of authority, his rights and functions are valid as far as his justice is needed. There is no need for judge among righteous, nor for peacemakers in time of peace. Law and justice, as we have said following Aristotle, exist for those "between whom there is injustice."

"Man is his own master," Aquinas says, "in things which pertain only to himself, but he is not master in things pertaining to others."⁴⁴⁰ Justice, we have said quoting Aristotle, "alone of the virtues, is thought to be 'another's good,' because it is related to our neighbor." This naturally leads us to the conclusion that judgment belongs to the one who is not an interested party in a conflict, who is not acting under the pressure of necessity, who is free from material concern, appointed to decide as equal among equals, and having the power to impose order for the good of others. This "one," in political society, is the *ruler*, the

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 194

magistrate. "Justice," Aquinas says, "is in the ruler [...]: that is as commanding and prescribing what is just."⁴⁴¹ The ruler, however, is not a *master*. The function of state power is not to dominate, but to resolve conflicts and sustain peace according to the truth; every deviation from this function of commanding and prescribing the just and the good is self-abdication from the seat of authority. Moreover, any usurpation of authority, i.e., any *needless* act of judging, is unjust and illegitimate.

"Three conditions are required for a judgment to be an act of justice,"⁴⁴² says Aquinas. First, it should be an *act of good will* (or inclination); second, it must proceed from one who has *authority*; and third, it must be "pronounced according to the *right reason of prudence*." In the first case, if inclination to good is missing, we simply don't have the will for the performance of an act of justice. In the second case, in order to judge, one must be asked to do so. From the "appointment," from the *calling*, as we have said, comes the authority of the judge. There are no self-appointed judges. It is contrary to the logic of justice one to get involved in a conflict between equals, when no party needs or desires one's help. Furthermore, the absolute authority is present only when all sides agree to respect the judgment of a common arbiter; otherwise, we have "judgment by usurpation." The judge must also have the power both to pronounce a command, or a verdict, and to *impose* order. The decision, as we have said, must reflect the truth hidden in the obscurity of the case. And here we reach the third requirement, namely, that the decision must be according to the "right

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

reason of prudence." Only reason, or the virtue of prudence, can tell the *is* and the *ought* in a case, i.e. the truth.

Aquinas spends more time in describing this last condition, because he understands that if the intellect is wrong, the will and the judgment would also be wrong. The primacy of reason in the act of judgment is crucial for the right verdict. It is so, because we may have good will, but if the reasoning behind it is wrong, its effect would also be wrong. But if we have good understanding, i.e., if our mind *reflects* the truth, then the will, if applied, would also reflect the truth, and the effect of the judgment would be good. Or, if we recall O'Donovan's words, "a well-made judgment is a statement that is true, and as such a deed that is effective." So, Aquinas advises that before we judge, we should patiently observe the *facts*. Our conclusions must avoid suspicions of mind or expectations based simply on experience. Aquinas says that the Lord "forbids us rashly to judge the intention of the heart or other uncertain things."⁴⁴³ He warns that we must not judge under the influence of passions and anger. Passion, or anger, makes the judge a side in the conflict; it destroys his authority. "A judge is appointed as a minister of God,"⁴⁴⁴ Aquinas says. This means that a judge is a minister of truth, and his only passion must be the passion of *love*. Judgment based on suspicion is a verdict produced by the opposite of love: hatred, fear, contempt, envy, or anger. In such emotional state, one is a servant of "shadows." It is easy, Aquinas says, "to believe what [one] wishes to believe," therefore, one must be conscious of his interests, feelings, and state of mind. "Know Thy Self" was inscribed on the door of the Temple

⁴⁴³ Ibid. p. 195

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

of Apollo. Young people are usually the ones led by passions and imaginations, but experience, that is a quality of the old men, could also be a source of rash judgment. Instead of helping us, experience, if not used prudently, makes us proud and prejudiced.

Thus, Aquinas concludes that before we pronounce a judgment, we must be sure that we do not "doubt the goodness of another from slight indications."⁴⁴⁵ Or as the Apostle says, "Judge not before the time" (1 Cor. 4:5), or as O'Donovan would say, judge not without a reason. We must "refrain from forming definite and firm opinions" and remember, as every noble, generous man does willingly, that it is better to "err frequently through having good opinion of a wicked man, than to err more seldom through having bad opinion of a good man."⁴⁴⁶

I will finish with practical advice that pushes us even further in our understanding of what is "right judgment." As we have noted, Aquinas warned that we must abstain from judging "the intention of the heart and other uncertain things," which means that we have no right, nor capacity to say without mistake or pride that a particular man is good or evil, righteous or sinful, clever or stupid. In our judgment, if it is a legitimate judgment, we do not pronounce over the goodness or badness of a man in general; the *object of justice* in the right judgment, and this is what I ask the reader to remember, is not the *man*, but his *action*. This is the meaning of Jesus' command "Do not judge so that you will not be judged." (Matt. 7:1) We have no right to *judge our neighbor*, we do not (and should never) question his morality, goodness, and value as a person; this is *God's prerogative*, God is the only good and righteous

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid. p.197

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid. p.199

Judge. We are *permitted* to judge merely the *act* of man, his momentous will as expressed in the case. We pronounce a verdict over the casus, and over the *particular action*, a verdict according to the *truth*. But the neighbor, not his act, but the *neighbor*, is the one that we are *called* not to judge, but to *love*.

(*Montreal, 2015*)

STATE AND IDEOLOGY. NOTES ON NIEBUHR AND VOEGELIN

Nothing on earth is his equal—a creature without fear.

He looks down on all that are haughty; he is king over all that are proud.

Job 41:33-34

This article covers primarily the negative aspects of state, man, and society. However, there is another Christian realist perspective, more optimistic and significantly more complex than the one presented below; it rests on both Aristotle's political philosophy and Scripture, and was first developed in the work of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. The optimistic Christian realist view on state power and human nature does not contradict the pessimistic one, expressed in this article. So, for the full understanding of this text the reader needs to have some background knowledge of the Augustinian and Thomistic political theologies, and also of the Lutheran and Calvinistic interpretations of social and political order.

It is commonly believed that there is a historical process of development from small social groups to larger ones. If we agree with this theory, we can argue that human history is a process of growing cooperation. But this could be only one aspect of the evolution of human societies. The growing cooperation, if it really happens, is always accompanied with a parallel process of enlargement of inter-group conflicts. The conflicts between big modern societies involve more people and power, take more casualties, and have greater magnitude and destructive force than the past conflicts between family clans, feudal principalities, and kingdoms. So, it seems that we witness in history of

human societies a *twofold* development that should make us neither optimists nor pessimists about their character and future—this development is the increasing cooperation between units, i.e. a formation of sovereign nations and international alliances, and the parallel growth of conflict between these larger units. The growth of conflict must not be sought in the number of wars and acts of violence, but in its magnitude and deadliness. Even if the number of wars has diminished over history, as Steven Pinker optimistically suggested in a recent book,⁴⁴⁷ the scope of their devastation has grown. Even if the risk for war has diminished with the rising cooperation, the stakes in every future potential conflict have risen proportionally. We, therefore, move into a more complex and dangerous world, not because we become less civilized and less cooperative, but on the contrary, because we become more sophisticated and more interconnected. This paradoxical effect of the growing, but always partial cooperation, has been proven in the twentieth century by its two world wars that followed the longest period of trade liberalization and globalization in human history, by the Great Depression that shook not only the United States, but the entire world, and by the Cold War that was a tentative peace dividing the world into two hostile camps.

The observation of the history of social cooperation and conflict should make us realists, and in this essay, I will discuss some of the realities of our common life from a Christian realist point of view. I will offer an interpretation based on the ideas of two authors, described as "realists"—Reinhold Niebuhr and Eric Voegelin. Niebuhr will give us an

⁴⁴⁷ See Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (Viking, 2011)

insight on the character of society; Voegelin will shed some light on the secular ideologies, civil religions, and human nature.

"Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics" is hardly a theological work.⁴⁴⁸ Niebuhr's Christianity appears subtly somewhere at the end of this book, and somewhat shyly, in the admission of the "non-realist" solution to all human problems—the selfless love. If the reader does not know the author's biography, he or she might not be able to recognize Niebuhr's typically Christian argument against pride and hypocrisy, as well as his typically religious distrust in human ability to create a perfect society. The main focus of the book is the mentioned above paradox of growing social cooperation and organization and the parallel process of "veiled" or clearly overt intensification of social conflict.

Niebuhr explains this paradox with the devaluation of moral sense that happens inevitably with the enlargement of society and its growing complexity. "Secular philosophers" and modern social scientists commonly see the creation and growth of state as a panacea against violence.⁴⁴⁹ They almost uncritically accept either (or both) the Hobbessian *Leviathan* who *imposes* peace and order to combat the anarchy of unchecked freedom or the Lockean enlightened society of tolerance that constrains the power of king and church in the name of peace and freedom. As we will see in the next pages, Hobbes's and Locke's ideas must not be embraced too enthusiastically, but thought

⁴⁴⁸ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2013)

⁴⁴⁹ See William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and The Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford University Press, 2009)

carefully as limited and historically determined solutions to the problems of violence and war.

For Niebuhr, *Leviathan* is what it is—a *beast*. The modern state is a coercive institution that struggles to maintain either peace or justice within the common life. It is a pale image of the small social groups that characterize with less coercive structures, whose members are more equal, whose organization is more just, and the belief and application of their constitutive principles more genuine. Modern states, the big societies, if not an opposite of their small counterparts, are only a distant reminiscence of them: they are necessarily coercive, inevitably unequal, just only on the surface, and *hypocritical*, especially in the light of their legitimizing principles.

Hypocrisy, this is what can make a moral "realist" vocal. Collective hypocrisy is a source of corruption and coercion. Niebuhr calls this coercion "veiled." If modern social science, especially its enthusiastic believers in Reason and State, does not recognize clearly the true character of modern state (and human nature), it risks to become an instrument, a means for covering the "brutal facts" of human life and a promoter of the dominance of powerful. The hypocrisy of big society, Niebuhr says, consists in the invention of "romantic and moral interpretations of the real facts, preferring to obscure rather than reveal the true character of... collective behaviour."⁴⁵⁰ He says that the collective hypocrisy is a symbol of the "tragedy of human spirit," of our

⁴⁵⁰ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), p. 9

inability to conform the collective life to the individual ideals of love, justice, peace, freedom, and equality.⁴⁵¹

The most hypocritical society is the democratic one. This is not a surprising conclusion, although it could be, if we think about the monstrous propaganda of totalitarian regimes. It is most hypocritical, because of its *professing and actual effort* to promote justice, equality, and freedom. Modern democracy, especially its Western forms, is the best political system ever invented and applied; historically, it proved less violent, less coercive, and less unjust than any other political order. But it is *more* violent, *more* coercive, and *more* unjust than we tend to believe or are taught to believe, because democracy has never lived up to its principles, and the temptation this fact to be overlooked or underestimated is always strong and dangerous. What Niebuhr suggests is not a critique and disapproval of democracy, not a search for better forms of political organization, but an open and honest admission of the fundamental imperfectness of *any* human society. In the *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, he tries to analyze the universal character of social organization, and doing so, to appeal to the spirit of humility and the sense of realism.

Why is any human society imperfect? Why is any state, even the democratic one, coercive and potentially aggressive? The most direct answer to these questions is that any society, especially the state, is a form of *division*. This means that there is no society that is all-inclusive and open, there is no state that is universal and all embracing. Nation state is always an entity, a unit, juxtaposed to other units. It can be in a

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

peaceful relation with other states, but it possesses a *negative* identity. The modern state is not a creation of the *positive will* of man as we can often hear. It is not a result of a romantic national emancipation. Historically, it was a product of either a coercive force or a collective reaction against dominance felt as "foreign." The state is born in *strive*, it is a fruit of war, not a result of a peaceful, voluntary, and purely romantic will. People organize in state to overcome challenges, necessity (and coercion along with ideological propaganda) is what makes them cooperate on a larger scale; people do not come together, do not organize in a rigid social structure voluntarily or spontaneously as couples and families do led only by mutual love and sympathy. In fact, the majority of people find themselves *within* a national political order without doing anything conscious for its creation and governance. Their participation in the nation-building process consists mostly in their compliance and non-opposition to the forces imposing the order.

The national state has identity as a unit. It has common language, shared history, culture, and dominant religion, territory, and specific political and judicial system. But the identity, or if I use George Kennan's expression, the "*personality*," does not make the state a human-like being;⁴⁵² the state is not a person. It has no moral feelings and its ideals and legitimizing principles are, as we have said, shallow, a cover for its true nature. The state is a *Leviathan*, a *beast* without heart. "Nations are temporal societies,"⁴⁵³ says Niebuhr, but they seem eternal

⁴⁵² See George Kennan, *The Sources of Soviet Conduct*, Foreign Affairs, (July, 1947).

⁴⁵³ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), p. 9

having a life longer than the life of human generations. Nation states do not feel sympathy. They are not "ethical," they do not have conscience, do not feel shame. A nation cannot feel "personal responsibility" or repent after committing a crime against another nation or domestic community. There is no nation sentenced in court for war crimes. There is no nation that can be charged for "war guilt." The winners in the First World War tried to blame Germany for the escalation of war, but this judgement, the Article 231 of the Versailles Treaty, was an act of hypocrisy, fear, and greed, not of justice and truth. There is no earthly authority over the sovereign states. A state can be humiliated in a conflict and constrained for a period of time, but it would rise again like in the blessing of Edom in Genesis 27:40: "...but when you grow restless, you shall break his yoke from your neck."

The collective responsibility of state's citizens is a chimera; there is no society that can experience a true sense of guilt. Have we seen Israel, the nation of God, ever truly repenting? Does not Israel always repeat its mistakes? The ancient lands of the Abrahamic religions still burn in the flames of violence. We see man repenting, never his society. Nations do not have reason, too; they have only laws (and their leaders' wills and passions). These laws are *shadows of reason*, dead snapshots of the living spirit. It would be a contradiction of terms to argue that the rationality we find in laws makes them equal to reason. That is why the sin of a nation not the same as the sin of a man. We do not judge imbeciles or the nature for their fury. A successful supra-national system of justice that deals with states and their behaviour has never been created and would be hard to create, if we think the state as a rational being. Beasts are not under justice.

Reason has freedom to choose between good and evil; it is a source of free will. We know the phrase "the free will of people"; today, it can be heard as part of the referendum appeals in Quebec, Scotland, and Catalonia. Then, do nations, people, have a collective freedom of will? Was Hillary Clinton right when she said in an interview for the BBC's *Newsnight* that Russia has the *choice* to be a truly great country, not a "bully" and "intimidator," or Moscow just acts under the pressure of circumstances and pre-set political realities?⁴⁵⁴ Recently, the people in Crimea voted for secession from Ukraine and re-attachment to the "mother" Russia. Was their will free when they incited the referendum, or something urged them to act, something forced them to go out and vote, to "emancipate"? Or was the protest on Kiev's Maidan a spontaneous, voluntary action or a *reaction* against the long history of Russian domination? No, there is no such thing as "the free will of people." Nations and societies have only a will that is negative, always in *response to* something, a limited and determined will. As we have said, the state is not a creation of a *positive will*, the only will that can be free; the state (and society) is *moved*, not a *mover*. If I were not afraid that the size of this essay would test the patience of the reader, I would support these claims with Augustine's interpretation of the early Roman republic and his idea of the importance of Christian love in social life as the only *genuine* mover. Now, I just argue that there is no nation acting from its own *free* will; yes, the organized in state society has a will, it has

⁴⁵⁴Hillary Clinton: *Full Newsnight Interview*, June 12, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-27826749>

freedom and power to act, but the *incentive* for its action is always an *impulse of necessity*.⁴⁵⁵

In contrast to men, nations do not sacrifice for other nations; they do not give birth and do not care for children; they do not suffer as men suffer. Their acts of "altruism" are always acts of self-defence and particular interest. There is no a "civic religion of love" so great and so powerful to convince a multitude of people organized in a nation to risk and give their life for the salvation of another nation. The nineteenth century wars of "liberation" led by Tsarist Russia against the Ottoman Empire were not for the cause of the "Slavic Christian brothers"; their aim was hegemony over the Balkans and control of the Bosphorus Strait. The United States was involved in the two world wars in Europe not because of its sense of collective altruism and duty, not for the sake of preserving human civilization from the "German barbarians"; its motive was the national security. The wars in Iraq were not wars of punishment of a dictator and liberation of Kuwait or Iraqi people; they were joint efforts of Western democracies for imposing a control over a region that was a source of instability and danger. The NATO bombardment of Belgrade during the war in Kosovo in 1999 was not a humanitarian action, as Vaclav Havel, for example, wanted to believe;⁴⁵⁶ it was a concerted pressure for deposing of a nationalist, belligerent regime, in a region that provided the spark for the fire of the Great War in 1914.

⁴⁵⁵ For a discussion on the importance of freedom from necessity in politics, see Hannah Arendt's "*The Human Condition*." For Augustine's interpretation of the peace and justice in Roman republic, see *The City of God*.

⁴⁵⁶ Vaclav Havel, *Kosovo and the End of the Nation State*. Address given to the Canadian Senate and House of Commons in Ottawa on April 29, 1999. For the full text, see *The New York Review of Books*, June 10, 1999.

Behind every "just war" lurks the shadow of collective self-interest and will for domination.

The state is an organism, it behaves like a living creature, but it does not have the spectrum of feelings, qualities, and emotions of human being. It does not feel real pain. It is a beast. It is also like a shadow of truth, of reality, a dark reflection of human collectivity. The state rests on power and organization, but also on loyalty, individual political disengagement, and compliance. People *are* the sovereign; they can change the political system, their collective behaviour produces the kind of power and order in which they exist, but do they realize this? The "most significant moral characteristic of a nation is its hypocrisy," says Niebuhr and I would add—pride. We see here a paradox: we claim that the state is not a human person, it has no real emotions and character, it has not true consciousness, yet, it can be hypocritical like a man, and experience a collective sense of pride. So *Leviathan* can be moved emotionally, but these emotions, we must note, are not love, sense of guilt, repentance, but the negative feelings of collective pride, humiliation, apathy, fear, anger, revenge, and lust for dominance.

So what is this characteristic of the nation state that makes of *Leviathan*, a *beast* without heart, yet with emotions and will. What is the source of the will of the state and its ability to act? It is the organizing and mobilizing *power and will* of the national elites and leaders. The highest legitimization of their power and actions is the ideal of peace. Power imposes order for the good of peace. This order is never perfect, and all peace that rests on power is simply *armistice*. To interpret armistice as peace is either hypocritical or superficial. We must

remember that peace, any "peace," gained by force is always uneasy and unjust one. The greater the force, the bigger the suffering and injustice.

In democratic societies, says Niebuhr, the political power has been made "responsible" by the system of division of powers and political representation; the economic power has been left "irresponsible." He wrote the *Moral Man and Immoral Society* in the 1930s, in the time of the Great Depression, and now, almost hundred years later, economy is still under the control of those who have the power of financial capital, and the abuse of this power is still suffered by the people who lack capital but sustain its growth. If the Western democracies have succeeded in some degree to deal with the distribution of political power and representation, they continue to fail with the restraint of economic dominance.

The dilemma and tension between freedom and order has ever been present in the modern Western world. Thinkers as F.A. Hayek and Milton Friedman, the intellectual fathers of the neo-liberal economic revolution of the 1980s and 1990s, warned that if Western democracies tighten the economic regulations and rise bureaucracy and control, they risk to disturb the unstable equilibrium of free economy, and thus threaten one of the most cherished values of Western society—the pursuit of individual success and happiness.⁴⁵⁷ Creativity is among the most valuable assets of Western democracies; state control suffocates it and distorts competition inevitably in favour of the interests of political, economic, and bureaucratic elites, and so prevents the development of

⁴⁵⁷ See Friedrich Von Hayek, *The Road To Serfdom* (University of Chicago Press, 1944, 2007), Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (University of Chicago Press, 1962, 2009).

economic progress or what Schumpeter famously called "the creative destruction."⁴⁵⁸ Western democracies seem eternally poised to wobble between the temptation of control and freedom, to stay on the edge of anarchy and order, being never in order or in anarchy. This temptation does not exist in East, in Russia, for example, or China, where the order has always been preferred before freedom, and control before competition.

"Power sacrifices justice to peace within communities and destroys peace between communities," says Niebuhr. It prevents the anarchy in intra-group relations and in the same time encourages the anarchy in intergroup relations. Putin's Russia is an example of this truth. After the fall of communism and the brief period of post-communist liberalization and anarchy during Yeltsin's presidency, Putin's government came with the "ambition" to restore the order (and justice) within Russia and along its borders, and to deal with the power of oligarchs.⁴⁵⁹ Today, Russia is an autocracy that achieved a tentative domestic peace, locked in a non-armed conflict with what Putin officially (and hypocritically) calls "our Western partners." In the recent years, the regime in Moscow restored the order (not the peace) at home and disturbed the international order with the annexation of Crimea, with its

⁴⁵⁸ See Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (Routledge, 2013, First edition 1942)

⁴⁵⁹ For a concise analysis of the post-Soviet transformation period see Peter Kenez, *A History of Soviet Union from the Beginning to the End* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), Chapter 11, *Leap into the Unknown*, pp. 278-302.

policy of economic blackmailing abroad, and the provocation of the civil war in Ukraine.⁴⁶⁰

The autocratic regimes are always insecure; nobody sees them as peaceful, but, paradoxically, their primary concern is preserving the order, and from here the peace or the *status quo*, which simply means their own power. The autocratic and totalitarian states are both rigid and restless societies. They are contradiction to themselves. They do not like swift changes, do not want war and anarchy, (this was sensed well by George Kennan, one of the architects of the politics of containment in the twentieth century)⁴⁶¹ but these regimes are always in combat readiness and thus are always a source of *instability*—the thing they fear most. The reason for their awkward situation, is their belligerent spirit, their sense of insecurity, suspicion, paranoia, and will for dominance. Niebuhr is right arguing that every group, as every individual, has "expansive desires" rooted in the "instinct of survival," an instinct that if

⁴⁶⁰ In a recent interview with the liberal journalist Vladimir Posner, Nikita Mikhalkov, one of the most talented Russian filmmakers and actors, also a nationalist and Slavophil, expressed in a few short sentences the logic of the Russian autocratic tradition. "It is the artist's task to predict what would happen," he said. "Russia has always been a cross—the vertical of power and the horizontal of culture. Without the vertical there will be anarchy that would bring Russia so much bloodshed and terror that any, even the most brutal power, could not bring... And most importantly, even if you have the cruelest dictator, *you know who he is*; but in a state of anarchy, you don't know *who* [the power] is...." Then, a few minutes later, speaking about Russia's character and fate to stir the world, Mikhalkov said, "In Russia, there will never be a mild climate... because Russia is destined to produce change..." (*Познер—ток-шоу с Владимиром Владимировичем Познером*; www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CbhmzoLoY, accessed on July 17, 2014)

⁴⁶¹ See George Kennan, *The Sources of Soviet Conduct*, Foreign Affairs, (July, 1947).

not satisfied, if ever satisfied, mutates into a *will* for dominance. "The will-to-live," he says, becomes "the will-to-power."⁴⁶²

We speak about totalitarian regimes and autocracies having a warlike spirit, but the truth is that every state, even the most liberal and peaceful one, has the demons of war, and the reason for this, as we have said, is that the state is a *distinctive* unit among other units and its organization depends on coercion.

"The fact that coercive factor in society is both necessary and dangerous," writes Niebuhr, "complicates the whole task of securing both peace and justice."⁴⁶³ Therefore, every state faces two main challenges—how to keep its internal unity, justice and peace, without the need of *violent* (or *open*) coercion, and how to navigate (or survive) in the "anarchy" of international system, without resorting to war and conflict. In short, the state, because of its coercive and distinctive character, seems to face, both domestically and internationally, the dilemmas of peace and conflict, of survival and destruction.

The historical fact that the nation state always survives and that a sovereign nation cannot be kept subjected forever does not make it more peaceful or just. This is so because the human generations that sustain and perpetuate the state organism may change and die, but their ceaseless reproduction and will-to-live, prompted by their ever present sense of finitude, are a constant source of fear, collective greed, and *immortality*. In fact, Leviathan is a fusion of *temporal* and *eternal*, as the *temporal* (human generation) sustains and molds the character of the

⁴⁶² Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), p.18

⁴⁶³ Ibid. p.20

eternal (national state). The primacy of temporal over eternal is, as we will see later, the *very source* of state's imperfectness and monstrosity. This primacy is inevitable since the state exists for the man, not the man for the state, but the confusion of aims and means is full, if we realize that historically the state institution dominated over the individual man while mirroring, on collective level, man's most negative features. Moreover, we have the paradox of international system that is anarchic and *could* be peaceful and stable, because of the ultimate tenacity of its composing parts, yet, it is always unstable, because, again, of the temporality of generations that sustain and mold the character of nation states. I would say here in advance that both the state as a Leviathan and the international system as a battlefield *would disappear*, if the common will-to-live of all human generations is liberated from their will-to-power. The only mean for this to happen, or at least to be approached, is the progressive conversion of the present order: not the temporal to sustain eternal, on the contrary, the eternal should sustain the temporal, which will result in an order where man is not serving the state (or society), but state (or society) is serving the man. And the *eternal* that can purify us as individuals *and* society from the passions of temporality, from the will-to-power, must not be searched in the "theology" of national state, nor in any secular (temporal) ideology; it should be found in the idea and belief in the existence of perfect Goodness.

But let's return to the question of society, peace, and war. There are two general approaches to this question. The first one examines the nature of social activity, the second one—the nature of man. The first has its beginnings in the social and political theories of Enlightenment, more concretely in the thought of Jean Jacques

Rousseau⁴⁶⁴; the second has its roots in the Christian tradition. Kenneth Waltz discusses these two approaches in his doctoral dissertation "*Man, the State, and War*," which is now a required reading for the political science classes.⁴⁶⁵ In his research, Waltz explains that the conflict between states (and groups within the states) is not only a result of the nature of man or of state, but before all of the *nature of social activity* and the "*anarchic*" character of international system. The lack of peace, he argues, is a result of historical *determinism* and *concrete situation* that makes the war a *solution*, a legitimate, although unwanted means for survival. This claim, I have to note, does not contradict the expressed above argument that state has a *negative will*, that it acts always in *response* to something, that it is *moved*, not a *mover*, even in periods of offensive and war for dominance. Moreover, Christian thinkers like J.H. Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas recognized the importance of the deterministic element behind war and conflict and built their pacifist, Christian theories on the argument that only a radical break from this determinism, which is the act of love and forgiveness, could pacify humanity.⁴⁶⁶ But Waltz's solution, if he offers such at all, to this determinism is instrumental, not moral. He believes that social activity is a process of interaction between particular units, therefore, any social system, domestic and international, is inevitably exposed to the risks of

⁴⁶⁴ See Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (Courier Dover Publications, 2012)

⁴⁶⁵ Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (Columbia University Press, First Edition 1954, 2001)

⁴⁶⁶ See Stanley Hauerwas, *Should War Be Eliminated?: Philosophical and Theological Investigations*, (Marquette University Press, 1984) and J.H. Yoder "*Discipleship as Political Responsibility*," (Herald Press, 2003)

instability and conflict. Different interests create different situations and the challenge is how to prevent societies (and individuals) to enter in situations, in which war, conflict, and violent coercion are seen as valuable, even necessary options. So, Waltz seems to suggest that governments (and the international community) have to spend efforts in search for cures against the *particular situations* that create *conditions* for war and conflict. There is no universal solution to war, he admits pessimistically, but there are conditions that prevent wars: a system of balance powers, high costs of the conflict, nuclear weapons deterrence, interdependence, world federation of states, etc. The last "condition" is rather utopian; the creation of a world government, he thinks, seems neither good nor possible option. The main argument against world government is that it can assure peace, even a perpetual peace, but would not secure freedom. A world government could become a homogenic tyranny, an all-powerful Leviathan, proud and unrestrained by foreign powers. Waltz's inability to imagine a peaceful world was perhaps a result of the spirit of time (he wrote in the peak of the Cold War), and to his interest in sciences—there were just no evidences that peace could ever be achieved in a system that is anarchic in character.

Waltz's approach belongs to the instrumental (but not institutional) realist tradition of dealing with political conflict that has no use of metaphysical or philosophical concepts on the nature of man. He just says that whatever the character of man or state is, wars happen because there is nothing to prevent them. Thus, what matters is not the search of the sources of metaphysical evil in man and state and its

description, but the discovery of useful methods of prevention.⁴⁶⁷ To this, I would ask, if we don't know where the roots of evil are, how would we find methods for its eradication? Waltz would probably answer that roots do not matter if we have the ax to cut off the sprouts every time when they shoot up.⁴⁶⁸ He does not believe that improving man's or states' character is a realistic option. One cannot change the

⁴⁶⁷ The liberal political philosophy also seems to favour prevention as the basic means for dealing with war. For example, John Rawls's "realist utopian" vision postulates, "The crucial fact for the problem of war is that constitutional democratic societies do not go to war with one another. This is not because the citizenry of such societies is peculiarly just and good, but more simply *because they have no cause to go to war* with one another." (Italics are mine.) This simply means that if we remove the conditions for war, we would achieve peace. But the problem still remains: How to remove the conditions? What are the conditions for war? According to Rawls the basic source of instability, i.e. the fundamental condition, is the internal structure of the states, for example, he thinks that the societies of old monarchies were "inherently aggressive and hostile to other states," while the democracies go to war only in "self-defence" and to "protect human rights." However, I must note, this last claim brings us back to the question of the nature of state, not to the nature of international system and the politics of war prevention. See John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples: With the Idea of Public Reason Revisited*, (Harvard University Press, 2001) p. 8.

⁴⁶⁸ This is indeed not very far from the Machiavellian pragmatic realism. In the *Prince*, Machiavelli advised, "In the beginning the disease is easy to cure, difficult to diagnose; but after a while, if it has not been diagnosed and treated early, it becomes easy to diagnose and hard to cure. So, too, in politics, for if you foresee problems while they are far off (which only a prudent man is able to do) they can easily be dealt with... The Romans always looked ahead and took action to remedy problems before they developed. They never postponed action in order to avoid a war, for they understood you cannot escape wars, and when you put them off only your opponents benefit..." So, if Romans acted resolutely with force against potential future enemies, we, moderns, must rather act in the same aggressive and timely manner, but against the *conditions* that make war a valuable option. (Niccolo Machiavelli, *Selected Political Writings*, Edited and Translated by David Wootton, Hackett, 1994, p.11)

nature of a given nature, as Eric Voegelin, whose ideas we will discuss after a while, says.⁴⁶⁹

As a Christian realist, Niebuhr does not embrace this overly pessimistic approach. Writing after the First World War, he still believes that the analysis of human nature and the nature of society matters, he reminds us that there were two general explanations for the existence of war and conflict—the lack of intelligence and the lack of moral sense. The Enlightenment bequeathed to human civilization the idea that if all people are well educated, there would be no wars and conflicts, there would be no violence, the power of Reason would be liberated, and it would start, as the ancient Greeks believed, to put the world in peace and order. On the other hand, Christian theologians and philosophers were convinced that reason alone is insufficient to bring peace, the prudence of reason, as Kant argued in his *Groundwork*, can be used for bad and egoistic aims, and can be destructive.⁴⁷⁰ So people must be taught not simply how to be clever and informed, but also how to be moral. Moreover, Niebuhr says that not every moral theory gives results. *Rational* morality, for example, often leads to utilitarianism, i.e. to elevation of happiness to the level of fundamental good (or as its motto says "It is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong"), and thus it is less potent in bringing to life the truly fundamental goods of peace and justice. Only religious morality that is aimed at duty can prevent the laziness of the soul and

⁴⁶⁹ "Among states, the state of nature is a state of war," says Waltz in *Theory of International Politics* (Addison- Wesley, 1979). p.103

⁴⁷⁰ See Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of The Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge University Press, 1998)

the prudence of reason from becoming slaves of the egoistic impulses of our finitude, from becoming instruments of the will-to-power. But even the idea of duty, which is originally a Stoic idea, is not sufficient to bring peace, if duty is resting only on reason and moral virtue, but not on selfless love. Duty from reason is always ideological, while the responsibility that love brings has no ideological program and thus it is free from temporal concerns and interests. For a Christian, love is what John Rawls would call the "veil of ignorance,"⁴⁷¹ this imaginable state of equality necessary for the creation of a social contract that can produce *true* principles of justice. Love equates justice with fairness, because love, as it is written in 1 Corinthians 13:5, "does not seek its own."

It seems that now we are steadily moving from Christian realism to Christian idealism. It is not so. And I will explain why. In what people, organized in society, believe is a question of fundamental importance. Do are they organized in a rational system of justice, having a culture of consumerism, loving peace and happiness, having no definite faith, or live in a system of terror and militarism, disillusioned or believing in a political or religious *gnostic* teaching, acting under compulsion or sense of duty, it doesn't matter. Neither the illusions for just political order nor the trust in rationality nor the duty and loyalty to the nation can restrain or change the unethical *Leviathan*. The beast can be *disrupted* from inside, which is with something immanent and real, and from without, which is something transcendent and ideal, but not less real. The "*inside*" is the man and his personal choices (or will), it is "*you*," and "*me*." The "*without*" is the *object* of our hope and its

⁴⁷¹ See John Rawls, "*Theory of Justice*" (Harvard University Press, 2009)

transformative power. Reason plays in our lives an important, yet supportive role; we know its limitations. Faith (or hope) is what brings true change in our lives, and not any faith and any hope, but the *right faith and hope*.

"*Right faith*" is a dangerous phrase, people don't want to hear about self-righteousness, it has brought too much suffering in human history, but people cannot stop believing, cannot stop hoping in something; if they lose faith, if they lose hope, they lose their will-to-live. Of what they hope and at what they aim is the measure of their *rightness*. What the Christian aims is the will-to-live, he believes that life is eternal; what he doesn't want, what his religion disproves, is the will-to-power. Whoever aims at power and hopes in life, is not a true Christian. Thus, the presence and the activity of the Christian within society is to defeat fear, to combat the illusions of power, to restore the spirit of truth, and to change the temporal order giving the eternal its due respect, and so reconciling the particular with the universal. His choices and actions are to set the things in their right order, permitting the universal to support the particular, transforming the society from a master into a servant to the individual. The Christian makes Leviathan, in any society, disappear, not through revolution and war, not through particular social, legal, or political technology, not even through living a life of self-sacrifice, but through hope merged with reason and right estimation of the value of things. Only a Christian truly believes that society must resemble the ideal of Christian Church or community; his religion educates him to believe that society must serve the individual; to do so, the individual must act socially, which is to act from love, not seeking his own: *my* property, *my* nationality, *my* achievements, *my*

church, *my* social class, *my* religion. He knows, there is no private property to defend, except his free will; there is no nation to receive loyalty, except humanity; there are no achievements to be proud, except the fruits of common efforts; there is no social class to belong, except the class of mortal; there is no one religion, but one God. The Christian knows the limits and drama of human existence and this does not produce in him the terror and desperation that a man without faith in the perfect Goodness can feel. He does not sweat to achieve the dreams of the will-to-power, he laughs at the naïveté of the Machiavellian disregard to the "*ought*" of Christianity. The true Christian faith does not make Christians righteous, nor perfect, it simply sustains their will-to-live; when they fall they rise, when they rise they fall, but faith gives them hope in time of despair and humility in time of exaltation. Christians transform society with their hope, faith, and choices. Niebuhr, as many others, was right to insist: it is not whether we attain happiness or perfectness or any other excellence in this world, these are impossible to achieve, it is how we see the world and what directs and moves us to aim at excellence, this is what matters.

Someone would argue that saying all this we have irreversibly slid into a Christian idealism. To this I would reply that we *would* descend (or rather ascent) into idealism, first, if we have claimed that this world is *fundamentally* evil, if we see the state and society as absolutely corrupted and immoral; and second, if we don't admit our human fallibility and limits.

In two articles,⁴⁷² published in the 1950s, Eric Voegelin sheds some light on the danger, to which a believer in a particular ideology or "truth" finds himself exposed. Nobody is safe from the illusions of supersessionism, even the "tolerant" liberal, as Douglas Farrow lucidly explained in an article for the *First Things*.⁴⁷³ The "supersessionist righteousness" is organically related to the pessimism (and, often, political pragmatism) of the "*gnostic*" and his ambition, his inexplicable optimism in the possibility to destroy and rebuild anew the common world.⁴⁷⁴ For Voegelin, the "gnostic" is the man of "knowledge," the learned man of special insight, the person who knows the truth and has the will and passion to impose it. Not the knowledge is the problem here, but the attempt, the political *action* to *enforce* a particular, temporal (limited) vision for good and bad. The fathers of the early Church understood what danger the *soldiers* of the "secret" knowledge and righteousness among them pose to the universal Christian faith, and exposed their delusions and haughtiness in books and credos. But Manichaeism has not disappeared with the ancient Gnostics. In history, political radicals of any kind, led or covered behind an ideology that describes the world as absolutely evil and unjust, caused bloody wars and conflict to achieve nothing but revelation of their own false ideology

⁴⁷² "*The Origins of Totalitarianism*" (1953) and "*The Oxford Political Philosophers*" (1953)

⁴⁷³ See Douglas Farrow, *Three Meanings of Secular*, in *First Things*, www.firstthings.com/article/2003/05/three-meanings-of-secular (accessed 16 July, 2014)

⁴⁷⁴ For a classical example of political pragmatism mixed with pessimism about "the old order" and idealistic optimism in a future order governed (dictated) by an enlightened vanguard, see Lenin's "*What Is To be Done*" in "*Essential Works of Lenin*" (Courier Dover Publications, 2012)

and will-to-power. Only in the twentieth century, humanity suffered the gnosticism of Bolsheviks, Maosists, religious fundamentalists, Nazis, and nationalists. Moreover, the sprouts of "Manichean" will-to-power are everywhere, we can find them among the modern liberals, conservatives, among scientists, "new atheists," economists, and in all "supersessionist" sects on the fringes of secular ideologies claiming to possess the truth, but blind for the limits of their projects, and yet willing to *fight* for their realisation.

So, I choose to devote this final part of the essay with a short discussion on the liberal Manichaeism, because political liberals, in which I include all who believe in the merits of liberal democracy, are the most widespread group of learned men in the West and thus, as a majority, the most susceptible to hypocrisy and self-blindness. I chose to do this also because it is most difficult for me to criticize them, since I share the fundamental principles of classical liberalism. Yet, I believe that what is good and universal in political liberalism can be preserved with frank and constant discussion on its limits. Following Voegelin, I will show that even the heart of liberalism, which is *pluralism*, is not safe from the encroachments of the supersessionist impulses and will-to-power. Pluralism is the foundation of the liberal political order and as such, it needs defence; the best defence it can receive is the open critique and debate on its limits and contradictions.

In a review of Hannah Arendt's "*The Origins of Totalitarianism*," Eric Voegelin used the opportunity to assert one of the central claims of his political philosophy—that the twentieth century politics had been divided not between the camps of liberals and totalitarians, but rather between modern "*immanentists*" and traditional

religious and philosophical "*transcendentalists*." In this essay, Voegelin agreed with Arendt that the aim of totalitarian ideologies and regimes was not to transform *society*; what they tried to do was to change *human nature*. He said that the transformation of *human nature* is "the essence of totalitarianism as an immanentist creed movement," and added that the "totalitarian movements do not intend to remedy social evils by industrial changes, but want to create a millennium in the eschatological sense through transformation of human nature." "Christian faith in transcendental perfection through the grace of God," Voegelin said, "has been converted—and perverted—into the idea of immanent perfection through an act of man."⁴⁷⁵ In what he didn't agree with Arendt was that she, in his opinion, assumed (although not accepted as right) that human nature can really be changed. Thus, he said, "'Nature' is a philosophical concept; it denotes that which identifies a thing as a thing of this kind and not of another one. A 'nature' cannot be changed or transformed; a 'change of nature' is a contradiction of terms, tampering with the 'nature' of a thing means destroying the thing. To conceive the idea of 'changing the nature' of man (or of anything), is a symptom of the intellectual breakdown of Western civilization."⁴⁷⁶

Voegelin argued that any attempt to change the nature of man is futile and dangerous; meanwhile he did not say anything against the possibility to transform society without changing the nature of man. Moreover, if the state is a Leviathan, as we have argued above, would

⁴⁷⁵ Eric Voegelin, ed. Ellis Sandoz, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, Vol. 11, Published Essays, 1953-1965* (University of Missouri Press, 2000), p.21

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

Voegelin agree that its nature is capable of transformation, at all? I would say that transformation is possible, because Leviathan is a beast composed by humans with good although fallible nature and its transformation would lead not to a creation of a new Leviathan, but to the disappearance of the old one; it is the progressive conversion of the City of Man into a City of God. And this conversion could happen and it is indeed happening not through supersessionist will-to-power and violence, not through revolutions or political programs; it takes place on a deeper and invisible level, through the multitude of *individual* ethical choices and acts that shape the world, prompted not only by reason, but, before all, by faith and hope in an *unworldly*, transcendent *Goodness* and *Rightness*. The impulse for this change is *in* man and so *in* society, yet it does not originate from man or society, but from the immaterial, and eternal, *object* of man's love and hope. Where all secular ideologies fail is their belief that the transformation of social reality is possible only as a mere result of the immanent will of man and his reason. They cannot accept seriously the reality and the transformative, miraculous power of a transcendent, unimaginable God, who cannot be depicted and idolized, and who has no clear *political* program for salvation. Being unwilling to accept the existence of the transcendent, they still need the mobilizing force of hope and faith and thus present and use their immanent ideology as a transcendent one. In this way, they confuse the order of things forcing the temporal into the position of eternal, and since there is nothing stronger than truth, they face opposition on every step, trying to impose their temporal and limited order against the unlimited and eternal structure of natural order.

This is what happens with all secular supersessionists, including with the liberal *immanentists*. In "*The Oxford Political Philosophers*" Voegelin criticizes the conviction that Western liberalism is the greatest and final political system and ideology that has succeeded to accommodate both the best of the ancient Greek culture and the modern ideals of freedom. Such belief in the superiority of Western liberalism is superficial, Voegelin argued, not because it is not a good system of governance, but because of the blindness to its temporality. It is an illusion, he said, that modern liberalism is a successor of the Greek culture. The ancient Greeks, he reminded, did not believe in the infallibility of their political orders. Plato and Aristotle, Voegelin wrote, "did not hesitate to rank Hellenic political culture higher than any other but found enough of a gulf between the standards and reality to make them despair that well-ordered polis could ever be realized in Hellas. The Oxford political philosophers do not adopt the classic philosophical attitude that reality at its best is still far from conforming with principles."⁴⁷⁷

Not having a sense for its own limits, every political ideology, including liberalism, becomes a totalitarian immanentist teaching. But political liberals do not see the world as a dialectic between immanentist credos and transcendental worldview, between radical anthropocentrism and faith in God. Moreover, they don't see themselves at all as having something in common with totalitarianism. They are used to think that the world and history have always been moved by the dialectical confrontation between the powers of "orthodoxy" and the

⁴⁷⁷ Eric Voegelin, ed. Ellis Sandoz, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, Vol. 11, Published Essays, 1953-1965* (University of Missouri Press, 2000), p.29

aspirations of "freedom." They assume three types of political principles, Voegelin says, "the medieval totalitarian, the modern totalitarian, and in between the preferred modern type characterized by free pursuit of truth, religious freedom according to *conscience*, and civil liberties."⁴⁷⁸ "In this radical opposition of freedom and orthodoxy as the respective representatives of good and evil, he says, we recognize an instance of gnostic-Manichaeism."⁴⁷⁹ Now, some would immediately point out Voegelin's failure to recognize his own dualistic vision, and I would not become his advocate, but will defend the Christian transcendentalist view with the Augustinian argument that the City of God and the City of Man are not totally opposed and separated, but intermingled, as the one is transforming the other, without destroying neither the nature of man nor the freedom, but acting in such a way that the potential for evil in man, which is his will-to-power, not to develop into action.

Voegelin reminds us that this dualistic, secular approach in dividing the world into evil orthodoxy and good liberalism has its roots, ironically, in the first secular, political philosopher, the thinker that according to Mark Lilla⁴⁸⁰ caused the *Great Separation* between the dangerous mysticism of the old political theology and the promising potential of the modern political philosophy—Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes was the one who set the ideological template for the modern theory of state, he was the first who used the metaphor of Leviathan to defend the necessity of secular order over the religiously inspired chaos, and who

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 32

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁰ See Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern Age* (Vintage, 2008)

had no other intellectual tool on disposition except the same old Manichaeism dualism, explaining reality as "Christian Commonwealth" versus "Kingdom of Darkness." The Hobbesian dualities have been re-branded by the modern liberals as "Barbarianism" versus "Civilization."

But was the medieval past more barbarous than modernity? We have started this essay with the paradox of growing cooperation and the simultaneous expansion of the range and deadlines of the inter-group conflict. As Niebuhr argues in his masterpiece *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, there is no *progress* in history; there is only *growth* of both good and evil. Voegelin says that the arguments of the liberal immanentist philosophers that the past was barbarous and despotic compared to the present are simply wrong. *There was* religious freedom in the Middle Ages, under the so-called "orthodoxy." What there was not was an institutional order that regulates the conflicts led under the banner (but rarely under the motivation) of religious identity. There was persecution in the past, but this does not mean that the old system was "totalitarian," *because of* the belief in a *transcendent* reality. If it was *undemocratic*, in the modern sense of the word, this was not due to religion, it was rather a result of the political organization of medieval and pre-medieval societies.

Freedom of conscience, that is the center of liberal criticism against "orthodoxy" and the beating heart of modern pluralism, turns out not to be the undoubtedly rational idea that prevented (once institutionalized) violence and helped the creation of a just society and state. On the contrary, human conscience has often been erroneous and has brought no less misery in the world than the unrestrained control and power. The danger with the liberalism is that rooting the rules of

justice in man's conscience, making it the highest measure of reality, and expelling God and religion, or the transcendent, as correctives and factors in decision making, sets up, again, the temporal before the eternal and so reverses the natural order of things. Voegelin writes that according to the liberal immanentists, "[A] will that deviates from conscience is immoral. Even if his conscience is badly in error, a man must follow it. Does liberty of conscience in the political sense mean that every man must be left free to follow it, even if it advises him to organize a revolution of Fifth Monarchy men or the proletariat?"⁴⁸¹ If our liberal mind and common sense respond to this question with "No," then, says Voegelin, "the so-called freedom of religion and conscience has never been opposed as a 'principle' to medieval persecution."⁴⁸²

If liberalism accepts the logic of common sense, if it admits that conscience errs, and eventually recognizes the need for control, (after all, John Locke did not propose unlimited freedom), "Could it be," Voegelin asked, "that behind the formulae of freedom and toleration hides the *orthodoxy* of a liberal, semi-secularized Protestant church-state?"⁴⁸³ Returning to Hobbes, he said that behind conscience there is *amor sui*, "beyond conscience lies the spiritual personality of the man who has it." Hobbes, the religious sceptic, diagnosed the existence of self-assertion behind every conscience, including the one of the devote

⁴⁸¹ Eric Voegelin, ed. Ellis Sandoz, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, Vol. 11, Published Essays, 1953-1965* (University of Missouri Press, 2000), p.34

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ Ibid. p. 35

Puritan, "he understood its dictates as a manifestation of *libido dominandi*,"⁴⁸⁴ a manifestation of the will-to-power.

So the conclusion is that liberalism, with its secular principle of freedom of conscience, becomes a "civil theology," which means that it becomes the next temporal order that tries to appropriate the qualities of eternal. Here, it should be noted that neither Voegelin nor I reject or underestimate the qualities of the liberal-democratic society and its political philosophy. What I support is Voegelin's insistence that the "English civil theology" must be constantly corrected and reminded for the dangers of immanenism. Liberalism survived the influence of the gnostic movements from the seventeenth to the twentieth century, but without the challenges of criticism, it would not be safe from the supersessionist tendencies. There is no other corrector, I think, against the liberal civil theology, against the Leviathan of the modern democratic state, except the faith in the transcendent reality, and the reasoning based on the rich tradition of divine revelations and historical precedents.

It doesn't also mean that the City of God, in which we participate and re-create with our faith, hope, and choices, is a creation of a *new* institution that must replace liberal democracy. In God, there should be neither time nor space for new things. The "new creation," promised in Scripture, has always been here and it is not an *institution*. Whether we see it, is another question. It does not mean that with his pessimism in the abilities of secular, the man of faith wants, of should want, to create a new Leviathan. Selfless love has no political program,

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

as it has been said. One can be a Christian, and a political realist, while being a liberal, or conservative, nationalist, or anarchist. But what makes one different from the *supersessionist* liberal, conservative, nationalist, or anarchist, is the sense for the limits of any secular ideology and power and of any group belonging and identity. The man of faith, the Christian, is loyal only to God and to the postulates of Gospel. There is one act that he accepts as legitimately supreme, as an end and a beginning—the self-sacrificing love of Jesus Christ, the God who dies for us. Such universalist and unworldly attitude, if shared by all men, would never produce an "immoral" society. Well, it is not shared by all. And there are no perfect Christians with perfect love.

So, we *ought* to be careful not to think ourselves as "elected," even as Christians. We *ought* to be anxious to preserve the domination of universal over the particular. This "*ought*," the realist would say, is still "*ought*," not "*is*," even for the Christians. Therefore, the free conscience, the source of Western pluralism, is not and could not be the final arbiter in resolving the conflict in society. We must accept, as Niebuhr and Voegelin advice, the reality of human nature, its limits, and weaknesses. "A theory of conscience that skies away from ontology, and in particular from a theory of nature of man, is empty," says Voegelin. Moreover, "it paves the way for the best of all consciences, viz., that of the totalitarian killers."⁴⁸⁵ This warning should make us aware that it is not enough to find a theory and methods for dealing with the failures of social action; there is also a need for understanding human nature. In the end, what ultimately makes the City of Man a City of God are the

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid. p.46

invisible acts of love and humility performed by each of us in our daily lives.

(Montreal, 2014)