

Between Earthly and Heavenly Peace: The Contemporary Discussion of Augustine's Concept of Peace

Entre la paz del cielo y la tierra:
la discusión actual alrededor
del concepto de paz en Agustín

7

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Abstract

This work will first present the recent magisterial appropriation of Augustine's concept of peace, especially in the magisterium of Pope St. John XXIII, Pope St. John Paul II, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis. Having established the Church's reliance upon St. Augustine's concept of peace, the author then explores contemporary interpretations of Augustine's understanding of peace in the twentieth century, especially in Catholic philosophy (Gilson, Arquillière, Marrou), and American Protestant theology (Niebuhr, Hauerwas, Ramsey). This essay will also explore recent interpretations, which have sought to reclaim Augustine's realism based upon his Christian anthropology. In addition to recontextualizing Augustine's thought in light of his anthropology, these interpretations have sought to demonstrate the essential Christological and eschatological dimensions of Augustine's understanding of peace (Markus, Milbank, Dodaro, Kaufman, Eckenrode, Mathewes, and O'Donovan, among others). This article will also attempt to review central arguments proposed by these commentators in relation to the concept of peace, and discuss significant points of dialogue and debate.

Keywords: Augustinianism, Augustinian Christology, Augustinian realism, eschatological peace, just war, peace.



Resumen

Este capítulo presenta, en su primera parte, la reciente apropiación magisterial del concepto de paz en Agustín, específicamente en el magisterio de los papas Juan XXIII, Juan Pablo II, emérito Benedicto XVI y Francisco. Una vez establecida la confianza de la iglesia sobre el concepto de paz de san Agustín, este trabajo explora algunas interpretaciones contemporáneas del pensamiento de Agustín sobre la paz en el siglo veinte, especialmente en la filosofía católica (Gilson, Arquillière, Marrou) y en la teología américo-protestante (Niebuhr, Hauerwas, Ramsey). Este manuscrito también explora interpretaciones recientes, que han buscado argumentar el realismo de Agustín basándose en su antropología cristiana. Además, para recontextualizar a Agustín a la luz de su antropología, estas interpretaciones han buscado demostrar lo esencial de las dimensiones cristológica y escatológica del pensamiento de Agustín sobre la paz (Markus, Milbank, Dodaro, Kaufman, Eckenrode, Mathewes y O'Donovan, entre otros). Finalmente, se hace un intento por revisar y resaltar los puntos más significativos sobre este debate.

Palabras clave: Agustinianismo, cristología agustiniana, realismo agustiniano, paz, paz escatológica, guerra justa.



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Introduction

While often invoked in contemporary discussions of human conflict and what is often called “Just War Theory,” frequently forgotten is how Augustine reflected upon the peace of the earthly *civitas* and the goal of heavenly peace in the *civitas dei*. As the Bishop of Hippo made clear in *civ.*, 19, in spite of the fact that there are many nations, they tend towards the same end of earthly peace. He notes: “Indeed, she [the Heavenly City] directs that earthly peace towards heavenly peace: towards the peace which is so truly such that—at least so far as rational creatures are concerned— only it can really be held to be peace and called such”¹ (*civ dei.*, 19, 17). Augustine clarified that heavenly peace was nothing less than the “enjoyment of God,” and called the pilgrim soul to foster and utilize the conditions of peace in the ordering of one’s own soul, family, and community. Only then could the pilgrim soul arrive at the peace of the heavenly city. In this work, we will first explore the magisterial reception of Augustine’s concept of peace and then discuss recent Augustinian interpretations of peace, which necessarily relate to Augustine’s realism, theological anthropology, Christology and eschatology.

Magisterial Teaching

The Church’s contemporary magisterial teaching on peace has maintained this Augustinian connection between *pax* and *ordo*, as peace begins in the ordering of the human soul to virtue, and subsequently extends to the community. In *civ. dei*, 19, 13, Augustine proposed that order was necessary for the establishment of peace, precisely because of the reality of human desire. He asserts:

The peace of the rational soul lies in the rightly ordered disposition of the appetites... The peace of all things lies in the tranquility of order; and order is the disposition of equal and unequal things in such a way as to give each its proper place.

In his 1963 encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, Pope St. John XXIII embraces the Augustinian conception of peace joined to order in the

¹ I will be using R. W. Dyson’s English translation (1988) throughout this work.

midst of the palpable tensions of the Cold War. Citing Augustine, John XXIII insists that peace could only be secured if the divine order present in creation governs the relations of individuals and societies (“Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*” 1). In support of this understanding of the divine order as the foundation of peace, he cited the Doctor of Grace, who identified the beginning of peace as the mastering of the passions:

Let it submit to a greater power, and it will conquer all beneath it.
And peace will be in you—true, sure, most ordered peace. What is that order? God as ruler of the mind; the mind as ruler of the body.
Nothing could be more orderly. (§165)

Often forgotten, therefore, in the discussion of this landmark encyclical, is the reality of peace beginning within the individual, who first allows God’s law to inform his mind and then his mind to govern his physical actions.

Indeed, this origin of peace in the ordered human person is derived directly from Augustine’s own understanding of peace. It is rooted in the anthropology of the Bishop of Hippo and the relationship envisioned between the earthly and heavenly *civitas* (we will return to both themes in the discussion of contemporary interpretations of Augustine’s understanding of peace). This Augustinian foundation was recognized by Pope Bl. Paul VI in his 1969 *Message for the Celebration of the Day of Peace*, in which he reaffirms that Augustine’s definition of peace is neither abstract nor static. Paul VI made clear that such an ordering of the soul is an “act” that depends “on the conscious effort and will of those who create [peace] and enjoy it.” He went on to make clear that such peace involves action: “Peace is not enjoyed: it is created.” This creation of peace requires a constant development, or as Paul VI calls it, a “progressive motion,” that allows us to first create the conditions of peace within our souls, and then allows us to work toward “loving brotherly concord.” This understanding of. Paul VI evoked the ongoing and active nature of securing peace, and can be directly related to the Augustinian understanding of conversion and penance.²

² For a discussion of Augustine’s conversion, see Wetzel.

Reflecting on the fortieth anniversary of *Pacem in Terris*, Pope St. John Paul II identifies Augustine's understanding of peace as central to the groundbreaking encyclical:

Boldly, but with all humility, I would like to suggest that the Church's fifteen-hundred-year-old teaching on peace as '*tranquillitas ordinis*—the tranquility of order' as Saint Augustine called it (*De Civitate Dei*, 19, 13) has a deep relevance for the world today, for the leaders of nations as well as for individuals.

A clear example of this concept of *tranquillitas ordinis* emerges in *ep.*, 189, addressed to the military commander Boniface, where after speaking of the goal of securing peace even through conflict, Augustine directs Boniface to "use mercy towards the defeated and captive," and subsequently implores him: "Let your character be embellished by marital chastity, by sobriety and by simplicity of life" (Augustine 201). Indeed, Augustine implored Boniface to secure peace not just through the cessation of conflict, but through the virtue and ordering of his own soul, which would be manifest in the officer's conduct on the battlefield, in his family life, and even in his economic affairs.

This connection of peace to the order of the soul and human activity was also cited in the last encyclical of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (2009). Here in the context of a discussion on the common good, Pope Emeritus Benedict notes how the love of others is manifest through securing the common good, and how earthly activity motivated by love helps to create unity and peace on earth. This leads to the "rendering [of our activity] to some degree an anticipation and a prefiguration of the undivided city of God" ("*Caritas*" §7). For Pope Emeritus Benedict this seeking of the common good implicates a wider vision for human activity and institutions. As Schindler describes, "CV challenges the assumption that [political and economic institutions] are simply procedural mechanisms... and not to offer any pedagogy regarding the meaning, order, and end of man" (Schindler 573). Accordingly, in a manner that is truly Augustinian, the call to seek the common good and work towards unity and peace on Earth is made always in reference to the eschatological fulfillment of such

unity and peace. This is also consistent with the teaching of Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), in which he restates the need for the Church to engage politics in its central task of the “just ordering of society and of the state...” (§183). Only this task of ordering human activities towards justice can yield peace and aids “the building of a better world” (§183). As Augustine himself wrote in *civ.*, 19, 17,

This peace the Heavenly City possesses in faith while on its pilgrimage, and by this faith it lives righteously, directing towards the attainment of that peace every good act which it performs either for God, or—since the city’s life is inevitably a social one—for neighbor.

Twentieth Century Interpretations

In his 1929 work, *Introduction à l'étude de saint Augustin*, Etienne Gilson centers Augustine’s understanding of peace in *civ.*, 19, 13, 1 (as discussed). In this passage, the Bishop of Hippo affirms that an ordered society is the fundamental condition of peace. Drawing from Augustine’s theological anthropology, Gilson made clear that peace in the rational soul implies directly the “harmony of rational knowledge and will” (173). Such harmony was to be reflected in the home and in the city, where people were united by the enjoyment of God and the love of one another in God. Gilson describes Augustine’s vision as including the presence of the impious, who in the earthly city follow a different order of soul centered on the domination of others and attainment of material things. Gilson maintains that for Augustine this order is “a mockery of the true order” of the heavenly city, and the peace of this earthly city is a coexistence of the impious in human society that remains a “false peace.” As a result, the earthly city is vulnerable to tyranny and the sovereignty of power and domination over others.

Nevertheless, Gilson admits that there is an ambiguity in Augustine’s vision of these two cities. The heavenly city remains the only true city, which rests on peace and “enjoys true peace,” but there existed the Roman republic, which was formed out of a “common enjoyment of what they loved” (Gilson 175). Hence, while these

cities are incompatible, Augustine asserted their co-existence, and the development of the city of God, whose citizens “share in [earthly] order and peace and, along with other men, benefit from the advantages that city provides and bear the burdens it imposes” (176). However, those pilgrims seeking the peace of the heavenly city work towards earthly peace and obey the laws of the earthly city always in light of “higher ends.” Gilson also clarified that the distinction of cities was not simply reducible to the “Church, on the one hand, and the State, on the other,” as the citizens of both cities are mingled within the Church and society in history. Hence, “it will be the divine society of God’s elect and the diabolical society of the reprobate” (181).

Responding to this understanding of peace and order in the two cities, as expressed by Gilson, Arquillière—in his work *L’augustinisme Politique*—makes the accusation according to which Augustine was at the origin of a medieval trend of subverting the civic order and sovereignty of kingdoms to the divine order of the Church. This was, as Arquillière argues, accomplished through the understanding of “real” justice and peace as remaining outside human society and capacity. As he notes, in “the spread of the ancient foundations of the natural state are initially delayed as a result of the new Christianized worldview, until they reappear again and crystallize as the topic of the Modern Age” (Arquillière 1955).³ Arquillière, therefore, concludes that this “Christianized worldview” led to an understanding of peace based solely as peace in the Church. He writes: “We see already an idea that triumph in political Augustinianism: the peace of the Church and that of the State are intimately connected; moreover, the peace of the Church assures that of the state” (Arquillière 1955). Etienne Gilson, however, disagrees with Arquillière on this point, as he believed that Augustine could not be held responsible for the medieval ideal of civil society placed under the Church. In fact, Gilson affirms that the city of God “consolidates” what each nation and State offers in securing earthly peace, as long as no contradiction exists with God’s peace. He argues:

³ For a more complete outline of this argument see Chapter 1 of Bruno.

The City of God is stranger to every nation and every State, and recruits its citizens from every quarter; it is indifferent to diversities of language, habits and customs, and attacks nothing, destroys nothing which is good and useful; on the contrary, among nations of widely differing character, it strives to consolidate whatever each places at the service of earthly peace, provided only that there is no opposition to the establishment of God's peace. (182)

Another significant response to Arquilière was provided by the historian Henri Irénée Marrou (343), who places earthly peace and civic virtue in Augustine's category of *infravalentes*: "Those temporal goods that exist in history, in the *saeculum*." Marrou argues that the temporal peace of history is fleeting in comparison to the *pax finalis* of the heavenly city, but consistent with Gilson believes peace is directly connected to order: "The Augustinian doctrine of peace is inseparable from that of *ordinata dilectio*, peace is *tranquilitas ordinis* and order is the hierarchy of beings, who determines the hierarchy of loves, appetites, uses" (347). Such order in the *saeculum* was necessary, as Kaufman has summarized:

What there was of peace on Earth would disintegrate without courts, clerks, and magistrates. *City of God* (Civ. Dei 19.17). concedes as much. 'Peace possessed in faith'—and in anticipation of everlasting peace—Augustine explained, consoled citizens of the celestial city during its pilgrimage in time. (61)

The question of earthly peace and how it is secured remained a central focus for the American theologian and ethicist Reinhold Niebuhr, who advanced a keen awareness in his work of what he called humanity's "primitive social norm" and the "inclination to injustice" that "makes democracy necessary" ("Children" xi). In his 1968 work, *Faith and Politics*, Niebuhr makes clear:

Our actual human communities are always shot through with disorder and confusion; for the same freedom which enables man to build wider and more complex communities also gives him the power to make his own will... the perverse center of the whole community. (106)

Such egoism and self-seeking inevitably flowed from Niebuhr's version of realism, and impacted his understanding of the possibility of peace in human society. This realism partly derived from his reading of Augustine. However, while Niebuhr recognizes human sinfulness he refutes any notion of the doctrine of "original sin." As John Diggins, commenting on Niebuhr, notes, "Niebuhr denied that humankind could transcend its sinfulness and cited Saint Augustine in asserting that what is called peace in this world must be gained by strife" (44). For the purpose of explaining the cause of this "strife," Niebuhr points to "inevitable corruptions of human self-seeking in all historic communities," including the domination of the weak, the presence of conflict, the seeking of personal interests, and other forces ("Faith" 106). As a result, Niebuhr posits in his version of Christian realism that there can be no perfect peace or order in the human community, but only a "tolerable justice" secured by "social structures and personal discipline and goodness." For this reason, Bradley Burroughs places Niebuhr in the company of Hobbes and Rawls, since together they held that "the preeminent question of politics has been how to establish order for society... given the conflicting, centrifugal desires of individuals and groups that threaten to rend society apart" (48).

Burroughs presents, however, a prominent dissenting voice to this Niebuhrian vision in the work of Stanley Hauerwas, who places virtue—not societal order—as the center of politics (Burroughs 49). A confirmation of this connection comes from Hauerwas himself, in his work *A Community of Character*, where he states, "The truest politics, therefore, is that concerned with the development of virtue" (2). As a result, Hauerwas argues that it is from the Church that we understand true politics, as only this "truthful polity" is "capable of forming virtuous people." The opposite of the "truthful polity" of the Church is the dishonest political order of the State. He explains: "Peace is built on truth, for ultimately order which is built on lies must resort to coercion" (33). Because the Christian social task is to form a society built on truth, Hauerwas notes: "The Church is always the primary polity through which we gain experience to negotiate and make positive contributions to whatever society in which we may find ourselves" (74). According to Burroughs (49),

Hauerwas then believed that the “the truthful polity of soulcraft is none other than the Church... which stands as the paradigmatic political institution.” As Burroughs summarizes the debate (52), while the positions of Hauerwas and Niebuhr were divergent, they both demonstrate the importance of Augustine’s understanding of “two cities,” and the necessity of maintaining the eschatological nature of true peace in light of their positions (Burroughs 52).

For Augustine, however, the ideal society is neither the State nor the Church, but rather the heavenly city, where true peace and concord exist. Burroughs explains: “Instead it is the eschatologically fulfilled City of God in which human beings shall possess the eternal peace ‘in themselves, among themselves, and with God’” (52). Building on the affirmation of *civ.*, 22, 30, the true order and true justice of the heavenly city necessarily means that there alone is found “consummate” peace (Burroughs 52). For Augustine the pilgrim soul grows in virtue through contact with Christ, who is experienced within His Church and its sacramental life, and is drawn to that eschatological reality of true heavenly peace.

Augustine explains that the “bond of peace” between citizens will endure, as there will be no envy or egoistic self-seeking. He notes: “No one will wish to have what he has not received, and he will be bound in a bond of uttermost peace to one who has received it; just as, in the body...” (*civ.*, 22, 30). Peace will also endure, Augustine believed, because in the heavenly city there is no “delight in sin.” While its citizens continue to be free, their freedom of will by God’s grace will not be able to sin: “That city will be redeemed from all evil and filled with every good thing; constant in its enjoyment of the happiness of eternal rejoicing; forgetting offences and forgetting punishments.” Burroughs explains:

The peace and justice of the City of God are not solely external phenomena but are rooted in the graciously cultivated peace and justice that define the souls of its citizens, which are so perfected that they no longer need to battle lust or vices. (52)

This analysis builds upon Augustine’s affirmation according to which, without vice, the soul in the heavenly city will enter a state of “unalloyed peace and virtue.” Augustine writes in *civ.*, 22, 24:

How wonderful will the condition of man's spirit be then, when it no longer has any vice at all: when it is neither subject to any nor yields to any, and when it no longer has to strive against any, however, laudably, but is perfected in unalloyed peace and virtue!

The heavenly city, therefore, is where the soul experiences true peace, as it will be free from the struggle against sin and vice.

The 20th century American ethicist, Paul Ramsey, criticizes the attachment of the love of neighbor with the ultimate peace found in eternal communion with God, and rejects this eschatological understanding of peace. His 1950 work, *Basic Christian Ethics*, criticizes the Augustinian understanding of love of neighbour as directed towards the “supreme good” of fulfillment with God (Ramsey “Basic” 121). He objects to Augustine’s argument in *civ.*, 19, in which “enjoyment of one’s neighbor” is an ordered and harmonious enjoyment of God. Ramsey and others dissents from the implication that the enjoyment of neighbour is only “just,” if it leads to the enjoyment of God (Dodaro “Augustine on”). In fact, this discussion around Augustine’s use of *uti-frui* has been the subject of a long debate.⁴ Ramsey objects the notion that all love is somehow part of a larger desire for the love of God, which, he argues, bypasses the neighbour due to a “Neo-platonic unification of Christian morality around man’s love for God” (“Basic” 126). Furthermore, he argues that this combination led to as “disastrous a deviation from Christian principles as many a secular system of humanitarianism” (“Basic” 126). Instead of an Augustinian “mystical union with God,” which is the source of our true peace and our ultimate end, Ramsey calls for a “purely responsive love” that replaces Platonism with the ‘concreteness’ of our neighbor’s need (“Basic” 131).

Ramsey’s argument paints Augustine’s focus on the love of God as a Neo-platonic deviation from the Gospel, which is distanced from the concrete need of one’s neighbour. However, this interpretation is a reduction of the eschatological understanding in the Christian notion of peace, which is essential to Augustine’s vision of desiring God through the love of our neighbour. It also ignores the centrality of virtue, which is manifested precisely through the love of God

⁴ For an overview of this debate see Canning.

in the neighbour, and which is strengthened through the grace of Christ. As Augustine instructs Macedonius in *ep.*, 155,

Therefore we should seek virtue from the Lord our God who made us, so that we can overcome the evils of this life; we should also seek the life of blessedness, so that we may enjoy it after this life for eternity. (Atkins and Dodaro 94)

While this Augustinian concept of *uti-frui* remains a complex debate within Augustinian studies, Robert Dodaro assists its clarification by indicating Augustine's motive for connecting the love of neighbour to the love of God. What Ramsey and others have obscured in their analysis is precisely the distinction between God and the neighbour. As Dodaro explains, "For Augustine, God is not a being like other beings," and so in these objections there is a false "rivalry between the love of neighbor and the love of God" ("Augustine on Enjoying" 514). Also, when we love the neighbour in God, we are not dividing our mind or heart, as Dodaro makes clear: "Augustine is not suggesting that God should be present to the mind while the neighbor is being enjoyed" ("Augustine on Enjoying," 514). Rather this love of God in the friend or neighbour calls us to act toward them in a manner that increases "the moral and spiritual growth of the person." It is a love of neighbour that is assisted by divine grace, as "one loves and enjoys him in the love that is God" (Dodaro "Augustine on Enjoying" 516). As Augustine notes in *ep.*, 155,

What should we choose to love particularly, if not the one thing we can find that is unsurpassed? This is God; and if in loving anything else we make it preferable or equal to him, we have forgotten how to love ourselves... We approach him, however, not by moving, but by loving. (Atkins and Dodaro 96)

In this understanding of love of neighbour in God, Christopher Beeley observes a point of commonality between Augustine and Maximus the Confessor, as seeking Christ's peace in ourselves and in our neighbours is central to both Church Fathers in their understanding of human flourishing. Beeley summarizes:

For now we love God and our neighbors in Christ with a trust that is based on faith, seeking to benefit them as far as it lies in our power as we look in hope to the perfect peace promised in Christ's resurrection. (149)

While these considerations are not exhaustive, they assist us in clarifying some of the presuppositions about Augustine's concept of *uti/frui*. Also, these clarifications help to answer the accusations of Ramsey and others, who have seen Augustine as responsible for the subversion of love of neighbor in the assertion of the soul's ultimate goal of truest peace in God. As Augustine instructed Macedonius:

Let us do everything we can, then, to bring to him also those whom we love as ourselves; if, that is, we now realize that loving ourselves means loving him... Surely we must count our neighbor here not only our blood relatives, but our fellow sharer in reason; and all men are fellows in this respect. (Atkins and Dodaro 97)

Another area where Paul Ramsey directly engages the work of Augustine is in the discussion of war and the Christian concept of *agape*. As we noted in the *uti/frui* debate, the discussion of "just war" is a large and complex argument that cannot be adequately captured here. However, Ramsey's work, *The Just War* (1983), objects to the reliance on the argument of "self-defense," and notes that such arguments to justify conflict were "based in the egoistic love of self, and contradicts the Gospel's call of *agape*" (8). There is a distinction for Ramsey between the individual acting in their own defense and the one who acts in response to the community's call for such action in time of conflict. Ramsey believes that this self-sacrifice on behalf of the community is grounded in the Augustinian understanding of *caritas*, which also applied to conflicting parties. He writes, "If a man cannot irresponsibly forsake those who need to be saved from an oppressor, neither can he directly and indiscriminately attack innocent people in order to restrain that same oppressor" ("The Just War" 145). Ramsey insists that even in war the government should seek the common good and "humanize the effects" of conflict, especially concerning the treatment of conscientious objectors ("The Vatican" 195). Charles

Mathewes helps to clarify this principle further as he explains the significance of justice even in war: “The war must be waged with justice throughout, for the more just it is, the closer the approximation of peace it will realize in the end” (Mathewes “Just War” 1174).

Augustine’s discussion of conflict, which has been central to the debate on “just war,” is drawn from several texts, including *civ.*, 19, 12. Augustine affirms that even the waging of war is to arrive at the “desired end” of peace. He points out that those who break peace for their own interest do not hate peace, but seek rather “the kind of peace that they wish.” Therefore, for Augustine, the true enemy of peace is pride, which “hates a fellowship of equality under God, and wishes to impose his own dominion upon its equals, in place of God’s rule.” It is pride, so often at the center of human conflict, which rebels against the just peace of God and, Augustine affirms, “prefers its own unjust peace.” William Danaher indicates the significance of Augustine’s analysis on the reality of human conflict:

Augustine therefore views war as a regrettable accommodation to the fractured world that we inhabit... War is a tragic reality tinged with regret, sadness, and second thoughts, and the doctrine of just war limits the scope of violence that is permissible in the effort to ensure our safety and well-being. (326)

Danaher demonstrates this interpretation by citing Augustine’s letter to Boniface: “Peace should be the object of your desire. War should be waged only as a necessity... Therefore, even in the course of war you should cherish the spirit of a peacemaker” (329).

Augustine’s insistence here upon peace as the object of desire extends even during conflict itself, as the combatant or commander must never relinquish this peacemaker’s spirit. This theme also emerges in *ep.*, 138, addressed to Marcellinus, where Augustine comments: “For the good would even wage war with mercy, were it possible, with the aim of taming unrestrained passions and destroying vices that ought, under a just rule to be uprooted or suppressed” (Augustine 38). For Augustine, even the soldier on the battlefield must desire the eternal peace that comes only through the security of the soul. As he instructs Boniface in *ep.*, 220,

On the other hand, the security of the soul, together with the immortality of the body, the strength of justice, victory over the hostile passions, glory, honor and peace for eternity... It is these then that you must love, these you must desire, these you must seek by any means you can. (Atkins and Dodaro 224)

Augustine, Danaher posits, demands three conditions for a “just” waging of war, and unsurprisingly first among them is the goal of securing of peace. Augustine held that the intent of war should always be to restore peace. Subsequently, it should only be waged to avenge a wrong or secure what has been seized by another “injuriously.” Finally, as peace entails order, conflict must be waged and directed by legitimate authority (Danaher 329–30). Danaher, however, maintains, in contrast to Aquinas and subsequent expressions of just war conditions, that Augustine held a suspicion of secular authority even in the midst of conflict: “Augustine views the political order as necessary but suspect, as a remedy to the persistence of sin and as an accommodation to living ‘between the times’” (330). This suspicion of the motives even of legitimate power, especially in light of the Roman imperial context he wrote in, characterizes Augustine’s thoughts on politics and society. In fact, Rowan Williams has recently affirmed this in his *On Augustine*:

Augustine grants, there is a case for a war waged to subdue an enemy whose aggression directly menaces your own survival; but he has severe words for those who seek, in effect, to provoke another’s aggression, to harden attitudes, to provide themselves with an object of hatred and fear, with the goal of reinforcing or extending a nation’s power... (121)

Williams here captures the balance in Augustine between the exercise of legitimate authority, especially in conflict, and the need to examine the motives behind the exercise of that authority, which could often be mixed and subject to human sinfulness.

Concept of Peace in Contemporary Augustinian Interpretation

The mid twentieth century reading of Augustine, especially concerning the issues of conflict and peace, saw a contemporary hermeneutical effort to “recontextualize” Augustinian interpretation.⁵ Robert Markus ascribes this shift to the work and influence of Henri-Irénée Marrou, who embraces a reading of Augustine that involves “overlapping interests” (Markus “Envolving”). To facilitate a synthetic understanding of Augustine’s conception of peace in contemporary interpretation, we can identify three common threads that have emerged from this “recontextualized” study of Augustine. While space admittedly limits the number of authors that can be directly engaged, contemporary commentators have discussed peace in Augustine in the context of his realism and the admitted reality of human conflict, his Christ-centered understanding of peace, and the eschatological tension between heavenly and earthly peace.

Markus himself recognizes in Augustine’s conception of earthly peace a sign of the bishop’s realism. He argues that the secular order of the State and government institutions were “means to turn human ferocity itself to the fostering of a precarious order, some basic cohesion which Augustine called ‘the earthly peace’” (“Christianity” 58). While the order that creates earthly peace remains “precarious,” it is the result of a social nature that puts us in relation to one another. Objecting to Markus’s assertion that the maintenance of peace is secured by the secular order, John Milbank among others in the Radical Orthodoxy movement have reasserted that peace is only secured by the Church, which is the “only true society” in human history. Milbank holds that within the Church alone one can find “absolute consensus, agreement in desire, and entire harmony amongst its members...” (Milbank “Theology” 402).

In Milbank’s reading of Augustine, peace is at the core of Augustinian theology, as it exists substantially only in the heavenly city. He makes clear, “Augustine already put the idea of the peaceful

⁵ See Bruno (Chapter 1 and 4).

community at the centre of his theology; thought of God, of revelation from God, was for him inseparable from the thought of heaven..." ("Postmodern" 229). For Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood, such an affirmation means that the heavenly city only makes "use of earthly peace" for its own ends, but the consensus of wills in the earthly city remains essentially irrelevant to the heavenly city. As they note, "The City of God 'makes use of the peace of Babylon, and quoting Jeremiah, 'In her peace is your peace'" (59). This is consistent with the call in Augustine to utilize the conditions of earthly peace, when it exists, but never confusing it with the fullness of heavenly peace foretasted in the Church. As Augustine explains the situation of Christians in the midst of the Roman Empire to Marcellinus in *ep.*, 138:

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 honorably, or only to provide a peaceful community for earthly city. It does so also to win everlasting security for the heavenly and divine commonwealth of a people that will live forever. Faith, hope, and charity make us adopted citizens of this city, so that as long as we are on our pilgrimage, if we are unable to reform them, we should tolerate those who want the commonwealth to remain with its vices unpunished. (Atkins and Dodaro 40)

While disagreeing on the nature of earthly peace and the method of obtaining it, both Milbank and Markus remain troubled by Augustine's support of the use of coercion in the suppression of the Donatist controversy. For Milbank, such action was the use of the earthly city and secular power to create earthly, and hence transitory, peace.⁶ Rowan Williams, building upon *civ.*, 19,16, explains this moment and the connection of coercion and peace in Augustine's understanding of the household and society. Augustine held, Williams argues, that coercion could only be used to restore the offender "*paci unde desiverat.*" Hence, any attempt at securing peace must remain in reference to the higher goals of lasting and eternal peace. Williams explains: "...it is clear enough that just rule

⁶ See discussion in Bruno (147).

(including where necessary, the use of force) must aim at a peace which is not restricted only to temporary adjustments or passing convenience” (119). On this point, William Danaher argues that Augustine foresaw the love of neighbor as requiring at times coercion, “particularly in acts of protecting the weak, preserving life, repelling aggression, and restoring peace” (326).

In the contemporary interpretation of Augustine, another strain has emerged seeking to avoid the political categories of realism and liberalism. Instead, there is a movement that reclaims an Augustinian understanding of peace that results from the soul’s cooperation with grace and flourishing in virtue. Burroughs has summarized this reading of Augustine:

The peace and justice of the City of God are not solely external phenomena but are rooted in the graciously cultivated peace and justice that define the souls of its citizens, which are so perfected that they no longer need to battle lust or vices. (Burroughs 52)

Indeed, there remains here the foundational Augustinian admission that concupiscence and sin influence human choices, and hence render the earthly community always vulnerable to discord and conflict. As James Schall notes, the Bishop of Hippo was aware that “men in all societies would be proud, spiteful, greedy, and grasping” (201). Hence, the healing of this sinful condition does not come from the earthly city, but—for Augustine—rested beyond it. Only through Christ’s grace experienced in the life of His Church could the healing of human sinfulness find a remedy, drawing us to the fullness of peace in the heavenly kingdom. In writing about the effects of the Donatist controversy in *ep.*, 185, addressed to Boniface, Augustine explains:

As a result, no one can be just as long as he is separated from the unity of this body. Just as one member cannot preserve the spirit of life once it is cut off from the body of a living man, so a person who is cut off from the body of the just Christ cannot possibly preserve the spirit of justice... (Atkins and Dodaro 198)

Ernest Fortin (26) notes that it was for this reason that Augustine did not highly value “the unprecedented peace and prosperity”

of Christian Rome. The peace of the heavenly city was to remain the goal of that city's citizen, who—as Fortin wrote—was “anyone dedicated to the pursuit of truth and virtue” (19). This truth and virtue, which characterizes the pilgrim soul, would be challenged in the earthly city, whether its governance was pagan or Christian. For while civic virtue was present in pagan and Christian Rome only through the embrace of *true religion* could one possess heavenly citizenship. As the Bishop of Hippo explains to Marcellinus in *ep.*,138:

For God revealed in the wealth and fame of the Roman empire how powerful are civic virtues even without true religion; to make it clear that with the addition of this human beings become citizens of the other city, whose king is truth, whose law is love, and whose limit is eternity. (41)

To clarify how Augustine saw this pursuit of truth and virtue in *true religion*, Robert Dodaro directs readers to Augustine's call to *pietas*, to prayer and penance embraced by the citizens of the heavenly city in response to God's grace (Dodaro “Christ” 36). Here we find a growth in humility and the sense of one's finitude that moves human beings to “choose permanent over temporal goods.” Building upon Augustine's letters, especially his letter to Macedonius, Dodaro notes how the Christian's focus on eternal goods leads to a two-fold sense of peace. He posits that Augustine's use of peace is both freedom from suffering, but also that final state, which is reached through the virtues of faith, hope and love (“Christ” 209).

Peace, especially for Christians in public office or with civic duties, must be a constant aim. However, it is not simply the temporal peace of health, riches, and personal happiness, but “happiness and life in God, which transcend death” (“Christ” 209). Therefore, this strain of contemporary interpretation, while maintaining the distinction of earthly and heavenly peace, demonstrates the possible manifestation of peace in the soul responding to grace. Thomas Eckenrode, in his study of the Augustinian notion of peace, supports this reading and cites Augustine's “Homily during the Octave of Easter”:⁷ “Carrying Christ's name ‘on your forehead

⁷ See PL 38, 1196.

and in your heart, focus your energies to that life where there is perpetual peace.’ This is the heart of the Bishop of Hippo’s peace affirmation...” (Eckenrode 250).

This affirmation directly implicates another essential element of Augustine’s understanding of peace, namely its Christ-centered nature. Building upon Augustine’s commentary of Psalm 119, Eckenrode has pointed out the strength of that connection between Christ and peace in Augustine: “So closely does Augustine establish the bond of peace between the Son of Man and peace, that it becomes an utter impossibility to separate the Christ, peace, and divinity” (254). Christ is at the center of Augustine’s understanding of peace precisely because it is Jesus who is the source of mercy and model of humility. As Eckenrode affirms, “where there is mercy and humility, there is tranquility” (254). This connection is directly engaged in Dodaro’s reading of Augustine, as Christ’s grace is the source of our forgiveness and He is the mediator of virtue. For Dodaro, this bond between the believer and Christ emerges in Augustine’s concept of *Christus totus*, as Augustine points to Christ’s role in the sanctification of the faithful. He explains: “Christ’s role as head of his body is paramount for Augustine in explaining the mediation of virtues that account for the believer’s growth in holiness” (“Augustine on the roles” 144).

Dodaro, citing Augustine’s commentary on both Psalm 22 and 30, affirms that Christ grants peace by taking away the fear of death through a *mira commutatio*, in which that fear is taken by Christ and replaced with “his own hope and consolation” (“Christ” 106). In countering the Donatist claims that were based upon heroic examples of holiness, Dodaro indicates that Augustine held that believers should seek true goodness from God alone, especially as they undergo afflictions and adversity. On their own, human beings “do not obtain the peace, freedom, or virtue that they hope to receive through appeal to spiritual beings” (“Christ” 102). Such peace, freedom and virtue come from Christ, who takes upon himself the “suffering members of his body” on the cross. Dodaro draws this affirmation directly from Augustine’s *en. Ps., 22*, where recited from the cross, Christ’s divine voice unites to our voice and provides the “voice of healing within the human soul” (“Christ” 107). This alone is

our remedy from original sin and its effects, especially in our human “ignorance and weakness.”

However, this reliance on Christ and his healing also implies that the Church, the body of Christ, is the instrument of this healing and provides a foretaste of heavenly peace. As Dodaro affirms, “Christ’s justifying prayer becomes the oration of the just society, of the church, whereby Christ speaks through the suffering members of his body” (“Christ” 107). For Augustine, therefore, true virtue resides in God and our experience of peace remains imperfect due to original sin. We experience peace then most often as simply the “consolation in the midst of misery” (“Christ” 111). However, while perfect justice and peace is elusive in this life, with our fellow pilgrims we are called to seek the “forgiveness of sins” accomplished through Christ (111). Turning to *civ.*, 15, 4, Christopher Beeley shows here again a clear connection between Augustine and Maximus’s conception of peace:

Both Augustine and Maximus emphasize that this state of affairs requires a pure will, which none of us possesses; consequently, true peace is dependent on God’s grace in Christ and the gift of the Spirit to make us a new creation. (148)

A final strand connecting many authors in this contemporary reading of Augustine’s conception of peace is a restoration of its eschatological sense. For Augustine, true and lasting peace is only found in the heavenly city, which is the fulfillment of the pilgrim soul’s journey. Indeed, this true peace is characterized by a perfect concord and harmony, as the divisions and conflict of the earthly city cease. Thomas Eckenrode describes Augustine’s vision:

The overarching reality will be full peace with perfect unity and good will... Nothing will contend against the soul, against itself or against others... Hearts will be at peace and at home. Humanity as a struggling way-farer will have transformed into humanity the peace-filled resident (259).

However, as a part of this eschatological understanding of peace remains the tension that emerges between the true peace of the *civitas dei* and the fractured reality of the earthly city in which we live.

The chaos and conflict of the earthly city means that peace is always transitory and fragile in the *civitas*. Hence, as Eckenrode explains, “It can be confidently assumed that the means for liberation toward peace is supernatural” (255). To demonstrate this, Eckenrode cites *conf.*, 4, 11, where Augustine speaks of “the place of peace that is imperturbable, where love cannot be forsaken unless it first forsakes” (264). Augustine recognizes this tension experienced by the pilgrim soul, and as Charles Mathewes makes clear, observes a *distensio animi*, as our souls await “eschatological consummation” (“An Augustinian” 303). Here Peter Iver Kaufman (2012) assists us in understanding this fundamental eschatological tension in Augustine’s anthropology, as the pilgrim soul stood in contrast to the reality of the earthly city. Kaufman explains: “According to Augustine, pilgrims who lived among the unregenerate, uncharitable, and contentious made the right choice, tolerating, to an extent, the tawdry and imperfect in this city of gaud” (71). Augustine–Kaufman observes–notes how the Roman search for glory and possessions was “inconsequential” in comparison to the justice of the commonwealth “whose founder and ruler is Christ...” (72).

Indeed, there remains a fundamental longing in the pilgrim soul for the peace of the heavenly city, which causes the citizen of the heavenly city to seek precisely the “higher goods” (as Dodaro has indicated above) amidst the earthly pursuits of “lawsuits, wars and strife.” As Augustine affirms, such higher things belong only to the heavenly city “where victory will be secure in the enjoyment of eternal and supreme peace...” (*civ.*, 15, 4).

Conclusion

To demonstrate Augustine’s understanding of peace, we have reviewed his use of this concept in some significant texts and how they have been received, especially in the twentieth century. Augustine connected peace to the tranquility of order and called Christians to seek the heavenly peace of the *civitas dei* amidst the trials and turbulence of this world. While often central in the discussion of “just war,” this work—though limited by space—has

attempted to provide a corrective focus on peace in Augustinian interpretation and scholarship. Indeed, peace and the securing of heavenly peace remained a constant concern throughout Augustine's *The City of God* and in several of his *epistulae*. In observing contemporary Augustinian interpretations, we have attempted to survey the landscape from Gilson and Marrou to Ramsey and Niebuhr's Christian realism, as well as the objections of Stanley Hauerwas. We have also examined how the conception of peace manifests further nuances in contemporary Augustinian interpretation, especially between Robert Markus and John Milbank. Finally, we have attempted to demonstrate how recent interpretations of Augustine have sought to re-contextualize Augustine's realism within his theological anthropology. In conclusion, we have observed how Augustine's understanding of peace is Christ-centered and eschatological. The pilgrim soul seeks the peace that comes from the healing of Christ, mediated through His Body, the Church, and fully experienced only in the heavenly city, where true peace and justice will be found.



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