CHRISTIAN ETHICO-POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE ROOTS OF LIBERALISM

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Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you

St. Luke, 6:27

ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the ancient Greek and Hellenistic notions of political ethics were incorporated within an evolving Christian thought which emphasized the importance of *agape* within a Universalist perspective. This evolution can be most clearly seen through the works of St Paul, Augustine and Aquinas who elaborated a doctrine involving the universality of Jesus's message but with adaptation and evolution according to the historical circumstances. This process has deep contemporary resonances not only theologically but also in terms of social and political philosophy. I will argue that Pauline cosmopolitanism ends up setting legitimacy as the main criterion by which to assess governance and offer allegiance. The ethical demands of Christianity are very stringent. Accordingly, it would appear that, in order to fulfil those demands, whenever possible, Christians should seek the right sort of social and political context. This context was to be developed by St. Augustine

and St. Thomas Aquinas. Augustine held that the most one can reasonably expect from a political structure is that it should promote peace. And he viewed this central political task negatively – as the suppression of anarchy and of those forms of evils that most disturb civil tranquility. For Aquinas, on the other hand, political organization, chiefly through the instrumentality of human law, has the capacity of furthering, in a positive way, the natural aspects of the human function.

Introduction

Christian ethics stems from the teachings and the example offered by the life of Jesus combined with Judaic monotheism, Roman Stoicism and Greek philosophy. By creatively developing both a practical and an intellectual synthesis of these beliefs, Christian thought claimed to embody at first a critique and then increasingly the truest and most complete expression of their cultural legacy. While making these claims, Christianity advanced three basic principles concerning the conduct of human life: the first is that we are supposed to strive for spiritual salvation, in fellowship with the saved; the second is that we cannot achieve this salvation solely by our own individual or social efforts, but we also require the grace of God operating mainly by the guidance of the Church; the third is that in order to love God, you have to love your fellow human beings, and you have to love and care for the rest of creation.

In the following sections, I will also point out how, in turn, these ethical and religious principles gave rise to a corresponding political philosophy, which over the millennia acquired an almost universal influence and relevance. My thesis is that the universality of this message lies in the fact that it does not embody a static doctrine but principles that are amenable to be adopted, adapted and progressively developed and actualized according to changing historical circumstances. St. Paul, Augustine and Aquinas, more than others, were instrumental in mediating between Christian core beliefs and the Greek and Hellenistic cultural legacy.

Legitimacy and Political Universalism

The ethical precepts of St. Paul, like the ones of Hellenistic Stoicism, have a markedly universal range, and were instrumental in how the new Christians understood political legitimacy. Aristotle inherited from Protagoras the idea that *nomos*, or what is customary, conventional and cultural in society, can aid in the pursuit of *eudaimonia*, or individual flourishing. According to Aristotle, morality and politics to fully play their role in the construction of the virtuous citizen require a Greek identity, therefore becoming matters of local rather than universal concern and fruition. There are no criteria of government legitimacy behind its capacity to ensure effective and fair rule. In contrast to this, St. Paul and the Stoics were arguing for more universal concerns. The early Christian believed that fulfilling the human function is a matter of obtaining the right understanding about the universe, or creator and creation. Cosmopolitanism is thus connected with the establishment of some general, although as yet not very specific criteria for government legitimacy.

For Christians, gaining the right insight about the world required correctly grasping and following the doctrines taught by the Church. Everything hanged on coming to understand, receive, willfully accept and implement the grace of God through the ecclesiastical administrations of the sacraments. This implied getting at least some rational grasp of the role of the Divine providence in achieving the proper human good and flourishing. But achieving such a rational insight about God's creation also required understanding the functions that God attributed to legitimate rulers and governance. For this to happen, then all disorderly passions should be subjected to the control of a substantive notion of (practical) reason. The volitional faculty will thus became strong and make the faithful act only according to his/her new insight and correct belief in a process that has some resemblance to the Stoic concept of *homologia*. Achieving spiritual regeneration depends upon the personal efforts of the believer, rather than their enculturation. In other words, some form of secular polity is required for humans to achieve salvation.

Christian cosmopolitanism and universalism was concerned with defining the nature and boundaries of legitimate political rule and of the allegiance required by believers to the secular authority, and raised very profound questions about the proper role that secular political institutions have in promoting the Christian message and the purpose of human life. Thus, the new way of looking at things according to Pauline cosmopolitanism also saw *legitimacy* as the main criterion by which to assess governance and offer allegiance. Consequently, there were universal or cosmopolitan political suggestions in Christian doctrine which became criteria for legitimate endorsement or allegiance by the faithful. The fundamental Christian moral imperative to love one's neighbour clearly has social and political implications. In regard to this, the ethical demands of Christianity are very stringent. Hearts must be changed in order to fulfil the Church's mission in solidarity with the poor and for achieving the necessary structural changes in society which would give voice to the voiceless, as required by Christian *agape*.[1] Accordingly, it would appear that, in order to fulfil those stringent demands, whenever possible, Christians should seek the right sort of social and political context. The desire to create a political context where demands for justice are made possible can thus become the criterion to assess the legitimacy of political institutions. Although, unfortunately, these demands have largely remained unfulfilled, and their effective political implementation has been mostly discouraged by the majority of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Nevertheless, it is important to point out that, because of Christ's and St Paul's teachings, at least in principle, a criterion of legitimacy based on the delivery of justice to the needy has always been formally maintained.

This has inspired countless examples of dedication to the cause of the poor epitomized by figures such as St Francis of Assisi, more recently Mother Teresa of Calcutta, and many of their less famous followers. However, these noble endeavours have mostly (but not always exclusively) concerned the all important practical ethical activity on behalf of the needy in the social sphere, but without directly calling to

task the powers that be by questioning their legitimacy to rule for their lack of support for the poor.

Reversing this almost apolitical trend, Liberation Theology, by reinterpreting early Pauline thought, may have significantly contributed to a renewed sensitivity to the idea of distributive justice as a measure to evaluate the legitimacy of existing political institutions. Moreover, these demands for social justice, now, both within and without Liberation Theology, are no longer confined merely to the economic sphere. Indeed, these pressing demands are becoming increasingly wedded to a quest for democratic rule by governments chosen by free and fair elections and to a quest for a broader respect of human rights within liberal constitutional frameworks.

So Liberation Theology saw salvation as something achieved not only through faith, but through concrete action against poverty, injustice and other human rights abuses. Interestingly, new readings of St Paul were made not only by progressive or leftist Christian believers and theologians such as Gustavo Gutierrez, Leonardo Boff, Giovanni Franzoni, Hans Küng, and John Milbank, but also by so called secular non-believers of Marxist orientation such as Alain Badiou, and Slavoj Zizek. According to Badiou, St Paul combines truth and subjectivity in a way that continues to be relevant for us living in the 21st century; allegedly, he does so by simultaneously overcoming both the ritual strictures of Judaic Law and the formal rational conventions of the Greek *Logos*. In other words, St Paul plants a revolutionary seed by making the subject of the conversion to Christianity undertake a radical and dramatic change that leads them to reject the order of the world as it is, with its present injustices, and strive for a new world dominated by Christian *agape*.[2] In other words, all traditional interpretations of St Paul are turned upside down, and the existing power structures of society are deprived of any moral legitimacy, and their subjects, following their inner transformation as believers in Christ, are mandated to create a new social and political order.[3]

Moreover, according to this 'subversive' interpretation of early Pauline thought, the fundamental principles of Aristotelian ethics and politics were completely rejected or reinterpreted, by the early Christian base communities. In particular, Aristotle's application of his very notion of *phronesis* had to be changed, if conversion to the new faith was to be meaningful. For Aristotle, the apogee of practical reason, when applied to the art of governance, was supposed to be the understanding of how to avoid situations of radical crisis in order to preserve stable constitutional systems. But, according to Liberation Theology, as Leonardo Boff points out, Christian *agape* mandates a totally different attitude from the classical Aristotelian one. Following from the conversion, and spiritual rebirth in Christ, prudence is now supposed to become *the* understanding of situations of radical crisis, and thus to indicate a new search for wisdom and insight, which does not avoid, but shares in the pain of the victims.[4] This implies a total transformation and a sort of rebirth, in that the believer in Christ must actively seek situations of crisis to immerse herself in. It also means being in solidarity with the poor. This is of course a very radical and revolutionary message, which implies a rejection of the political *status quo* in so far as there is oppression, poverty, exploitation and injustice in society. It follows that political legitimacy would be conditional on the powers-that-be showing effective action against all injustices. In other words, according to this politically radical interpretation, the Christian *agape* advocated by St Paul mandates a 'preferential option for the poor', with all its ethico-political implications, also as far as political legitimacy is concerned.[5]

Badiou's thesis, and indeed some tenets of radical versions of Liberation Theology remain highly controversial (in particular, their tight ideological wedding with Marxism, and association with messianic political millenarianism), but there is no doubt that the problem of how to create a social and political context conducive to the exercise of the Christian theological virtues necessary for salvation (faith, hope and love), was high on the agenda also of the more traditional interpretations of Pauline thought.

Indeed, specific concerns about how to develop a social context conducive to the fulfilment of the stringent ethical demand to love one's neighbour sets what were to become the two most historically influential answers to the questions about the role of the political structures for the life of Christians. These answers were developed by St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. Most starkly put, Augustine held that the most one can reasonably expect from a political structure is that it should promote, to a greater or lesser degree, peace. And he tended to view this central political task negatively – as the suppression of anarchy and of those forms of evils that most disturb civil tranquility. Thus, he set a very limited criterion of political legitimacy. For Aquinas, on the other hand, political organization, chiefly through the instrumentality of human law, has the capacity of furthering, in a more direct or positive way, at least the natural aspects of the human function. He thus set a wider criterion of political legitimacy. However, there is a sense in which the magisterial works of the two greatest Christian philosophers were only drawing two possible, but different conclusions already more implicitly and less systematically set by the Apostolic and Pauline criteria for political legitimacy, which in turn were only partly novel, finding some roots and correspondence in earlier as well as contemporary Roman eclectic Stoicism. Both Augustine and Aquinas together with other saintly figures, like St. Francis of Assisi, constitute the spiritual heirs of Pauline and apostolic thought on ethics and/or politics (but St. Francis took a more practical approach). But, unfortunately, as in all human matters, together with these noble legacies, there is also a darker side concerning the political consequences of the new Christian way of looking into things. As soon as it became dominant 'the new way' was hijacked for more expedient purposes than the original evangelical ones and religion became a tool in the hands of the powers that be.

But the question is: what caused the Church over the centuries to underestimate the gospel's core message, which is love (*agape*)? The answer may lie in the fact that, after the emperors Constantine and Theodosius embraced Christianity, in the fourth century, it instilled a

spirit of power and dominance. However, the full effects of this corrupting attitude can be most clearly and famously seen at work much later in the Crusades, Inquisition, and other tragic bloody events constituting the dark side of European history. Many members of the church, including some leaders like Pope Gregory VII, tried heroically, but unsuccessfully, to stop this trend. And yet conversely, European rulers were successful in taking advantage of the situation, by staking their legitimacy on their claim to universal moral authority and religious orthodoxy. The consequence of this was that, by extension, all those who were not religiously orthodox were considered suspect, persecuted and, in some cases, eliminated. Thus, first, the pagans were targeted, then the Muslim and Jewish communities, then the heretical Christian groups. The reformation led to a series of bloody wars. More recently, some secularized ideologies, like Fascism and Stalinism, which emerged in the last century at least in part as a reaction or consequence of these events.

The Roman Catholic Church reacted to these tragic events especially in the 1960s, by elaborating its own program of renewal and reform, which, through the Second Vatican Council, manifested the intent of opening up itself more to the modern world, and by developing some new and more inclusive doctrines that eschewed the intolerant practices of the past. Accordingly, the mission of all Catholics is defined as to show people how to see the love of God, while at the same time not imposing it on them. This requires the correct application of the Golden Rule of doing unto others as you would like them to do unto you. In the same fashion, the current Pope Francis is delivering a universal message of forgiveness, reason and tolerance aimed at reaching the hearts and minds of all throughout the world, without making any distinction between race, political stance, or religious creed. According to him, the main challenge facing the church today is not simply to resolve long standing controversial issues like celibacy of the clergy, admission to sacraments of the divorced, etc., but to relearn how to communicate a deeper, more intelligent and relevant religion that leads to a life of acceptance and love.

Pope Francis' position remains loyal to the traditional theological, ethical and political teachings of the Catholic Church. These doctrines were inherited from St. Paul and the Apostolic thought of the late classical antiquity, and also from the Church's two most influential philosophers: Augustine and Aquinas, who developed the two main political implications of the Christian conception of human nature, or human purpose. I will next examine more in detail the specific contribution that each of the two have respectively given to the development of Christian, and more in general to Western political philosophy.

Augustine's Political Pragmatism

Augustine introduces the contrast between the concept of enjoyment (which refers to the Latin word *fructus*) and the one of use (referring to *usus*). Whereas enjoyment pertains to that which *per se* brings about happiness, use refers conceptually to that which is supposed to aid us in achieving what will make us happy and achieve a blessed state. Alas, Augustine laments, we tend to strive for the objects of use, and not our own ultimate aim, or *telos*.[6] But even worse, we often strive to enjoy what we should altogether avoid even as object of use (and sexual misconduct constitutes a major embodiment of this fault, according to Augustine). Thus, there are two different kinds of people: the blessed ones who succeed in enjoying the love of God, and are to be saved at the end of time, and the "fallen" ones who improperly enjoy the world.

However, according to Augustine, the two *civitates*, where these two different kinds of people (figuratively) inhabit, are not cities in a literal sense, and are not to be identified with any specific historical, social or political institution. This means that the earthly city does not coincide with the Roman Empire nor with any other existing or future secular state, while the heavenly city cannot coincide with the (Catholic) Church. They cannot coincide because, on the one hand, those who love the world can be found both in the state and in the church, and, on the other hand, there are some in the state who love God. Therefore, the two *civitates* cut

across both worlds achieving independence of them in an invisible way. That is to say, whenever and wherever there are people who love God, there is the Heavenly city, and conversely the Earthly City whenever and wherever there are those who love the world. Nevertheless, the Church instituted by Christ the Saviour still resonates with the power of His love, and therefore constitutes the most natural, although not exclusive, home of those belonging to the Heavenly City.

Augustine thought that the tension between these two cities offered him not only the key for his own personal understanding of history, but also the divine logic of salvation. This logic involved the need to reconcile humanity to its creator through the saving acts and the sacraments instituted by Christ. It also explains why Augustine reacted so strongly against the views of the Celtic thinker Pelagius who thought that Christians are not infected with original sin and hence not giving, to Augustine's dismay, a central role to God's grace.[7] According to Augustine, humans inherit from Adam the propensity to sin, and our freedom consists only in the way in which the divine providence may draw us to the good. We are incapable to achieve goodness except through God's grace. Augustine was at pain to escape the conclusion that either God brings about or that there is a separate source of evil. As he had earlier abandoned Manichaean dualism, he developed a theory which derived from Neo-Platonism, the idea that all that exists comes from God and that evil therefore cannot exist, it is the absence of good. It follows that humans are free to choose evil, but when they do so, they are not under the direct influence of the grace of God.

Moreover, Augustine thought that individual good and evil should be seen in the wider context of society in what became a major contribution to political thought about the relation between the Church and the State. Thus, as it appears from the following passage, the contrast between the earthly and the heavenly answered to his eschatological views concerning his philosophy of history:

In this wicked world,… in these evil times, the Church through her present humiliation is preparing for future exaltation … In this situation, many reprobates are mingled in the Church with the good, and both sorts are collected, as it were, in the dragnet of the gospel … and enclosed in nets until the shore is reached. There the evil are to be divided from the good.**8**

It follows from this that, unfortunately, until the final judgment it is not possible to precisely identify the two cities and their spiritual dwellers, beyond the general guidance provided by the Bible.

The earthly city or Babylon, which was ruled by self-interest rather than by Christian charity or *agape*, could be akin to the Assyria of the Old Testament. However, Augustine did not intend to precisely associate it with the Roman state, whilst at the same time also not endorsing the opposite view that considered the Empire as the main instrument for the onward transmission of the faith. But he did fully endorse the view that the state should be fully subservient to the Church, in so far as the latter was an imperfect embodiment of the heavenly city. The state could thus be used as an instrument to suppress the existing heresies. And Augustine somewhat reluctant support for the bloody suppression of Donatism had fateful consequences for the subsequent history of the Church, and its intolerance for intellectual dissent.**9** Perhaps, Augustine, who also used various arguments, including an earlier proto-version of Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* to confute the scepticism influencing the Academy, could have been a little bit more open to the kind of intellectual freedom which he himself had enjoyed earlier on. But as the situation was developing, the times were not yet ripe for that. The relative tolerance of antiquity was coming to end, and the medieval dark ages were inexorably approaching. Augustine still belonged to the late imperial civilization, and the synthesis which he constructed between revelatory and philosophical concepts remains one of the greatest intellectual achievements in the history of the Church. Thus, the theoretical political consequences he draws from the

exercise of the temporal power have to be seen in the light of this synthesis between the revelatory and the philosophical, and of his eschatological concerns about the ends of human history.

Accordingly, the theory of the two cities led Augustine to believe that the state is not, on its own, supposed to advocate or endorse any particular world view, ideology or organic conception of how society should be organized. Indeed, as a temporary human institution with a limited scope and range of competencies it should not have any particular ultimate historical mission, beyond maintaining peace and public order. The prevention of major social turmoil and unrest, together with the punishment of crimes, and restraint for the would be offenders, is the most that members of the heavenly city can expect as the outcome of the administration of the temporal power. To put it bluntly, the spiritual inhabitants of the *civitas peregrina* must always bear in mind that all human institutions are fallible because they are morally incapacitated as the result of the original sin.

Augustine consequently, was skeptical about the feasibility of finding political solutions to human problems. However paradoxically, this seemingly discouraging skepticism, pessimism, or realism about the capacity of secular governments to promote human redemption has far-reaching theoretical consequences, providing some positive, however limited suggestions about how to organize public policies. It is indeed such a prudential skepticism that leads Augustine to draw a distinction of sorts between private morality and public law, a distinction which also renders him extremely wary of endorsing the ideal of the state as a promoter of the personal virtue of its members. It also inspires him to pragmatically consider secular governments as providers of 'neutral means', which can be used by citizens who do not share the same ultimate concerns.

This may seem, *prima facie*, and perhaps with a bit of a stretch of imagination, to anticipate the political neutrality of the state advocated by some versions of modern liberalism. Accordingly, it is not uncommon to find political theorists assuming that Augustinian thought does in fact foreshadow some features of the liberal conception of the state, which

together with political and religious neutrality predicates also the distinction between private morality and public law.[10] Nevertheless, any such comparison needs to take into account they involve different notions of political justice.

On the one hand, Augustine, unlike liberalism, does not develop a fully-fledged political theory centered on a notion of human justice. But he merely provides suggestions for prudential and pragmatic accommodations with what he regards as necessarily morally flawed, and thus intrinsically inadequate, government of temporal matters. According to Augustine, the most that can be expected from the state is a kind of equity according to which power is exercised not arbitrarily, but in conformity with those relatively vague principles of natural justice and dictates of conscience which even the wretched earthly city members may have some inkling. On the other hand, liberalism develops a fully fledged political theory centered on a notion of justice. Thus, the liberal theory of justice is based on a principle of equality prescribing as a normative principle, a certain degree of political, ideological, religious neutrality or impartiality by the state out of respect for the different, but morally equal, interests and identities of its members. This is not a political priority for Augustine, even though it may be a moral corollary of Christian agape.[11] Accordingly, the Augustinian conception of the task of temporal and therefore secular politics is much more modest and limited, even though not radically at odds with Rousseau's inspired ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. This is because for Augustine, a certain state non-interference in the private life of people is more a matter of prudential considerations, which could be adjusted or even withdrawn according to circumstances and changing historical situations rather than a strict prescriptive doctrine. This political pragmatism, was in the service of the Christian philosophy of history, which was announcing an imminent *parousia*. The result of this discrepancy is that the world has currently turned into a space of contestation between two differing sets of ethics also with diverging political implications: the first is the liberal ethics of autonomy, according to which people are primarily autonomous individuals

with subjective and specific wants, needs and desires; the other is the more traditional conservative and politically more authoritarian ethics of divinity/community, where people attain meaning as members of larger entities such as families or communities of faith.

However, Augustine does not attribute great importance or priority to a 'positive' political or legal doctrine. Unlike the case of contemporary liberal political theory stemming from John Locke, Augustine does not construct a theory of governance in which a degree of political, religious and ideological neutrality, together with freedom of thought and expression, and the distinction between moral and legal obligations figure as necessary conditions for the exercise of legitimate political authority. For Augustine, these are not fundamental principles, but could at best be practical conditions offering members of the city of God the best opportunity to fulfil their function and spread the divine message. But the Augustinian philosophy of history makes Christian wisdom and secular power under the most favorable conditions very uneasy partners, and more often than not in downright disagreement on how to conduct human affairs. According to Augustine, it may be superficially true that some polities are better than others, but what really matters is that none of them, by their own temporal and limited nature, will ever be able to satisfy our deepest and everlasting aspirations. This points to the fact that, at least in the deepest meaning of the concept, man, for Augustine, is not the political animal described by Aristotle, but a divine creature who can only fulfill his ultimate *telos* by rejoining God. Thus, the heavenly city to which all humans are summoned is very distant not only from the Aristotelian ideal *polis* but also from any existing political community. It is left to Thomas Aquinas to try to fill the gap between this ideal Augustinian spiritual polity, which is far removed from earthly considerations, and the practical demands of our own political, biological and mortal life.

Aquinas' Christianized Ethico-Political Aristotelianism

> *…Whatsoever is a means of preserving human life, and of warding off its obstacles, belongs to the natural law… Man has a natural inclination to know the truth about God, and to live in society…* Aquinas[12]

Aquinas recognizes a natural sphere of rational and ethical values, universally applicable to all believers and non-believers. This universally known rational standard of justice is what he calls *natural law*. But to fully account for the coherence and organic unity of his rational understanding of the contiguity, even though not identity, that he postulated between politics and theodicy, thus significantly altering the Augustinian paradigm. It is essential to refer, at least briefly, to Aquinas' famous systematic description of four types of laws:

The first is the *eternal law*, which consists in the plan of Government in God. All other laws, in so far as they accord with right reason, derive from it.

The second is the *divine law* as set forth in the Holy Scriptures, which serves as additional guidance to those commands of natural law known by all rational men.

The third is *natural law*, which, with some Aristotelian connotations, for Aquinas applies only to humans as conscious, rational, moral, social creatures, teaching them to seek self-preservation, avoid ignorance and not give offence to or harm others with whom they associate. Thus, unique to men is their natural inclination to know the truth about God and to live in society. For this reason, he assumes that humans are naturally religious, and share one standard of truth and rightness. However, the specific circumstances where standards of truth are applied vary, and therefore, so does natural law. Therefore, Aquinas argues that as history changes, progressing towards its ultimate end, secondary precepts and conclusions derived from the immutable first principles may also vary. This is consistent with the idea that the world historical evolution is to be seen as

the gradual unfolding of a divinely ordained plan. Thus, Aquinas' theory of natural law allows him to reinterpret more optimistically Augustine's philosophy of history without directly contradicting it.

The fourth type is *human law*, which is promulgated by the rulers of the community, according to the political regime governing the state. While the natural law establishes that its transgressors shall be punished, it is the positive human law which determines the specific penalty. However, as positive enactment it has the quality of law in so far as it proceeds according to reason. It is further divided by Aquinas into the law of nations (*ius gentium*), similar to what we may call today international law, and civil law (*ius civilis*), i.e. the specific laws of each single country. Accordingly, the former concerns the general norms governing buying and selling, and the other activities necessary to social exchange in all countries; the latter comprises the particular applications of the natural law to local conditions. Concerning the three forms of government described by Aristotle, Aquinas is mostly in favor of monarchy, but in true Aristotelian spirit, one that shares at least some features of a mixed government with the other two forms, especially with aristocracy, and even with democracy. One of the advantages of such a mixed monarchical rule is that the consequent division of power involved makes it clear that there is never a right to depose or kill a tyrant because such an action should only be undertaken by a public authority, preferably under the moral, spiritual and even political guidance of the Church. In any case, Aquinas prudently argues, the toppling of tyrants should be avoided if the disorder or scandal resulting from such move is likely to result in a greater harm than that already existing. But besides preventing and punishing the various human mischief and evil doings, civil law should actively contribute to the virtue and well being of citizens. And with regard to the promotion of the people's welfare, Aquinas points out that the human agreement enshrined in positive law also determines the rights of private property, which has a utilitarian purpose. Property, therefore, while permissible and natural in moderate quantity, should not be accumulated superabundantly, and usury always shunned. Most significantly, in conformity with Christian *agape*, help for the poor and

needy should be ensured and promoted by the public authority according to natural right, and in cooperation with the Church.

But the theme of the promotion of *agape* brings in wider questions concerning moral and political philosophy also discussed elsewhere in *Summa Theologiae*. Aquinas is well aware that when more than two people are involved, the expression of love involves being fair to each of them. This not only frames questions of corrective and distributive justice, but even the issue concerning the justification of conflict. In regard to this, he discusses the rudiments of a doctrine of just war in his detailed treatment of love or *agape*.[13] For Aquinas, love presupposes justice, even when transcending it; otherwise it would degenerate into sentimentality. Paradoxically, those who mean well commit some of the worst sins against love. As the old saying goes, the roads to hell are often paved with good intentions. Accordingly, Aquinas lists three conditions for waging a just war. By quoting Augustine, he argues that it must be declared by a legitimate authority, a just cause is required, and the belligerent should have a rightful intention. In this context, he quotes the biblical exhortation to "*rescue the poor: and deliver the needy out of the hand of the sinner*."[14]

On the other hand, Aquinas also points out that Aristotle's supposition that the state could provide everything that the people need, was based on his ignorance of the divine revelation contained in the Holy Scriptures. Taking care of these needs, is definitely important, and leads to proper human flourishing, but it is insufficient. This aspiration qualifies human nature in a different way than in Aristotle's philosophy.[15] In regard to this, Aquinas thought that the state it is not equipped to provide precise direction concerning how to achieve our ultimate ends, only the Church can do this. Thus, the former is supposed to be subordinate to the latter. Nevertheless, the State still maintains the important legitimate function of providing for the natural ends of the human existence. This function makes it relatively, but not absolutely autonomous from the Church, which is supposed to deal with the praeter-natural ends. Here, in particular, Aquinas departs from Aristotle in that he thought that besides the *natural* and the *human law*, people should be directed to their end by

a law, prophetically delivered by God, found in the Holy Scriptures. This is the *divine law* that is not the product of human reason, but is granted to us through the creator's grace and mercy to help us know how to fulfill our natural and, especially, our praeter-natural destiny. Consequently, the difference between the *natural* and the *divine law* consists in that the former embodies our rational understanding of the good by which our practical reason, in Aristotelian fashion, directs our wills to control our appetites and passions, thus leading us to fulfill our natural end by achieving the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude. Therefore, Aquinas, on the one hand, subscribes to Aristotle's view that virtue is that by which one lives well. On the other hand, by the means of the divine law, which comes directly from God through the gift of revelation, we are directed to our supernatural destiny by receiving the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and agape or love (in Latin: *Fides*, *Spes*, *Caritas*). This means that the theological virtues are infused into human nature by divine grace, and are not the result solely of our own human capabilities, although they surpass and complete them. In this way, Aquinas accomplishes the no mean task of superseding Aristotle without directly contradicting him. He does so by describing how our highest nature is perfected through the grace of God.

But, apart from his unrivalled greatness as a moral theologian, Aquinas' philosophical doctrines also prefigured the various later Western secular and progressive liberal, utilitarian and democratic theorists, and especially by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Jeremy Bentham, Immanuel Kant, Hegel, Marx, John Stuart Mill, and John Rawls. These doctrines were:

1. The principle of the natural moral equality of all humans in terms of rights and duties.
2. The political importance of the *no harm principle*.
3. The theory of the separate sphere of authority for the Church State.

4. A conception of the limits of sovereign power, and of the state in general.
5. The idea that law must be directed towards the common good and must be fair to all, justly distributing burdens and benefits (distributive justice) and rectifying the wrongs (commutative justice).
6. And finally, he introduced the concept that the source of human law is fundamentally the whole people, and only derivatively any authority acting on their behalf.

Conclusion

I want to throw open the windows of the Church so that we can see out and the people can see in.

(sentence famously attributed to St. John XXIII[16])

The legacy of the universalist doctrine developed by St Paul, Augustine and Aquinas can be seen in the slowly changing reactions of the upper echelons of the Catholic Church towards death penalty, liberalism, modernism, and, especially after the Vatican Council II, liberation theology. With regard to the progressively mutating positions involved, it is possible to make a significant comparison with the much earlier changing attitudes towards classical thought. The ancient pagan Greek and Hellenistic thought was initially viewed with a certain amount of suspicion, if not utter rejection, by the early Church but then became increasingly incorporated in the mainstream teachings and eventually even theology. In the same fashion, political and theological tendencies inspired by liberalism, modernism and liberation theology, were initially condemned by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. However, these philosophies or religious interpretations are now being progressively adapted, and, in some cases, even wholly adopted by the officially approved papal theology. It is my hope that, once again, these progressive changes will motivate people to act socially and politically with renewed energy in favor of

liberty, democracy, social and cultural progress, and, especially, against poverty and injustice. This means taking decisive action to uphold the notion of universal human rights, as well as rights extended to all sentient beings, to the earth itself, and parts of God's creation. Christian theology decisively contributed to establish the theoretical underpinning of this extended notion of "human rights", to which secularists and people of other faiths have also significantly contributed. Alas, the full unfolding of the implications of this theory, and its practical implementation is a long, complex, process, but one which can provide inspiration to those who strive for justice. Yet, in terms of magnitude, this process today has striking similarities to the task undertaken by the great theologians like St Paul, Augustine and Aquinas as they transformed the ancient Greek and Hellenistic pagan cultural heritage.

END NOTES

[1]This is the interpretative perspective of St Paul's letters developed by liberation theology, many of whose theological insights, even though, arguably, not the whole corresponding political ideology, now constitute integral part of Pope Francis' renewed message of preferential option by the Church for the poor. See: 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 1 Cor. 6:19; also, for instance, Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, ed. and trans. by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990, pp.193-195, 300.

[2]See, Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism (Cultural Memory in the Present)*, for example, p.74.

[3]Although Liberation theology is usually regarded as a 20th century development, the roots of its ideas lie in the much older tradition of political millenarianism. Literally, this means a belief in the millennium, the establishment on earth of a thousand-year Kingdom of God. However, moderate versions of Liberation Theology reject all connections with extremist millenarianism highlighting, instead, the importance of political expediency in the historical fight for liberty and social justice, and the necessity to combine the purity of the dove with the wisdom of the snake in order to improve and/or change existing societies and polities.

[4]See, for instance, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, *Salvation and Liberation*, Transl. from Portuguese by Robert R. Barr. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988, p.25.

[5]However, a socially conservative view of Christianity, which has been more often dominant, takes a completely different interpretative stand. It identifies Pauline thought with a call for a fervent, but more apolitical morality drive relying on strict social controls as the best form of governance, and problem solving in society; underpinning this position is the belief that no struggle to obtain fundamental political changes in the direction of liberty and social justice is required to obtain salvation. I think, it would be fair to say that it is possible to read St Paul in many different and not univocal ways, hence the different interpretations.

[6]Here, as an obvious example of the improper use of things, a modern reader could see Augustine as preventively stigmatizing the unlimited desire for the acquisition of money, goods, properties and power advocated by what C. B. Macpherson, last century, famously called possessive individualism. This reading would thus, somehow, counterbalance the vision of those who take Augustinian Calvinism as anticipating and embodying the spirit of capitalism, as it was earlier assumed by Max Weber.

[7]Pelagius, who lived from about 360 to 431circa, was a moral reformer who wished to stress human freedom and moral obligation. He regarded perfection as possible and mandatory. He did not believe that the original sin was an obstacle to salvation, arguing that Adam and Eve only set a bad example, but that just by following Christ's moral teaching and exemplary life it was possible to achieve human redemption. Consequently, God's grace and the administration of sacraments by the clergy became all but redundant. His views were condemned as heretical by the Church following from his controversy with Augustine.

[8]*City of God*, 18.49

[9]The Donatists were purist in that they did not want to let back into the Church those who had shown themselves unworthy during the times of persecution. In particular, they considered some priests unworthy, and for this very reason not entitled to administer the sacraments. According to their doctrine, even ordinary, but serious sinners would need rebaptism in order to rejoin the Church again. Augustine strongly argued against this position by pointing out that the Church it is not a perfect institution, and it is not to be identified with the heavenly city. It contains sinners, truly penitent people as well as some of those bound to be damned. However, it constitutes the extended body of the sacramental Christ. Augustine pointed out that the Donatists' rigorist doctrine was ultimately damaging the Church itself. For this reason, the Donatists were later suppressed by imperial edict.

[10]See, for example, Edmund N. Santurri, 'Rawlsian Liberalism, Moral Truth and Augustinian Politics,' *Journal for Peace and Justice Studies* 8:2 (1997), 1-36.

[11]Corollary here is understood as the ethical consequence of the fact that every human being is created by God, and therefore, for this very reason, deserves love and respect regardless of the specific individual physical or psychological features, and social position. Indeed, a corollary of something is an idea, argument, or fact which is the direct result of it.

[12]Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q.94, a.2 (I added the capital letters at the beginning of the two sentences.)

[13]See, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a, 2ae, q.40 articles 1-3.

[14]See, Ps. LXXXI 4

[15]However, at least in my view, this position does not really contradict, as some conservative interpreters have tried to construe, the guiding Christian principle that as pointed out by Liberation theologians such as Gustavo Gutierrez and Leonardo Boff, *agape* mandates to act within the existing historical contexts to change and improve them, on behalf of, on the side of, and with the poor and the oppressed.

[16]Born Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli (1881-1963), Pope from 1958; he has been recently canonized together with St. John Paul II, by Pope Francis I in 2014.