Political Augustinism Revival*

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José-Luis Villacañas, professor of the Complutense University of Madrid, has published a book dedicated to the problems of the imperial political theology. The author is well-known in the field of political philosophy and over the last decade, he has made a name as a specialist on Carl Schmitt and as an editor of his works. He has also written books about Hans Blumenberg and the imperial idea in the Spain of Charles V Habsburg. Therefore, when one meets a new book by Villacañas called *The Imperial Political Theology and the Community of Christian Salvation*, one expects another text about Early Modern political culture. However, this expectation would not be met. Based methodologically upon the conceptions of Max Weber, Friedrich Nietzsche and Carl Schmitt, Villacañas writes about the Roman Republic and, further, the Roman Empire in the context of the birth of Christendom and Christian theology. If one of the first heroes of this book is the Roman dictator Sulla, its last hero is the famous theologist of the 5th century AD, Aurelius Augustine.

Villacañas structures his book in seven big chapters, each of them divided into sections. The first chapter covers questions of the genealogy and the logic of the Roman *ratio imperii*. The first section gives a brief excursus on the origin of the principal concepts of the Roman world, such as a *patrimonium*, *paterfamilias*, *princeps*. The author further analyses the main algorithms of the evolution of the Roman Republic in the 1st century BCE. He shows that the formation of the Principate was, in fact, an inevitable result of the processes initiated by the Sullan dictatorship and his lack of legitimacy (p. 45–47). The Empire, being born, became the second column of the Roman world, where the first was its traditional patrimonialism.

The political constitution of the Principate was too weak and needed additional support to make the emperor's rule stronger and more prosperous. This support was found, according to Villacañas, in the political religion and, particularly, in the deification of the *princeps*. The *princeps* was considered as the father of the fatherland, *pater patriae*,

which gave rise to the one of essential traits of the Roman constitution, its political retrospection. Here Villacañas gives a brilliant metaphor, defining the political culture of the Roman Principate as a retrospective look. As the deification of August, for example, was conditioned by the precedential deification of Julius Caesar, while Alexander the Great, who also was declared a god, did not initiate the deification process of his father, King Philip. August was deified as a representative of the Julius-Octavius kin, while Alexander as a personal ruler, who received his crown and status directly from the gods and not from his father (p. 13, 607).

The detailed analysis of the reigns of Octavian August and his successors to Nero and the end of the Claudian dynasty made by the author in the last section of the first chapter, show that traditional Roman resources were insufficient for achieving this objective. The Principate, affirms Villacañas, evolved towards the Eastern Hellenistic monarchies, such as the Sirian and Egyptian, but this evolution referred above all to the elaboration of a political imaginarium. This was only a change of political symbolism not a transformation of the practices of *potestas politica*, and this became the main reason for the failure of this project (p. 74). The deification of the first Roman emperors had, Villacañas explains, mainly a literary character. Beginning with the same Octavian August and his *Res gestae Divi Augusti*, Roman historians and poets started to create an image of the pious emperor, who lived the life of the ideal Roman citizen and died a peaceful death, worthy of him. Because of August, there are many descriptions of various visions, where the people saw him as the son of Jupiter or as a Jupiter himself (p. 82–83). But the other emperors of the Claudian dynasty lived severely and often died violently, so the Augustan image did not work in connection with them. They rather were scapegoats in the Biblical sense, the *homines sacres* than the gods (p. 84–85). The lack of personal charisma gave the emperors a feeling of insecurity, which they tried to overcome with magic. But, as is well-known, the magical is strictly opposed to the political and always weakens it, so the power of Roman emperor weakened, with only some exceptions (p. 87). Moreover, the Roman religion, that was a cult of the *patresfamilias* could not transform into a religion of the salvation, appropriate for all the people of the great Empire.

The emperors who came after Nero, understanding (or, rather, feeling) the insufficiency of their traditional religion, adverted to the eastern religions of the Hellenistic reigns, but these reigns did not have patrimonial traditions, so, they were not appropriate for Rome. Villacañas describes the strivings of the Roman emperors and shows how they finally approached Judaism. Only this was able to become a religion of salvation, and precisely Judaism made possible the concept of the division of powers, one of the key concepts of Western culture (p. 14, 127–143, 601–603). Judaism also gave an opportunity to construct a political theology, an opportunity which the Roman emperors had lost. The author analyses two (in effect, three) versions of Judaism in connection with the Roman Empire: one expressed by Philo of Alexandria in the face of Caligula, the second the theocratic project of Joseph Flavius, the third in the preaching of Jesus Christ. It is crucially important that later, in the sermon of the apostle Paul, Philo's and Jesus's versions were united (p. 15, ch. 3 entirely), which Villacañas calls "the Pauline revolution".

Leaving aside Villacañas's analysis of the doctrines of Roman stoicism and Marcion (ch. 4), and his considerations about Diocletian, Arnobius and Lactantius (ch. 5–6), I will focus on his examination of Augustinian theology, since, in my opinion, the seventh chapter of this book, dedicated to Aurelius Augustine, is the key section that crowns his conception of political theology.

Augustine emphasized the main Paulian principles but also introduced some new points of the crucial importance. First, he postulated the existence of two churches, one visible and the other not. These made possible the idea of the division of the powers. Governmental power belonged to the imperial administration and the visible, external church. This power had a normative character and was founded on various laws and regulations (p. 19, 587–589), but it only had an outer, temporal character. Neither the visible church nor the imperial administration could, according to Augustinian theology, save souls, which was only possible for the inner, invisible church. In this sense salvation and deification were the real cornerstones of the separation of powers and this was fixed by Augustine. In this sense, the habitual notion of the *civitates permixtae*, of the *Civitas Dei*, which wandered through time and space, and of the *civitas terrena*, fixed in the time and space, receive other interpretations, more sophisticated than usual (p. 578–581).

Augustine proposed a cardinally new vision of human nature. Instead of man overburdened with passions and affects needing to get rid of them, he proposed man whose life is constituted by his libido. Such a man needs to recognize his nature and its weaknesses and to try to orientate his passions towards the God. The same action made by a multitude of men together creates a new type of the community, which Augustine himself calls the Church (p. 595). From here develops the Augustinian concept of the people as a political community. In book 19 of his treatise "the City of God" Augustine enters into the polemics with Marc Tully Cicero about his definition of the people and, consequently, of the *respublica*. Where the Roman *rhetor* looks at the people as at a multitude united by juridical consent and common utility (De re publ.I.XXV.39), Augustine proposes another formula. According to him, the people can be defined as a multitude united by the Concord to objects of common love (De civ.XIX.24). The only difference in this sense between the political and ecclesiastical communities is the object of the common love. While in the first case it could be an emperor (although I'm sure that Augustine himself did not suppose such argumentation) or, later in the Middle Ages, a king, in the second case it was a God. Such a love for common things created a new order, *ordo amoris*. This brought some of the most prominent medieval Augustinians to a new conception of power, which was interpreted as the strength and ability to create and then sustain some order. From here, particularly, grew the conception of *potestas absoluta* and *potestas ordinata*, which is beyond the scope of this review.

The construction of this dichotomy between the celestial and the mundane cities, according to Villacañas, changed the whole system of coordinates of the Roman world. Instead of the Roman retrospection, typical as mentioned, for a patrimonial society, Augustine proposed a prospection. The Augustinian man no longer looked backwards, to *generatio*, but forward to *regeneratio*, not to ancient *forma*, but to future *transformatio*

(p. 596). This prospection was, according to Villacañas, one of the principal innovations of Augustine and this became an important reason for the impossibility of constructing a political theology within the framework of Augustinian doctrine. Schmittian political theology looked backwards and tried to save the past, while the Augustinian men looked forward and upwards and hoped to deserve the celestial reign.

Eighty-three years ago, in 1934, a book *Political Augustinism* by the French historian and philosopher Henry Arquilliere was published for the first time. He first raised political Augustinism as an autonomous problem worthy of detailed analysis and scrutiny. Much later, at the end of the 20th century, political Augustinism became a popular subject of investigation, mainly in French humanitarian science. Now we can fix the next step in this examination. I think that Villacañas's book will take its worthy place in the political and theological studies of the Augustinian thought.

Возрождение политического августинизма

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