

Just War and the Theology of Evil

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THE BASIC question I am trying to help us answer—namely, “how does the tradition think about actual war?”—can benefit from a number of different approaches. My approach is relatively indirect. I want to look at some of the reflections on the nature of evil in Christian tradition, particularly in the thought of St. Augustine and those who followed after him. By doing this I hope to bring together the theology of war and the theology of evil, to see how they interpenetrate, and to see how that interpenetration illuminates the tradition’s thinking on war.

It may be surprising to think that illumination on the fraught topic of war can come from the still-more fraught topic of the Christian theology of evil. Controversy about Christianity over the past several centuries, especially in the more enlightened precincts of the West, has returned time and again to this dark topic. From Gibbon forward (and perhaps before him), many modern thinkers have believed that monotheism is inherently jealous and hence intrinsically intolerant, or it is tacitly dualistic and hence inevitably demonizing. In either case, many think that faith in a monarchic God tends to produce a dangerously zealous moral extremism in its adherents.¹ This purported extremism manifests itself, according to these thinkers, in a tendency to demonize its opponents—

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¹ See, for example, John Grey, *Black Mass: “Apocalyptic Religion” and the Death of Utopia* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), against Michael Burleigh, *Sacred Causes: The Clash of Religion and Politics, from the Great War to the War on Terror* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007).

to make them its enemies and then proceed to tar them with the most metaphysically profound opprobrium imaginable, namely, that they are evil. Thus the theology of evil seems to reinforce Christians' purported tendencies toward demonization and violence. Christianity creates zealots, not peacemakers; and one if not the main force for creating such zealots is precisely Christianity's fixation on evil.

The historicity of this view is a topic for another essay (in truth, for many, many books); suffice it to say that, despite my dislike of this story and my conviction that it gets the facts wrong, there is enough evidence in support of the view to require those who would contest it (like myself) to make an argument. It is not obviously and on its face mistaken. It is its ideological force that I find myself compelled to contest here. For even today the association of thinking about evil and violence has meant that thinkers have shied away from working out the connections between the theology of evil and a certain structure of constraining violence. The theology of evil, to continue to use this somewhat awkward term, is in fact one of the main imaginative forces shaping Christian understandings of limited war.

The story I want to tell has three large parts. In the first, I will discuss the development of a representation of evil that culminates (in a way, for my story) in the West in Augustine's elaboration of the theology of evil. In the second, I will discuss Augustine's subsidiary (logically, not chronologically) application of that theology of evil to thinking about human warfare. In the third, I will suggest that these two dimensions of his thought worked themselves out in one particular episode in Augustine's own life—his confrontation with the Donatists.

I. The Theology of Evil

The first thing to say about this phrase, "the theology of evil," is that it probably gets things the wrong way round. There is not a free-standing theology of evil at all, not in Christian thought. Rather, theological reflection on evil is a secondary activity, an after-effect, a consequence of the more primordial theology of goodness, love, and grace. There would not be a need for a theology of evil but for the deeper conviction that God is absolute goodness, and God's creation is fundamentally good.

The second thing to say is, what we today would think of—were we to think about a theology of evil—is the outcome of a very long process of intellectual and imaginative work stretching over many centuries.² Through this process, a set of convictions has come to shape Christian,

² When I say "we" here, I really mean *me*—though I invite you to judge if you would agree with me.

and especially Western Christian, theological understandings of the nature and place of evil in the divine economy of creation, redemption, and salvation. These convictions include a metaphysical commitment to the fundamental unreality of evil; an anthropological commitment to the present power of evil as warping human beings; and a theological commitment that, though God sees evil, God is in no way responsible for evil and indeed the divine will is set against evil and will, in God's good time, completely overcome it.

This picture emerged out of a long history, and it will be helpful to have it in place here. And because these convictions are most powerfully formulated in the writings of St. Augustine, this part of the essay will conclude with a summary of his views. To get there, I want to make a three-part argument. First I will sketch something of the views of evil found in the New Testament. Second, I will sketch the background to those New Testament views that is found in the ancient Near Eastern accounts of evil, which are often collectively gathered under the title "the combat myth," and delineate the resistance to this mythology put up by the thinkers of ancient Israel as that resistance is visible in the Old Testament. Third and finally I want to chart the course of this thinking, from the New Testament to Augustine, who I judge to have offered a very powerful and influential synthesis, to which may of us still, more or less and for better and for worse, subscribe.

A. Early Christians and "the War in Heaven"

Beginning with the theology of evil has immediate benefits for thinking about Christian views on war, for it dispels a too-simple picture of early Christian attitudes toward violence and war. Early Christians are often called pacifists, but it is better to think of them as they thought of themselves, as bystanders in a cosmic war. All too often the language of early Christian pacifism partakes of a terribly supersessionist theology, wherein the "politics of Jesus" is seen to replace the bloody politics of the Old Testament, whose worldly commitments mark it out as somehow deeply compromised. Jesus, such proposals strongly imply, was all about love—non-violent, self-sacrificial love, even unto death. For them, it is Jesus's non-resistant love that led him to the Cross, which cross led to humanity's redemption. Direct textual evidence to the contrary—driving the money-changers from the Temple with a whip, commanding his disciples to wear swords when they go out on the roads—is downplayed at best, and more typically ignored. Love and bloodshed are simply part of two separate orders of being.

But such readings of Christian social ethics are too simplistic. After all, in Romans 12 Paul tells Christians to feed their enemies, and then in Romans 13 he authorizes Christians to kill their enemies for a just and legitimate cause—a juxtaposition that can produce exegetical whiplash in an attentive audience. The truth is that early Christian thinking about evil contextualizes the reports of Jesus's refusal of the sword in a way that helps us understand such refusal as not about a general pacifism but about the right weapons for the war in which they are engaged. Attention to the full scope of the New Testament will show something of what I mean.

Gospel Texts. The Gospel texts exhibit a great deal of variation, but in general, demonic powers are a vivid presence in them all, even if those powers are not all apparently represented as part of a Satan-centered conspiracy.³ Nonetheless, the individual figure of Satan (or the devil) is a repeated presence throughout, and demonic spirits are perpetually present. Satan tempts Jesus in the desert at the beginning of his mission (Mk 1:12–13, Lk 4). At different times Jesus seems alert to the presence of “the devil and his angels” (Mt 25:41), and many of Jesus' miracles (especially exorcisms) are reported to have come at the expense of bad spirits (for example, the Gadarene swine of Mk 5:2–13). In Luke 10:18, when his disciples return with their stories of their successful missions, Jesus says “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” A coming final battle with these evil spirits seems to lurk behind the “synoptic apocalypse” or “little apocalypse” of Mark 13 (and Mt 24 and Lk 21). And finally, John represents Jesus's plans as climaxing in Gethsemane, in his triumph over the “prince of this world,” who will “be cast out” (Jn 12:31). In all these ways, and more, the presence of demonic powers engaged in struggle with God and God's angels, and with Jesus, his disciples, and all humanity, is a powerful theme in the Gospels.

Paul's Letters. Although the presence of evil is not the dominant theme in Paul's letters, it is clear that Paul understood the churches to be caught in a struggle between God and Satan, with the outcome decided already (perhaps for Paul by the Cross and Resurrection); as Romans 16:20 says, “[t]he God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” Nonetheless, Paul thinks that the struggle is one that is presently continuing (1 Thes 4–5). Because of this, the faithful must equip themselves spiritually for this struggle, and Paul uses a remarkable range of military metaphors for this process of equipping. Consider the central passage of this sort, Ephesians 6:10–18:

³ For a nice summary of some of the literature on this, see Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982).

Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness; and as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying always in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep watch with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints;

Verses 19–20 continue with Paul's own mission as part of the larger movement of God:

And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

This passage makes very explicit the fusion of military and agonistic understandings of faith and the theology of evil, and the way that both were part of Paul's understanding of his larger evangelical mission.

The Book of Revelation. Revelation is of course the most famous of the apocalyptic texts in early Christianity, though interpretive attention to it seems to have been by and large surrendered by the churches to marginal wing-nuts. (Thus the *Left Behind* series has been one of the most popular series of fictional books ever in American history, but few churches have attempted to engage its theology.)⁴ And yet it is unarguably a major text

⁴ See Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Boyer, "Biblical Prophecy and Foreign Policy," in *Quoting God: How Media Shape Ideas about Religion and Culture*, ed. Claire Badaracco (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), 107–22; Amy Johnson Frykholm, *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Martin Cook, "Christian Apocalypticism and Weapons of Mass Destruction," in *Ethics and Weapons of Mass Destruction: Religious and Secular Perspectives*, ed. Sohail H. Hasmi and Steven P. Lee (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 200–210. For a wonderfully rich theological engagement, see Oliver O'Donovan, "History and Politics in the Book of

for Christians of that age, and succeeding ages, in thinking about the end-times and thus also the meaning of history for today. It is a shame that many Christians today are by and large too embarrassed to think about it, for fear of being associated with apocalyptic cults hunkered down out somewhere in the American Badlands. (Here as elsewhere, bad theology drives out good.)

The crucial fact here again for our purposes is the pervasiveness of the theme of combat in this text, and combat between an embodied force of evil and a good God. Examples are not hard to come by: consider the imperial beast of Revelation 13, and the war between Satan and the angels in Revelation 20:7–10. But the most dramatic example of this motif in Revelation is probably the war between the archangel Michael and his angels on the one side and “the dragon” and his angels on the other:

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (Rv 12:7–9)

None of this should be taken to suggest that the Book of Revelation expresses a fundamental escapism or animus at the world as a whole; it is the way that the cosmos is currently structured, not the fact of our existence in it, that is the problem. Revelation is fundamentally a pastoral text; as Christopher Rowland puts it, “[e]schatological teaching in the New Testament always serves to answer a particular pastoral problem.”⁵ The aim of Revelation seems to be to teach patience and endurance in a time of trial for the churches. Even in Revelation, then, the most vivid depiction of cosmic war and dualism available in the New Testament, there is a sense that the dualism is temporary and ultimately only provisional. Yet the sense of a cosmic struggle is palpable and inescapable.

The upshot of all this is that, as I said, the early Christians imagined the cosmos to be a battlefield. Evil is real, and has declared war against God and the forces of goodness. Far from being pacifistic, early Christians saw themselves as bit players in a cosmic struggle that dwarfs our capacity to imagine it.

Revelation,” in Oliver O’Donovan and Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, *Bonds of Imperfection: Christian Politics, Past and Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 25–47.

⁵ Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 415.

B. Before Christianity: A Brief Excursus about the "Combat Myth"

To understand this vision of evil it will help to have a sense of the context in which it emerged. Central to this context is what scholars have come to call the "combat myth," a narrative structure for cosmogony that was fairly common across the ancient Near East, in which the cosmos is the site, or perhaps the consequence, of a titanic struggle between the forces of a good god and the forces of an evil rival. To appreciate the radicalism of Christianity's alternative, it will help to appreciate this myth.

Early ancient Near East mythologies—Mesopotamian, Hittite, Canaanite, and Israelite—all contain similar efforts to tell the story of the cosmos as a site of combat or agonism between good and bad divine powers. In various traditions, the struggle pitted Ninurta against Anzu (in the Sumerian, Akkadian, and Babylonian cosmologies) and Baal against Yamm and Mot (in the Ugaritic one); even the figure of Ahriman in Zoroastrianism (developing contemporaneously with Judaism) is marked by this combat myth. Most of these mythologies contain creation stories in which chaos-monsters (or early gods) are confronted, defeated, and destroyed by other, often younger (up and coming) gods. In some versions of these myths—as with the *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian story of the new god Marduk against the evil sea-monster Tiamat—the defeat of the chaos-monster blends into the creation, by the hero-god, of the world humans know; by the act of destroying the evil chaos-monster and (in an obscurely overlapping way) creating our new world, the hero-god becomes the primary god in the pantheon.⁶

Two facts about this for the later elaboration of the Christian theology of evil are key. First of all, the chaos god or monster is not represented as the font of evil; rather, it represents a rival principle, with its own source of vitality, power, and intelligence. Indeed, because the hero-god is often represented as the young upstart, the combat myth tradition tacitly suggests that the chaos god is in fact prior, and perhaps more profoundly part of the universe, than the hero-god. (Tiamat, for example, is Marduk's mother.) A major trace of this lurks still in all the Abrahamic traditions today, for the etymological roots of "Satan" lie in the early

⁶ See Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith*, 2d ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); and Yuri Stoyanov, *The Other God: Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000). For a very interesting contemporary effort to think through the history of this tradition for evangelical Christians, see Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: the Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1997).

proto-Semitic word *shatan*, which seems to have meant “rival.” Secondly, because the cosmos is created in a struggle, and out of the old cosmos, the cosmos so created may bear traces of, or be the ongoing site of, the struggle between the hero-god and the chaos-monster; the cosmos remains marked by this dualism, which explains the persistence of evil.

Clearly, the Abrahamic traditions (as monotheisms) would all have problems with these myths. And in many ways they do reject those myths. (For example, the word for the “deep” over which the spirit moves in Genesis 1 is *tehom*, a word etymologically linked to Tiamat.) Nonetheless, it took a long time before they were fully rejected, and traces of this mythology permeate various texts common to Jewish and the Christian Scriptures. In those books Yahweh seems to struggle against similar creatures; we see this in Leviathan (Job 40–41), Behemoth (Ps 74, 89), Rahab (Is 51). Even the prophets at times recur to this notion of God involved in a struggle with a rival power—such as the prince of Tyre, the Egyptian pharaoh (Ezek 28–9), or the ruler of Babylon (Is 14). Even the Dead Sea Scrolls suggest a combat among angels occurring in the cosmos as a main principle for understanding the course of history.

Yet by the time of the New Testament’s composition, it is clear that the combat myth, while shadowing some of the texts, is not the story to which the faithful generally subscribe. Even in the most apocalyptic of Jewish and Christian texts of this era, Satan’s apparent dominance is only a temporary phenomenon.⁷ It is not even merely a matter only of goodness’s ultimate victory; all along the good God has been wholly in charge.

Nonetheless, there is a real and vital sense of a cosmic combat still underway, even though it is no longer thought of as between equally powerful rivals. St. Ignatius of Antioch, in his *Letter to the Romans*: “All the way from Syria even unto Rome I am fighting with wild beasts, by land and sea, night and day, chained as I am to ten leopards (I mean a detachment of soldiers), who only get worse the better you treat them.”⁸ Even, then, as Christians understood the theological inappropriateness of the combat myth for their faith, they yet retained the powerful sense of struggle and agonism as both phenomenologically powerful and theologically acceptable. What they lacked was a theological framework broad enough and deep enough to make this directly coherent and self-consciously cultivatable for creedal-confessing Christians. This is where Augustine comes in.

⁷ Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 91–92, and see 156–60.

⁸ Ignatius, *Letter to the Romans*, chap. 5. Quotation from *Early Christian Fathers*, ed. Cyril C. Richardson (New York: Collier Books, 1970), 104.

C. Augustine's Final Transformation of the Combat Myth

Augustine was not a heroic lone intellectual who on his own transformed the combat myth, and its attendant dualistic imagination of the cosmos, into a monarchical monotheism; traces of this transformation stretch far back into the ancient Israelite traditions and texts, and parallel with Augustine the rabbis were undertaking similar work themselves. But Augustine is uniquely important because he seems to have been the early Christian thinker who, for complicated reasons (some due to context, some due to his own interests) most thoroughly rethought the notions of judgment, divine sovereignty, and sin in a way that set the terms for later Western Christianity, and decisively rejected the combat myth and its attendant dualisms.

To say that Augustine demythologized evil for Christians is not to say that Augustine did not believe in demons. On the contrary: his world swarmed with them. Demonic forces were a vital presence in his thinking, and they appear repeatedly in his writings. But he understood all of these as rebel angels—figments of God's will let loose on the world for a season, but always standing under God's sovereign judgment, however graciously deferred it may be. Furthermore, while Satan is definitely the leader of all these demons, for Augustine this leadership is only the lowest and most distant parody of God's sovereignty.

The truth is that the demons in general, and Satan in particular, are not the lords of sin and evil but the first victims of sin and evil. For Augustine, Satan's fall is not a magnificent and noble rebellion but a pathetic collapse into a childish and self-centered pouting. The fall is not itself a sign of Satan's rivalry with God but of God's remarkable, though temporary, gracious forbearance in the face of Satan's tantrum. Were God to wish it, Satan's punishment would be swift and sure; indeed, ultimately it will be just that. But God, in the inscrutably mysterious wisdom of divinity, permits Satan to tempt humanity throughout history, postponing his ultimate entrapment in the infernal pit until the end of time.⁹

Augustine's treatment of the fallen angels well represents his more general point about the nature of evil and its presence in history. Evil is fundamentally a metaphysical nothing, an attempted refusal to participate in God's gracious creation. Because of the metaphysical identity of being with goodness for Augustine, evil is properly speaking only the privation of being, a sheer emptiness. Furthermore, and equally importantly for him, those categories' transcendental identity with intelligibility itself as

⁹ For texts on Augustine's demonology, see *City of God* 11.14–18, 33; 12.1–9, 22–28; *Literal Commentary on Genesis* 11.12–14, 16–17, 19–29.

well, an evil act is an act which is marked by a refusal of goodness, being, and intelligibility, all at once. The fundamental absence of these three characteristics in the evil act qua evil makes it hard to speak about such acts as what they purport to be. This is why Augustine describes efforts to grasp the ratio of evil as efforts “to see darkness, or hear silence.”¹⁰

Yet this darkness, this silence, has a real power to warp our actions and pervert our best wills. Hence, along with evil’s ontological status as privative of being, Augustine recognized sin’s psychological status as perverting the self’s loves, in ways that can have “positive” or actual effects in the world, causing us to do evil deeds out of a misplaced sense of their necessity or even their moral rectitude, because we have prioritized one lesser good—for example, the supreme value of our country above all others—over a good that is properly superior to it—for example, the fact that all humans possess the *imago Dei* and are not to be used as instruments for the advancement of our country’s aims. Furthermore, evil is not only powerful in how it perverts our wills; it is powerful because it is so pervasive. Augustine is not the first Christian to emphasize the universality of sin. But he is the first for whom that universality has become a central principle of their practical advice for the world. Against smug ecclesial optimists like Eusebius and snobbish elites like Pelagius, Augustine affirmed the moral and spiritual homogeneity of humanity across all time and space from Eden to Armageddon. And he worked this conviction into his practical thought in the most fundamental way imaginable.

This may all seem fairly esoteric for a discussion of just war theory. But the point is quite fundamental. In offering this picture of evil, Augustine is proposing a way to think about our condition that is as thoroughly nondualist as possible. The good is primordial and cannot be wholly annihilated by evil; indeed, evil is ultimately nothing but a perversion and parody of the good. In fact, speaking practically, this way of thinking is properly anti-dualist; it diagnoses the temptation to think of “us” and “them”—to make our enmity a metaphysical and not just political fact—as just the sort of thought that Satan has in his mind as he rebels. It is an attempt to replace a metaphysics fundamentally built around a structure of opposition and rivalry with one built upon a structure of participation.

The ironies of this account are deep. The theology of evil developed from the vision of cosmic war of the early mythologies. It then turned around and shaped Christian notions of just war. How it did that is the topic of Part II.

¹⁰ *uelit uidere tenebras uel audire silentium*. Augustine, *City of God* 12.7.

II. "Be a Peace-Making Warrior:" Augustine's Theology of War

Augustine's thought is often acknowledged to be important, but its bulk and complexity have discouraged most prudent scholars who are not Augustine specialists from engaging his thought in a substantial way.¹¹ Those of us who are not so prudent engage him with fear and trembling, but engage him nevertheless, with the conviction that Augustine's work can substantially illuminate our situation and the Christian tradition. This is especially so in his work on war.

Augustine differs from later thinkers associated with the just war tradition in important ways, ways most readily summarized by saying that he was in no way an academic, let alone a scholastic. This is not a condemnation of Augustine, nor is it a patronizing apology for some perceived lack of clear-headed and systematic thinking on his part. Far from it; rather it is a recognition of the way in which his distinct situation must be considered in any attempt to understand his writings. Augustine's writing is largely occasional, and more often than not prompted by events in his town or the wider world, or provoked by requests from correspondents, pagan and Christian, near and far. In a way more immediately pressing than is the case with some other thinkers, then, his texts must be read in light of their contexts.

More significantly for our purposes, Augustine was not centrally or primarily interested in the legal and systematic questions that came to occupy later thinkers in the just war tradition. One imagines he would have found a too-exclusive focus on such a topic to be spiritually, practically, and even philosophically unsound. Instead, he is concerned primarily with theological and pastoral issues. As we will see, the key for him is that the just war form of thinking is part of a virtue-theory account of engagement in "worldly affairs." Thus, Augustine can be used for a legal account, but he is not ultimately interested in that; his refusal to be conscripted for that cause is worth our reflection. After all, he worries that legality may be a bit too tidy. He thought that war is part of God's providential governance and judgment, and so an Augustinian contribution to a discussion of the just war tradition must first and foremost bring to the consciousness of all the inescapably *theological* reverberations that such an account either overtly or tacitly entails.

For Augustine, politically proper warfare, held to account by God and the neighbor, can authentically explain itself in terms of love—even unto

¹¹ On the topics of this section I have been much illuminated by David S. Bachrach's *Religion and the Conduct of War, c. 300–1215* (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2003). For a larger elaboration of these themes see my *The Republic of Grace: Augustinian Thoughts for Dark Times* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), esp. chap. 5.

the use of force. As Augustine articulated this view, “it is the adversary’s iniquity that thrusts a just war upon the wise.”¹² Put in another way, as Paul Ramsey suggested, “the justice of sometimes resorting to armed conflict originated in the interior of the ethics of Christian love.”¹³ And more recent figures in this tradition, such as Oliver O’Donovan, make similar claims.

Here I will explain how love can underlie the use of force. How can slaying an aggressor be an act of love? Finally, the conclusion attempts to place this practice of political authority in light of our eschatological destiny as judged by God, as called to hear God’s judgment on us.

A. Love and Compulsion

The key question is whether we can imagine force used legitimately, even lovingly. That sounds paradoxical. As we said, ultimately power is inevitably attached, in this life, to compulsion. But how can love compel? We cannot imagine love leading to compulsion. Love seems to us not to compel, but to be passive, basically about adoration at a distance. (There is desire-love, but we do see this as oddly connected to adoration-love, I would submit.) We are tempted to set love against compulsion; we assume an “either/or” of power versus static bystander. We are tempted to believe that we must value each other *or* force one another, in an instrumental way, which merely makes the other an extension of my ego.

In fact we are caught in a performative self-contradiction about whether love can compel and be invasive. This is visible even in our ordinary uses of compulsion. Thinking about the breadth of our everyday use of words like “compulsion” can help here. For it is ordinary use of the English language to say that a book, a piece of music, or a painting is compelling. We can be compelled by things—for example, works of art we find “compelling.” What does this mean? It means that we find ourselves judged by it, put in our place, commanded, made to sit up, found wanting. (Think of a poem such as Reiner Maria Rilke’s “Archaic torso of Apollo,” with its famous last line, “you must change your life.”) Authority need not be oppressive and destructive; it can be enabling and creative.

The larger lesson here is simple: Love is not simply distanced voyeurism and spectatorial respect. Power is not invasive; it can be enabling and creative. The lover’s gaze can change the beloved. We often disparage paternalism, but it is an inescapable part of our lives, for it speaks to this

¹² *Iniquitas enim partis aduersae iusta bella ingerit gerenda sapienti.* Augustine, *The City of God* 19.7.

¹³ Paul Ramsey, *The Just War: Force and Political Responsibility* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002 [1968]), 143.

phenomenon, most frequently visible in parents, of genuinely seeing and being committed to the other's good. With parents and children, often the parents' love is as the sun, nourishing and bringing to maturation. In ordinary life we both practice paternalism and allow it to be practiced upon us. It is love, and not the power we exercise in light of love, that makes us intimate with one another. Love is ontologically a real force, not just a word used to mask our admiring manipulation of one another.

So love can compel. But can it be the motivating energy of violence? Can it be true that, as we quoted Paul Ramsey arguing, "the justice of sometimes resorting to armed conflict originated in the interior of the ethics of Christian love"? Augustine's thought lets us see how this could be so.

B. The Mournful Warrior

Put bluntly: how can slaying an aggressor be an act of charity, however alien? The tradition conceives of the use of force, and the nature of politics as a whole, through the idea of compelling necessity. In fact, the use of force is the ultimate example of our enmeshment in the necessities of the world. (One of Augustine's favorite scriptural passages—appearing again and again when he thinks about politics—is Psalm 25:17, "From my necessities deliver me!") The past constrains and orients our action in the present and for the future. Those who are authorized politically are those who have been put in a situation downstream from history, as it were. And sometimes they must accept the historical necessity of the legitimate and authorized use of force for righteous ends.

The language of "necessity" stands at the basis of the well-known just war tradition of Christian reflection about war. I will not get into the technical details—the "grammar"—of that tradition here, such as the criteria that help the rightly formed agent determine when it is right to go to war, or what it is right to do in war. Instead here I want to focus on the deep theological background and worldview that motivates that tradition.

To begin with, we should recognize that the language of necessity, which Augustine uses, is theologically problematic for him as well. After all, talk about necessity is complicated by God's free providence. In Gethsemane, Jesus does not say that his death is necessary, but that the Father wills it. When Augustine uses the Latin *necessitas*, he does not mean inevitability or determinism, but the will of God.¹⁴ God's will is not subject to any helpless compulsion; God is not forced to do anything. But

¹⁴ See *City of God* 5.9–11. What stands between Augustine's use of *necessitas* and any such of our own is the modern understanding of determinism and messianism, whether Hegelian or Marxist or "Manifest Destiny."

this is not properly understood simply as a whim of God's, that can be revoked, or as a sheerly arbitrary act of God's will. The distinction between "being" and "will" is one that makes sense for humans, because of the conflicts and incoherencies in our fallen existence (the experience of which is quite clearly something we have); because God does not have those conflicts and incoherencies, that distinction makes no sense in God's case. What God necessitates is neither arbitrary nor inevitable. But that does not make God's will any less omnipotent, or any less the prime mover of history; it simply means that what God, in the unity of God's "being" and God's "will," has proclaimed will be the course of history. Thus "necessity" must be understood not as an impersonal brute force pushing blindly from behind the scenes of human history, but instead as the unvexable and wholly free dynamic action of God leading history through judgment to the mercy seat.

This judgment is what humans endure, and they endure it as a mode of accepting responsibility for their history. In the political sphere Hannah Arendt ably summarized this:

When Napoleon, seizing power in France after the Revolution, said: I shall assume the responsibility for everything France ever did from Saint Louis to the Committee of Public Safety, he was only stating somewhat emphatically one of the basic facts of political life. It means hardly more, generally speaking, than that every generation, by virtue of being born into a historical continuum, is burdened by the sins of the fathers as it is blessed with the deeds of the ancestors.¹⁵

Possibly the only great modern political actor who has understood the course of history in this way is Abraham Lincoln.

This "necessity" is properly understood only within a vibrant faith in God's providential ordering of the world. The reality of compulsion is not merely a fact about the political sphere; it reveals God's providential governance of the whole world, including human agency, as the world makes its way through the great drama of Creation, Fall, Redemption and Sanctification, and we will be made to answer for this drama. So Augustine's insistence that we are politically responsible, not just for the current structures of order, but for the past as well—that we have inherited guilt—is insistence on a fact about the human condition. Humans in this world are not able to choose with total impunity; we always come to consciousness of our situation *in medias res*, with lines of filiation and obli-

¹⁵ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (London: Penguin, 1964), 298.

gation (and opposition and enmity) drawn before we have a chance to say yes or no. We are always constrained by the course of history, global and local.

The picture of agency we hold is crucial for the full reach and significance of this account. All our actions are prompted by other actions upon us, and each act is part of this larger interchange, our “dialogue” with God, and through God with the world and our neighbor—a story stretching far back behind our birth, and far forward into the future.

The implications of this picture for a proper understanding of the use of force are substantial. Those authorities legitimated to use force do not act on behalf of their own private vengeance, but always are compelled by a proper apprehension of the particular situation in which they—as the particular political agents they are—find themselves, including their own particular obligations and commitments in that situation. A useful analogy is with an individual’s right to self-defense. “Right” here is almost too contingent for this reality; if someone attacks you, it is almost automatic that you will defend yourself—it is simply a reflex, not something you voluntarily or deliberately do. The ideal of political authority would be similarly automatic, reflexive, in terms of defending those with whose care the authority is charged. It does not *permit* our intervention, or give us license to indulge in what we already want to do. Rather, it *insists* that we acknowledge our prior implication in the situation and our responsibility to confront it as well as is possible. As Augustine says in his famous letter 189 to Boniface, “it ought to be necessity, and not your will, that destroys an enemy who is fighting you.”

The focus on necessity may sound troubling at first, but consider carefully the alternative. The idea that one needs only permission to go to war may be morally more troubling than the thought that one needs a command to do so. One suspects that, for Augustine, a “war of choice,” so understood, is an avoidable war; and a war that can be reasonably and morally avoided, should be.¹⁶ (So Augustine critiqued Moses for killing the Egyptian overseer, and Peter for cutting off the right ear of the High Priest’s servant, because both exhibited “hasty zeal.”¹⁷) When war is not understood as a freestanding *ex nihilo* act, we are better able to recognize our prior relations and present responsibilities, our implication in the violence of the world, and accentuates an agent’s sensitivity to the fraught character of their actions. Obligation is a more realistic, and ironically also

¹⁶ As James Turner Johnson has made clear in oral presentation, the language of a sovereign’s “free right to make war,” the *liberum jus ad bellum*, is an early modern innovation.

¹⁷ Augustine, *Against Faustus the Manichee* 22.70.

more gentle, merciful, and humane, way to think about a war's rationale, than any language of "permission."

Furthermore, this account understands the just war mode of deliberation to be not essentially an exculpatory moral algorithm, applicable by just anybody. Rather, just war thinking is a narratively enframed interpretive matrix that both offers a picture of the world and proposes how to live within it, and requires properly formed—morally and religiously—agents to enact it. The tradition situates particular moral actions within a rich theological narrative frame in order to understand properly where you stand—what necessities are forcing your hand, and what judgment you stand under.

The just war tradition is best understood not as a distinct and self-sustaining tradition but as part of a Christian political theology of justice and judgment. As Frederick Russell puts it, Augustine's own account is not so much a systematic theory as it is really "clusters of ideas grouped around the central theme of sin and punishment."¹⁸ Just war theory, that is, is part of a larger theological worldview which begins from a vision of human life as tragically, irremediably corrupted, and it describes one facet of how humans should participate properly, or least improperly, in life so conceived. God's justice and judgment are beginning to be worked out in history, the tradition insists, and we are to inhabit history as the site where and medium whereby that judgment and justice are deployed. The just war tradition depicts us as necessarily part of the world, and as such part of the awesome and horrendous unspooling of God's providential judgment on the world. Here as elsewhere, the just war tradition is part of a larger theology of history as providential.

This affirmation of providence is paired with a realistic assessment of human sin. So just war theory is not only based on the "Christian universalism" of egalitarianism and universal concern that lies at the basis of international law, as many point out; it is also based on that other, less palatable, Christian universalism, unacknowledged in international law but even more basic in international relations: the universalism of sin. Just war theory emerges out of an account of human fallenness; without it, just warriors may delude themselves into assuming that they are ever other

¹⁸ Frederick H. Russell, *The Just War in the Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 25. See also Gregory Reichberg, "Just War and Regular War: Competing Paradigms," in *Just and Unjust Warriors: The Moral and Legal Status of Soldiers*, ed. David Rodin and Henry Shue (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 193–213; see 198–99 on the disappearance, after Aquinas, of discussion of intention as a concern in the tradition, and see 212 for the idea of the warrior as executor of justice as a "normative ideal" that disappears after Suarez.

than significantly morally compromised. The “justice” in just war theory should never be claimed to be more than relative justice. Hence it harbors no pretense of offering a tidy resolution to the problems that it is designed to address, and to suggest otherwise is to court a dangerous hypocrisy. On the Christian understanding, just war reasoning is not undertaken by people who see themselves primordially as rulers or other political actors; it is undertaken by people whose primordial view of themselves is as sinners—creatures who suffer from the same basic maladies as their opponents, and who are therefore susceptible to the same basic temptations.

For these reasons, Augustinian-informed just war thinking will insist that the decision to go to war can never be a light one. That force must be used, that it is obligatory, is always and for everyone (for everyone who is morally sane, anyway) an occasion for moral regret, for the recognition that such evils that a war will inevitably bring are to be regretted. But regret seems a pallid term with which to capture the full range of torment that the properly formed agent will experience. The frequent recognition of the import of “regret” does not go far enough, I think, in recognizing the moral state of near-despair which “just warriors” ought to cultivate.

Many thinkers in the just war tradition acknowledge the inadequacy of regret, and appeal beyond regret to remorse: Not only is the idea of a perfectly immaculate policy not to be had in our world, but our sense of the flaws in our policy should help us to cultivate a recognition of our own sinfulness, and likely complicity, in the evils we intend to stop. Yet this need not entail, as it seems to entail for some proponents of remorse, that we are hereby authorized actively to acquiesce in any “necessary evils.” Rather, it is simply an acknowledgment, tragic as it may be, that a language of “regret” does not fully capture the psychic trauma and long-standing sense of guilt that attach to war-making, but instead attempts to draw our attention away from such murky realities and toward an all-too-tidy moralized fantasy that we might wage war in a way that keeps us fundamentally in charge of it, that allows us the illusion that direct and conscious human agency is always in steady command of the monster of war. Our moral remorse and regret should be gripped by the very disquieting idea that we will be made to answer for our complicity in these events; that we will be held to account, if not here on earth then in some final court of justice; that the blood of the innocent cries from the ground; that justice is not forever deferred; that God will not forever be mocked. This is what looms behind Augustine’s repeated brooding on the text of Psalm 25:17, “from my necessities deliver me!”¹⁹

¹⁹ *De necessitatibus meis erue me!* See, for example, *City of God* 19.6.

On this account just war reasoning is part of a larger worldview, not most fundamentally an algorithmic system or check-list aimed at exculpating those who act; it must also discourage any moralistic evasions of responsibility and so, positively, encourage our recognition of our sinfulness. It must not merely make warriors, it must make mournful warriors, who recognize that their decisions have been made at real moral cost. This is not about imposing on soldiers a framework alien to their experience—as if they would not have these disturbing thoughts unless some troublesome priest inserts them into their minds—but rather giving them a way to talk about what they experience already.

This is why Augustine dwells on the inescapably eschatological overtones of just war reasoning. While many of its original convictions predate Christianity, and today parts of it are embedded in wholly secular international law and the laws of war, just war thinking in its true richness is far more organically related to the Christian theological tradition than many allow. Of course, in any human's hands, believer and unbeliever alike, just war reasoning can easily be a lie we tell ourselves about the intelligibility, transparency, and rationality of the world, and typically our uses of it amount to just that. This is not to deny that we should seek whatever clarity we can find, as diligently as possible; but the pursuit of that genuine clarity is also and simultaneously the rejection of any and every temptation of spurious sanitation that is proffered for our purchase. Furthermore, any appropriation of the just war tradition that lets its adherents assume that we are in charge of the world is deeply flawed. The fixation on enabling human agency via a language of options or choices is not a permanent feature of the just war tradition, but a development of it—I think a modern development—that we should resist. The idea that authority bestows power, understood as something like unconstrained freedom to act as we will, is one of the great delusions about political life, and typically one of the first surrendered by even moderately intelligent authorities when they gain office. The exercise of political power—an exercise sometimes entailing the use of force, and always relying tacitly on the threat of force—is something that should affect our souls; it should trouble, humble, even perhaps break our wills, make us wish we were other than who we are. Happy is the land that is ruled by someone who does not enjoy ruling too much; best is the war that is waged by someone who wishes earnestly that it did not have to be waged, and who fears for their soul because of the “necessities” involved.

Some would call this vision of the political world “pessimistic,” but it is better described as soberly realistic. It is saved from becoming a disabling pessimism because it is paired with the very powerful idealism of Augustine's understanding of peace. In a real way, Augustine thinks that just war

is pacification, and has as its end peace, true peace, the tranquility of order. This end is not merely extrinsic to combatants' behavior in war; it will shape the means that are suitable as well. 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. "Be a peace-making warrior," wrote Augustine to Count Boniface, and the just war tradition sees no overwhelming paradox in that phrase, much to its benefit.²⁰

Yet for Augustine, to say "peace" is to say far too little. Peace is the end of war—even the wicked, Augustine insists, seek peace. But what sort of peace? Of triumph and subjugation, or of right order? A peace in which outright evil is directly perpetuated by the state is no peace. True peace is not simply the absence of overt war. We must beware, Augustine seems to say, of seeking the peace of mere indifference, the peace of the dead. The peace Christians seek is eschatological, the peace of those who have been resurrected. For Augustine, we participate in Jesus's peace, which is Jesus Christ's union with the Father in the Holy Spirit. But we are at war with ourselves, so we do not have this peace fully; and we cannot see each other's hearts, so we do not have this union with one another.²¹

In this way, Augustine's understanding of war is not a cry of despair, but a sober consequence of the height of its "ideals" (what an inadequate word that is). Just as the Christian sense of sin and evil is based on hope and graceful holiness, so that the former is unintelligible without the latter, so this Christian understanding of war relies on a more fundamental if partial apprehension of peace. We must hope for and fear God's judgment at one and the same time, and cling not to our own righteousness—which we know to be an illusion—but to the righteousness that we have as an alien gift. In this way the theology of evil and the doctrine of just war echo one another.

III. An Augustinian War on Terror

Providentially enough, Augustine's theology of evil and his reflections on the use of force come together in an episode from his life—namely, his engagement with the Donatists. This is in many ways ironic, particularly for our day. In recent years there have been many attempts to enroll Augustine in the discussions of the war on terror. But few who attempt this recognize that he was involved in a "war on terror" of his own: the theological, cultural, and ultimately political struggle with a group called the Donatists. This conflict has many of the marks of our war on terror:

²⁰ *Esto ergo etiam bellando pacificus*. Augustine, *Epist.* 189.6; see also 93.8.

²¹ I have found Rowan Williams's small book *The Truce of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005 [1983]) very useful on these matters.

a clash of cultures (Imperial Roman colonialists vs. North African native culture), an insurgency, acts of terror (assassinations, church burnings, etc), and finally government reprisals culminating in a grand council—the Council of Carthage, in 411—where the full weight of Roman power was finally brought to bear on the Donatist “schismatics.” While the received story of this episode is fairly bleak for Augustine, more careful recent work has done a good deal to complicate the story—not precisely in ways that exonerate Augustine, but rather in ways that recast the tale as one effort to see how this vision of evil and the just war can work in complimentary ways. For Augustine did try to engage in that conflict in a properly Christian way. His struggle to do so shaped Western Christian understandings of the legitimacy of intolerance of dangerous sects, and profoundly influenced the deep roots of all later Western political thinking about legitimacy and violence. But in some important ways those lessons have been ill-learned; and in how he taught his congregants, and in how he urged the authorities to behave, he still has much to teach us.

A. Coercing the Donatists

The Donatists were those Christians in North Africa who, in the fourth and fifth centuries, held to the more traditional and local ways of the faith, against what they saw as the corrupt and outsider Imperial Latin churches, which they saw as interloping carpet-baggers. Originally Donatism began as a complaint, a century before Augustine’s time, by some of the faithful against certain high church officials who had betrayed the church by handing over church bibles and perhaps other information to pagan Roman authorities out of fear of persecution and who, after the persecutions ended, wanted to return to the church and to their ecclesial offices. Once the persecution was over, these authorities were permitted by the larger church to return to the fold. But many among the local churches of North Africa—which had a reputation for parochial nativism, toughness, and for enduring bloody persecutions with great resilience—wanted nothing to do with priests seen as cowardly, duplicitous, and in the service of Romans (no matter that they were catholic Romans; “a Roman’s a Roman,” one can almost hear Donatists say). So they refused to accept them, and set up parallel ecclesial bodies, which took most of the people (in many cities, all of the people and the buildings) with them. At its most basic, the theological issue was a matter of moral and religious propriety and rectitude: Donatists demanded, as they saw it, a certain integrity among their priests, and they saw the Latin catholic priests as irremediably corrupted by their descent from traitorous bishops. And they simply wanted nothing to do with them.

Augustine's North African church, then, was split between two warring factions, with his faction visibly the smaller and weaker. Augustine's first response to this challenge was debate. As he said in a letter to Vincentius (bishop of a faction of Donatists called Rogatists), "[m]y opinion at first was that no one should be coerced into the unity of Christ: that we must act only by words, fight only by arguments, and overcome by reason alone, lest we should have those whom we knew to be true heretics becoming false catholics." Furthermore, this debate was expected to be mutual, with force being used by neither side. Early on, in a letter to a then-Donatist bishop Maximinus, he said, "let there be no terror produced by gangs of circumcelliones," that is, groups of hard-line Donatist vagabonds who roamed the countryside like outlaw gangs, using violence and assassination against the Catholic clergy and their allies in the North Africa of Augustine's day.²²

Augustine never jettisoned debate as a default option. Until the end of his life he always tried argumentative means of persuasion toward the Donatists, and urged others in his congregation and through letters to do the same.

This strategy was rhetorically powerful. He sought accommodation, always insisting that it was the other side that was not accommodating. Furthermore, he worked to undercut the Donatists' cultural ethnonationalism by insisting that the catholic church could be authentically "native." But over time, his wish to manage matters by nonviolent debate foundered on the rocks of (what he described as) Donatist intransigence. As he wrote to the Donatist bishop Januarius, various Donatist radicals attacked priests, ransacked churches and monasteries, and ambushed catholic religious processions, "disturbing our peace and devastating us by their most appalling crimes and mad acts of violence." This "*compelled* us"

²² On Augustine and the Donatists, see W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952; repr. 1985), T. D. Barnes, "The Beginning of Donatism," *Journal of Theological Studies* 26 (1975): 13–22, and, famously, P. L. R. Brown, "Saint Augustine's Attitude to Religious Coercion," *Journal of Roman Studies* 54 (1964): 107–16. More recent, and influential for me, are Frederick H. Russell, "Persuading the Donatists: Augustine's Coercion by Words," in *The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R. A. Markus*, ed. William E. Klingshirm and Mark Vessey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 115–38, and two essays by Neal Wood: "African Peasant Terrorism and Augustine's Political Thought," in *History from Below: Studies in Popular Protest and Popular Ideology in Honour of George Rudé*, ed. Frederick Kranz (Montreal: Concordia University Press, 1985), 279–99, and "*Populares and circumcelliones: The Vocabulary of 'Fallen Man'* in Cicero and St. Augustine," *History of Political Thought* 7 (1986): 33–51.

(note the use of “compulsion” here) to ask imperial authorities to combat the worst of the Donatists with the threat and at times the use of force to throw them out of their churches, to force them to enter in communion with Catholics upon pain of death, to employ physical violence to foster inner belief.²³

In no way did Augustine think that urging such compulsion was a theologically or morally inconsequential matter. He recognized that there was a theological problem with the idea of coercion, which is why he tried to offer reasons for it. More surprisingly still, he urged the turn to coercion for profoundly “civic” reasons. He framed his argument to the imperial authorities not first of all as a theological matter of saving souls, but as a civic matter of protecting people, presenting the extremist Donatist radicals, the *circumcelliones*, as threats above all to the civic order. So he wrote to Emeritus, a Donatist bishop: “when our people seek help from the powers which are ordained, they do so not to persecute you, but to protect themselves from the lawless acts of violence perpetrated by your people.”²⁴

Yet his civic-mindedness was not the whole story. Augustine was convinced that fear could shape souls in good ways, that it could be a vehicle for positive formation, which is what he understood by discipline. As he wrote to the aforementioned Vincentius, “[m]y opinion at first was that no one should be coerced into the unity of Christ. . . . But this opinion of mine was overcome not by the words of those who opposed it, but by the examples to which they could point by way of demonstration. For, in the first place, my own city stood in opposition to my view. Once wholly on the side of Donatus, it was converted to catholic unity by fear of the imperial laws.”²⁵ Fear, he thought, is a useful force for shaping souls, and no realistic political psychology can do without it.

But Augustine thinks of “fear” and “compulsion” far more broadly than we typically do. The word he uses most commonly in his letters, especially in Letters 93 and 185 (to Boniface, count of Africa), is *cogo* (to collect), not *compello* (to compel). *Cogo*, “to collect,” is not a matter of simple compulsion; furthermore, Augustine seems to think of it as etymologically related to thinking (*cogitando*), as the prerequisite for it—because we must have collected things for us to think over. Outward *cogo* can lead to inward

²³ See especially Epist. 88, esp. § 6. A translation is in *Augustine: Political Writings*, ed. E. M. Atkins and R. J. Dodaro (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 147–48.

²⁴ Epist. 87.8.

²⁵ Augustine, Epist. 93.17. This translation is from R. W. Dyson, *The Pilgrim City: Social and Political Ideas in the Writings of St. Augustine of Hippo* (New York: Boydell and Brewer, 2001), 203.

cogito. On his understanding, compulsion is the use of external power in the hope of enabling (not straightforwardly causing) an inner change. Think about teaching and learning: teachers “compel” their students, and put them in a situation to learn. Doctors compel their patients’ bodies with medicine, and hope that the bodies use the medicine rightly to heal themselves; God, the supreme doctor, uses suffering’s “harsh medicine” along with pleasant lessons to educate and reclaim sinners. The same is true for civic authorities; rebuke and reform, *corruptio* and *correctio*, are intimately related. For Augustine, coercion was not punitive but therapeutic, a matter of using what Frederick Russell calls “constricting circumstances” to coerce. God can use fear as well as hope—indeed, the two may be far more intimately related than we imagine. Rulers should lovingly chastise their subjects; magistrates can make some behaviors unpalatable, by taxation or punishment, in the hope of effecting changes in behavior. Heretics’ “blasphemous folly, like some tumor, is healed by deterrence, rather than punishment by surgical removal.”²⁶ The external threat of punishment may induce people to avoid overt behavior, and over time the hope is that the law enters into their souls to shape it—and so they eventually become not only grudgingly non-rapists, for example, but people for whom doing sexual violence to another person’s body is strictly speaking unthinkable.

Augustine regularly intervened for leniency and insisted that disciplinary correction must be moderate. As he put it, in a letter to one Donatus, proconsul of Africa (not a Donatist, despite his name): “We desire that the terror of judges and laws shall be an opportunity not to slay them but to correct them, lest they fall under the penalty of eternal judgment.”²⁷ But nonetheless, state coercion was for him *an opportunity*—not a necessary evil, but possibly, in this setting, useful and commendable. This had seriously damaging consequences. His account, with nuances forgotten and ambivalences effaced, underwrote in part a millennium and more of political thought about the use of political force to coerce.

B. Resisting Demonization

Yet, disappointment with Augustine should not be the only thing we take from this episode. His ultimate civic rationale for forcing the Donatists’ conversion was not directly to gain them for the Church, but rather to subvert their greatest pretension to religious purity, thereby indirectly rendering them more susceptible to accepting the merciful grace of God. He was no Grand Inquisitor. His fundamental purpose in this matter was

²⁶ This translation is from *Augustine: Political Writings*, 134.

²⁷ Augustine, *Epist.* 100.1. Translation is from *The Pilgrim City*, 198.

not the use of the sword to gain bodies for his One True Church; it was more fundamentally defensive, an attempt to let witness peaceably play its worldly role, in a situation where some were willing to use violence to resist that action.

There is another insight here, easily overlooked. Augustine's response to the Donatists has often been summarized as an exemplary case of "Constantinianism," collaboration with the kingdoms of this world. But in fact his most important words were not to the authorities of the *imperium Romanum*, but to his parishioners in the "catholic" churches of his diocese, and believers in North Africa in general. This is visible especially in his preaching to his congregants. Sermon after sermon grapples with the problems of manifesting rightly ordered love, and in a setting in which rivals such as the Donatist churches violently contested the "catholic" churches. Here we find Augustine's most direct response to the challenge of the Donatists. In them he asks: how should his parishioners face the dualism of the Donatists, and the violence of their most fanatical adherents? It would be all too easy, Augustine suspects, to react to them by returning the compliment, mirroring the Donatists' own behavior, and demonizing them just as they demonized the catholics. He recognizes the power of such polarization, but he knows it is based on a reactionary fear that refuses to recognize the many connections we have with each other—the many complicated strands of attachment and affiliation that run across boundaries of faction and party. Furthermore, it would simply reproduce the Donatists' mis-vision of the world. Their problem, after all, is that they assume a dualism between World and God and seek to abandon the world; against this temptation Augustine reminds his parishioners to ask, "Were there no saints in the world at large? Was it right for you to condemn them unheard?" Rather than leaving the world and the neighbor, we should more fully engage it and recognize its radical ambivalence for faith. For Augustine, congregants do this by manifesting with their lips and in their lives a willingness to see others as their neighbors, deserving their love and esteem.

And we do that, Augustine insists, through hope, hope for the possibility of love between the two sides, between "us" and "them"—a sense that we are, at least potentially, more united than divided, that we are better together than apart, that no one is ultimately a stranger or enemy. There is no security in attempting to inhabit such hope, Augustine warns. But none should be anticipated, or even hoped for, in this life. As Augustine says, "Let us not expect security while we are on pilgrimage: when we find ourselves wanting it, it will be the birdlime of the body, not the security of the human."²⁸

²⁸ *Ennarationes in Psalmos* 85.16: *Securitatem non exspectetis in peregrinatione: quando illam hic voluerimus, viscum erit corporis, non securitas hominis.*

Our hopes must seek only a transcendental satisfaction. This condition of suspension, of waiting, is hard to take; but it is our condition, and any attempt to end it by telling a story that excludes our ultimate end—or, as in the Donatists' case, suggests that we know with too much certitude which side our neighbors will be on when at last that end arrives—is dangerously premature. Instead, we should seek to be “trained by longing” for the eschaton. But this training takes place here, and we cannot escape it, or the conditions of this journey, before our completion.²⁹

Augustine's strategy is simple. In situations where “religion” and “politics” are already mixed together, we should not necessarily seek to disentangle them *directly*—for all such efforts may backfire. Instead, we might accept what may look like the instrumentalization of the church for civic ends, in order to achieve certain finite civic goals by resisting the bad theological pretensions of the spiritually self-righteous. The civic peace this strategy secured lets us pursue our fundamental spiritual project of confronting the challenge of living hopefully in such a situation.

The danger of the civic instrumentalization of religion is that it can defeat one threat to the hope of faith by collaborating with another. So even as we respond to those who would terrorize us, we must stay alert to how the defense may turn out to be just as hazardous as the danger. But it is a risk, Augustine says, we are well advised to run.

Conclusion

Though this essay has been concerned largely with description, I would like here at the end to articulate some of the lessons I draw from the story I have been telling. The crucial point is simple: keeping the theology of evil and just war theory connected will strengthen each; conversely, disconnecting them will weaken both. This is so because the various questions we ask about the moral situation of war are divided between putatively “ethical” and “legal” and self-professedly “theological” and “spiritual” registers, and to focus on one register to the neglect of the other will invariably result in a partial and imbalanced view on the full range of the challenge.

This should come of no surprise. In the end, the question of “just war” is not separable from the larger questions of the meaning and purpose of authority. And this understanding of authority is really a working out of what it means to love someone. Furthermore, if we say this, we can

²⁹ See Augustine's *Homilies on the First Epistle of John* 1.12, 10.10; and his *Ennarationes in Psalmos* 49.2.2. The phrase “love and do what you will” (*dilige, et quod vis fac*) is found in *Homilies* 7.8; the idea of being “trained by longings” comes from *Homilies* 4.6.

understand better what it means to say that “God is love.” For God is love in the same way that God is authority, just as all political sovereignty is simply a surrogate for God; we are simply God’s agents, acting in God’s name. And God’s “authority” is better understood as God’s judgment. In this way, we always also stand under God’s judgment. So love, authority, politics, and judgment are all internally related. For this tradition, the task of politics in general is quintessentially one of *judgment*—of policing the community in order to secure the closest approximation of peace, the tranquility of order, in anticipation of the Last Judgment.

This vision reminds us, again, that the goals of politics transcend political realization. To associate love and politics is not to denigrate the former but to realize the true depth of the latter. Politics is not simply a mundane thing; among its many motivations—getting along in the world, organizing social energies, protecting ourselves against bad people, whether they are others or ourselves—is a curiously non-instrumental one: we long for genuine encounter with others, an encounter that is best described in terms of communion. Civic action also moves toward communion, genuine engagement. We want genuinely to see each other and to be seen. Yet this hope, this longing, is not finally realizable in the world as we have it; it is an eschatological hope. Furthermore, this hope is complicated and shadowed for us by our sense that we stand under judgment, that we will surely be condemned if anyone truly knows us. And we know this, so that all our efforts at attaining the communion of love are always fraught by an ambivalence we would be well advised to acknowledge.

This vision of politics, and of the human condition in general, is the context for the understanding of war and the use of force in general, out of which the medieval just war tradition emerges and within which it makes perhaps the most sense. And this vision of politics is itself enframed and given its particular intelligibility by the tradition’s theology of evil—its vision of the nature of evil and how God triumphs over evil as well. When we undertake to interpret or employ the just war tradition, we ignore this larger vision at our peril. N-V