

Classical Political Thought: Lectures, Hilary Term 2006

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4. The Christian Prince

1. Augustine: *The City of God (Civitas Dei)*

Book V ch 24:

When we describe certain Christian emperors as 'happy' it is not because they enjoyed long reigns, or because they died a peaceful death ... We call Christian rulers happy, if they rule with justice; if amid the voices of exalted praise and the reverent salutations of excessive humility, they are not inflated with pride, but remember that they are but men; if they put their power at the service of God's majesty, to extend his worship far and wide; if they fear God, love him and worship him; if, more than their earthly kingdom, they love that realm where they do not fear to share the kingship; if they are slow to punish, but ready to pardon; if they take vengeance on wrong because of the necessity to direct and protect the state, and not to satisfy their personal animosity; if they grant pardon not to allow impunity to wrong-doing but in the hope of amendment of the wrong-doer; if when they are obliged to take severe decisions, as must often happen, they compensate this with the gentleness of their mercy and the generosity of their benefits; if they restrain their self-indulgent appetites all the more because they are more free to gratify them, and prefer to have command over their lower desires than over any number of subject peoples; and if they do this not for a burning desire for empty glory, but for the eternal blessedness; and if they do not fail to offer to their true God, as a sacrifice for their sins, the oblation of humility, compassion and prayer. It is Christian emperors of this kind whom we call happy; happy in hope, during this present life, and to be happy in reality hereafter, when what we wait for will have come to pass.

Book XIX:

- two cities
- ch4: City of God: eternal life is the supreme good, eternal death the supreme evil
- 'For who is competent, however torrential the flow of his eloquence, to unfold all the miseries of this life?'
- 'all man's use of temporal things is related to the enjoyment of earthly peace in the earthly city; whereas in the Heavenly City it is related to the enjoyment of eternal peace.' [ch 14]
- domestic peace: orders given by those who are concerned for the interests of others;
- two kinds of household
- the 'Heavenly City' is on a pilgrimage in this world, she calls out citizens from all nations and so collects a society of aliens, speaking all languages

2. Aquinas:

2.1. Method

- disputation
- by ST he is not commenting, but raising his own questions
- finding points of insertion for revealed theology into Aristotelian philosophy

2.1. Nature and Justification of Rule

- ST 1a 96: 'Whether in the state of innocence man would have had dominion over man.'

2.2. Virtue

- ST IaIIae 92: 'Whether it is an effect of law to make men good'
Aristotle: *Politics* 3.4: the good ruler is a good and wise man, but the citizen need not be wise ... the excellence of the subject is certainly not wisdom, but only true opinion

3. Obedience:

Augustine:

Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's [Luke 20.25; Mark 12.17, Matthew 22.21]

Paul: Render to all what is due them: pay tax and toll, reverence and respect, to those to whom they are due [Romans 13.7]

Aquinas:

- STIIaIIae/SSL: 'obedience consists in the observance of a command which it is our duty to observe; cause of such duty – order of authority; christian bound to obey God's auth; might not be 'of God', either because of way in acquired, or use to which it is put. Abuse of authority: when what is commanded is contrary to the purposes for which ruler appointed; when what is demanded goes beyond what the order of auth can require; [Dyson ed 57-75]

References

Aquinas, *De Regimen Principum, or De Regno; Summa Theologia* (extracts in Dyson (ed))

Augustine *The City of God (Civitas Dei)* esp Bk V ch 24, Bk XIX

Cicero *On the Commonwealth (De Res Publica)* – Book 6: 'The Dream of Scipio'

Figgis, J. N. (1921). *The Political Aspects of St Augustine's 'City of God'*. London: Longmans, Green and Co.