

The bad peace and the good war. Rhetoric of duplicity in Augustine, from *De Civitate Dei* to *Epistola 185*

Ileana CORNEA*

ABSTRACT. The present paper is rooted in an older concern, regarding Augustine's contradictions¹. In the history of ideas there is a common place that authors contradict themselves and that their ideas migrate from one pole to another. This paper aims to present the case study regarding Augustine's contradictions. I propose to focus on an issue that interfered later with the Church's politics, namely the subject of peace and war, as we find them in *De Civitate Dei* and *Epistola 185*. Even though the issue of peace and war appears in several of his writings, those mentioned before seem more relevant for the topic, as they were also approached previously by other authors. I equally propose to highlight that Augustine echoes some ideas on war that can be read under Plato's pen, although he was more of a Plotinus's follower. But, as a personal touch, I would try to incorporate it within the entire dual thought of Augustine, that was echoed in the following centuries in the thought of the scholastics and the policy of The Catholic Church.

Keywords: *peace and war, Catholic Church, Plato, Plotinus, Augustine.*

* Ileana Cornea is PhD student at Doctoral School of Philosophy, Faculty of History and Philosophy, Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca. E-mail: ileana.cornea@ubbcluj.ro.

¹ I'm aiming to speak about the ideological contradictions in the present article (the good peace/the bad peace, the good war/the bad war, connected to the good love/the bad love etc)



The dual thinking at Augustine

In a review of Hanna Arendt's doctoral thesis, *Love and Saint Augustine*, published in *Gnomon*, Max Zepf claims that the origin of Augustine's contradictions could be found in the double tradition he inherited: "ancient philosophy and the oriental Christian ideas"². A similar point of view can also be found in Catherine Marés's presentation, *Augustin d'Hippone et de Carthage, un palimpseste de cultures*, from November 4th 2022, at Nîmes.³ The French classicist takes the argument further and stresses the double origins of Augustine, a Berber born from a pagan father and a Christian mother⁴. She also pays a peculiar attention to the dualism of each spiritual trend to which Augustine acceded, as the Manicheism and the Neoplatonism, the last one represented by Plotinus. It may be relevant in the context the duality of the way the Neoplatonism was read by some Christians, especially Ambrose⁵, even though Plotinus may seem less dualistic, because Neoplatonism was the way Augustine approached Christianity and Ambrose was the one who influenced him mostly.

Augustine's duplicity, his so-called lack of consistency, has been a well-known question⁶, a matter of never-ending debates and the reason for several and regrettable misunderstandings, as well as misinterpretations, along the centuries

² Arendt, Hannah, *Love and Saint Augustine*, edited and with an Interpretive Essay by Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark, University of Chicago Press, 1996, p 21. This page corresponds to the Romanian version (*Iubirea la Sfântul Augustin*, Humanitas, București, 2022). Max Zepf's opinion is quoted in the introduction, signed by Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark.

³ Marés, Catherine, *Augustin d'Hippone et de Carthage, un palimpseste de cultures* in *Mémoires de l'Académie de Nîmes, Xe série, tome XCV, Année 2023*, Académie de Nîmes, 2023, pp 201-219 (Séance du 4 novembre 2022).

⁴ Ibidem, p 204.

⁵ Fredriksen, Paula, *Augustine and the Jews. A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2010, p 131: "Intellectuals both pagan and Christian pored over Plotinus and Porphyry in Milanese reading salons. Ambrose preached that Christianity was not simply compatible with the best philosophy but that it *was* in fact the best, the truest philosophy. Ambrose's allegories operated by sharply contrasting, indeed by opposing, spirit to flesh, while maintaining that God, purely good, had made them both."

⁶ We can find it at Jaspers, *Plato and Augustine*, edited by Hannah Arendt and translated by Ralph Manheim, A Harvest Book, A Helen and Kurt Wolff Book, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., New York, 1962, p 111 ("Augustine's *Biblical Exegesis* seems to be fundamentally contradictory"), and at Paula Fredriksen (see *supra*, p 261), when she talks about the contradictions coming from Augustine's works regarding the Jews ("If we regard Augustine's theological teachings about Jews as evidence for what he really thought or really felt about Jewish contemporaries, we will come away with the impression of a man riddled with deep inconsistencies..."), and others.

that followed. Speaking of love as we find it at Augustine, Arendt exposes the two kinds of love in Augustine's works – *cupiditas* and *caritas*, the bad love and the good love – as well as two deaths included in the death of the body: a good death for the good ones (the believers) and a bad death for the evil (the sinners)⁷. And how else could it be as long as we have two cities – the city of God and the city of man, two communities – the former represented by Abel (the good one) and the latter represented by Cain (the bad one)⁸. Further on, in the “story” of the two cities, Augustine goes on and builds up the foundation for a new duality that will last for centuries and will be used as an argument in the politics of wars and persecution. We are talking about the concept of peace (and subsequently, of war) as it appears in *De Civitate Dei*, mostly in Book XIX⁹. Peace is a major theme in Augustine. He had already written about it nine years earlier, in *Epistola 185 (Liber de correctione donastistarum)*, addressed to count Boniface in 417, in a completely different context.

An interesting fact, considering the changes Augustine went through – young pagan student, Manichaean adept, and finally, Christian bishop, the ruler of an important community in North Africa¹⁰ – is that the good in each of all his dual options is always embodied in the Christian truth. Because, even if we have two kinds of almost everything, there is only one truth and that is Jesus Christ's¹¹. From this point of view, the good love, *caritas*, is the love of Christ, the love of the only true God; the good death is the death of the body in the name of Christ, that changes death into eternal life, the good city is the city of God and, finally, the good peace

⁷ Arendt, Hannah, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 1996 by Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark, 1996 by The Literary Trust of Hannah Arendt Blücher. The volume includes Hannah Arendt's doctoral thesis. One can find the discussion about *caritas* and *cupiditas* in the first part of the academic work, as well as in the second part, a second chapter in both sections treating this topic. In the third part of the thesis, *The social life*, Arendt will approach the question of the good and the bad death at Augustine.

⁸ Ibidem – there is a footnote in the third part of the thesis, at p 170, that develops the topics, starting from the affirmation from the main text that the community of all the nations comes from Adam. The original thought of this theory can be found at Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, Book XV.

⁹ Saint Augustine, *De Civitate Dei, Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, Penguin Books, 2003, pp 843-894.

¹⁰ Brown, Peter, *Augustine of Hippo. A Biography*, A New Edition with an Epilogue, University of California Press, Berkley and Los Angeles, 2000. The first two parts of the book, from chapter 3, *Education*, to chapter 14, *Presbyter Ecclesiae Catholicae: HIPPO*, follow the evolution of Augustine, from a young pagan student to a Christian bishop.

¹¹ Arendt, Hannah, *Love and...*, also *Sermones in epistola Iohannis primam, X, 8: Extend your charity (charitas) over the whole earth if you will love Christ, for Christ's members are over all the earth. (Homily 10 on the First Epistle of John, 8 - <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/170210.htm>)*

can only be the peace of Christ – *pax Christi*. Consequently, the war, even if it is a bad thing itself, when waged in order to obtain the peace of Christ, the good peace, it will be a good war.¹²

The concept of peace and war in *De Civitate Dei*

Nowhere is the idea of peace better expressed in Augustine's works than in *De Civitate*. As the French theologian, Dominique Gonnet, noticed in an article from 2002, the word *peace (pax)* appears in *De Civitate* 133 times, while in *Epistola*, we find it occurring only about twenty times¹³.

De Civitate Dei represents the most significant work of Augustine and was written between 413 and 427, that means it was a work that covered about fourteen years including the late middle and old age of the philosopher. This may explain why, besides his well-known duality, one can find here some more definite opinions on essential questions, such as peace and war.

It is in *De Civitate*, Book XIX, where Augustine talks about the necessity of wars “waged with peace as their objects”, about the natural peace and “the perverted peace” of the wicked, which needs medicine to be cured, namely the war “waged with peace”, the natural, good peace, of course.¹⁴

We can find here an idea from Plato's *Laws* (628d-e), even if Augustine seems to refute most of Plato's ideas in *De Civitate*.

The highest good, however, is neither war nor civil strife – which things we should pray rather to be saved from – but peace one with another and friendly feeling. Moreover, it would seem that the victory we mentioned of a state over itself is not one of the best things but one of those which are necessary. For imagine a man supposing that a human body was best off when it was sick and purged with physic, while never giving a thought to the case of the body that needs no physic at all! Similarly, with regard to the well-being of a state or an individual, that man

¹² See Hannah Arendt, *Love at Saint Augustine* and Dominique Gonnet, *Théorie et pratique de la paix selon Augustin dans l'Epistola 185 et le De Civitate Dei, XIX, 17*.

¹³ Gonnet, Dominique, “Théorie et pratique de la paix selon Augustin dans l'Epistola 185 et De Civitate Dei, XIX,17”, in *Regards sur le monde antique, Hommage à Guy Sabbah*, dirigée par Madeleine Piot, Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2002, p 120.

¹⁴ Saint Augustine, *De Civitate Dei, Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, Penguin Books, 2003, pp 866-869 (Book XIX, Chapter 12).

will never make a genuine statesman who pays attention primarily and solely to the needs of foreign warfare, nor will he make a finished lawgiver unless he designs his war legislation for peace rather than his peace legislation for war.¹⁵

Augustine was closer to Plotinus than to Plato in his thought. He even takes some distance from Plato in his writings. But, regarding this idea, the connotation is the same. The bad peace is like illness. War is medicine in that case. And sometimes bitter medicine is needed in order to attain the good peace. Individuals in mankind are like parts of the body. If one of them is ill, then the entire body is ill. To have a healthy body and a healthy mankind we have to cure the inflicted parts of the body, to correct the “wrong” humans who live within this world. The war in order to get the Christian peace is, therefore, a good war. Augustine sees peace in *De Civitate* as *ordinatio*, a social project, *ordinata concordia*, based on justice, but justice can be done only by means of grace¹⁶. Therefore, the earthly peace is just a temporary and fragile peace, permanently at risk. The true eternal peace is the heavenly peace, the peace we shall gain only in the City of God. “For even they who intentionally interrupt the peace in which they are living have no hatred of peace, but only wish it changed into a peace that suits them better.”¹⁷

The same idea of necessary wrongs in view of a right end can be found in Aristotle’s *Politics*, Book 7, 14-15:

The proper object of practising military training is not in order that men may enslave those who do not deserve slavery, but in order that first they may themselves avoid becoming enslaved to others; then so that they may seek suzerainty for the benefit of the subject people. (14, 1334a)¹⁸

¹⁵ Plato, *Laws*, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, London, William Heinemann LTD, 1984, p 16 (628 d-e).

¹⁶ Gonnet, Dominique, “Théorie et pratique...”, p 122.

¹⁷ Augustin, *De Civitate Dei*, XIX, 12. This quote is from an alternative translation, by Marcus Dods, to the one from Penguin Books edition, from 2003, referenced in the bibliography. In the Penguin edition of *De Civitate Dei*, the translator formulates this passage in this way: *In fact, even when men wish a present state of peace to be disturbed, they do so not because they hate peace, but because they desire the present peace to be exchanged for one that suits their wishes.* (p 866) I find this phrase from the Penguin edition even a bit more Ciceronian than in Augustine’s original text and that’s why I preferred the other one. (*Nam et illi qui pacem, in qua sunt, perturbari volunt, non pacem oderunt, sed eam pro arbitrio suo cupiunt commutari.*)

¹⁸ Aristotle, *Politics*, VII, 14, 1334a.

Since the end of individuals and of states is the same, the end of the best man and of the best state must also be the same; it is therefore evident that there ought to exist in both of them the virtues and the leisure. For peace, as has been after repeated, is the end of war, and leisure for toil [...] For many necessities of life have to be supplied before we can have leisure. (15, 1334a)¹⁹

It is very unlikely that Augustine knew Aristotle's work that well, considering he almost didn't know Greek and that he was more interested in Neoplatonism. Yet, being brought up in the pagan culture of Antiquity, he was somehow familiar with these ideas, although it is difficult to make any direct connection between the two philosophers. Nevertheless, the idea of war seen as a tool, even an evil one sometimes, yet necessary to achieve the final goal, the good one, embodied by peace, is present both in Plato and Aristotle, and later in Augustine, in strikingly similar terms.

Of course, there is no one in this world who would not wish peace. But Augustine notices that there are many kinds of peace and not each of them is good. All men look for peace, yet not all look for the good kind. The vicious person regards peace as domination. In a perverted way, he sees himself as God and demands obeisance from the others, disregarding the fact that all humans are equal in front of God. Bottom line, he loves *the bad peace* and not *the good one*: "It abhors, there is to say, the just peace of God, and loves its own unjust peace."²⁰

Augustine goes on, defining the kinds of peace, the way they are aiming at harmony, under the guidance of God. *Ordinata concordia*²¹ is operating between man and man and between "those of the family who rule and those who obey", praying that the only true God will bring us eternal life along with eternal peace after the temporal peace that we gain during our mortal life.

But, in order to have even the domestic peace, it is necessary to have punishment, correction, the just one, of course. Even though the term *coercitio* appears better reflected in *Epistola 185*, we can find a sort of constraint in *De Civitate*, book XIX, chapter 16, in a softer way, reinforcing thus the idea that the two works were written in different contexts.

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Politics*, translated by Benjamin Jarvett, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1908.

²⁰ Saint Augustine, *De Civitate Dei, Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, Penguin Books, 2003, p 869: *This means that it hates the just peace of God and loves its own peace of injustice. As in De Civitate Dei, Book XIX, 12: Odit ergo iustam pacem Dei et amat iniquam pacem suam.*

²¹ Augustin, *De Civitate Dei*, ediție bilignvă, XIX, 17: *...ordinatissima scilicet et concordissima societas fruendi Deo et invicem in Deo; quo cum ventum erit, non erit vita mortalıs, sed plane certeque vitalis nec corpus animale...*

And if any member of the family interrupts the domestic peace by disobedience, he is corrected either by word or blow, or some kind of just and legitimate punishment, such as society permits, that he may himself be the better for it, and be readjusted to the family harmony from which he had dislocated himself. For as it is not benevolent to give a man help at the expense of some greater benefit he might receive, so it is not innocent to spare a man at the risk of his falling into graver sin. To be innocent, we must not only do harm to no man, but also restrain him from sin or punish his sin, so that either the man himself who is punished may profit by his experience, or others be warned by his example.²²

Accordingly, for the righteous it is not enough to do no harm to anybody, but he has to bring the sinner to the right path, to reunite the lost sheep with the herd. And for this purpose, any means, the word or the blow, would be justified. We shall see how this theory was developed in *Epistola 185* and which were its echoes in the centuries that followed. But here, in *De Civitate*, we find the idea of a well-known Latin proverb, *Qui bene amat, bene castigat*²³. In this way, the punishment is justified when it is done for a good purpose. And what purpose could be better than the good peace, the peace of God? To reach it and to correct the bad peace of the wicked, we can wage war which, in that case, would be justified. The war of the great emperors who fought in the name of Christ to bring His peace, would be as good as a bitter medicine that brings about health in a sick body. According to Dominique Gonnepet, we have to consider here the position of authority in Augustine thought. The *ordinatio* here means that the head of the family, as well as the ruler of the state, has the authority to correct those who don't obey (children and

²² Saint Augustine, *De Civitate Dei. Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, Penguin Books, 2003, XIX,16, p 876, the translation differs a little bit from the alternative one of Marcus Dods, mentioned before. I opted for the translation above (Marcus Dods) because of the word "innocent" that I found closer to the Latin *innocentis*. In the Penguin edition, the last sentence sounds as follows: *Hence, the duty of anyone who would be blameless includes not only doing no harm to anyone but also restraining a man from sin or punishing his sin, so that either the man who is chastised may be corrected by his experience, or others may be deterred by his example.* *De Civitate Dei*, XIX, 16: *Si quis autem in domo per inoboedientiam domesticae paci adversatur, corripitur seu verbo seu verberare seu quolibet alio genere poenae iusto atque licito, quantum societas humana concedit, pro eius qui corripitur utilitate, ut paci unde dissiluerat coaptetur. Sicut enim non est beneficentiae adiuvando efficere, ut bonum quod maius est amittatur, ita non est innocentiae parcendo sinere, ut in malum gravius incidatur. Pertinet ergo ad innocentis officium, non solum nemini malum inferre, verum etiam cohibere a peccato vel punire peccatum, ut aut ipse qui plectitur corrigatur experimento, aut alii terreantur exemplo.*

²³ "He who loves well, castigates well" or the more colloquial, adapted form, "spare the rod and spoil the child."

citizens)²⁴. In a footnote, mentioning an article of E. I. Fortin, he quotes from Augustine: “Men’s freedom is more seriously jeopardized by the rejection of all authority than by the manifest abuses to which the exercise of authority lends itself.”²⁵

Therefore, the authority of the Church and of the leaders ointed by the Church, more precisely, of all those who act in the name of the one and only true God, is entitled to punish, to correct, to go to war in the name of the good love and the good peace.

Let us not forget, though, that *De Civitate Dei*, “the only political tractate” of Augustine, as Hannah Arendt named it²⁶, was written after the conquest of Rome by Alaric. The fall of Rome made many Romans blame their fellow citizens for having chosen the Christian faith abandoning the traditional Roman religion. The renouncement of the *mos maiorum* would have led to the sack of Rome. Augustine wrote *De Civitate* in response to these allegations. His purpose was to prove that not only Christianity did not lead to the collapse of Rome, but, on the contrary, it brought a new rising, a new order, a new peace. A peace that, nonetheless, was gained through war. Therefore, it becomes clear that the war brought by Alaric was a good war, because it replaced a bad peace, the pagan peace, with a good peace, the peace of Christ. If we may speculate, it was the bad peace of the pagans who worshiped several gods instead of the unique, real one, that brought the war. The good peace that comes along with the city of God is supposed to be eternal, with no war needed to interrupt it.

²⁴ Gonnet, Dominique, “Théorie et pratique de la paix selon Augustin dans l’*Epistola* 185 et *De Civitate Dei*, XIX,17”, in *Regards sur le monde antique, Hommage à Guy Sabbah*, dirigée par Madeleine Piot, Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2002, p 125.

²⁵ Ibidem, the footnote No 4 also mentions the title of Fortin’s article, the place and year of publication, as well as the page number where the article can be found: *The Political Implications of St Augustine’s Theory of Conscience*, *Augustinian Studies*, 1 (1970), p 133-152

²⁶ Arendt, Hannah, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 1996, by The Literary Trust of Hannah Arendt Blücher, 1996, by Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark, p 221. This page corresponds to the Romanian version (*Iubirea la Sfântul Augustin (Love at Saint Augustine)*, Humanitas, București, 2022). Actually, Arendt named *De Civitate* this way in an essay, *What is freedom?* from the volume *Between Past and Future*, but the quotation mentioning it was used in the present volume, in the afterword that follows the doctoral thesis of Arendt (the main corpus), signed by Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark.

Another perspective: *Epistola 185*

On the other hand, but not necessarily on the contrary, *Epistola 185* speaks of peace in an answer to another challenge, the Donatist “issue”. Written to count Boniface, in 417²⁷, it approaches the methods that can be used to bring the Donatists back to the Church. The Donatists, a schismatic rather than a heretical sect, were a movement detached from the Church, in North Africa, which focussed on the moral purity of its members, especially of those who practiced the sacraments (the priests). Augustine, himself a sinner and a wanderer before he reached the shore of the true faith, understood the danger that lay underneath this rigor and started a debate in order to prove that no man is without sin. After all, he says, we all descend from Adam and we inherit the sin that came into the world together with his fall. We are saved only by grace. Donatists’ claim they are pure is but a testimony of vanity and arrogance.²⁸

Besides, it is important not to forget that Augustine was not only a theologian and a philosopher, but also a political leader. He was the bishop of Hippo Regius in Numidia. As a political man, entitled to lead the Christian community in the area, it was essential for him to have a united, powerful Church. The Donatists were making too much trouble, breaking the unity and the peace, the Catholic Christian peace, the only good one in Augustine’s view. As Dominique Gonnet observes in his article, *Théorie et pratique de la paix selon Augustin*, while in *De Civitate* Augustine builds up the theory of peace, in *Epistola 185*, he approaches the practice of it²⁹. Because, while in *De Civitate*, he answers to some hypothetical reproaches, in *Epistola 185*, he faced the very real danger of the Donatist schism, which spread through the entire North Africa, threatening the unity of the Church and the peace of the Christian community, led by Augustine.

²⁷ Brown, Peter, *Augustine of Hippo. A Biography*, A New Edition with an Epilogue, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2000, p 282.

²⁸ Ibidem, pp 207-221, the chapter *Ubi Ecclesia?*

²⁹ Gonnet, Dominique, “Théorie et pratique de la paix selon Augustin dans l’*Epistola 185* et *De Civitate Dei*, XIX,17”, in *Regards sur le monde antique, Hommage à Guy Sabbah*, dirigée par Madeleine Piot, Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2002, p 116 (*L’Epistola 185 est adressée au comte Boniface, et elle concerne les moyens de ramener les donatistes à la vérité.*) and p 123 (*Comment interpréter la relation entre la théorie de la paix de la Cité de Dieu, XIX, et la pratique de la paix dans l’Ep. 185?*).

Returning to the same Dominique Gonnet, *Epistola 185* approaches the theme of peace almost exclusively from a religious point of view³⁰. As the French theologian notices, let us remember that while the word *peace* (*pax*) appears 133 times in Book XIX from *De Civitate* (from a total of 300 times in the entire work), in *Epistola* it is used around twenty times³¹. In *Epistola 185*, as in *De Civitate*, the only desirable peace is the peace of God. Only that here, God is represented by the Church. Thus, the peace of the Church (*pax ecclesiae*) is the real and good peace. The peace of the Donatists is the peace of compromise when it comes to their own members, as it happened with Maximianus. That makes them as well hypocrites, if we think about their criticism of the Catholics. Therefore, the peace of Donatus is false (*vana*)³². Gonnet makes a parallel between *Epistola 185* and *De Civitate*, seeing in these different levels of peace “a confrontation that evokes (reminds us), *mutatis mutandis*, the one between the two cities”. And here we have the metaphor of Absalom’s rebellion against his father, David, regarding which Gonnet states:

An earthly kingdom that keeps on going with a civil war can’t find peace but with the death of the rebel son, no matter how painful might it be. Peace is gained with the cost of David’s pain, as well as the salvation (redemption) of those who return to the Church is gained with the cost of losing some, those who were committing suicide among the Donatists.³³

In other words, there is a price to be paid in order to attain peace, but this is an inherent loss. It would provoke some pain, but it does so for a superior cause, for a better goal. After all, didn’t Aristotle, too, say that “many necessities of life have to be supplied before we can have leisure”? To achieve a good purpose, to have

³⁰ Gonnet, Dominique, “Théorie et pratique de la paix selon Augustin dans l’*Epistola 185* et *De Civitate Dei*, XIX,17”, in *Regards sur le monde antique, Hommage à Guy Sabbah*, dirigée par Madeleine Piot, Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2002, p 116. The word *peace* is used in association with the religious terms, avoiding political connotations. And there are some examples given by Gonnet here: *pax Christi* (15, 17c, 32c, 47a), *pax salutis aeternae, acquise par le sang du Seigneur* (31), *vinculo pacis* (réfèrece à *Éphésiens 4,3*) (24, 43), *pax catholica* (14a, 14b, 18), *pax ecclesiae* (44a, 44b), *pax des donatistes* (17a, 17b, 47b), *pax dans l’Ancien Testament (David)* (32a, 32b), (*Jérusalem* (46abc).

³¹ Ibidem, p 120.

³² Ibidem, p 117 and Ep 185, 47 – see also Augustine – *Letter 185*, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102185.htm>

³³ Ibidem, p 118: “Un royaume Terrestre plongé dans la guerre civile ne peut retrouver la paix que par la mort du fils rebelle, si douloureuse soit-elle. La paix est au prix de la douleur de David, comme le salut de tous ceux qui reviennent à l’Église est au prix de la perte de quelques-uns, ceux qui se suicident parmi les donatistes.”

leisure (peace) there are always necessary losses. Let's recall this quote from *De Civitate*: "To be innocent, we must not only do harm to no man, but also restrain him from sin or punish his sin, so that either the man himself who is punished may profit by his experience, or others be warned by his example."³⁴ To be innocent is also to accept the "side effects", so that those who are to be saved would take advantage of them.

This leads us to the "righteous persecution". In *Epistola 185*, Chapter 2,11, Augustine comes up with this concept:

If, therefore, we wish either to declare or to recognize the truth, there is a persecution of unrighteousness, which the impious inflict upon the Church of Christ; and there is a righteous persecution, which the Church of Christ inflicts upon the impious. She therefore is blessed in suffering persecution for righteousness' sake; but they are miserable, suffering persecution for unrighteousness. Moreover, she persecutes in the spirit of love, they in the spirit of wrath; she that she may correct, they that they may overthrow: she that she may recall from error, they that they may drive headlong in error. Finally, she persecutes her enemies and arrests them, until they become weary in their vain opinions, so that they should make advance in the truth; but they, returning evil for good, because we take measures for their good, to secure their eternal salvation, endeavor even to strip us of our temporal safety, being so in love with murder, that they commit it on their own persons, when they cannot find victims in any other. For in proportion as the Christian charity of the Church endeavors to deliver them from that destruction, so that none of them should die, so their madness endeavours either to slay us, that they may feed the lust of their own cruelty, or even to kill themselves, that they may not seem to have lost the power of putting men to death.³⁵

³⁴ Augustine, *The City of God*, XIX, 16, alternative translation of Marcus Dods.

³⁵ Augustine, *Letter 185*, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102185.htm>; *Epistola 185*, 2, 11: "Si ergo verum dicere vel agnoscere volumus, est persecutio iniusta, quam faciunt impii Ecclesiae Christi; et est iusta persecutio, quam faciunt impiis Ecclesiae Christi. Ista itaque beata est quae persecutionem patitur propter iustitiam 27; illi vero miseri qui persecutionem patiuntur propter iniustitiam. Proinde ista persequitur diligendo, illi saeviendo; ista ut corrigat, illi ut evertant; ista ut revocet ab errore, illi ut praecipitent in errorem: denique ista persequitur inimicos et comprehendit, donec deficient in vanitate, ut in veritate proficiant; illi autem retribuentes mala pro bonis 28, quia eis consulimus ad aeternam salutem, etiam temporalem nobis conantur auferre, sic amantes homicidia, ut in seipsis ea perficiant, quando in aliis perpetrare non possunt. Sicut enim caritas laborat Ecclesiae sic eos ab illa perditione liberare, ut eorum nemo moriatur; sic eorum laborat furor aut nos occidere, ut suae crudelitatis pascant libidinem, aut etiam seipsos, ne perdidisse videantur occidendorum hominum potestatem".

Temperata severitas made Leon Poliakov say that the Inquisition wasn't a Spanish invention, but that even since Augustine "we found in its respect an anticipative apology"³⁶ and Giovanni Filoramo wonder how could the delicate young man from *Confessiones* turn into a disillusioned old man, an Inquisition theorist³⁷. The same Filoramo also claims that the same *Epistola 185* legitimates the concept of *coercitio*, when Augustine refers to a fragment from the Apostle Paul, where we find the parable of the master who first bids the guests to his supper and afterwards compels them to come, from Luke 14:22-23.³⁸

Epistola 185, even if it is written earlier, puts a greater emphasis on the authority that needs to be used when it's necessary to achieve the good peace. It is the point of view of a political man, while in *De Civitate*, the one who speaks is the philosopher and his reflections on peace will gain more shades, even if Hannah Arendt claimed that *De Civitate* was Augustine's only political treatise. But his contradictions will remain also in *Epistola*. He will praise the importance of free will, but, at the same time, will strengthen the idea of a right punishment. The punishment will be done in the spirit of love, but it will be done at any cost, in order to bring the sinner back to the righteous. Of course, Augustine's dogmatic rigidity amplified while he aged, as Hannah Arendt, in her doctoral thesis, and many others pointed out in a very accurate manner³⁹, however, as Arendt herself said, yet, Augustine, unlike Luther, never made a radical choice between the philosophical

³⁶ Poliakov, Leon, *Istoria antisemitismului, De la Mahomed la marani, vol II*, Editura Hasefer, București, 1999, p 191. The translation in English is mine, if otherwise not specified. In fact, Poliakov refers here to *Letter 93*. For this, also see: Augustine, *Letter 93*, New Advent, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102093.htm>: "It is manifest, however, that moderate severity, or rather clemency, is carefully observed towards those who, under the Christian name, have been led astray by perverse men, in the measures used to prevent them who are the Christ's sheep from wandering, and to bring them back to the flock, when by punishments, such as exile and fines, they are admonished to consider what they suffer, and wherefore, and are taught to prefer the Scriptures which they read to human legends and calumnies." "Sed plane in eis qui sub nomine Christi errant ducti a perversis, ne forte oves Christi sint errantes, et ad gregem taliter revocandae sint, temperata severitas et magis mansuetudo servatur, ut coercitione exsiliorum atque damnorum, admoneantur considerare quid et quare patiantur, et discant praeponere rumoribus et calumniis hominum Scripturas quas legunt."

³⁷ Filoramo, Giovanni, *Crucea și puterea. Creștinii, de la martiri la persecutori*, Humanitas, București, 2022, p 373.

³⁸ Ibidem, p 372, also see *Letter 185*, 6, 24, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102185.htm>

³⁹ Arendt, Hannah, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 1996, by The Literary Trust of Hannah Arendt Blücher, 1996, by Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark, p 27. This page corresponds to the Romanian version (*Iubirea la Sfântul Augustin*, Humanitas, București, 2022).

reflection on his own self and the obedience to the faith⁴⁰. Most likely, it wasn't easy to be a philosopher, a theologian and a political person, all at the same time. And above all, it was certainly hard to be the heir of the pagan legacy. His inner fights must have been tougher than anyone can imagine. It must have been a hard mission to bring together Cicero, Plotinus and Apostle Paul, all in the name of Jesus Christ. This might be one reason why Augustine seems inconsistent here and there. And that made Paula Frederiksen and others claim that, by reading him, one might think that he suffers from a comportsmental (bipolar) disorder⁴¹. Here he says that the war is bad and the peace is good and there he discovers that peace may be bad or, at least false, and war might be good when it comes to change a bad peace with a good one. Maybe we should not forget that first of all, besides a theologian, a philosopher and a political man, Augustine was an orator. Cicero's influence on his thought and his writings (just think about his long and complicated phrases) was huge. And actually, all that Augustine did was to adapt his speech to the opponent against whom it was built.

Later echoes on the subject of peace and war

Undoubtedly, Augustine was the greatest thinker of the Late Antiquity. His thought and his works left a remarkable trace behind, a trace that was followed in the centuries that came after his death. And, as so well noticed James Carroll in his book, "After Constantine, the conversion of Augustine (354-430) may be the most momentous in the history of the Church."⁴² His conversion brought to Church one of the greatest orators of the time, able to build up speeches that were meant to manipulate the listener into turning to the direction that the speaker aimed. And that direction was the one of making the catholic Church the ruling church in the

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p 32

⁴¹ Frederiksen, Paula, *Augustine and the Jews. A Christian Defence of Jews and Judaism*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2010, p 261. In this paragraph, the author considers Augustine's position regarding the Jews: *If we regard Augustine's theological teachings about Jews as evidence for what he really thought or really felt about Jewish contemporaries, we will come away with the impression of a man riddled with deep inconsistencies, emotional conflicts, unresolved anger, and so on.*

⁴² Carroll, James, *Constantine's Sword. The Church and the Jews*, A Mariner Book, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. New York, 2002, p 208.

Empire. He built a dogma in order to empower the Church. And the pattern he used for his purposes was one of a rhetoric of duality.

Where did this pattern lead? The pattern of a troubled man, with so many traits that contradicted each other. We have, on one hand, the pagan philosopher and the rhetor and on the other, the theologian and the leader (the political man). His personality and his thought were the product of two traditions that melted into one, as Max Zepf noticed⁴³, but he also was the pioneer of a new way of thinking and acting down the line. What was next? The Crusades, the Inquisition, many succeeding wars, all in the name of love and peace. The good peace that could be achieved only by the means of war. Did Augustine imagine how his words would be reinterpreted? Would he do anything differently?

Maybe, before I go any further, it would be necessary to bring up two opinions on Augustine's duality. The first one belongs to the before mentioned Catherine Marés, from her presentation at Nîmes Conference:

Et pour ceux qui seraient encore rebutés par certaines prises de position extrémistes d'Augustin, je leur suggère de se laisser prendre par son style, quintessence de sa culture. La fougue berbère s'y mêle aux principes de la rhétorique romaine en un ensemble d'une grande expressivité. Le musicien qu'est Augustin se délecte en clausules cicéroniennes et mélodies du phrasé. Sa sensibilité extrême se complait dans des métaphores baroques. La Bible, assimilée au point de faire partie intégrante de son écriture, surtout les psaumes et les lettres de Saint Paul, couronne, par des images frappantes, ce mélange étonnant d'un grand tempérament et d'une grande culture.

Le portrait serait incomplet si je ne signalais quelques domaines où Augustin a été un précurseur. Il a bouleversé la philosophie de l'histoire, lui donnant un sens et l'arrachant définitivement à la vision cyclique qui prédominait chez les anciens. La mémoire et le temps furent parmi ses sujets favoris. La psychanalyse, l'existentialisme et la sémiotique peuvent se réclamer de lui, excusez du peu!⁴⁴

Indeed, Augustine's thought resorted to a kind of existentialism and in this respect, I shall bring here a fragment from Karl Jaspers' *Die grossen Philosophen (The Great Philosophers)*, that I found in the afterword of Hannah Arendt's, *Love at Saint Augustine*:

⁴³ See supra, quoted in Hannah Arendt's book.

⁴⁴ Marés Catherine, *Augustine d'Hippone et de Carthage, un palimpseste de cultures* in *Mémoires de l'Académie de Nîmes, X-e série, tome XCV, Année 2023*, Académie de Nîmes, 2023, p 218.

Nothing is easier than to find contradictions in Augustine. We take them as a feature of his greatness. No philosophy is free from contradictions – and no thinker can aim at contradiction. But Augustine is one of the thinkers who venture into contradictions, who draw their life from the tension of enormous contradictions. He is not one of those who strive from the outset for freedom from contradictions; on the contrary, he lets his thinking run aground on the shoals of contradiction when he tries to think God. Augustine faces contradictions. And more than that: he presses them to their utmost limits. He makes us aware of the provocative question: Is there a point, a limit, where we are bound to encounter contradiction? And of the answer: Yes, wherever, moved by the source of being and the unconditional will within us, we seek to communicate ourselves in thought, that is to say, in words. In this realm, freedom from contradiction would be existential death and the end of thinking itself. It is because Augustine took up these essential contradictions that he still exerts so provocative a power. And it is because, working with the methods of ecclesiastical thinking, he encompassed a maximum of contradictions – even in opposition to reason – that he was able, within the authority of the Church, to meet its needs so eminently without devising a system.⁴⁵

Undoubtedly, contradictions are essential in philosophy, mainly in existentialist philosophy, but what happens when they cross the border, from philosophy to politics? Obviously, Augustine used them in his public debates and his writings against his opponents. It is a necessary exercise to analyse the contradictory lines towards one disputant or another. Accordingly, depending on the debates he was engaged in, he could turn the meaning of the phrase in the direction that suited him.

When arguing against the Donatists, he used all the arsenal he had available. For that purpose, he used the image of referential enemies, in order to castigate the Donatists. Therefore, he will use the triad “pagans-heretics-Jews” in his speeches. His controversies in his letters, sermons and works are mostly against pagans and heretics. Jews will be used just as a reference. It is hard to say if Augustine had met any Jews during his life. In his texts, some sort of hermeneutical Jews show up, imaginary persons, drawn out of the Scriptures⁴⁶. He would use them

⁴⁵ Arendt, Hannah, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 1996, by The Literary Trust of Hannah Arendt Blücher, 1996, by Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark, p 314, apud Jaspers, Karl – *Plato and Augustine*, edited by Hannah Arendt and translated by Ralph Manheim, A Harvest Book, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., New York, 1962, p 111. The page from Hannah Arendt’s volume corresponds to the Romanian version (*Iubirea la Sfântul Augustin*, Humanitas, București, 2022).

⁴⁶ Fredriksen, Paula, *Augustine and the Jews. A Christian Defence of Jews and Judaism*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2010, pp 226-227, regarding the Jews in the rhetoric of all Christian authors, and chapter *Slay Them Not*, specifically for the way Augustine had “made acquaintance” to the Jews (pp 290-352).

to show the righteous how bad the Donatists can be and how the righteous should avoid becoming, using a sort of cross-identification between the Donatists and the Jews⁴⁷. It's a rhetorical strategy, "not even the Jews are as bad as you (Donatists) are" type, "not even the Jews do this or that" technique, as Paula Fredriksen named it⁴⁸. In the centuries that followed Augustine, the Donatists were absorbed by the Catholic faith and the pagans were converted to Christianity. The Jews were the only ones who still didn't accept conversion. And they were still alive. During the Middle Ages, it became a problem to explain how this was possible.

The other theory of Augustine, the doctrine of the Jewish witness, prevented Jews from being killed by the furious Christian mobs. Yet, the concept of *temperata severitas* endured. And so did the *coercitio*. They were to be punished in the spirit of love. If Augustine himself, the greatest Father of the Catholic Church, was ambiguous, why shouldn't the Church adopt the same approach? For centuries, the heretics and the Jews, those who misinterpreted the true faith and those who rejected it, were persecuted and harassed in the name of love, using the words of Augustine. That lasted until Luther used Augustine in a more radical way and took the misinterpretation of his words to a new level of anti-Judaism. What happened further is a matter which is not subject of this paper. But we can find there a bitter echo of the theory of war and peace.

Conclusions

Ovidiu Raetchi's book, *The History of Holocaust*, begins with the chapter "The Holocaust of words. The genocidal speech: in the beginning was the word."⁴⁹ "In the beginning was the word, and the Word was with God and the Word was

⁴⁷ Shaw, Brent, *Sacred Violence. African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine*, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p 272. *The cross-identification of Jews with dissident Christians is explicitly made in many sermons. In an early homily, after a series of extended remarks against the "Donatists", it is noted that, like them, the Jews (along with Arians and Manichees) will be condemned on the day of the Final Judgement (Aug, Sermo 5-4 f(CCL 51: 53-56, see note 39 from page 272).*

⁴⁸ Fredriksen, Paula, *Augustine and the Jews. A Christian Defence of Jews and Judaism*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2010, p 309.

⁴⁹ Raetchi, Ovidiu, *Istoria Holocaustului. Desființarea omului: de la ascensiunea lui Hitler până la execuția lui Eichmann*, Litera, București, 2022, p 37: *At the beginning of this chain, that finally led to the gas chambers, there was the word: the antisemitical speech that made Hitler chancellor.*

God" (*John 1:1*). Afterwards, the man came and fell, and the Word became a weapon. Did Augustine know that? Most probably yes, but also most probably, he thought his words to be weapons in the good war, made to correct the bad peace. The double traditions that he inherited made him slip from one point of view to another one, completely opposite. Besides, it may be useful to remind that he spent many of his early years as a Manichean. This must have left a mark on his way of thinking for sure. And, above all, he was a rhetor and a political man, as well, the ruler of Hippo region. That forced him into adapting his position depending on the debate he was involved in. As the necessity imposed to defend a certain point of view, he modified his speech according to that. It became obvious, in this case, his training in rhetoric.

He remains, undoubtedly, the most significant thinker of the Late Antiquity. And his concerns for peace remain a turning point in the peace talks all over the centuries. But the way he relativised the concept of peace, as well as that of constraint, persecution and war and the way this relativism was used in the time of the Crusades (the good wars, waged to correct the unfaithful) and in the time of Inquisition (when *coercitio* meant autosdafé and death) cast a shadow over his work, a question we will probably never be able to answer. *Quaestio mihi factum sum*, said Augustine in *Confessions*. "I have become a question to myself"⁵⁰. And so has he to us.

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