

AUGUSTINE’S THEOLOGY OF LOVE: AN IMPETUS FOR CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ACTION

By

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Abstract

Love, understood as the unity of love of God and love of neighbor, provides the theological and ethical hermeneutical normative for accessing the foundation and scope of Christian social engagement. Although Augustine would not have considered himself a political theologian in the formal sense of the term, this paper argues that his teaching on love nevertheless provides a theological framework for active Christian social encounter. This validates one of the major claims of critical theologies: that it is the responsibility of every; and not any single, theological discipline to dialogue with human persons in their concrete situations, i.e., in the world.

Keywords: Augustine, Theology, Love, Christian, Social Action

Introduction

It is a widespread belief among theologians, ancient and modern, that love, understood as the unity of love of God and love of neighbor, provides the theological and ethical hermeneutical normative for accessing the foundation and scope of Christian social engagement. According to A. D. Mattson (1960, 4), an American Lutheran and member of Social Gospel Movement, it is the love and will of God, not any kind of hedonism, utilitarianism, eudemonism, or simply good human relations that grounds Christian social responsibility. The same idea was held by his German Roman Catholic contemporary, Karl Rahner. Rahner (1982, 231-2) maintains that no matter how important, wonderful and useful they may be, our concerns for the human person, especially socio-political concerns, do not belong to the present economy of salvation unless they are acts of love ... love understood within its mysterious horizon as love of God, *caritas*. Without love these activities degenerate into mere functions of a secular society with every possibility of “becoming an empty feeling, and nothing but talk [rather than] a tangible helping action.”

Based on his elaborate work on the topic, this reflection investigates Augustine’s treatment of the concept of love to determine how it fulfils this theological assertion and could thus become an impetus for Christian social responsibility. It critically describes and evaluates the developments in Augustine’s teaching on love: the reduction of three loves to one; the argument for the practical primacy

of love of neighbor; the argument for love as a process of identification; and the case for *Totus Christus* and its relation to and implications for social responsibility. While primary attention is on Augustine's work, the interpretations of some of his readers, especially the Belgian Augustinian Tarcisius J. van Bavel, O.S.A., are of immense value to this discussion. Tarcisius J. van Bavel, an outstanding scholar in Augustine's thought, wrote extensively on this topic. To him this work is indebted for its methodology.

Development of Augustine's teaching on love

Either as a lived experience or a concept of intellectual reflection; love permeated Augustine's life from the beginning to the end. "The mature bishop of Hippo, as well as the young convert of Milan," Charles Kannengiesser, S.J. (1986, 187), writes, "was a loving person...from his teens, he was in a constant state of being consumed by love. His human experiences as well as his reading and intellectual endeavors, never failed to inflame his senses." In his *Confessions* (13.9), Augustine wrote, "My weight is my love, by it I am carried." In his diverse experiences, he never stopped deepening his understanding of the actual meaning of love. His entire pastoral messages and activities were regulated by the subject of love.

The development of Augustine's theology of love gives evidence to the popular claim among scholars that it is characteristic of Augustine that his teachings on a number of doctrines and topics came through a wide range of development, warranting changes, some fundamental, in his thought. Frederick Van Fleteren (1978, 9) claims that the discussion as to what Augustine understood by Christianity at the early stages of his conversion, and how he gradually came to the knowledge and interpretation of various Christian doctrines, remains open-ended. His teaching on love reveals an evolution in his thought which developed as he matured in the faith, and as he was becoming gradually more familiar with the Holy Scriptures. In the initial stage of his teaching on love he placed stronger emphasis on the distinction between the two loves – love of God and love of neighbor. God is God and human beings are human beings; therefore they require distinct precepts and distinct acts. That is why God is and must be loved as God and human beings are and must be loved as human beings (*Sermon*, 265.8, 9; *De Trinitate*, 8.9, 12; *De Disciplina Christiana*, 3.3). Within this period he basically saw love of neighbor as belonging to the lesser realm, merely a necessary condition of love of God, a preparation for it, a cradle for it, or a ladder or step up to it (van Bavel, 1986, 169). Though he never denied that some unity exists between the two loves, yet he paid little or no attention to it.

Thus Augustine's earlier teaching of undue emphasis on the distinction between the two loves and the supremacy to the love of God had a great influence on later

Christian schools of thought. He is blamed for the scholastic tradition that believed that in loving our neighbor we also love God yet would deny that conversely, “every act of the love of God is formally also the love of neighbor” (Rahner, 1982, 237). A person with this kind of understanding would see the act of love of neighbor as love of God only insofar as it is God, not the individual, who is originally and directly intended in this concrete act of love. The problem is that this type of mindset may degenerate into some individualistic proclivities and provides for the practice of sentimentalized compassion, bearing no concrete and practical import for the individual recipient, who really does not matter.

Whether it is justified to blame Augustine for this position remains contentious. However even Augustinian scholars would agree that the ambiguities associated with some of his admonitions such as “seeing the poor as our ladders to heaven,” do not help the situation. Some people today still refer to this in their subject-object relationship with the poor whom they see as necessary instruments for their self interest and gratification. In that case the poor cannot be helped to improve their condition or else we will lose a necessary means to get to heaven. It is not surprising that such people would ordinarily denigrate social responsibility as having nothing in common with their Christian vocation. Their conception and practice of Christian charity suggest a dichotomy between humanitarianism - alms giving and social activism- advocacy for systemic change, two necessary components of social responsibility. In other words it is comfortable and admissible within this understanding to give alms to the poor but not engage in socio-political activism that challenges the unjust structures of society creating poverty. Without a theology of the unity of love that justifies a Christian’s love for his or her neighbor as, at the same time, a true love of God, the Christian lacks the impetus to embrace certain socio-political actions demanded by the practice of this love. We discover a tilt in this direction in Augustine’s thought as he matured in Christianity and understanding of the scripture.

Augustine and the reduction of love to one

The Scriptures, particularly the Gospel of Matthew 22; the First Letter of John and the Pauline theologies of love influenced to a large extent the mature Augustine, who, by 407 had turned to the unity of love from his earlier position that emphasized distinction. Commenting how his growing familiarity with the scriptures influenced his development in thought and categorization of love, Charles Kannengiesser writes, it is because there is a double commandment of love of God and love neighbor in Mt. 22 that Augustine talks of the double face of love. Because 1st John describes God as Love and reduces the double

commandment to one, viz. love of neighbor, Augustine envisioned love in those categories. He assimilates and integrates the literal reference to the divine value of love expressed in the Scriptures with human experience, in a striking and radical simplicity. For instance, in *Enarratio in Psalmum* 98, Augustine (as quoted by Charles Kannengiesser) says, "For it is written, 'God is love.' Therefore, the one who is full of love is full of God..." By this expression, he immediately ascribes to the human condition at its best, what he takes from the Scripture: 'God' and 'Love.' However, Kannengiesser cautions that one should hesitate to assume that, by employing the literal sense of Scripture, Augustine was embracing a simplistic fundamentalism. As is evident in most of his works, especially *On Christian Doctrine*, he combines a creative theory of hermeneutics with literal applications of Scriptures (Kannengiesser1986). It is striking that this type of reference to the scriptural use of love and the interrelation of Scripture with the human condition have remained a common methodology among those who later developed the unity of the two loves as the basis for Christian social responsibility. For them, love is present in the Scripture as motive, vocation and norm. We have a perfect example of this in Karl Rahner's theology of the unification of love and how it infiltrated the Vatican II teaching on Christian social responsibility especially as documented in *Gadium et Spes*.

Augustine's *Commentary on the First Letter of John* gives testimony to this transition in Augustine's thought from the distinction to the unification of objects of our love and also bears witness to how pragmatic he became in his approach. Tarcisius J. van Bavel says that, in Augustine's attempt to demonstrate how these three loves – love of self, love of neighbor and love of God – are related. He first showed the relation between love of self and love of God. To love one's self is to hate iniquity. For him, love of self is genuine only if the self loves God; otherwise one would miss the supreme good. His position stems from the words of Psalm 10:6, "He who loves iniquity hates his own soul." Augustine (*Sermon*, 128.3, 5; *De Doctrina Christiana* 1.23), therefore concludes that true love of neighbor depends on the self being intent upon God. I am inclined to think, since he followed the scriptural prescription, "Love the Lord your God ... then your neighbor as yourself," that Augustine first reduced self-love to love of neighbor and then the love of God to that of neighbor. However, following the length of this argument may distract us from the essentials we are concerned with in this reflection.

It would seem that Tarcisius J. van Bavel's record of Augustine's assent to the unity of love of neighbor and love of God was rather precipitous. Van Bavel himself acknowledged this tendency in his reading that leaves the impression

that he ignores or minimizes the amount of time and energy it took Augustine to come to the appreciation of the relationship between love of neighbor and love of God as well as love of self. Following Bavel's mistaken path, we may miss many of the implications to be drawn from Augustine for our own social responsibility toward our neighbor. For instance, in his *On Being a Christian*, relating the love of neighbor with one's true love for oneself, Augustine asks, "and you who love iniquity, how can you possibly want me to entrust a neighbor to you? For if you love yourself in a way that causes you to lose yourself, you will undoubtedly, by acting that way, lose the person you love as yourself." Such a person, Augustine would then sternly warn not to love anyone: "Perish alone!" "Either put your love in order, or renounce the fellowship," he would say (Augustine, *De Disciplina Christiana*. 5.5, Russell J. DeSimone, O.S.A., 1986, 4, 5). Augustine identifies love for material things (avarice) as the inordinate love of self which not only corrupts the love of neighbor but also might detract one from loving the neighbor at all; for Scripture says "where your treasure is, there also is your heart" (Matt. 6:21). He asks the Christian, "How can you boast that you wish them well? You want them to have as much as you have. You wish the needy well, that they may possess as much as you have, but you do not give them anything of your own possessions."

Augustine's next concern was how to reduce the love of God to love of neighbor. Though the ten commandments are divided into two parts, love of God and love of neighbor, Augustine maintains they can be reduced to one commandment, the so-called Golden Rule in Tobit 4:15: "Do to no one what you would not want done to you." "In this one commandment," he says, "the Ten Commandments are included and also the two commandments of love of God and neighbor" (*Sermon*, 9.14). Following St. Paul's statement in Rom. 13: 9-10, that love is the one thing that cannot hurt your neighbor; that is why love is the Law in all its fullness, Augustine then asks "What is this Love?" His answer: "Love for our fellow man (sic)." He concludes that the reason why Paul did not say anything about the love of God is because it is sufficient to fulfill the Law solely by loving one's neighbor. "What were formerly two has been made into one. It couldn't be put more concisely: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (*De Disciplina Christiana*, 5.5-6). Augustine's theology of love is presented as a reduction of love to the single commandment, love of neighbor. According to him, "though love of God comes first in the order of commanding (*ordo praecipendi*), love of neighbor has to come first in order of execution (*ordo faciendi*)" (*Tractate in Ioannes Evangelium* 17.8). This assertion provides the rationale for Christian social responsibility. It opens up the two principal concerns at the center of the controversy concerning

Christian social engagement based on the concept of love as a unity, viz. “the love of neighbor as man’s manifestation of his wholeness and essence, and the encounter of the world and of man as the medium of the original, unobjectified experience of God” (Rahner, 1982). Augustine’s argument for the practical primacy of love of neighbor sheds more light on these two primary causes of controversy over Christian social responsibility. This transition in his thought benefits from his practical approach to love, which often he prefers to refer to as *caritas*, for its less abstract and action-evoking dynamics.

The argument for the practical primacy of love of neighbor

The thesis of Augustine’s argument here as summarized by van Bavel (1986) is: “in the practical order of action, love of our brothers and sisters comes first, for it is in everyday life that the claims of love are felt most concretely.” It must first be acknowledged that to make this claim was very troubling for Augustine. He sometimes battled himself over this principle. His worry being whether holding this position gives deserved emphasis and respect to the first great commandment, the love of God above all things. However, he found his encouragement in reading various Pauline and Johannine texts which gave the same priority to love of neighbor. For instance, in his exposition of Paul’s letter to Galatians he reflected:

Since love is not complete except in the two precepts of love for God and neighbor, why does Paul in both Galatians and Romans mention only love of neighbor? Is it not for the reason that, since love of God is not so frequently put to the test, people can deceive themselves about it? In love for neighbor, however, they can more easily be convinced that, when they act unjustly towards others, they do not have love for God... Therefore, since both precepts are such that neither can be kept without the other, it is normally sufficient to mention just one of them when it is a matter of the works of justice. But the precept of love for the neighbor is more appropriate, for by that, a person is made aware of his shortcomings... Some of the Galatians were deceiving themselves that they had love for God. They were shown clearly that they did not have it because of the hatred among brothers, about which it was easy to judge in daily life and conduct (*Exp. Ep. ad Galatas*, 45).

He made a similar remark with regard to John: “Some of you may wonder anxiously why John so explicitly and exclusively insists on love for our sisters and brothers. He speaks of ‘him who loves his brother’ and ‘this is Jesus’ commandment that we love one another.’ Brotherly love is continually spoken

of. But the love of God, that is, the love whereby we love God, is not so frequently mentioned, though it is not altogether passed over in silence" (*Homily on Io. Ep.*, 8.4). For Augustine, John would never have placed the perfection of goodness in love of neighbor had he not intended that God be understood in brotherly love itself. He maintained that "a person sees his brother and sister with human sights with which God cannot be seen..." This is why John asks, 'How can someone who does not love his brother and sister whom he sees, love God whom he does not see?' (1John 4:20) (*De Trinitate*, 8.8, 12).

It is easy for one to deduce from these texts and Augustine's interpretation of them, "that the greater concreteness of the human being alongside us is the reason why we must start with love of neighbor in order to love God." As it concerns Christian social actions and welfare, this concreteness is described variously as doing justice or as 'seeing' our sisters and brothers. This expresses that God is invisibly loved and served when we express any practical act of love toward our neighbor. Augustine bases his argument here more on the meaning and implication of the Incarnation, of God's Word, by which fact Christ has become our neighbor, and therefore the human and the divine have become interrelated. In view of this interrelatedness he asks, "Do you think that when you love your sister and brother you are loving her or him alone and not Christ as well? That is impossible, because you are loving the members of Christ. When you love Christ's members, you love Christ himself. Love cannot be split up [love is so entirely one piece]" (*Homily on 1st John*, 10.3). We shall return to this in the next section when we deal with love as a process of identification as illustrated in his theology of *Totus Christus* 'the whole Christ.' His response to the objection of God's invisibility is that: "one can always say, 'I don't see God' but one can never say 'I don't see a human being'" (*Homily on 1st John*, 7.5; *Tractates on Gospel of John*, 17.8).

From this the conclusion can be drawn that, for Augustine, we touch God in loving human beings. By extension we can say that the love of neighbor is the absolute condition for love of God. Augustine presses his argument beyond a mere representation or reproduction of biblical statements. He also supports his argument from a philosophical point of view by insisting on the ontological identity of the act of love. The starting point of the argument is biblical, of course: John's insight that "God is love." Based on this, Augustine asks, "Does the person who loves his brother and sister love God also?" "Yes," he answers, "the one who loves his sister and brother necessarily loves God. He cannot do otherwise than to love Love itself. A person cannot love his sister and brother

without loving Love. He necessarily loves Love... And in loving Love, a person loves God." This argument of the ontological identity of the act of love is carried on in contemporary discussion by Karl Rahner from the wisdom of transcendental theological anthropology. Whether Augustine had a direct influence on Rahner or not, they seem to have a shared idea on love, which many contemporary Christian social activists draw upon in shaping an active Christian response to the needs and conditions of those most deprived in society.

For Augustine and Rahner, love of neighbor is the first act of love for God, and love of neighbor always includes necessarily a movement towards the transcendent God. There is no competition between loves. Therefore, both loves do not only coincide because they are related with one another as divine commandment and its human realization, but they also coincide because they are related ontologically. This solves one of those questions relating to our call to Christian social responsibility, namely, the possibility of the encounter of the world and of the human person as the medium of the original, unobjectified experience of God.

It is obvious that this conclusion has remained a contentious issue in Augustinian scholarship. Another question which is not addressed here, though many will claim it is implied, is the extent to which one can conclude that Augustine's reduction of three loves, especially the love of God to love neighbor implies that the neighbor can be the object of our true love. The reason for this concerns some scholars like William R. Schoedel would say, is the teleological nature of Augustine's ethics, that everything ought to lead us to the ultimate good, the true object of our love which is God ... a teaching he maintained all through his life (van Bavel, 1986, 183-5). In view of this, Augustine, in his treatment of love, always distinguishes between *frui* and *uti*, between "enjoying" God and "associating with" the things of this world, in which humanity is included. If that is the case, Augustine would be more likely to have maintained that we love our neighbor insofar as he/she leads us to God.

For William R. Schoedel, this criticism of Augustine derives from a misconstruction of his statement in *Homily on 1st John* 5.12: "Let love even now be stirring in your inmost heart to do it, not for display, but out of the very marrow of compassion, thinking only of the man and his need." In actual fact, Augustine is referring to the individual lover and the one loved and not, as assumed above, referring to our neighbor and God. As he may seem to say, this is a case of misappropriation of emphasis of relationship, confusing what is used in relation to two human beings to mean God and the individual being loved as our neighbor. I think Schoedel's observation is true inasmuch as it presents a picture

of the struggle Augustine went through in his love discourse, especially in relation to his apparent disregard for all that is other than God. Augustine himself admitted this struggle, as I pointed out in the first part of this reflection. However, as Mary T. Clark, R.S.C.J. (1984, 88) would suggest, it is not right to interpret this Augustinian disposition as “an instrumentalism of means-end” teleological ethics as Schoedel indicates. We earlier cited an example of this with those who interpret Augustine’s analogy of the poor as ladder in terms of instruments for self goal – whatever that maybe – achieving heaven or some boast of self-ego. Sometimes the accusation of an exclusively one dimensional view of love in Augustine stems from an erroneous presumption that Augustine, with the zeal of his conversion, came to live love exclusively in a vertical direction, a God and I direction. But we know from many of his writings that Augustine was always surrounded by friends. “To love and to be loved” (*Conf.* 3.1, 1) was his daily task. We also see a similar stand in *Sermon* 96.1, 1; *De Civitate Dei*, 19.8. Therefore there seems to be no sufficient evidence to deny that in Augustine there is a possibility of loving the neighbor, the individual person, for himself while at the same time qualifying that as loving God. To hold otherwise, I earlier mentioned, citing an example from the scholastic position, is detrimental to the practice of compassion that brings practical relief to the suffering of others, that compassion which Augustine practiced so well. This issue will become clearer when we consider his next argument, “argument for love as a process of identification.”

Returning to our discussion, van Bavel helps us to see that, by this argument of the unity of the two loves and the practical primacy of love of neighbor, Augustine does not limit love to merely Christian love, but extends the notion of love to all human beings. His understanding of neighbor has a universal and trans-religious or cultural character. In *Sermon* 359.9 he writes, “Whether someone is a pagan or a Jew, he is our neighbor because he is a human being.” Again in *De Disciplina Christiana*, 3, he maintains, “Every human being is the neighbor of every human being.” By referring often to Isaiah 58: 7, Augustine, provides the foundation and scope of Christian social responsibility based on the unity of this love (van Bavel, 1986, 174). This is laid out in his Tractates on the Gospel of John, 17.8: “We must begin with the love of neighbor, sharing our bread with the hungry, sheltering the homeless poor, clothing the man we see to be naked, and not turning from our own kin.” To this list we must also add: to challenge structures of injustice as Augustine exhorts: “you give bread to a hungry person; but it would be better were no one hungry and you could give it to no one. You clothe a naked person. Would that all were clothed and necessity

did not exist. Remove distress, and there will be no place for works of mercy” (Homily on 1st John, 8.8).

In this section we encountered how Augustine became more practical in his discussion on love as his thought continued to mature. In a remarkable way, he provides us with a great opening in our search for the theological ground for social action and welfare based on the unity of love of God and of neighbor. His teaching here makes it possible for us to focus on individual persons in their concreteness, and yet have our actions qualify as a participation in the salvific event. This counters the classical scholastics’ thought that the human person must be seen and used only as a ladder to God. The other concept Augustine developed in his theology of love which is of great significance for our understanding of the foundation and scope of Christian responsibility, is his idea of love as a process of identification.

Argument for love as a process of identification

To aid a true understanding of Augustine’s intents here it is important to begin with a clarification and distinction between the terms, ‘identity’ and ‘identification.’ T. J. van Bavel warns, “By identifying love of God and love of neighbor Augustine never intends an identity between God and human beings, for identity means that two beings are completely the same thing. He insists always on the fact that God and human beings remain different beings. ‘They are *aliud* and *aliud*, [other and other] and we love God as God and a human being as a human being.’ Precisely because of this difference, it is possible to speak of identification. For identification can only happen between two different persons. Where complete identity exists, there can be no question of identification” (van Bavel, 1986, 174).

What Augustine teaches in his argument for identification is a union of two persons through free love. “What is love but a kind of life that unites or seeks to unite two beings, namely the one who loves and that which is loved,” says Augustine (De Trinitate, 8, 10, 14). Love and freedom are distinguished here by Augustine as two principal and irreducible elements for a psychologically healthy identification. Thus by the love process the lover, out of his or her free choice, becomes present in the persons s/he loves, and vice versa. This has a great implication for our understanding of solidarity, a necessary congruent of Christian social responsibility and a basic principle of Catholic social teaching. Solidarity is also called ‘being-with,’ indwelling in which two persons in relation are both subjects and drawn into one another. It stems first from God’s action with humanity through the giving of his Son – the Incarnation and is also used

sometimes as a synonym of love. This is illustrated in this phrase Augustine puts in the mouth of God: “Love itself makes Me present to you” (Homily on 1st John, 10.4). Therefore, God’s presence in the human being becomes both the reason why we touch God by loving our fellow human being, and also the propellant for such love. One aspect of this theology of identification, which is relevant and related to solidarity as a principle of Christian social engagement, is the maintenance of the individuality of both the lover and the loved while incorporating both in the new life of community, with some degree of freedom, mutuality and equality. This does not make provision for a relationship of instrumentalism of means-end teleological ethics as mentioned earlier.

Augustine further illustrates his thought here with the concept of *Totus Christus*, as another aspect of free identification through love. *Totus Christus* is the third of Augustine’s tripartite conception of Christ, namely the ‘total Christ’ including all human beings. The first two are the ‘pre-existent eternal Son of God’ and the ‘historical man Jesus, the incarnate Son of God’ (van Bavel, 1986, 175). *Totus Christus* means that Christ includes all human beings. This has been expanded in contemporary narrative of cosmic soteriology to include the whole creation, especially on account of the reading of Paul’s presentation in Romans 8: 22, which allots the groaning for salvation to the whole creation. Moreover, it has become imperative that we include the entire universe within this scope since today the call to compassionate solidarity urges us to extend our Christian responsibility to other components of creation, together with which we form the one common body of God’s gift.

The concept of *Totus Christus* also has the connotation of ‘the particular’ being present in ‘the general’ and vice versa. Yet at the same time it insists on the individuality of the particular, which cannot on any account be subsumed in the general by the fact of this relation. Christ, for Augustine, is not only an ‘I,’ but also a ‘We,’ a kind of the whole present in the parts, and conversely, the parts present in the whole. This impacts greatly our practice of Christian solidarity and social responsibility, as it highlights the important aspects of this responsibility: personalism and communitarianism. In this concept, Augustine not only gives Christians a theology of activity that links our genuine concern for the individual with the Christian personal relationship with Christ. He also offers us a narrative and tool for dealing with two major plagues of modern times: liberal capitalism that reduces the individual to unconnected atoms and hence favors individualism, and communism that, on the other hand, sees the person as a

mere functional tool. These modern thoughts are contrasted with Augustine's, which basically favors cooperation, freedom, and equality.

The final case for the theology of identification exemplified by this concept of *Totus Christus* comes from his elucidation of Christ's saying in Matt. 25, "whatsoever you do to the least of these [brothers and sisters] of mine you do to me." In *Sermon*, 25.8.8, he writes, "Each of you expects to receive Christ seated in heaven. Turn your attention to Him lying in the street. Direct your attention to Christ who is hungry and suffering from the cold, Christ in need and a stranger." He not only identifies Christ with and in the whole of humanity, but he draws particular attention to the poor. From this, modern Catholic social teaching draws its inspiration and confirmation in its insistence that the poor are the central concerns of our social action of charity and solidarity. Augustine also establishes an eschatological theology that connects the two worlds and their respective realities and scope (this-world and other-world, as seen in the unity of the heavenly Christ and the poor of today). This plays a prominent role in the doctrine of Christian social teaching and responsibility. One of the final goals of such teaching is to unite these essential aspects of the Christian life, the belief and hope in the life hereafter and the reality of life here and now.

In concluding this reflection I want to reiterate that, although Augustine would not have considered himself a political theologian in the formal sense of the term, his teaching nevertheless provides a theological framework for active Christian social encounter. This validates one of the major claims of critical theologies: that it is the responsibility of every; and not any single, theological discipline to dialogue with human persons in their concrete situations, i.e., in the world. The tasks of the various theologies "are not to be fulfilled in the unhistorical and sterile realm of eternally valid truth, but in the historical situation which is ours at any one particular time" (Rahner, 1972, 106-7).

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