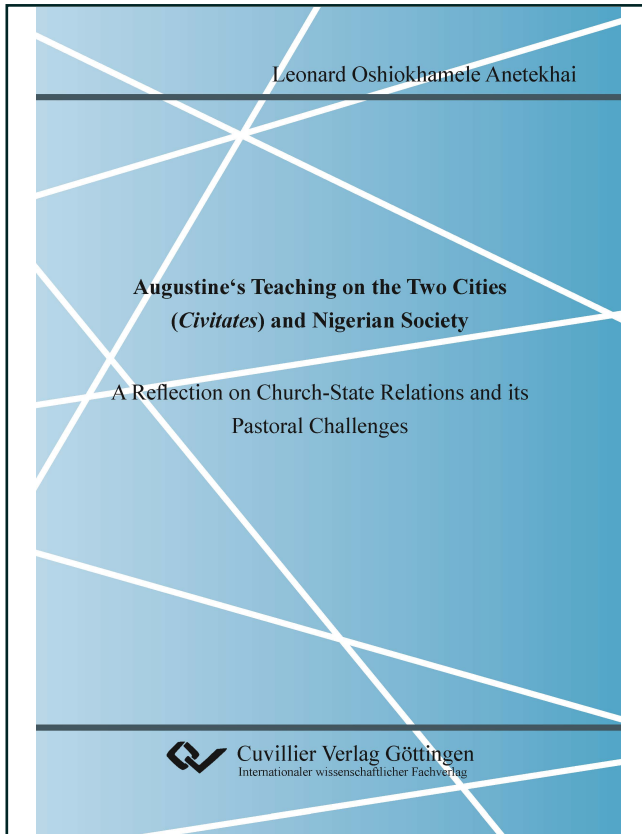




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Augustine's Teaching on the Two Cities (Civitates) and Nigerian Society
A Reflection on Church-State Relations and its Pastoral Challenges



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“As one created in the image of God, each human being has the dignity of a person; he or she is not just something, but someone, capable of self-knowledge, self-possession, free self-giving and entering into communion with others. At the same time, each person is called, by grace, to a covenant with the Creator, called to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his place. From this supernatural perspective, one can understand the task entrusted to human beings to mature in the ability to love and to contribute to the progress of the world, renewing it in justice and peace. In a remarkable synthesis, Saint Augustine teaches that God created us without our aid, but he did not choose to save us without our aid. Consequently, all human beings have the duty to cultivate an awareness of this twofold aspect of gift and task.”¹

Prologue

In the first period of ancient church history, the Church dealt with all her problems ecclesiastically – the Church settled all matters of doctrine, discipline, worship and Government. However, with the emergence of Constantine, the situation changed. Though the emperors before Constantine had seen the importance of religion for the unity of the Empire, Constantine too, saw it as clearly as they did. He thus followed the same approach as did his predecessors, but with one difference.

A difference built on the thought of Eusebius, a leader who was not only an immensely hardworking and able propagandist, but a historian in the tradition of Josephus, and a bishop (of Caesarea) who evolved a political theology. A theology that “the Church and the empire were designed to work in harmony frustrating the designs of ‘the envious demon,’ whose jealousy of increasing human enlightenment and prosperity was the prime cause of persecution”² – the persecution of Christians.

¹ Benedict XVI, *The Human Person, The Heart of Peace*, message delivered on January 1, 2007, on the celebration of the World Day of Peace, in: http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20061208_xl-world-day-peace.html. Accessed on 19.03.2019.

² W.H.C. Frend, 1984, *The Rise of Christianity*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, p. 479.

For emperors³ before Constantine, Roman religion was the unifying factor that they encouraged, but for Constantine, it was Christianity. The pagan emperors built pagan temples; Constantine built churches. The pagan emperors supported the Roman priests; Constantine gave grants to the Christian clergy. The pagan emperors suppressed Christianity; Constantine and other emperors who followed him suppressed paganism and the heresies of their time.

During this period of history, paganism was referred to as *religio licita* and Christianity *religio illicita*. However, at the end of the fourth century, Christianity became *religio licita* and paganism *religio illicita*. Everything changed “as the power of the Empire became joined to the ideology of the Church – the empire was immediately recast and reenergized, and the Church became an entity so different from what had preceded it as to be almost unrecognised,”⁴ yet, in a real sense, nothing changed.

In the words of W.H.C. Frend, “in practice, the ancient world had exchanged the guardianship of one set of divine masters, capricious but benevolent, for another that would brook no opposition. There were already signs that the Church which had suffered persecution for so long would soon be persecuting its opponents. The movement of protest could not be tamed overnight – to the victors belonged the spoils. Ecclesiastical decisions were to be enforced by secular power.”⁵

At this time, Christians could not separate the happenings within the Church from that of the State. The Roman traditions and political submissiveness to the emperors characterised their activities as a people. Yes, the Church could render many services which she had not been able to perform before. However, with her alliance with the State, she exposed herself to many unprecedented temptations. Thus, State politics entered the Church, and the Church entered the politics of the State.

Consequently, the disasters of the era before the fifth Century, “culminating in the capture of Rome by Alaric on 24th August 410 had increased the acceptability of judgment and its associated theological concepts. Disasters interpreted as the ‘penalty of Roman guilt’ came easily to the minds of the victims. Augustine, albeit reluctantly, became the man of the hour.”⁶

Augustine (354 – 430) tried to analyse this situation with his thought of *De Civitate Dei – The City of God*. As purported by James Carroll, Augustine’s *City of God*,

³ Within these periods Emperors Decius (c. 249 – 251) and Diocletian (c. 245 – 313) were the main protagonists. It was Diocletian who in 303 ordered the destruction of all Christian churches and texts, and Christians during his reign were liable to be put to death almost anywhere in the empire.

⁴ James Carroll, 2001, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews, A History*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, p. 183.

⁵ W.H.C. Frend, 1984, *The Rise of Christianity*, p. 479.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 653.

“his last great work written to refute the charge that the Empire’s embrace of Christianity had led to the collapse implied by vandal victories, Augustine firmly justified the harsh, even authoritarian policies of the Christian rulers. If anything, they had not been harsh enough. Now, for Augustine, the world was divided between those who lived in the flesh of the city of men and those who lived in the spirit of the *City of God*. The latter could look forward to heaven, the former to hell, and if hell began for them on earth, so be it.”⁷

Though the young Augustine sang the praises of the emperors in his early years, as an adult, he was full of praises of God through the help of Monica, his Mother and Ambrose of Milan. As opined by some historians and James Carroll as well, “the dualistic Manichaeism of Augustine’s youth reasserted itself with a vengeance.”⁸ The argument that Christianity brought reins to the Roman Empire was absurd and as postulated by Peter Brown, “the disaster that fell on the Roman Empire had come not from neglect of the old rites or embrace of Christianity, but from tolerating paganism, heresy and immorality in the new Christian empire.”⁹

These thoughts Augustine captures in his classic work the *City of God*, where he classified his idea into four essential elements. He speaks of the heavenly city (which is the *City of God*), the earthly city (the city of men), and by allegory which is the focus of this research, the Church and the State as it affects and concerns the human person in building a rational and caring order of life. The Church, on the one hand, is divinely established and leads humankind to eternal goodness, which is God.

On the other hand, the State adheres to the virtues of politics and of the mind, formulating a political and social community. Both the Church and the State are visible entities which intermingle, and they seek to do good, but mirroring these two societies, in the thought of Augustine are two invisible societies. The Heavenly city, for those who conform to the values of virtues and are predestined for salvation, as well as the Earthly city, for those who engage in self-love and pride, which leads to eternal damnation.

In the opinion of Justo L. González, “no theologian, except perchance Paul, has been more influential in the Church than Augustine. He brought together many different elements of thought and wove them into a system that entirely dominated Christian theology at least until the thirteenth century and has continued to be influential in our days.”¹⁰

Influenced by the Neoplatonic outlook of his time, Augustine sees the world, creation and creatures from a holistic perspective. He viewed the world as a hierarchy of being, from the lowest echelons of materiality to the highest levels of rationality and spirituality. For him,

⁷ James Carroll, 2001, *Constantine’s Sword*, p. 212.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Peter Brown cited in James Carroll, 2001, *Constantine’s Sword*, p. 212.

¹⁰ Justo L. González, 1990, *Faith and Wealth: A History of Christian ideas on the Origins, Significance, and use of Money*, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, p. 214.

it was a natural order established by God, which exists not only in creation in general but also within human society.

To this Augustine writes in his *Contra Faustus*,

“in the eternal law is the divine order or will of God, which requires the preservation of natural order, and forbids the breach of it. However, what is this natural order in man? Man, we know, consists of soul and body; but so, does a beast. Again, it is understandable that in the order of nature, the soul is superior to the body. Moreover, in the soul of man, there is reason, which is not in a beast. Therefore, as the soul is superior to the body, so in the soul itself the reason is superior by the law of nature to the other parts which are also found in beasts; and in reason itself, which is partly contemplation and partly action, contemplation is unquestionably the superior part.”¹¹

For Augustine, just as humans contemplate and act, so too the angels. Unlike humans, the angels necessitate of themselves the performance of the orders of God whom they contemplate and in whose eternal Government they freely and sweetly obey. As humans, though dead in the body as a result of fragile nature, God will, in the end, awaken the mortal human bodies by His Spirit. In this earthly life, individuals are called to live virtuously, according to the laws of God by which the law of nature is well-preserved. It is to this end; one must embrace and live a sincere faith which works by love, partaking in that immortal and incorruptible hope by a good conscience, for which as a pilgrim one must hunger and thirst because we live and walk by faith and not by sight.¹²

Given this hope, one must act in faithful obedience to God by restraining from all earthly lust and keeping himself within the natural limit of regulating his desires to do that which is right and avoid that which is wrong. For if there were no delight in what is unlawful, no one would sin, for to sin is to indulge in pleasure instead of restraining from it.¹³

Hence in classifying created things, Augustine believes that in the order of created things, all is good. Nothing is in itself, evil. Evil, he says, is not a substance but the exploitation or misuse of what by nature good is. This view is also reflected in earlier authors before him, that the evil in material goods, that is, wealth, lies not in having riches but in the avarice that comes along with such desires and misuse of material goods.¹⁴

This thought allowed Augustine to elaborate his theory of Justice within social life, which he believes comes from the good and just sharing of those things necessary for life, just as God freely distributes air, water and light. Humanity must, therefore, pursue the values of the heavenly city to uphold a fitting sense of order, which in turn leads to true peace.

¹¹ Augustine, *Contra Faustus*, 22. 27, in: Philip Schaff (ed.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian church*, Volume IV, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, p. 388, in: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf104.pdf>. Accessed on 22.02.2018.

¹² Cf. *ibid.*

¹³ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁴ Cf. Justo L. González, 1990, *Faith and Wealth*, p. 215.

Reviewing the challenges before the Church today in her relationship with the State, one can concur with Augustine that the purpose of history, which involves a path of social progress, is to recount God's plan, which consists in fostering the Heavenly city and filling it with worthy citizens. This task for the Church calls for adequate pastoral care for her faithful so that the Church will not be a sign of contradiction, but a sentinel of hope.

In understanding any human society from this concept of being a sign of contradiction, the *City of God*, with its abundance of virtues, must be thought of as better than the city of men. For in the city of men, the spiritual importance of human life is or wholly neglected as a result of 'lust of the flesh'. This worldview, according to Robert Markus, "belongs to a whole genus of 'lusts' – for power, for domination, for renown – all brought about by the same disorder rooted in man's sin"¹⁵ and the preferment of lust and self-interest. This lust, which is of the flesh, that is, 'love of self' as against 'love for God and others' brings about disarray, insincerity and the craving for personal satisfaction instead of the common good which should satisfy all created Beings.

Nigerians as part of such created Beings also have a share in God's common good, and like the biblical description of the land of Israel, Nigeria could be called a 'land that flows with milk and honey'. More so as a human society, she is endowed with enormous potentials and opportunities that could make it great and offer every citizen a happy life. However, the reality she faces today, plagues citizens, leaving them in disorder and allowing insincerity to take its hold in virtually every aspect of life.¹⁶

In a homily admonishing the people of Nigeria, Pope John Paul II believes that "God has blessed Nigeria and Nigerians with human and natural wealth, and everyone must ensure that these resources are put into use for the good of the whole people. All Nigerians must work to rid society of everything that offends the dignity of the human person or violates the human right. It implies reconciling differences, overcoming ethnic rivalries, and injecting honesty, efficiency and competence into the art of governing."¹⁷

These words of Pope John Paul II echo the set of values in Augustine's mind in his concept of *civitas* in his *City of God*. *Civitas* expressed by Johannes van Oort "is not just a random group of people living together, but an organised community with connecting elements such as worship, legal norms, cultural and ethical values"¹⁸ binding them together, not by accident but by Divine Providence. Augustine recognises that the destiny

¹⁵ Robert Markus, 1990, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, New York, USA.: Cambridge University Press, p. 61.

¹⁶ Cf. Chris Angelo Otuibe, 2003, *Amos: A Challenge to Nigerian Church and Society*, Ibadan, Nigeria: Okey Printers Limited, pp. 69 – 70.

¹⁷ John Paul II, *God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself*, (2 Cor 5,19), Homily at the Mass for the Beatification of Father Cyprian Tansi at Oba-Onitsha on March 22, 1998, Nigeria, in: https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1998/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19980322_Nigeria-beatification.html. Accessed on 18.01.2015.

¹⁸ *Für Augustin ist die Civitas nicht nur eine zufällige Gruppe von beieinander wohnenden Menschen, sondern eine organisierte Gemeinschaft mit sie verbindenden Elementen wie Gottesdienst, Rechtsnormen, Kultur und ethischen Werten.* Johannes van Oort, *De Civitate Dei (Vom Gottesstaat)*, in: Volker H. Drecoll (Hrsg), 2007, *Augustin Handbuch*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, (pp. 347 – 363), p. 354.

of human empires or any society is dependent on this providence of God – that is, human happiness is dependent on God's Divine Providence.

Nigeria, as expressed by Georg Ehusani,

“is a nation blessed not just with great men and women of international repute, but a nation filled with abundant natural resources, as well as with human resources, yet some Nigerians live in abject poverty. Blessed with fertile land and intelligent people, and still live in misery. For years, the Nigerian society has been stripped naked by corruption, selfishness and greedy at the hands of a succession of despotic rulers, corrupt administrators, visionless leaders and thoughtless managers. We have been humiliated and reduced to a state of penury by the combined forces of military dictatorship, political deception and economic recklessness.”¹⁹

Consequently, socio-economic and cultural life is suffering much dishonour because of ill will and misuse of public funds, looting of properties and amenities made for the common good. Moreover, the quest for material wealth has created a deplorable state of religious life, thus making the dignity of the human person lose its pride on the betterment of the common good that satisfies not an individual, but everyone created by God.²⁰

With the rebirth of democratic rule in 1999 after years of military regimes, the whole idea of the common good is continuously elusive and downplayed. Human social and political life, which for Augustine should be subordinate to eternal life as promised in scripture invites Christians (mostly Christian leaders) to make sure that life here and now becomes an image or a sign of life in heaven. In the quest for social and political life, this here and now has become a patrimony of a few privileged in the helm of affairs, who through their empty public promises effortlessly manoeuvre and induce the ordinary people to vote for them. Afterwards, they forget that human governance should be exercised with a high sense of commitment, humility and sincerity in the communal life of God's creatures, for sovereignty resides in the citizens of any society.

As commented by P. G. Walsh, Augustine presents with his idea a blueprint of an ideal emperor. A true leader, who is obliged to live the moral life proper of a Christian and to observe his duties towards God which of course does include impartial justice and a warning against vainglory.²¹ He believes that,

“We count them blessed if their government is just, if they are not puffed up by those who address them with high praises and by those who greet them over-obsequiously, and if they remember that they are men; if they make their power subject to God's majesty, to extend his worship as widely as possible; if they fear, love and worship God; if they feel greater affection for that kingdom in which they do not fear to have

¹⁹ Georg O. Ehusani cited in Chris Angelo Otuibe, 2003, *Amos: A Challenge to Nigerian Church and Society*, p. 71.

²⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 80 – 81.

²¹ Cf. P. G. Walsh, 2009, *Augustine: De Civitate Dei*, Book V, (Aris & Philips Classical Text), Gateshead, Tyne & Wear, England: Athenaem Press, p. 139.

co-emperors; if they punish more reluctantly, and pardon readily. If in the end, they exact such punishment, it is because they must govern and defend the state, not to give vent to hatreds arising from enmities; if they extend that pardon, they do so not to allow wickedness to go scot-free, but in the hope of amendment; if they are frequently impelled to pass harsh decrees, they balance these with lenient acts of mercy and generous gifts of kindness; if, when there is greater scope for self-indulgence, they discipline it the more; if they choose to control their base desires rather than any number of nations; and if they do all this not out of zeal for empty glory, but out of regard for eternal blessedness; if they do not neglect to offer to their true God the sacrifice of humility, compassion, and prayer as atonement for their sins."²²

With these in mind, Augustine tries to explain with a combination of allegorical creativity, the disruptions between personal and public life as it concerns social existence. With its reflection on Church-state relations, the State and those who hold civil authority, are enjoined to possess a good conscience that brings about responsible living for all and on the side of the Church, conscientious pastoral care and concern for the people God has created, without excluding those in civil authority. As citizens of the earthly city, individuals have a collective responsibility for the common good, and must not be led off track by the belief that true happiness is in this passing life, as true and eternal happiness can be found and secured in the life to come. However, it must find its primary and concrete reality within human co-existence.

In social life, it is a pity to find humans between two loves. The love of self, extending even to the contempt of God who created the earthly city, and the love of God, extending even to contempt for self, which created the heavenly city.²³ This act has completely misguided individuals who are only bent on their profit, self-aggrandisement and the enjoyment that earthly pleasure offers instead of the common good where God is in all things.

The Church existing in Nigeria in the face of all social disruptions remains for the people a sign and instrument that will bring about this common good by making visible and sharing the love of God. The Church as light, as expressed by Benedict XVI in his Post-

²² *Sed felices eos dicimus, si iuste imperant, si inter linguas sublimiter honorantium et obsequia nimis humiliter salutantium non extolluntur, et se homines esse meminerunt; si suam potestatem ad Dei cultum maxime dilatandum maiestati eius famulam faciunt; si Deum timent diligunt colunt; si plus amant illud regnum, ubi non timent habere consortes; si tardius uindicant, facile ignoscunt; si eandem uindictam pro necessitate regendae tuendaeque rei publicae, non pro saturandis inimicitarum odiis exerunt; si eandem uenam non ad inpunitatem iniquitatis, sed ad spem correctionis indulgent; si, quod aspere coguntur plerumque decernere, misericordiae lenitate et beneficiorum largitate compensant; si luxuria tanto eis est castigatio, quanto possent esse liberiores; si malum cupiditatis prauis quam quibuslibet gentibus imperare et si haec omnia faciunt non propter ardorem inanis gloriae, sed propter caritatem felicitatis aeternae; si prosuis peccatis humilitatis et miseracionis et orationis sacrificium deo suo uero immolare non neglegunt.* Augustine, *De Civ. Dei* V. 24, in: P. G. Walsh, 2009, *Augustine: De Civitate Dei*, Book V, pp. 100 – 101.

²³ *...terrenam scilicet amor sui usque ad contemptum dei, caelestem uero amor dei usque ad contemptum sui.* Cf. Augustine, *De Civ. Dei* XIV. 28, in: P. G. Walsh, 2017, *Augustine: De Civitate Dei*, Books XIII & XIV, (Aris & Philips Classical Text), Liverpool, London: Liverpool University Press, pp. 174 – 175.

Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus*, must lead all created beings out of the darkness of the city of man. More so as “a ‘domestic Church’ it must be a place of faith, of prayer and loving concern for the true and enduring good of each of its members, a community which lives the sign of peace” (AM n. 133).

Augustine in describing his *City of God* sees it as a Christian society, projected in the Old Testament, exemplified by the moral and religious values derived from the New Testament view of the kingdom of God, a kingdom, which is more than just a potential religious dimension of human life. Within human society, the *City of God* continues to relate and interact with the Earthly City. Hence, it will be impossible to remove the meaningful relationship and potential tension between church and state authorities within any given Christian society or any society that humans inhabit. So, while state authorities must be concerned with temporal objectives for ‘the enjoyment of earthly peace,’ the *City of God* is concerned with ‘the enjoyment of eternal peace’ which is the objective of the Church within any given society.

The task as a Church, of facing the challenges of the common good, of justice and peace in human society, is summed up in these words of Augustine. He writes in his *City of God*,

“So long then, as the heavenly city is wayfaring on earth, she invites citizens from all nations and all tongues, and unities them into a single pilgrim band. She takes no issue with that diversity of customs, laws, and traditions whereby human peace is sought and maintained. Instead of nullifying or tearing down, she preserves and appropriates whatever in the diversities of diverse races aimed at the same objective of human peace, provided only that they do not stand in the way of the faith and worship of the one Supreme and true God.”²⁴

Hence as the Church relates to the secular world, wherein political principles guide the activities of the people, Augustine holds that:

“the heavenly City, so long as it is wayfaring on earth, not only makes use of earthly peace but fosters and actively pursues along with other human beings a common platform in regard to all that concerns our purely human life and does not interfere with faith and worship of course, though, the *City of God* subordinates this earthly peace to that of heaven. For this is not merely true peace, but, strictly speaking for any rational creature, the only real peace, since it is as I said, ‘the perfectly ordered

²⁴ *Haec ergo caelestis ciuitas dum peregrinatur in terra, ex omnibus gentibus ciues euocat atque in omnibus linguis peregrinam colligit societatem, non curans quidquid in moribus legibus institutisque diuersum est, quibus pax terrena uel conquiritur uel tenetur, nihil eorum rescindens uel destruens, immo etiam seruans ac sequens, quod licet diuersum in diuersis nationibus, ad unum tamen eundemque finem terrena pacis intenditur, si religionem, qua unus summus et uerus Deus colendus docetur, non impedit. Cf. Augustine, *De Civ. Dei* XIX, 17, in: <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/Augustine/civ19.shtml>. Accessed on 18.01.2015.*

and harmonious communion of those who find their joy in God and one another in God.”²⁵

To this end, there must be a sharing of roles and functions of church and state authorities within the *City of God* as a human society. Their shared responsibility will bring about the mission, which the *City of God* must perform within the history of man and its consummation at the end to come. This goal is the task of this research effort through assessing Augustine's teachings as reflected from his concept of Two *Civitates* and its pastoral Challenge for the Church in Nigeria.

²⁵ *Vititur ergo etiam caelestis ciuitas in hac sua peregrinatione pace terrena et de rebus ad mortalem hominum naturam pertinentibus humanarum uoluntatum compositionem, quantum salua pietate ac religione conceditur, tuetur atque appetit eamque terrenam pacem refert ad caelestem pacem, quae uere ita pax est, ut rationalis dumtaxat creaturae sola pax habenda atque dicenda sit, ordinatissima scilicet et concordissima societas fruendi Deo et inuicem in Deo; quo cum uentum erit, non erit uita mortalis, sed plane certeque uitalis, nec corpus animale, quod, dum, corrumpitur, adgrauat animam, sed spiritale sine ulla indigentia ex omni parte subditum uoluntati.* Augustine, *De Civ. Dei* XIX, 17, in: *ibid.*

