

Sovereignty under trial: crisis in Augustine of Hippo's political theology, between Carl Schmitt and Erik Peterson

Soberania sob julgamento: crise na teologia política de Agostinho de Hipona, entre Carl Schmitt e Erik Peterson

Martín Grassi

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9378-6254> - E-mail: martingrassi83@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In this paper I will argue that the concept of *crisis* is at the heart of Political Theology by focusing on the major work of Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*. Augustine's strategy is to gather both medical and theological meanings of *crisis* to argue for the unique sovereignty of the One God, the only one that decides and judges over the critical course of history and the One that will bring everything to an end by His Final Judgement. The focus on Augustine's treatise will also show how the Political Theology quarrel between Carl Schmitt and Erik Peterson should be examined once again, mainly to redefine the concept of sovereignty by the concept of crisis, for to be considered a sovereign is in itself something to be decided on.

Keywords: Crisis. Sovereignty. Political Theology. City of God. Schmitt. Peterson.

RESUMO

Neste artigo argumento que o conceito de crise está no coração da Teologia Política, focalizando o trabalho principal de Agostinho de Hipona, A Cidade de Deus. A estratégia de Agostinho é reunir os significados médicos e teológicos da crise para defender a soberania única do Único Deus, o único que decide e julga ao longo do curso crítico da história e o Único que porá fim a tudo com Seu Juízo Final. O foco no tratado de Agostinho também mostrará como a disputa teológica política entre Carl Schmitt e Erik Peterson deve ser examinada mais

uma vez, principalmente para redefinir o conceito de soberania pelo conceito de crise, pois ser considerado um soberano é em si algo a ser decidido.

Palavras-chave: Crise. Soberania. Teologia Política. Cidade de Deus. Schmitt. Peterson.

Political theology: Carl Schmitt and Erik Peterson

Crisis is a word that we have been constantly using and hearing in the last years, due mainly to the global pandemic of COVID-19. This word, however, is so often used that almost covers all aspects of life. Reinhart Koselleck refers to the “inflationary usage” (2002, p. 236) of this concept in modernity. Derived from the Greek verb *krinein*, that means *to cut, to select, to decide, to judge*; and, by extension, *to measure, to quarrel, to fight*; “crisis aimed at a definite, irrevocable decision” (KOSELLECK, 2002, p. 237), and, as such, implied strict alternatives that permitted no further revision (success/failure; right/wrong; life/death). In the medical Hippocratic School, the concept referred to the critical phase of a sickness in which the decision between life and death was due. In the case of the theological use, taken up from legal language, *crisis* and its Latin translation as *judicium* is especially important in Christianity, meaning the judgment before God. Coming from different discourses, *crisis* referred to *the pressure of time* “in order to prevent disaster or to search for salvation” (KOSELLECK, 2002, p. 238). Hence, this medical and theological use moved toward a historico-philosophical dimension that entailed that “the entire course of history can be interpreted out of its diagnosis of time” (KOSELLECK, 2002, p. 239), which started to be especially important in Modernity. In this paper, I will show how this concept of crisis is at the heart of Political Theology¹ focusing on the major work of Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*. Augustine’s strategy is to gather both medical and theological meanings of *crisis* to argue for the unique sovereignty of the One God, the only one that decides and judges over the course of history and the One that will bring everything to an end by His Final Judgement, the only One that decides over and has the power to give life or death, happiness or misery, redemption or damnation.

“Political Theology” is a very broad term to include reflections on how politics and theology are intertwined in history. The Christian Political Theology stems from three “roots”: Judeo-Christian Scriptures, Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei*,² and the emergence of the *Political Theology* as a distinct specific discipline in the XXth century (PHILLIPS, 2012, p. 11-30). The ground-breaking work in XXth century’s Political Theology was Carl Schmitt’s *Politische Theologie* (1922), focused on the concept of sovereignty. “Sovereign is he who decides on the state of exception” (SCHMITT, 2009, p. 13). This definition is paramount, if one is to understand the meaning of both sovereignty and juridical system, and their mutual relationship. For, although a sovereign is the one who decides in all cases, only in the limit-case of an exceptional situation can the concept of sovereignty be clarified: “for the decision on the exception is a decision in the ultimate sense” (SCHMITT, 2009, p. 13). Since the exception is, by definition, impossible to

¹ One must notice that, although Koselleck regards his own work as heavily influenced by Carl Schmitt, his “history of the concepts” (*Begriffsgeschichte*) is antithetic to the Political Theology, and this contraposition enabled him to emancipate his vision of history from any direct political connotation (MEHRING, 2013, p. 169).

² Augustinism is still important in Political Theology controversies today, mainly concerning the question of liberalism and Christianity (as one could see in the works of Reinhold Niebuhr, John Milbank, Stanley Hauerwas, Eric Porter, John Bethke Elshain, Oliver O’Donovan). As Eric Porter would argue, “the continuing debate over modern liberalism has to a large extent consisted in variations on Augustinian themes and antiphonal responses to them” (quoted in: PHILLIPS, 2012, p. 121).

delimitate by a current juridical order, the only one who can decide/define (*entscheiden*) what is to be done is the sovereign himself. The "state of exception" (*Ausnahmezustand*), thus, plays a central role in the understanding of what sovereignty really and deeply means, for it shows that a juridical order depends ultimately on a sovereign decision. By grounding law on a sovereign decision, Schmitt is attacking the *naïve* understanding of the juridical system as being self-sufficient, and the understanding of legitimate political decisions as depending on the existing and prevailing norms (as it is the case of Hans Kelsen's theory of law). Against this liberal illusion, the main question of sovereignty is "who decides on the power of authority when it is not regulated constitutionally, that is, who is competent (*wer zuständig ist*) when the juridical order (*Rechtsordnung*) does not resolve the problem of competence (*Zuständigkeit*)" (SCHMITT, 2009, p. 16-17). This decision is made by the sovereign, despite the existing juridical norms, showing the nature of sovereign authority, which *does not need a right to create rights* (SCHMITT, 2019, p. 19). In defining the concept of sovereignty, Schmitt finds in theology the epistemological place to understand it. Schmitt calls this theological grounding of politics, "Political Theology", and offers a definition of it:

All of the key concepts of the Modern theory of the State are secularized theological concepts. Not only because of their historical evolution, for they were transferred from theology to the Theory of the State, as it is the case from the Almighty God (*allmächtige Gott*) to the omnipotent legislator (*omnipotenten Gesetzgeber*), but also because of a systematic structure, which knowledge is indispensable to the sociological consideration of these concepts. The *state of exception* (*Ausnahmezustand*) has for jurisprudence an analogous meaning as it has the miracle (*Wunder*) for theology. Only understanding this analogy can one acknowledge the evolution of the philosophical and political ideas of the last centuries. The Modern idea of the "rule of law" was coined along Deism, a theology and a metaphysics that relegate Miracles and do not admit any exceptional violation of natural laws that is implicit in the concept of miracle and produced by a direct intervention, as they do not admit also any direct intervention of the sovereign in the ruling juridical order. The Enlightenment's rationalism does not admit exceptional cases (*Ausnahmefall*) in any of its forms (SCHMITT, 2009, p. 43).

Also focusing on this shared semantical ground between theology and politics, Erik Peterson wrote his essay, *Monotheism as a political problem* (1935). Peterson was concerned with neutralizing the universal presupposition that entailed Schmitt's understanding of Political Theology, by excluding Christianity from this epistemological scheme that mirrors monotheism with monarchism by arguing that both Trinity and Eschatology. His essay was a direct attack against the raising of German Nazi movement, by rejecting any possibility of identifying the *Kingdom of God* with a historical human reign (URÍBARRI, 1999, p. 30-32). According to Peterson, one of these identifications can be found in the historical-eschatological connection drawn by Eusebius of Caesarea between the Emperor Augustus and the Gospels. In Eusebius' view, there is a providential connection between the end of the Jewish Nation and Augustus monarchy, whose Empire will dissolve pluralistic polyarchies and polytheism, and will bring a definite peace under the One God and the One Ruler, mirroring the political and the theological. On the contrary, argues Peterson, Augustin of Hippo suspended any possible connection between the Emperor and Christ, and between the *Kingdom of God* and the worldly empires: Christian peace cannot be associated with the *pax romana*, but only with the eschatological *Second Coming* of Christ. Peterson, therefore, ends his essay dilapidating any attempt to build a *Christian Political Theology*, in the name of both the Trinity and of Eschatology: "the peace that the Christian seeks is won by no emperor, but is solely a gift (*Geschenk*) of him who is higher than all understanding" (PETERSON, 2011, p. 104-105). However, one should give

this contraposition between Eusebius and Augustine further examination, by reading *De Civitate Dei* within the Political Theology discussion.

De Civitate Dei: the judgment of God over history

If Christianity is about the way that God redeems us, then this economy of redemption must take place in history, and Christian faith is but the narratives of this redemptory work of God, and the tension between the historical, the eschatological and the Church as messianic are intermingled. Augustine's *De civitate Dei* is a claim on God's unique and absolute sovereignty, exercised even over the political realm of human history. Written amid the breaking down of the Roman Empire, Augustine argues against the accusation that Christians are to blame for Rome's ruin. Because Rome has abandoned the cult to their gods, it has lost their protection; because Rome started to praise a foreign God (the Jewish-Christian God), it was left unprotected. The old and stark bond between the religion and the state (defined by Cicero as *civil religion*) entailed that national unity was a correlate of religious unity, and a religious dissension causes a political division. Augustine must, therefore, face a double task: on the one hand, to work for the unity of the Roman Empire, an Empire that offer Christianity a territory of peace and expansion, and, on the other hand, to argue for a Sovereign God that could ground a universal unity of humankind. However, the geniality of Augustine is to bring these two tasks into a dialectical logic pierced by the eschatological dimension of Christianity. For, on the one hand, although the Roman Empire must be considered in a positive way as a historical mean to achieve human peace and happiness, this Empire must not be identified with the Kingdom of God. On the other hand, the kind of sovereignty that the Christian God performs is developed through His Trinitarian activity, and its intrinsic political power is not bound to a particular nation or to a particular time in history, but it aims at the universality both of humankind and of history. Both claims, grounded on the eschatological nature of the *Kingdom of God*, entail a dialectical relationship between human and divine dominion: one cannot be separated from the other. This is the everlasting originality of Augustine's perspective which will define Christian Political Theology until today.

In the first of the two parts of the *City of God*, Augustine will engage with the history of the Roman Empire, and how this history can be interpreted from the perspective of God's *providence (providentia)*, turning the Roman Empire at the same time as something strange to the Kingdom of God, but also as a mean to God's will. At the very start of his work, Augustine argues that one should distinguish between two kinds of *dominion (dominatio)* through history, translated into political terms by the confrontation between the *City of God* and the *City of Men (De civitate Dei, I, 1)*. To discern the very nature of God's dominion or sovereignty, Augustine engages with a long debate with the Roman theology, whose gods are themselves in a constant struggle between themselves and cannot offer any protection or peace at all: "to worship 'vanquished' gods as protectors -he claims- is to rely not on divinities but on defaulters" (I, 3). However, in the midst of history, where good and evil are mingled and God's power cannot be clearly detected, the whole theological problem is how to discern a defaulter divinity from the true sovereign God, and this is the problem of *providence*, the very divine work of distributing the good and bad fortune (I, 8). As Christian, the believer is a good servant of God if he is to regard God's will as his great resource, albeit the sufferings that he must endure during his lifetime (I, 10), for the justice of God will be clearly seen in the End of times and, in the meantime, "the providence of the Creator and Governor of the universe is a profound mystery" (I, 28). The

holy men that are subjected to God's rule, the saints, will play, thus, a key role in this argument for God's providence, for the saints are the witness (martyrs) of His sovereign power on this earth (I, 13). These holy men, instruments of God's will, witness His power albeit the terrible fortune they had to endure. The way in which the saints witness the power of God is not by their present good fortune, but by their hope in the ultimate victory of God over history and the ultimate gift of an eternal lifetime of bliss after death. Conversely, saints are not subjected to earthly rules or laws, but only to God's command, for if He is the sole Creator and Sovereign of the world, only His commands are absolute, so when His orders are clearly heard, saints should not be accused as unlawful people but as obedient to the True Sovereign (I, 26). Those, instead, that are not subjected to God's rule are enslaved to "the oppressive domination of demonic powers" (I, 31). But, if God is then the true source of justice and good, the fall of the Roman Empire should not be ascribed to Christians, but to Romans themselves, who praise their pagan gods, those who are a source of depravation (I, 32), and Romans themselves, whose vicious lives are to blame for their ruin (I, 33). However, far from destructing the Empire as a whole, it is thanks to God that Romans are still alive, and in sparing them He is warning them to amend their erratic ways by means of penitence (I, 34). God's *decision* over history, the discernment between God's allies and God's enemies is, thus, not clear at all: why would He spare the life of the Roman Empire? Why He condemns the truthful to a life of misery? The mystery of God's providence can only be understood by the correlative mysterious alignments of people on this earth, for there is no possible way to discern between the truly faithful to God's City and the adversaries to His power, those belonging to the City of Men. "In truth, those two cities are interwoven and intermixed (*permixtae*) in this era, and await separation at the last judgement" (*donec ultimo iudicio dirimantur*) (I, 35). The whole work of Augustine aims, thus, at showing this providence of "the true God, in whose power are all kingdoms" (*in cuius potestate sunt regna omnia*) (*De civitate Dei*, I, 36).

The City of God is characterized by Augustine as "the Heavenly Commonwealth, whose law is the will of God" (*caelestis re publica, ubi Dei voluntas lex est*) (*De civitate Dei*, II, 19). In this commonwealth, God is not just the lawgiver, but His will is the very essence of law, that is, there is no intermediaries and no possible misunderstanding or lacking of strength in the "force of the law". The force of the law is here identified with the power of God's will, the will/law of the ultimate sovereign of the whole world. Building upon Cicero's political philosophy, Augustine claims that a commonwealth is defined by the harmonic disposition of its different elements by the virtue of justice performed by the law, being concord and security the outcome of a well-ordered community. If this is so, a commonwealth is only real where a sound and just government organizes this political body, and that is, for Augustine, not to be found within the sphere of human politics, but "true justice is found only in that commonwealth whose founder and ruler is Christ" (II, 21). Not even pagan theology can offer an exemplary commonwealth, argues Augustine, for the struggles between divinities that characterize Greek-Roman cosmogonies, "gives excuse for civil wars between men – and one may notice the malice or misery of gods like these" (II, 25). Only the "true religion", now reachable for the Roman citizens thanks to the grace of God by the Incarnation of the Son and the power of the Spirit, can achieve the promised "empire without end" that Virgil prophesized as the gift of Augustus: the Heavenly City outshines Rome, beyond comparison, for it is in this City that truth -and not arbitrary victory- is to be found; instead of high rank, holiness; instead of peace, felicity; instead of life, eternity (II, 29). Hence, only the one and true God is to be praised as "the giver of happiness" (IV, 25). And this God that gives happiness is not to be identified with Fortune: "He is himself in control, as the master of events, and arranges the order of things as a governor" (IV, 33), giving power to rulers

and kingdoms not for the sake of themselves, but because a providential plan only known by Him. Even the greatness of the Roman Empire is not due neither to chance nor to destiny, but to the providence of God, that rules over stars and men (V, 1). God is, therefore, the only Being that is not subjected to anything, but to whom everything is subjected to. That God is *Almighty* (*omnipotens*) means that "he does what he wills and does not suffer what he does not will" (*faciendo quod vult, non patiendo quod non vult*) (*De Civitate Dei*, V, 10). But it also means that He is the supreme reality, ruling with His Word and the Holy Spirit the entire world, every single existent being.³ And "it is beyond anything incredible that he should have willed the kingdoms of men, their dominations and their servitudes, to be outside the range of the laws of his providence (*a suae providentiae legibus alienas esse voluisse*)" (V, 11).

The peace that will be the outcome of this perfect subjection of man to God is only to be achieved in the *Eschaton*, in the *End of Times*. In the meantime, as *pilgrims*, the citizens of the Heavenly City must face the anxiety, misery, and illness due to sin. History is but the narratives of this "in between", and as there is a personal and individual story of this restoration of health by the grace of God (which was the red thread of Augustine's *Confessions*), there is also the history of the people of God, the history of how God elected and redeemed not singular persons, but a people as such (and this structures the work *The City of God*). In the second part of *The City of God*, Augustine examines the history of this people as it is revealed to us in the Scriptures. It seems that this history is a kind of counterpart of the history of the Roman Empire that was at the heart of the first part of this work. Somehow, although the history of the people of God is dramatic, and one finds terrible events and sufferings, the constancy and the faithfulness by which God keeps His promise reveals His absolute sovereignty over history. *History* is written in capital letters as being just one, and the multitude of peoples on earth does not limit God's sovereignty: the History is one, because the Lord of history is one. Hence, even pagan history is subjected to the one and true God, according to His providence. Moreover, the rise of the most powerful empires, the Assyrian and the Roman, were under the providence of God (*De civitate Dei*, XVIII, 2). And this is not just random examples in Augustine's argument, for it is within these two empires that the history of the chosen people takes place, as if it were the earthly scenery for God's activity: the people of Israel is constituted as such with the giving of the Laws to Moses as the consequence of their emancipation from Egypt, and the crucifixion of Jesus and the development of the Christian Church takes place under the political rule of the Roman empire.

The *chosen people of God* is a key topic in Political Theology, evidently. But the question on the nature of this people is not just as simple. The people of Israel is not the same in nature than the Church of Jesus, and their kind of political structure and universality is by no means the same. Thus, to examine a Christian Political Theology, one should focus more on the Church than on Israel. The historical turning point in this "interruption" of the theologico-political meaning of the chosen people should be found in the figure of Paul of Tarsus. Despite this transformation from Israel to the Church, the chosen people of God is still the descendants of Abraham. The political structure of this chosen people is not a physical or territorial one, for its meaning is ultimately spiritual. As Augustine claims, the house of God is not made of stones, but of men; God's house is made up by all those who are faithful believers of Jesus Christ (XVII, 8). This community of believers, that will constitute the spiritual body of which Christ is the

³ Batut argues that Augustine makes a difference between *omnipotens* and *omnitenens*: whereas *omnipotens* declares God to be Almighty and refer to his capacity to create from nothing, *omnitenens* refers to his Lordship upon the creation and His creatures. And, in the same line of thought, Augustine differentiates *potentia* and *potestas* (that already appeared in Tertullian): *potestas* is God's *potentia* when it is exercised according to justice regarding creation. (BATUT, 2009, p. 502).

head, is somehow anticipated in the figure of Noah's ark, for "this is a symbol of the City of God on pilgrimage on this world, of the Church which is saved through the wood on which was suspended 'the mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus' (1 Tim. 2, 5)" (XV, 26). In fact, the measurements of this ark symbolize the human body, the reality in which God came in Jesus. Hence, the glory of God's house, which was prophesized by Haggai in the Old Testament, finds its fulfilment in the Church of Christ, and the restoration of the Temple is not physical, but is to be found in the Second Covenant, when the temple is made of "living stones", that is, of those men who believe and who themselves have been created anew (XVIII, 48). However, this fulfilment is not yet complete, for in the Church itself there is a *mixture* of elect and reprobate: the Church, thus, rejoice only in expectation, itself being a pilgrim, and through its present humiliations is preparing for future exaltation, when God will be all in all in the good (XVIII, 49). Until the Final Judgement comes, the miseries and sufferings of the faithful empowers God's sovereignty, and the persecution of Christians and the testimony of the martyrs serve God to eradicate the false worship of pagans and bring them to the veneration of the one God made visible in Christ (XVII, 8). This pilgrimage goes on till the end of history, and in the meantime, everything is mingled and confused:

In this book we have brought our discussion to this point, and we have shown sufficiently, as it seemed to me, what is the development in this mortal condition of the two cities, the earthly and the Heavenly, which are mingled together from the beginning to the end of their history (*ab initio usque finem permixtarum*). One of them, the earthly city, has created for herself such false gods (*falsos deos*) as she wanted, from any source she chose -even creating them out of men - in order to worship them with sacrifices. The other city, the Heavenly City on pilgrimage in this world (*quae caelestis peregrinator in terra*), does not create false gods. She herself is the creation of the true God, and she herself is to be his true sacrifice (*a vero Deo ipsa fit, cuius verum sacrificium sit*). Nevertheless, both cities alike enjoy the good things, or are afflicted with the adversities of this temporal state, but with a different faith, a different expectation, a different love, until they are separated by the final judgement (*donec ultimo iudicio separentur*), and each receives her own end, of which there is no end" (*De civitate Dei*, XVIII, 54).

But now, for how long must the people of God suffer from the persecutions of the earthly city? The *End of Times* will come when the people of God suffer the final persecution, which "will be inflicted by the Antichrist (*Antichristo*), and that will be only extinguished by Jesus himself, present in person" (XVIII, 53). The salvation that God promised is but the achievement of eternal bliss and the end of this internal war in ourselves between the forces of evil and the forces of good (XIX, 4). And this is also true concerning the cities, for peace is always doubtful within social life: although we can distinguish between friends and foes,⁴ and live in peace with the former and in war with the latter, one never really knows who the enemy is, for we don't really know the hearts of our friends. The real enemies are not outsiders; "a man's enemies are those of his own household" (*et inimici hominis domestici eius*) (XIX, 5). Hence, if not even our home is secure, cities are intrinsically dangerous, and peace is just a temporary state, always threatened. This internal war is the worst kind of war, and even between good men, friendship and loyalty cannot be taken for granted: everyone, even our most dear friend, can betray us, and the betrayal of our most loyal friends is the worst danger from which we should take care (XIX, 8). Accordingly, the reward for a lifetime of struggle against evil and of endurance is the everlasting peace which no adversary can disturb (XIX, 10). This bliss of everlasting peace is the very

⁴ The opposition *friend/foe* is what defines the concept of the political, according to Schmitt (1987).

fulfilment of the saints (XIX, 11). Everything that exists, argues Augustine, aim ultimately at peace, and war itself is made in order to achieve future peace (XIX, 12). Even peace should be achieved concerning the relationship between the two cities, the earthly and the heavenly, for both *men of spirit* and *men of flesh* pertaining to these two kinds of households need and make use of earthly and temporal things. Even the citizens of the City of God make use of these worldly things as a pilgrim in a foreign land, who uses these things as supports in his journey. Among the earthly things that the citizen of the City of God must make use is the political peace, which creates a harmonious agreement concerning what is needed in this mortal life. Hence, these pilgrims live a life of captivity in this earthly city as in a foreign land and obey the laws of this city by which the needs for the mortal life are regulated: "since this mortal condition is shared by both cities, a harmony (*concordia*) may be preserved between them in things that are relevant to this condition" (XIX, 17). What the heavenly city cannot share with the earthly is the law concerning religion, for Christian can only worship the true God of Jesus Christ, and there is no possibility of an arrangement or compromise on this matter. Hence, the citizens of this City of God had to endure the anger and hatred of the citizens of the city of men. On this account, the believer will never be subjected by the law of the earthly city, for the Heavenly City does not care about the ways in which the earthly peace is achieved, such as customs, laws, or constitution. However, this Holy City does not annul nor abolish these earthly laws but maintains them and follows them as long as they don't go against the true Christian religion. Hence, regarding the political realm (a nation, a culture, a territory, a sovereign), "the Heavenly City is on pilgrimage in this world and calls out citizens from all nations and so collects a society of aliens, speaking all languages" (XIX, 17). Even more, the Heavenly City does not only make use of the earthly peace, but in fact relate this peace to the heavenly peace, the only true peace, "for this peace is the perfectly ordered and completely harmonious fellowship in the enjoyment of God, and of each other in God (*ordinatissima scilicet et concordissima societas fruendi Deo et invicem in Deo*)" (XIX, 17).

One could easily discern here the key move of Augustine, not only regarding the duties that Christians have to the earthly cities where they live, but also how the notion of peace is performing a normative task concerning the idea of a city. In contrast to the peace of the empire, which is built by the force of domination and by the usurpation of differences, the peace of the heavenly city knows no end because it is not a peace gained by a fragile and arbitrary or contingent power. The peace of the Heavenly City is a perfect one because every citizen lives happily under the same Ruler, from whom they obtain true and eternal happiness. And this Heavenly City is not one among others, and it is not limited in its extension as the empire is; this City of God is absolutely universal, and calls everyone to it, regardless of their cultural, linguistic, national, historic belonging. In this universality, thus, peace is such that it cannot be shaken from the outside. Consequently, the peace of the Heavenly City cannot be disturbed neither from within nor from the outside, for the only outside of this City is the powerless mob of the fallen angels and fallen men. The City of God is, therefore, the paradigmatic city to which every human association should aim at. Taking Cicero's *De Republica* and his definition of the state as the "wealth of the people", and people meaning "a multitude united in association by a common sense of right and a community of interest", Augustine argues that Rome was never truly a state (XIX, 21). Instead, Augustine claims that a commonwealth or people should be defined as an association of rational beings united by a common object of love, and therefore, its health depends on the object they love. Consequently, only a people that is bound together by the love of God and is subjected to His rules is truly virtuous, for true virtues are impossible without religion (XIX, 24-25). Hence, only the City of

God is to be truly called a city, for peace is only to be found by those who serve God, and it will not be found on this earth, but in the *Kingdom of God* (XIX, 27).

The subject of the XXth book of the *City of God* is the *Last Judgement*, the eschatological time of the return of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Kingdom of God. Although the second coming of Jesus is called the "Last Day", or the "Day of divine judgement", Augustine clarifies that the reference to the "day" must not be taking explicitly, for nobody knows how long this final judgment will take. This *inter-regnum* is an interesting figure. In any case, the name of the *eschaton* or End of times, makes clear that, although God is judging everyone (men and angels) and their particular actions from the very beginning of history, that day is called the *Day of Judgment* in a special sense. In effect, "it will then be made clear that true and complete happiness belongs to all good, and only to them, while all the wicked, and only the wicked, are destined for deserved and supreme unhappiness" (XX, 1). Although God's judgements are untraceable in this life, for fortunes and virtues do not always go together, in this "Day of the Lord" He will make clear His Justice. In this Day, our scepticism on God's justice will be ruled out, for in the present time we don't know why He allows evil things to happen, but then His Justice will be manifest. In that Day all His actions and judgements within history will be justified (XX, 2). The plans of God and His justice are a secret for every of His creatures, just as the intentions of the sovereign are not to be known by his subjects: one thing though is certain for the devout, and that is "that what is hidden is just" (*iustum esse quod latet*) (XX, 2). In this Day of the Lord, Augustine, taking the *Apocalypse* of John, argues that there will be a time before the End when the saints will rule the Earth, after Christ emancipates the good from the captivity of the Devil. What is clear for him is that, after this period of peace the Devil will be unleashed again to show his malice in all its strength, but also to show how the City of God will overcome such a powerful enemy and those who belong to this faction, and praise "the immense glory of its Redeemer, its Helper, its Deliverer" (*cum ingenti gloria sui redemptoris, adiutoris, liberatoris aspiciat*) (XX, 8). It is interesting that this last assault of the Devil also shows the essential difference between the "kingdom of the saints" and the "eternal kingdom": whereas the kingdom of the saints does *not* know an absolute peace, for there is still a struggle against sin and vices, in the eternal Kingdom where God the King rules indisputably, absolute and perfect peace will be enjoyed (XX, 9). Again, the idea that grounds this claim is that peace is only to be found where only one ruler governs without any danger of a competing sovereign, where no factions can overthrow the king or damage his power. This perfect peace cannot be enjoyed, thus, before the Day of the Lord, and the reference to Gog and Magog, whose "universal city of the Devil" damages and attacks the "universal City of Christ" through the whole earth (*De civitate Dei*, XX, 11), makes clear that the only possibility of achieving peace is by the absolute affirmation of a single power.

The question remains, however: why did not the Kingdom of God arrived already? This question would also imply another one: why did not the Antichrist attacked with all his fierce yet? Since the coming of the Kingdom of God is inseparable of the ultimate battle between the City of Jesus and the City of the Devil, then the question on the delay of the *eschaton* is connected to the question on the element that *restrains* the Antichrist to make its final move. This exciting question is raised around the concept of *katechon* used by Paul of Tarsus (*Thess. 2, 1-12*). Augustine himself interprets this Pauline fragment (*De civitate Dei*, XX, 19), where he depicts the Antichrist as the "apostate", the who stands against God. This apostate would "take his seat as the temple of God", meaning that he would purport to be himself God's Church. Thus, the ultimate danger of the Antichrist is that he will appear to be the true messenger or representative of God, and even pretend to be God Himself. Hence, the fight is not with an external enemy, but with the internal enemy within the Church. Because the City of God and the City of man are

mingled together, the Church is *permixta*, both made of good and evil people. The coming of the Kingdom, thus, will depend on the fight inside the Church itself, and only the victory of Jesus at the End will separate the good from the bad, and clean the Church so that it becomes the true house of God. However, although Paul referred explicitly to the figure of the Antichrist, he did not clarify to what does this mysterious "power that restrains" (*katéchon*) the manifestation of the Devil's ultimate power refers. The meaning of this passage is even beyond the understanding of Augustine, and does not take a position regarding the meaning of the *katéchon* (XX, 19).⁵ In any case, when the Day of Judgement arrives, God will show His absolute power. God is called the Almighty (*omnipotens*) because He has the power to do whatever He wills, and it is this power that grounds the Christian believes in marvels and miracles (XXI, 7). But it is also His omnipotence, His absolute power as an absolute sovereign, the reason of His mercy. In effect, the justice of God's punishment to men for their disobedience meets God's merciful grace, given to the people (lesser in number) that stand up from the rest of humanity and are not condemned to eternal punishment (XXI, 12). In His sovereign capacity, He can both retribute in justice and give pardon as a graceful Lord. The redeeming work of God takes man from his natural belonging to the heritage of Man and adopts him as His son by grace, turning him into the heir of His Kingdom (XXI, 15). For this reason, the citizens of the pilgrim City of God on earth should find peace with themselves in believing that they will inherit the Kingdom and make war against the demonic powers during their lives: "better war with the hope of everlasting peace, than slavery without any thought of liberation" (XXI, 15).

Absolute liberation and peace will be achieved only in the *Eschaton*. The City of God is an eternal city that knows no end, where all the citizens will be immortal, and men will obtain this immortality that is proper to the angels by the grace of God, who promised this life of eternal bliss for those who are obedient to Him; every spirit -angelic and human- will be bound in one fellowship in which God Himself is their means of life and their felicity (XXII, 1). In His eternal and unchangeable will, God turns everything that seem to oppose His will towards those good and just ends that He have planned. "God's activity in the heart of those who obey his commandments is also called God's will" (*dicitur etiam voluntas Dei, quam facit in cordibus oboedientium mandatis eius*). It is due to the faith in God and in Christ that the saints do not doubt of God's omnipotence, and, as Augustine argues, the belief in God does not grow out of the power of His City. In contrast to the Roman political theology, where the earthly powers are worshipped as gods, the Christian political theology worship God not because of this earthly political power. In Christ, this eternal and true good of eternal life and bliss is fulfilled. And the belief in Christ was not due to human persuasion, but to the power of God (XXII, 7). Even after the First coming of Christ, the miracles performed by God's power so that men believe in Him did not cease to happen (XXII, 8). The miracles that the martyrs performed in Christ's name bear witness to their faith (XXII, 8), and show their superiority over the demons (XXII, 9). And all of these miracles show that God's power is infinite, and that His promise of eternal bliss will be fulfil. In this eternal City we will see God and partake of God's peace: peace in ourselves, among ourselves, and peace with God (XXII, 29). In this Day of the Lord, as if it were an Eight day that knows no end and will last forever, "we shall be still and see, we shall see

⁵ The concept of the *katéchon* and its Theo-political interpretations is paramount to understand the dialectics between the earthly and the heavenly, between time and eternity, from an eschatological perspective. The tension between the End of times and history is expressed in this idea of "something that holds", for holding is both a kind of expectation and a kind of rejection. This ambiguity gives way to different interpretation of what is holding what, or what it is holding to what. And this ambivalence is also referring to the role that both the earthly powers and the demonic powers play in the history of redemption. For an essay discussing this enigmatic figure of the *katéchon* and its possible political and theological derivations, see Cacciari (2013).

and we shall love, we shall love and we shall praise" (*ibi vacabimus et videbimus, videbimus et amabimus, amabimus et laudabimus*) (*De civitate Dei*, XXII, 30).

2 Crisis as a theological-political concept

Peterson's final thesis on the *liquidation* of Christian Political Theology was absolutely influential within Christian theology. Certainly, on the one hand the little treatise could be read as a piece of resistance against the Nazi regime; on the other hand, Political Theology was too bounded with Carl Schmitt, who participated in the Nazi movement and, therefore, was then stigmatized as a totalitarian thinker. From 1960 onwards, Christian Political Theology will be transformed into the question on how Christians should engage with the political situation in the light of the Gospels (as in Johannes Metz, Jürgen Moltmann, and Liberational theology). But the question on the conceptual correspondences between theology and politics was for many years left aside, and Carl Schmitt's response to Peterson's thesis appeared thirty-five years after the publication of *Monotheismus als Politische Problem*. According to Schmitt (1970, p. 9), the *closure* of any Political Theology turned to be a "scientific myth" (*wissenschaftlichen Legende*). Schmitt attends to the strategic position that Eusebius of Caesarea plays in Peterson's argument. Schmitt stresses that Peterson does not discard Eusebius' theology because of its Trinitarian ideas, but because of its posture regarding salvation and eschatology, especially concerning the link between Roman Empire and History of Redemption. Schmitt argues against Peterson in this exemplary use of Eusebius, seen in his treatise as an ideologist, and claims that it is always possible for a Christian to read his historical and political situation from a theological standpoint; in fact, there cannot be any "pure, apolitical" theology. The exemplary case of Augustine of Hippo is also quite illustrative of this political dimension of theology. Amid the falling of Roman Empire, Augustine claims an absolute difference between the Kingdom of God and the politics of men, giving an eschatological interpretation to his actual historical situation. In the case of Eusebius, who suffered Roman persecution in the times of Diocletian, it is not surprising that his eschatological reading linked the Emperor Constantin with the History of Redemption. Eusebius should only be discarded if he identified the Emperor with God or Christ, which he certainly did not. Schmitt claims, thus, that "Peterson's argument moves within the separation between the purely theological and the impurely political, in an abstract and absolute disjunction that makes it possible to overlook the concrete historical events, where the sacred and the mundane are combined (*in deren Auswirkung er an jeder konkreten, Geistlich-Weltlich gemischten Wirklichkeit des konkreten geschichtlichen*)" (1970, p. 82). In a way, Schmitt is using Augustine's concept of *permixta* when referring to this mixing (*gemischten*) between the spiritual and the mundane to stress the need for a judgement: history is a permanent crisis, and the Christians judge the passing of time as theologically significant. God is judging and separating the faithful from the unfaithful, friends from enemies, and is acting upon history, intervening on history with sovereign power. Is hard not to see how Schmitt's concepts of sovereignty are not working theologically in Augustine's *City of God*.

The very formula, "political monotheism is ended theologically" -argues Schmitt- has a scientific precise meaning if one understands it within the *theological-juridical* frame. If theology and politics are two different spheres separated by its content, a *political* question could only be ended *politically*. If theology gives a theological answer to a political question, the theologian is either renouncing to the world and the political sphere, or he is trying to influence this political sphere. Thus, he is either renouncing to any theological competence concerning the political

(theology is pure, apolitical) or he is starting a conflict of competences. Therefore, the formula "political monotheism is ended theologically" entails the theologian's ambition to decide on the political sphere, a desire that becomes even more political as it claims that the theological authority is above the political power. If the theologian insists in his theological decision, then he has decided theologically over a political question and take a political stance. In the end, argues Schmitt, Peterson's verdict is pretentious and apparently triumphal, for it is a sharp declaration, but abstract and absolute, about the question of *competence*. A conflict is always a dispute between organizations and institutions, "a fight (*Streit*) between *instances* (*Instanzen*) and not between *substances* (*Substanzen*)" (SCHMITT, 1970, p. 106). The *conflict of competences* should end with the question *quis iudicabit?*, or with a territorial and regional delimitation. The Augustinian doctrine of the Two Cities will face the question "*Quis iudicabit? Quis interpretabitur?*" time over time, till the End of History.⁶

Who decides *in concreto*, for men who act with a creaturely independence, the question: what is sacred and what is mundane, and how to behave in front of the *res mixtae*, those which characterize (*ausmachen*) the whole of the earthly existence of this dual-nature (*Doppel-wesens*) (religious and mundane, spiritual and temporal) *men*, within the *interim* between the arrival (*Ankunft*) and the Second Coming (*Wiederkunft*) of the Lord? (SCHMITT, 1970, p. 107).

But, now, the Political Theology of Schmitt, focused mainly on the concept of sovereignty, finds in *crisis* (*iudicium*) even a more fundamental concept: for sovereign is he who decides over a *state of exception*, that is, is he who decides/discerns when an exception is such and demands his intervention. It should be noticed that in 1922, the second edition of one of the most important theologians of the XXth century was published: Karl Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*. In this work, the concept of *crisis* played a paramount role in understanding the dialectics between the Judgement of God and the judgment of the Church upon history (Korsch, 2013): in a way, history itself is a "state of exception" that needs the sovereign intervention of God as sovereign.

However, the concept of *crisis* seems to be even more fundamental than the one of sovereign, for the question of a competent sovereign is also a matter of a decision: who is deciding who the sovereign *really* is? In short, the sovereign is also *under trial*. The whole *De Civitate Dei* is but an apologetics of God as the true sovereign, an argument to discern the true sovereignty of the Christian God over the Pagan gods (hence, the subtitle of his treatise: *contra paganos*). Therefore, the very problem of Political Theology to be solve is how two competing communities (the religious and the political) struggle to decide on who has the ultimate sovereign competence over the pressing times of history, over the permanent crisis we are living in, one that is waiting for an ultimate decision, whether that be a final annihilation, or an eschatological consummation. If *crisis* is not just the verb "to discern", but the very process of discernment, then sovereignty is itself under this evaluation: the true sovereign is he who transcends this process and shows beyond any possible doubt his power. In the meantime, the so-deemed sovereign rules in-between competing adversaries. Even the sovereign God will show to be such when this competition is over, when the process of crisis ends in His Judgment... and this is something that He cannot show yet, if ever.

⁶ The use of Augustine by Schmitt and Peterson is examined by Gontier (2019), mainly by their interpretation of the *katechon* concerning the State and the Church.

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Sobre o autor

Martín Grassi

Licenciado en Filosofía pela Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina Santa María de Los Buenos Aires (2007). Doctor en Filosofía pela Universidad de Buenos Aires (2014). Pós-doutorado pela University of Oxford (2016). Atualmente é Investigador asistente del Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Técnica e Profesor da Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina Santa María de Los Buenos Aires.

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