Augustine of Hippo (354-430) between the classic antiquity and the roman empire: instruction, education and action

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ABSTRACT. The North Africa churches used to be an advanced frontier for Christianization in the West World of the Late Antiquity. And yet, Augustine's presence favorized the local tendency towards the debate about Christian faith, and the drawing of educational directions for the people. In Augustinian perspective, Education role overlapped formal rules of the Classic World disciplines, by proposing the raising of a new culture. The formative perspective was a highlight into the Augustinian activity, and that turned very quickly to the replacement of the knowledge in the way of Christianization. In the center of this arrangement were the works for laics, although never excluding bishop's high writings.

Keywords: knowledge; episcopacy; christianity; North Africa; culture.

Agostinho de Hipona (354-430) entre a antiguidade clássica e o império romano: instrução, educação e ação

RESUMO. As dioceses do norte africano constituíam um posto avançado da cristianização no Ocidente tardo-antigo. A presença de Agostinho favorecia a vocação da região para o debate em torno da fé e para a formulação de diretrizes formativas para os fiéis. Na perspectiva agostiniana, o papel da educação ultrapassava o ensino formal das normas das disciplinas do mundo clássico, e propunha a criação de uma nova cultura. O viés formativo caracterizou a ação agostiniana, que se voltou rapidamente para a reelaboração de saberes tendo como finalidade a cristianização. No interior desse rearranjo, assumiriam papeis de destaque as obras destinadas a leigos, embora sem prejuízo da tratadística episcopal.

Palavras-chave: conhecimento; episcopado; cristianismo; norte da África; cultura.

Agustín de Hipona (354-430) entre la antigüedad clássica y el imperio romano: instrucción, educación y acción

RESUMEN. Las diócesis del norte africano se constituyeron como un puesto avanzado de la cristianización en el Occidente de la Antigüedad Tardía. La presencia de Agustín favorecía la vocación de la región por el debate en torno de la fe y por la formulación de normas directivas para los fideles. El la perspectiva agustiniana, el rol de la educación transcendía la enseñanza formal de las normas de las disciplinas del mundo clásico, para proponer la creación de una nueva cultura. El carácter formativo he caracterizado la acción agustiniana, la cual se volvió muy rápidamente a la reelaboración de un saber cuya finalidad era la cristianización. En este rediseño, tuvieron rol destacado las obras destinadas a los laicos, aunque sin daño a la tratadística episcopal.

Palabras-clave: conocimiento; obispado; cristianismo; norte de África; cultura.

Educating to form Christians: dilemmas of a Church Father

The year was 410. The bishop of Hippo, a city in North Africa not far from Carthage, shared his concerns between explaining to the faithful of his congregation the event of the day before - the unexpected sacking of Rome by the Visigoth and hitherto empire's ally Alaric - and suppressing the advance of Donatist heresy around Carthage - whose bishopric had retreated in its crackdown on 'deviance' - and, last but not least, using arguments from classical rhetoric to debate an illustrated pagan aristocracy , made up of refugees from Rome in the halls of Carthage - which motivated him to write his masterpiece, *On the city of God*.

Augustine of Hippo therefore had concerns arising from such a diverse agenda. The allegory of the olive press came to frequent Augustine's sermons: "This is the end of the year. It's time to be pressed". (*Enarratio in Psalms,* 136, 9, apud Brown, 2005, p. 362) Land of olive trees, North Africa was propitious to the image, which summarizes the Augustinian interpretation of the sacking of Rome: the catastrophes of the time represented the pressing of all humanity. Likewise, he justified the 'controlled catastrophe' of Donatist coercion by the Catholics. Humanity needed discipline and God, as a stern father, "[...] whips the son whom he welcomes" (*Sermon* 296, 10, cf. *Epistle* 99, 3, apud Brown, 2005, p. 363). But the pressing would eventually result in the release of the good olive oil: "The world staggers under crushing blows and the old man is troubled; the flesh is pressed and the spirit becomes fluid and crystalline olive oil". (*Sermon* 296, 6, cf. *Epistle* 111,2, apud Brown, 2005, p. 363) Augustine's reaction to the events of the present therefore implied action: disasters would be of a corrective nature and would not necessarily represent a sign of the end times - this one he leaves as a possibility. In *The City of God*, as in Sermon 105, he states:

> [...] do not be discouraged, brothers: all earthly kingdoms will end. If this is the end, God is seeing it. Perhaps things have not yet reached this point: for some reason - let us call it weakness, mercy or simple meanness - we all hope the end has not yet come. (*Sermon,* 105, 11, apud Brown, 2005, p. 365)

Augustine believed in living in the Sixth and Last Age of the World, old age - *senectus mundi*. But he did not conceive of this reality as waiting on an imminent event; his perspective was that of someone for whom nothing new could happen: old age of the world, old age of Augustine. But in his sermons he would insist on the future tense: human action - or action of some select ecclesiastics - would be able to build, even in this life, the Celestial City.

According to the text of Genesis (1, 26), God created man in His image and likeness. In sinning man had fallen from his resemblance to the Creator, having remained only a trace - this is the meaning of the term Fall, used in reference to the original sin. For Augustine, man, being fallen from the condition of resemblance to the Creator, tends to God, and therefore seeks Him in order to be reconciled. All human existence on earth would therefore be a pilgrimage whose ultimate end would be the return to the heavenly kingdom, homeland of men where they would have been conceived as angels (Magalhães, 2015).

Within this context, the presence of the Incarnation in the Christian narrative would perform the function of giving meaning and purpose to the history of human existence. In incarnating himself according to human nature, Christ remembered and made present the resemblance announced in Creation. But beyond the incarnate God, the second person of the Trinity was also a divine *verbum* - the driving principle of the work of a God who creates from the Word: 'let there be'. The Greek term is even more illuminating in this sense: *logos* means ordered speech and has a semantic load similar to the Latin *ratio*. In resuming the *logos*, the Greek Patristics would associate it with wisdom - *sophía* - paving the way for an identification, present in Augustine, between divine *logos* and knowledge. *Sapientia* would have adapted "[...] to our so little carnal weakness, to become a model of life precisely by becoming a man" (Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, I, 11). For this reason, education was justified from the outset among Patristic theologians both on the Greek and Latin sides.

Man's pilgrim state on earth implied the transformation underlying the condition of imperfection: whereas God corresponded to perfection and immutability, the human condition was characterized by a mutability that mobilized men to educate themselves. In the Augustinian conception, education consisted of a privileged way to attain the "Truth that lives immutably [...]", from the purification of the spirit, presupposed to the attainment of sound eyes, "[...] that [may] behold the light and adhere to it when contemplated". (Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, I, 10) Despite the consensual thinking around the content of the treatise entitled *De doctrina christiana*, namely the problem of exegesis, many scholars point to the fact that the writing has undeniable pedagogical basis and, therefore, would be related to Augustine's pastoral activity. In other words, *De doctrina* would not consist in a treatise on exegesis itself, but rather in a formation manual with the aim of facilitating the interpretation of Scripture to Christianity in general. In this sense, it stands next to *De catechizandis rudibus*, a libel designed to promote the broad knowledge of the biblical text. The educational meaning of these works points to the fundamental concerns of the Bishop of Hippo's context of action - which would have placed knowledge in a prominent place for the realization of the ideal of all Christians: the reunion with the Creator.

The path taken by Augustine in relation to the conception of education from his maturity concerns the dilemmas faced in his episcopate in Hippo - a peripheral city in relation to the great radiating center of

culture and power, namely Carthage. Peter Brown points out that the great master, henceforth, "[...] circulated in an environment in which many men were entirely uneducated" (Brown, 2005, p. 330). His action in the monastery of Hippo bore witness to this aspect of his 'new' persona: there he would create mechanisms for a shared coexistence between educated and uncultured men. In the monastery or among the members of his congregation, Augustine had taken up the disposition to incarnate the "educator [...] of his circle" (Brown, 2005, p. 330).

The reunion with God was therefore available to man, despite the precariousness of his nature. God had endowed him with the will - ability to choose - and the intellect - ability to know. While the intellect always tended to God, the will was potentially deviant, unpredictable. 'I do not want to want' is the Augustinian topic for characterizing the tension between an intellect turning to God and a will that occasionally went the other way. This is the great motto of Augustine's pessimism. Sigmund Freud would argue that the prospect of happiness was intangible to men and would point to the three main sources of human suffering: the arrogance of nature, the fragility of the body, and the inadequacy of social norms (Freud, 1930-2010). Regarding the first two obstacles, Freud would note that there is nothing to be done: we will never dominate nature, whereas our organism, which also participates in nature, will always be a "[...] transient construction, limited in adequacy and performance" (Freud, 1930-2010, p. 31). However, the creator of Psychoanalysis would not fail to point to a parallel alternative to the conclusion drawn by the bishop of Hippo: instead of making knowledge impossible, awareness of limitation would point the available way.

To man belonged the miserable condition of the fallen, born of sin and amid excrement; his nature did not lean for good - the image used in the *Confessiones* is famous (two twins being breastfed, and the first, though already sated, tries to prevent the second from feeding):

> Bitter adversities of the world, once, twice and three times bitter, because of the desire for prosperity, the hardness of adversity and the fear that it will overcome our ability to endure it! Who can deny that human life on earth is a constant temptation? (Augustine, *Confessiones*, I, 11).

But there was an alternative, a chance of redemption from the valley of tears: the (re)encounter with God was at will and it was a way for man, pilgrim and abandoned in the Earth City, to glimpse the Heavenly City.

De magistro: Augustine of Hippo between earthly life and the heavenly world

Saint Augustine was born Aurelius Augustinus in the year 354 in the city of Tagaste[1] in North Africa. For much of his adult life (about nine years), he lived in Carthage, a city of intense cultural life in the region. Then he went to Milan where he became a disciple of St. Ambrose. His reluctance to live a life of faith is well known. He would receive the priestly order only at 391, 37 years old. To him is attributed the sentence: 'Lord, grant me chastity and continence but not now'. In 395, he would become bishop of Hippo also in North Africa, from where his epithet comes. There he died in 430 from natural causes.

In his early writings, Augustine presents traces of Manichaeism. According to the so-called Manicheans, there would be two entities at the origin of the world: a good one that would have created the spirit world and a bad one that would have created the material world - which would contain all the things on earth. This perspective could only result in an anti-materialism, which would impose the negation of everything that referred to life in society.

By about 386 Augustine would convert to Catholicism and would deny Manichaeism. The writing *Confessiones* dates from around the year 400 and is not his last work. It is a work of maturity but it precedes *The City of God* (written starting in 410), his greatest work. This is a breakthrough in stylistic terms for the fifth century. Not being the first autobiography, the text innovates by not proposing an idealized vision: Augustine exposes his weaknesses and questions, in anguish, about his motivations. He finds himself a riddle in his own eyes, judging himself as a "land of trouble". The title indicates the purpose: it is a matter of recognizing one's own faults and also of connecting with God (both meanings of the Latin term *confessio*).

In his challenge to Manichaeism, the bishop of Hippo would assume a relative - as well as subtle - defense of materiality. In the *Confessiones*, he refers to the Manicheans as 'these' (*istes*), a pejorative form of Latin, and describes them as "[...] deceived and deceiving, talkative and mute" (Augustine, 1997, *Confessiones,* VII, 3). For Augustine, human society could not be regarded as essentially bad, but only inferior to heavenly society. Paradise, the state prior to the Fall, would be fully social - not the antithesis of

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[1] Present day Souk Ahras, Algeria.

worldly life. His reconquest was open to both desert monks and Christians of the Church established in the cities.

For Augustine, moral weakness, a constitutive feature of human nature, extinguished the categories of Roman society, placing humanity back on an ideal of universality. The prophecy of the 'reconquered paradise' - which supposed the reconciliation of men with their original nature - was in keeping with the Pauline ideal of 'simplicity of heart', to be reached by overcoming the concerns of the double heart - which characterized marriage and domestic life and that were the essence of existence in the 'world'.

In the militant Church, the *homo viator* was moving towards his true homeland - the Kingdom of God - through prayer, the liturgy and the ministry of the sacraments; the achievement of this objective was, in turn, subordinated to the institutional character of the *ecclesia* - endowed with an administrative apparatus and legal personality, linked to the distribution of material goods and the organization of the state. The unfolding of the phenomenon of the immersion of Christianity in the *saeculum* from the beginning of the fourth century would be assimilated in various ways in the Mediterranean world, according to the practices and leaders of the various communities. In his controversy with the donatists[2], Augustine would formulate a broad concept of the Church, designed to reconcile its supernatural character with its earthly attributions (Markus, 2007, p. 112-113). Throughout his work, he describes the concrete community of Christians that constitutes the Church as a mixed body of saints and evil, thus rejecting the idea of it as an elite of the elect in a profane world. In some passages, the two cities - earthly and heavenly - would coexist in the Empire and in the Church, the latter being identified with the City of God here and now, while the former was similarly open to both cities.

Thus, the Church that Augustine had described supposed the coexistence of the two cities not only in human life, but also in their institutions - albeit by definition imperfect. Renunciation of the material world - by choosing the hermitic life, for example - could not, therefore, elevate anyone above the fallen nature of man: this was the "[...] lowest common denominator of the great democracy of sinners gathered in the Catholic Church" (Brown, 1989, p. 265). Peter Brown refers to solidarity within the Christian basilica, frequented by all and devoid of distinctive spaces (opposing factors to Roman temples and synagogues) - the common bond among Christians was sin, and the distinguishing features of the categories necessarily departed from this inevitable assumption. Augustine stated in his *Confessiones* the scope and depth of original sin in the constitution of human nature: "The innocence of the child lies in the fragility of the limbs, not in the soul" (Augustine, *Confessiones,* I, 11).

This assumption about the constitution of human childhood would have profound consequences for the educational conception of the following centuries. In the first place, education imposed itself as 'necessary' to the human being, notably the Christian, as it consisted of a path to God. Secondly, "[...] the knowledge of God presupposed the knowledge of things" (Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, II, 17), relevant aspect of Augustine's emphasis on allegorical exegesis. According to the bishop of Hippo, knowledge of the manifestations of nature - that is, 'science' - would be fundamental to the correct understanding of the messages hidden in the biblical text, since "[...] ignorance of the nature of things makes interpretation of figurative expressions difficult when they refer to animals, stones, plants, or other beings often quoted in the Scriptures" (Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, II, 17).

Knowledge of the Word of God was not, therefore, without the recognition of the importance of studies in the natural and theoretical sciences, as it was their task to identify and explain earthly phenomena hidden in the Holy Scripture under an enigmatic terminology. Beyond the moral norms set forth in order to reach Truth, there is a willingness to use scientific knowledge, useful for knowledge of the world, which serves as a metaphor for the biblical message.

According to Peter Brown, there is an important biographical assumption to consider when dealing with the bishop of Hippo's relations with science. Deeply involved with knowledge issues throughout the years of his youth, it would have been this

> [...] the mold [in which] Augustine poured his intellectual life into midlife. The mind that had once hoped to prepare for the vision of God through the liberal arts would now rest on the solid and intractable mass of the Christian Bible (Brown, 2005, p. 326).

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[2] Donatism is a heresy dating back to the first half of the fourth century, following the action of Bishop Donatus in North Africa. One of its foundations was to seek to protect its church from contact with the so-called *traditores*, those who had abandoned Christianity during the Great Persecution of Diocletian (303-305). The strand would survive until the Islamic expansion of the seventh and eighth centuries, supporting the conception of the Church as a persecuted "elite", namely, a group of faithful, holy and endowed with tasks foreign to the hostile world of the secular society that surrounded it. Catholics, in turn, should be seen as apostates, committed to secular authorities - the same ones who had persecuted Christianity - and would represent a permanent betrayal of the tradition of martyrs.

Evil is absence; only good exists

Augustine's doctrine of the Church implied his refusal of Manichaeism, which he did by denying the existence of Evil. There is only one Creator of all things, one God, and therefore all Creation must be attributed to him. Being God absolute Good, no evil could come from him. This doctrine, often expressed throughout the extensive Augustinian work, implied that Evil was not autonomous and therefore should have an origin related to Good itself. Thus, Evil is merely a gap, the absence of Good: Evil is not in itself, but consists in the manifestation of an absence. For this reason, it does not have the same status as the Good.

These elements relate as follows: insofar as man of his own accord ceases to turn to Good, he makes room for Evil. This explains the phenomenon of the Fall, and also explains all sin. In his *Confessiones*, Augustine recounts his reluctance to go to school, the fact that he is a lousy student and finally the 'stick' punishments of teachers. But it also tells how he discovered the religious among the masters and how he became fond of them, which would make him permeable to the learning of Latin. This game implied a regime of compensations and relativisms, which would result in a distancing from the absolute postures. Augustine of Hippo's fundamental opposition to physical punishment at school - something always related to his own experience - would find correspondence in his relativistic postures, expressed mainly in the *Confessiones*.

> But who raised me? Was it not my God, who is not only good, but also goodness itself? How can I explain that my will tends toward evil rather than good? [...] Who planted in me these germs of suffering and fed them, since I am a creature of my God who is full of love? If it was the devil, where does he come from? If he too became a devil by his own wicked will, he who was a good angel wholly created by a God of goodness [...] (Augustine, *Confessiones*, VII, 5).

For Augustine, the main element underlying the relationships that men establish is love. Still, regarding the school, Augustine asks if a grammar error is more serious than a fault against man. An aspect of a fundamental Augustinian humanism, man finds himself at the center of ethical concerns - the fault against the other overcomes in seriousness any other kind of misdemeanor:

> See, Lord God, with patience - as you see it - how diligent are the children of men to observe the conventional rules of grammar inherited from those teachers who preceded them and how they are negligent concerning the everlasting covenant of eternal salvation, received from you! Thus, if one of those who know and teach the old grammatical conventions transgresses them, pronouncing the word *homo* without aspiring the first syllable, it displeases men more than if he contravenes your commandments, hating 'man', which is his own similar (Augustine, *Confessiones,* I, 29).

In a sense, it is possible to defend a kind of modernity that underlies *De doctrina christiana*. From a certain perspective, the Augustinian conception of education pointed to a relative freedom from the formal norms of disciplines - especially as regards grammar and rhetoric. This inclination - largely related to personal experiences - would result in a relaxation of the rules and a willingness to educate the common man[3].

All hatred, according to Augustine, is of oneself - insofar as it proceeds from the self (and never from God, from which no evil can proceed). Following the comment comes:

> As if there could be a worse enemy than the hatred itself, with which a person irritates himself; or as if someone through persecutions harms others more than his own heart, cultivating such enmity! (Augustine, *Confessiones,* I, 29).

The Augustinian formulation of hatred is a mirror of his doctrine of love, spelled out and developed in De *doctrina christiana* - it can be summarized by the statement that all love of neighbor is love of self. According to Augustine, since the love of God is superior to all things and manifests itself in such a way that "[...] makes all other loves converge for themselves [...] by being told 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself', thy love for thyself has not been left out either" (Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, I, 27).

The transgression of the *ethos* of love is, according to Augustine, the greatest fault against the laws of God insofar as it excludes the perception of the 'other'. From Hannah Arendt's perspective, the absence of perception of the other transgresses the notion of plurality, a fundamental element of human action on Earth. For Arendt, the experience of coexisting in the world with others who view it from different

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[3] Peter Brown even points to an opening to the 'natural' in order to value 'talent' over the rules (Brown, 2005). We believe that the modern conceptual burden on these notions prevents us from making such a direct association. However, we agree with the assumption that under Augustine there would be more room for educational freedom.

perspectives can make us better able to understand the reality around us and develop shared consensus. Without it, we would all be focused on our own subjectivity in which only our own feelings, needs and desires are real (Arendt, 1998).

The *vita activa*: vocation of men in the century

Augustine of Hippo would assume a key role in the establishment and consolidation of doctrine in one of the most dynamic poles of Christianity in Late Antiquity: North Africa. In the perimeter that extends from Carthage - the most important episcopal seat in the region - to Caesarea, embracing Salda, Satafi, Milevo, Cirta, Rusicada, Calam, Madaura, Assur, Simittu, Tabraca, Uzalis, Utica and Hippo itself, the debate around conceptions and practices of religion would assume the status of guiding force for the construction of Christian theology and ecclesiology. Such strength, combined with Augustine's intellectual capacity, would result in laying the foundations for Christian instruction and education from the challenges faced by the bishop himself.

The North African dioceses were very close to the Church of Rome and the headquarters of Milan - both geographically and culturally, and represented an outpost of Christianization in the late-ancient West. The presence of Augustine would further enhance the vocation of the region for the debate about faith and for the formulation of formative guidelines for the faithful. The role of education, for this set of intellectual bishops, thus surpassed the formal teaching of the norms of the disciplines of the classical world - and was directed toward the creation of a new culture. This new matrix was ideally Christian, but had the foundations of the education of the Roman aristocracy. These elements were in permanent negotiation, the norm being tempered by dogmatism, the freedom underlying the rigor.

The formative bias characterized the Augustinian action, which turned to the re-elaboration of knowledge with the purpose of Christianization. Within this rearrangement, the works destined for the laity would assume prominent roles, although without prejudice to the episcopal treatise. Augustine's work presents, however, unavoidable characteristics that link it to the controversies of his time, showing a transformation of thought according to the respective panorama. For this reason, it is often considered that there is no underlying project to the Augustinian work. In spite of the philosophical correctness of this analysis, we can indicate directions for an analysis of Augustine from a political perspective. In a broad sense, we could therefore say that Augustine's action and work in the community of Hippo and the churches of North Africa in general were permeated by an educational project towards mobilization. Educating the Christian represented, in this sense, leading a political project in the most original sense of the meaning of *polis.*

In The Human Condition, Hannah Arendt used the term *vita activa* to designate the three fundamental human activities: labor, work, and action. Among these, action would be the only activity that would take place directly among men, without the need for the intermediation of things or reasons - and would therefore correspond to the condition of plurality, according to which 'men', not 'Man', live on earth and inhabit the world (Arendt, 1998). While all other aspects of the human condition are somehow related to politics, this plurality is specifically the condition - not only *conditio sine qua non*, but *conditio per quam* - of all political life. Therefore, the Romans used the forms 'living' and 'being among men' (*inter homines esse*), and 'dying' and 'ceasing to be among men' (*inter homines esse desinere*). At the time of Augustine, with the demise of the city-state, the term *vita activa* broke away from the notion of civilians (citizens) and political life (*bios politikos*) in general, and came to denote all kinds of active engagement in the world: action lodged itself among the necessities of earthly life, whereas contemplation (*bios theoretikos*, *vita contemplativa*) was the state of holiness, related to the term *beatus* (saint; also associated with 'happiness').

he engine of history and as a condition for salvation. If he had been inclined throughout adulthood to conceive of the *'vita contemplativa'* - the monastic state - as superior to the *vita activa*, the problems facing his community around the year 410 would make him reconsider this relationship. Fighting heretics and 'pagan' doctrines, and the need to protect himself from violence - fear - would produce a practical thinking that would be noted in *The City of God* and in the *Confessiones*, works of his maturity and old age. The olive press should work to extract the best of olive oils; the vita activa was to lead humanity to physical and spiritual salvation. Action would result not only in imposing assumptions on the 'other', but also in establishing compromise solutions. Given that he was a public authority - a bishop, Augustine needed to negotiate with his colleagues and build consensus, reason of his perennial quarrel with the bishopric of

Carthage. Given that he was an illustrated man - a rhetoric, he needed to apply his power of persuasion in establishing dialogue with the illustrated pagan elite who came to inhabit Carthage. Finally, given he was a preacher - a priest, he needed to convey confidence to his congregation, always modulating the discourse in view of the heterogeneity of his audience.

Final considerations

Political by nature, man would therefore develop his vocation as he lived in society. The Greek polis - the city state - was the materialization of social life for those philosophers who first thought about the human condition. Aristotle classified men as social animals (we say today, gregarious, alluding to Hellenic culture) and, thus, political animals. Politics defines human relations beyond the question of power. Therefore, there is no political class since politics is inherent in human nature.

Action, a concept established by Arendt, which links men directly, can be understood as politics. Of course, the production of dissent is inevitable and obviously healthy. The consensus concerns the performance of the philosopher king, who, having the ideal model, shapes his passive subjects to fit the model. The framing would correspond to the scheme of a perfect society, in which each one conforms to the picture designed by its creator. In practice, there are no perfect societies in the sense that there is no uniformity. Strictly speaking, in practice, there is no man, this universal abstraction; In practice, what exists are men - different from each other and whose mark is plurality. Augustine recognized that the Church of God was plural, corresponding to a heterogeneous ensemble - later medieval nominalists such as William of Ockham would say that the Church does not exist as an universal: the Church only comes into existence insofar as each of the faithful exists. If the Church were to be understood solely from its institutional presupposition, it would simply be an organism of power and thus a papal theocracy. Hannah Arendt, in turn, understands that the abstractionist model that uniformizes people and wills results in totalitarianism.

In order to establish lasting solutions for compromise in societies, Arendtian action must imply two fundamental elements: forgiveness and commitment. The first breaks the chain of harm resulting from a given disastrous decision; the second offers some, albeit contingent, security in that it assumes that plural people are bound together for a common purpose - which, according to Hannah Arendt, would create islands of predictability in the unpredictable ocean (Arendt, 1998). The production of a mediated consensus, which results from working together, enables great power to be gained; at the same time, agreements between plural people are always difficult to reach and never absolutely secure.

Both for Augustine and for Hannah Arendt, the human condition is also implicit in the Book of Genesis (1:27): it is the narrative that "God created them, male and female". Thus, the multiplicity of human beings would be the result of their multiplication. It is a different account from that, also present in Genesis, according to which God would have molded woman from the rib of man (Gen 1:22). From this perspective, men should be the exhaustive repetition of the same model, which would exclude action as unnecessary. The principle of multiplication, which would originate human multiplicity, would originate difference, that which characterizes the plurality of men. Hence the need for action - the relationships that men establish among themselves in order to build consensus through political interaction.

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