

UNIT 2 MEDIEVAL POLITICAL THOUGHT

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

Medieval political thought was born in the context of conflict of jurisdiction between the priest and the king. In Christian Europe, the highest priest was the Pope who claimed moral and secular authority on the life of the believers. The kings, on the other hand, had grown out of the community of people or had come to rule over them. They would not submit to the authority of the Pope in the mundane affairs. The rift has been reflected within the church itself as well as in the relation between the church and the state everywhere.

St. Augustine first advocated self-control of the church with regard to the secular affairs of people. St. Thomas Aquinas was intolerant of non-Christian orders and gave papal authority a position of overwhelming pre-eminence. Marsiglio de Padua was more forthright on separation between the church and the state.

2.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain St. Augustine's views on the state and church
- Discuss the two sword theory
- Interpret St. Aquinas' view on state and church
- Describe the law of nature as formulated by Aquinas
- Evaluate Marsiglio's views on liberty and separation of power

2.2 ST. AUGUSTINE AND HIS METHODS

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St. Augustine (AD 354–430) was a theologian and philosopher whose writings influenced the development of Western Christianity and Western philosophy. He was influenced by Jewish Christian traditions. Christian education had a lasting impact upon him. He was also moved by the philosophy of neo-platonic Christianity. He drew from philosophies of two cities, from the Western Christian tradition and the tradition in Africa. The primary objective of Augustine was *otium liberale*. This alluded to a simple enjoyment of fruits. It was based upon the rural domain.

St. Augustine believed that all reasonable governments, irrespective of their types, represented those who were neglected and not perfect (in his book *City of God*). Stringent laws to discipline those who sinned, by using legal and educative procedures were provided by the state. Augustine considered the church as the representative of the perfect and the eternal (*City of God*). According to him, the church preserved the divine and other worldly principles of harmony, trust and donation. Therefore, both the church and the state were independent but linked. They occupied different realms and held different values, but both existed in this world.

2.2.1 Church and State Controversy

The first real controversy between the church and the state took root in the 11th century with the deposition of Pope Gregory by Emperor Henry IV. It continued throughout the middle ages and became dominant theory and practice of politics. The age saw a conflict emerging between the papacy and the secularists. The first advocated a grant of supremacy to the church and while the second sought to give supremacy to the state.

Argument for papal supremacy

Augustine had already supported the cause of the church. According to Dunning, the papal supremacy argument comprised the following: Firstly, with regard to the two species of authority greater dignity pertained to the spiritual and hence precedence was given to those in whom its exercise was vested; secondly, God was seen as directly conferring upon the church such power of inspection and correction which is seen in reference to the character and motives of secular rulers. The first idea stemmed from the views of the early church which pertained to the relative importance of the earthly life and the life to come.

The second line of argument in the theory of clerical supremacy drew its strength from the distinction which soon became clearly marked between the clerical and the lay elements in the church and the elimination of the latter element from all authority in ecclesiastical functions, whether spiritual or merely administrative.

The most effective presentation of the papal claim to supremacy was made by John of Salisbury. His *Policraticus* was the most elaborate medieval treatise on politics. Here, he made a lucid case for papal supremacy. The other champion of the papal cause was Thomas Aquinas. He rejected the Roman empire because at that

time the Roman empire harboured injustice, unjust wars, aggression, and robberies. There was a possible connection between Augustine and the Donatists. The Donatists said that Cyprian was a perfect bishop given his attitude to martyrdom and ascetism. On the other hand, St. Augustine firmly believed that Cyprian was referring to eschatology.

The issue here riveted on eschatological reality and a tension ensued. Augustine was taught by Tyconious that in any given particularistic society both cities must exhibit the moral and religious obligations of their members. It came to be known that Tyconious did not join the Catholic church. Augustine, due to many orthogenetic situations, criticized Donatism in using the sociological inseparability of the two opposed societies.

St. Augustine tried to delineate the four essential elements of his philosophy in *The City of God*. His ideas can be seen reflected in the philosophy of church, the state, the city of heaven and the city of the world. According to him, the church is divinely established and directly leads to humankind. This brings to the fore the question of eternal goodness which was being questioned for God only. Here, the virtue is important and it is the sole responsibility of the state to adhere to the virtue of politics. It can directly stem from the political community. These societies stood the test of the time for the sake of a good life. Reflecting these issues, are the two indistinguishable societies, the *City of Heaven*, for those ordained for deliverance, and the *City of the World*, for those given eternal damnation.

This philosophy allows Augustine to postulate his concrete theory of justice where he articulates the problem and refers to how this entails the distribution of those possessions which are obligatory for life, just as God without restraint distributes air, water, and light. Human kind ought to trail the city of heaven to maintain a suitable common sense of order, which in turn leads to true tranquility. He underlined the sense of supreme God. Apart from this philosophy, Augustine himself put together a Christian philosophy of society. He defined the various areas of philosophical inquisition in terms of ethics, politics and unity in the universality of celestial disclosure. He himself has been regarded as a theological philosopher of the ages, and was also considered a saint of the church. It is said that his philosophy has been vehemently criticized as being of a deviating nature. The doctrine of grace, predestination, etc., comprised the major attributes in the church.

The separation of the church and the state are to be seen the biggest achievements of St. Augustine's philosophy. His contribution to the study of western political thought was highly important. The issue pertaining to the division of the church and the state can be witnessed as undergoing rapid variation. While, the sword is to be seen as the core value of the state, the city of God provided the strength of the church. According to St. Augustine, the church represented the reflection of peace, security, charity, and hope. He stated that the role of the church should not be undermined. The duty of the church is not to overlook the state, but look after the human beings. The role of the state is to employ repression and a sense of punishment to hold down people who were intrinsically aberrant. God has selected very few good men and women and also saved their identity from damnation. To him, the highest good was not of this world but comprised eternal life with God.

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