Two traditions shaped the political thought of Western Christendom in the later fourth and the early fifth centuries, the age of St Ambrose and St Augustine. The first was the collection of ideas about human society which the Christian fathers of the fourth century inherited from the pre-Constantinian period. This included, of course, the hints on these subjects contained in the New Testament writings as well as ideas elaborated by Christians of the second and third centuries, in large part but not entirely in their reflection on the New Testament hints and their implications (see part I, chapter 1 above). The second set of ideas consisted of those engendered by the Christian response to the conversion of Constantine and to the progressive christianisation of the Roman Empire culminating, during the years which spanned the careers of Ambrose of Milan and Augustine of Hippo, in the official establishment of Christianity as the legally enforced religion of the Empire. Christians have always been apt to see the conversion of Constantine as a watershed between the age of a persecuted church and the age of a triumphant established Christianity. Whatever the appropriateness of such a view may be to the historical development (see Introduction to part III, above pp. 86—7), it does only partial justice to the political ideas rooted in the two different sets of circumstances, and to their overlap in the post-Constantine age. Some Christian political ideas distinctive of the age of the persecutions showed an obstinate ability to survive the Constantinian revolution, and to receive new infusions of life repeatedly. Conversely, some ideas more at home in the christianised Empire had their origins in the second and third centuries. The interplay between these two sets of ideas remained important to the generation of Ambrose and Augustine. The relationship of Roman political structures, and by implication of human societies in general, to the Christian Church,
to man’s salvation and to God’s providence was the central problem in this period.

The vision of a christianised Roman Empire had been dimly foreshadowed in earlier writers (see above, chapter 1, p. 17; chapter 4, pp. 51–2); but with the conversion of Constantine Eusebius’ interpretation of that vision came to dominate the minds of many fourth-century Christians. They saw the whole course of their history changed in consequence of the miracle which had brought about the conversion of the first Christian emperor, and they saw God’s hand at work in the christianisation of the Empire under his successors. The images in which Eusebius had represented the Christian Empire and its emperor received wide currency. Church and Empire were both reflections of a heavenly kingdom; the monarchy of Constantine brought that kingdom to men, and with his conversion the earthly city became the city of God. Hellenistic and biblical ideas blended to produce an image of the emperor as entrusted with representing God’s authority among men. The notion of the Empire as the vehicle of the Christian religion, embodying God’s providential plan for the salvation of mankind, became a literary commonplace and was to be frequently heard from Christian pulpits. Christianity and the Empire became indissolubly united: Christianity was the Empire’s religion and the Empire its proper, divinely intended, setting.

The frequency of the clichés and images of this way of thinking attests the ease with which the ideas of ‘Roman’ and ‘Christian’ tended to merge, even to the point of identification, in the minds of many Christians of the later fourth and fifth centuries. This fusion of the two, previously distinct, spheres raised one of the central problems for political thought during this period, and one which remained central so long as the Roman Empire – or any other political structure – was instinctively identified with the ‘Christian society’: who exercised ultimate authority in such a society? Who was God’s accredited representative and wielded his supreme authority over those who acknowledged the lordship of Christ? In what ways, if any, was his authority limited in relation to other bearers of authority, perhaps also divinely sanctioned?

It was not until the time of Ambrose of Milan that the Eusebian assumptions began to be questioned. Under Constantine himself and during the reign of his son Constantius II (337–59) the emperor continued to be seen as God’s representative in the Christian Empire, as the ‘bishop of bishops’ endowed with an authority sacred in its source and embracing the
sacred in its scope. Already in the time of Constantine, however, dissident groups had questioned the emperor’s authority in ecclesiastical affairs. Donatist schismatics, ready as they had been to resort to the emperor’s judgement, were later said to have raised the question: ‘What have Christians to do with kings, bishops with the imperial palace?’ Such heart-searchings, in language reminiscent of the rhetoric of Tertullian, seemed to revive ancient feelings of hostility. They were also expressed by adherents of Nicene orthodoxy against the arianising views of Constantius. Protests against imperial interventions in the Church’s affairs multiplied in the 350s and sometimes, notably in the writings of Lucifer, bishop of Caralis, reached an apocalyptic pitch of denunciation. The text of Matthew 22:21 (‘Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s’) and its synoptic parallels were occasionally cited to give scriptural authority to the dissenters’ — the orthodox Nicene — rejection of the emperor’s authority over the Church. There is little doubt, however, that such protests were directed not against the Eusebian—Constantinian conception of the imperial office so much as against the misuse of an imperial authority by emperors regarded as heretical or godless. Behind the protests there is a shared body of assumptions about the nature of properly Christian imperial authority. In the writings of Athanasius of Alexandria, Ossius of Cordova, Hilary of Arles and even Lucifer of Caralis the divide runs between ‘Christian’, orthodox emperors and godless, heretical tyrants; not between two spheres we might label as ‘lay’ and ‘clerical’ or ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’.2

Donatist and Nicene dissent from the official orthodoxy of the court had kept alive the language and attitudes of a persecuted elite in the Empire of Constantine and Constantius. Ambrose of Milan made use of its resources to express the confident self-consciousness of a Christian elite emerging to dominate Roman society in the 380s and 390s. Like many of his contemporaries, Ambrose was apt to identify ‘Roman’ and ‘Christian’ almost instinctively: unbecoming conduct in a heretical priest was ‘as abhorrent to Roman manners’ as it was ‘sacrilegious’.3 He was still inclined to think of the Empire as the embodiment of God’s providence and to identify the pax Augusta with the pax Christi.4 The survival of such clichés in

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1. Optatus, De schismate 1.22.
his writings is a testimony to their wide currency; but it is significant that despite his strong Roman patriotism and universalism\(^5\) which tended to encourage the equation of ‘Roman’ with ‘Christian’, Ambrose sometimes went out of his way to avoid or to qualify the Eusebian image of the Empire.\(^6\) His view of the role of Christian emperors in the Church owed as much to the Nicene opponents of Constantius II as to the Constantinian–Eusebian tradition. The continuity with the former appears most clearly in the conflict between Ambrose and the court of Milan over the basilicas in 385–6, when the court was claiming the right to take over some of the city’s churches for Arian use. In this conflict Ambrose was defending the Church’s right to its places of worship and repudiating the court’s claim to the right of appropriation. This conflict raised no new principles, but it gave Ambrose an occasion for questioning the all-embracing autocratic power claimed by the emperor. His statements fall into the mould made familiar by his ‘dissenting’ predecessors: ‘divine things are not subject to the imperial power’.\(^7\)

This incident gave Ambrose an opportunity to treat the emperor as a ‘son of the Church’. This principle came to guide him in his rebuke to Theodosius I in 390 for the massacre the emperor had ordered in Thessalonica as a reprisal for the murder of a Gothic officer in the Roman army. Ambrose’s success in exacting penance from the emperor for that precipitate act of inhumanity quickly became the classic example of a bishop treating an emperor as a filius ecclesiae, vindicating the normal claims of Christian morality and a bishop’s authority in punishing breaches of it. So dramatic a demonstration that the emperor was in the Church, not above it, certainly played an important part in defining the model for the Christian ruler: the idea of the humble prince, ready for penitence and willing to heed the admonition of his bishop recurs in Ambrose’s preaching and writing\(^8\) and quickly established itself in the repertory of ‘mirrors for princes’.

Incidents of this kind served to establish the principle that rulers as individual Christians were subject to ecclesiastical censure. Ambrose, like most of his contemporaries, failed to draw a clear distinction between the emperor as a private Christian and the imperial office as an institution. He was well placed and able to exercise influence over the Christian court, and he saw that exercise in terms of his pastoral responsibilities, not in terms of

\(^5\) E.g. Exp. Ev. Luc. x.10; De Tob. 15.61.  
\(^6\) Exp. Ev. Luc. ii.36–7; In Ps. 118 Sermo 20.49.  
\(^7\) Ep. 20.8; cf. ibid., 19; Ep. 21.4; Sermo C. Aux. 18; 30–7.  
\(^8\) Apol. proph. David 2.6; 6.29; In Ps. 37 Enarr. 1; De ob. Theod. 28, 34; De of. min. ii.7.32–5.
establishing the right relationship between 'Church' and 'state'. Two other well-known incidents, however, have more far-reaching implications and throw some light on Ambrose's assumptions about the public nature of the office which might well have influenced his pastoral practice.

In the controversy over the pagan senators' appeal for the restoration of the Altar of Victory in the Senate house and of the endowments and revenues for the support of public pagan cults, both the pagan senators and Ambrose opposing their spokesman, Symmachus, seem clear about the crucial issue involved. What was at stake was the nature of the religious basis of the Roman state. Symmachus had made a clear distinction between the personal religion of the emperor and the public religion of the Empire: Constantius, he said, though he followed his own (Christian) religion, had maintained that of the Empire.9 Ambrose's intervention against the petition was an appeal to Valentinian's personal piety: he should have no truck with heathen cults and give them no encouragement. But Ambrose was equally aware that the crucial issue was the question of revenues and stipends: to restore these would amount to nothing less than an endorsement of the public adhesion of the Empire – whatever the private religion of the emperor – to the traditional pagan cults.10 This has sometimes been seen as a call for the 'secularisation' of the Roman state. Some twenty years later, however, the Christian poet Prudentius saw it as something quite different. In his Contra Symmachum, recapitulating the conflict, he represented it as heralding the final triumph of Christianity in the Roman Empire – indeed, in the world.

Ambrose's own attitude seems to have been more in line with the way Prudentius thought than with the way it is represented by those who want to see it as a demand for official neutrality in religion. This is suggested by another much-discussed episode in his dealings with Christian emperors: the affair of Callinicium a few years later. When the bishop of this town had been ordered to restore Jewish property and to rebuild a synagogue destroyed by Christians in a riot apparently instigated by the bishop, Ambrose insisted that as a Christian, Theodosius must rescind the order. This dealt a severe blow to traditional notions about the government's duty to maintain public order and safeguard property rights. 'Which is more important: the show of discipline or the cause of religion?'11 The notion of a neutral, secular Roman state – anachronistic anyway – is scarcely compatible with Ambrose's conduct in this matter, or with his approval of

Theodosius’ anti-heretical and anti-pagan legislation. All this suggests that, beyond wanting to set up moral standards for the personal conduct of Christian emperors, Ambrose envisaged the Roman Empire as a society which was, or should be, a radically Christian society and the Church as called upon to mould its public life and institutions.

This is much clearer in Ambrose’s episcopal actions and admonitions than in any systematic exposition, for which we look in vain in his writings. There are some hints with a bearing on the nature of society or political authority to be found; always, however, in the context of discussions directed to other ends. Two of these raised problems of a political kind, though only incidentally: the discussion of men’s duties towards their fellows, and the exposition of the biblical narratives of the Creation and Fall of man.

Ambrose’s crowning work on Christian morality is the professional handbook addressed to clergy, De officis ministrorum. Here he drew together the threads of his thought on Christian living, much as Cicero had drawn together his reflection on public conduct in his De officis, the work Ambrose took as his literary model. Cicero had set himself the task of re-interpreting the best of Greek philosophy, especially the ethical teaching of Panætius, for a Roman public. Ambrose re-interpreted Ciceronian Stoicism for a Christian public. In doing so he found himself compelled to modify, sometimes so profoundly that his debt to Cicero has been seen as literary rather than philosophical, the Stoic concepts he found in Cicero’s (and perhaps other philosophical) writings. Some central moral concepts required fundamental re-interpretation in a Christian sense. Thus the notion of the virtuous life in accordance with reason or nature constituting man’s supreme good had to be given a more theocentric orientation, but placed within a Christian perspective it continued to serve Ambrose as a basic moral principle. The Stoic morality of reason and nature thus remained embedded in Ambrose’s, as in many other Christian moralists’, ethics. Of the cardinal virtues justice was the bond of society. Ambrose adopted Cicero’s statement that ‘the foundation of justice is faith (fides)’; but he gave a new meaning to the concept of ‘faith’. Cicero’s ‘good faith’ is turned into ‘trust in Christ’. A society based on ‘faith’ thus understood could not be the same as Cicero’s. Stoic teaching on the brotherhood of man — present in Cicero’s version though somewhat eclipsed by the competitive orientation of his society — was given a new twist, and Cicero’s ideas

12. De ob. Theod. 38. 13. E.g. Ep. 73.2; lac. 6. 14. De off. min. i.29.142; De off. i.7.23.
underwent drastic modification in a God-centred direction. The body and its members, Cicero’s simile for the solidarity of human society, is for Ambrose no longer a simile: it is the Body of Christ. The res publica has been transformed into the Christian community.

Stoic concepts were thus carried over, re-interpreted in varying degrees, into Ambrose’s Christian moral system. Similarly, in his theological interpretation of the biblical stories of Creation and Adam’s Fall, he inherited a long Christian exegetical tradition, but here, too, the contributory influence of classical ideas is noticeable. The traditional Christian teaching concerning man’s paradisal state of innocence, at harmony with himself and with God’s creation, traced the tension, disharmony, conflict, inequality and force in human affairs to man’s alienation from his original state through Adam’s Fall. This teaching had a great deal in common with classical imagery of a Golden Age and subsequent decline, which often furnished political writers with utopian images of an ideal society. Their trace appears clearly in Ambrose’s exposition of the book of Genesis. In his exegesis he follows in the footsteps of St Basil of Caesarea. The Fall is the key to man’s present condition. Ambrose is clearest in this respect in his discussions of property and slavery; both subjects on which Stoic views helped him to formulate his own.

Following Cicero’s principle that nothing is private by nature, Ambrose held that private ownership was not an institution of nature but the result of ‘usurpation’. It must therefore be used for the common good and the support of others. He was concerned to preach the virtues of poverty and generous giving, not to reject the right to property. This right he disputed no more than it had been disputed in the mainstream of the tradition according to which property, like other forms of inequality, was rooted in man’s sinful state. Ambrose’s views on slavery are all of a piece with this. He did not question the institution, but held that it belonged to man’s sinful state after the Fall, not to his nature as intended by God. A long letter (Ep. 37) is largely devoted to arguing that slavery and freedom, as the Stoics had taught, are not fundamental realities of human nature. True freedom is wisdom, true slavery folly and wickedness. Although he says that subjection of the stupid to the wise was intended by God for the subject’s own good, he sees the institution as inextricably bound up with the loss of equality brought in its train by the fall from innocence.

Ambrose is much less clear concerning the effects of this fall on the

government of human societies. With the help of Virgilian images of the societies of birds and bees he sketched his notions of a rightly ordered society, one in accordance with nature. The contrast he drew between a ‘republic’ based on full equality such as is found among the cranes, and a ‘monarchy’ such as the bees have, suggests that in some way the former is superior to the latter; perhaps Ambrose intends it to portray the natural, the paradisal form of social organisation from which others represent a decline. Both forms, however, are given as instances of ‘natural’ types of constitution. A monarchical form of government, like the cranes’ ‘free city’,\(^\text{21}\) is a fully natural form of social organisation in which ruler and ruled are singled out for their place and tasks by nature; they collaborate for the common and indeed for their own individual good.\(^\text{22}\) On the other hand he also asserts men’s equality by nature\(^\text{23}\) and holds that inequality and subjection are the result of greed and lust for power.\(^\text{24}\) It is not at all clear from all this whether he regarded all subjection of men to other men, or only imperfect forms of subjection, as bound up with man’s sinful condition.\(^\text{25}\)

Ambrose never resolved the ambiguity in his views about government. Problems of this kind did not interest him greatly. He was more concerned to use classical imagery, philosophy and the biblical stories for the purpose of moral exhortation than for the philosophical analysis of human nature and social relationships. These problems were to receive much more systematic attention from later Christian thinkers, not least from his younger contemporary, Augustine of Hippo.

An unknown contemporary commentator on the Pauline letters known since Erasmus as the Ambrosiaster, who was beyond much doubt the author also of a set of Questions on the Old and New Testaments, is notable among fourth-century writers for his strong legal interests. He owed much to Stoic philosophy and to Roman legal traditions and shared some of Ambrose’s approach to this subject. Like Ambrose,\(^\text{26}\) he founded all law on the ‘law of nature’; but he grounded this concept more firmly in Pauline than in Stoic thought. The idea of a law inscribed into the structure of the world by its creator, which is the norm for men and accessible to them, being written on

\(^{21}\) Hex. v.15.52.  \(^{22}\) Ibid. 21.68–72.  \(^{23}\) Ep. 37.9.  
\(^{24}\) Hex. v.15.52; Exp. Ev. Luc. iv.20.  
\(^{25}\) It has been suggested that Ambrose’s main concern in this discussion is quite different: to give the Empire as respectable a justification in ‘nature’ as the Republic had been given: see J. Béranger, Principatus. Etudes de notions et d’histoire politiques dans l’Antiquité gréco-romaine, Droz, 1973, pp. 303–30.  
\(^{26}\) E.g. De fuga iii.15; Abr. 1.2.8; cf. above, pp. 98–9.

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their hearts’ (Rom. 2.15), is fundamental to the Ambrosiaster’s thought about the various kinds of written law. St Paul’s long discussion of the Law (of the Old Covenant) in his letter to the Romans furnished the Ambrosiaster with the key notions for the relations between the law of nature and all other laws. The Law of the Old Testament, and secondarily other written law, is imposed to remedy man’s failure to follow the natural law. Roman law and ‘ecclesiastical’ law – a concept which was coming into use in the later fourth century and generally used to refer to the Church’s power to bind and to loose – are drawn, along with the Jewish law, into the framework of this schematisation of natural and written law.

A lively interest in the administration of Roman law and in legal procedure prompted the Ambrosiaster to give some thought to the ruler’s function in society. Here again Pauline teaching gave the main impulse: commenting on Rom. 13.1 the Ambrosiaster defines the subject’s obligation to obey the ruler very firmly: ‘the law of heavenly justice’ must be obeyed, and those who administer the law – which has God as its author – are ordained by God; men must obey them. Political obligation is grounded in the law of God and nature. The ruler bears God’s authority in repressing wickedness. Even pagan rulers must be honoured and obeyed, since they enforce God’s order.

In his estimate of the ruler’s position the Ambrosiaster goes far beyond Pauline teaching in the exalted hierarchical status he ascribes to the ruler. Subordination to the Emperor’s authority is analogous to the body’s subjection to rational control by the mind; the imperial officials (comites) stand to the emperor – as in much Christian iconography – as the angels to God. The emperor receives adoratio on earth as God’s vicar, just as Christ will be adored ‘in heaven and on earth’ after the fulfilment of the ‘vicarial’ dispensation. This pronounced monarchical streak in the Ambrosiaster’s concept of the ruler leaves little room for any restriction of the sphere of secular authority as against ecclesiastical. In fact there seems to be no trace in these writings of any interest in problems such as those Ambrose had encountered in this respect. The Ambrosiaster’s hints on the obscure notion of ‘vicarial’ authority seems to point in another direction altogether. Repeatedly he asserts that the ruler has the image of God, whereas the bishop has that of Christ. This distinction is apparently related to the notion that ruling is the essential

27. Comm. in Ep. ad Rom., c.7 passim, 5.13; cf. ad 1 Tim. 1.11.
30. Ibid. 13.3.
31. Q. vet. et novi test. 35; cf. ibid., 110.6.
32. Ibid. 115.35, 40.
33. Ibid. 45.1; 114.3, 9.
34. Ibid. 91.8.
35. Ibid. 35; 106.17; 127.36.
constituent of having the image of God, the ruler of all; derivatively, man is also the image of God in so far as he is set over woman whom he rules; woman, lacking rule, lacks the image of God.\textsuperscript{36} The ruler is God's \textit{vicarius} in representing and mediating God's rule over men; the 'vicariate' of Christ held by bishops and their ministers appears to consist in carrying out prayer, offering and sacramental action among the people.\textsuperscript{37} This 'incomplete' political theory\textsuperscript{38} needs far more study than it has so far received, having been unduly neglected in comparison with the wealth of work devoted to the problem of the relations of clerical and lay power in this period.

The Ambrosiaster had little interest in this problem, and Ambrose's interest, as we have seen (see above, pp. 97–9), was worked out in pastoral practice rather than on the level of political theory. Ambrose did, however, leave a rich legacy to be exploited by later thinkers. In the course of the hundred years following his demonstration that emperors could be treated as sons of the Church, his lead was taken up by a series of popes. The development of papal thinking during this century was dominated by two closely linked efforts: to set limits to the scope for lay, especially imperial, intervention in ecclesiastical affairs, and to lay the foundations for the special authority the popes were claiming for the see of Rome. Ambrose had not given the Roman see any special authority among the other bishoprics; on the contrary, he denied that Peter's primacy involved any precedence in honour or jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{39} At the hands of the popes who developed the concepts of lay and clerical authority, however, the assertion of the supremacy of spiritual over secular power involved upholding the supremacy of the Roman over the other churches. Ambrose's somewhat pragmatic attempt to set limits to the right of the secular authorities to intervene in ecclesiastical affairs and to influence the conduct of emperors was absorbed into a grander design for the right distribution of authority in the Christian world.

The christianisation of Roman society – largely achieved by the middle of the fifth century – prompted the equation of the \textit{plebs romana} with the \textit{plebs Dei}. Pope Leo I in the middle years of the century could take this identification for granted. Echoing the old providential view of the Empire as God's instrument for establishing a \textit{pax Christiana} in the world, Leo depicted the Empire as now reborn into a new, Christian society. The

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid. 106.17; 45.3. \textsuperscript{37} Ibid. 127.36.
\textsuperscript{38} The description is from Heggelbacher 1959, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{39} See Ullmann 1981, pp. 19–20, referring to \textit{De inc. sacr.} 4.32.
foundation of Romulus and Remus was renewed by the apostles Peter and Paul. Rome was reborn as a 'holy nation, an elect people, a priestly and royal City'.

The debates of this period over spiritual and secular authority spring from the assumption that what is at stake is the right distribution of authority within this Christian Roman society. It was in this context that a succession of popes – Innocent I, Boniface I, Celestine I, Leo himself, Simplicius and, finally, Gelasius I, put together the ideas of a Roman principatus and the distinction of functions within the Church. The unifying hierarchical principle was Ambrose's distinction of functions: teaching and learning. In matters of religion laymen are subject to clergy, bishops to their metropolitan, and these to the pope. It was Gelasius who rounded off this grand scheme of subordination, at much the same time as an unknown Greek monk gave classic expression to a more mystical version of such a vision of hierarchical order. Gelasius' more modest, though momentous, contribution was to define the role of the secular ruler in the Church. In his letter to the emperor Anastasius in 494 Gelasius spoke of the emperor's duty to submit to the bishops in religious matters, while they must recognise the laws he makes for the maintenance of public order. These are the respective functions of the 'sacred authority of bishops' (auctoritas sacrata pontificum) and the 'royal power' (regalis potestas). Whatever the implications of this much-debated vocabulary, which Gelasius was anyway not consistent in using, the main thrust of his argument is clear: the sacral character of the imperial office, the idea of a priest-king, must be abjured by Christian rulers. Their role is confined to dealing with outward necessities and public order among the Christian people committed to their care. Gelasius' language left much imprecise, and his views could be developed in either of two different directions: to assert the separateness of two co-ordinate and complementary powers, or, alternatively, to assert the ultimate supremacy of the clerical over the lay power, the latter being represented as its agent and servant in mundane matters.

The development of this line of thinking between Ambrose and Gelasius presupposed the equation of 'Christian' with 'Roman' and the consequent need to define the distinct functions and the mutual subordination of authorities in the single politico-religious structure. The only thinker to question this underlying assumption and to reject the implicit equation of 'Roman' with 'Christian' was Augustine of Hippo.
St Augustine: a radical alternative

Augustine’s surviving writings span a period of over forty years. Many of them were called forth by controversy or served the needs of his congregation. All are the product of a restless mind, perpetually on the move. Any attempt to distil his political ideas from his writings must reckon with changes of mind, not only on matters of detail or particular questions, but also in the intellectual perspectives in which he came to approach his questions. Several of the subjects to which Augustine devoted serious thought are directly related to problems of political life. Most important among these for our purpose are his views on (i) the Roman Empire, its place in the divine plan of salvation and its relationship to Christianity; (ii) human nature and relationships in society, and the effect of the Fall upon them; and (iii) the Church in relation to the secular world. Two notes are added on themes less fundamental to his preoccupations, but of considerable importance for the future development of political ideas: (iv) religious coercion; and (v) the just war.

i. The Roman Empire and the two cities

For a long time Augustine did not question the view of the Roman Empire widely current among fourth-century Christians (above, p. 93). He accepted the notion that the Empire was God’s providentially intended instrument for the establishment of Christianity in the world. In the years around 400 views of this kind were almost universally held among Christians. The official enforcement of Christianity under Theodosius I in the 390s, the legislation to repress heresy and paganism and Theodosius’ victory over the pagan opposition (392–4) produced a sense of elation among Christians. In the Empire of Theodosius and his sons they saw the fulfilment of God’s plan for mankind: in submission to Rome the peoples of the world were united in an idealised, universal Christian Empire. The rule of Rome was now the reign of Christ in the world. This sense of Christian triumph was most fully voiced in the poetry of Prudentius. In the late 390s and the opening years of the fifth century Augustine shared this euphoric vision of a Christian Empire realised under his very eyes. The ancient prophecies about the conversion of the heathen were now being fulfilled: secular rulers have come to save Christ and through them God himself was destroying the idols of the heathen. 'The whole world has become a choir praising Christ.'

For many Romans, pagan as well as Christian, these years

44. For a fuller exposition containing further references both to texts and to other discussions, see Markus 1970, pp. 22–71. 45. Enarr. in Ps. 149.7.
of Theodosius and his sons were the ‘Christian times’ *par excellence*.

The calamities which hit the Western Roman provinces from 406, the barbarian raids culminating in the sack of Rome by the Goths in 410, gave a severe jolt to the confident assurance of the Theodosian age. Old conflicts rekindled in this time of general dismay, and many pagan Romans turned against the ‘Christian times’. In their eyes those times became an age of disaster and decay directly linked with the Empire’s betrayal of its religious traditions. It was to answer pagans who were blaming the troubles on the adoption of the new cult in place of the old, and to give comfort and hope to Christians baffled by a providence which permitted such reverses to the fortunes of an Empire which Christ had made his own, that Augustine wrote his *City of God*. The work occupied him (along with other tasks) during the years 413–27. Much of it, especially the first ten of its twenty-two Books, is primarily polemical in intent and directed against pagan jibes. But the work also represents the maturing of a plan Augustine had in mind for a treatise devoted to the opposition of holiness and impiety in the drama of human history: a subject he had already given some thought to early in his career as a writer. The later Books of the *City of God* contain the long-planned constructive exposition of his theological understanding of history. The work as a whole is thus a fusion of polemical argument and a personal meditation – carried out over fourteen years and fully matured only in its later parts – on human history and on the Roman Empire and Christianity in the perspective of divine providence.

By the time Augustine embarked on this ‘huge work’, he had already moved away from the views he had held in the years around 400 about the Christian Roman Empire. The elation he felt over the Theodosian ‘establishment’ of Christianity became noticeably less pronounced and vanished almost without trace from his preaching and writing from about 405. The *City of God*, especially in its last eight Books, is the result and the record of his rethinking of the place of the Roman Empire in the divine scheme of redemption forced upon him by his disenchantment with the collective mirage of the Theodosian epoch. He had come to see the idea of a fully realised Christian Empire fulfilling the ancient prophecies as a delusion. He now turned his back on the whole tradition of Christian thought represented by Eusebius, and hardly questioned among his contemporaries, according to which the historical destiny of Rome was achieved in a fully christianised Roman society. He was now in no doubt that there was no scriptural warrant for the prophetic interpretation of contemporary history. Any attempt to be assured about the future course of
Roman history was sheer guesswork and could claim no prophetic insight. Augustine rejected both the assurance of his Christian contemporaries and the bewildered despair it was turning into by discarding the assumptions from which both sprang. By adopting an agnostic attitude to history Augustine emptied the idea of Rome of what had been its universally accepted religious significance. For him the Empire is neither the indispensable instrument of salvation in the divine plan, nor an obstacle to its realisation, an alien and hostile power in the midst of which the Christian Church was set as God’s chosen elite. In a religious perspective the Empire was, ultimately, neutral. Rome became an ambivalent symbol. Augustine could speak of it with moving patriotism, and genuine admiration for Roman achievement, Roman virtue and glory. At the same time he insistently rejected any identification of ‘Roman’ with ‘Christian’. The contrast between ‘theirs’ and ‘ours’ – between Roman heroes, thinkers, writers, and their Christian counterparts – a contrast with a strong flavour of the age of persecutions, recurs constantly in the pages of the City of God. The Roman Empire (and, by implication, any earthly society) is of itself neither holy nor diabolical. Like all human work, its ultimate value is determined by the ultimate allegiances of its creators: their piety or impiety.

Augustine defined this indeterminateness of human society in the image of two ‘Cities’, the City of God and the earthly City. Both are abstract. He defined them in several ways, evidently intended to be equivalent: as the societies of the saints and the unjust, the proud and the humble, the pious and the impious, the elect and the reprobate, those destined for salvation or damnation. His fullest version traces the two ‘Cities’ to the opposition of two kinds of ‘love’:

These two loves [the perverse love ‘which isolates the mind swollen with pride from the blessed society of others’ and its opposite, ‘charity which seeketh not its own’: contrasted in the preceding paragraph] of which the one is holy, the other impure; the one sociable, the other self-centred (privatus); the one concerned for the common good for the sake of heavenly society, the other subordinating the common good to self-interest for the sake of a proud lust for power.

These two loves (Augustine’s catalogue of their contrasts continues) ‘have brought about the distinction among mankind of the two cities . . . the one of the just, the other of the unjust’. This is Augustine’s favoured
formulation. In the *City of God* he adopts it at the outset of his sketch of the historical careers of the two ‘cities’: ‘two loves have built the two cities: self-love in contempt of God the earthly city, love of God in contempt of self the heavenly’.  

The two ‘cities’ are the outcome of divergent fundamental human motivations. They are radically opposed and mutually exclusive; no individual can belong to both and each belongs to one or the other. It follows that no human group can be unmixed. Augustine insists that on earth in any actual or possible society the two ‘cities’ are bound to overlap and melt into one another. Their boundaries are invisible. Any society must necessarily cut across them: ‘in this world the two cities are inextricably interwoven and mingled with each other, until they shall be separated in the last judgement’. As actual, discernible societies the two ‘cities’ have a separate identity only eschatologically. They are inextricably interwoven in the Roman Empire as in the Christian Church or indeed in any social group. In this image Augustine represented the course of human history in terms of a dramatic conflict of forces which will appear in their naked reality only beyond history, while actual temporal societies must always remain radically ambiguous. A theology of the primordial forces at work in human will and action has become an interpretation both of history and of social existence.

Augustine’s mature reflection on political life and institutions took shape within this framework. A political society is irretrievably mixed. This is the reason for his rejection of Cicero’s definition of a ‘commonwealth’ (*res publica*). The definition involved identifying a human group (*populus*) as a ‘multitude joined together by one consent of law and their common good’. Augustine poured into Cicero’s *ius* far more than it had been intended to contain: he made it mean ‘justice’, ‘righteousness’ in a very full-blooded sense. He thus drew from Cicero’s premiss the conclusion that in the absence of true justice there can be no *res publica*. On Cicero’s definition thus construed there could only be one genuine commonwealth, the one society in which true justice was perfectly realised; all others are in greater or lesser degree ‘dens of robbers’. Augustine therefore rejected this definition of a *res publica* as inapplicable to any actual state. In its stead he adopted a neutral definition in which he tried to define a group in pragmatic, value-free terms as ‘a multitude of rational beings united in

agreement over the things they love’. On this definition the values to which members of a group are committed will be immaterial to the question as to whether they constitute a group which may be politically structured (a res publica). Any common bond of allegiance is enough to constitute a society which, given political shape, will rank as a res publica.

Augustine’s re-definition of the res publica in terms of the ‘loves’ of its members is designed to bring it into relation with his distinction between the two ‘cities’ (above, pp. 105–6). These are defined by their members’ ultimate ‘loves’, the fundamental orientation of their wills. But not all ‘loves’ are ultimate: we love many things for the sake of others, some for their own sake, some modestly on a scale of graded goods, appreciated more or less on the scale of our valuations, some supremely, some not at all. Human excellence is attained in achieving a balanced perspective over the whole range of these ‘loves’ placed in a rightly graded hierarchy of values. ‘Things are loved well when the right order is kept in loving, badly when it is upset.’ Thus there will be many lesser, intermediate goods which members of the two ‘cities’ can and are bound to agree in ‘loving’, conditionally, with reference to something else which forms the object of their ultimate ‘love’ or supreme allegiance. The two ‘cities’ are bound to be in radical opposition in their ultimate ‘loves’, by definition; but their members’ intermediate ‘loves’ will coincide over a wide area, thus constituting a web of values generally acknowledged in the group. It is this realm of shared intermediate values which defines a society and in Augustine’s view it is within this area that its political institutions function. The discussion in Book xix of the City of God of the relations between the two ‘cities’ in actual societies is based upon the possibility of coincident decisions springing from fundamentally divergent structures of motivation. Thus the satisfaction of material needs, security from attack and orderly social intercourse are valued by citizens both of the earthly and the heavenly ‘cities’. This is what Augustine calls the ‘earthly peace’. It is everybody’s concern to maintain it, though people are bound to wish to maintain it for the sake of different ultimate objectives. For the members of the heavenly city within the society the ‘earthly peace’ will be referred ‘to the enjoyment of eternal peace’. Augustine thus came to see secular societies as intermediate provisions, forms of social organisation on which the ‘heavenly city’, transcending them all, was temporarily contained while on its pilgrimage to its final goal:

The heavenly city, while on its earthly pilgrimage, calls forth its citizens from every nation, and assembles a multilingual band of pilgrims; not caring about any diversity of customs, laws, or institutions whereby they severally make provision for the achievement and the maintenance of earthly peace. All these provisions are intended, in their various ways among the different nations, to secure the aim of earthly peace. The heavenly city does not repeal or abolish any of them, provided that they do not impede the religion whereby the one supreme God is taught to be worshipped.

So the heavenly city, too, uses the earthly peace in the course of its earthly pilgrimage. It cherishes and desires, as far as it may without compromising its faith and devotion, the orderly coherence of men’s wills concerning the things which pertain to the mortal nature of man; and this earthly peace it refers to the attainment of the heavenly peace.63

ii. Nature, Fall and society

Reflecting on the destiny of Rome in relation to the ultimates of salvation and damnation Augustine arrived at a discovery of a place for the intermediate and the ambivalent: the realm of secular social life and institutions. The close bonds which had linked the Roman Empire to Christianity were severed; its – and any state’s – sacral pretensions drastically deflated. His thought on social relationships was also, however, linked to another context, that of the Fall and its effect on human nature. In this respect, too, his mind was subject to important changes in perspective over the years.

In his earliest writings Augustine stood closer to a Greco-Roman than to a Judaeo-Christian attitude towards human society (see above, pp. 86–7).64 In the years following 385–6, when Augustine heard Ambrose preach sermons soaked with a Platonic interpretation of Christianity and read the ‘books of the Platonists’ circulating among his neo-Platonic acquaintances in Milan, ‘order’ (ordo) was the keynote of his thought. Society was not, at this time, a subject central to his interests. In so far as it entered the subject matter of his reflection, however, it did so as an element of the all-embracing order which he saw, with the Platonic tradition, running through the universe. Society was part of the ordered hierarchy of the world and a stage of man’s itinerary for his journey towards his final goal. ‘Order’, at this stage of Augustine’s intellectual career, was ‘that which if we follow it in our lives, will lead us to God’.65 The social order had its place within the cosmic order. The order of earthly society is the reflection of a higher, intelligible order, and is among the means whereby that order is

63. Ibid. xix.19. 64. For this section, Markus 1970, pp. 72–104. 65. De ord. 1.9.27.
brought into human affairs.\textsuperscript{66} In principle the over-arching world order was accessible to rational and educated human beings. The vital link which anchored social institutions in the rational order of the universe was the ruler. He must be a wise man, able to resist the appeal of things which distract other men from seeking their true good. He must remain firm in bringing true rational order into the society he governs; thus will its members be led to their final self-realisation and their ultimate happiness.\textsuperscript{67} This was Augustine's youthful vision of a 'rational myth of the state', founded on a conception of a cosmic order akin to and accessible to reason and a human destiny which could be achieved by human intellectual and moral resources.

At this early stage of his intellectual development this, essentially Greco-Roman, perspective could accommodate the biblical ways of thinking which Augustine was beginning to make his own. It was not until later that he came to see the tensions between the two modes of thought. Now he still found it easy to identify Christ's kingdom which 'is not of this world' (John 18:36) with the intelligible world of the Platonic forms.\textsuperscript{68} This was a characteristic, but precarious assimilation of two essentially disparate bodies of thought. It was not until much later that Augustine came to perceive the gulf between the Platonic and the biblical discourses.\textsuperscript{69} The strains began to show well before the time when Augustine repudiated his early belief in human self-determination as illusory in his \textit{Confessions}, written around 400.\textsuperscript{70}

What undermined Augustine's youthful confidence in the ordered rationality of the world and the real possibility of attaining a rational order in human life, individual and social, was his reading of St Paul in the 390s. This gave him a vivid sense of the power of sin over men's lives, men's inability to free themselves from it unaided and the impossibility of realising the harmony of order in this world. The order which led to God was not to be found, now, in human affairs, and the hope that it might be established through the rule of wise men or men perfectly dedicated to God was revealed as illusory.\textsuperscript{71} Since Adam's fall, the harmony of human life was lost. Neither the tensions which threaten the wholeness of the self from within, nor the conflicts in society at large are capable of resolution, except eschatologically. Here, they are permanent features of existence. Disenchanted with the notion of an ordered harmony attainable in human life and

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid. ii.4.12. \textsuperscript{67} Ibid. ii.8.25, 5.14. \textsuperscript{68} Ibid. i.11.32. \textsuperscript{69} Retr. i.3.2. \textsuperscript{70} On this development, see Cranz 1954, where the evidence is marshalled. \textsuperscript{71} De Trin. iii.4.9.
affairs Augustine thus re-entered that mainstream of earlier Christian thought which saw conflict, inequality, subjection and violence in society as the product and the punishment of sin. Augustine continued to regard man as social by nature; but he ceased to think he was also political by nature. Life in politically organised societies, in subjection to rulers and coercive institutions is – like slavery and other forms of inequality – the result of man’s sinful state, and its object is to deal with the conflict and disorder attendant upon it. On this view the institutions of government are concerned, not to help men to achieve the right order, but to minimise disorder.\footnote{72 For detailed justification of this interpretation against attempts to assimilate Augustine’s views to the Thomist-Aristotelian tradition, see Markus 1965.}

The business of government is not the promotion of the good life, or virtue, or perfection, but the more modest task of cancelling out at least some of the effects of sin. Its function, summarily stated, is to resolve some of the tensions in society and to contain those that cannot be resolved. In the condition of radical insecurity – ‘this hell on earth’\footnote{73 De civ. Dei xxii.22.4.} – political authority exists ‘to safeguard security and sufficiency’ (securitatem et sufficientiam vitae).\footnote{74 Ibid.} All the institutions of political and judicial authority and their administrative and coercive agencies serve this object: that the wicked be held in check and the good given a space to live in innocence.\footnote{75 Ep. 153.6.16; De Gen. ad litter. ix.5.9.} Thus by another route, from neo-Platonism through St Paul, Augustine was travelling towards the view he would expound fully, a few years later, in the \textit{City of God}. The convergence is manifest in the very terms he now uses to commend the value of the ‘order of the state (rei publicae)’: ‘it controls the wicked within the bonds of a certain earthly peace’.\footnote{76 De Gen. ad litter. ix.9.14.} This is an anticipation of the ‘temporal peace’ which in the \textit{City of God} forms the shared concern of both the earthly and the heavenly Cities (see above, pp. 107–8). It embraces the whole sphere of material needs and security, as well as subtler and more positive means of bringing some harmony into disordered social relationships: ‘the fostering of a certain coherence of men’s wills’.\footnote{77 De civ. Dei xix.17.} The obligations laid on men by membership of a society are serious and not to be escaped. They demand unremitting dedication, even though men’s best efforts to procure justice and order in society are doomed to frustration.\footnote{78 Ibid. xix.6.}

The sombre realism of Augustine’s later views on political existence was born of his disenchantment with the idea of an order accessible to men and capable of realisation through their intellectual and moral resources. He
continued, however, to speak of a political 'order' and to hold that the state was part of an order. *Ordinata est res publica*, he once said remonstrating with a congregation which had been involved in lynching a local officer. The order, however, to which political authority belongs is no longer the rational cosmic order as envisaged on Platonic lines earlier in his career. Now it is the mysterious order of God’s unfathomable providence and hidden purposes. Augustine had to rethink his early ideas on law in the light of this drastic change in perspective. He had at first conceived human law as a reflection of the rational order pervading all things. Like many others he thought of this universal law as imprinted by the creator upon all his creatures and ‘written in the heart of man’ (see above, pp. 98–9). Temporal laws, to be valid, had to be derived from this eternal law, to be its public embodiment: ‘for it is just that all things should be perfectly ordered’. This conception of law could not survive the collapse of his notion of a rational order accessible to men and capable of being realised in their societies; and in the late 390s Augustine had to revise his views on law. His new ideas are worked out in his *Contra Faustum*, where he came to adopt systematically a new formula: ‘the eternal law is divine reason, or the will of God, which orders (iubet) the preservation of the natural order and prohibits its transgression’. The ‘natural law’ is now separated from the divine; no longer its reflection or impression, it is now commanded to be observed by it. This new language belongs to a careful rethinking that Augustine undertook at about this time of his views on God’s providence. He now saw it as operating through two distinct channels: through created natures, and through the acts of wills and the trains of events in which these issue. The two streams of divine providence generate two distinct kinds of order in the world: the order of nature, subject to its own law, and the order expressed in human choices, actions and their consequences. Such order as men could produce in their social existence through their laws is no longer part of a natural order, but runs alongside it; both are subject, though in different ways, to God’s providence. Human law is no longer directly related to natural law nor, through it, to the cosmic order. It takes its place among the institutions of political society. As human work, it is infected with sin; as God’s providence, it is intended to cope with the results of sin, to be a remedy for the disorder and conflict endemic in man’s fallen condition.

79. See n. 76 above. 80. *Sermo* 302.13; cf. C. Gaudent. 19.20. 81. *De lib. arbit.* 1.6.15, 5.11. 82. C. Faust. xxii.27; cf. ibid., 28, 30, 43, 61, 73, 78, etc.
iii. *The Church and the world*

Both Augustine's pastoral work as a bishop and the controversies in which he was involved throughout his life prompted him to devote much thought to the nature of the Church. Most of this, though crucially important in the history of ecclesiology and of the theology of the sacraments and the ministry, is of no direct interest for his political ideas. Questions about the distribution of authority within the Church, though occasionally touched on, did not interest Augustine greatly. Problems about the relationship between secular and ecclesiastical authority, in so far as they were more than pastoral, were peripheral to his thought. In one important respect, however, his views on the nature of the Church and its relations to the world are of importance for a discussion of his political thought, in so far as they are linked with the central themes discussed in sections (i) and (ii) of this chapter.

Augustine formulated his views on the Church mainly in the course of the controversy with the Donatists. This schismatic movement dating back to the time of Constantine continued to create anxiety for Augustine throughout his career.83 The Donatists upheld a view of the Church as the lineal descendant of a persecuted elite. For them it was a Church of the gathered faithful, holy and unspotted, alien to the hostile world of secular society around it. The Catholics they regarded as the apostate Church—the Church which had compromised with the secular authorities in the time of persecution and which now, since Constantine, depended on secular support. For the Donatists the Catholic Church was a permanent betrayal of the ancient African tradition of Cyprian, Tertullian and the martyrs. Augustine had much in common with their view of the Church. Once he had come to turn his back on the Theodosian 'establishment' of Christianity (see above, pp. 104–5), the tenacity of the old African tradition reasserted itself in his mind. Although he felt himself wholly identified with the 'universal' Church and therefore committed to communion with the churches 'across the sea' which in Donatist eyes had apostatised from true Christianity, he could nevertheless endorse the 'established' Christianity of the Theodosian or Constantinian Empire no more than could his Donatist opponents. Significantly, it was an outstanding Donatist writer, eventually disowned by his own sect, the shadowy Tyconius, from whom Augustine adopted some of the central ideas which went into the making of his

83. For this section see Markus 1970, pp. 103–32. On Donatism also the survey in Markus 1972b.
The Latin fathers

ecclesiology as well as his concept of the two ‘cities’. The crucial insight which Augustine received from Tyconius was that the actual community of Christians which constitutes the visible Church is a mixed body, containing the holy and wicked side by side. It was not an elite of the chosen set in the midst of an alien profane world, either persecuted by it or, later, called to dominate it. This was the insight which led Augustine to elaborate his views on the two ‘cities’ and their necessary presence in any human group (see above, pp. 105–6).

The stark antithesis between righteousness and iniquity could not be expressed in sociological categories. Hence, as we have seen, the two ‘cities’ are only eschatologically separable within any social group. Nevertheless, the Church can be identified with the City of God, and not only in the rhetorical manner in which the Roman Empire could be identified with the earthly City. In this respect there is a lack of parallelism between the Church and the Empire, despite the fact that they are both mixed bodies containing both the elect and the reprobate. The Empire, and any secular society, is neutrally ‘open’ to both ‘cities’; the Church is not, but is, in some profound sense, sacramentally identical with the eschatological community of the redeemed. Here and now it contains many who shall not be with her at the end; but the essential continuity between the Church ‘as it now is’ with the Church ‘as it then will be’ creates an asymmetry between Church and Empire in the way the language of the two ‘cities’ applies to them. The Church is the City of God here and now in a sense in which no state or group is the earthly City. Like the Donatists, Augustine rejected a sacred conception of the Empire; like them, he affirmed the holiness of the Church; but unlike them he rejected – with Tyconius – the dichotomy of sacred and profane as distinct spheres each contained within its own sociological milieu. There can be no clear frontiers between Church and world, the old opposition especially dear to African ecclesiological language of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ has lost its applicability. The conflict between sin and holiness cuts into the substance of all human groups, the Church not excluded.

iv. Religious coercion: a note

As a provincial bishop Augustine was deeply involved in the coercive regime of Theodosius and his successors. He has been called the father of the Inquisition and the prince of persecutors. He rejected the whiteness of the Church; but unlike them he rejected – with Tyconius – the dichotomy of sacred and profane as distinct spheres each contained within its own sociological milieu. There can be no clear frontiers between Church and world, the old opposition especially dear to African ecclesiological language of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ has lost its applicability. The conflict between sin and holiness cuts into the substance of all human groups, the Church not excluded.

Edict of Unity (405), having held out against his fellow-bishops, he consented to their wishes and endorsed the government’s measures against Donatists. This seems surprising in a man who was, at about this time, coming to view the Empire as a neutral secular institution, not directly concerned with enforcing matters concerned with ultimate choices. Around 400 he would have had no reason for hesitation about measures against paganism (pagans were, however, not forced to become Catholics, only forbidden to continue their own worship). In 408 he wrote his famous letter to Vincentius (Ep. 93) to justify the forcible conversion of Donatists and the view he adopted there remained substantially unchanged in his mind thereafter, throughout the period of the gestation and the writing of the City of God. The paradox calls for some comment.\(^86\)

Augustine had always envisaged the recourse to pastoral ‘severity’ as a last resort to curb sinners. God had used disciplina to teach his people to keep his law; men still needed the discipline of externally applied force to bend their wills to the pursuit of their good. This was the principle Augustine appealed to: ‘We see many who have renounced their former blindness; how could I begrudge them their salvation, by dissuading my colleagues [fellow-bishops] from exercising their fatherly care, by which this has been brought about?’\(^87\) Coercion is like medicine administered to an unwilling patient for his own good;\(^88\) how can we doubt that people should be compelled to embrace their own salvation when we read that the master commanded all who could be found to be compelled to come in to the wedding-feast?\(^89\) The application of external pressure for pastoral ends, to procure the salvation of souls, remained Augustine’s principle to justify religious coercion.\(^90\)

Augustine did not notice the strain thus introduced into the view of the functions of government towards which he had been moving. With growing clarity he saw its sphere as confined to outward needs, public order and security (see above, p. 107); but he failed to see how hard it was to reconcile religious coercion with that conception. He was helped to conceal this conflict from himself by his habit of thinking (like Ambrose and many others) of Christian rulers and public officials as members of the Church rather than as officials of an institution charged with carrying out specific public functions. As individual Christians it was their duty to use whatever power they had at their disposal for the good of souls. The idea of a ‘state’

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86. On this section see Markus 1970, pp. 133–53. For an important discussion since the publication of this, see Lamirande 1975. 87. Ep. 93.1.1, 5.19. 88. Ibid. 1.3. 89. Ibid. 2.5, referring to Luke 14.23. 90. E.g. C. Caudent. 24.27–25.28.
with its distinctive and restricted function, just emerging in Augustine’s mature thought, thus remained liable to dissolve. ‘When you act’, he once wrote to a high African official, ‘it is the Church that acts, for whose sake and as whose son you act.’ He regarded religious coercion primarily as a function not of the civil authorities, but of the Church. Through Christian rulers it is the Church that ‘uses power’. This tendency to allow the Church to absorb the state has been seen as Augustine’s most distinctive legacy to the political thought of the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, this ‘political Augustinianism’ was no part of what is distinctive of Augustine’s own mature reflection on the nature of society and politics.

v. The just war: a note

Questions about the morality of warfare, though linked with the fundamental themes of Augustine’s political thought, were also on the edges of his interest. His views on war were, however, often quoted by later writers and were to play an important part in the development of the theory of the ‘just war’. In essence, Augustine’s views on war are a simple affirmation that warfare, for all the misery, suffering and almost unavoidable wickedness that it involves, may in some circumstances be justifiable and that it may be a Christian’s duty to take part in it. Augustine never defined the conditions under which a war may be just with the systematic care which was later to be given to the question. It is clear from his scattered statements that relatively few wars, especially few wars which were not defensive, would have qualified. To be legitimate a war had to be either defensive or fought to remedy some grave injustice perpetrated by the enemy; it had to be carried out under the command of a properly constituted public authority, not as private vengeance; and its conduct had to be confined within some bounds of human decency, to be waged without the sins which are its almost inevitable companions: violence, cruelty, savagery, lust for power, and the like.

Augustine justified warfare on exactly the same lines as he justified recourse to force in society in general: as a necessary evil which had its part to play in the maintenance of order. The order in question was, as we have seen (above, pp. 108–11) differently conceived at different times. At first it was

91. Ep. 134.4. 92. Ep. 185.6.23, 2.11. 93. Ep. 173.10. 94. Arquilliere 1934, p. 4. 95. For one of the important problems not fully resolved by Augustine see Hartigan 1966. 96. For details, the best full account is Deane 1963, pp. 154–71. Russell 1975, though mainly devoted to the medieval tradition, gives a perceptive and balanced, though brief, assessment of Augustine (pp. 16–26). For a fuller account of Augustine’s views in the context of the development of his political ideas, see Markus 1983a.
the rational order of the universe of which the social order was a part. Later it was the 'earthly peace', that minimal condition of security and public order required for the maintenance of civilised life, between nations as well as within them. War is among the tragic necessities laid upon men in their conflict-ridden fallen state. Pre-Constantinian Christianity had not been entirely unanimous in the way it regarded warfare. Augustine could not return to the 'pacifist' tendencies predominant in it, upheld as late as the age of Constantine by Lactantius. Though killing was still often viewed with disapproval even in a justified war, the 'pacifist' thread in the early Christian tradition had been largely eroded during the fourth century by the willingness of Christians to identify themselves with the Roman Empire. Augustine's attitude to war, especially in his later years when he had come to reject this identification, was a much less positive and more reluctant and limited endorsement than could be found in many fourth-century Christian writers before him. Far from throwing the weight of his authority into the scales against the Christian 'pacifism' of the first three centuries, Augustine brought back something of that reserve into the wholly changed world of the Christian Empire of Theodosius and his successors.

Gregory the Great: towards new forms of community

During the 200 years between Augustine and Gregory the Great Europe had changed dramatically. Of Western Europe only Gregory's Italy remained under imperial control, and even here the Lombards had been advancing for some twenty years before his accession to the pontificate and were settling in large parts of the peninsula. Since about 540 Italian society had been profoundly dislocated by the long-drawn-out wars against the Goths, by plague and depopulation, by the collapse of the old aristocracy and the rise of new classes, mainly military and clerical, to positions of power in a society increasingly localised and restricted in its horizons. In a more than geographical sense Gregory lived on the edges of two overlapping worlds: that of the post-Justinianic Empire and that of Germanic Europe.97

Gregory's political consciousness was shaped both by his dealings with the Germanic regna and his daily experience of the imperium. He had been in contact with the imperial court at Constantinople; the imperial representative in Italy, the Exarch at Ravenna, maintained an extensive administra-

97. This is the form of the classic presentation in Caspar 1933, pp. 306–514.
The Latin fathers

The contacts of bishops with the civil administration had become closer than ever since Justinian's time. Churchmen now had public functions of unprecedented scope, and with them came increased exposure of the Church to imperial interest and legislation. The imperial Church after Justinian, Gregory's Church, was so closely integrated into the administrative structure of the Empire and this dispensation was so readily accepted by its bishops and popes that questions such as those that had agitated the age of Gelasius (see above, p. 102) could now scarcely arise. If conflict arose between Gregory and the emperor, as sometimes happened over particular ecclesiastical measures enacted by the government (as well as over some questions of secular politics in Italy), the conflict was formulated in personal rather than institutional terms. The pope, even when bitterly opposed to particular instances of the exercise of imperial power over ecclesiastical affairs, remonstrated with the emperor but did not dispute his right to legislate in ecclesiastical matters. In general, Gregory's official correspondence and particularly the traditional formulae of its preambles suggests that he never questioned the provisions Justinian had laid down for the imperial Church, but took them for granted as the normal framework of his activities. Even in his dealings with the now independent kings of Western Europe, Gregory tended to see them within the perspective of Byzantine constitutional fictions.

Gregory inherited many of the basic assumptions about the Byzantine regime for the Church and about the Christian Empire, which he accepted as a necessary part of the world order. There are, however, two other important sources for Gregory's ideas about society. The first was his wide reading of the works of previous Christian writers, the Latin fathers, especially Augustine, and Greek writers (in Latin translations). The second was his acquaintance with various traditions of monastic life, his admiration for one of its towering figures, St Benedict, and his own attachment to monastic ideals. Gregory was not a speculative thinker such as Augustine or the Greek fathers. There is no trace in his writings of any sustained attempt to integrate into a theoretical whole disparate ideas from such a variety of sources, or even to reconcile them with some of the inherited political assumptions which still had a powerful grip on his mind. Nevertheless, there are clear traces in his work of new ideas on Christian social living, taking form gradually. He made use of his reading, especially of Augustine, to help him give shape to these ideas. He used Augustine's language to

98. E.g. Epp. iii.61, 64, viii.10. See Fischer 1950.
express thoughts sometimes very different from their original content. Two overriding needs in his mind dominated the way in which he appropriated ideas from earlier writers: the need to represent all rule and authority in terms of service – itself an old Christian idea – and the need to find a way of integrating the active and the contemplative lives in the life and work of the ruler.100

His allusion to Augustine’s two ‘cities’ reveals the direction of the re-orientation that such ideas underwent in his mind. In a characteristic section of his commentary on the Book of Job (Mor. xvin.43.69–70), one full of echoes of Augustine, the tension between citizenship of Jerusalem and Babylon – Augustine’s types of the two ‘cities’ – is transformed into the tension between the contemplative and the active lives. Augustine had used the image of the two ‘cities’ to evaluate in a Christian perspective a whole political and cultural tradition rooted in the pagan past of Rome and charged with pagan associations. Much of this tradition was still alive in the culture and the institutions of his society; and he wished to give the sphere of secular institutions its proper place, emptied of the religious significance it had carried. This need had vanished from Gregory’s world. The secular traditions of pagan Rome no longer offered a real intellectual or moral option and its social and ceremonial expressions claimed no allegiance, even of the kind that the Lupercalia had commanded among some Christian senators as late as the end of the fifth century. The secular past had drained away from Rome and Gregory’s Italy. Christianity had absorbed such of its traditional institutions and culture as remained. Gregory’s Dialogues present an image of an Italy where the pagan past appears only in the remote haze of folklore and which is being drawn, through the patres Italici, into a Christian ecclesial community.

Gregory’s historical consciousness was shaped by a sense of the crumbling away of the secular institutions and the profane traditions rooted in Rome’s past. The result is clearly visible in his views both on Roman secular society and on the Church. The expectation of an imminent end, a sense of doom and the dissolution of the established order hangs over much of his work.101 At the same time, Gregory viewed the future of the Church with a calm assurance of peace and secure progress which contrasts as sharply with Augustine’s agnosticism about the vicissitudes in store for it as does his apocalyptic imagination with Augustine’s concern and hope for the regeneration of Rome.102 The eschatological tension of Augustine’s two

100. An early instance of the two themes in combination: Mor. v.11.18–19.
101. Hom. in Ez. ii.6.22, i.9.9; Ep. iii.29; Dial. ii.15.3.
'cities' interwoven in all secular institutions as well as in the Church on earth is relaxed by Gregory, transformed into another tension: that between the active and the contemplative forms of life. His image of the Church of his own time is that of a community which has absorbed earthly powers into its own being, and he can envisage no reversal of this condition until the final persecution in the last days preceding the end. Until then her life and mission are secure; even the rhinoceros of earthly power which had raised its horn against the Church now humbly bends his neck to the plough by ministering to the preaching of the holy faith.103

Gregory and the Christians he was preaching to or writing for had come to define their identity in religious terms. They thought of themselves as belonging to groups centred on holy men, on bishops or clergy. Gregory's ideas about authority assume the radically religious basis of the group in which authority is wielded as well as the essentially religious nature of the authority itself. His favourite word for those who bore authority was *rector*. In his *Moralia* he had used it often, both as a general word for 'ruler' and as a synonym for 'those who are at the head of' (*qui praesunt*, *praepositi*, etc.) Christian congregations, bishops and others. He had found the term in one of his most important sources, in Gregory of Nazianzus' *Apologeticus*.104

Here it was embedded in a wealth of political imagery of hierarchy and subordination, of ruler and ruled, higher and lower. The word had sometimes been used in reference to bishops before him; its more common meaning, however, was quite general: 'ruler', 'superior', anyone in a position of authority. In Gregory's time it was also the official title of the Church's agents in charge of its estates. Gregory's constant dealing with these men makes it all the more striking that when he came to write a handbook for bishops, at the outset of his own pontificate, he chose *rector* as his normal term for their office. Gregory's use of the vocabulary of government in the formulation of his own ideal of ecclesiastical office appears, at first sight, to offer a sharp contrast with Ambrose's title for his treatise on the same subject: *De officiis ministrorum*. In fact one of the threads running through Gregory's *Regula pastoralis* is the insistence that the exercise of power must be a mission of service to those subject to it, and humility its indispensable condition. The contrast with Ambrose's vocabulary of office as ministry is therefore not one of substance; but it reveals a

103. Mor. xxxi.4.4.

104. *Apol.* 3, in the translation by Rufinus, discussed in Markus 1986. This study now seems to me inadequate and both the lexicography of the word and its use by Gregory require further study. See also G. Folliet, 'Les trois catégories de chrétiens. Survie d'un thème augustinien', *L'Année théologique augustiniennne* 14 (1954), 81–96.
fundamental shift in the perception of authority. Gregory chose a word encrusted with strong overtones of government and hierarchy. These overtones were precisely the associations he set about to dissipate. The result is a model for the ecclesiastical superior formulated in the language of government; but as the language was borrowed from that of secular government, the ideal it was used to sketch could be taken over by secular rectores. There was no radical distinction to be drawn between ruling in the two spheres. The ruler merges into the spiritual guide.

Gregory was well aware — the point is especially clear in his correspondence — that ecclesiastical and civil administration remained distinct, though overlapping. In his political vocabulary, however, he was moving towards a world in which sacred and secular were apt to melt into each other. In his desecularised world the language of secular politics acquired a religious dimension and could be used to speak of ecclesiastical office, while, conversely, secular authority was envisaged within a religious setting. The cura regiminis was synonymous with the cura pastoralis, secular governing was as much a ministerium as ecclesiastical rule, bishop, priest and king could all be symbolised by the image of the shepherd.

Gregory’s ideas on the exercise of authority had been anticipated in St Benedict’s image of the abbot. Like Gregory’s rector, the abbot had to know how to profit (prodesse) rather than to ‘be over’ (praeesse) those subject to him. This ‘paternalist’ view of authority had deep roots in a long tradition of thought, Greek as well as Christian, and could be found in Augustine’s City of God in a chapter (xix. 14) echoed in one of Gregory’s crucial passages on the rector (Regula pastoralis ii. 6). This is one of those dense chapters which distils years of thought, reading and personal experience; and Gregory allows us to see the threads of his thought as they are being woven together. He had long ago absorbed Augustine’s teaching on how anyone in authority should conduct himself towards his subordinates. Like Augustine, he insisted that authority must be exercised with compassionate care (consulendo) not with lust for power and pride (dominandi cupiditate; dominando). Gregory’s ideal coincides with Augustine’s, even, to a noticeable extent, verbally. Despite the identity of their ideals, there is, however, a profound difference between Gregory and Augustine.

Augustine had gone on in his immediately following chapter (xix. 15; on

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105. E.g. Reg. past. i. 4. 106. E.g. Mor. xxvi. 26. 45.
107. Benedict, Regula monachorum 64. Gregory’s source for the doublet praeesse/prodesse in Reg. past. ii. 6 is however more likely to have been Augustine, De civ. Dei xix. 19; cf. Sermo 340. 1.
108. Mor. xxiv. 25. 52 contains some of the clearest allusions to Augustine, De civ. Dei xix. 14; the idea occurs in his works too frequently to multiply references.
it see above, pp. 110–11) to state his views on the origins and the nature of authority and subjection. It contains his classic exposition of his theology of the original equality of men by nature and the loss of equality with the loss of innocence. Gregory knew the chapter well. He borrowed heavily from it in a passage of his *Moralia* (xxi.15.22) to which he refers in the *Regula pastoralis* (11.6). Yet he failed to notice the change in Augustine’s argument between the two chapters: the subject of the first was the ideal ruler’s conduct; in the second Augustine moved on to the origin and nature of authority and subjection. Gregory was so little interested in the second theme that he not only failed to notice it, going on to use Augustine’s views in his own exposition of his ideal for the ruler to follow; but he misunderstood its central point. Augustine had traced inequality, especially servitude, to sin, not nature (*culpa meruit non natura*). Gregory took the ‘sin’ to refer to the personal faults of individuals.109 In contrast with Augustine, who thought of Adam’s sin as the source for the dislocation of nature which runs through man’s whole historical existence, Gregory traced the inequality among men and their subjection to others to the uneven distribution of merit among them, and to the mysterious operation of God’s providence.110 Those placed in authority must merit their position by virtue. God will often permit the unworthy, the proud or the foolish to wield power; but the wise will know how to profit from the rule of the fool and the sinner will receive in it his just punishment.111 There is a strong streak of egalitarianism in Gregory’s *omnes natura aequales sumus*: whereas Augustine pushed this equality back into primordial origins to explain its evident absence from our present world, Gregory made it a moral demand here and now.112 This was one of the more far-reaching consequences of his failure to understand Augustine. The rector, especially, must always remember men’s fundamental equality and act in accordance with that knowledge.113

Deeply as Gregory was influenced by the writings of the fathers and particularly Augustine, whose phrases he often reproduces (perhaps from memory), this divergence between them, at a point where Gregory is borrowing particularly freely from Augustine, reveals the fundamentally different orientations of their thought. Augustine’s concern to trace universal features of the human condition, the nature of power and social institutions had no interest for Gregory. His bent was pastoral and

110. *Mor.* xxvi.26.44–8, xxv.16.34. 111. *Mor.* xx.24.52, xxv.16.34 41.
contemplative rather than speculative; but, more important, the problems raised by the society he lived in were different. Gregory saw it in terms of groups defined in religious terms, and he wished to uphold an ideal – a thoroughly Pauline and ancient ideal – for all rulers, lay or clerical, in which power was understood as ministry. How to promote holiness among men: that was his overriding concern. He had seen the power of the Spirit at work in the holy men of the Italian countryside, drawing it into the orbit of a radically christianised society. He wished his fellow-bishops and his clergy to become foci of Christian living like them; to be praedicatores, channels for the power of the Gospel, rooted in God’s world by a life in which the painful tensions between action and contemplation were held in a fine equilibrium. His Regula pastoralis, a classic equally of ‘spiritual’ and of ‘political’ literature, created a model in which not only the active and the contemplative ideals but also the acquired status of the Italian viri Dei of the Dialogues and the bestowed status of the rector were integrated.

The grand simplification of Gregory’s model had more influence on medieval political thought than the complexities of Augustine’s theology of social living. The Aristotelian revolution of the thirteenth century swept Augustine’s theology of society aside, to substitute for it a fundamentally different account of political institutions;114 but it left Gregory’s ideal intact.

114. See n.72, p. 110 above.