

Christianity according to st. augustine and machia



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In St. Augustine's book entitled *Political Writings*, one could see that Christianity plays a very important role in his view of politics. His opinion on the morality or lack of morality in politics, to me makes it more evident that Christianity persuades his views. Although it seems his writings have become quite well known and admired, not everyone fully shared his beliefs. Niccolo Machiavelli, for instance, seemed to believe in a government that was not driven by morality, but more by practicality. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli stresses that the moral fibers of government should not be so soft. Like St. Augustine, his work went on to become one of the most famous books ever written about politics. Throughout the two works there are some similarities and differences regarding politics, however it their view of Christianity and morality that many find most intriguing.

After reading St. Augustine's book it seemed to me that he had very little interest in politics as a whole, but he did seem to have a great interest on the moral problems that plagued them. The books that make up this work come from one of his previous works entitled, *The City of God*, in which Augustine discusses many different aspects of the city. Augustine's view of Christianity in regard to politics was due to the moral decline of the Roman Empire and the effect of this decline on the still faithful Christians. Augustine blamed the pagan gods and their lack of concern for the moral character which defined those who worshiped them. He also makes a reference to Plato's *Republic*, in regards to the way Plato wanted to banish the poets from his city in speech. Augustine also felt that there should be strong censorship of the poets when writing about the gods because they made fools out of them. Augustine is also very concerned with the amount of people who in

past invasions of their homelands escaped by lying about being Christians and then turned their backs on Christ when the danger had subsided. Augustine's work also raises the question of why mercy is extended to the pious and ungrateful. Augustine responds by reminding everyone that, "The sun rises upon the good and evil, and the rains fall upon the just and the unjust." The book also discusses God's patience with humans and how the choice to repent one's sins lies within the man. He tells how some will recognize God's patience and repent while others will turn their backs and wait for their own judgment. Augustine also had an interesting view of how the mind and body were holy as well. He felt as though that if the mind were virtuous, which consisted of living a good and noble life, it would command the body, and that the body would become holy through the exercise of holy will. For example, this idea of a holy body was used to determine the purity of a woman who had been raped, for instance if the woman is strong in mind but the body is overcome by force then the body remains holy. However, if the woman is pure but weak in mind and gives in, then the body is no longer holy. Augustine also addresses some of the discrepancies some people had with the Old Testament, mainly the commandment that said that thou should not kill. He says that he who kills by order of another is not a killer, but is an aide. An example of this that he used was when Abraham sacrificed his son upon the altar by the order of God. In his work Augustine tells the Christians not to defy the enemies of the City of God because someday many will repent and become citizens of the city. Augustine is a very religious man, which causes his political theories to be somewhat, clouded by his stern beliefs of morality.

Many of the pagans try to blame the rise of Christianity for the moral decline of the Roman citizens, however as Augustine points out the moral decline of Rome began before the coming of Christ.

Niccolo Machiavelli seemed to some people to be in favor of tyranny in some ways. His book expressed very different concepts to those proposed by Augustine, in regards to the morality of politics. Machiavelli refers to government as the prince and makes various references to many aspects of politics, most of all morality. He claims that in order to secure the state the prince must become a master of the art of war. He says that this is the most important quality a person can obtain, and this art should be practiced in time of war and more importantly in time of peace. Though this does not explain his views of Christianity, it does show a strong distinction between how Machiavelli and Augustine have laid out their priorities. Machiavelli states that if a prince becomes driven to pursue what seems to many people to be a virtue, it will in time lead to him losing his state. While on the other hand, if the prince remains focused on what many consider to be a vice, it will help to ensure the safety of himself and his state. Machiavelli felt as though the prince should learn how to not be a good person, and to learn to use this quality according to necessity.

Of all of the virtues and vices listed in The Prince that the prince should or should not seek, neither justice nor injustice was found. This makes me wonder if Machiavelli, like St. Augustine, felt as if you could not have justice without the presence of God. This would make more sense in conjunction with the fact that Machiavelli claims that in order to be a prince one must steer clear of morals and take little account of faith. A person cannot be of

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loose moral standards and take little account of faith, and still be in the presence of God. And according to Augustine justice cannot be sought after without this presence. Machiavelli does not seem to be of loose moral standards himself but he does seem to rely on the fact that humans throughout history have not been so perfect. He does not like the way Augustine, Plato, and Aristotle build their imaginary perfect cities, but instead would rather build a city by using what is practical knowledge. He uses mistakes found in history to strengthen his city, because these were actual faults not some that he imagined. He displays this characteristic by showing his admiration of King Ferdinand for expelling the Jews and the Moslems from Spain. He admires the use of religion as a tool to secure the state and not use it as a guide of morals in order to rule. I believe the admiration of Ferdinand also shows that Machiavelli was not anti Christianity, due to the fact that he was the first King of the Christians.

Though these two writers are different in regard to their moral stance on certain things, I do think it is safe to say that they are both Christians. Although, without question St. Augustine is more in touch with his faith, he seems to be less in touch with politics. Machiavelli on the other hand does not separate man from what he sees to be his natural state of morality but uses it to the advantage of politics. When discussing Moses and his helping the Israelites escape to the promise land, Machiavelli mentions the miracles of Christ and states that God has done his part and it is time for humans to do theirs. This leads me to think that he believes politics should not lack God but work in conjunction with him. To me St. Augustine is not educated only in his faith, but in the faiths of others as well and he shows no discrimination

but more concern with how they are led morally in their beliefs. Machiavelli, however seems to be content with the use of religion as tool to secure the strength of the state. After fully reading the work I do not feel as though Machiavelli is as anarchical of a person as some would be led to think. I think he just had a better understanding of human nature and how it is commonly applied to politics.