

# St. Augustine, 'realistic pacifism,' and the Strategic Defense Initiative

by Gabriel Del Estal

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Saint Augustine is the spiritual father of the West, which, more than a geographical concept, is a spirit which has radiated through all continents of the world.

Man is not a thing, but a value. He is not animal biology. He is responsible consciousness. His role in the world is consequent action, willful risk-taking, a project for the future, ever-renewed adventure. He is on the Earth not as an inert particle, the pawn of cosmic gravitation, but as a transforming power submitted only to the gravity of the spirit. Rather than a docile tool, he is a cause.

Society, the state, man, technology, all the creations of man exist for him to perfect himself, in the world and in himself. All men are sons of God, not mere speaking beasts, but rather, creatures in the image of God, regenerated in Christ. This means that we are brothers, and as such, we must help each other. We have no castes or ranks given by nature, or privilege. In the eyes of theology, we are equal. Only God is absolute master of all goods, of all riches. From this standpoint, the economic barriers between the first, the second, and the third world must disappear if we desire that justice reign upon the Earth.

No one other than Augustine has so precisely expressed the concept of peace in its various orders and degrees, as in his work, *The City of God*. These are his words:

The peace of the body is the orderly temple of each part. The peace of the irrational soul, the orderly quiet of its appetites. The peace of the rational soul, the orderly balance between thought and action. The peace between the body and the soul, an orderly life and the health of the subject. The peace between mortal man and Immortal God, orderly obedience in faith under eternal law. The peace of man, orderly concord. Peace in the home, the orderly concord of orders and

obedience between those who therein dwell. Peace of the celestial city, the most orderly and most harmonious society, prepared to rejoice in God. . . . The peace of whole things, the quiet of order. And order, the disposition of equal and unequal things through each one being adjusted to its true and proper place.—

*The City of God*, XIX, 13, 1, PL 41, 640.

Nonetheless, for St. Augustine, a defensive war is always just. Therefore he writes words which he puts into the mouth of Evodius:

The soldier who kills the enemy in combat is a pure executor of the law, since he carries out his task without wrongdoing. Certainly, the law itself, which has been promulgated to defend the people, cannot be called licentious. Because he who gave it, if he did so by divine order, i.e., in accordance with the principles of eternal justice, can act free from all guilt.—*On Free Will*, I, 5, PL32, 1227.

Between war and peace, the value judgment cannot be clearer:

The Will must be directed towards peace, while war should be undertaken by necessity alone, while God frees us of necessity and keeps us in peace.—*Letter 189 to Boniface*, 6, PL 33, 856.

Offensive wars, devoid of other causes, are those which are unjust in themselves. Thus, Augustine says:

To declare war on neighboring peoples, and from thence, to yet other conquests, to plunder and submit peaceful peoples with only the aim of increasing the domains of the state, what name does this deserve save that of a gigantic theft?—*The City of God*, IV, 6, PL 41, 116-1170.

Although peace is placed higher than war as a category of values, this does not prevent Augustine from considering legitimate the defense of the state, with military organization and equipment in arms for the struggle against any aggressor. This is the law of primary existence.

But placing peace higher than war is not pacifism as such. There are three sorts of pacifism today:

- *Utopian pacifism*: sincere, directed by a simplistic heart. Most ordinary people, most ecologists, and some

angelic ecclesiastics who read the Bible with more of a lyrical than a pastoral bent;

● *Manipulated pacifism*: This is a form of pacifism between servile and sincere, ruled by a depersonalized reason. Ardent souls, knowingly or unknowingly the tools of a warlike power bent on the conquest of the world. The temptation and the proposal to reconstruct one *civitas* alone will be brought secretly to fruition by the most brutal war, surprising those who stand unprepared, without weapons and in no condition to resist. The victory over confidently empty arsenals will be the sure final consequence. The demonstrations and hostile cries against Ronald Reagan on his recent trip to Europe, from May 4-9, 1985, culminating in the most untriumphal fashion in Madrid on the 7th and 8th, are the model for this type of frivolous pacifism.

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tive, also known as space defense or Star Wars, have been thus rejected by certain European circles.

● *Realistic pacifism*: This is true pacifism, directed by critical thought. This pacifism grasps and takes upon itself the necessity for war, but only within just limits of those arms required to defend the highest value of peace. This is how St. Augustine understands pacifism, when he writes to General Boniface: "Peace is not sought to promote war, but war is fought to win peace."—*Epist. 189 ad Bonifacium*, 6, PL33, 856.

This realistic pacifism, in the terms of our times, is represented today by President Reagan and his program known as the Strategic Defense Initiative, as he further expressed in his speech to the 40th Anniversary of the foundation of the U.N. on Oct. 24, when he committed himself to uphold decisive action in order for there to be a true peace, throwing down the gauntlet to the U.S.S.R., yet another manifestation of the good faith of the President of the U.S.A.

One should also bear in mind that Augustine, in his

doctrinal dialectics, writes guided by the theology of sin and of grace, as a standard for reason. This theology sets man against man in a constant state of warfare, since the fall of Adam. Therefore, Augustine says: "There would be no war if human nature, using its free will, were steadfast within the uprightness in which it was created."—*The XXI*, 15, PL 41, 729.

In order that the ideals and revolutionary needs of hope lead actively to the peace of "orderly concord," more noble and speedy herald than the efficient heart. St. Augustine knew this secret perfectly when in 429, he wrote an amiable letter of greetings to Count Darius, plenipotentiary of the Empire in Western Africa, sent there to reconcile the rebel General Boniface with the Ravenna court, to avoid that this last imperial province of the North African diocese fall to the vandals.

It was a moment of intense anxiety. The *Pax Romana*, far from being immortal, was in its death rattle. In addition to the external danger, there were the internal disorders, worse than the sword of the barbarians. Faced with this fragile panorama of divided resistance and wills, Augustine wrote in telegraphic style in the text of that letter, the following luminous words:

Not only those who are strong fighters shall be great and enjoy glory, but also those who fight faithfully, which is a lineage still more deserving of praise . . . but before killing men with arms, it is far more glorious to kill war itself with words, and gain and consolidate peace with peace, never with war.—*Epist. 229 to Darius*, 2, PL 33, 1019-1020.

The *Pax Romana* of the dying empire suffered yet another ratchet turn, with the sack of Rome which occurred in August 410. Other citizens of the *Civitas*, especially those of Rome itself, who had remained faithful to the pagan divinities, attributed the causes of the catastrophe to Christianity. Augustine refutes this accusation. He suffered more than anyone from the fall of Rome. But he transferred to the Romans themselves, by the perversion of their habits, the causes for the terrible devastation wreaked upon the City. And to demonstrate this, in his great Christian theology of history, represented by the twenty books of the *City of God*. In this way, there can be said in the first pages of this *magnum opus*: "Those evils, which they justly suffer due to the perversion of their habits, are imputed by the blasphemers to Christ."—*The*

The death rattle of the *Pax Romana*, of which Augustine was a witness in his day, could well become the death rattle of the *Pax Humanitas*, which many of us foresee for our time. Unless we desire to perish in a universal holocaust, it has never been more urgent to walk together along a civilizing path, ever higher toward peaceful concord. Either we build a new world through peace, or we destroy the one we are living in through war.