Bart VAN EGMOND
Augustine's Early Thought on the Redemptive Function of Divine Judgement
Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018, 304 pp.

One of the most important Fathers of the Church, Saint Augustine was and remains a writer that can be investigated and offers answers to many of contemporary theological problems. This is the reason why, Bart van Egmond, one of the contemporary scholars known for his interest in the aforementioned author, offers a new research entitled *Augustine's Early Thought on the Redemptive Function of Divine Judgement*, published at Oxford University Press in 2018.

Segmented in for big chapters and accompanied by an introduction and conclusion, his book aims to investigate the eschatological conception of Augustine and to see how relevant currents of thinking and spirituality from his times, like Gnosticism and Manichaeism, influenced the bishop of Hippo. Starting from these aspects that are clearly mentioned in the introductory part, in the methodological question, he realises a historical inquiry with multiple valences. Therefore, as he underlines:

«This book is limited in its scope. It offers a historical reading of Augustine, rather than a contemporary application of his theology. Moreover, it does not cover all of Augustine's works, but describes the development of his thought on the relationship between God's grace and his justice during the first ten years of his career as a philosopher and theologian. This does not mean, however, that the book is only of interest to those who read Augustine from an historical perspective. As indicated above, the historical context in which Augustine developed his Christian theology of grace and judgement resembles our modern and postmodern situation in many respects. This makes the study also relevant to a readership» (p. 4).

In order to help the reader to understand his ideas not only in the general cultural context of the 3th and 4th centuries of our Era, but also inside the tradition of the Church, where some authors have also been influenced by the aforementioned currents, he also offers a brief overview of the problematic and of the different forms that it took for the most important authors of the beginning of Christianity (p. 9-14). Pleading for a pedagogical understanding of controversial authors like Origen and of sensitive conceptions like *apokatastasis*, he shows that:

«Although it remains a matter of discussion whether Augustine adopted Origen's metaphysical framework (the fall of the soul and the apokatastasis pantoon), his early writings testify that he did share Clement and Origen's pedagogical understanding of salvation history and the function of divine judgement within it. This raises the first question of our investigation: how does Augustine relate to this pedagogical understanding of punishment in his early writings and how does his thought develop up until the Confessions? I will argue that Augustine initially adopted a pedagogical approach, in which God's punishment of sin is by nature instructive (presupposing the freedom of the will), but gradually comes to disconnect this combination of punishment and mercy. Only for the predestined, who have been liberated from the law of death in the body of Christ, does God's judgment have pedagogical effects. In this regard, Augustine

departed from the Origenist tradition by upholding its theodicy without upholding its belief in human free will» (p. 9).

The investigation contains a deep regard to works like the dialogue from Cassiciacum (p. 28-75), where the author retired for a while to meditate at the meaning of life, *Confessions*, the masterpiece of Augustin's work and one of the most important works on spiritual autobiography from the entire Christian history, but also investigation of aspects like his conception on the «embodied soul» or the influence of Saint Paul on Augustine's theology. Passionate by the investigated author and his ideas, the author offers a synthesis of his work and ideas and presents how, starting from keywords like happiness, governance of universe, eternal life, the soul and s. o., they can be found in the entire augustinian creation and the way how they suffer a metamorphosis in time, when this happens. For example, he shows that:

«In De ordine Augustine defines happiness in similar terms to those in De beata vita, but now from the perspective of providence and evil. When people see evil in the universe, they either conclude from this that God does not govern the universe or that God is not good. The real problem, however, is the sickness of the soul itself. The irrational soul, occupied with the particulars of temporal life, cannot perceive order –and instead of blaming itself for this mistake, it blames God–. We will only reach the happy life if the law according to which God governs everything –including evil– is written in our minds. In order to reach this state, the soul should withdraw itself from its occupation with particulars and train itself to discover that everything, good or bad, fits in the bigger whole of a divinely established order» (p. 30).

Valuable thanks to the historical information offered, but also important for the doctrinaire or philosophical research, the wok of Bart van Egmond dedicated to *Augustine's Early Thought on the Redemptive Function of Divine Judgement*, is for sure an useful and interesting tool in understanding *Confessions'* author eschatological conception, the relevance of the cultural context of his times and of Manichaeism on some of his ideas, but also the actual aspects that can be found there. Although some of the arguments may not look very acceptable from the point of view of some confessional conceptions, the research remains valuable for its scientific value, for the bridges that can create, but also due to the fact that it offers a potential topic of debate and dialogue between theologians coming from different confessional backgrounds, philosophers and theologians, historians or philologists.

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