The thoughts of St. Augustine on the temporal order, as expressed in *De Civitate Dei* and elsewhere, have engaged the attention of many modern commentators. During the course of a long life St. Augustine had much to say on the subject; his opinions crystallised gradually; his words are often pregnant and mystifying. Accordingly commentators differ among themselves in their interpretations. Now Dr. Markus enters the field with a work notable for its wealth of scholarship, its lucidity of expression, and its concern to render St. Augustine relevant to the politico-religious issues of our own day. *Saeculum* makes a fitting sequel to Dr. Mazzolani's *Idea of the City in Roman Thought* noted above.

The central line of this enquiry, writes Markus (p. vii), is: 'How did Augustine conceive the purpose of human society, in relation to his conception of man's ultimate destiny? How did he think of actual, historical societies — particularly of the "state" of his own day, the Roman Empire — in relation to the whole history of human societies? What, in the end, did he consider to be man's right posture in the *saeculum*: the world of men and of time'.

As Markus points out, there was in the ancient Church a wide spectrum of opinion about the Empire. At one extreme is the apocalyptic tradition exemplified by Hippolytus that the Empire is Anti-Christ. At the other end of the scale, exemplified by Eusebius and Orosius, is the belief that the Empire is the providentially established vehicle of the Church and is to be regarded with great respect.

In Markus' judgement, Augustine in his definitive thought follows a via media. Augustine is agnostic about history and divine purpose in history for the whole period, whatever its length, between the Incarnation and the Parousia. We live, as it were, permanently in the confusion of the Last Days. Accordingly, the Empire has no religious significance; it is neither Satanic nor Messianic; it is an empirical society, theologically neutral.

Markus explores this interpretation in five closely argued chapters, supplemented by appendices. In the sixth chapter, 'Coge intrare', he considers what is prima facie an objec-
tion to the agnostic rendering of the *saeculum*, that is Augustine's readiness, nay eagerness, to endorse religious coercion by the civil power. Markus traces Augustine's attitude to coercion through the stages of his career, especially in the struggle against the Donatists, and comes to the conclusion that while an unresolved paradox remains, the desacrilisation of the *saeculum* persists.

Chapter 7, 'Civitas Peregrina: Signposts' is described by the author as an epilogue in which he tentatively carves a channel from Augustine to our own times. Here Markus' own convictions about the Church and the World are revealed; he belongs it seems to the school of thought which looks to the disestablishment of the Church and the advent of the secular state as a salutary release for Christian witness; he deplores the Thomistic doctrine of a cosmic order in which right civil order participates; and he dismisses as a profound mistake the whole notion of a Christian society. He substitutes eschatological hope, with no programme, no ideology, and no strategy, for the classical concept, stemming from the days of Constantine, of a Church-State settlement; he seems to envisage politics as a continuous revolution. The State should be desacrilised, and he comes near to asserting that the Church should likewise be desacrilised. What really matters is the eschatological Kingdom, the final consummation of God's creative intention.

In all this, Markus looks to Augustine as the forerunner. 'The main lines of Augustine's thinking about history, society and human institutions in general (the *saeculum*) point towards a political order to which we may not unreasonably apply the anachronistic epithet "pluralist", in that it is neutral in respect of ultimate beliefs and values'. (p.151). The Augustinian concept was frustrated by political events towards the close of the ancient world; it was further obscured by the triumph of Aristotelianism in the thirteenth century; only now in the twentieth century is it coming into its own.

The foregoing outline cannot remotely do justice to the subtlety and depth of Markus' thesis. The book demands very careful reading. In judging the thesis two distinct questions arise. Does Markus correctly represent Augustine's views on the *saeculum?* This will be a matter for scholars.
Is the case for the pluralistic idea of the State as strong as Markus claims? This is a question for philosophical discussion.

The second question is bound to arouse much controversy. Those who are suspicious of authority and chafe at obedience will welcome Markus' support for pluralist politics. Socialists, and the Old Left, on the other hand, will sternly reject that politics. Markus' assertion that the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition of ordered politics, and the notion of Christendom, are incompatible with true Christianity will enlist enthusiastic assent in recklessly adventurous circles, but will be received sceptically by those who enjoy adventure only when it is steadied by prescription.

The last named will regret the fact (if it be a fact) that Augustine lent himself to agnostic politics; a politics which seems to imply the worthlessness of the natural man; which seems to encourage cynical opportunism; which smacks of Machiavelli and Hobbes; which could issue in a State leviathan as easily as in the gentle tolerance which Markus envisages; a politics, in fine, which betrays the great European tradition of manners, law and citizenship.

Such critics will point out that all programmes to diminish the importance of the material and natural, on the plea that the spiritual and supernatural will thereby be exalted, end in the reverse of what was intended; they will thank God for the sobriety of the Stagirite and the Angelic Doctor; they will rejoice that the political ideas here attributed to Augustine have languished for so long in limbo; and they will hope that the present 'Augustinian' political revival will be of short duration.

Wherever our convictions and sympathies lie in this profound and complex matter, we must pay a tribute to Dr. Markus' achievement. He has probed into the foundations of politics with a lucidity rarely matched by modern authors. His book is strongly recommended.

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