



**A CRITIQUE OF THE AUGUSTINIAN VIEW OF POLITICAL CITY AND THE
HEAVENLY CITY IN THE LIGHT OF THE SOCIO-CULTURAL
STATUS OF AFRICAN COSMOLOGY**

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Abstract

Politics principally precedes the activity of governing or leading people. It is the act and tact of persuasion by which the expression becomes political. It is the science that crafts and craves for leadership by an objective process of selecting leaders in a given community. In the human domain, this process follows the logic of careful selection by canvassing for votes, persuading and attracting people if it is by democratic process. In the human world, there are many and diverse theories of politics, which involve democracy, monarchy, dictatorship, communism, and socialism. A closer look at the divine plan, politics is void; it is elicited as theocracy: leadership by divine authority and power. Employing a constructive and analytical methodology, the research unveils the nuances and intricacies that emerge as humans go out in quest for political leadership, yet God is beyond politics; He is divine authority. The Incarnation is a doctrine that invites us to the leadership of Jesus Christ. It is given to humanity to yearn for heaven, to submit to the act of establishing the heavenly city on earth. The human city, therefore, is needed to prepare for the heavenly city, as the two are states of beings; the former temporal, leading to the immortal state of perfection in the latter, the perfect and final destination of all human beings.

Keywords: African Cosmology, Earthly, Heavenly, Human, Theory of Politics

Introduction- Epistemology of Politics

Politics can be said to be a theory of human governance. The great ancient Greek Philosopher Aristotle had said that “man is a political animal.” This is true due to his rationality and intelligibility. A careful examination of the nature of Political Knowledge has revealed it to be tripartite: Complexity, Contextual and Interpretive. By discussing its complexity, we refer to the aspect of political knowledge that is complex, multifaceted, and influenced by various factors, including history, culture, economics, and power dynamics. By contextual nature, we examine the fact that political knowledge is deeply contextual based on a geographical location, shaped by specific social, cultural and historical contexts. In this research, we are examining principally the socio-cultural settings of the African Cosmology. By Interpretative nature, we are analyzing that political knowledge which involves interpretation and critical analysis of information, events, and ideologies.⁹⁹ All these interplays capture the syntax and complexities of the African world.

The research examines and analyzes the evolution of African villages from an ancestral style of leadership, by eldership based on town square settings and methodology, into city style calibration

⁹⁹Cf. AI technological expertise on the evolution of politics in human society



in modernity. Now, in African cities, “Urbanization has been described as a critical process in the development of the nation-state.”¹⁰⁰ This seemingly quick progression of the African village set-up, which is still in existence, but needs to affirm that the majority are moving now to the lavish city dwellings urban setup. This drive and yearning have brought transformation and the need to give effective leadership in every African country in the 21st century.

The quest for urbanization and the movement of human populations from rural village life to towns and cities are not modern phenomena, but have been in practice in Africa for many centuries. History reveals that Africans are not new to city settlements; they have been present in the lifestyle and habitation. Ozden wrote: “... urbanization is not a modern phenomenon in Africa. It has been in occurrence since time immemorial when Africans started founding permanent settlements, which invariably paved the way for the first urban revolution around the Nile Valley in the region of Alexandria in Egypt.”¹⁰¹ As this reality revealed the complex nature of the African elders moved from a town-square system of leadership to a city structure, so too, did the evolution of governance, politics and leadership emerge amongst Africans.

We explore further the nature and manner the phenomena of city dwelling came up and how African human persons develop the rules of governance, the politics of selecting suitable leaders for the community of citizens in the city state.

The Phenomenology of City and Human Habitation – Scientists have revealed from data collected and observations made of the different planets in the galaxy, only the Earth is habitable by human beings, because of the presence of oxygen, water and conducive atmospheric weather. Since life is lived and organized on this planet, it is guided by the gift of family, village and city style of leadership. Thus, in the human cosmos, different forms of leadership emerge from the politics to lead a given people. Specifically, from the ancient Greek concept of politics – democracy – was understood to have the semblance of American definition to be “government of the people, by the people and for the people – build on Fundamental Principles and values: Equality, Rule of Law, Limited Government and Representative Democracy”¹⁰² *Ab initio*, the word democracy comes from the Greek words “*demos*” meaning people, and “*kratos*” meaning power. Thus, “*democratia*” – Government of the people or better still, democracy can be thought of as “Power of the People”: a way of governing which depends on the will of the people”¹⁰³ Africans prior to the present state of politics did not practice democracy. Yet, it can be infer that the cosmological reality of the thinking and intellectual of pre-colonial African was well organized around the “town hall, elder forum, town square” system of leadership. From the study of anthropology, sociology and ethnology, it reveals that human persons differ from place to place, race to race and from

¹⁰⁰Rakodi Carole, *The Urban Challenges in Africa: Growth and Management of Large Cities*, Tokoyo, New York: United Nations University, 1997, 8

¹⁰¹Ozden Kemal & Enwere Chogize, *Urbanization and Its Political Challenges in Developing Countries. Eurasian Journal of Business and Economics*, Vol. 5, No. 10, 2012, 100

¹⁰²Fundamental Principles and Values of American Political and Civic Life, Accessed on 03:03:2023, on <https://www.edtechbooks.org> – democracy.

¹⁰³Democracy-definition, History, Meaning, Types, Examples & Meaning, Accessed on 04:04:2023, on <https://www.britannica.com>



civilization to civilization; no two realities are the same, yet Africans are resilient people, with honour and dignity for life and elders.

The evolution of the power-play in politics is as old as the human person. Intellectual records affirm that the human person in the existential truth, as Man or Woman, is a being that thinks. As such over the years, we have been able to evolve theories and construct best and tested structures to govern, develop and move events of leadership beyond the ancient civilizations, including of the Greeks. In the contemporary African perspective, democratic structure in politics is the science of canvassing for elective post by making direct contact with the electorate. By this system, the politicians, by socializing, engaging and interacting with the masses and electorate, have one goal in mind: to be elected to serve. Thus, politics deals with a centrifugal purpose of interactions with the foot soldiers – citizens of the earthly city – to win their confidence for garnering votes, loyalty and support to take charge of an elective position of leadership. The research examines how past and current political theories, trends and structures that are developed and experimented by Europeans and Americans can be learnt and applied to better the socio-cultural, politico-economic landscape and milieu of the African person in the 21st century.¹⁰⁴

The Template and Setting of Two Cities Literary History – Since the creation of the human being, the stage was set for the platform of two cities: the temporal and the earthly in contradistinction to the eternal and the heavenly. From the first law given to Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden, where they were well instructed to eat any type of fruit, except the one in the middle of the garden, the conflict ensued in the two cities: the earthly city govern by human desires and passion that led to the fall of the human race and the heavenly city govern by the law of love and obedience restored by Christ at the Paschal Mystery. In the strict examination of concepts, the two cities can and do weigh in feuds, conflicts and wars seeking dominance over the affairs of politics to lead.

It is actually in defense of the eternal city – the intellectual and classic scenario was espoused by Augustine of Hippo in A.D. 412. He wrestled and succeeded in clarifying the quantum accusations that were made by the pagans, that it was Christianity that caused the sack of Rome by Alaric. “Augustine wrote his magisterial *City of God* shortly after the sack of Rome by the Visigoths in 410, as a response to accusations by Roman aristocrats that Christians were to blame for the sack.”¹⁰⁵ The Roman aristocrats thought the earthly city was beyond destruction by foot soldiers. By when it happened, they were devastated and overcome by anguish. “They claimed Christian otherworldliness and humility made them too meek to be patriotic citizens willing to defend their fatherland. In response, Augustine claimed that Christians make the best kinds of citizens because their religion prepares them better to practice justice and love.”¹⁰⁶ Thus, the template is a scenario of a blame game cast on the cheap platform lies, deceit, and fraud causations.

¹⁰⁵Augustine, *City of God Against the Pagans*, trans., R. W. Dyson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); John von Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001); 42.

¹⁰⁶“Disarming, Simple, and Sweet: Augustine's Republican Rhetoric,” in *Talking Democracy: Historical Perspectives on Rhetoric and Democratic Deliberation*, eds. Benedetto Fontana, Cary J. Nederman, and Gary Remer, (University



Conflict in the Emergence of the Heavenly City in the Earthly City – “No pain no gain” is secured as a rule of thumb from the motivational challenge given by gymnastic rule of rigorous training in exercises that schools the human body and spirit to take shape and tonality of strength, agility to develop firm muscles. The conflictual nature of the human person is beyond the politics to dominate, but to exercise power, authority, and to conquer to rule. In ancient Rome, a great conflict arose between the pagan citizens who accused the Christians of being responsible for the destruction of the political city. To this false and ungrounded accusation:

...in 413, St. Augustine took upon himself the task of writing a reply. In his *retractations*, St. Augustine writes: “When Rome was devastated as a result of the invasion of the Goths under the leadership of Alaric, the worshippers of the false gods, whom we are accustomed to call pagan, began, in their attempt to blame this devastation on the Christian religion, to blaspheme the true God with more bitterness and sharpness than usual. Wherefore, fired with a zeal for God’s house, I determined to write book, *The City of God*, against their blasphemies and errors.”¹⁰⁷

From the foregoing, the classic book of St. Augustine – *The City of God* - thus, was written to resolve, explain and digest the false presumptions of the pagan Roman citizens to illustratively to build on it the solid logic and basic principles that the eternal city of heaven endures against the principalities and demonic structure of the earthly city.

The constitution and criteria of the citizenship of the heavenly city away from that of the earthly city are sharp, distinct and explicit. For example, “Members of the city of God love God at the expense of themselves, while members of the earthly city love themselves at the expense of God.”¹⁰⁸ Discerning the origin or source of the conflict is complex but sometimes based on psycho-emotional distress. It is true that: “All human beings must struggle to have the love of God dominant over the love of self. Because the struggle is inner, one cannot say with finality whether someone is a member of one city or the other. Augustine observed that Christian churches are filled with members of the earthly city.”¹⁰⁹ The doctrinal versus linguistic conflict must have erupted to mis-application of basic scriptural and orthodox issues. Thus, Augustine “objected to claims, such as those made at the time by the Donatists, that mere membership or communion is sufficient for salvation. He also suggested some non-Christians could be members of the city of God, including the Greek philosopher Plato and the Roman general Regulus. Augustine saw in Plato a genuine love of the transcendent Good which Augustine took to be equivalent to the

Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2004), 163-86; "Soulcraft, Citizenship, and Churchcraft: The View From Hippo," in *Cultivating Citizens*, eds. Dwight Allman and Michael Beaty, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002), 29-

¹⁰⁷Saint Augustine, *City of God* ed. Vernon J. Rourke, New York: Image Books, 1958, – *Retractations* 2.43-2

¹⁰⁸Ogle, V. (2020). *The Status of Politics: Rereading City of God 19 in Light of Augustine’s Sacramental Vision*. Also, *In Politics and the Earthly City in Augustine’s City of God* (pp. 144-181). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/9781108903639.007

¹⁰⁹Ogle, V., *In Politics and the Earthly City in Augustine’s City of God* (pp. 144-181). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



Christian understanding of God.¹¹⁰ This will explain that the polarity examining one from the other is unique but different.

Formation of the Earthly City and the Apparatus of Politics – The interplay of the elements that add up to form the features of the earthly city emerges from strong elements of leadership, citizenship and the order created by the use of law, not force.

African Settlements are oriented by wealth to fruitfulness – In African cosmology, life is circle of birth, marriage and death, it is raining, planting and harvestings seasons, it is farming, fishing and agriculture, it is childhood, adulthood and elder status, it is innocence of infant stage, to youthful energy to elderly wisdom. The whole chromosome of the African person is designed by culture, tradition and wisdom to be communitarian to bear seeds of fruitfulness.

The African cosmology deals with the transmission of ancestral blessings that emerge from hard work, industry, honesty, truthfulness and productivity. Leadership in the family, clan, community and the city emerges from the capacity of hard work, honesty, truthfulness, thriftiness and industry. The style of leadership is either hereditary or by the emergence of a hero, who champions a cause that leads to liberation from oppressive forces, sickness, or the provision of necessities for the common good of the Community.¹¹¹

In African cosmology, leadership thus, is wealth, homogeneity, competence or comes by ancestral blessings. The bestowal of the riches of leadership, which guides the direction of political life, deals with the provision of visionary leadership skills in farming, fishing, hunting, or destroying the forces of political conflict and crises.

Conclusion

The concluding remarks point to the reality that an African is a religious person to the core of his or her being; as such, the quest for eternal destiny is foremost in the mind of every African Christian or Muslim. Within this setting, the cosmological atmosphere stipulates that politics must be done in the spirit of setting a harmonious co-existence between the earthly city seeking a reputable place of refuge in the heavenly city. There must not be love lost by the daily struggle.

The optimum desire of the African person is a beatific place of peace, joy, love, and eternal rest with his or her ancestors in the heavenly city. This is where book 19 comes in. Here, Augustine's profound sense that the earthly city overstates its claim on the world translates into a different vision of politics: one in which our political communities are wounded. Making conceptual space between natural political community, postlapsarian political necessity, and sinful political behavior, Augustine of Book 19 does not concede the political sphere to the earthly city. Instead, he urges us to participate in our political communities without participating in the earthly city.

¹¹⁰Ogle, V. (2020). *The Status of Politics: Rereading City of God 19 in Light of Augustine's Sacramental Vision*. Also, *In Politics and the Earthly City in Augustine's City of God* (pp. 144-181). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/9781108903639.007



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Thus, I conclude, when it comes to politics, the psychagogic goal of City of God is that we participate as pilgrims, striving to be a healing presence within our political communities while seeking a good beyond them all the same.”