

THE PROCRUSTEAN BED OF THE *ORDO*.¹¹ COMMENTS ON ANNE-ISABELLE BOUTON-TOUBOULIC, *L'ORDRE CACHÉ*: LA NOTION DE L'ORDRE CHEZ SAINT AUGUSTIN¹¹

I

Throughout his working life, Augustine shared the insight of the classical philosophers that a reflection on the notion of *ordo* was very important. Although he defined the term *ordo* in his early work *De ordine* as 'that by which all things created by God are guided' (*ord.* I. 28), the same text shows that the term did not have a definite meaning. As early as 386-7, he used *ordo* for 'sequence', 'causal connection' between two events, or 'order of ranking'. *Ord.* I.1. demonstrates that *ordo* also implied and evoked a sense of coherence: a coherence in which everything has its own place and meaning and into which human beings may be integrated and into which they may know they have been incorporated. It is the first pole of Augustine's thinking about *ordo*. At the end of *De ordine*, he reveals the second: the world is intelligible (*intelligibilis*) and the intelligibility of those parts of it that seem ugly at first sight, derives from the ordering of the whole beauty and perfection. The integration of mankind into the order and intelligibility of the world do not, however, mean that human beings will ever know the cause of the *ordo* here on earth (*ord.* II.51). The intelligibility of the order, in which men can partake through study and a proper order of life, is but a taste of the definitive insight into the coherence of everything and everyone in the last things.

Anne-Isabelle Bouton-Touboulic's extensive and impressive study *L'ordre caché. La notion de l'ordre chez saint Augustin*. Paris, 2004 (*Collection des Études Augustiniennes – Série Antiquité* 174) shows, among other things, that tension continued to exist between these two poles in Augustine's thinking for the entire duration of his life. No such extensive examination of Augustine's notion of order has ever been published before. The book fills a void. Some research

¹ This text is the result of a seminar on Augustine, given by Prof Paul van Geest in the Research Master programme of the Faculty of Theology at the VU University Amsterdam in 2006 and 2007. One of the works discussed during the seminar was Anne-Isabelle Bouton-Touboulic, *L'ordre caché. La notion de l'ordre chez saint Augustin*. Paris, 2004, 700 pp. (*Collection des Études Augustiniennes – Série Antiquité* 174).

has been done into the socio-cultural aspects of the concept of order in a number of specific writings of Augustine, for example by S. Budzik and M. Ruokanen. But up to now no comprehensive study existed of all the aspects of meaning in the notion of *ordo* as it appears in Augustine's entire oeuvre.²

The source material for this study consists of all of Augustine's writings. Nevertheless, Bouton-Touboullic's extensive book does not address developments in the denotation of the concept of *ordo*.³ Rather, *L'ordre caché* is organised thematically, so as to demonstrate the unity in Augustine's idea of order and simultaneously to show his originality. Firstly, the author has examined order as it manifests itself in creation and has attempted to answer the question as to whether the order of nature is autonomous of the Creator or dependent upon him. Subsequently, she has addressed the issue of how order underlies God's plan of salvation, which accomplished the restoration of order when man's free will proved to contain the seeds of order's polar opposite. Does redemption mean a restoration of the original order, or does Augustine think that a new order is introduced after the effects of original sin took their course? Finally, she has investigated the normative value of *ordo* for thinking, willing and acting human beings: the practical and existential dimensions of the order.

It is one of the great merits of the book that Bouton-Touboullic has not limited herself to passages in which Augustine explicitly speaks of *ordo*. On the contrary, she has analysed not only terms related to 'ordo' in their context ('unitas', 'concordia', 'contextio' etc.), but also equivalent terms ('amor', 'pondus') and even opposite terms ('distinctio'), in order to obtain understanding of the depth and breadth of Augustine's concept of *ordo*. It is typical for the method employed by the author that she has interpreted the meanings of *ordo*, *ordinare* and *ordinatio* (or related words) as they were current in Augustine's time in the light of Greek, Latin, pagan and early Christian sources or source terms such as τάξις and κόσμος. The aim of this is to bring Augustine's own understanding of *ordo* to light more clearly (cf. p. 20). Moreover, Bouton-Touboullic has not only examined the *notion* of *ordo*. She has also engaged Augustine's assumption in her

² S. Budzik, *Doctor pacis. Theologie des Friedens bei Augustinus*. Innsbruck-Wien, 1988 (*Innsbrucker theologische Studien* 24) or M. Ruokanen, *Theology of Social Life in Augustine's De civitate Dei* (Göttingen 1993). 29-76 (*Forschung zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte* 53).

³ Unlike J. Rief, *Der Ordobegriff des jungen Augustinus*. Paderborn, 1962, who analysed the works up to 391.

book that order is a reality which presupposes faith and which convinces men – through their experience of disorder – that the *ordo* will remain *occultus*, even when they – through *tenere ordinem* – obtain a certain amount of insight into the order behind everything and everyone. Finally, she has argued along the lines of R. Markus's *Saeculum. History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge 1970), that Augustine marks the shift from a spatial-cosmic concept of *ordo* to a more biblically-based concept in which the temporal dimension of order is preeminent. Before formulating some comments on this book, we will first address its contents.

II

As has been seen, the first part of the book deals with the order which underlies God's act of creation and which is unfolded in this act. It sketches Augustine's thoughts about God as absolute and immutable Being, as the Good, as the *essendi causa*, *essendi actor* and *summa essentia* who creates *ex nihilo*, in order to show that these thoughts reflect Augustine's Platonic views. These are characterised by the assumption that creatures participate in the One, Good and Beautiful, without, however, detracting from the absolute transcendence of the One, which participates in the things it establishes. The measure in which a creature participates in this One Good determines its position on the 'scale of being'. The more material (un-spiritual) and transient the creature, the more it gravitates towards 'non-being'. On the basis of several proof texts from *diu. quest.* 83. 46 and *uer. rel.* the author argues plausibly that, for Augustine, *creatio* and *ordinatio* – the creating and ordering of all things in hierarchical relations (cf. *ciu.* 12.2) – are united in one single act. Nature is dignified if everything within it is ordered according to the place that corresponds to each thing's essence (cf. p. 46). In her concern for comprehensiveness, Bouton-Touboulie appears now and then to have lost sight of her theme. Thus in her treatment of Augustine's views on *ordo* she dwells a little too extensively on his argument that creation was *ex nihilo* because, according to him, it was impossible that matter could be co-eternal with God. This is also the case for the sections in which she discusses the argument that God did not create out of his own corporality (*formans corpus de corpore* cf. p. 56), or in which she demonstrates from Augustine's sources that *Sap.* 11:18 ('qui fecit mundum de materia informi') does not contradict *creatio ex nihilo* (cf. p. 52, 59, 61). It is true that these issues have some connection with Augustine's views

about *ordo*. It is precisely the organic interconnectedness of everything in Augustine's brilliant thinking that makes it difficult for researchers to remain faithful to their own specific research question. The latter is, of course, nonetheless desirable.

Bouton-Touboullic's description – on the basis especially of *Gen. c. man.* and *Gen. lib. imp.* – of Augustine's idea of the divine *ordinatio* is more to the point. She describes the contrast between the *distinctio* of matters on the basis of their changeable form on the one hand and the related *digestio* through which the world was brought into being on the other. Her analysis of the passages in the *Confessiones* in which Augustine describes matter as formed and ordered in time is persuasive, as is her explanation that the order of time consequently follows the order of causes in creation. A little verbose is her exposition (cf. p. 104) of Augustine's concept – based on Plotinus and Cicero's idea of the *apta compositio* – that the ordered interconnection (*ordinata contextio*) of beautiful and less beautiful parts *gradibus quibusdam* and every part *pro suo moduo aptum* contributes to the resplendence of the texture as a whole. She observes that Augustine defeated Manichaean dualism in this manner, for example in *De Genesi ad Manicheos*. But unfortunately she has not attempted a critical assessment of the postulated 'model of harmony' included in this concept.

Her subsequent description of Augustine's view of the human soul as *quiddam medium* is clear and persuasive. It is set against the background of the idea that creatures – in accordance with their essence – partake of God's *simplicitas* and *aequalitas* to the extent to which they participate in the *ordo*, which is directed towards it and derived from it. Connected on the one hand with the immutable divine *rationes*, which are not bound by space and time, the human soul, on the other hand, also permeates the lower, material body as *uitalis intentio*. On the basis of its predisposition, the human soul is therefore able – Platonically – to perfect itself to the extent of directing itself towards the spiritual which is above it. It can also degenerate to the extent of inclining towards the material (p. 114-129). This part of the book succeeds best in affirming that for Augustine *ordo* is inherent to creation. If man directs his *pondus voluntatis et amoris* towards the proper objects, he contributes to the maintaining of the *ordo universitatis* by keeping the *ordo proprius* in interior balance (p. 155f.).

At the end of the first part, Bouton-Touboullic addresses Augustine's conviction that divine action remains operative in the world after the creation in the *vis occulta* or in the *interior motus occultissimus* which underlies the *cursus naturae*. In an exception to her rule of systematic rather than chronological analysis, she also deals with the

developments in Augustine's thinking about the world-soul. Whereas the younger Augustine was much attached to the idea that there is a material *pneuma* that is inherent to the world, the older Augustine eventually doubted the existence of a world-soul very much (cf. 202). Precisely this excellent study of Augustine's notion of the world-soul prompts the reader to think that it might have been better to deal chronologically with key passages in which Augustine discusses *ordo* or specific aspects of it. The *developments* in his thinking about the issue would then have been made clearer.

The second part of the book is devoted to the relation between fixed order and freedom. For Augustine the *ordo providentiae* is connected with the *ordo naturae* (cf. p. 229-232, 239, 251), but paradoxically, because it encompasses all good things and all evil things. It is clear from this part that Augustine as he became older emphasised more strongly that the way in which human *peruersitas* and *inconstantia* are foreseen by God exceeds all understanding. Nevertheless, Bouton-Touboullic's extensive paraphrase of Augustine's *sermo de providentia dei* demonstrates that he was determined – by analogy with creation – to uphold that there was a miraculous interconnection between the beautiful and the good on the one hand and the ugly and the bad on the other, even in the *secretissimum maiestatis arbitrium* (p. 224, 228, 242). From 386 until well after 410, Augustine also appears to have held the view that the *peruersa*, disorder and punishment had a purpose because they could be derived from an inscrutable *ordinata contextio* which arose from God. Evil, if used *convenienter* and not as a goal in itself, was necessary in order to establish balance and harmony (cf. p. 263, 285, 288). The reason why the *ordinata contextio* of everything in creation and history provides for the killing of one animal by another or for the freedom of human beings to decide whether or not to abide by the normative *summa lex* or *summa ordo*, is unfathomable to Augustine. This reason belongs to the mysteries of the *pulchritudo temporalis* (296, 298, 299).

Equally clear is the author's subsequent description of Augustine's thinking about original sin: disorder assumes the figure of sin. With sin an alienation occurs from the *ordo naturalis*, which by nature orientates man to God. Neglect of their proper place in the order through love of things lesser than God, and a concomitant incorrect use of things in nature and the world, caused an ontological degradation among the first human beings. Henceforth the original harmony between body and soul had disappeared (p. 311). Bouton-Touboullic demonstrates very well that this was the reason, according to Augustine, that mankind became the *massa damnata*, a *massa peccati indistincte* (p. 353). Mankind has inherited the sin and the

concomitant guilt (Ambrose did not believe that man also inherited the guilt). Human beings are also determined by original sin in their individual actions. Augustine accounts for pain, suffering and mortality – the *connexio miseriarum*, which, according to him, flowed from the loss of original harmony, and which, he believed, had also been foreseen by God – by interpreting them as contributions to the restoration of *ordo*. *Tenere ordinem*, which man did not succeed in accomplishing, became *ordine teneri* (p. 331) in an *occultus poenalis ordo*. At the end of the second part the author stresses that for Augustine both grace and free will were necessary – in that order – to regain the liberty that is necessary even merely to desire the good. Bouton-Touboullic is right in saying at the end of the second part of her book that for Augustine, God's prescience of all this does not mean that he is also its *causa efficiens*. Augustine was at pains to show that God's *prescientia* and the autonomy of free will are in harmony with each other and are not mutually exclusive (cf. *Ciu.* V. 9.4). She has also persuasively demonstrated in this part that the Church Father refused to deny God's prescience in spite of the *connexio miseriarum*, because that would imply that something in creation or history was unforeseen and therefore *inordinatum*. And that is a thought which Augustine is unwilling to accept, in spite of the unfathomable nature of order.

Bouton-Touboullic begins the third part of her book by placing the development of Augustine's thinking on grace and predestination in the context of his thinking on *ordo* and its inscrutability. She observes that, after the Fall, a new order was established in individual human beings through grace, which allowed man to transcend the consequences of original sin and even to will what is good. It is well-known that Augustine did not believe that everyone would receive this grace. Bouton-Touboullic shows, however, that, according to Augustine, the reason why Jacob was, and Esau was not predestined to receive that grace which is necessary for justification through faith, is unknowable here on earth – that is, the reason why God distinguishes between human beings even before they have had the opportunity to act is incomprehensible. This does not mean that God is unjust, but that the human understanding of justice is incapable of describing divine justice adequately (cf. for example p. 422). On the basis of *De dono perseuerantiae* Bouton-Touboullic shows saliently and convincingly that for Augustine grace realises an order that is inaccessible in this life. It is an *occultus ordo*, which must not therefore be considered unjust and the existence of which must not therefore be denied (p. 424).

The author would have done well to emphasise a little more strongly in this part that Augustine shows himself a mystagogue more than what we would call a systematic theologian. The fact that God is represented as simultaneously *iustum et occultum* can be explained more plausibly in the light of Augustine's own explicitly acknowledged mystagogical effort to guard people who see things in this way from becoming proud (cf. p. 425). On the basis of proof texts already referred to (i.e. *diu. quaest.* 68, cf. p. 397 and 542), Bouton-Touboullic demonstrates again that both the evil and the good in the *ordinatio* derive their meaning from their utility (*utilitas*) for the good. The evil accentuates the good; it stoically puts good people to the test, it frightens them, it exhorts them or corrects them (p. 452-460). Bouton-Touboullic could have paraphrased Augustine's opinion on this divine pedagogy a little more succinctly. Her analysis would also have benefited from a chronological reading of the texts, because Augustine's own development would have become clear. Moreover, she should have elaborated further on the impasse in which Augustine found himself on account of the presence of evil and bad things in creation. Augustine asserted ever more clearly that evil, the vessel of wrath, the inhabitant of Babylon all served the *communis utilitas*. At the same time he also believed that the goodness of the entire order transcended the particular good and evil elements within it. This means that evil, without losing its badness, nonetheless lacks autonomous reality and is, eventually, integrated in some ineffable way into a good order. Bouton-Touboullic could have expanded on how this came to be in Augustine's thinking. Such explanation is also absent in her reflection on Augustine's ideas about the *ordo temporum*, which he regarded as a *magnum carmen* with a temporal beauty. An opportunity for elaboration does present itself, because in the *magnum carmen* all good and bad parts are eventually absorbed into a *mundus in melius renovatus*, in which the *pulchritudo* is no longer *temporalis*... (p. 514-515).

Finally, in the third and last section of the third part of her book, Bouton-Touboullic explains that, according to Augustine, man's *tenere ordinem* converges with the consciousness of universal *ordo*. *Conuersio* incorporates the recognition of one's own place in the order. For Augustine the *ordo naturae* is like an *admonitio*, in which respect for the ontological status of each being is part of the recognition of their proper place in the *ordo*. Bouton-Touboullic does not tire of repeating that the *artes liberales* (cf. p. 522, 539, 540, 541, 557) and the *ordo studiorum* produce knowledge of this order. The *ordo uiuendi* and *ordo eruditionis* merge in this process and also direct man to God. She describes this process of orientation too much in terms of the neo-Platonic ascent (*gradatim*) from the sensible to the intelligible world.

She also overemphasises the fact that this gradual ascent amounts to a Plotinian return from the exteriority-multiplicity in matter to the interior, where the *leges pulchritudinis*, order in itself (*memoria intellectum voluntas*) and the ontologically congenital *vox (visio) ordinis* and *vestigia trinitatis* may be discerned (p. 530). All of this is at the expense of an exploration of Augustine's Christology. The author very briefly mentions the humility of God in Christ as *antidotum* against the excessive sense of one's own importance: pride. Her treatment of the incarnation is also too short: it is only mentioned as the realisation of the doctrines of the philosophers ('Par elle, [l'incarnation, pvg], le Christ réalise le triple enseignement de la philosophie (physique, morale, logique) et guérit également l'âme en la délivrant de la triple concupiscence', p. 549).

The concluding discussions in this part about the *ordo amoris* and the *ordo pacis* are, however, more satisfactory. Concerning the former, Bouton-Touboulie clearly asserts that Augustine's *dilectio ordinata* is characterised by the commensurability between love and its object or subject (571). This *dilectio* consequently also means that things and human beings are loved to the extent in which they provide a perspective of God. The good use of things that are not worthy of love can be of service to the loving of something higher. Bouton-Touboulie gives an excellent analysis of this connection, which Augustine himself made in his explanation of the distinction between *uti* and *frui* in *De doctrina christiana*, as of the relation between the love of God and the love of one's neighbour. The *ordinata dilectio* presupposes that man is loved for the sake of God and God for his own sake. The fact that Augustine regards love of God as the first in the order of the commandments (*ordo praecipiendi*) and love of one's neighbour as the first in the order of practise (*ordo faciendi*, p. 582) shows that there is no contradiction between both. As regards the *ordo pacis*, the author makes it clear that *ordo* and *pax* are synonymous for Augustine when it comes to the last things. She bases her argument primarily on *De ciuitate Dei* when she asserts that temporal peace becomes manifest even in the present when things are used properly and in several domains: security, health, community of like minds. She also correctly observes that for Augustine individual order and peace interconnect with social order and peace. On the individual level, a right *temperatura* is required and a *consensio* and *concordia* between body and soul. Social peace is related to this and thus amounts to more than simple, Ciceronian consensus. The exaltedness of a nation is determined, according to Augustine, by the objects of that nation's love. The *ciuitas bene ordinata* can become a prefiguration of Jerusalem if this love is directed towards the right goals (p. 625), if the *compositio uoluntatum* is the prelude to

fruitio dei. But it is true of this also that if a perverse intention is concealed behind the lawful actions of a *potestas ordinata*, the order behind it is *occultus*, although nonetheless always in conformity with the Eternal law. Touboullic has again succeeded very well in making clear that the hidden nature of the *ordo* does not mean that it does not exist.

III

As has been said in the introduction, Bouton-Touboullic's impressive study fills a void. An extensive and thorough study of Augustine's notion of order of this kind has not been published before. Never before has the analysis of texts on this subject been carried out so meticulously. The author excellently clarifies the layered nature of Augustine's concept of *ordo* and how organically his ideas about *ordo* are connected with his thoughts about creation and redemption; about the development of the world and of the individual. And these thoughts are themselves all mutually interwoven with each other. Precisely in the light of the sources used she succeeds in painting an outstanding picture of the depth and breadth of his ideas about *ordo* and equivalent concepts. An important strength of the book is that she has succeeded in making it clear that the unknowable nature of the order does not mean that it does not exist. As Augustine became older he appears to have used the word *ordo* less and less in his writings and teaching. We may deduce from this that, as a negative theologian, he had come to consider 'order' an inadequate word to describe the order (sic) in and from God, and therefore preferred not to speak at all.

In her instructive journey Bouton-Touboullic sometimes approaches her subject too thematically and systematically. As has been said, it would have been better if she had chosen to select those passages that were representative of Augustine's teaching in a particular period. She could then have discussed these nodal points in his work chronologically. Taking the chronology into account when reading key passages from Augustine's writings helps to discern developments and emphases and allows discovery of the coherence and development of trains of thought.⁴ This course of action would have

⁴ Cf. P. van Geest, 'Omnis scriptura legi debet eo spiritu quo facta est... On the hermeneutics of Wilhelm Dilthey and Albert Deblaere' in: R. Faesen (ed.), *Albert Deblaere, S.J. (1916-1994). Essays on mystical literature-Essais sur la littérature mystique-Saggi sulla letteratura mistica* (Louvain 2004), 427-442 (*Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium* 177).

prevented repetition (cf. p. 292 and 298 on free will; 137-139 and 1298 on the perfect order etc. etc.). The author frequently has to revisit texts because they are being discussed from a different angle and require a new explanation in the context of her systematic approach. The answers to these new questions do not always add much to the answers previously given to earlier and comparable questions. If she had used a chronological approach she would not have been obliged to force passages from Augustine's writings onto the Procrustean bed of her systematic triptych. This would not only have obviated repetitions. It would also have been possible to address questions that Augustine himself posed about the *ordo* during different periods of his life more clearly, especially in the light of the sources used so masterfully as a frame of reference by Bouton-Touboulic.

As has been said, Bouton-Touboulic's treatment of the relation between Christ, the incarnation and the *ordo sanandi* is a little too hasty (cf. p. 538). Precisely in the passages that mention this connection, her discussion of Christ is more philosophical and does not do full justice to the Christological developments in Augustine's work; developments that are also connected to his thinking on *ordo*. This objection raises another. She has paid scant attention to the relevant secondary literature. Consultation of the abovementioned studies by Budzik and Ruokanen would have considerably sharpened and deepened her analysis of the *ordo pacis*, because both works take the relation between the *ordo pacis* and the figure of Christ as a point of departure. Both argue cogently that Christ plays a crucial role in the *ordo pacis* in the present as well as in the future.⁵

Making these comments, however, has taken too much space already. In spite of these imperfections, Bouton-Touboulic's systematic approach has – and at times beautifully – revealed the insights that befell Augustine in his thinking about the relations between God and *ordo*. Anyone seeking to understand Augustine's notion of the *ordo* as a *medietas* in which dichotomies between good and evil in creation, history and salvation history are harmonised will ignore this book at their peril.

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⁵ Cf. Ruokanen, 1992, p. 129; Budzik, 1988, p. 81.