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AUGUSTINIAN THOUGHT IN ALCUIN’S WRITING:

A PHILOLOGICAL-HISTORICAL APPROACH

Abstract: This paper examines the influence of Augustine of Hippo on Alcuin of York and illustrates the philological-historical method applied in my analysis of Alcuin’s surviving oeuvre. By introducing Alcuin’s *Epistolae* and Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei*, I demonstrate the ways in which we can trace connections to Augustine at various levels of Alcuin’s texts. This approach will expose the different purposes of Alcuin’s direct and indirect use of Augustine. While Augustine will emerge as heavily represented (explicitly and implicitly) in the content and language of the sources, a distinction will be revealed in the aims of direct quotation and indirect reference. On the surface, Alcuin avails himself of Augustine as an authority and binding guideline in matters relating to Christian doctrine. However, a deeper reading that views Alcuin’s texts as a political discourse, defined by content and language, shows a more complex scheme on the author’s part.

I

Introduction

This research attempts to review the question of Augustine of Hippo’s influence on Alcuin of York. The aim is to explore ideas about empire and the moral conduct of political agents by asking questions relating to Augustine’s later work, *De Civitate Dei*. The paper examines the extent to which Alcuin used Augustine and the manner in which Augustine’s later political thought,¹ which belonged to the Roman empire, was taken on and

¹ In line with *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*, I distinguish between ‘political thought’ and ‘political theory’. Both categories involve people who do the thinking. ‘Political thought’, the broader category, is used with reference to general, unsystematic reflection on things political. ‘Political theory’ is used for a framework of thought that ‘represents direct, systematic reflection on things political’. C. Rowe, ‘Introduction’, in: C. Rowe and M. Schofield (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought* (Cambridge 2010), pp. 1-6.

modified to serve the Carolingian dynasty. The motives behind Alcuin's use of Augustine in his attempts to legitimise Carolingian rule are discussed.

Alcuin was the most prolific author and adviser² to Charlemagne, the first medieval emperor of the Latin West. This research concentrates on Alcuin's *Epistolae*: first, because they contain direct and indirect references to Augustine. Second, the letters Alcuin wrote - to Charlemagne, his children, and his closest friends (e.g. Arn, Bishop of Salzburg, and Angilbert, Abbot of Saint-Riquier) - not only reveal the nature of his political thought, but also the manner in which he communicated to his peers the thoughts he considered important for the strengthening of Carolingian rule. The epistles show, more clearly than his treatises, the way in which Alcuin attempted to put his political agenda into effect.

Charlemagne's imperial plan for a 'state' and 'church', and his cultural reforms, have tempted historians to propose that his scheme involved the realisation of Augustine's *Civitas Dei*³. According to Einhard's *Vita Karoli Magni*, the emperor enjoyed listening to Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*.⁴ Nevertheless, a comprehensive investigation of how Augustine was perceived under Charlemagne, and of those parts of Augustine's thought

² F. Brunhölzl, 'Der Bildungsauftrag der Hofschule', in: B. Bischoff (ed.), *Das Geistige Leben, Karl der Grosse: Lebenswerk und Nachleben 2* (Düsseldorf 1967), pp. 28-41; J. Fleckenstein, 'Karl der Grosse und sein Hof', in: H. Beumann (ed.), *Persönlichkeit und Geschichte, Karl der Grosse: Lebenswerk und Nachleben 1* (Düsseldorf 1967), pp. 24-50; W. von den Steinen, 'Der Neubeginn', in: B. Bischoff (ed.): *Das Geistige Leben, Karl der Grosse: Lebenswerk und Nachleben 2* (Düsseldorf 1967), pp. 9-27; D. A. Bullough, 'Alcuin: Achievement and Reputation: Being Part of the Ford Lectures Delivered in Oxford in Hilary Term 1980' (Leiden 2004).

³ H.-X. Arquillière, *L'Augustinisme politique: Essai sur la formation des théories politiques du Moyen-Age* (Paris 1934); F. L. Ganshof, *The Imperial Coronation of Charlemagne: Theories and Facts* (Glasgow 1949); E. Patzelt and C. Vogel, *Die Karolingische Renaissance/La réforme culturelle sous Pépin le Bref et sous Charlemagne* (Graz 1965); Steinen, 'Der Neubeginn', pp. 9-27; A. Dempf, *Sacrum imperium: Geschichts- und Staatsphilosophie des Mittelalters und der politischen Renaissance* (Darmstadt 1973).

⁴ O. Holder-Egger (ed.), Einhardus: *Vita Karoli Magni* (MGH SS rer. Germ. 25) (Hannover 1911).

which had an impact on early Carolingian ideas of ‘state’, rulership and ethics, is still outstanding.

No extensive study has been undertaken since Arquillière, who illustrated how a certain thought inspired by Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei* developed in Merovingian times, when kingship began to be seen as subservient to the ‘church’.⁵ Arquillière refers to this thought as *Augustinisme politique* (‘political Augustinianism’). Before Arquillière, German scholarship had suggested - without producing evidence - that in the Carolingian period, the Augustinian concept of the *Civitas Dei* served as a model for the Carolingian ‘state’.⁶ After Arquillière, the Belgian historian, Ganshof, indicated that French scholars (e.g. Kleinclausz, Halphen and Levillain) had understood Charlemagne’s empire as ‘a kind of prefiguration on earth of the city of God’.⁷ Ganshof, along with subsequent scholarship by Patzelt and Vogel and Steinen,⁸ argued that Charlemagne’s advisers (particularly Alcuin) had attempted ‘to realise the “Augustinian” conception of the city of God.’⁹ While Wallace-Hadrill, Dvornik and Anton endorsed Arquillière’s thesis, Wilks attempted to invalidate it.¹⁰

Despite some engagement with Arquillière, the question of Augustinian influence on Carolingian thought and ethics has not been at the forefront of recent research. Markus uses the phrase *Augustinisme politique*

⁵ Arquillière, *L’Augustinisme politique*, p. 151f.

⁶ Dempf, *Sacrum imperium*, p. 134.

⁷ Ganshof, *Imperial Coronation*, p. 9.

⁸ Patzelt & Vogel, Patzelt and C. Vogel, *Renaissance*, p. 17; Steinen, ‘Der Neubeginn’, p. 17.

⁹ Ganshof, *Imperial Coronation*, pp. 26f.

¹⁰ F. Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy: Origins and Background* (Washington D. C. 1966), p. 849; M. J. Wilks, ‘Roman Empire and Christian State in the *De Civitate Dei*’, *Augustinus* 12 (1967), pp. 489-510, pp. 489-493, 499; H. H. Anton, *Fürstenspiegel und Herrscherethos in der Karolingerzeit* (Bonn 1968), pp. 230-231; J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, ‘The *Via Regia* of the Carolingian Age’, in: *Idem* (ed.): *Early Medieval History* (Oxford 1975), pp. 181-200, pp. 188-189, 192.

‘in a very different sense from that given it by Arquillière’: ‘to mean the political theory implied in Augustine’s theology of the *saeculum*’.¹¹ In an article arguing that Augustine had no political theory at all, Boler merely touches upon *Augustinisme politique*, noting that its propagandists ‘cannot be accused of a wholesale fabrication’.¹² Van Oort, meanwhile, agrees with Arquillière when stating that ‘medieval life was modelled to a great extent after the *City of God*, but [...] this occurred through a radical metamorphosis [...] no more attention will be devoted to this remarkable historical development’.¹³ Neither Bullough’s work on Alcuin and the Carolingians, nor Nelson’s research on rituals of inauguration, provide anything more than outlines of Augustine’s influence on Carolingian thought.¹⁴

Until the 1960s, traditional European scholarship on Carolingian history was thus led by French/Belgian and German scholars, who examined Carolingian politics with a focus on formal, constitutional elements.¹⁵ Viewing Carolingian society as a near theocracy, their reading of politics was idealised.

Historians’ treatment of the Carolingian ‘state’ has shifted since the 1970s. The debate in Britain is dominated by Nelson, whose work prompts

¹¹ R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine* (Cambridge 1970), p. 168.

¹² J. Boler, ‘Augustine and Political Theory’, *Mediaevalia: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 4, (1978), pp. 83-97, pp. 83, 87, 90. Boler bases his argument on Markus.

¹³ J. van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon: A Study into Augustine’s City of God and the Sources of His Doctrine of the Two Cities* (Leiden 1991), p. 92.

¹⁴ D. A. Bullough, *Carolingian Renewal: Sources and Heritage* (Manchester and New York 1991); ‘Die Kaiseridee zwischen Antike und Mittelalter’, in: C. Stiegemann and M. Wemhoff (eds.), *Kunst und Kultur der Karolingerzeit: Karl der Grosse und Papst Leo III in Paderborn: Beiträge zum Katalog der Ausstellung, Paderborn 1999* (Mainz 1999), pp. 36-46; ‘Alcuin: Achievement and Reputation’, J. L. Nelson, ‘Kingship and Empire in the Carolingian World’, in: R. McKitterick (ed.), *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation* (Cambridge 1994), pp. 52-87, p. 56; ‘The Lord’s Anointed and the People’s Choice: Carolingian Royal Ritual’, in: J. L. Nelson (ed.), *The Frankish World, 750-900* (London and Rio Grande 1996), pp. 99-131.

¹⁵ Ganshof, *Imperial Coronation*; W. Ullmann, *The Carolingian Renaissance and the Idea of Kingship* (London 1969).

more dynamic questions: how politics happened as a process.¹⁶ This shift is the result of anthropological findings that concern small- or no-‘state’ societies. Traditional political thought has been left behind by this recent scholarship, which supports the premise that institutionally weak ‘states’ can be called ‘states’.¹⁷ Thus this contribution relates Augustine to newer work on Carolingian thought, and identifies what Augustine had to offer thinkers of the period, given that the political context they were working in has been so radically re-evaluated.

The use of modern concepts and abstractions such as ‘state’ and ‘church’ in scholarship concerning the Early Middle Ages is contentious.¹⁸ The connotations of the modern term ‘state’ have changed throughout the twentieth century.¹⁹ The ‘state’ can take many forms; in a pre-modern context, it would be difficult to imagine two ‘states’ more dissimilar than the Roman and the Carolingian empire. The Carolingian ‘state’ did not have a standing army, full-time bureaucracy, or standard forms of delegation of political powers, or the complex system of taxation which made the Roman empire so powerful. Carolingian rulers had a different hand to play with, which made them by definition more dependent on consensus.²⁰

¹⁶ J. L. Nelson, *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London 1986); ‘Kingship and Empire’; ‘The Lord’s Anointed’.

¹⁷ R. Davies, ‘The Medieval State: The Tyranny of a Concept?’ *Journal of Historical Sociology* 16(2) (2003), pp. 280-300; S. Reynolds, ‘There were States in Medieval Europe: A Response to Rees Davies’, *Journal of Historical Sociology* 16(4) (2003), pp. 550-555.

¹⁸ See the pioneering editions of W. Pohl and M. Diesenberger (eds.), *Integration und Herrschaft: Ethnische Identitäten und soziale Organisation im Frühmittelalter* (Wien 2002); S. Airlie, W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (eds.), *Staat im frühen Mittelalter* (Wien 2006); W. Pohl, and V. Wieser (eds.), *Der Frühmittelalterliche Staat - Europäische Perspektiven* (Budapest 2009).

¹⁹ See M. Weber’s *Staatsbegriff* in W. Pohl, ‘Staat und Herrschaft im Frühmittelalter: Überlegungen zum Forschungsstand’, in: S. Airlie, W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (eds.): *Staat im frühen Mittelalter* (Wien 2006), pp. 9-38, pp. 9-10.

²⁰ Nelson, ‘The Lord’s Anointed’.

The terminology for different types of politically organised communities examined in my sources is in Latin. Dunbabin argues that *regnum*, *res publica* and *civitas* ‘could, but need not, denote that combination of a precise territorial area with a form of political organisation which “state” implies for us’.²¹ Martin reads the famous political passage on *regna* in the *De Civitate Dei* as relating to the ‘imperial state’, which he sees as representative of the *Civitas Terrena*.²² Although *regnum* specifically denotes ‘kingdom’ and *imperium* ‘empire’, I follow the positions of Dunbabin and Martin and define ‘state’ as a suitable, broader translation of the Latin terms which designate different types of politically organised communities.

Likewise, the ‘church’ is a concept subject to change. This investigation covers a timespan from the early fifth to early ninth centuries. It is not possible to provide a definition of ‘church’ that would cater to the broad spectrum of meanings conveyed by this concept within such a timeframe. I decided to use ‘church’, enclosed in single quotation marks, consistently. ‘Church’ may refer to a general Christian spiritual power or a distinct Christian institution with a distinct sphere of action.

What ‘church’ always presupposes is a contrast to the ‘state’. Augustine recognised the imperfect worldly ‘state’ as an instrument of power for missionary purposes and identified a functional relationship between ‘state’ and ‘church’.²³ He approved of laws/government regulations for

²¹ J. Dunbabin, ‘Government’, in: J. H. Burns (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350-c. 1450* (Cambridge 1988), 477-519, p. 479. See also Markus, *Saeculum*, p. 209.

²² Augustinus Hipponensis: *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Episcopi De Civitate Dei libri XXII B.* Dombart et Alfons Kalb (recogn.) (Stuttgart 1993), IV 4, pp. 112-113; R. Martin, ‘The Two Cities in Augustine’s Political Philosophy’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 33 (1972), pp. 195-216, pp. 195, 204-206.

²³ N. H. Baynes, ‘The Political Ideas of St. Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei*’, *Historical Association Pamphlet* 104 (1936), pp. 3-18, pp. 14-15; H. von Campenhausen, *The Fathers*

religious affairs, particularly when pagans and schismatics (e.g. Donatists) were concerned.²⁴ In purely abstract terms, Augustine regarded the ‘state’ as a worldly system of power separate from the ‘church’.²⁵ The ‘church’s superior role was not to be understood in a worldly sense: it had an eternal mission, which the ‘state’ lacked.²⁶

Augustine’s ‘church’ is *societas* (i.e. more ‘community’ than a hierarchically structured body).²⁷ The Carolingian ‘church’ also aspired to constant expansion, achieved by secular means.²⁸ Since Late Antiquity, the ‘church’ had become more powerful and wealthy. In terms of scope, the late Roman councils had been more wide-ranging.²⁹ The Carolingian ‘church’ councils were less interlinked with other regions and involved bishops from the same kingdom. Rulers convoked ‘church’ councils and, as in Augustine’s day, the structures of the Carolingian imperial ‘church’ allowed for merging with secular structures.³⁰ Bishops increasingly assumed secular functions.³¹

of the Latin Church (trans. M. Hoffmann) (London 1964), pp. 238-240; R. A. Markus, ‘The Latin Fathers’, in: J. H. Burns (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350-c. 1450* (Cambridge 1988), pp. 92-122, p. 86; R. Dodaro, ‘Church and State’, in: A. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Michigan Grand Rapids 1999), pp. 176-184, p. 176; K. Flasch, *Augustin: Einführung in sein Denken* (Stuttgart 2003), pp. 164, 391-393.

²⁴ Dvornik, *Early Christian*, pp. 842-843; Markus, ‘Latin Fathers’, pp. 113-115; Dodaro, ‘Church and State’, pp. 180-181.

²⁵ Dempf, *Sacrum imperium*, p. 134; Flasch, *Augustin*, p. 391.

²⁶ Baynes 1936, p. 15; Markus 1970, p. 133; Flasch, *Augustin*, pp. 391-392.

²⁷ Flasch, *Augustin*, pp. 386-388; M. De Jong, ‘The State of the Church: *Ecclesia* and Early Medieval State Formation’, in: W. Pohl and V. Wieser (eds.): *Der Frühmittelalterliche Staat - Europäische Perspektiven* (Budapest 2009), pp. 241-254, p. 242.

²⁸ This is reflected by the Saxon War (772-804), the war against the Avars (791 803/811) and forced baptisms (795-796). Holder-Egger, *Einhardus*, pp. 9, 13, 15-16; H. Büttner, ‘Mission und Kirchenorganisation des Frankenreiches bis zum Tode Karls des Grossen’, in: H. Beumann (ed.), *Persönlichkeit und Geschichte, Karl der Grosse: Lebenswerk und Nachleben 1* (Düsseldorf 1967), pp. 454-487, pp. 467, 476, 479.

²⁹ K. F. Morrison, *Holiness and Politics in Early Medieval Thought* (London 1985), p. 14. On the African ‘church’ synods during Augustine’s episcopate, see: Dodaro, ‘Church and State’, p. 180.

³⁰ Morrison, *Holiness*, pp. 3-52; A. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California 1991).

³¹ C. Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (Berkeley and London 2005).

One may argue that in terms of structure and government, the Carolingian ‘state’ had a shape closer to that of Augustine’s ‘church’ than to his ‘state’, and that it operated not unlike a ‘church’ council. Carolingian rulers seem to have consciously made this connection.³²

II

Methodology

The proposed method is justified on two grounds: one is related to the subject matter of the analysis and explained by its nature; the other is a matter of my personal preference.

In terms of the former, this study is not concerned with the political history of the early Carolingian era in and of itself, but the manner in which Augustinian thought took shape in the Carolingian empire. The research needs to consider the history of ideas between 400 and 800 and acknowledge that these Augustinian thoughts were passed down in written Latin for 350 years before reaching the Carolingians. It seems appropriate to choose an approach which is sensitive to the language and etymology of concepts; in other words, a philological-historical approach.

The research explores texts written in an empire which had Christianity as its ‘state’ religion; and at the same time, with the early Christian thought of a preeminent Church Father. In all the texts under investigation, Christian doctrine plays an essential role. Since, according to scriptures,³³ the ‘word’ (λόγος) is divine, Christian texts from the beginning

³² ‘Church’ councils held in the Carolingian empire could well be integrated in legislation. The *Admonitio generalis* drew more material from canon law than from any other source. The decisions of the Council of Frankfurt (794), whose subjects of negotiation were drawn up in fifty-six chapters discussing theological, political and legal matters, were summarised in a capitulary.

³³ The opening of the Gospel of John. John 1:1.

placed emphasis on the meaning and origin of words. This is another reason why semantic and etymological aspects should not be ignored when discussing the sources.

When early medieval commentators read Augustine, they were not simply reading his words; theirs was a ‘thick’ reading of the text, imbued with connections to concepts, terms, expressions and figures familiar to them from biblical, patristic and exegetical writings. This makes an inter-textual method indispensable in understanding how the Carolingians interpreted Augustine’s words.

I take personal inspiration for part of the method applied from the synthetic-historical analysis undertaken by Auerbach in *Mimesis*³⁴ and *Literatursprache und Publikum in der Lateinischen Spätantike und im Mittelalter*.³⁵ Auerbach was, above all, a philologist, who contributed to the investigation of how Christianity influenced literary word formation in the Middle Ages.

I approach the sources in two ways: by looking for explicit, then implicit evidence of Augustinian influence on Alcuin. To search the texts and locate these direct and indirect references to Augustine, I use the (Electronic) *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*.

The procedure for the first approach involves finding explicit references to Augustine. These include any mentions of his name, citations and quotations. The aim is to discern whether there is a qualitative or quantitative difference between explicit references to Augustine or his works,

³⁴ E. Auerbach, *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (Bern 1946) (first published in English in 1953).

³⁵ E. Auerbach, *Literatursprache und Publikum in der lateinischen Spätantike und im Mittelalter* (Bern 1958) (first published in English in 1965).

and to other Church Fathers or patristic sources. The answer will reveal to what extent the author used Augustinian thought directly and which aspects of Augustinian thinking he raised explicitly.

The second approach explores implicit evidence of Augustinian influence at two levels: the content and formal level of the texts. At content level, I examine Alcuin's material with regard to Augustine's political ideas in the *De Civitate Dei*. I investigate the meanings Alcuin and Augustine attribute to kingship/imperial authority and to worldly realms in the context of God's providential plan. The content analysis will shed light on those features of Augustinian political thought which Alcuin embraced most.

The formal analysis is concerned with indirect references to Augustine in Alcuin's language. The primary source of inspiration is the type of historical philology developed by Auerbach: which strives to develop a synthesis. The method Auerbach expounds in his *Literatursprache und Publikum in der Lateinischen Spätantike und im Mittelalter* seeks to find key elements in the sources that are worth investigating because they help explain coherences between texts.³⁶ It is a simple philological approach, with a focus on the interpretation of selected textual passages. It involves linguistic comparison (in terms of terminology, grammar, rhetoric or style) between relevant passages.

I adopt a strategy similar to that which Auerbach implemented when working on French Classicism in 1930. Auerbach collected thematically related texts, examining them for recurrent terms and expressions. He analysed these linguistic elements with regard to the contexts in which they

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-21.

occurred, which enabled him to define them. Thus, he came closer to understanding the meaning of the texts in the historical context under investigation.³⁷ I believe that this approach is fruitful for two reasons: it compels the researcher to establish early in their work what can be identified as being characteristic within the sources; and it does not impose external theoretical frameworks on the texts, but looks for what is characteristic in the material itself.

In Alcuin's material, I focus on recurrent concepts, terms, expressions and figures which I can show to be characteristic of Augustine and prominent in the *De Civitate Dei*, in contexts where Augustine reflects on the worldly 'state' and secular power. The point of departure is an attempt to define the original Augustinian meaning of the selected elements. A second step involves determining what meaning these elements acquire in Alcuin's material. My selection in Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* and Alcuin's texts involves reading for meaning (regarding political thought), terminology, expressions and phrases, and clusters of terms. The relevance of the selected elements to Augustine³⁸ and the Carolingians³⁹ has been confirmed in part by scholarship.

As a result, the texts will appear as political discourses defined by content and language. The influence of Augustinian ideas will emerge as

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ For *imperium* and *gentes*, see: D. A. Bullough, 'Die Kaiseridee zwischen Antike und Mittelalter', in: C. Stiegemann and M. Wemhoff (eds.), *Kunst und Kultur der Karolingerzeit: Karl der Grosse und Papst Leo III. in Paderborn: Beiträge zum Katalog der Ausstellung, Paderborn 1999* (Mainz 1999), pp. 36-46; R. McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge 2004). For *imperium Christianum* and *populus Christianus*, see: Ganshof, *Imperial Coronation*. For *iustitia* and *pax* - elements of the doctrine of *Augustinisme politique* - see Arquillière, *L'Augustinisme politique*. See also: C. P. Mayer, E. Feldmann and K. H. Chelius (eds.), *Augustinus-Lexikon 1-4, 5/6* (Basel 1986-2016).

more pervasive. I will be able to discern not only whether Alcuin's political statements contain Augustinian elements, but also whether Alcuin is imitating Augustine in his language. We can explore whether Alcuin uses this language in Augustine's sense or with a shift in meaning, and whether he is using it to make a political statement that conforms to Augustinian thought. The findings will reveal whether Alcuin's texts were influenced by Augustine, and how Augustinian elements were taken on and modified to serve the Carolingian dynasty.

Skinner, reflecting on the relevance of language in methodology and the history of ideas, echoes what Auerbach expressed and formulated half a century ago: the importance of the contextualisation of texts for understanding their original purpose.⁴⁰ Skinner draws on Austin (deviser of the 'illocutionary act' in the influential work *How to Do Things With Words*)⁴¹ and his colleague, Searle,⁴² stating that he had recourse to the theory of speech acts in order to appeal for 'a more historically-minded approach to the history of ideas'.

Skinner highlights two dimensions of language: meaning and linguistic action. In choosing words, any author (even more so political writers and rhetoricians) pursues a purpose and hence, performs an action. Skinner, likewise, emphasises the relationship between language and power, and refers to the idea that, particularly in political discourse, the power of words is exploited in order to shape the social world and exercise social control.⁴³ More generally, Skinner calls attention to the importance of aspects

⁴⁰ Q. Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume I: Regarding Method* (Cambridge 2013), pp. 1-7.

⁴¹ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (London 1976).

⁴² Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, p. 2.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-7.

such as performativity (the process by which semiotic expression in language produces results or real consequences in extra-semiotic reality) and intertextuality (how a text's meaning is shaped by another text) when approaching sources and seeking to establish the original meaning and motive of texts.⁴⁴

In this paper, I present a passage from the first five books of the *De Civitate Dei*, which contain assessments of worldly 'states' with a focus on the imperial power of Rome; and an extract from Alcuin's *Epist. 257* written to Emperor Charlemagne, which expresses how Alcuin evaluates Charlemagne's imperial authority and worldly realm within God's providential plan. In doing so, I hope to let the texts speak to one another.

III

Augustine in Alcuin's Texts: A political discourse defined by content and language

In what follows I trace connections to Augustine, examining explicit and implicit evidence at content level and the formal level of Alcuin's writing. The formal analysis explores the following elements: the nouns *imperium*, *imperator* and the verb *imperare* (collectively); the noun *gentes*; the verb *subicere*; as well as the hexameter, *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos*, taken from Virgil's *Aeneid*: where Anchises prophesies to Aeneas Rome's future as a world power.⁴⁵ Alcuin's use of the political terms *imperium* and *gentes* will emerge as striking. These are two opposing terms, in reference to

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. vii.

⁴⁵ G. B. Conte (recensuit atque apparatu critico instruxit). Publius Vergilius Maro: *Aeneis* (Berlin 2009) 6.853. See also: L. Holtz, 'Alcuin et la réception de Virgile du temps de Charlemagne', in: H. Schefers (ed.), *Einhard: Studien zu Leben und Werk* (Darmstadt 1997), pp. 67-80.

which *subicere* ('to subject') and other words⁴⁶ are found grouped together to heighten their polarity. The terminology I investigate in the formal analysis and explicit evidence of Augustinian influence are highlighted in bold and italics in the selected excerpts.⁴⁷

The passage from the *De Civitate Dei* is taken from a book in which Augustine evaluates the worldly rule of Rome and classifies 'states' according to moral standards and power achieved. Chapter 12 of Book V explains why God permitted the heathen Romans to become a world power. Augustine praises them for having possessed virtues and skills, which brought them fame and power.⁴⁸ Augustine quotes from Virgil's *Aeneid* in chapter 12 of Book V:

Henceforth, there is also that [extract] from the same poet [Virgil], which, since he [Virgil] prefers these very distinctive skills of the Romans - to reign over and also to ***rule over*** and to subjugate and furthermore to vanquish peoples - to the skills of other ***less influential groups of people***, says: some will forge the blazing metals more smoothly, indeed I admit that they will derive living faces from marble, that they will plead their causes more convincingly, that they will both describe the movements of the sky with a pointed rod and tell the risings of the stars: you Roman, remember to govern the peoples with ***supreme power*** (these skills

⁴⁶ For example: *subdere* ('to subdue'), *iugum* ('yoke') and *regna terrarum* ('realms of the earth'). Examinations of these terms are beyond the scope of this paper.

⁴⁷ The quotations in the main text from the Latin are given in English translation, which is my own. The original text is given in the footnotes.

⁴⁸ Augustinus Hipponensis V 13, pp. 217-218; 15, pp. 220-221; 16, p. 221; XVIII 22, p. 284.

will belong to you) and to establish morals for peace, *to spare the subject peoples and to vanquish the proud*.⁴⁹

Due to their achievements, the heathen Romans appear to rank above other races, whose influence is considered second-rate. However, at the same time as praising them, Augustine criticises them for having moral standards inspired by a profane thirst for glory.⁵⁰ This marks a tension in Augustine's argument in the *De Civitate Dei*, between approval of worldly rulership and supreme power and harsh criticism of any form of worldly social organisation, government and power.

In a broader context, Augustine argues that divine providence has decreed that there are two superior temporal realms: the pagan 'states' of the Assyrians and the Romans.⁵¹ Augustine presents the polytheistic Assyrians in the East as the *typos* and the polytheistic/pre-Christian Romans in the West as the *antitypos*.⁵² Both 'states' are meaningful because they are two large, in their own way good,⁵³ worldly 'states' that parallel the *Civitas Dei*.⁵⁴ Their

⁴⁹ *Hinc est et illud eiusdem poetae, quod, cum artibus aliarum gentium eas ipsas proprias romanorum artes regnandi atque imperandi et subiugandi ac debellandi populos anteponeret, ait: excudent alii spirantia mollius aera, cedo equidem, uiuos ducent de marmore uultus, orabunt causas melius caeli que meatus describent radio et surgentia sidera dicent: tu regere imperio populos, romane, memento (hae tibi erunt artes) paci que inponere mores, parcere subiectis et debellare superbos.* *Ibid.*, V 12, p. 213; ll. 20-30.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, V 12, pp. 211-217; 17, pp. 221-223; 18, pp. 223-228; 19, pp. 228-231.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, XVIII 2, pp. 256-259; 22, p. 284; 27, p. 292; V 13, p. 217; 21, pp. 232-233; IV 6-7, pp. 152-154. Augustine defines the two supreme powers as follows: [...] *Babylonia, quasi prima Roma* [...] and [...] *Roma quasi secunda Babylonia* [...] XVIII 2, p. 258; ll. 22-26.

⁵² *Ibid.*, XVIII 2, pp. 256-259; 22, p. 284; 27, p. 292; V 13, p. 217; IV 6-7, pp. 152-154.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, V 19, p. 230.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, XVIII 1, pp. 255-256; 2, p. 259.

function for Christianity is that of safeguarding peace among the divided community.⁵⁵

The significance of these temporal realms in the context of God's providential plan is because the Assyrian empire is relevant for events pertaining to the Old Testament. Augustine indicates that Abraham was born in the Assyrian 'state'.⁵⁶ The Roman empire is relevant for the New Testament. Augustine contends that, because of the virtues of the heathen Romans during the Roman Republic (Sallust), God allowed Christ to be born under their rule.⁵⁷ They were rewarded by being given the task of defeating the Jews, who did not recognise Christ.⁵⁸ At times, the Roman 'state' appears the greater and more powerful of the two superior realms.⁵⁹ In chapter 2 of Book XVIII, Augustine clarifies that his illustration of the *Civitas Terrena* as running parallel to the *Civitas Dei* will focus on Roman power: such is the density of available historical sources.⁶⁰

The Latin term *imperium* holds the meanings 'supreme power (of Roman emperors)', '(military) command', 'rule', 'empire', 'world power';

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, XVIII 2, p. 256; 22, p. 284; XV 4, p. 63. On *pax* ('peace'), see: Markus, *Saeculum*, pp. xi-xx; 'Latin Fathers', pp. 110-111.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, XVIII 2, p. 257; 3, pp. 259-260.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, XVIII 27, p. 292; ll. 4-13.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, V 18, p. 228; XVIII 46, pp. 328-329.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, V 13, p. 217; XVIII 22, p. 284.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, XVIII 2, p. 258. Van Oort, by contrast, highlights the importance of the pagan Assyrian 'state' and the city of Babylon when referring to Book XVIII. Van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, p. 71. He writes: 'First the author [Augustine] outlines the development of the *terrena civitas* since Abraham, so that the readers can compare the two cities. He gives an overall view of world history, always chronologically related to that of Israel: Assyria (*Babylonia prima*), Egypt, Greece and the rise of the Roman Empire (*Roma quasi secunda Babylonia*).' It seems, however, that Augustine mainly refers to the pagan Assyrian 'state' and city of Babylon when talking about the origins of the *Civitas Terrena*, because Assyria and Babylon form the *typos* and existed first, i.e. before the pagan Roman 'state' and the city of Rome. In chapter 1 of Book XI, Augustine relates his use of *civitas* back to the (Latin) Bible. My judgment is that in the *De Civitate Dei*, the Roman 'state' appears to be more relevant. Passages beside chapter 2 of Book XVIII support this. In Chapter 22 of Book XVIII, Augustine sees the Romans as more competent in political organisation and the military subjection of other races. The Romans had to overcome more dangerous enemies who were more capable in their defence than the enemies of the Assyrians had been (XVIII 22, p. 284.).

and is a derivative of *imperare* (‘command’, ‘rule (over)’).⁶¹ In Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei*, *imperium* primarily occurs in the books⁶² on politics and the characteristics of Rome. Only once is *imperium* found as a spiritual/religious concept;⁶³ otherwise *imperium* is used in the worldly sense of ‘world power’, referring to the Roman empire (*imperium Romanum*)⁶⁴; or occasionally, to other supreme ‘states’⁶⁵ (i.e. ‘states’ dominant over others in power and influence). *Imperium* often translates as ‘supreme power (of Roman emperors)’⁶⁶ or ‘command’.⁶⁷

In the passage quoted above, *imperium* is meant in the sense of ‘supreme power’.⁶⁸ For Augustine, as a term for a ‘state’, *imperium* is reserved for a power with supremacy over other ‘states’ and a notable function for Christianity. The title of *imperator* appears analogously in similar contexts in the *De Civitate Dei*. It is reserved for rulers who have supremacy over other rulers and are significant within God’s providential plan, because their empire is meaningful for Christianity.

In one case (Chapter 7 of Book XIX⁶⁹), *imperium*⁷⁰ or *imperiosa civitas*⁷¹ represents a sample model of a superior ‘state’ that, in order to be able to communicate with its neighbours, conquers them; and together with

⁶¹ OLD 1 (1968), pp. 843-845; *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae Online* (München 1900); Lemma/Sublemma, s.v. *imperium*, -ī n.

⁶² Augustinus Hipponensis I, IV, V.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, II 29, p. 96; ll. 7-8. Here, *imperium* occurs within a quote from two verses of Virgil’s *Aeneid*. *Aen.* 1.278f. Augustine adapts Virgil in a similar way, as he avails himself of Cicero for his own argument.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, I 30, p. 47; I 36, p. 52; II 17, p. 73; II 20, p. 79; IV 2, p. 148; IV 5, p. 151; V 1, p. 190; V 18, pp. 227, 228; XX 19, p. 450.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, IV 6, p. 152; XIX 7, p. 366.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, I 36, p. 52; IV 2, p. 147; IV 7, p. 153; IV 15, p. 165; IV 29, p. 182; V 12, pp. 211, 214, 215, 216; V 15, p. 220; XII 3, p. 515.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, I 23, p. 38; I 26, p. 41; IV 26, p. 178; V 18, p. 224; XII 26, p. 553.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, V 12, p. 213, l. 28.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, XIX 7, pp. 366-367.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 366, l. 28.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 366, l. 19.

the peace treaty, imposes its language on the subdued 'races' (*gentes*).

Augustine notes that even when this state is reached, peace is not secured.

Enemies from the outside must be repulsed while the *imperium* strives for constant expansion. The result is a never-ending cycle of war.

In the *De Civitate Dei*, *imperium* has unhappy connotations of war and repression, and refers to the military. This concurs with the meaning of *imperium* most common in the Classical Roman Period.⁷² It is therefore not surprising that in the *De Civitate Dei*, *imperium* seldom has a spiritual meaning. Although Augustine does recognise some positive contexts for the use of force (e.g. against pagans, non-believers and schismatics),⁷³ these are worldly and have no place in Augustine's spiritual community, the *Civitas Dei*.

Bullough has explored the political term *imperium*: translating it as 'lawful authority/rule'. He refers to a specific meaning of *imperium* - 'authority exercised over other *gentes* and their rulers' - which he attributes to medieval England and Alcuin.⁷⁴ However, the examples from the *De Civitate Dei* (e.g. the multiple occasions when it stands for the dominant Roman power) manifest that *imperium* in this sense was already much used by Augustine (and by Virgil).

Nelson and McKitterick agree that Alcuin used *imperium* to denote

⁷² Another derivative of *imperare*, *imperator*, which in the Classical Roman Period signified 'commander', 'commander-in-chief', '(victorious) general' (as a title of honour) and 'emperor', even more strongly expresses its relatedness to military affairs. OLD 1, pp. 842-843; *TLL Online*, Lemma/Sublemma, s.v. *imperātor*, -ōris m. See: R. Combès, *Imperator: Recherches sur l'emploi et la signification du titre d'imperator dans la Rome républicaine* (Paris 1966), on the formation of the term *imperator* during the Roman Republic.

⁷³ Campenhausen, *Latin Church*, pp. 238-240; Dvornik, *Early Christian*, pp. 842-843; Dodaro, 'Church and State', pp. 180-181.

⁷⁴ Bullough, *Die Kaiseridee*, p. 42f.

‘power over many subject peoples’.⁷⁵ This suggests that, to Alcuin and Augustine, *imperium* is reserved for a power with supremacy over other ‘states’ or, in Augustine’s terms, for ‘states’ that are significant within God’s providential plan because they are meaningful for Christianity.

In ‘The Imperial Coronation of Charlemagne’, Ganshof investigates Alcuinian political thought in the lead-up to the imperial coronation and discusses the notion of *imperium*. Asserting that Alcuin’s impact on Charlemagne’s elevation is undeniable, Ganshof explores the critical argument of Kleinclausz, Halphen, Pfeil, Caspar, and particularly Löwe and Stengel, that Alcuin made his *imperium Christianum* (which began to appear in correspondence around 798, and was used by him up to 801/802), familiar to Charlemagne in order to acquaint him with the idea of emperorship.⁷⁶ According to Ganshof, this term conquered the minds of other Frankish clerics of the royal circle - such as Alcuin’s agents, who he had sent to Rome in 800: Witto (Candidus), Fridugisus (Nathanael) and other monks of Saint-Martin. *Imperium Christianum* features in Alcuin’s epistles to Arn of Salzburg, and Ganshof reasons that another of Alcuin’s correspondents, Angilbert of Saint-Riquier, shared Alcuin’s thoughts on empire.⁷⁷

Alcuin’s *imperium Christianum*, according to Ganshof, corresponds to the territories submitted to Charlemagne’s authority and inhabited by the *populus Christianus* (the community of Christians spiritually dependent on Rome). Charlemagne’s duty is to govern, defend and enlarge it; linked with

⁷⁵ J. L. Nelson, ‘Kingship and Empire’, in: J. H. Burns (ed.): *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350-c. 1450* (Cambridge 1988), pp. 211-251, p. 230. McKitterick holds that in Frankish annals, *imperium* appears in the sense of ‘rule of the Franks over many peoples’. McKitterick, *History and Memory*, pp. 115-118.

⁷⁶ Ganshof, *Imperial Coronation*, pp. 9-28.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-17, 22.

these obligations is his task to protect faith and ‘church’.⁷⁸ Ganshof contends that the term *imperium Christianum* has a ‘geographical’ meaning: Alcuin mentions its frontiers and alludes to a territory in his epistles.⁷⁹ Ganshof argues along the lines of Caspar and Pfeil, dismissing Löwe, who rejected any meaning of *imperium Christianum* apart from a religious one.⁸⁰

In light of the evidence that Alcuin likely drew from Augustine the notion of *imperium* as a power with supremacy over other ‘states’, the following theory promoted by Löwe and Stengel, and debated by Ganshof, is noteworthy in terms of Charlemagne’s acquaintance with the concept of emperorship. One important constituent of Charlemagne’s idea of imperial dignity is, according to Löwe and Stengel, a notion of authority, conceived as a superior royal power - i.e. a power of supremacy - already familiar to the Franks. These scholars contend that as the notion of *imperium* would have been known to the Anglo-Saxons in this sense of a power of supremacy (indeed, they anticipated Bullough’s conclusion), *imperium* would have contributed to the creation of the notion of empire as understood by Charlemagne.⁸¹

Löwe and Stengel reason that Alcuin was successful in acquainting Charlemagne with his understanding of *imperium* because a similar notion of authority had already existed among the Franks. While this theory may or may not be accurate, it reflects the scholarly consensus that Alcuin drew Charlemagne’s attention to the notion of *imperium* in the sense of a power

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15; J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent: The Ford Lectures Delivered in the University of Oxford in Hilary Term 1970* (Oxford 1971), pp. 101-103.

⁷⁹ E. Dümmler (ed.), *Alcuinus: Epistolae* (MGH Epp. 4) (Berlin 1895), pp. 185, 202, 234.

⁸⁰ Ganshof, *Imperial Coronation*, p. 15.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

having supremacy over other 'states'. The analysis below reveals that Alcuin added a spiritual Christian meaning to this idea of *imperium* as a notion of supremacy.

In the Hellenistic period, cities were of primary importance as Christianity had first developed there. In Greek, *πολίτης* means 'citizen' or 'townsman'; the Latin equivalent is *civis*.⁸² In the Classical Roman Period, foreigners first had to move from the countryside to the cities, then learn Latin (in the West) or Greek (in the East), if they wanted to qualify for Roman citizenship. The Latin equivalent of the Greek *ἔθνη* (pl.) is *gentes* (pl.) ('races', 'tribes', 'nations').⁸³ *Gentes* appears in this sense in the *Vetus Latina*, where Abraham is presented as *pater multarum gentium*. A comparison of passages in the *De Civitate Dei* has shown that the dominant meaning of *gentes* in political contexts is 'less influential groups of people'.⁸⁴ *Gentes* appears in the above quotation from chapter 12 of Book V.

According to Augustine, the Latin term *gentes* (or Greek *ἔθνη*) refers to a less dominant group of people, such as peasants, in contrast to urban 'citizens' or 'townsmen'. In Christian Latin, *gentiles* are 'pagans' or 'heathens': evidently derived from *gentes*, who usually lived in the

⁸² Flasch shows that *civitas* is the Latin equivalent of the Greek *πόλις* ('city-state', 'city', 'state'). Flasch, *Augustin*, p. 385.

⁸³ Mayer *et al.*, *Augustinus-Lexikon* 3 (2004-2010), p. 140. This concept will only be explored in its plural form because of its different meaning in the singular. Unlike *gentes*, *gens* does not have a negative undercurrent. The Hebrew Old Testament differentiated between the plural *haggōjîm* ('non-Jewish/heterodox tribes') and the singular *ha'am*, which meant the small, elected 'people of God' tied by faith and blood bond. The Septuagint reinforced this opposition, using originally the terms *ἔθνη* and *λαός* (corresponding to the Latin *gens*). Hence the word *gens* also appears in the Latin Old Testament with reference to the Jewish nation. Augustine uses the singular *gens* when talking about the 'Jewish people' (*gens Iudaeorum*) and the 'Roman people' (*gens populi Romani*) (here following Varro). *Ibid.*, pp. 140-142.

⁸⁴ Augustinus Hipponensis II 5, p. 58; IV 7, p. 153; V 12, p. 211; V 15, p. 221; XVIII 22, p. 284.

countryside.⁸⁵ This makes sense given that Christianity first formed in the cities, and rural populations remained pagan for longer. Bullough also explored the term *gentes*, but in connection with Alcuin. His suggested definition corresponds to that which is relevant to Augustine: less influential groups of people.⁸⁶

Unlike the Greek term *βάρβαροι*, *gentes* does not have an overtone of ‘being uncivilised’, but instead implies superstition, idolatry, polytheism, the making of violent sacrifices and later, hostility towards the Christian religion.⁸⁷ From the fourth century onwards, *pagani* (‘pagans’, which has no precedent in Greek) began to replace *gentes*: because of the polysemy of *gentes*, and as its pejorative meaning was not considered strong enough. In the language of the councils, *gentiles* replaced *gentes*.

In the Latin Old Testament (*Vetus Latina*), *gentes* was only used for non-Jews (its general meaning of ‘races’, ‘tribes’, or ‘nations’ persisted). Only when Christians dissociated themselves further from both faithless non-Jews and Jews did they first perceive pagans and Jews as a single entity. However, when Christianity was made the ‘state’ religion, the term *gentes* became not only further opposed to the Christians, but also opposed to the Jews and Israel.⁸⁸

In the *Augustinus-Lexikon* (s.v. *gentes*), it is noted under particular usage of *gentes* by Augustine that in a pejorative sense, *gentes* means ‘non-believers’. The *Augustinus-Lexikon* (s.v. *gentes*) refers to a differentiation which Augustine makes (explicitly in his *In Iohannis evangelium tractatus*)

⁸⁵ Mayer *et al.*, *Augustinus-Lexikon* 3, p. 140.

⁸⁶ Bullough, ‘Die Kaiseridee’, pp. 42-43.

⁸⁷ Mayer *et al.*, *Augustinus-Lexikon* 3, pp. 140-141.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

between the Jews and *gentes* as ‘non-believers’. While the term *gentes* stood in opposition to the Jews and Israel before Augustine, Augustine takes this opposition further. He devalues the Jews in relation to the *gentes* (arguing that they are more to blame for Christ’s death), seeing them as arrogant. However, he regards the *gentes* as humble groups of people, who will eventually open up to the Gospel.⁸⁹ Thus, for Augustine, a distinctive use of *gentes* seems to denote ‘less influential groups of people who are to open up to conversion’.

If we turn to Alcuin and evaluate the occurrence of the political terms *imperium* and *gentes* in the vicinity of the verb *subicere* (‘to subject’) in *Epist. 257*, we discover that *gentes* suits Augustine’s notion. We find that, in alignment with Augustine, for Alcuin *imperium* must have meant ‘ruling over *gentes*’ (inferior groups of people who will eventually open up to conversion).

Epist. 257 was written to Charlemagne in the aftermath of his imperial coronation and is a dedicatory letter for the manual, *De Fide Sanctae et Individuae Trinitatis*, which Alcuin composed for Charlemagne. Alcuin commends Charlemagne for the imperial title he has obtained:

Since the *imperial* dignity, ordained by God, seems to have been exalted for nothing else but for presiding over and being of use to the people: hence, power and wisdom are given by God to the chosen ones: ***power, so that he may oppress the proud and defend the humble from the wicked; wisdom, so that he may rule and teach the subject peoples with pious concern.***

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 141, 144.

With these two gifts, holy *emperor*, divine grace has exalted and honoured your sublimity above others, in a manner incomparable to the predecessors of the same title and divine power, inflicting the terror of your power upon all the *less influential groups of people* from all parts, in order that those come to you by voluntary *subjection*, whom the labour of war could not subdue to itself at earlier times.

What then, what must be done for your most devoted concern for God, at a time of serenity and peace, at which, after the sword-belt of military exertion has been unfastened, the entire people hastens to flock together at the proclamation of your command in pacific freedom from exertion, and eagerly awaiting, standing before the throne of your glory, what your authority wants to dictate to which person, if not also to decide what is just for every dignity, to dictate what is valid, to bring to mind what is holy, so that each one may return home pleased with the precepts of eternal salvation?

But lest the eagerness of my devotion to the Lord be inactive by idleness, lest it had failed to assist you in the proclamation of the Catholic faith, I have directed to your most holy authority a sermon concerning the faith of the holy and indivisible Trinity, in the form of a little manual, so that the praise and faith of divine wisdom may be tested by the judgment of the wisest of men.

And that is to say that I neither estimated wisdom to be worthier than any other gift of your *imperial* majesty: nor did I think any other to be equally worthy of accepting such an excellent gift, as it is very well known that it is necessary for the leader of the Christian people to know everything and preach what pleases God.

Nor in fact is it more seemly for anyone to have learned either better or more things than the *emperor*, whose doctrine can be of use to all the *subject peoples*.

Not that I thought by that, invincible *emperor* and wisest ruler, that anything of your knowledge of the Catholic faith is not investigated or less explored, but that I showed the duty of my title, by which I was called a teacher by some people, although not deservedly: and indeed that I convinced those, who belittled your most noble intention of wanting to learn the theories of the dialectic discipline, which *St. Augustine in the books concerning the holy Trinity* thought to be necessary in the highest degree, when he demonstrated that the most profound questions concerning the holy Trinity can only be explained through the subtlety of categories.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ *Dum dignitas imperialis a Deo ordinata, ad nil aliud exaltata esse videtur, nisi populo praeesse et prodesse: proinde datur a Deo electis potestas et sapientia: potestas, ut superbos opprimat, et defendat ab improbis humiles; sapientia, ut regat et doceat pia sollicitudine subiectos.*

His duobus, sancte imperator, muneribus divina vestram incomparabiliter sublimitatem, eiusdem nominis et numinis antecessoribus gratia superexaltavit et honoravit, terrorem potentiae vestrae super omnes undique gentes inmittens, ut voluntaria subiectione ad vos veniant, quos prioribus bellicus labor temporibus sibi subdere non potuit.

Quid igitur, quid agendum est vestrae Deo devotissimae sollicitudini, tempore serenitatis et pacis, quo, militaris laboris cingulo soluto, totus pacifica quiete populus concurrere festinat ad vestrae iussionis edictum, intentusque ante thronum gloriae vestrae consistens, quid cui personae vestra auctoritas praecipere velit, nisi etiam omni dignitati iusta discernere, rata praecipere, sancta admonere, ut quisque laetus cum perpetuae salutis praeceptis domum redeat?

Ne vero meae in Domino devotionis studium otio torpens, vestro in praedicatione catholicae fidei defuisset adiutorio, direxi sanctissimae auctoritati vestrae de fide sanctae et individuae Trinitatis, sub specie manualis libelli, sermonem, ut divinae laus et fides sapientiae sapientissimi hominum probaretur iudicio.

Nec videlicet alio quolibet vestrae imperialis maiestatis munere digniorem aestimabam sapientiam: nec alium quemlibet tam excellenti dono in accipiendo aequae dignum putabam, dum principem populi christiani cuncta scire et praedicare quae Deo placeant necesse esse notissimum est.

Neque enim quemquam magis decet vel meliora nosse vel plura, quam imperatorem, cuius doctrina omnibus potest prodesse subiectis.

Non quo, imperator invicte et sapientissime rector, aliquid scientiae vestrae fidei catholicae incognitum esse, vel minus exploratum cogitarem, sed ut mei nominis, quo a quibusdam magister licet non merito vocabar, officium ostenderem: necnon, ut convincerem eos, qui minus utile aestimabant vestram nobilissimam intentionem dialecticae disciplinae discere velle rationes, quas beatus Augustinus in libris de sancta Trinitate adprime necessarias

Regarding the explicit evidence, Alcuin mentions Augustine and his *De Trinitate*, emphasising that the emperor above all needs to know which doctrine can benefit all subject peoples. In the above passage, Alcuin introduces his manual. In the last paragraph, Alcuin refers to Augustine, not only in terms of *De Trinitate* - whose contents he promotes and laid the basis for his manual - but also in connection with Charlemagne's thirst for knowledge in philosophy. One of the manual's aims is, according to Alcuin, 'that I convince those, who belittled your most noble intention of wanting to learn the theories of the dialectic discipline, which St. Augustine in the books concerning the holy Trinity thought to be necessary in the highest degree'.

Alcuin's letters to the ruler are interwoven with instructions and praises of Charlemagne's 'wisdom' (*sapientia*), which endows him with a desire for knowledge and to internalise and propagate the Catholic doctrine.⁹¹ Alcuin tends to refer to Augustine directly as the leading authority in matters relating to Christian doctrine. Augustine is named, cited and quoted more than the other Church Fathers, while the references to him are more detailed and precise.⁹²

esse putavit, dum profundissimas de sancta Trinitate quaestiones, non nisi categoriarum subtilitate explanari posse probavit. Dümmler, *Epist.* 257, p. 414, line 20 - p. 415, line 6.

⁹¹ In *Epist.* 307, sent to Charlemagne within the first years after his imperial coronation, Alcuin's instruction begins in the first line after the greeting and ends with the letter itself. Dümmler, *Epist.* 307, p. 466, line 23 - p. 471, line 6. Alcuin praises Charlemagne for being inclined to seek *sapientia* from the people surrounding him, including himself as a teacher, in order that perfection of intellect and character might be spread to all people. *Ibid.*, p. 466, line 24. Before Alcuin sets out his argument - engaging with a hypothesis offered by a Greek sage - he announces that he will base his comments in this letter on the views of the Fathers. *Ibid.*, p. 467, line 1.

In *Epist.* 136, Alcuin explains to the King that conversion to the Christian faith should not be forced by the sword, but achieved by the words of God. In order to convince Charlemagne, Alcuin emphasises the reciprocal relationship between him and the King. He claims that it was Charlemagne's wise inquiries, his curiosity and eagerness for knowledge that helped him reach these conclusions. *Epist.* 136, p. 205, line 16-18.

⁹² Augustine is one of several patristic sources consulted by Alcuin, but is arguably presented in a different way. The findings concerning the explicit references are based on an analysis in Chapter Two of my doctoral research, where I examined a sample letter (*Epist.* 307)

Before pointing out the indirect references to Augustine in content and language, we should note that in *Epist.* 257, Alcuin expresses clearly the meaning he attributes to the imperial authority, along with his evaluation of Charlemagne's worldly realm within God's providential plan. Regarding the content, in the passage's first paragraph, Alcuin explains what the imperial dignity with which Charlemagne has been invested is for: no other purpose than to 'preside over' (*praesesse*) and 'be of use to' (*prodesse*) the people. To accomplish this task, *potestas* ('power') and *sapientia* ('wisdom') are given by God to the elected.⁹³ Alcuin maintains that 'power' is used by the ruler 'so

alongside other letters for direct and indirect references to Augustine. S. C. Mösch, 'Augustine of Hippo and the Art of Ruling in the Carolingian Imperial Period'. Unpublished doctoral dissertation (King's College London 2015), pp. 98-188. The analysis revealed that the epistles where Augustine is prominent by direct quotation all have a strong instructional component. The letters to Charlemagne also make calls on his *sapientia*, a tool of encouragement through which to learn and spread the correct Christian doctrine. Augustine is Alcuin's prime reference in questions of faith for the following reasons: compared to other authors and texts, he is named and cited more frequently and rigorously (Dümmler, *Epist.* 307, *Epist.* 110, *Epist.* 182); his articulateness and logic are repeatedly praised by Alcuin (*Epist.* 307); quotes from him are more often given a precise textual reference than quotes from other authors (*Epist.* 307); he tends to occupy a key position in the structure of the letter, i.e. he is either mentioned in the opening (*Epist.* 307) or closing (*Epist.* 110, 182); Alcuin relies more heavily on Augustine when complex theological questions are raised, as the latter's texts contain concentrated information within few lines (the *De Trinitate* in *Epist.* 307 is used to disprove misinterpretations, while *Epist.* 110 ends with an accurate review of the method of conversion suggested by Augustine in the *De Catechizandis Rudibus*). Alcuin really wanted Charlemagne to follow Augustine's directions in matters of faith above all others, and was promoting him as holding an overriding authority, in a way that bolstered his own.

⁹³ Dümmler, *Epist.* 257, p. 414, line 20. *Sapientia* and its antithesis *fortitudo* ('strength') had been an established *topos* among Roman moral ideals since Virgil's *Aeneid*. E. R. Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (Bern and München 1961), pp. 171-190. We find the classical *topoi* of 'wisdom' and 'strength' already represented in the Greek epic poetry attributed to Homer: the optimal performance in war is achieved by a balance between 'mind' and 'strength'. Cicero, who reformulated the argument of Polybius, saying that according to Roman history the key element in the Romans' rise was from the first the wisdom and moral superiority of individuals, contributed to the integration of these ideals into Roman political thinking. In late antique Latin literary theory, Fulgentius was prominent. According to his allegory, the *topoi* of *sapientia* and *fortitudo* featured in the opening words of Virgil's *Aeneid*, in *arma virumque cano* ('I sing of arms and the man'): *arma* was supposed to represent *fortitudo*, *virum* was supposed to represent *sapientia*. Isidore of Seville, intermediary between the ancient and Carolingian worlds, writes on epic: 'It is called heroic song, because it recounts the deeds of brave men. For heroes are men who are worthy of heaven on account of their wisdom and strength'. Cited in Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*, p. 184.

that he may oppress the proud'; and 'wisdom' 'so that he may rule and teach the subject peoples with pious concern'.

Alcuin usually reminds the ruler of the gifts of 'power' (*potestas/potentia/imperium*) and 'wisdom' (*sapientia*) granted by God in writings that portray Charlemagne as a supreme Christian ruler. Throughout the epistles, 'power' has a political function; 'wisdom', a religious function.

On the formal level, the construction '*potestas, ut superbos opprimat, et defendat ab improbis humiles; sapientia, ut regat et doceat pia sollicitudine subiectos*' is an allusion to Virgil's hexameter *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos*, quoted in the *De Civitate Dei*. Alcuin definitely had Augustine in mind - because in another letter, *Epist. 178*,⁹⁴ from before the imperial coronation, Alcuin gives a direct quotation of Virgil's hexameter, specifying that Augustine elaborates on this hexameter in the *De Civitate Dei*. In *Epist. 178*, Alcuin uses similar terminology in order to indicate to Charlemagne that he is an exceptional ruler: he has already gained the power and influence of an emperor before having obtained the imperial title.

In *Epist. 257*, *subicere* recurs in various grammatical forms and builds up to a recurrent theme. Regarding the concept of *gentes*, the meaning corresponds to that which is relevant to Augustine: 'Less influential groups of people who are to open up to conversion'.

Considering the content of the first paragraph and the findings on the formal level of the text, it appears that Alcuin links Charlemagne's empire with the Roman and Assyrian realms, which have a notable function in God's providential plan. It seems that, when using the title of *imperator*, Alcuin

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, *Epist. 178*, pp. 294-296.

follows Augustine's definition of a 'ruler who has the supremacy over other rulers in power', and equates Charlemagne with the Roman *imperatores*. They are significant in God's providential plan because their empire was meaningful for Christianity.

However, in the second paragraph, Alcuin refines the statement made in the first, by asserting: 'With these two gifts [*potestas* and *sapientia*], holy emperor, divine grace has exalted and honoured your sublimity above others, in a manner incomparable to the predecessors of the same title and divine power'. Alcuin portrays Charlemagne as superior to any other secular leader and contrasts him with all previous emperors.

While the first paragraph of *Epist. 257* only hints at the purpose of these gifts, the following text divulges their different function. The second paragraph states that divine grace inflicts the terror of Charlemagne's *potentia* upon all *gentes* from all parts, so that those may come to Charlemagne by voluntary subjection who the labour of war could not subdue at earlier times.

What is implied is first, that Charlemagne's gift of 'power'⁹⁵ has a political function: expanding and securing his empire. Second, Alcuin intimates that, after successful victories in war, the remaining unsubdued tribes will eventually bow voluntarily to such a powerful ruler. Alcuin hints that the hard times of war are over. Accordingly, the rest of the text expands on the second gift of 'wisdom', which comes into play after the first one has fulfilled its purpose.

Alcuin continues by asking Charlemagne: 'What then, what must be

⁹⁵ Dümmler, *Epist. 41*, p. 84, lin. 12.

done for your most devoted concern for God, at a time of serenity and peace?’⁹⁶ It emerges that Charlemagne’s attribute of ‘wisdom’ instead has a religious function. After drawing attention to a sermon on the Holy Trinity, which he composed for Charlemagne in the form of a manual,⁹⁷ Alcuin explores the meaning of ‘wisdom’. To him, ‘wisdom’ allows the ruler to discern and make known God’s will.⁹⁸

In *Epist. 257*, Alcuin presents Charlemagne as superior to any other secular authority by claiming that he has gained *potestas* and *sapientia*: which reflect the ruler’s political and religious responsibilities of defending and enlarging his realm, and defending and spreading the Catholic Christian faith, to a greater degree than any past or present ruling figure.⁹⁹

Having determined Augustine’s multiple use of *imperium* with reference to the Roman empire in the *De Civitate Dei*, we may claim that, by quoting from the passage in which Augustine discusses the sovereignty,

⁹⁶ *Quid igitur, quid agendum est vestrae Deo devotissimae sollicitudini, tempore serenitatis et pacis [...]. Ibid., Epist. 257, p. 414, line 27.*

⁹⁷ J. Cavadini, ‘The Sources and Theology of Alcuin’s *De Fide Sanctae et Individuae Trinitatis*’. *Traditio* 46 (1991), pp. 123-146.

⁹⁸ Another example reflecting the value of ‘wisdom’ is *Epist. 177*, written to Charlemagne during the summer of 799, imploring the King to intervene in favour of Pope Leo III: ‘Look what has been done with regard to the apostolic see in the particular city, to the most excellent dignity. All these are only saved by your judgment; in order that with the most prudent counsel of wisdom, given to you by God, with temperate consideration the things that have to be corrected are corrected, and the things that have to be preserved are preserved; and these which divine piety carried mercifully are raised in praise of that one’s name, who healed his slave and freed him from the cursed persecution of infidelity. In fact, your wisest prudence of mind - while it understands everything about what is fitting for whom - in doing good or in punishing should do and perform what pleases God’. (*Ecce quid actum est de apostolica sede in civitate praecipua, in dignitate excellentissima. Quae omnia vestro tantummodo servantur iudicio; ut prudentissimo consilio sapientiae, vobis a Deo datae, temperata consideratione corrigantur quae corrigenda sunt, et conserventur quae conservanda sunt; et quae clementer divina gessit pietas extollantur in laudem nominis illius, qui salvum fecit servum suum et liberavit a persecutione exsecrante infidelitatis. Vestra vero sapientissima animi prudentia - dum omnia intellegat, quid cui conveniat personae - in benefaciendo sive in vindicando faciat et perficiat quod Deo placeat*). Dümmler, *Epist. 177*, p. 292, line 28-33. Further writings containing the concept of ‘wisdom’ are *Epist. 249*, p. 404, line 3; *Epist. 148*, p. 237, line 30, p. 241, line 1; *Epist. 111*, p. 161, line 13-18.

⁹⁹ On the gifts of ‘power’ and ‘wisdom’, see: Dümmler, *Epist. 174*, pp. 288-298, which is part of the historic correspondence concerning the assault on Pope Leo III on 25 April 799.

function and supreme qualities of Rome as an eschatologically relevant imperial power, Alcuin both links Charlemagne's rule with the Roman empire and confers eschatological significance to Charlemagne. To Alcuin and Augustine, the title of *imperator* is reserved for rulers with supremacy over other rulers in power or, in Augustine's terms, for eschatologically relevant rulers. In view of this, Alcuin's juxtaposition of Charlemagne and the *imperatores Romani regni* takes on its true meaning.¹⁰⁰

In one regard, Alcuin's understanding of the nouns *imperium*, *imperator*, and the verb *imperare* differs from that of Augustine. To Alcuin, these notions do not simply refer to eschatologically relevant empires and rulers in the sense of the Assyrians - who Augustine deems relevant to the Old Testament - and the Romans - who he considers relevant to the New Testament - but to an actual people of God on earth. This difference manifests itself in the single distinction in meaning of *imperium* in Augustine and Alcuin's texts.

It has been argued that *imperium* in the Classical Roman Period and *De Civitate Dei* carries a connotation that refers to the military: which proposes that Augustine's *Civitas Dei* is, in principle, at odds with any secular political power. Alcuin's notion of *imperium*, however, which gains prominence in the correspondence leading up to Charlemagne's imperial coronation, refers to a secular military power at the same time as having a strong spiritual connotation.

¹⁰⁰ See Dümmler, *Epist. 178*, pp. 294-296, sent to Charlemagne before December 800. Another set of expressions that appear in this letter along with *gentes* and reinforce its meaning of hostile, subordinate tribes to be converted, involve *subdere*, *iugum* and *regna terrarum*. An examination of the occurrence of the political terms *imperium* and *gentes* in the vicinity of *subdere*, *iugum* and *regna terrarum* in *Epist. 178* confirms that, in line with Augustine, *imperium* for Alcuin implied 'ruling over *gentes*'.

IV

Conclusion

There are other passages we could have discussed. This paper has traced references to Augustine in Alcuin's writing. It has explored the ways in which Alcuin drew on Augustine through direct reference and a more indirect, but nonetheless pervasive, borrowing of concepts.

In an initial analysis concerned with Alcuin's explicit use of Augustine, *Epist. 257* showed that, in the instructional parts of the content, Augustine is presented as a distinguished authority and binding guideline in questions relating to Christian doctrine. In a second analysis, *Epist. 257* was examined for implicit references to Augustine in content and language. It emerged that in the same writing, explicit references tended to be used in statements which served to instruct in the domain of Christian faith; while implicit references, below the surface, formed part of an underlying political discourse.

Alcuin's discourse, leading up to Charlemagne's imperial coronation, began to permeate the court from 794 onward, when his opinion started to gain authority. Around the same time, after Charlemagne's move to Aachen, the pseudonym 'David' came into use. The established pseudonyms for Charlemagne were '(novus) David', '(novus) Salomon', '(novus) Moyses' and '(novus) Konstantinus'.¹⁰¹

Fleckenstein notes that the pseudonyms for Charlemagne appeared after 794; *Epist. 41* being the first letter of Alcuin's to celebrate Charlemagne

¹⁰¹ Fleckenstein, 'Karl der Grosse', pp. 43-46; Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship*, p. 100; M. Garrison, 'The Social World of Alcuin: Nicknames at York and the Carolingian Court', in: L. Houwen and A. MacDonald (eds.): *Alcuin of York: Scholar at the Carolingian Court. Proceedings of the Third Germania Latina Conference Held at the University of Groningen, May 1995* (Groningen 1998), pp. 59-79.

as 'David'. This phenomenon spread at court only after the Anglo-Saxon had won Charlemagne's approval - which supports the theory that Alcuin introduced the practice of using pseudonyms.¹⁰²

Compared with other Church Fathers, Augustine was the Father with the most negative stance on worldly rule. It is remarkable that Alcuin chose him when evaluating and justifying Charlemagne's rule. Alcuin portrayed Charlemagne as superior to any other authority by stating he had gained and deserved *imperium* ('supreme power')/*potestas/potentia* ('power') and *sapientia* ('wisdom') - which together, reflected political and religious responsibilities - to a greater degree than any past or present political figure. This places Charlemagne's 'state' above that of the Assyrians or Romans, whom Augustine presents as eschatologically relevant in the *De Civitate Dei*. Charlemagne is given a different, superior position and is contrasted with all previous emperors.

Alcuin reinvented Augustine to suit his own project. He assessed the Carolingians according to Augustine's strict criteria in order to give a positive evaluation of the Carolingian 'state'. While the Christian Roman emperors had not met Augustine's challenge, Charlemagne was the first ruler to lead a people perfectly under God's command. By using Augustinian political thought in order to make a positive statement about Carolingian rule, Alcuin resolved the tension in Augustine's argument in the *De Civitate Dei* - in other words, the author's dilemma between approval of the supreme worldly power of Christian rulers and harsh criticism towards any worldly government.

¹⁰² Fleckenstein, 'Karl der Grosse', p. 45; P. Kershaw, *Peaceful Kings: Peace, Power and the Early Medieval Political Imagination* (Oxford 2011), pp. 2-8, 50-61, 81-124, 128-147, 180-196. Dümmler, *Epist.* 41, 139, 148, 177, 198, 217 and 229.