LDST 390-07 and RELG 393-02      Fall 2008
Emperors, Bishops, & Martyrs

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LDST 390 considers the efforts of political leaders to annex a new religious faith to
their disintegrating empire and efforts of religious leaders to annex government to
their religious faith or, to be precise, to find room for political calculations in their
religious thought and practice. What follows gives you a week-by-week description:
what we’ll read and discuss, what you’ll write, and why. More specific explanations of
your “if absent” assignments and the grading for the course follow the schedule. And a
series of paper topics with starter-bibliographies brings up the rear.

August 27th   We begin at the end or--to be precise--with what some contemporaries
perceived to be the end--the so-called “fall” of Rome and disintegration of the western
empire.

Each weekly session starts with a conversation about assigned reading. The assumption is
that fatigue will only become a factor as the afternoon makes its turn towards evening. As
that occurs, I’ll do more of the talking and try to set the following week’s assignment in a
context (historical or historiographical) that will enliven your encounter with the material
assigned. Hence, today we have an abbreviated session (you’ve no assignment to discuss)
so we can get acquainted, share your initial impressions of the Roman Empire--its extent,
decline, and “fall”--probe the differences between “historical” and “historiographical,”
before recreating the crisis of 410.

If absent, work your definition of “civilization” into and through the account of
the fifth-century calamities offered by Ward-Perkins, and tell me whether what you’ve
defined did indeed “end” at that time.

September 3rd   Please read Bryan Ward-Perkins, The Fall of Rome and the End
of Civilization and spend time with the maps--the hardback has them on the inside cover;
if the paperback doesn’t, get an historical atlas to scout out the Mediterranean world from
roughly 310 to 500. We’ll check on the meaning of the word “civilization,” so come with
some preconceived notions.

If you randomly grabbed a few specimens from the herd of historians of late antiquity,
you’d get responses to the “crisis” of the early fifth century that range from indifference
(as if nothing of major consequence occurred) to shock (as if “civilization” ended). His
subtitle tells you where Ward-Perkins settles. You’ll tell me how he makes his case and
whether he does so to your satisfaction--when we open our session. No need to write for
submission (unless you were absent last week), but you may want to scribble a few notes
to yourself in addition to whatever file card is assigned. Your colleagues might appreciate the coherence that comes with preparation. Note the differences between developments in the eastern and western parts of the empire. So how might such differences be explained?

If absent, consult the discussion of Salvian and Orosius in Kaufman’s *Redeeming Politics* (on reserve), and compare the assessments there with the shorter ones included in Ward-Perkins. Conclude your essay with a half-page outline of the chapter that you’d add to *The Fall of Rome* and devote to an elaboration of the responses of Augustine, Salvian, and Orosius.

**September 10th**  
Today we stay close the end of our story and read contemporaries’ evaluations of same. You’ll find Augustine’s sermon on the sack of Rome in Atkins and Dodaro, *Augustine, Political Writings*, pp. 205-14. Augustine, a prominent and prolific African bishop was trafficking in consolations at that time (390s to 430). But Salvian of Marseilles approaches the crisis very differently. You’ll find him--books 4 thru 7 of his *On the Government of God*--on reserve in the library.

If absent, ponder not the “fall” or disintegration of the empire, but ponder what held it together for so long. Do so by commenting on the first two chapters of Lendon’s *Empire of Honor* (on reserve)

**September 17th**  
We’ll spend time in the second century with a philosophical emperor and a rather frantic bishop. Please read *The Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius and Ignatius of Antioch’s letter to the Smyrnnaeans (on reserve). Our conversation will touch on the similarities and differences between Stoicism and Christianity. You’ll be asked to come up with a word that describes the tone of the *Meditations* and one that captures the tone of the bishop’s letter. Prepare by asking whether and how “grief” is (in)adequate for the first and “aggrieved” for the second.

If absent. One could argue that Ignatius of Antioch’s early efforts to centralize authority in the church--at least locally or regionally--responded to a crisis in the early Christian ministry. Evaluate that argument by returning to one of two documents used often to depict that “crisis,” either the Book of Acts in the New Testament (translation, your choice) or *The Didache* (on reserve).

**September 24th**  
Please begin by reading Ramsay MacMullen’s *Christianizing the Roman Empire, A.D. 100-400*, then sail thru the first five chapters of Averil Cameron’s *The Later Roman Empire*. Two of those chapters bear the title “new empire.” What’s new?

If absent. MacMullen mentions the “restless and imperious ambition” of Bishop Ambrose of Milan. Indeed, nearly every effort to fathom Ambrose’s leadership style and strategies--as well as his objectives--identifies rather than resolves a raft of problems. He
was “ambitious,” but for himself, as well as for the church? Was he playing defense as often as, or more often than, defense? Neil McLynn’s striking biography (on reserve) puts Ambrose in control, fashioning his image. Read what McLynn has to say about Ambrose’s election and about the basilica crisis, compare that to what Kaufman says (Church, Book, and Bishop, on reserve), then take sides.

**October 1**

Please read Peter Brown’s *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity*. All the talk about a comprehensive “conversion” of the Roman Empire to Christianity during the fourth century, as MacMullen informed us, needs to be qualified, notwithstanding the difficulties encountered by Emperor Julian (as you’ll see) when he tried to revive pagan rituals. Paganism, nonetheless, hangs on. But perhaps we can talk about a “conversion” of a different sort in the fourth century, a “conversion” of Christianity to the empire, a new addiction to power. What does Brown think? What do you think?

If absent, dock what you can learn from the last two chapters of Michele Renee Salzman’s *Making of a Christian Aristocracy* (on reserve) alongside what Power and Persuasion has taught you about the ways in which the church’s leadership catered to the “upper echelons” of society? Did such tactics as “donor-centered” appeals for poor relief compromise the new faith or make it more relevant to affluent and destitute alike?

**October 8**

I think Gore Vidal’s novel, Julian, is a gem. Shouldn’t it grace a syllabus for your modern literature course? What’s it doing here, in a course that concentrates on history and historiography? Your first position paper is due today. Reply to that second question after you read what Averil Cameron has to say about Julian in chapter 6 of her *Later Roman Empire*.

If absent. Your paper is still due today at class time. If you must send it in and miss the discussion, your paper should integrate into its discussion of Vidal, Cameron, and Julian an exposition and evaluation of G.W. Bowersock’s Julian the Apostate, which you’ll find on reserve.

**October 15**

Take a break!!

**October 22**

http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/Englishconfessions.html should get you all thirteen books of Augustine’s Confessions. You need only read books 3 through 6 and 8. If you’re not a screen-person and prefer to save trees, any used bookstore worth aiming at respectability should have multiple paperback copies—none more expensive than a gallon of gas. Also read Kaufman’s Incorrectly Political (on reserve), pp. 11-39. We’ll reflect on Augustine’s report of his encounter with Bishop Ambrose in 386 and take a look at their very different “leadership styles.”

If absent, assess Augustine’s two “conversions” (emphasizing the plural). Discuss the way he relates (or fail to relate) his turn to Christianity to his turn away from politics.
October 29th  My colleague Robert Dodaro is convinced that, during the 390s and into the next century, leading church theorists were impressed by what Emperor Theodosius was doing to complete Constantine’s work on behalf of their new faith. But Robert’s best known now for maintaining that Augustine took it upon himself to develop the principles of a “Christian political conscience” and “to evangelize the political sphere.” Documents critical to Dodaro’s developing position compose most of your assignment for today; see Atkins and Dodaro, *Augustine, Political Writings*, pp. 1-22 and 61-99, but also read my rejoinder, on reserve, Kaufman, *Incorrectly Political*, pp. 39-49.

If absent, read pp. 30-43 in Atkins and Dodaro’s edition of Augustine’s *Political Writings*, use that letter to corroborate or undermine the impressions you’ve drawn from the readings assigned today, and evaluate the importance Augustine concedes to civic virtues.

November 5th  At some time between 409 and 412, there was a riot in Hippo. A customs officer accused of corruption was taken from the church—where he had sought sanctuary—and murdered. His body was mutilated. Augustine preached a sermon very soon afterward, which is your only assignment today—in Atkins and Dodaro, *Augustine, Political Writings*, pp. 107-119. It takes the bishop/preacher quite a while to mention the recent, unfortunate episode. Why? What was the sermon’s theme and how did it relate to the homicide, for which the sermon is our best evidence. Then, infer from that evidence the identity of the rioters, namely their socio-economic background and interests. You’ll be able to add your inferences to what you learned last week about the crisis at Calama, shaping some provisional conclusions about the responsibilities of civic and religious leaders to the poor in late antiquity.

If absent, please read Peter Brown’s *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (on reserve), which concludes with the observation that “the hope of solidarity with the poor” was then, as it is now, “a fragile aspiration.” But, as you’ve learned, bishops, emperors, regional officials, and local magistrates were often advocates for the impoverished. Use the sermon assigned today to discuss Brown’s observation and to evaluate the “fragility.” Why, given what Brown calls “the advocacy revolution,” was solidarity with the economically disadvantaged but a dream?

November 12th  Martyrs, saints, and shrines: one could argue that historians who study the veneration of martyrs (as if they were the new faith’s version of “godlets”) are witnessing “the paganization of Christianity.” You might get that impression from reading Peter Brown’s *Cult of the Saints*; you might not. Your second position paper, which is due today, will tell me what you’ve learned about—and what you think of—Brown’s position on “paganization,” and the ways in which the cults of saints and martyrs represented a continuation of pagan patronage systems.

If absent, you must still find a way to get your position papers to me and submit as well a second paper (your “if absent” paper) assessing the first paper’s exposition and conclusions in light of your familiarity with texts circulated by Bishop Gregory of Tours, published as *Life of the Fathers*, on reserve.
November 19th  You’ll find two short selections from Augustine’s City of God on reserve, book 4--chapter 4 and book 19--chapter 6. The first famously likens emperors to pirates and politics to piracy. The second asks if a Christian magistrate, when required by law, should torture witnesses and accused criminals to get to the truth. Hot topics. Please read the two pieces alongside the account of imperial politics in Averil Cameron’s Later Roman Empire, chapters 7-12. Augustine found it difficult to think of leadership in the secular world apart from the boundless lust for domination that seemed to motivate its leaders. Does Cameron tell you anything that would explain or question the bishop’s judgment on that count? Many Augustine-watchers are not as certain as i am that our subject was so depressed by the pervasiveness of that lust for domination (the libido dominandi); we’ll see how they’ve taken the punch out of his pessimism, and we’ll consider what that mean for his political theory.


November 26th  Off for Turkey

December 3rd Read Atkins and Dodaro, Augustine, Political Writings, pp. 128-203, documents related to the Donatist controversy, which began long before Augustine was born but which crested during his pontificate. The Donatists, in essence, insisted that the church be pure; Augustine and the faction that later claimed exclusive “rights” to the title “catholic” insisted that the church be universal, “a school for sinners” as well as a nursery for saints. The word you’ll want to keep in mind is “schism,” because the rival brands of Christianity disagreed on what circumstances (“when in the course of human events’’), if any, justified declarations of independence from institutions or individuals perceived to have gone astray. We’ll want to sift the differences between “schism” and “heresy,” as Augustine did, and we’ll want to revisit the issue of church and state, because Donatist Christians and Catholic Christians could not agree on the value of government. Finally, watch for Augustine’s justification for religious coercion.

If absent--on the last day of the class!!! Chapters 4 and 5 of Maureen Tilly’s Bible in Christian North discuss the several phases of the Donatist controversy. Your challenge is to use the assignments for today’s class to elaborate her distinctions.

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Grading:

Your final examination is scheduled by the university. You may earn up to 30 points. Another 30 points is at stake when you submit your research paper on the last day of classes. You may chose from one of three topics sketched at the conclusion of your
syllabus. Papers are to run 10 +/- double-spaced pages. Late papers are taxed at the modest rate of 3 points per day. The same holds for each of two position papers (5 pages +/-) scheduled during the class is worth 20 points.

Occasionally I’ll ask you to compose and submit file card responses to a question raised in class or on the syllabus. Use only 4X6” cards; write legibly. Think of these cards as a prompt for your three or four sentence briefing, during which you’re expected to inform colleagues, to explain to them what you found significant in the reading material you’ve prepared for that day’s class. The cards need only contain phrases, clauses--whatever kicks your memory into gear. Sentences work too. They will be collected when class adjourns, but they will not be graded.

Absences are regrettable and, ideally, will be rare. But if you miss, i’ll expect you to compose a 3-5 page paper that responds to the “if absent” prompt in your syllabus with the outline of the class session you could not attend. Occasionally, you’ll need to consult sources other than the regular assigned reading. Papers must be submitted at the session following the one you missed. They will be held until the end of class and then graded. Important: you may lose but not gain points (up to 8) on the basis of your “if absent” submissions, 8 points per submission. If your participation in class discussion exhibits inadequate or incomplete preparation of assigned reading, you’ll be asked to complete that “if absent” paper.

Research Papers (due-- last scheduled class)

Topics are designed to promote conversation among colleagues who select the same topic, enabling each to benefit from work done by others; therefore, talk to each other. The topics, ideally, will encourage you to relate your research for LDST 390 to studies you’ve undertaken elsewhere. Finally, topics have been formulated to prompt critical reading of both primary and secondary sources.

1) We started the course by probing the so-called “fall” of Rome, which, we learned generally applies to the empire’s western or “younger” half. Augustine and Salvian of Marseilles offered explanations, which you’ve read, but neither has cuffed historians to one approach. You might wish to begin by returning to Edward Gibbon’s monumental study of “decline and fall,” and reading selectively what he had to say in the eighteenth century. A synopsis will do, though, because your best passage into the issue is, I think, Ramsay MacMullen’s Corruption and the Decline of Rome (on reserve). Please read that with care, be sure your paper includes an exposition, and do use the footnotes and bibliography to point you towards primary and secondary sources. As for the sources that get my “don’t miss,” Ammianus Marcellinus’s history of the fourth century and the seventh of Paul Orosius’s Seven Books against the Pagans. You’ll also find the first ten books of Augustine’s City of God helpful. You might also sift carefully the Theodosian Code to discover what was on lawmakers’ minds as things started to disintegrate. Law? Enforcement? Leadership? Overwhelming force from beyond the borders? Corruption within? Or Christianity? What happened or didn’t happen to prompt the collapse?
2) You’ll soon read that Emperor Julian turned up his nose at Antioch, but it still seems a shame that we should move so quickly through our history and miss what was happening at some of the empire’s leading cities. I recommend that you pick one--Antioch would be my choice. If you agree, steer clear of debates about the apostle Paul’s mission to the city and Ignatius’s exit from same. Concentrate instead on the city’s commanding presence in subsequent centuries, for which, begin with J.H.G.W. Liebeschutz, *Antioch: City and Imperial Administration in the Later Empire*. You might want to probe the relationship between the imperial bureaucracy and local elites or the tangle of christological disputes that preoccupied the bishops of Antioch and Alexandria. Certainly don’t miss touring the city with its best known citizen, Libanius, who’s obviously captivated Gore Vidal. That ancient orator’s autobiography and correspondence are on reserve. Liebeschutz also wrote about the *Decline and Fall of the Roman City*, which should give you ideas for other stops, if Antioch doesn’t hold your interests. Besides, it will give you something interesting to talk about when you encounter colleagues writing on topic one.

3) Elena Zocca recently suggested that the Donatist controversy, with which we finish our class, represented the culmination of Christianity’s “growing pains” in a “crisis of identity” (*Annali di storia dell’esegesi*, 2004). Her argument is that moderates who were looking for détente were replaced in the late fourth century by extremists, and your job is to ascertain how and why some cranky folks got cranked up. You will be reading some of Augustine’s anti-Donatist work for the last class. Obviously, you’ll want to take a careful look beforehand as well as get acquainted with his extended answers to Donatists, which the series on post-Nicene church father collected in a single volume. To compare, check what Optatus of Milevis wrote against the Donatists decades earlier. It’s the best source we have for the moderate Donatist position inasmuch as Optatus, fortunately, made a point of replaying the arguments of his adversary, the Parmenian, Donatist bishop of Carthage. W.H.C. Frend’s *Donatist Church* is fine for background, but chase down Maureen Tilly’s *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, and begin there.