Leadership and Religious Values: Augustine and leadership in late antiquity.

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It was not easy to be a citizen of the Roman Empire during and after the 370s, and, as historian Peter Brown goes on, quoting multiple sources on the relation between religion and politics, “it was not easy to be a Christian.” We shall be examining the difficulties and the challenges they posed for Aurelius Augustine, as he developed (then surrendered) political ambitions, while he searched for truths that would make sense of wickedness in the world. Becoming an influential bishop in North Africa, he continued to face difficulties, making churches safe havens of a sort, places where moral rigor could be tempered by charity and persons could discover how Roman misfortunes might be construed as part of a cosmic plan.

Augustine’s political, moral, and religious leadership: that’s what this class is about. We’ll not draw extensive parallels between his world and ours, although the occasional comparison may help us comprehend the complexity of his challenges. Our job is to enter his world, where the churches have been called countercultural communities—although their “cultures” were rarely characterized by consensus—and where the political cultures church leaders encountered and “countered” were “driven too relentlessly by considerations of honor” (Brown, again) which some religious leaders thought obsolete.

The class meets for nearly three hours. Come fresh. Three persons chosen at random the week before will be responsible for leading the discussion of assigned topics and questions as well as issues raised by assigned texts/issues that they found intriguing. Come prepared to assist those colleagues with your contributions to the conversation. After a short break, I may request a few others to complete the conversation of that day’s assignments—but will devote most of our final hour + to set the context for the next week’s assignment.

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Grades:

100 points are possible. Short papers composed at the start of 7 classes will be graded (10=superb; 9=fine; 8=adequate; 7=barely adequate; 6=barely breathing). You’ll sit for an oral final exam during the last week of classes or during exam week—up to May 1, 7-10 PM, which the university has set as the day and/time for our final. A sensational performance on that final can net you 30 points. If absent and excused (health / travel for job and internship interviews),
students may complete a paper on the assigned topic, the discussion of which they missed--
evaluating additional (unassigned) texts.

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SCHEDULE

Jan 16 -- introduction to class and introduction to Stoicism

Jan 23 -- Read Augustine’s City of God, book 5, sections 5-26.

Augustine seems to appreciate “the glory that was Rome,” “all the hardships
. . . sufferings they endured . . . the desires they suppressed to gain the glory of men. They
deserved to receive that glory as a reward for such virtues.” Assess the authenticity of his
appreciation. Augustine defends the Stoics against Cicero, because he wishes to claim the
compatibility between free will and divine sovereignty. How well does he do?

Jan 30 -- Read Augustine’s Confessions, books 3-5 and his letter, Against the Fundamental,
chapters 1-4, on electronic reserve.

Why was Augustine attracted to and then drawn away from Manichaeism?

Feb 6 -- Read Augustine’s Confessions, books 1-2 and 6-10. Also read Richard Miller’s article,
“Evil, Friendship, and Iconic Realism in Augustine’s Confessions” and Kaufman’s “Augustine,
Ambrose, and Ambition” on electronic reserve.

Having read the assigned chapters in Augustine’s Confessions and attending
to what we’ve discussed so far, you should be able to form an impression about the relative
importance or influence of Stoicism, Manichaeism, Neoplatonism, and Christianity getting
Augustine prepared for the leadership roles he assumed by the year 400+-+. Do so, please.

Feb 13 -- Read the letters to and from Augustine in Atkins and Dodaro’s collection of Political
Writings, pp. 1-47 and 218-225

Marcellinus inquired whether Christianity was incompatible with “the ethics
of citizenship” and with leadership. How did Nectarius and Augustine, in effect, reply?

Feb. 20 -- Read Augustine’s answer to the letters of Petilian, on-line access available.

http://librarycat.richmond.edu/vwebv/search?browseFlag=N&instructorid=1321%7CKAUFMAN%2C++P
ETER&departmentId=0&courseld=1758%7CLDST%3A+387&recCount=25&searchType=5&page.search.se
arch.button=Search
Which one or more of Augustine’s many accusations against Donatist secessionists struck you as persuasive? Which seemed unfair?

Feb 27 -- Read Ward-Perkins, The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization, part 1 (available at the book store); Peter Brown’s chapters on “Rome and Riches” as well as Drake’s “Church and Empire, both on electronic reserve.

Was what Drake calls “the Christian turn to coercion” inevitable after the conversion of Constantine? Ward-Perkins argues against the claim that Romans and their “new masters,” from the early fifth century, easily accommodated to each other (and to the political changes that followed the so-called “fall” of Rome. Do you subscribe to his counter claims? Peter Brown emphasizes economic forces that led to conquest and accommodation. Evaluate his account.


After Rome was humiliated in the early fifth century, critics of Christianity blamed it for the crisis, and many Christians were perplexed by what appeared to be their God’s betrayal of the faithful. How effectively did Augustine answer the critics and console his coreligionists?

3/20 -- Read Augustine’s *City of God*, books 2 and 4; reread the eighth book of his *Confessions*; and read Jennifer Herdt’s “Theater of Virtues,” on electronic reserve.

Classical and Christian rhetoricians argued their causes with *exempla*. According to the *Rhetorica ad Herrenium*, a widely read textbook in Augustine’s day, illustrations or examples “render a thought more brilliant . . . throwing light upon what was obscure; more plausible when rendering the matter closer to the truth; more vivid.” Assess the role examples play in Augustine’s case against Roman religions and for the moral and political preeminence of Christianity.


Was Augustine too critical of the practice of politics in his time and of leadership prior to the crises that led to the disintegration of the Latin Roman Empire? Would you call Augustine a political realist or an idealist--or designate another term to cover what you’ve discovered about his *City*? How does introducing Machiavelli, who could sometimes seem quite contemptuous of late medieval and early modern religion, advance our understanding of “sin city” and of Augustine?
4/3 -- Read Augustine’s *City of God*, chapters 6, 7, 8 of the twenty second book and his correspondence with Macedonius in Atkins and and Dodaro (pp. 70-99).

How does the assigned section of the *City’s* last book--short as it is--help you to formulate a fresh response to any of the questions previously raised in this syllabus and discussed in class? Do Augustine’s arguments against capital punishment seem persuasive?

4/10 -- Read Lamberigts’s “Pelagius and Pelagians” as well as the first book of Augustine’s *On Grace and Original Sin* and selections from his treatise *On Predestination*. You’ll find everything for today on the electronic reserve.

Would it be accurate to reduce the controversy between Augustine and the Pelagians to a competition between rival understandings of divine grace? What does that reduction capture or clarify? What does it miss?

4/17 -- Read Augustine’s two short “letters on corruption” along with Kaufman’s “Augustine and Corruption,” all on electronic reserve.

Reconcile Augustine’s comments on corruption with what you have learned from our discussions of his Stoicism, his anti-Manichaean literature, and his opposition to Pelagians (about human freedom and responsibility). Evidence of both intimidation and corruption is all too familiar in the twenty first century; did you find anything unique or noteworthy in the cases reported by Augustine?