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 it was especially challenging to be a leader of the empire’s new faith in North Africa. We’ll be examining the difficulties and challenges faced by Aurelius Augustine as he savored (then surrendered) political ambitions and while he searched for truths that would make sense of wickedness in the world. He became an influential bishop in Africa in the 390s and until his death in 430, struggled to make the churches safe havens of a sort, places where moral rigor could be tempered by charity and where persons learned how Roman misfortunes could be construed as part of a cosmic plan.

Augustine’s political, moral, and religious leadership; that’s what this class is about. Our job is to enter his world, where Christianity’s churches might be called countercultural communities—although rival “cultures” made it hard to reach consensus about the faith’s positions on political responsibility, on the meaning of the empire’s disintegration, and on the importance of sanctity.

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’ll devote most of our final hour + to set the context and questions for the next week’s assignment.

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Grades:

100 points are possible. You have choices. You may defer submitting graded assignments until the final exam, which will have take-home and in-class sections. If you do so, all 100 points will be at stake on the final. Or you may also submit as many as four short papers (typed, double-spaced, no more than 800 words) that address issues raised by assignments for any one or more of the following weeks: Jan. 28, Feb. 4, Feb. 11, Feb. 18, March 18, April 1, April 8, and April 15. You may earn as many as 15 points for each paper. Hence, if you elect to submit one paper, your final exam will count 85 point or 85% of your final grade. If you submit the maximum of four papers, the final will count 40 point or 40%. Papers must be submitted, email attached, by the Sunday noon preceding our regularly scheduled Tuesday class. Regular attendance as well as lively, informed participation in class conversations will get you a bump in your final grade, but I reserve the right to drop your final grade, if chronic absences and/or poor preparation of assignments warrant it.
Assignments:

The book store in the Commons has four volumes you’ll want to purchase: Augustine’s *Confessions*, his *City of God*, the Atkins and Dodaro collection on his *Political Writings*, and Bryan Ward-Perkins’s *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization*. On regular reserve, you will find *Algérie Antique*, which i’ll ask you to consult for maps and pictures. But most other assignments you’ll find beneath each week’s questions/concerns (in italics) are on the library’s electronic reserve.

**SCHEDULE**

Jan 14.  The Mission

Jan 21.  Ambrose of Milan was probably the most powerful bishop in Latin Christendom during the fourth century. Augustine met him during his short but eventful stay in Milan in 386, yet one could argue that he fashioned his career to avoid the political complications that seemed to make Ambrose’s tenure a particularly different one. *What judgments about Ambrose’s leadership and character can you formulate from the letters he wrote to explain his controversial activities? Is Brown’s assessment of Ambrose’s social policy securely grounded in the evidence he presents?*


Jan. 28.  The first five books of Augustine’s *Confessions* take readers to and through his late adolescence and right up to his meeting with Ambrose. But he remembers (and writes in that memoir) that he came to Milan less to learn from the celebrated bishop there than “to get away from the Manichees.” *Who were the Manichees? Why was Augustine initially attracted to them, and why did he feel the need to get away from them?*

Read Augustine’s *Confessions*, books 1-5 (depending on the edition, +/- 90 pp) and “Augustine-De utilitate,” pp. 291-94 and 306-23 on electronic reserve.

Feb. 4  The remaining autobiographical portions of Augustine’s *Confessions* return readers from Italy to Africa. *How would you characterize Augustine’s conversion to Christianity? Was he right to contrast his approach to his new faith with “the blessed impulsiveness” that, he said, drew others to it? Why does he abruptly give up his political ambitions? What purpose does the tenth book of his memoir seem to serve? What have you learned, revisiting your impressions of Ambrose and docking them alongside the discussions of Ambrose in this week’s assignments?*

Read Augustine’s *Confessions*, books 6-10 ( +/- 140pp) and, on e-reserve, “Kaufman-Augustine, Ambrose, Ambition,” pp. 11-39.
When the government of the empire got friendlier to Christianity in the early fourth
century, a set of African bishops wanted to rid their church of colleagues whose leadership left
something to be desired during the persecution that ran from the 290s. And when those accused
of collaborating with persecutors in Africa got the backing of Emperor Constantine and bishops
across the Mediterranean, the African bishops who opposed alleged collaborators seceded from
what was soon called Catholic Christianity. Secessionists became known as Donatist Christians,
and, by the time Augustine returned to North Africa, they outnumbered the Catholic Christians,
whom he took to defending. His defense featured a blistering attack on the Donatists’ supposed
self-righteousness. *What developed as the principal points of disagreement between the Donatist
Christians and Augustine? Did the latter fairly or unfairly brand his adversaries as inconsistent?*

Read “Augustine-Letter 93,” on electronic reserve, pp. 377-408 and Augustine’s letter to
Boniface, in *Political Writings*, pp. 173-203. Also--on electronic reserve--“Kaufman-Donatism

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Emperor Constantine was said to have converted to Christianity as he was fighting to
reunify the empire in 311. He delayed baptism until he was near death, but official policy went
from persecution to toleration soon after his purported conversion, even before he completed the
reunification in 321. With the exception of eighteen months during which Julian, now known as
“the apostate,” was emperor, Christianity prospered during the fourth century, toward the end of
which Emperor Theodosius outlawed pagans’ public worship. Augustine and his fellow bishops
in Africa addressed their various appeals for support against the Donatists and pagans to one of
Theodosius’s two sons, Honorius, who ruled the western or Latin portion of the Roman Empire.
Augustine’s take on imperial leadership and on the power and glory of Rome was affected not
only by his need to maintain the government’s support but also by his sense that statecraft was
somewhat suspect. He briefly recapitulates his reason for having composed the *City of God* at
the very start of its fourth chapter. (We shall be reading the earlier chapters after the break, but
we need now only accept that Augustine believed he had refuted pagan critics who blamed the
political setbacks the empire experienced on Christianity—specifically, on the neglect of deities
Rome once worshipped.) *Does Augustine succeed advancing his purpose, comparing the glory
that was Rome to what the new faith promoted as a greater glory? What strikes you as his most
meaningful and memorable assessments of imperial expansion, Roman nobility, and the quality
of imperial leadership, notably the leadership provided by Constantine and Theodosius?*

Read Augustine’s *City of God*, book 4, chapters 1-9 and 23-34; book 5, chapters 13-26
(+/- 55pp); “Cameron-Late Roman State, electronic reserve, pp. 99-112; Bryan Ward-Perkins,

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**Feb. 25** Rome had “fallen” before 410. But when Emperor Honorius abandoned the city for
Ravenna--and Alaric seized it for several days--the shock and aftershocks shook nearly every
citizen’s confidence that the center might hold while the empire’s frontiers were in jeopardy.
Pagan citizens blamed Christianity, and we shall encounter Augustine’s reply to them in mid-
March, after a break. Christian citizens were appalled that the capital’s humiliation happened during their God’s watch. This week we’ll deal with Augustine’s reply to them, to those who shared his faith and whose faith needed refortifying after the “fall” of Rome. We’ll also zoom forward to discuss historians’ evaluations of “the fall.” For several decades, they’ve minimized the significance of 410. They’ve classified a stretch of centuries as “late antiquity,” giving 410 little play. Ward-Perkins disputes their conclusions and calculates that the Goths’ conquests of Italy and the vandals’ takeovers in Iberia and Spain—not to mention the Romans’ withdrawal from England and struggles in Gaul—were much more tragic and traumatizing—and that “the western empire “entirely disappeared” by the end of the fifth century. Changes “in levels of economic sophistication” seem to cinch Ward-Perkins’s argument. *What evidence does he present for those changes? Does Ward-Perkins persuade you that the “fall” of Rome was categorically “the end of civilization”? What conjectures does Augustine offer to console Christians who sense that the fate of Rome and the changes that Ward-Perkins chronicles signaled their God’s displeasure? After reading Rebenich’s article and Augustine’s sermon, would you say that Jerome do a better job than Augustine explaining Rome’s fate, adapting prudently to the changes at the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth, and refashioning the faith? If it’s true that crisis brings out the best in leadership, whose best, Augustine’s or Jerome’s was better?*

*Read Ward-Perkins’s book, pp. 33-83, 94-137, 169-83; Augustine’s sermon in *Political Writings*, pp. 205-214; and Rebenich’s “Making of a Christian Catastrophe,” pp. 49-59, on our electronic reserve as “Rebenich-Asceticism and Incursion.”*

March 4  On Monday, March 3rd, in the late afternoon, Bernard McGinn, one of the three or four most celebrated and prolific scholars of medieval Christian leadership--intellectual and political--on this planet will be lecturing at UR. The topic and title have yet to be determined. In return for your attendance, I’ve eliminated assignments for this week and, weather permitting, will set our Tuesday session as a party at my place—right across River Road. Or if you prefer, we can cancel and get you started on Spring break early. Check whether your mid-terms allow you a pre-break break, and make the call.

March 11  B R E A K  

March 18  In one of the sermons assigned for today, Augustine speaks of “the icy blasts and cold weather” of this world. Yet he concedes, in the *City of God* and elsewhere, that fallible humans have been able to “heat up” affairs with secular achievements, among which he can appreciate the peace and “glory” that was Rome. But even those achievements are tainted by idolatries associated with paganism. It has been said that, on the trip from a universal empire (Rome) to an ostensibly universal church (Roman Catholicism), Augustine was the wheelman. Figuring that Augustine is still at work putting the “fall” of Rome in a context that exonerates Christianity’s God and consoles Christians, you might be able to assess his efforts now more comprehensibly than before. *Do so, please. Why does Augustine spend so much time on “icy
weather” at the start of his *City of God*? Is his emphasis on “the illicit doings of this world” counterproductive in his effort to convince pagans of the legitimacy of Christianity?

March 25  410 marks both Alaric’s humiliation of the empire’s capital and the appearance of Pelagian preachers in Africa. Pelagius, the mastermind of their spin on the Christian faith was popular in Rome, in part, because he proposed that Christians received sufficient grace at their baptism to behave in a manner that pleased God. The message was simple, and it had obvious appeal to missionaries who could circulate the good news that a new faith promised forgiveness of sins as well as an ability to avoid further sinning. Augustine, however, saw Pelagianism as a polarizing force, one that challenged God’s sovereignty by exalting the power of the human will, only minimally assisted by divine grace. The Pelagians persistence and popularity, according to historian Peter Brown, compelled Augustine to give “drastic” [and perhaps indefensible] answers to simple questions. Do you agree? Would you identify the great enemy of freedom and virtue as concupiscence (with Augustine) or predestination (with the Pelagians)?


April 1  In Augustine’s world the elites had political responsibilities. They entertained fellow citizens in their cities, staging spectacles. They led legions into war. They presided over courts that, as a matter of course, tortured witnesses as well as the accused to get the truth. Conceivably, compassion would get in the way of getting things done. Addressing possible conflicts between the virtues recommended by faith and the responsibilities of political authorities, Augustine may have given mixed signals. Did he think faithful Christians could be leaders of their communities “in this wicked world” and keep faith with the tenets of their religion? Was he consistently in favor of Christianity taking a politically active role? One of his correspondents suggests that civic duty is a path leading to celestial reward; how and why does Augustine object? Why is Augustine challenged, according to Burnell, to “show that the conditions of this present life” will not “make nonsense of human moral practice”? Have you learned anything from your assignments today or in the last few weeks that give you confidence that the conditions you experience “are not such as to make nonsense of . . . moral practice” or of leadership in a business or political context in the early twenty-first century? Is might such confidence be characteristic of April fools?

Read Augustine’s *City of God*, book 19; Augustine’s correspondence in *Political Writings*, pp. 1-43; Peter Burnell’s “Open Questions,” on electronic reserve, pp. 194-204.

April 8  Grappling with the “April fools” question last week, we presumably confronted the pervasiveness of corruption in our world. Corruption was characteristic of Augustine’s world. What was his opinion of it? Was he as pessimistic, as your instructor claims, or did he expect that Christianity’s leaders and laity could keep the faith and enthusiastically participate in—or perhaps lead—political initiatives? How does Augustine answer Macedonius, who thinks bishops ought to leave the conduct of courts to magistrates? Does Augustine meet Macedonius’s concern about interference that would obliterate the division between church and state? Does Augustine
Read Augustine’s *City of God*, book 14, chapters 1-7, book 18, chapters 49-54, and book 22, chapters 22-24; Augustine’s Macedonius correspondence in *Political Writings*, pp. 70-99 as well as his letter on electronic reserve as “Against Antoninus.” Also read Kaufman-Dystopia and Kaufman-Corruption (pp. 55-74 and pp. 46-59, respectively), on electronic reserve.

April 15  From the course prologue until now, you’ve heard plenty about Kaufman’s Augustine, a figure who not only countenances but commends a radical form of leadership, one that rewrites “the narrative” and defies “the system.” And you’ll have read several interpreters who see a very different Augustine at work in late antiquity. Today’s assignments, however, bring you directly into the controversies. You’ll read some of my colleagues who write against my interpretation. Kaufman and critics go head-to-head today, and you are welcome to join the critics, who might just be more to your liking. *Why does Dodaro think of Augustine as a political reformer? What issues keep Kaufman and Gregory apart? Do Gregory and Dodaro have creative ways to deal with Augustine’s apparent illiberalism, particularly his advocacy of coercive measures during quarrels with the Donatists? Does Augustine’s intolerance of the Manicheans, Donatists, and Pelagians pose problems for ethical theorists who’ve made him an influential advocate for political liberalism or for a “robust civic humanism”? Does Augustine appear to move as seamlessly as his admirers claim from the Christian statesmen’s love of God to civic piety, effective moral policy, and love of neighbor?* Read--all on electronic reserve--Dodaro-Eloquence and Virtue, 183-214 and Ecclesia, Republica, pp. 237-71; Gregory-Christianity, Democracy, pp. 1-14; Rex-Review, pp. 587-90; Kaufman-Constantinian Christianity, pp. 1-19, Liberalism, pp. 699-724, and Augustine’s Punishments, pp. 1-24.

April 22 Augustine biography has come a long way, from his first biographer--his colleague--Possidius to his most recent critic James O’Donnell. You get to sample both. The first doubles, one could say as apology, and the second, to my mind defies classification, save to say that it considers Augustine a “humorless” Don Quixote, whose influence far exceeds his abilities or expectations. *What does Possidius most admire? What displeases O’Donnell most? Stressing Augustine’s part in “rationalizing and mechanizing the hopes for salvation,” has O’Donnell exaggerated Augustine’s part in “the invention of Christianity”?* Read O-Donnell-Augustine and the Invention of Christianity, on electronic reserve, pp. 171-208 and access [http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/possidius_life_of_augustine_02_text.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/possidius_life_of_augustine_02_text.htm) for Possidius’s “Life” of Augustine.
Awarding of Credit

To be successful in this course, a student should expect to devote 10-14 hours each week, including class time and time spent on course-related activities. 

http://registrar.richmond.edu/services/policies/academic-credit.html

Disability Accommodations

Students with a Disability Accommodation Notice should contact their instructors as early in the semester as possible to discuss arrangements for completing course assignments and exams. 

http://studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/disability-services/policies.html

Honor System

The Jepson School supports the provisions of the Honor System. The shortened version of the honor pledge is: “I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work.”

http://studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/honor/

Religious Observance

Students should notify their instructors within the first two weeks of classes if they will need accommodations for religious observance. http://registrar.richmond.edu/planning/religiousobs.html