

TEACHER'S GUIDE

by Junius Johnson, PhD

Essential Readings
for the Study of History

Humanitas

Early Middle Ages



Twilight of Rome to Viking Age



Humanitas: Early Middle Ages
TEACHER'S GUIDE
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Introduction to the Teacher's Guide: On Teaching *Humanitas*

The *Humanitas* series is designed to introduce students to important ideas and events of Western civilization by means of the primary texts of different periods and places. Thus, it is not a conventional history text but an immersive one. Instead of being told about peoples and ideas and events, students will encounter them firsthand. For most students, it will be the first time they encounter the questions, philosophies, and works of art that are our common heritage, and it is only a beginning.

One of the truly marvelous things about great works is that they reward multiple readings. Any decent book is worth reading over again, if only because it's fun. After a fourth or fifth time through the *Harry Potter* series, though, the especially sharp reader will begin to notice that the work holds no more secrets: we have plumbed its depths and seen all there is to see, gotten all there is to get from the work. On the other hand, it probably takes *at least* four or five times through *Macbeth* just to begin to grasp all the different threads running through the play. Homer's *Odyssey*, Livy's *From the Founding of the City*, and Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* are the kind of books we can reread every year, and every year find ourselves newly amazed by something we've never seen before—the depth of some idea, the poignancy of some insight. It is a rare work that rewards rereading with new discovery as though the book were read for the first time, but we do not reread only to discover something new. We reread to reexperience and to meditate upon the beautiful and the humane in the hopes that we might come to think, speak, and act more beautifully, to more fully realize our humanity.

So, if you suspect—or if you are afraid—that your students are not going to glean every kernel of insight or wisdom from each reading as they progress through *Humanitas*, rest assured that they will not. Rest assured that there is more to say than you or we have said and that they may, one day, come back to re-contemplate some of it or none of it—either way, the undertaking is still worthwhile and the doing is its own reward. Whereas it may be easy to gauge whether students have attained “mastery” over the content covered in conventional history texts that traffic in facts, many of the texts that appear in *Humanitas* are not so easily tamed. Scholars who have spent their entire lives wrestling with Homer and Plato do not pretend to mastery or sometimes even understanding. The goal, then, in reading through *Humanitas* ought not to be for students to understand all of the content. Part of the value of humane learning is acquiring the right posture: of humility, of wonder, of the desire to know more. And this is something that is brought about, in part, by encountering texts written by those who know so much more than we do.

For these texts, then, your time will be well-spent in asking questions and being able to discuss them with your students. Often, the best answer to a question is a more precise question. Indeed, a useful evaluative tool is to ask whether students are improving in their ability to ask meaningful questions of the texts they encounter. Socrates himself almost never gave answers—he engaged interlocutors in collaborative conversation in pursuit of truth. This is ultimately what Socratic conversations aim to replicate. Most of all, do not worry that these are too difficult; if there were easy answers to the questions raised by these texts, then we wouldn't still be reading them. One sign of an exceptional class is that students, and teachers, will leave wanting to read the material again. The chapters are designed to be conducive to discussion, and the best teachers learn right alongside the students. There don't have to be prearranged

or even definitive answers toward which each question or class discussion aims. A good class will be full of conversation, and it will be worthwhile to repeat the same questions and conversations multiple times across different class sections—you will soon discover that every group of students will take the discussion in a different direction. This in part demonstrates the inexhaustible nature of great texts. As Eliot says near the end of the *Four Quartets*,

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

Remember, then, that while we want students to read *Humanitas*, we want them even more to reread the authors they here encounter, to develop lifelong friendships with Tertullian and Jerome, Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, Petrarch, Chaucer, and Marie de France; to sit with Charlemagne and be taught by Alcuin; to travel into lands unknown with Saint Patrick and Marco Polo; to triumph with Beowulf and lament the fall of Roland; to be consoled by Lady Philosophy alongside Boethius, that they might better bear the suffering that befalls them in their own lives. We want our students to see that the medievals read and loved the ancients, to be inspired to take up and read again and again until they are tuned to the echoes of ancient Greece and Rome coursing through the pages of Augustine and Aquinas. We want our students to read and reread in the hope that they might come to know not only the medievals and the ancients but also themselves. . . .

The full text of the introduction to the Teacher's Guide will be available upon purchase.

I

A People Set Apart

LESSON PLAN

OBJECTIVES

- To consider the religious and political tensions inherent in the encounter between late classical and early Christian culture
- To become familiar with Tertullian's arguments that Christians cannot share in secular entertainments
- To enable students to seriously consider the lived tensions of being both a Christian and a Roman during this time

SYMPOSIUM

In contemporary Western society, we take for granted a separation of life into secular and religious or sacred spheres. There are duties to God on the one hand, and then the business of living on the other. For people of faith, the former speak to the latter, but it is generally an outside voice speaking into a different realm. The clearest form of this appears in the way Americans understand the separation of church and state, which presupposes this division. A person's faith very well may inform how one votes, what school one sends one's children to, and so on; but it is not the church's business as church to tell you who to vote for or how to manage public policy. Likewise, religion represents a sphere in which the secular government has no power and in which it ought not to meddle.

This notion, however, would have been strange to anyone living in the late Roman empires: to them, it was obvious that religion is not one sphere of life but a transcendental feature of life. Religion is one of the key components of existence, the bedrock on which everything else stands. As we have seen in our study of ancient Greece and Rome, everything—no matter how mundane or seemingly at a remove—had to do with the gods: from the marketplace to the army, from the governmental administration to leisure activities, all of life was lived in the shadow of divine power and done in deference to the reality of divine expectations.



This does not mean that every person was devout or approached the world in a more pious fashion than the average person today: their own stories are full of the foolishness and destruction that comes upon people who do not acknowledge the gods. These stories reveal that there were such people and that it was enough of a concern that writers felt the need to warn their readers not to be among them. But they got there by a different route: While the contemporary person who is negligent of divinity considers religion an aspect of life that may be dispensed with, his ancient counterpart believed that piety could be dispensed with because he was giving constant lip service to the gods as he went about his daily life. For him, because religion was everywhere, he was free not to be especially attentive in his heart.

This is the necessary context for Tertullian's arguments: the Christians of his day are claiming that they can have the outer trappings of the pagan rituals without actually becoming participants in the worship that goes along with them because their hearts remain devoted to a different god. Tertullian wants to show that this is not possible. He argues that the man who worships Mars perfunctorily does not therefore cease to be a Mars-worshipper; he just becomes a bad Mars-worshipper. Thus, true devotion to Christ will require a break from even the outward forms of pagan religion.

WARM-UP

Ask your students to list out the things they do in a typical day, taking note of each unique answer on the board. Once you have a pretty comprehensive list of the types of activities they engage in, go through the list and ask them to identify, in light of what they remember from their studies of Greece and Rome, which of these activities would have required a prayer or another religious observance. If they struggle or have false starts, point them to Pausanias's accounts of folk religion and the various religious games (chapters 30 and 31 in *History of Ancient Greece Book 2*) or the chapters on Roman entertainment and emperor worship (chapters 28 and 36 of *History of Ancient Rome Book 2*). The *Feriale Duranum* (chapter 33 of *HAR2*) could also serve as an excellent refresher. If your students have studied the Old and New Testaments, they can call on other examples; the Old Testament, for instance, identifies many occasions for prayer (e.g., Deuteronomy 6:3ff.) and outlines different activities required for various feasts throughout the calendar. When students have exhausted their memories, continue to flesh out how intertwined religion and life really were. Here are some examples of a Roman's common activities that would have required a prayer:

- Starting the day: The *paterfamilias* would lead the family in prayer to the household gods (*lares*).
- Taking a shower or washing one's hands: a general prayer of cleansing
- Leaving home: prayer to Janus, god of portals and thresholds
- Returning home: another prayer to Janus
- Before beginning any work (including household labor): prayers and perhaps libations to the appropriate deity
- At the evening meal: food must be cast into the fire in honor of Vesta, goddess of the hearth
- When entering into any kind of agreement: a prayer, usually to Jupiter
- In addition to these, there would be prayers for certain days of the week or month, for major and minor holy days, and before all forms of entertainment. Ask your students if they say prayers or weave another aspect of their religious beliefs into their everyday life (e.g., a Christian student might mention offering a prayer of thanksgiving before a meal, a Jewish student may mention the Shema, etc.). Finish the exercise by asking the students to think about how much time they would have to add to their day for all of the religious activity that ancient peoples participated in.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & WRITING

1. What are the various types of festivals and public shows Tertullian criticizes in *On Spectacles*? How does Tertullian view Roman culture at large? Are there any aspects of Roman culture that Christians can participate in?
2. What are the “views of the heathens” regarding public shows that Tertullian addresses? How does Tertullian combat these arguments?
3. Trace Tertullian’s argument. What does he set out to prove? What does Tertullian find objectionable about the public shows? How do the shows affect spectators? What makes this especially problematic for Christians?
4. In his argument, Tertullian calls idolatry “the crowning sin.” The Old Testament refers to idolatry as worshipping and sacrificing to foreign gods, which seems at first glance to be entirely different from attending a play or chariot race. What then is idolatry according to Tertullian? What forms does it take in his day? What dangers does idolatry present to Christians at this time?
5. Why might the locations and decorations of the spectacles be idolatrous as well? When does Tertullian say it is permissible to enter these places, if ever?
6. How does the origin of the theater support Tertullian’s thesis? How are martial arts and gladiatorial combat similar to the wickedness of the games? Why are the various passions aroused by the festivals incompatible with Christianity?
7. What solutions for Christians does Tertullian provide, if any? How should Christians act? What are the Christians’ spectacles?
8. Are there any internal inconsistencies in Tertullian’s argument?

TEACHER’S TIPS

- Tertullian holds an interesting place in the history of theology. He is believed to have been the first person to use the word “Trinity” to refer to the Christian God, and as the earliest theologian to write in Latin, his style greatly influenced later Latin theologians. Yet toward the end of his life, he became associated with a heretical sect called the Montanists, who believed that God would send new prophets after the New Testament and that their pronouncements would be equally authoritative. Though contemporary scholars dispute whether Tertullian really became a Montanist, his reputation has been tainted by the possibility. As a result, he has never been made a saint by the Catholic Church.
- The most famous quote from Tertullian is “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” This question represents the tendency, ubiquitous in his thought, to see everything in stark terms and dichotomies. An interesting exercise for the students would be to ask them to find ways to dismantle these dichotomies, finding a third path between the extremes Tertullian identifies.
- A key aspect of the premodern outlook that students must internalize is the belief that the world is full of supernatural agents. In more recent centuries, Christianity has responded to pagan beliefs and practices with the idea that they are superstitious and vain: no power corresponds to what followers of other religions do, and no one is listening to prayers offered to idols. But before rationalism (a belief in reason alone) took hold in the West, this was not thought to be so. Christians did not deny that there was someone who went by the name of Jupiter among men; they just denied that he was a god. They replaced the many-tiered deities of paganism with a no less populous supernatural that included angels and demons. Idolatry was not just mistaken ignorance; it was dangerous because it invited the attention of powerful, malevolent spiritual forces. Students must keep in mind this fundamental orientation to a vulnerability to supernature as they study the centuries that follow.

As students continue in their studies, they will encounter John Milton, who takes up this idea in [*Paradise Lost*](#), presenting Satan's fallen angels as the pagan deities worshipped of old. In Milton's epic, the demons attempt to deceive and mislead humankind away from God.

CONCLUSION

While the project of comparing the various shows Tertullian discusses and the ones we have today can be interesting and instructive, we must keep in mind the fundamental difference between the two. The ancient shows were all explicitly religious in nature and origin; it is not clear, however, that contemporary ones are. Tertullian has offered two types of arguments here: one is based on the religious nature of the shows, and the other on the effect the shows have on us. The second set of arguments may well be applied to contemporary shows or spectacles, but your students risk equivocating if they apply the first.

What is important here is not so much whether we are convicted today that we ought to avoid various public forms of entertainment but rather the effect that Tertullian's logic would have on succeeding generations of Roman Christians. He planted a seed that would ultimately overturn Roman culture, for as more and more citizens become Christian, there were fewer and fewer people attending the traditional shows. In the works of Tertullian, Roman culture stands judged and is found wanting; its end is now in only a matter of time.



2

Negotiating Citizenship

LESSON PLAN

OBJECTIVES

- To reflect on the changing nature of the relationship between the Church and the Roman emperor
- To encounter the strategies used by one influential Christian preacher to help believers navigate fear of bodily harm through their faith
- To encounter an early Christian example of excellent rhetoric
- To consider the positive and negative aspects of the emperor confessing the Christian religion

SYMPOSIUM

The question of the relationship of church and state is one that will become urgent at various periods of Western history. Indeed, it might be said that it has never *not* been an issue, from Jesus being asked by the Pharisees whether Jews ought to pay required taxes to Caesar (see Matthew 22:17) to twenty-first-century legal cases involving religious freedom and civil rights. But the question takes on a wide variety of forms over the centuries, and it is important not to distort it in the direction of later developments. Instead, we try to understand the question charitably as it arose in its own context, requiring both humility in the reader and a sincere desire to know.

At this period in history, there is widespread enthusiasm about the fact that the imperial office has ceased to persecute or merely tolerate the Church and has embraced the faith. Constantine is viewed as a hero of the faith both for his role in safeguarding Christian worship and for his passion for theological orthodoxy, evidenced by his organizing the ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 (see *HAR2*, chapter 45); indeed, he is considered a saint by Eastern Christians to this day.

However, this is not without risk. The emperor is used to being the authority on all things, including religion. The title *pontifex maximus*, used formally by the pope since the fifteenth century but applied to popes as early as the time of Tertullian, was originally a Roman religious office. Caesar Augustus received



the title in 12 BC (see *History of Ancient Rome Book 1*, chapter 20), and from that time on the emperor was the head of the state religion. It was expected that Christian emperors would play—and desire to play—a similar role.

This danger was not unforeseen by the great theologians of the day. Both Gregory of Nazianzus and Augustine of Hippo would argue that the emperor was bound to the faith, not the faith to the emperor. Gregory explicitly told the emperors Valentinian I and Valens that they were subject to bishops in spiritual matters. The stage is being set for the papacy's claims to supremacy over secular rulers, but it has not yet become a conflict of authority. Instead, what is happening here in the fourth century is a revision of the concept of emperor, which will be applied to all rulers going forward. Because the rulers are Christians and hold their authority from God and rule in God's name, they must rule differently. They are themselves under authority, and their judgments will be judged.

WARM-UP

Read Matthew 22:15-22 aloud to your students. In this passage, Jesus responds to the Pharisees' question about whether to pay taxes to Caesar. Then, ask the students to discuss the relationship Jesus indicates. Does it seem like a sufficient mapping of the relative spheres of power of church and state? If the students claim that it is, you might ask how one is to know what belongs to Caesar and what to God. For example, for the Christian emperor, does it belong to his rank as emperor to build a hospital or to his duty as a Christian? Can they think of any situations where such an ambiguity might lead to conflict? If they feel that Jesus's account is insufficient, ask them to clarify where they see it coming up short. Be wary of seemingly pious but actually thoughtless responses that sidestep the question, responses such as "everything is God's," not only because they belie the nuance of the actual quotation but also because Jesus himself didn't answer the question that way.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & WRITING

1. How is the situation of the citizens in Antioch similar to Job's situation in the Old Testament according to John Chrysostom? What is unique about their plight? Why is it worse than other disaster scenarios in Chrysostom's opinion?
2. How do the citizens feel about their plight? Does Chrysostom agree with them or suggest they should understand their situation differently?
3. How has the situation changed between Homily 2 and Homily 13? How does the state of the city appear in both homilies? What has improved for the citizens? What evidence reveals that not all is well?
4. How do the women comport themselves throughout these events?
5. How does Chrysostom connect the present suffering of the city with the Christian life? How does he connect their suffering to the afterlife? To what extent does he suggest Christians should be concerned with each?
6. In light of the words and actions of the various clergy or priests, what roles did members of the Church hierarchy play in society? Do they deal primarily with religious or political matters? Are there other arenas in which they move? Think in particular of Bishop Flavian and Chrysostom.
7. What roles did the townspeople, the people of God, play in these events? Were the townspeople or the clergy more influential in determining the course of these events?
8. What is the nature of the Church's relationship with the state in this region? To what extent does Christianity impact the emperor's actions? Conversely, how did the state affect the Church?

TEACHER'S TIPS

- Antioch is one of the five historical principal seats of Christianity. According to Acts 11:26, it was the place where the name “Christian” first began to be applied to followers of the new religion. The others were Jerusalem, Alexandria, Constantinople, and Rome. Antioch was home to a rich tradition of biblical interpretation that tended to stress literal interpretation of the Scriptures (as opposed to the more allegorical Alexandrian school). Christians therefore were especially fond of the city. All of this, in addition to the normal care a pastor feels for the well-being of his flock, would have moved the bishop to speak on behalf of the city.
- It should be stressed that, in the eyes of the Christians, the emperor would not be acting unjustly in punishing Antioch. A crime was committed, a crime that amounted to an act of sedition: harsh punishment was warranted, and the emperor would not thereby incur any condemnation from the Church. The bishop’s argument is not that the emperor *must* show mercy but that because of his understanding of divine justice through his Christian faith, he is *able* to show mercy. Showing mercy would be highly fitting but not necessary.
- This situation and the topic of this chapter’s text make the text possible to put it in conversation with Seneca’s attempt to exhort Nero to mercy in *On Clemency* (HAR1, chapter 22). There are obvious differences between Nero and Theodosius I, but the Stoic argument for mercy offers interesting parallels to what students will encounter in this chapter. Ask students, whether in class or for a writing assignment, to essay the ways in which the two visions of mercy are similar and different, including the articulated *ratio* for why mercy ought to be sought.
- Chrysostom has the bishop speak of the Gentiles and barbarians who are watching to see how the emperor will respond. This idea of the world as a stage where the actions of rulers will be judged is one that has been transposed to the personal level in Christianity. The deaths of the early Christians were called “martyrdom,” from the Greek word for “witness,” because Christians were not only being killed by the secular power but also declaring something to the watching world. For both of these reasons, this appeal would have been seen as very relevant by the emperor. The reputations of Theodosius’s empire, his own regime, and of the faith were all at stake.
- Chrysostom is also noteworthy for his contributions to Christian liturgy. In the west, the Anglican liturgy concludes with an elegant prayer of John Chrysostom. In the east, his influence on liturgy is profound. The liturgy of Eastern Orthodox, Eastern Catholic, and Byzantine Rite churches today is called “The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom” and is believed to have been developed by him. Consider showing students some brief sections of the divine liturgy being performed in a church. What they would see would be very close to what would have happened leading up to and following the sermons they are reading here.
- It is also important not to miss the opportunity to ask the students to engage with Chrysostom’s rhetoric, as it is for this that he is most famed. To begin, you must guard against allowing the students to judge his literary ability by the quality of the English translation, which lacks the melody and forcefulness of the Greek original. Instead, attention should be drawn to how he paints the scene, how he constructs his arguments, and the whole imagistic journey he takes his listeners on. Written assessments imitating this aspect of Chrysostom would put students into the tradition of imitation of great writers that, in medieval Byzantium, would likely have included Chrysostom.

CONCLUSION

In the end, the resolution to the incident at Antioch was a victory for the project of holding the emperor to the standards of the Christian faith. As presented by Chrysostom, it was also a victory for the recognition of a certain autonomy for spiritual authority because it was the bishop's intercession that won the emperor to a merciful response. Of course, we cannot know for sure that this is a right presentation of the situation: the bishop himself, by Chrysostom's own account, claims that he did little to persuade the emperor, who had already made up his mind before the priest arrived. This gap between what actually happened and what we are told happened is one the students ought to be invited to explore, especially considering the range of possible ways the encounter between the bishop and the emperor might have gone.



3

The City of God and the City of Man

LESSON PLAN

OBJECTIVES

- To introduce Augustine's influential notion of two parallel cities running through human history
- To see this distinction of two cities as inaugurating a new era in thinking about the relationship between religion and society
- To learn to see the world, as the medievals would, through the lens of a dual identity as both citizens of the world and citizens of Heaven

SYMPOSIUM

The division of reality into those who belong to Christ and those who do not is original to the teaching of Jesus. He constantly warns his disciples about “the world,” which is the entire system that does not submit to the lordship of God, contrasting it with “the kingdom of God,” the new reality made up of those who have responded to the call of repentance and new life. This continues throughout the New Testament: the apostles refer to believers as a new race (*genos*), as a nation (*ethnos*), and as a distinctive people (*laos*). The first has to do with genealogy; the second references political structure; the third calls to mind the people of Israel, for whom the term was exclusively reserved in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.

Augustine is, therefore, picking up on an original thread within Christianity. He is not introducing a new concept so much as expanding, refining, applying, and clarifying an existing one. As a pastor, he has diagnosed the spiritual illness of the people as a failure to understand who they really are. The refugees flooding into his city describe themselves as Romans. Indeed, Augustine's own family, though they were Berbers, wanted to identify as Romans so much that they only spoke Latin at home rather than their native language. In Augustine's view, this is



spiritually dangerous, because an exile who forgets where his true home lies is in danger of becoming a citizen of the land of his exile.

After Augustine, Christians would have a stronger sense that they were only sojourners in this world and that their real home lay elsewhere. The most common way to characterize the distinction between this world and the world to come in the Middle Ages is by this notion of citizenship or belonging. A Christian living this life is said to be *in via*, “on the way.” This earthly life was seen as a pilgrimage. The Christian in Heaven, by contrast, is *in patria*, “in his native land.” This is a very good application of the shift in perspective Augustine is trying to effect with this work.

WARM-UP

Hand out copies of “[Ozymandias](#)” by Percy Bysshe Shelley and read it to the class. Ask them to sit quietly reflecting on the poem, calling out from time to time a short word or phrase that stands out to them. Read it aloud again. Then invite them to a discussion about the nature of political and military glory. Ask them to name as many great empires and generals as they can. Finally, ask them to speculate about what the fall of America will look like. For many of them, this last thought may seem unimaginable. Remind them that America has only been in existence for 250 years and that Roman dominion had stood for more than twice that long (dating from the conquest of Greece) by the time Rome was first sacked. The end of Roman power was even more unthinkable to the Romans than the end of American autonomy and power probably appears to us; and yet, end it did.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & WRITING

1. What are the main attributes of the two cities Augustine identifies? How did they come to exist? What are their respective futures?
2. How does Augustine trace the cities through the Old Testament? What Old Testament figures does he associate with each city? What do the various figures suggest about the cities? More broadly, how does Augustine read Scripture? What do his interpretations suggest about the relation of the Old and New Testaments, of Israel and the Church?
3. What are the flaws in the earthly city? What makes earthly goods twisted? Can things of this earth be good, according to Augustine?
4. What produces peace and discord between the two cities?
5. How does suffering relate to Augustine’s thesis? Does God prevent or heal the suffering of Christians? If so, to what extent?
6. To what extent should Christians on earth be concerned with earthly affairs? What might be some examples of Christians living successfully on earth, according to Augustine’s thesis?
7. What are the implications of Augustine’s thesis? How, in light of his argument, should Christians understand the sack of Rome in 410?
8. How does Augustine address the question of how Christians should live and engage the broader culture? To what extent is he in agreement with Tertullian or Chrysostom? To what extent does he argue something new?

TEACHER’S TIPS

- Augustine’s *City of God* is read in many ways: as a snapshot of late Roman culture, as a political philosophy, as a systematic theology. It has been selected here for its original purpose, which is training in worldview. It is crucial that the students understand the shift that is happening if they are to enter into the medieval way of viewing the world.

- It is very natural for students to read Augustine as saying that one belongs *either* to the city of man or to the city of God, but this would be a major mistake. Because Christians are being saved out of the world—and this is a process that goes on throughout their lives—not only is every Christian born a citizen of the city of man, but each Christian *remains* a citizen of the city of man. Christians have dual citizenship, but they are working on naturalizing to their newer citizenship.
- The title of the book in English is a bit misleading. The Latin word *civitas* is originally an abstract noun formed from the concrete noun *civis*, “citizen.” Thus *civitas* etymologically means “citizenship.” That meaning is active in Augustine’s text. However, in usage it comes to mean “citizenry” (the body of all citizens) and then the entirety of the state (the larger whole to which the citizens belong). Late in antiquity, it comes also to refer to a city. This usage is not found in Cicero or Caesar. *Civitas* would be the logical Latin translation of the Greek *polis*, and it might be helpful for students to consider those dimensions as they read this text.
- An important aspect of the section of Augustine’s text that would be easy to miss is the last paragraph, in which Augustine points out that the city of God, as represented on earth in the Church, does not abolish cultural diversity, forms, and norms. Quite the opposite: insofar as these tend toward peace among the citizens of the earthly city, the heavenly city preserves and even adopts them. This vision of harmony and cooperation between the two cities (so long as the earthly city does not interfere with the affairs of the heavenly city) is a major part of the medieval vision of the relation between religion and secular authority.
- It is important to recognize Augustine’s importance and influence over time, particularly in Western Christianity. On the one hand, he connects us back to the ancient world, having inherited Neoplatonic philosophical ideas that he sought to marry with tenants of Christian theology. On the other hand, his influence over the future of Western Christian theology could hardly be overstated. Martin Luther was an Augustinian monk; John Calvin cites Augustine more than any other figure outside of biblical authors; the Counter-Reformation answers the reformers in many different ways but frequently calls on Augustine; and in the British colonies, Jonathan Edwards’s theology clearly bears the influence of Augustine. He thus demonstrates the way one ought to receive an education from the past. As you continue on in the study of the Middle Ages, the early modern period, and American history, there will be many opportunities to see Augustine’s influence.
- If you are teaching a humane letters course or a history course that runs alongside an English course, an excellent text to consider reading, whether in part or in full, is [Augustine’s Confessions](#), which recounts the story of his life and conversion to Christianity. Book I of *Confessions* is rich, beautifully written, and accessible for tenth graders. The latter part of the text, books 10–13, is much more difficult, delving into dense theological and philosophical territory that is probably beyond most sophomores but something that seniors might meaningfully wrestle with.

CONCLUSION

This first unit has been all about a succession in the self-understanding of a people’s identity. In their own ways, Tertullian, Chrysostom, and Augustine have been working to transfer the locus of meaning from Roman culture and society to the Church and the kingdom of God. This project was mostly successful, and the new reality, in which Christians see their Christian identity as at least as important as their national one, will be immensely important for students to keep in mind going forward.

The project was only mostly successful, however. As Roman power over the various lands of the western empire is broken and new kingdoms emerge, it will not cease to matter what people you hail from. This is partially because many of the peoples succeeding to power in former Roman lands were not yet

Christians when they took over. But it is also because the project is one that must be renewed over and over again, as each new people and each new generation of the same people must choose where to find their sense of identity.



4

The Way of the Monk

LESSON PLAN

OBJECTIVES

- To develop general familiarity with the monastic form of life
- To contrast monastic life with the secular life of most Christians
- To consider what made monasticism attractive to some early Christians

SYMPOSIUM

It is likely that, far from seeing the appeal of monasticism, our students may be repelled by it, so different is it from the normal forms of life on offer in our society. It is crucial that they begin to develop at least a sympathetic ear for the call of monasticism, as monks and monasteries play such a crucial role in the next 1200 years of history. This is students' first introduction to a segment of society that was ubiquitous, powerful, and very active in the Middle Ages but that has all but disappeared from regular awareness in society today. The reasons for the attractiveness of the monastic life to the medieval mind are manifold, but they divide largely into two groups: disillusionment with the world and desire for greater spiritual intimacy.

Disillusionment with the world took many forms. In Evagrius's case, he was awakened to his inability to resist the temptations of city life and saw that this was leading him down a path of perdition. His flight to the wilderness is a flight *from* temptation that he felt unable to conquer. In the coming centuries, we will also see men and women who have wielded great power retiring to monasteries as a way to get relief from their worldly cares. Kings, queens, and other great political leaders set aside their crowns in exhaustion to seek a more peaceful form of life. But there were also those who fled to the monasteries because of the security they provided. Monasteries tended to be less likely to be attacked and pillaged by passing armies, and so they offered greater physical safety. But it was also the case that one who had no real prospects could count on having their basic needs met in the monastic community. Men who had lost their lands could find stability as a member of a monastery. Finally, in a society with very limited social mobility, the monasteries could offer a pathway to a better form of life or to social advancement. One might, for



example, become abbot, which in some times and places was basically equivalent to being a noble lord. One might even rise to importance in the worldly realm because of one's monastic reputation.

The desire for greater spiritual intimacy is one that was not new to Christianity: every religion has those who compare what the religion offers to what the world offers and despises the latter in favor of the former. These are not those who are fleeing from the world but those who are running to their beloved. This is the purer form of monastic desire, and those who had it often looked down on those who were merely fleeing the world. For monks driven by love, worldly affairs were a distraction that kept them from their real business, which was devoting their lives to their beloved God.

It also ought to be said that the monastic life, however different it looks from secular life, is really just a concentrated form of the Christian life. It is not for monks alone to pray: this is enjoined upon all Christians (see 1 Thessalonians 5:17). Monks suffer hardship in their chosen life, but both Jesus and Peter warned believers that this was to be their lot (see John 16:33 and 1 Peter 4:12). Monks fast; and while Jesus does not command fasting, he assumes it: "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward" (Matthew 6:16). The monks are not those who perform different spiritual disciplines; they are those who have set aside other responsibilities so that they might spend more time on those disciplines. All Christians pray, endure hardship, and fast, but the monks are the experts in these practices—the elite corps, if you will, a sort of spiritual special forces. In Eastern Orthodox Christianity, there is to this day a special relationship between monasteries and their communities, such that the secular Christians will bring their prayer needs to the monks to have them prayed over.

WARM-UP

Have the students read the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42. Throughout the Middle Ages, these two sisters were taken as models of the active and the contemplative life. As in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, the active life is engaged in the business of life and society, contributing by virtuous action, while the contemplative life is devoted to spiritual things: in Aristotle, the pursuit of knowledge, but in monasticism, piety and holiness.

Divide the students into two groups: some supporting Martha's vision of hospitality and service to the Lord and others supporting Mary's vision of setting aside all else to sit and listen to him. Have the two sides come up with and present their best arguments in favor of the life they've been asked to consider. Remind students that the goal of this exercise is not to stir debate or to suggest that one vision is superior to the other. Rather, students should come to understand that both the active life and the contemplative life were ways that Christians in the Middle Ages understood as legitimate paths to living out their faith.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & WRITING

1. In the opening section, how does Evagrius define Christianity and the Kingdom of Heaven? Is the Kingdom of Heaven similar to Augustine's heavenly city?
2. What is the place of desire in the spiritual life? Is desire necessarily bad or good?
3. According to Evagrius, what are the characteristics of an ideal monk? What should the ideal monk believe? How should he act? Which is more important in the life of a monk, right belief (orthodoxy) or right practice (orthopraxy)?
4. Evagrius enumerates eight tempting thoughts. Why are they dangerous? Which appears most dangerous, and why?
5. What are some of the demons' tactics? How are the tactics similar from temptation to temptation? How are they different?

6. The text was originally intended for monks, who lived together in community in order to grow closer to God. What are some particular temptations for monks, according to Evagrius? How can the monks combat these temptations?
7. Throughout the text, Evagrius gives various instructions to the monks. Which instructions appear to be the most vital for the flourishing of their community and their souls? What are common pitfalls that the demons try to take advantage of?
8. What is dispassion? How can one identify the state of dispassion in the soul? Why is dispassion the goal toward which monks should strive, and how does Evagrius argue one can achieve it?
9. How would you describe Evagrius's ideal monastic community? What devotions would the ideal monk practice?

TEACHER'S TIPS

- Evagrius is speaking from his own experience and the experience of the monks he has known. It is helpful to ask the students to lay their experiences alongside the text as well. Can they recognize their own temptations in the eight tempting thoughts? Care should be taken to consider the age and maturity of your students, however, as this is an exercise best performed on their own rather than publicly before the class. A helpful assignment might be for each student to pick a tempting thought they find especially difficult and spend the weekend trying not to give in to it, keeping a journal of their struggle.
- Entry 48 on page 71 of the student text presents an especially interesting idea for discussion in the notion that demons attack monks through thoughts because monks have withdrawn from the types of external things the demons normally use to tempt others. Evagrius points out that it is easier to sin in the mind than in action, an idea whose proof is readily available if you consider the sins of murder or lust, which we may enact regularly in our minds but only with greater difficulty in the world. Because of this, the monks are subject to more difficult temptation than other Christians.
- The notion of “dispassion” (*apatheia* in Greek) is central to Evagrius's understanding. On the surface, this seems to be Stoic detachment (and Stoics used this very word for what they taught). Yet they are in fact quite different, which provides an opportunity to demonstrate how ideas and terms can function differently in distinct systems. Students should be encouraged to do the careful work of close reading and defining one's terms to help avoid equivocating as they put different authors in conversation. In the first instance, the Stoics emphasized the power of the self to become immune to overpowering emotions. It is ultimately a philosophy of self-sufficiency. It is no small difference that Christian *apatheia* is only achievable by grace: it is only attainable with God's help. The impact of this difference can be seen in the Stoic emphasis on separating what one can control from what one cannot control, which leads to a kind of resignation about the things in the world outside of one's control. This resignation frees the philosopher to focus his energies on the things he can in fact manage. The Christian, by contrast, sees all things as subject to God's will. The correct response to difficulties is not to be unmoved by them but to see how they are part of God's work of sanctifying the soul. For more on the Stoics, see *HAG2*, chapter 50; *HAR1*, chapter 22; and *HAR2*, chapter 38.
- Another major difference between Christian and Stoic *apatheia* is the nature of what is excluded. The Stoics are aiming to exclude overpowering negative emotions, such as terror. The Christian, as Evagrius has it, is aiming to exclude tempting thoughts. For this reason, he can advise that the monk weaponize one tempting thought against another, as he does in entry 58 on pages 72–73 of the student text. The Stoic strategy would be to disallow all the tempting thoughts. The Stoic passions are

conceived more as emotions, whereas Evagrios conceives of passions as temptations to abuse the good things of God's creation.

- The perfection of life that Evagrios preaches is characterized not by absence but by presence. On pages 73–74 of the student text, Evagrios describes a person who has successfully fought against the tempting thoughts such that he no longer finds them tempting. The monk lives virtuously because he has become virtuous. His life is not primarily characterized by being empty of vices but by being full of the goods the vices would have kept him from. As Evagrios quite memorably puts it, he has exchanged praying without distraction (steadfastness in keeping the tempting thoughts away) for singing Psalms without distraction (rejoicing in the beauty of his God).
- It can be useful for students to remember that they have encountered various forms of retreat from the world before. In our study of ancient Greece, students will have encountered Socrates and the various philosophical schools of the Cynics, Epicureans, and Stoics, all of whom critique the way society goes about its business. As we move forward in time, students will encounter Calvin's Geneva and the New England Puritans, who conceive of their societies as a proverbial city on a hill, a sort of New Jerusalem that has retreated from the rest of the world to be an example. So too, Thoreau opens *Walden* by noting that while he is a sojourner in "civilized society," he learned to live for the two years and two months wherein he resided in the cabin he built at Walden Pond.

CONCLUSION

Something that must not pass unnoticed is the aspect of personal pressure and attack that runs through this text. The demons are considered to be real, personal, spiritual beings of great power, as in Tertullian's thinking (see *History of the Early Middle Ages Book 1*, chapter 1). These evil beings are actively working to destroy the salvation of the monks. They are especially desirous of bringing the monks down because the monks are trying to do something great for God. If the monks succeed, their prayers will be especially powerful, and they will greatly hinder the demons' work. Thus, the monastic life is not just about spiritual discipline but spiritual warfare. To become a monk and devote oneself to pursuing the high things of God is to paint a spiritual target on your back. This outlook is common to all the Christians of the medieval period, and it is one of the directions in which the students must develop their historical imaginations. The physical world is just the tip of the iceberg of reality, and one who interprets solely on the basis of what is seen does not interpret well.

