
Fusion of Classical Culture & Christianity

- Frame of Reference: Roman Crisis, Regimentation and Decline (200-500 A.D.)
 - In 200 the empire was at a critical point.
 - Rome faced both internal and external threats.
 - The political crisis of the 3rd century. Almost 30 men wore the purple in the mid 3rd century. Most chosen by the army.
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- Questions:
 - I have made the comment before that a period of disaster and destruction may also be a period of creativity. Again, your response to this? Would you prefer to live through such a period, or a stable one?
 - Why did the Roman empire never devise a better policy of political succession? Could they have? How?
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- Frame of Reference: Roman Crisis, Regimentation and Decline (200-500 A.D.)
 - Other disasters. Goths in West. Persians the East. Disease and famine. Decline of cities; Inflation. Debasement of coinage.
 - Strong emperors of late 3rd century pulled it together again. Diocletian (284-305). Constantine (306-337).
 - The reforms bought another century but at great price. Regimentation.
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- Question:
 - Your text and this lecture make some judgments about why Rome fell? What theory (ies) do you think most convincing?
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- Frame of Reference: Roman Crisis, Regimentation and Decline (200-500 A.D.)
 - Diocletian's reforms
 - Division into East and West
 - Exaltation of emperor(s)
 - Enlarging army
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- Frame of Reference: Roman Crisis, Regimentation and Decline (200-500 A.D.)
 - Dioceses, administered by vicars, controlled from center.
 - Economic reforms. Fixing of wages and prices. Fixing work and status. For example, Coloni or tenant farmers.
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- Questions:
 - 1. Rome saved itself by political authoritarianism and regimentation. It froze people in their occupations and made the emperors ever more powerful, and survived. Is survival worth such a price?
 - 2. Imagine yourself in late Imperial Rome in the conditions just described. What would be your response?
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- Frame of Reference: Roman Crisis, Regimentation and Decline (200-500 A.D.)
 - Constantine added : New capital at Constantinople; toleration of Christianity.
 - After Constantine's death things go downhill.
 - Military disasters.
 - Theodosius (378-395) pulls it together again briefly.
 - In the West barbarian generals. Last emperor deposed in 476. Alaric, 410. Vandals, 455.
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- Christianity and Classical Culture (200-500)
Antagonism, Adjustment, Fusion
 - The Crisis of Roman Empire as a backdrop to Classical Culture vs Christianity.
 - Three questions:
 - Why did Christianity triumph?
 - By what stages did it become dominant?
 - How did it change and to what extent did it borrow from classical culture?
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- Question:

- Do you buy the argument that one ought to try to be objective about the triumph of Christianity? Why, or Why not?
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- Christianity and Classical Culture (200-500)
Antagonism, Adjustment, Fusion
 - Question 1: Why was Christianity Triumphant?
 - An easy answer. The harder question: is there an historically acceptable answer?
 - Classical Culture and Christianity made different responses to the crisis of the 3rd Century.
 - The Classical response: failure to understand or to think imaginatively about change. Focusing on ideal past, it was blind to change. Eternal Rome as an Ideal. When the unthinkable happened, classical culture had no solutions to offer.
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- Christianity and Classical Culture (200-500)
Antagonism, Adjustment, Fusion
 - The Christian response: freedom to think boldly and act decisively. They were sure about what and why they believed. They looked to the future. Fate is not in control; God is.
 - How fresh and invigorating this outlook was!
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- Question:

- Christianity as a fresh new wind blowing away the failures of the ancient world? To what degree has it kept that freshness and excitement? Does Christianity today identify with the new or the old in life and society?
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- Christianity and Classical Culture (200-500)
Antagonism, Adjustment, Fusion
 - The effect of crisis and regimentation was to undermine the city. Eternal Rome as an Ideal.
 - Aristotle: he who lives outside society cannot be truly human. The empire by the 3rd and 4th centuries was incapable of nurturing human excellence.
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- Questions:
 - It has been argued that despotisms of whatever sort do not last long. Is that true? Is naked force of no long-term value in making society stable? Why? Is it human nature that we won't accept it?
 - Do people turn to the non-rational in times of stress and strain? If so, why?
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- Christianity and Classical Culture (200-500)
Antagonism, Adjustment, Fusion
 - Other classical values were also undermined. Order? Pessimism. Fortune or Fate.
 - By contrast, Christianity perfectly suited the times.
 - Lost faith in Eternal Rome? All kingdoms are passing. State is a “remedy for sin.”
 - Given up on peace and security? Christ offers peace and security.
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- Christianity and Classical Culture (200-500)
Antagonism, Adjustment, Fusion
 - Escape from oppressive rulers, failing economy, and barbarians? Resign yourself.
 - State religion and philosophies sterile? Personal faith with direct access to God and assurance of your ultimate importance.
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- Christianity and Classical Culture (200-500)
Antagonism, Adjustment, Fusion
 - Abandoned in a collapsing world? Join a tightly organized group which knows what it believes.
 - Fate or Fortune got you down? You are saved through your own response to God's grace. You are free.
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■ Questions:

- ❑ 1. The state as a "remedy for sin?" Think about that.
 - ❑ 2. Ultimate loyalty to God alone? The implications then? Now?
 - ❑ 3. Resign yourself to the ills and misery of this life? A good approach?
 - ❑ 4. Man is free? Not under the sway of Fortune or Luck? Do you know people who believe (really believe) in astrology?
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- Christianity and Classical Culture (200-500)
Antagonism, Adjustment, Fusion
 - Question 2: What were the stages of Christianity's triumph?
 - At first Christians not important enough to be noticed.
 - Thinking of Christians changed. Imperial persecution.
 - Persecution most intense in 3rd Cent.
 - Strengthened the church by making martyrs (witnesses) of those executed.
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- Question:

- Why did persecution appear to strengthen the Church? Can one stamp out an idea, or a set of values? Under what circumstances? Will force ever silence belief?
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- Christianity and Classical Culture (200-500) Antagonism, Adjustment, Fusion
 - Constantine adopted Christianity. Christians a minority. In cities. Pagan meant rural-dwellers (paganus).
 - Victory brought new challenges to Christianity.
 - Used by political authorities to save empire?
 - What is purpose of state within God's rule?
 - Different answers in West and East.
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- Question:
 - What did the Church lose as it won supremacy?
Is Christianity best when dominant, or when a struggling minority?



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- Christianity and Classical Culture (200-500) Antagonism, Adjustment, Fusion
 - Question 3: How did Christianity change as it prevailed and to what extent did it borrow from classical culture?
 - First response was Tertullian's (c.160-c.225)
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- Christianity and Classical Culture (200-500) Antagonism, Adjustment, Fusion
 - But Christians did borrow classical ideas. Heresy as Problem.
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- Question:
 - Is heresy the result of trying to make rational sense of matters of faith? Always? Often?



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- Christianity and Classical Culture (200-500) Antagonism, Adjustment, Fusion
 - Augustine of Tagaste (354-430) a Study. Confessions and City of God. His spiritual search.
 - His views about reason, human nature, institutions, the world, and history become fundamental to Christian doctrine and to the First Europe.
 - Reason: guided by faith. “Believe in order that you may understand.” Holy Spirit illuminates.
 - Man: a total being, body and soul, reason and will. Will + Intellect. Faith + Reason.
 - Society: only a “remedy for sin.” City of God and City of Man.
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- Questions:
 - 1. Has Christianity changed its position that one must believe in order to understand? Is this still true?
 - 2. Is all thinking based on an act of faith? Even rational thinking? Justify your answer?
 - 3. The reasoning faculty is free from error only when guided by faith?
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- Questions:
 - 1. React to the statements about what society can and cannot do for human beings.
 - 2. If you agree that society cannot make man better, why spend any time on improving society? Why worry about social justice? Why try to eradicate evils and inequities?
 - 3. Those holding power have a higher purpose than enjoying power? Doing the work of God on earth? Your view?
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- Christianity and Classical Culture (200-500)
Antagonism, Adjustment, Fusion
 - Augustine (cont)
 - Allegiance to City of God, not the state.
 - World: explained by Revelation. Frees science to be descriptive rather than prescriptive.
 - History: moving toward the victory of the City of God over City of Man. Rejects cyclical view.
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- Questions:
 - 1. "Let every good and true Christian understand that wherever truth may be found, it belongs to his Master...." Do you agree? Why? Why not?
 - 2. My lecture makes the point that modern science will grow out of the Christian conviction that knowing the world is knowing God, and that it is at His behest that we learn and master the world. Do you agree? Why then do some perceive science and religion at odds?
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- Christianity and Classical Culture (200-500) Antagonism, Adjustment, Fusion
 - St. Augustine is not the whole story. Christianity lost its revolutionary character. Monasticism. St. Simeon Stylites (early 5th cent).
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- Questions:
 - 1. React to the statements about Christians coming to the view that the kingdom of heaven would not come in this world, but the next.
 - 2. Did success spoil Christianity, as stated?
 - 3. Can one be a Christian and hold power over others?
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- Christianity and Classical Culture (200-500) Antagonism, Adjustment, Fusion
- Other Christian borrowing from classical world.
 - Art and architecture-the basilica



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- Question:

- Neither Jesus nor the early Church leaders prescribed a form of worship or the place where it would take place. Is it ironic that the Roman empire gave Christianity its places for worship?
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- Christianity and Classical Culture (200-500) Antagonism, Adjustment, Fusion
 - Administration-diocese, archdiocese
 - Law-bishops held court.
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- Question:
 - Power struggles began early in the Church. The rise of the Pope, a good thing? Just a power play? Was strong leadership necessary for the survival of the Church?
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- Christianity and Classical Culture (200-500) Antagonism, Adjustment, Fusion
 - By 500 Christianity had gone far in adopting and changing elements from Classical Culture
 - After Augustine, faith is joined to reason as a way of knowing. Faith is predominant.
 - This faith could draw on classical culture.
 - Man is unique as the greatest of God's creatures, the only one to possess an eternal quality
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Fusion of Classical Culture & Christianity

- Christianity and Classical Culture (200-500)
Antagonism, Adjustment, Fusion
 - Nature lost its divinity. A means for knowing the nature and purpose of God.
 - Society existed for a higher purpose: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth.”
 - God’s ethical character by 500? Love and mercy or wrath and judgment? Ultimate victory of the City of God.
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- Question:

- The changing emphasis on God and the turning to the Old Testament revelation of God as an awesome and jealous deity? Which is a truer picture: love and mercy, or wrath and judgment?
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