



University
of Glasgow

Leslie, Joel (2013) *Kingdom without end: the sacralisation of Roman Imperium from Eusebius of Caesarea to Avitus of Vienne*. MRes thesis.

<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/5299/>

Copyright and moral rights for this thesis are retained by the author

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the Author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the Author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given



KINGDOM WITHOUT END

The Sacralisation of Roman *Imperium* from Eusebius of Caesarea
to Avitus of Vienne

Joel Leslie
Master of Research Degree Thesis
Matriculation Number: 0806382
Department of Classics (30th September 2013)
College of Arts
University of Glasgow

Contents

Abbreviations	ii
Note on Texts and Translations	iii
Introduction	1
Eternality	6
Universality	27
Monarchy & Christian Leadership	47
Conclusion	65
Bibliography	67

Abbreviations

Aen.	Vergil's Aeneid
Ambr. - Ep.	Ambrose of Milan Epistulae ('Letters')
Amm. Marc.	Ammianus Marcellinus
Aug. - DCD	Augustine of Hippo De Civitate Dei ('City of God')
Avit. - Ep. - Hom.	Avitus of Vienne Epistulae ('Letters') Homiliae ('Homilies')
Eus. - HE - LC - VC	Eusebius of Caesarea Historia Ecclesiastica ('Church History') Laudes Constantini ('Panegyric to Constantine') Vita Constantini ('Life of Constantine')
Greg. Tur. - HF	Gregory of Tours Historia Francorum ('Historia Francorum')
Jer. - Chron. - Ep.	Jerome Chronicon ('Chronicle') Epistulae ('Letters')
Rur.	Ruricius of Limoges' Epistulae ('Letters')
Sid. - Carm. - Ep.	Sidonius Apollinaris Carmina ('Poems') Epistulae ('Letters')
Socr. - HE	Socrates Scholasticus Historia Ecclesiastica ('Church History')
Suet. - Jul.	Suetonius Vita Divi Juli ('Life of Julius Caesar')
Theod. - HE	Theoderet Historia Ecclesiastica ('Church History')
Tib. - Eleg	Tibullus Elegies

Note on Texts and Translations

The translations which I have used in this thesis can be found in the Bibliography. I have decided to use predominantly English translations when quoting from primary texts, but have added the original Latin or Greek in those instances where I felt that it was particularly relevant. Occasionally I have performed some minor adjustments to a translation, when I believed that it was not literal enough or was not sufficiently clear. These changes have been noted appropriately. All Bible translations are taken from the English Standard Version, with the exception of some which have been taken from the New International Version. Those taken from the New International Version have 'NIV' marked beside them in accordance with the publisher's regulation for quoting from the text.

Introduction

When the Augustan poet Vergil wrote the words ‘*His ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono: imperium sine fine dedi*’,¹ he set the Roman idea of *imperium* on a trajectory that moved it away from its original meaning of ‘command’ or ‘power’, towards a concept of a unitary territorial empire; one that embraced universality and eternity as a kind of *post factum* justification of might.² Fundamental to this is the idea of the sole ruler who exercised a form of absolutism within a constitutional framework. The demise of the Roman Republic had shown quite clearly that a large empire could not prosper under a form of government which bred internecine competition for office, putting the integrity of the Empire itself at risk. Despite the protestations, therefore, that his administration was a continuation, or a restoration, of Republican government, Augustus himself was the prototype and the legitimator of the personal rule of the emperor. Those who followed in his footsteps owed both their legitimacy, in the first instance, and the honorific epithet of ‘*Augustus*’ to him.³ By the fourth century, however, contrived republicanism had been replaced by the kind of unqualified monarchy that Augustus had so ostentatiously affected to lay aside.⁴ The ruler, once, through political expediency, grounded in the *res publica*, now had an unmistakable whiff of divinity about him.

Any idea that the nexus between the emperor and the divine would be broken with the advent of the first Christian ruler of the Roman Empire in 306 was not realised, notwithstanding Constantine’s repudiation of the imperial cult.⁵ This is hardly surprising in view of the importance which the Bible attached to the office of ‘king’. Kings in the Bible, pre-eminently the Old Testament King David, were seen as God’s anointed, and so the status of a Christian emperor, in religious terms, was not substantially different from that of his pagan counterpart. If anything, the scriptural basis of a Christian ruler’s authority gave him a warrant that his pagan counterpart lacked,⁶ as the development of Christian kingship through the Middle Ages was to show. Nor did the emergence of Christian kingship compromise the political ethos of the Roman Empire. The ideas of eternity and universality which had characterised Roman political thinking from at least the time of Augustus were as familiar to those Christians who scrutinised their sacred scriptures as they were to those who imbibed classical literature. This is nowhere

¹ *Aen.* 1.278-9

² Cf. Richardson’s article (1991); see Horace’s *Carmen Saeculare* for another synthesis of these elements of *imperium*.

³ ‘*Augustus*’ was the imperial title *par excellence*. Diocletian was the first to make effective political use of such a title; see Jones (1964), 322-23.

⁴ See Oakley (2010), 15

⁵ Jones (1964), 93-4

⁶ *Psalms* 22:28

more clearly adumbrated than in the prophetic writings of Isaiah. Referring to the promised Saviour, he writes:

*‘Of the increase of his government and of peace
There will be no end,
On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
To establish it and to uphold it
With justice and with righteousness
From this time forth and forever more.’*

Isaiah 9:7

This has a clear political as well as a religious significance and its themes of peace and justice, setting aside universality and eternity, were not unfamiliar imperial *topoi*. For both Roman imperialists and Christians, therefore, the idea of a ‘kingdom without end’, governed by a quasi-divine monarch, was an established convention. I will show, however, that what was an implicitly understood conceit under the pagan emperors became, with increasing Christianisation, a more clearly defined synthesis of political and religious policy, driven by the Christian idea/vision of mission. The impetus that this had gathered from the reign of Constantine was somewhat checked by the Gothic sack of Rome in 410, but this did not arrest the imperial programme so much as redefine it, because the attack on the imperial capital had demonstrated beyond doubt that any pretensions Rome had to everlasting universal *imperium* were misplaced. Henceforth, it would be the Christians rather than the Romans who would aspire to universal hegemony without limit of time or space, and to a new kind of sacralised *imperium* that would emerge as a consequence.

I propose to look at how Christianity in the Western Roman Empire not only survived the trauma of Rome’s breakdown but began a journey that would see it eventually inherit Rome’s imperial crown. I believe that, in order to do this, it will be more profitable to examine the concept of *imperium* as a product of the three constituent elements that I have already mentioned, rather than as a *gestalt*; for, although eternity, universality, and monarchy are interconnected, what they connote as a whole is more empyrean than temporal, and I must necessarily examine *imperium* from a temporal perspective. For example, Christianity’s world-view is teleological in outlook, working towards a preordained destiny such as that prophesied in the book of *Isaiah* where the kingdom of God will rule without limit of space or time. But there is no hint in the Bible that anyone from the House of David, or anyone else, will rule universally or eternally on

earth before the end times; there is no mandate for the followers of God to fashion an earthly empire. I will show, however, that, from the time of the first Christian emperor, there was a sense among some Christians that the kingdom of heaven had begun to take shape on earth, and that heavenly authority was about to translate into earthly power. Accepting the Roman Empire initially as a champion of the faith and then as a model for the Church, Christianity self-consciously positioned itself to assume a worldwide role and exercise universal authority. By the time that Avitus of Vienne signs off his last extant epistle, the seeds of empire that had been sown two hundred years earlier in the age of Eusebius are bearing fruit.

The sources that I have chosen reflect what I consider to be the pivotal periods in the development of the 'Christian Empire'. Eusebius is an obvious starting point because he is contemporaneous with Constantine and, in some ways, sets the tone for what comes after. He reflects in his writing the sense of a man who wills what he is writing to be true, mindful perhaps of the state-sponsored persecution which Christians had experienced before Constantine,⁷ and which they were only one hostile emperor away from experiencing again. He does not write in a spirit of prophecy, but in a spirit of (self-)fulfilment, hoping to convince his audience of the superiority and the permanence of Christian kingship and Christian government, realised in the providence of God and irrevocable. Fact and aspiration blend easily to inform us that the Church and Rome are effectively now one, with a common ethos and a shared future. It is often where the Church would like to be rather than where it is, and in this respect it is a crucial index of Christian ambition.

The last quarter of the century in which Ambrose was bishop of Milan is remarkable for the degree of progress that the Christian Church had made and how many of its ambitions had been achieved. By the time of his death in 397, Christian emperors were *de rigueur* and Christianity was the official religion of the Empire. What may be of greater import, however, is the *tone* of the relationship between Ambrose and those emperors under whom he served. Even allowing for the force of the bishop's personality,⁸ this indicates a new stage in the development of Christianity vis-à-vis the state. It was the apogee, in fact, of the relationship between Rome and the Church before the sack of Rome in 410, in which the Church appears to be not only equal with the sovereign power, but sometimes more than equal, and Ambrose's book of political correspondence,⁹ notably with the emperors themselves, is a good gauge of how far the rhetoric has moved away from flattering rulers to admonishing them.

⁷ Cf. Jones (1964), 32-5 for the persecutions of Decius and Valerian; 71-6 for that of Diocletian.

⁸ McLynn (1994), see *Introduction*, pp. xxi-xxii.

⁹ I.e. Book Ten

The period in which Augustine, bishop of Hippo, flourished falls roughly halfway between that of Eusebius and Avitus, and marks the point in time at which the Catholic Church and the Roman Empire became estranged. The criticism of Christianity which motivated him to pen *De Civitate Dei* ('City of God') may have brought to the fore the tenuous nature of the relationship between the people of God and people of the world,¹⁰ but it was the riposte itself which brought about the divorce. In a theological *tour de force*, he compared the history and the nature of the Roman people with those of the Bible and arrived at the conclusion that they were characterised by discrete ideologies which made them irreconcilably different. The creation of a separate identity for Christians was thus enabled by the distinct, eschatological, vision that they had of the future; but the strength of inherited assumptions and the fluidity of the religious and political landscape that prevailed for much of the fifth century decreed that the process of adjustment was drawn out. The 'City of God' not only informed Christians that they were different; it also told them that they were superior, and in that respect it was of the utmost importance in helping to define a Catholic identity that would have to jostle for another century with 'pagans', 'heretics' and 'barbarians' to be the authoritative voice in the Latin West.

The influence of Augustine theology on the Catholic bishops of the Gallic Church would be a compelling enough reason to examine the extant works of the bishops Sidonius, Ruricius, and Avitus, but for the present purposes the context in which their convictions were formulated is probably more important. From the mid-fifth century through to the second decade of the sixth, they represent a class, a culture, and a faith that had to come to terms with alienating political circumstances whilst negotiating their own place within them. Their correspondence is less than revelatory, to say the least, but as an entity it captures by degree the mood of that transitional period in Gaul when Catholic bishops, bereft of Roman patronage, turned to the resources of the Bible and the Church as a means of support. It is their shared values as Catholics, therefore, rather than their personal or local characteristics that come to identify and strengthen them and it is often these which permeate even the most mundane or routine correspondence. This makes them a valuable contemporary source for the spirit of the Church in Gaul, in a period where literary evidence is not abundant.

Gaul itself is of fundamental importance because it was there that the Church faced one of the greatest threats to its progress, if not quite its survival, in the Western Empire. It may be difficult now to imagine that a Catholic triumph over their Arian adversaries was anything other than inevitable, but that would clearly be an abuse of hindsight. From the middle of the fifth century, and certainly under the leadership of Euric (r. 466 – 484), it must have seemed to many Romano-

¹⁰ E.g. Aug. *DCD* 1.1; 1.30; 2.2, etc.

Catholics that the future of Gaul belonged to the Arian Visigoths and not to the Catholic Franks. From the conversion of Clovis (c. 496), however, at the end of the century, history moved decisively in favour of the Catholics, culminating in the Christian Empire of Charlemagne three hundred years later.¹¹ The time from Sidonius to Avitus was a seminal period in the development of the Catholic Church in the West, therefore, and should be recognised as such.

¹¹ For Charlemagne's *Imperium Christianum*, see Alberi (1998), 3-17.

I

Eternality

Eternality is a theme that one would expect to find more prominently advertised with regard to the celestial kingdom of God than with the earthly realm of Caesar. Under the emperors, it was more readily associated with the kind of empire that Vergil inaugurated, one without limit of time, which was itself an extension of the idea of the *urbs in aeternum condita* ('the eternal City').¹ It was thus only a short step from the *urbs aeterna* to *Roma aeterna*, with all that implied for the imperial project. If the elevation of a city to legendary status can be ascribed to patriotic vanity or religious conviction, then the elevation of an empire cannot: this was nothing more than an attempt to legitimise the concept of *imperium* by raising it to a level ordinarily occupied by the divine. This meant that eternity, as the Romans understood it, was both narrow in conception and limited in application. Furthermore, only in an indirect way was immortality available to the individual, as to the poet Ovid.² In this system, it would only be 'good' emperors who, henceforth, could look to emulate the deified Julius Caesar and join the ranks of the deathless gods. Augustus, who was always keen to champion the immortality of his deified father, clarified the distinction between those who had been apotheosised and the rest:

'...he (Caesar) was declared to be the equal of the gods and was given eternal honours...We cannot become immortal, but we are able to achieve a kind of immortality by living nobly and dying nobly.'

Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 53.9.5

It was into this religio-political context that the Christian idea of the eternal and everlasting was introduced and formulated to harmonise with its secular equivalent. Christianity had already taken the idea of eternity from the much older tradition of the Jewish scriptures, as these examples illustrate: when Peter writes of '*the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*' (2 Peter 1:11), he is echoing the refrain of the Psalmist, '*Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom...*' (Psalms 145:13); or when Jesus says that some '*will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life*' (Matthew 25:46), he was reiterating the Book of *Daniel* when it says that '*many of those*

¹ The phrase 'eternal City' is first found in Tibullus, *Elegies* 2.5.23; 24: '*Romulus aeternae nondum formaverat Urbis moenia*'. See K. J. Pratt, 'Rome as Eternal', in the *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol. 26 (1965), pp. 25-44, for an overview of the events and the scholarship surrounding it.

² Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.875-879

who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt...' (Daniel 12:2). So there would not have been a great deal of difficulty in fashioning this aspect of their ideology, for those Christians with a political programme, to blend in with the prevailing views on eternity, because they were not mutually exclusive. What was impressive about the Christian view of the eternal, however, was the stress that was laid upon it in the Bible, in both the Old and the New Testament, but particularly the latter. In the Latin version of the Bible, the Vulgate, the gospel of *John* alone contains the adjective *aeternum* or its synonyms more than twenty times.³ This was not so much a fanciful notion, therefore, as a teleological goal, driven by the compulsion to fulfil individual needs in the same way that universality was driven by the obligation to gratify the needs of others. Nor was it a vague abstraction. The general call to faith [*...whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life...*] (John 5:24) is supplemented by more specific and mundane examples of how to secure immortality:

'And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my sake, will receive it a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.'

Matthew 19:29

The '*kind of immortality*' that had hitherto been on offer to the Romans for '*living nobly*' was thus challenged and eventually usurped by the promise of eternal life '*to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality*' (Romans 2:7). Eternity had been Christianised and limited to those of the Christian faith; and not even the gods of the Roman pantheon or those who had been deified to join them, were held to be anything other than mortal creations or mortal beings.⁴ And so, eternity was crucial to Christian identity and contributed greatly to their world-view; but there was more than one world-view and more than one identity. Many of those in the West whose views have been passed down to us from the fourth and fifth centuries were, after all, simultaneously Christian bishops and Roman aristocrats, who saw no conflict of identity.⁵ The eternity of the Roman Empire was not called into question, therefore, because it was through the agency of the Roman army, under the license of the *imperium Romanum*, that the *imperium Christianum* would inherit the mantle of world ruler;⁶ until, that is, the claims that underpinned the concept of the *imperium Romanum* were shown, in the fifth century, to be hollow, and Christianity had to adjust its programme accordingly.

³ E.g. *John* 3:15; 3:36; 4:13...etc.

⁴ Aug. *DCD* 4.1; 7; 20

⁵ Consider, for example, the case of Sidonius Apollinaris, who '*became a Christian bishop...but continued to live as an old-fashioned (Roman) aristocrat*'. Van Dam [1985], 158. Cf. Miles (1999), 1-12.

⁶ For the use of this term, see Alberi (1998), 3.

Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea to Ambrose, Bishop of Milan

The egalitarian message of the New Testament did not preclude its advocates from eulogising their earthly superiors,⁷ but it did establish a new kind of Christian panegyric for a Christian ruler. Eusebius, in the prologue to his oration celebrating Constantine's *Tricennalia*, justifies his change of direction:

I come, then, prepared to celebrate our emperor's praises in a newer strain; and, though the number may be infinite of those who desire to be my companions in my present task, I am resolved to shun the common track of men, and to pursue that untrodden path which it is unlawful to enter on with unwashed feet. Let those who admire a vulgar style, abounding in puerile subtleties, and who court a pleasing and popular muse, essay (since pleasure is the object they have in view) to charm the ears of men by a narrative of merely human merits. Those, however, whose minds have embraced a wider compass of wisdom, who are acquainted with Divine as well as human knowledge, and are able to appreciate the choice of a nobler subject, will prefer those virtues of the emperor which Heaven itself approves, and his pious actions, to his merely human accomplishments.'

Eusebius, *Prologue to the Laudes Constantini*

Eusebius' 'newer strain' of eulogy is to characterise the emperor as a type of the *Logos* of God,⁸ who is himself the regent and representative of the Supreme Sovereign;⁹ and the Empire as conforming to the pattern of heaven itself, indivisible in time and space. 'Imperial' now becomes synonymous with 'celestial' and it manifests itself clearly in a number of ways. To begin with, the Roman Empire and the Christian religion were contemporaneous, emerging 'together for the benefit of men'.¹⁰ The government was that of a sole ruler, 'according to the pattern of the Divine original...';¹¹ administered by a royal household that was 'devoted to the service of God, and distinguished by gravity of life and every other virtue',¹² in much the same way as angels and spirits carried out the divine business.¹³ The earthly sovereign populated all parts of his empire with temples, churches and

⁷ *Galatians* 3:28: '...for you are all one in Christ Jesus...'; see Jones (1964: 93-4) for Constantine's right to be Christian but engage with some of the traditional Roman customs associated with imperial rule.

⁸ Eus. *LC.* 2: '...in imitation of God himself...'

⁹ Eus. *LC.* 3

¹⁰ Eus. *LC.* 16

¹¹ Eus. *LC.* 3

¹² Eus. *LC.* 9

¹³ *1 Kings* 22:20-22; *Luke* 1:26

palaces, partly as a rebuke to those pagans who had been overthrown;¹⁴ partly in imitation of those heavenly ‘mansions’ with which heaven teemed (*John* 14:2). With the erection of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the apogee of Constantine’s architectural programme, he built at one and the same time a memorial to the resurrection of Christ and a monument to the idea of eternal life.¹⁵

The test of this developing relationship, and the most important product of its synthesis, was not to be found in construction, however, or even in administration. It was to be found in *peace*. In the Bible, peace and eternity are complementary, fulfilling prophecy that betokens the coming of the ‘latter days’:

*He shall judge between many peoples,
and shall decide for strong nations far away;
and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war anymore.’*

Micah 4:3

It was against this background that Eusebius projected his own type of millenarian sentiment:

‘One God was proclaimed to all mankind; and at the same time one universal power, the Roman Empire, arose and flourished. The enduring implacable hatred of nation against nation was now removed: and as the knowledge of One God, and one way of religion and salvation, even the doctrine of Christ, was made known to all mankind; so at the self-same period, the entire dominion of the Roman Empire being vested in a single sovereign, profound peace reigned throughout the world.’¹⁶

In short, he declares, what has taken place with the alliance of the Roman and the Christian worlds is nothing less than the fulfilment of the ancient oracles and the predictions of the prophets. Citing *Isaiah* 2:4 (the mirror image of the ‘swords into ploughshares’ prophecy in *Micah*

¹⁴ Eus. *LC*. 9

¹⁵ Eus. *LC*. 18: ‘*With such memorials have you adorned that edifice which witnesses of eternal life.*’

¹⁶ Eus. *LC*. 16

4:3 quoted above) and *Psalm* 71,¹⁷ it must have seemed as if the kingdom of God had come upon the Roman Empire,¹⁸ that eternity had indeed begun.

Proof, if proof was needed for any ‘doubting Thomas’ out there, could be found in the lengthened period of years that had been granted to Constantine’s governance of the Empire, granted by a Sovereign power on a duteous subject, an obedient child. He was, in fact, the longest reigning emperor since Augustus, ruling from 306 until 337 and, like Augustus, sought to legitimise his rule.¹⁹ Constantine was not tainted with usurpation to the same degree as Augustus was, however; it could be argued that he does not need to prove his credentials as an emperor: it is his Christianity that is moot. That is why Eusebius emphasises the peaceful nature and the longevity of his reign; the former underlines his authority, the latter promotes his legitimacy as the first Christian monarch. As his peace was the perfect peace of the last days, so too was the length of his reign extended beyond the natural span of time:

*‘...that the Supreme Sovereign Himself, as a gracious Father, delights in the worship of duteous children, and for this reason is pleased to honour the author and cause of their obedience with a lengthened period of time; and, far from limiting his reign to three decennial circles of years, He extends it to the remotest period, even to far distant eternity.’*²⁰

By projecting his reign into the unknown future he imbues him with a perpetually unchallenged authority and a perpetually uncontested legitimacy, because eternity is the supreme form of both. It implicitly disdains opposition and denies license to censure by establishing something as normative that was originally innovative. This is no different in its motivation from that of Vergil who, in his role as imperial and Augustan apologist, uses the indeterminate future to define the present as a *fait accompli*, but it does differ in its terms of reference. Stripped of the hyperbole that characterised imperial panegyric, Eusebius’ oration would still have alluded to the eternal destiny of his *dominus*, because eternity, according to the Bible, was what awaited all Christians, regardless of status.²¹ Constantine himself begins his oration *To The Assembly Of The Saints*, by calling the resurrection ‘*the path which leads to everlasting life*’.²²

The connection between Christianity and the Roman Empire, certainly as far as Christians were concerned, served to invest the latter with the divine and the eternal in a way that was

¹⁷ *Psalm* 71 in LC. 16: ‘And again, “In His days shall righteousness spring up; and abundance of peace.”’

¹⁸ *Luke* 17:20-21

¹⁹ Barnes (1981: 29)

²⁰ Eus. LC. 6

²¹ See note 7 above.

²² Constantine’s oration *To the Assembly of the Saints*, Ch. 1.

politically advantageous to the former and, notwithstanding the reverse under the emperor Julian, it was a relationship that continued to grow for the rest of the fourth century.

By the time of Ambrose, bishop of Milan from 374 to 397, there was not the same need to justify the temporal claims of the Christian emperor because Christianity, I would argue, had supplanted the place of traditional religion to a degree that was irreversible.²³ Indeed, in his obituary for the emperor Theodosius, Ambrose has him embrace Constantine in heaven as the founder and progenitor of the Christian Empire.²⁴ As far as the bishop was concerned, Roman government, through its Christian emperors, was set on a path that had abandoned vice and the ‘errors of philosophy’;²⁵ and for him at least there was no going back. The greater threat to the Church was not from without but within in the form of Arianism. This was a sect of Christianity that denied the divinity of the second and third persons of the Trinity, an issue which was not only important for the integrity of the Christian Church, but also for the position and authority of its Christian monarch. It was important in a temporal sense because it challenged the harmony of the relationship between ruler and bishop, and in a theological sense because the monarch was essentially a proxy for Christ, the source of his authority,²⁶ and if Christ’s authority was questionable then so was his.

Ambrose dealt with the Arian issue by asserting the eternity of Christ who was:

‘... ‘without a mother’ according to Divinity, because He was begotten of God the Father, of one substance with the Father; ‘without a father’ according to the Incarnation, because He was born of the Virgin, ‘having neither beginning nor end,’ for He himself is ‘the beginning and the end’ of all things, ‘the first and the last.’”

Ambrose, *On the Mysteries* 22

This was not only a rebuke to his religious opponents but an implicit warning to emperors not to think of themselves as greater than the source of their authority. This took a more explicit form in an exchange of letters between Ambrose and the Western emperor Gratian, correspondence

²³ Cameron (2011) argues at length for this position.

²⁴ Ambr. *De Obitu Theodosii* 40

²⁵ Ambr. *De Obitu Theodosii* 51

²⁶ Eus. *LC.* 2, ‘Our emperor, ever beloved by Him, who derives the source of imperial authority from above...’, taking his cue from the sentiments expressed in *Hebrews* 13:17: ‘Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.’

which reflects the growing confidence of the Church to assert its doctrines, regardless of imperial approval, and the changing power dynamic between bishop and sovereign in the West. In answer to a request from his sovereign to provide convincing proof that Jesus Christ was his ‘*eternal God*’,²⁷ Ambrose adopts a tone that is superficially respectful but with barely veiled censure for his religious doubts. Gratian was right, he assures him, in not imputing to Christ the ‘*created nature*’ that he found in himself, for ‘*to describe Christ as created is a contemptuous imputation, not a reverent confession*’.²⁸ Lest the young ruler misconceive the thrust of the message, his confessor makes it clear: ‘*After all what could be more arrogant than to think him to be the same as ourselves?*’²⁹ Even Roman emperors, therefore, should know their place; that they too are creations of the divine and not their compeers. Gratian’s humility is extolled as a virtue, however, and Ambrose concludes his epistle by reiterating Gratian’s desire ‘*that we are also to believe in the eternal divinity of the Holy Spirit*’,³⁰ thereby claiming the emperor for Nicene Christianity and the cause of the Trinity.

By using eternity as a defining characteristic of divinity, divinity of a type that has not been created, Ambrose opens up a chasm that separates the Christian prince from his Godhead. He eschews the kind of metaphysical imagery and language that Eusebius employed to praise Constantine, preferring instead to root his emperors very firmly in the material reality of earthly service, a standard requirement for all Christians if *eternal light and lasting peace*³¹ are to be enjoyed post mortal life. The emperor is now located very firmly indeed within the church and not above it.³²

By the end of the fourth century, there are clear signs that the Roman Empire has entered ‘the Christian era’,³³ not least because it was appointed the primary religion of the Empire in 391, but there were also signs that the Church was exploiting its new found religious ascendancy to reduce the political sovereignty of the emperor: Christian miscreants avoided punishment;³⁴ imperial edicts were challenged;³⁵ and the emperor Theodosius was ordered to do penance for an act of vengeance that was politically acceptable, but theologically dubious.³⁶ Ambrose’s dictum, therefore, that ‘*divine things are not subject to imperial power*’ was no mere platitude,³⁷ but rather a statement of intent challenging ‘sons of the Church’ to fall into line behind the bishops. To

²⁷ *Letter of Gratian to Ambrose* 3 (CSEL 79.3-4)

²⁸ *Ambr. Ep. ex. Coll.* 12.4

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ambr. Ep. ex. Coll.* 12.8

³¹ *Ambr. De Obitu Theodosii* 32

³² *Ambr. Ep. 75A*, 36

³³ See *Aug. DCD* 1.1; 1.30; 1.33, for mention of the ‘*Christianis temporibus*’. Cf. *Ambr. Ep.* 72.10.

³⁴ See *Ambr. Ep.* 74 on the destruction of the synagogue at Callinicum.

³⁵ See *Ambr. Ep. ex. Coll.* 11 on the massacre at Thessalonica.

³⁶ *Ambr. De Obitu Theodosii* 34

³⁷ Cf. Markus (1988), 95.

enforce this, they again turned to eternity, not as a reward but as a threat. Bad emperors, like Maximus and Eugenius, go to hell,³⁸ *'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched'* (Mark 9:48). Eternity was now a weapon to be used as much against any recalcitrant emperor as upon any other believing Christian and all were now firmly under the authority of the Church. The *genius* that had long been associated with the idea of the *imperium Romanum* was now being superseded by the Spirit of the *imperium Christianum*.³⁹

If the Church thought, however, that there would be a seamless transition of authority from one imperial power to another, it was soon to be disabused of this notion, as within thirteen years of Ambrose's death, the barbarians were at the gates of Rome itself.

Augustine, Bishop of Hippo

With Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* (*City of God*), Christianity was cut loose from the Roman husk to which it had been attached for more than a century. The reality of the barbarian invasions of 406 and the Gothic sack of Rome four years later had been extremely damaging to imperial pride, but had not dealt an insuperable blow to the empire itself (*DCD* 4.7). For the idea of the *imperium Romanum*, however, or certainly those aspects of it that were outlined in the introduction, it was fatal. *'Roma aeterna'* was shown to be like all those other empires that had preceded it, destined neither to be eternal nor universal, with the seeds having been sown for a gradual and piecemeal abdication of sovereignty, in the West at least, to erstwhile foes.⁴⁰ For Christians, the immediate aftermath was to be blamed for the disaster by those who lamented the usurpation of the traditional gods, to which Augustine's considered response was the *City of God*.⁴¹ The gist of that response was to dispel the long held theory, of which Eusebius was a leading proponent, that Christianity would move towards its destiny in tandem with and under the aegis of the Roman Empire. Henceforth the identification of 'Christian' with 'Roman' could not be assumed in Christian ideology, and as if to reinforce the division Augustine refers to the Romans as *'our adversaries'*.⁴² This does not mean that there was some kind of clear fissure running through society that separated Christians from their 'adversaries'. To all intents and purposes they were indistinguishable, with both groups, or 'Cities', seeking to utilise and even harmonise the things that are essential for mortal life (19.17). Rather it was to be at the 'last judgement' that

³⁸ Ambr. *De Obitu Theodosii* 39

³⁹ The *genius*, or guiding spirit, of Roma as the theological driving force behind Rome's imperial expansion.

⁴⁰ Visigoths, Burgundians and Ostrogoths.

⁴¹ Aug. *DCD* 2.2

⁴² See *DCD* 1.24; 4.15 for instances of the phrase *'our adversaries'*.

the 'City of God' and the 'earthly City' would be separated into the elect and the reprobate and until then they were inextricably interwoven and intermixed (1.35). The City of God is, in fact, the Church,⁴³ but not the visible Church, because there are some who appear to belong to the 'earthly City', the City of Man, who, at the final reckoning, will be part of the elect (1.35); equally there are those appear to belong to the City of God who will not see heaven (18.49). Both 'Cities' are abstractions, therefore, consisting of two mutually exclusive metaphysical communities selected from a corporeally constituted commonwealth.

The task for the bishop of Hippo, as he outlines it in the first sentence of his *magnum opus*, is to uphold (*defendere*) the City of God, treating it as it exists both in this world of time (*in hoc temporum cursu*) and in that security of its eternal home (*in illa stabilitate sedis aeternae*).⁴⁴ In essence, temporal existence was nothing more than preparation for eternity (1.29), and it was for eternal life, and eternal life alone, that people became Christians (6.9). Those who aspire to the 'heavenly country' should not try to emulate those famous Romans, therefore, like the Curtii or the Decii, who devoted themselves to the honour of an earthly City, for the 'kind of life after death' that they sought through glory died on the lips of those who praised them and certainly did not result in eternal life (5.14). Christians, to the contrary, gain the reward of eternity by devoting themselves to the glory of God, which is hateful to the lovers of the world and brings them, as a matter of course, obloquy (5.16). They endure curses and slander, the severest persecutions and the harshest punishments, including martyrdom (5.14). Unlike their Roman counterparts, they must eschew the praise of men in order that the glory may accrue to the Father (5.14).

By comparing the Roman aspiration for glory unfavourably with the altruism practised by the City of God, Augustine discredits the basis of traditional imperialism. This is something which belongs more properly to 'Universality' and will be looked at in more detail in the next section.⁴⁵ As far as it pertains to eternity, however, the well-established relationship between heroic exploits and honour is inverted so that the glory and the immortality no longer accrue to those who are honoured for what they did for the earthly City (henceforth their achievements will be considered passing and transitory), but to those who ordinarily would be instantly forgotten. The disgrace and the hardships and the persecutions and whatever earthly misfortunes they have to endure are no longer a cause of shame either, and so this temporal life should not be a cause of regret, since it is in this life of time that they are being schooled for eternity (1.29). This was a

⁴³ *DCD* 16.2

⁴⁴ *DCD*, Preface to Chapter 1

⁴⁵ For example, see *DCD* 3.14.

clear indication that the meek and the humble were now inheriting heaven as well as earth,⁴⁶ and that Roman heroes were being replaced with Christian saints.

As far as Augustine is concerned, the superiority of the City of God to the earthly City is not to be doubted, even *in hoc temporum cursu*. It is a matter of record in the Scriptures and if anyone has doubts about the veracity of the Bible, then the realisation of Scriptural prophecy, ‘*which we see before our eyes*’, will allay them (15.9). And yet, Christians enjoy no material advantage over those who share their temporal existence.⁴⁷ For they are not a conspicuously separated people, being neither temperamentally detached nor socially aloof. Indeed, apart from their beliefs, they have much in common with the communities in which they live: they both enjoy the good things in life; and both are afflicted by the adversities of the temporal state (18.54). No, the advantage that the members of the City of God enjoy is in the mental apprehension of those ‘*blessings which are promised as eternal in the future*’ (19.17). Issuing from faith it produces in believers a different expectation and a different love (18.54), one that inevitably relegated Rome, or any other earthly power to a subsidiary, even subservient, status. Christians are thus imbued with an identity that is informed by the future rather than by the past, a teleologically determined hereafter which was promoted using vistas of everlasting peace and harmony,⁴⁸ and contrasted with imperfect temporal peace, which was no more than a solace from wretchedness (19.27).

Using the theological theory of (double) predestination, notably present in the epistles of Paul,⁴⁹ allowed Augustine to validate the City of God at the expense of all earthly empires, not just Rome. For, by this theory, it was predetermined that for the kingdoms of the world, decline is not only possible but inevitable; while those who make up the society of believing Christians ‘*will reign with God for all eternity*’ (15.1).

The Christian era had not begun tentatively with Constantine after all, but had been preordained by God and was destined to endure into the future uninhibited by the spectre of decline. Unlike the empires of the past and the present, therefore, which had emerged into history and promised to endure **into** eternity, the Christian Empire would last because it was decreed **from** eternity and would never end. I would suggest that for Christians, this model of the future, derived from the Bible and articulated by Augustine, was a powerful influence in the development of an identity which took the *imperium Christianum* for granted, to the detriment not only of the Roman Empire *per se*, but to the mental assumptions which accompanied it. Bearing

⁴⁶ Cf. *Matthew* 5:5: ‘*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*’

⁴⁷ *Matthew* 5:45: ‘*For he makes his sun rise of the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*’

⁴⁸ *Isaiah* 11:6-8

⁴⁹ E.g. *Romans* 9:10-13. Double predestination is the theological position which holds that some have been set aside by God for Heaven, while others have been set aside for Hell.

in mind the biblical injunction that no-one can serve two masters,⁵⁰ I believe that it was a relatively short step for many Christian believers to transfer their mental allegiance primarily from the City of Man to the City of God, and that from this time on the *idea* of Rome was of secondary consideration for Christians of the Western Roman Empire.

The Gallo-Roman Bishops

Sidonius Apollinaris, Bishop of Clermont

The political consequences of the barbarian migrations into the Western Empire from the first decade of the fifth century had become clear by the 460s. Loss of territory was the corollary of a loss of authority, which had resulted in a diffusion of power and a localisation of sovereignty. For those Christians who hankered after the comforting protection of Roman government, notwithstanding Augustine's counsel, these new circumstances could have undermined confidence in the notion of a unitary empire and engendered a sense of foreboding about the future. Singleness of empire, as I have shown,⁵¹ was not a peculiarly Roman idea, however, and with the demise of the Western Roman Empire, it was only the fact of the *imperium Romanum* that was invalidated, not *imperium per se*. Christians who imbibed the teachings of the Bible, for example, would have understood that the *regnum* of Caesar had been replaced by the *regnum* of God on earth and, for this kingdom, *imperium* was not so much a product of power as a condition of being. The Bible was of seminal importance, therefore, in the justification and communication of this new *imperium*, the *imperium Christianum*, which unlike its Roman counterpart did not require the stamp of legitimisation from those outside its own constituency: the Scriptures being judged as the sole standard and the sole authority by which the Church conducted its affairs. It seems clear then that without Jerome's pioneering Vulgate version of the Bible, the Church in the Latin West could not have assumed that uniformity of thought and expectation that can only be derived from a common source of authority. By bringing order out of the chaos of the *vetus latina*,⁵² the Latin Vulgate provided the canon by which conformity to an objective standard could henceforth be measured and judged.

⁵⁰ *Matthew* 6:24

⁵¹ See the introduction.

⁵² The *vetus latina* is the collection of Biblical texts in Latin that preceded Jerome's Vulgate.

For the strongly aristocratic episcopacy in Gaul,⁵³ the need or desire, if not anxiety, to maintain their social cohesion would have been heightened by the increasing reality of a fragmented political environment. Affinity and shared values with their class had been a way of life after all, but a secular way of life, and one that was conducted in a broad Roman context. With the gradual disappearance of much that had been familiar to them,⁵⁴ they found in the Catholic Church an antidote to the localisation of power and the narrowing of horizons that took shape under the new dispensation of provincial rulers: Germans in ethnicity and Arians in religion. Sidonius, bishop of Clermont from the early 470s to at least 480, makes reference to this when he reassures the bishop of Sens that their geographical separation matters little because of their unity in the sphere of religion.⁵⁵ When Sidonius speaks, however, even as a Gallic Christian bishop, he speaks in an authentic Roman voice and in the language of empire: Latin.⁵⁶ His writings teem with Roman *mores*, classical allusions, and imperial imagery.⁵⁷ His religious content, by comparison, is limited, with relatively few Biblical references.⁵⁸ Sidonius the Christian, indeed Sidonius the bishop, is more reticent, therefore, than Sidonius the Gallo-Roman aristocrat.

And yet, in the only letter of his collection not written by himself, the priest Claudianus refers to Sidonius' deep knowledge of the Scriptures and his liberal use of them in instructing others (4.2.3). It has to be borne in mind, however, that Sidonius saw his correspondence as a badge of his class, rather than his religion. He considered a knowledge of letters, in fact, to be the last token of nobility (8.2.2), and felt that assemblies, of any kind, which were devoid of literary talent, were no more than 'a complete wilderness' (*maximam solitudinem*, 7.14.10). It is hardly surprising then that such a man should, more often than not, follow his 'natural inclination' and forget his sacred calling (4.12.1). His 'natural inclination', as is to be expected of a Roman aristocrat, is invariably to glance backward at his temporal forbears and take pride in his worldly status,⁵⁹ not to dwell on his spiritual objective. He does, nevertheless, occasionally give voice to his thoughts on the question of immortality, thoughts which betray a rejection of Augustine's salvation by grace and a steady move toward salvation by works. In a letter to a fellow poet, for example, he disavows the literary output of his earlier life (i.e. before he was a bishop), deeming it to lack the necessary gravity required of a Christian:

⁵³ For an in-depth discussion of Gallo-Roman aristocrats at the time of Sidonius, see Harries (1994), 27-30; 78-81.

⁵⁴ Sid. *Ep.* 4.17.2

⁵⁵ Sid. *Ep.* 7.5.3. He expresses a similar sentiment in 9.8.2.

⁵⁶ For Sidonius' references to 'Latin', cf. 3.14.2; 5.5.4; 8.2.1.

⁵⁷ Harries (1994), 2. Sidonius is firmly rooted in Roman traditions. E.g. *Ep.* 8.6.1; 8.10.3; 9.16.3.

⁵⁸ There are no Biblical citations in the first five books of Sidonius' letters.

⁵⁹ See *Ep.* 3.12

*‘...but now it is time for serious reading and serious writing; one should think about life eternal rather than posthumous renown, and never forget that after death it will be our deeds, not our screeds, that will be weighed in the balance.’*⁶⁰

Elsewhere he writes about *‘buying a place in the kingdom of heaven’* (4.24.7); and the reward of heavenly blessings on the completion of the pious life (3.1.3). Sidonius would not have been unfamiliar with the writings of Augustine, bishop of Hippo. Faustus of Riez, who was the sponsoring bishop at Sidonius’ baptism, and also the only clerical recipient of a poem in his published works,⁶¹ wrote a work on grace, *De Gratia*, in which he was critical of Augustine’s theory of predestination. It is something, he affirmed, that *‘is thought to be suspect by the most learned men’*.⁶² Judging by the sentiments cited above, Sidonius was counted among this group of learned men who were suspicious of the merits of the doctrine of predestination, or salvation by grace, to the exclusion of meritorious deeds. This is not surprising because, whatever his theological reservations, Sidonius was a bishop more by profession⁶³ than by inclination and the idea that some people had no hope of salvation, and were, by implication, beyond the authority of the Church and its drive for moral perfection, would not have been palatable to his refined, and superior, tastes. He now represented a new ruling class of churchmen who were seeking to centralise authority by bringing the most important tenets of the faith into harmony, without prejudicing the local customs and traditions that often defined Christian identity at a parochial level. The issue of eternal life was unquestionably the most central of those tenets and could not be seen to be open to interpretation. Sidonius himself draws the lines of demarcation when he is giving out advice to an old friend. Irritated at his failure to receive correspondence commensurate with their friendship, the bishop reminds him of the inherent differences between friendship with an agent of God and with his contemporary associates: *‘...if you attach importance to the future life, write to your cleric; if you value things present, write to your colleague’*.⁶⁴ Eternality must be kept under the control of the visible Church, therefore; but perhaps even more importantly, it had to be seen to be under the control of the visible Church because of the need to maintain orthodoxy. This could not be taken for granted in an environment that was politically and

⁶⁰ Sid. *Ep.* 8.4.3

⁶¹ Sid. *Carm.* 16.68-70: *‘da Faustum laudare tuum, da solvere grates, quas et post debere iuvat. te, magne sacerdos, barbatus hic noster plectro licet impare cantat.’*

⁶² Faust. *Epist.* 7: CSEL 21.201; for discussion, see Mathisen (1999), 38. Faustus’ *De gratia Dei et libero arbitrio* was actually written to explain the issues that had been discussed at the Synod of Arles (473), which had been convened to investigate the predestinarian views of Lucidus, a priest in Faustus’ own diocese. Another synod was held at Lyon the following year on the same subject. Augustinian predestinationism was condemned at both synods of the Gallic Church. See also Villegas Marin (2010), 163.

⁶³ Sid. *Ep.* 4.2.24: *‘...religion is my profession’*.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 4.14.4

religiously fluid. The difficulties posed by the Arians to the Catholic Church in Gaul may be gauged by the harm that was done to the latter as a result of the pro-Arian religious policies of the Visigothic king Euric. Sidonius' depiction of him as so bigoted that he found the mere mention of the word 'Catholic' in his mouth repugnant,⁶⁵ is no doubt hyperbole, borne of frustration, but it does give a sense of the tribulations that Catholic bishops could encounter without official support. The wide tracts of spiritual devastation and sparsely attended urban churches that resulted from the inability to replace deceased bishops in the sees under Euric's political authority⁶⁶ do not, however, characterise a Church that could deal with heterodoxy from within any easier than it could deal with what was unorthodox from without. That is why a prescriptive doctrine on the merits of grace found general acceptance among the Catholic bishops of Gaul.

Sidonius, as well as being an orthodox Catholic was also an orthodox Roman, who by his own admission revered the ancients (*veneror antiquos*)⁶⁷ to a degree that even he probably considered unbecoming for a Christian bishop.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, when his political influence had lost its power to influence, and his literary achievements had lost their power to motivate, his classical inheritance relinquished some of its hold on him and it was to the future and eternal life that he placed his hope.⁶⁹ In this respect, Sidonius epitomised the shifting fortunes of both Empires: the sun was indeed setting on the imperial majesty of Rome while the future lay with the Christians and the promise of eternal life.

Ruricius, Bishop of Limoges

Ruricius, bishop of Limoges, was of a similar aristocratic status as the bishop of Clermont; and, in fact, they were related through marriage.⁷⁰ Their letters, therefore, have a generic quality that identifies them as members of an elite class and bastions of that 'vanishing culture' that the older man lamented.⁷¹ Like Sidonius, his letters are filled with those tropes and figures that are the mark of their education in classical rhetoric;⁷² and, of course, there are references and allusions to

⁶⁵ Ibid. 7.6.6

⁶⁶ Sid. *Ep.* 7.6.7-8

⁶⁷ Ibid. 3.8.1

⁶⁸ Ibid. 6.12.7

⁶⁹ Ibid. 4.22.4

⁷⁰ See Harries (1994), 32.

⁷¹ Sid. *Ep.* 4.17.2

⁷² Rur. 1.13; 2.13; 2.24

classical literature.⁷³ There is a different tone, however, to Ruricius' correspondence. His letters⁷⁴ are, in the main, non-political, parochial, personal, and circulated almost exclusively within the Visigothic kingdom of Toulouse. This may reflect the political climate of the times which made communication between regions hazardous (Sidonius, in a letter written in the 470s, for example, asks the recipient to desist from writing further, because of the risks posed to the privacy of the information carried and to the person of the courier carrying it);⁷⁵ or it may reflect the private concerns of Ruricius' character. Certainly on the basis of his published correspondence, where the balance between classical and Christian subject matter much favours the latter, and in comparison with his more illustrious colleague, Ruricius' character is more identifiably Christian than Roman.

It may also be, however, that Ruricius has temporised, conformed to the circumstances that he found himself in, in order to come to terms with the political reality of his time and place. The hope, long nurtured by Sidonius, that the Roman Empire in the West would overcome its trials and tribulations to regain its glory had been extinguished, so that by the time he became bishop of Limoges in 485, even the name of Roman emperor, bereft of its glory, had been gone for almost a decade. Ruricius' episcopacy (c. 485 – c. 506) was almost exactly contemporaneous with the rule of the Visigothic king Alaric II (484 – 507), son of Euric, who like his father was an Arian. This was a Catholic bishop, therefore, who had to temper many of those assumptions which Christians had increasingly taken for granted since the reign of Constantine; and his guarded references to tribulations⁷⁶ suggest that this adjustment had to be made in difficult circumstances. Nor should we presume, with hindsight, to impute to Ruricius any confident expectation of an eventual Catholic victory over his political masters, either by conquest or conversion. This would only impose an artificial premise on the private sentiments of a public figure.

Instead, Ruricius' letters should be read in the context of a Latin Church which finds itself alienated from the sovereign authority, both politically and religiously, in a way that it has not known since before the time of Constantine. This lends an air of melancholy to much of the writing, which is only assuaged by the hope of eternal life. Eternality, therefore, which had been promoted for so long under favourable government as a reward for the faithful, becomes under this new dispensation a consolation for the poor in spirit. He outlines this thinking quite

⁷³ Rur. 2.4; 2.10; 2.15

⁷⁴ Written between c. 470 and c. 507.

⁷⁵ Sid. *Ep.* 9.3.2; cf. 9.5.1.

⁷⁶ Rur. 1.6; 1.13; 2.52

explicitly in the longest letter in the collection when he anticipates the ownership of ‘joys that are true not false, eternal not temporal’:⁷⁷

*With such and similar precepts and pledges of the Lord, best of brethren, we should console ourselves, because, just as the future already has been realised in the Lord, thus the faithful Catholic, in some way, ought already to possess the heavenly promises that he trusts will be fulfilled in due time.’*⁷⁸

And, indeed, he considered his role in providing the solace of eternal life to be the very essence of his ministry,⁷⁹ but not for everyone. Ruricius consistently draws a distinction between those who will inherit eternal life and those who will not. In an effort to persuade a friend to become a penitent, for example, he employs a nautical allegory to make the point:

*I rejoice that, amid the adverse and diverse storms on the sea of this age, you have guided your rocking boat, with the Lord as a helmsman, to the port of safety. Settled within His trustworthy and peaceful mooring-place, you now will ridicule rather than fear the billows of this same perfidious, troublesome, and bitter sea, regarding which you now can have as much joy as you have little fear, because you either look back at those left behind or, settled upon a higher peak, you look down, and you marvel that you have escaped.’*⁸⁰

In two letters concerned with bereavement he paraphrases the teaching of the Bible to discriminate:

*Let those who are dead (i.e. spiritually), who presume that the soul perishes with the flesh, grieve for their dead, whom they do not believe will be resurrected...let us take consolation from His promise...’*⁸¹

For Sidonius, the dichotomy, the ‘them and us’ so to speak, had been between Romans and ‘barbarians’⁸²; for Ruricius it was between the ‘saved’ and the ‘unsaved’. There is no doubt that this had less to do with the fact that the first category was largely redundant, and more to do with the influence of Augustine’s ‘Two Cities’. We know that Ruricius requested the *City of God* from a correspondent (Rur. 2.17), but he would have been aware of it already. In the very first letter of Book One, he flatters Faustus, bishop of Riez, that he has quaffed his treatises but

⁷⁷ Rur. 2.4

⁷⁸ Rur. 2.4

⁷⁹ Rur. 2.12

⁸⁰ Rur. 2.13

⁸¹ Sid. *Ep.* 2.46; see also 2.4; *Luke* 9:60

⁸² Sid. *Ep.* 7.14.10, ‘I shun barbarians even if they are good.’

thirsts for more. It is unlikely that this would not have included the bishop's work on *De Gratia* which was mentioned above, as the letter in question almost certainly post-dated the treatise itself.⁸³ Like Sidonius before him, he too accepted Faustus' critique of predestination and rejected the essential principle of Augustine's doctrine of salvation by grace, while embracing the general proposition that human society was divided up between those who would enjoy eternal life and those who would suffer eternal damnation. To be part of the former company, the faithful Catholic who is seeking consolation in the heavenly promises, would have to '*anticipate them in hope, possess them in faith*' and crucially, '*obtain them by works*.'⁸⁴

To suggest that access to the heavenly city would be anything but arduous,⁸⁵ would be to undermine the discipline of the faithful and the control of the bishops and in this respect Ruricius is in agreement with Sidonius. But there is something even more fundamentally important here, and that is the need of the Latin Church to maintain consensus and harmony, and ensure that a loss of power and influence is not accompanied by a concomitant loss of authority. The strength of the Church was in her leaders and her leaders must be seen to be united in purpose and in doctrine. Ruricius, writing to a fellow bishop, makes the case for unity:

*'...if we are limbs of a single head, then we ought to be like-thinking custodians of the body, because the sheepfolds of the Lord's flock may be many in number, but they are not disparate in the nature of their faith, so that, just as the Lord himself deigned to foretell, a manifold schism ought not to develop among us, with us disagreeing because of a jealousy and dismembering the Lord's flock because of dissension. But rather, with us gathering the Lord's flocks through the unity of a single doctrine, let there be among us 'a single flock and a single shepherd.'*⁸⁶

The idea of *imperium Christianum* for a Church that has been marginalised politically and usurped religiously may seem incongruous; and yet the element of eternity, which is under discussion here, was never questioned. When much of the power and the influence that the Latin Church had accrued over the fourth and fifth centuries ebbed away, it returned to its core values and cultivated orthodoxy, so that by the end of Ruricius' correspondence it is internally stronger than it has been before and ready to take full advantage of political developments.

⁸³ Mathisen (1999), 88.

⁸⁴ Continued from Rur. 2.4 quoted above; 2.52 expresses the same idea.

⁸⁵ See Rur. 2.17, '*...the eternal is difficult to obtain.*'

⁸⁶ Rur. 2.6; '*...a single flock and a single shepherd...*' is a phrase taken from *John* 10:16.

Avitus, Bishop of Vienne

Just as in the case of Ruricius, we do not know anything about Avitus, bishop of Vienne in Burgundy, before he assumed the episcopacy in the mid-490s; but his significance is amplified by the fact that, at this point in time, he is a generation away from the collapse of Roman government in the West, with all that entails for Catholic thought. It informs his writing in fact by looking forward to a Christian future more than back to a Roman past. He had more reason to be optimistic than Ruricius, although even the latter years of the Visigothic kingdom had more than hinted at an improvement in the Catholic position.⁸⁷ Of primary importance in this respect is the baptism of Clovis, king of the Franks, into the Catholic faith⁸⁸ and his later defeat of the Visigoths at Vouille in 507. Avitus was buoyed by these events and what they promised for the Latin Church in Gaul,⁸⁹ but even in his own neighbouring kingdom of Burgundy he was not without encouragement. He corresponded with the Burgundian king Gundobad (d. 516), for example, in letters which admit of no danger or menace to the Catholic population. To the contrary, there is a suggestion that the king, an Arian, was a protector and benefactor of Catholic churches, and we know that he welcomed the bishop's Catholic interpretations on a host of theological matters.⁹⁰ The conversion of Gundobad's son and successor, Sigismund (r. 516 – 523), to Catholic Christianity was another sign that the political tide in Gaul was turning back in their favour after several decades of inferior status.

It is clear, however, from the character of his poetry and his homilies, as well as his epistles, that Avitus did not regard the nature of Catholic strength to rest upon the favour of the secular power. Like the self-confident injunction made by Pope Gelasius in 494 that the Eastern emperor should acknowledge the inferiority of his office *vis-a-vis* the Church, Avitus' writing, notwithstanding the continued difficulties, does not admit of temporal weakness. Part of the reason why can be found in his five-book poem on Biblical themes, from the creation of the world to the crossing of the Red Sea.⁹¹ With the Fall of Man, the human race degenerated into unimaginable woe:

Who could recount such upheavals, who in words describe the storms which would churn the ages yet to come? Arms rage, the earth is shaken again and again by fear, streams of blood are spilled, and yet they thirst for

⁸⁷ See Mathisen (1999), 40.

⁸⁸ Greg. Tur. *HF* 2.30, cf. 2.37, '...in the fifteenth year of his reign', i.e. c. 496.

⁸⁹ Avitus wrote a letter to Clovis, *Ep.* 46, praising his baptism, in which he assured him that, 'Your faith is our (i.e. Catholic) victory.'

⁹⁰ On the first point, see Avit. *Ep.* 44 and *Hom.* 24; on the second see, e.g. *Ep.* 4, 21, 22, 30.

⁹¹ Avitus' *De spiritalis historiae gestis libri I-V*, translated by G. W. Shea.

*more. Why should I speak of the towering cities built by communities of famous men only to be reduced to wasteland, of nations scattered by the ravages of pillaging tribes, of the laying waste, part by part, of the torn earth, of lords reduced to slavery and slaves set in turn over their lords, of the fact that fate's earlier grant of famous lineage often perishes in the lottery of war.'*⁹²

It matters little that Avitus may have had contemporary Gaul in mind when he produced this catalogue of mortal woe; the location is not important, it could be anywhere. What is important is that this is the inescapable curse on mankind brought about by the Fall, producing the ineluctable misery of the mortal condition. The answer to this evil is not to be found in political systems, therefore, which are transitory, but in the God of the Bible, mediated by His Church. This is Augustinian in its theology, but political in its assumptions, for behind it lies the appreciation that the Church did not need the patronage of the state, any state, to protect its status. When Augustine wrote the *De Civitate Dei*, his intention was to reassure those believers who had been discouraged by the events surrounding the sack of Rome, and what that portended for the Christian religion, that the Church was inherently independent of the state. I would argue that Avitus is representative of the first generation of Catholic leaders who, deprived of even the hope of that patronage which Rome afforded, recognised *a posteriori* that Augustine was right, and with the conversion of Clovis in c. 496 sensed that in Gaul the dynamic of the relationship between (Catholic) Church and state had changed to the benefit of the former.

Avitus put his confidence in 'the magisterial authority of heavenly scripture that is one and always the same' and took it to its ultimate conclusion.⁹³ After the Fall must come the Judgement, and just as Noah took preparations for the deluge so too must the faithful be ready:

*'Today, there are some who dedicate their hearts, once stirred, to faithful service, who know the final peril that closes in on the world, that peril in which all that is corporeal will crumble, in which the centuries will consume all the flesh that has held its revel too long. Then that man will escape the coming evil who has made preparations and built a strong ark of enduring protection. Saved from the waters by the life-giving wood of the cross, he will behold in that moment the **great reward** for which he held the dissolute life of sin in contempt.'*⁹⁴

The 'great reward' that he refers to is, of course, eternal life. That, and the fear of losing it, animated him greatly, and not only with regard to his flock. In a theological letter to the Arian

⁹² Avit. *De spiritalis historiae gestis*, 3.338-50

⁹³ Avit. *Ep. contra Eutychianam haeresim* 2, Book 2.19. See Shanzer and Wood (2002), 123.

⁹⁴ Avit. *De spiritalis historiae gestis*, 4.315-25

king Gundobad, he suggests that the end of the world is in sight,⁹⁵ a theme he reprises in his poetry.⁹⁶ Time is of the essence, therefore, before the eternal overtakes the temporal and the opportunity to gain eternity is lost. To Avitus, political concerns were important and called for expediency,⁹⁷ but they were not paramount and they must be overcome:

*‘... (and) having overcome the world, may we come to celestial calm, where, since there will be no possibility of dying, neither will a cause of danger be born; where God will always be with us, and we will always be with him, if he has consented, and the man who here sometimes lies asleep with the negligent, will there be perpetually awake with the happy forever.’*⁹⁸

Conclusion

At the beginning of the sixth century, almost two centuries had passed since Christianity had acquired the stamp of official approval that it previously lacked. The Empire that recognised its legitimacy had been sundered, however, and its western sphere abandoned to heterogeneous forces, leaving the Latin Church to negotiate its own future, often at a local level. Shorn of imperial protection and imperial patronage, it had to fall back on its own resources and ideologies in order to resist the forces of external opposition, internal discord, and creeping apathy. On one level, it would have gained succour from the increasing political and religious authority of the bishop of Rome,⁹⁹ and from the knowledge that it was a broad Church, in the geographical sense, which gave it a depth of resource that was difficult to challenge, let alone overcome; and on a lower, parochial, level, it found consolation and strength in the teachings of the Bible, whose apocalyptic passages took on greater significance in the uncertain circumstances of late and post imperial Gaul.¹⁰⁰ Within the teachings of the New Testament, there was nothing more consoling than the imminent advent of the everlasting kingdom that had been foreshadowed in the prophecy of Isaiah.¹⁰¹ Unlike the ‘kind of immortality’¹⁰² on offer to the elite

⁹⁵ Avit. *Ep.* 22, “For since it is predicted in the gospel: ‘Nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom’ [Mk. 13:8], from these very signs of evil let us understand that the virtual end of the world is upon us.”

⁹⁶ Avit. *De spiritalis historiae gestis*, 3.35-45; 3.56-66; 3.185-191; 4.319-329

⁹⁷ Avit. *De spiritalis historiae gestis*, 4.500-508: ‘We too should yield to the world in this way as long as we are subject to it. For whatever resists utterly and knows not how to bend, must be afraid of snapping under pressure.’

⁹⁸ Avit. *Hom.* 6 (on Rogations)

⁹⁹ See chapter on ‘Monarchy & Christian Leadership’.

¹⁰⁰ Sidonius and Ruricius (e.g. *Ep.* 2.17), as well as Avitus (see note 83 above) make frequent reference to the imminence of the last days.

¹⁰¹ See the introduction to this thesis. See *Matthew* 3:1-3 for the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy (*Isaiah* 1:3).

¹⁰² See beginning of this chapter.

citizens of the earthly empire of Rome it was available to all the citizens of the 'new Jerusalem', including, if not especially, the new constituency of the 'poor in spirit'.¹⁰³ This should not be equated with the poor in substance, because it included among its number Sidonius: bishop, Gallic aristocrat, and 'old-school' Roman who was as proud of his literary heritage as he was conscious of his literary posterity.¹⁰⁴ But this was little consolation in his extremity. Exiled from the Auvergne by the Visigothic king Euric in and despondent about his disappearing world, he confessed that he found his sojourn in foreign parts '*painful*' and his old reading '*profitless*'.¹⁰⁵ Rome had let people like Sidonius down, proving, despite the continuation of the 'New Rome' in the East, to be as impermanent and faithless as all previous imperial powers. In this context, the promise given in the New Testament of Isaiah's heralded messiah must have taken on even greater significance: '*...of his kingdom there will be no end*'.¹⁰⁶ The eternity, therefore, that had been an intrinsic part of the justification of the *imperium Romanum* did not die with the Western Roman Empire: it just assumed new life in another form.

¹⁰³ *Matthew* 5:3

¹⁰⁴ *Sid. Ep.* 8.2.3; 8.5.1

¹⁰⁵ *Sid. Ep.* 4.22.4

¹⁰⁶ *Luke* 1:33

II

Universality

The universal element of imperium is similar in some ways to eternity: both imply completion and finality, if not perfection; and both are associated with systems of supreme power. A clear distinction between them is that universality avoids much of the abstraction which, quite obviously, attaches itself to eternity, and is very much in the realm of the temporal and the carnal. In the context of this work, it concerns itself with the self-conscious objective of ubiquitous and unbounded authority, underwritten by received wisdom and sacred texts.

The indiscriminate way in which Rome acquired her empire gives lie to any suggestion that she set out to be 'mistress of the world', but as the aggrandizement of Rome became inextricably bound up with that of Augustus and his religious programme, it was inevitable that the imperial adventure would assume a providential character. Tibullus, echoing the sentiments of Vergil himself, declared that 'Rome' was 'the name pre-destined for the empire of the world'.¹ Mastery of the world could only be achieved, however, when the 'proud' had been subdued² and put in their place:

'Even India bows her neck, Augustus, to your Triumph
And unexplored Arabia quakes before you.
Whatever land retreats to the edges of the world,
Later defeated let it feel your hand.'

Propertius, Carmina 2.10.15-18

Universality was an expression of Roman power, therefore, that focused on the person of the first emperor:

'...Augustus will be considered a god among us when the Britons and the troublesome Parthians are added to the Empire.

Horace, Odes 3.5

¹ Tib. Eleg. 2.5.57: 'Roma, tuum nomen terris fatale regendis.'

² Aen. 6.853

The Pannonian revolt and the disaster in the Teutoburg Forest³ were salutary reminders to Augustus and to the Roman people, however, that a policy of limitless expansionism was easier to write about in poetry than it was to bring about in practice;⁴ but the genie had been let out of the bottle and, despite the inherent political and military risks involved, it was to the glory of boundless territorial expansion⁵ that Rome and her emperors were drawn; and indeed it was by this criterion that they were often judged.

The teleological aspect of Christianity meant that its programme of universal expansion did not entail the same risks that it did for a wholly temporal power like the Romans. Failure to extend the Roman Empire could be attributed to the inadequacy or weakness of an inauspicious emperor, with political or dynastic consequences, but for Christianity, although the undertaking to publicise the religion on a universal scale required human agency, its ultimate success did not lie within human control. Rather it was a sign of the end of the world and that rested with God alone:

‘And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.’

Matthew 24:14

Emphasis on mission, therefore, and the need to harvest the ‘elect’ before the final judgement is a key feature of Christian literature. The Jewish scriptures did contain the seed of proselytization,⁶ but this often had more to do with the efficacy of God than the agency of the faithful:

‘...the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations.’

Isaiah 61:11

The importance of mission as one of the core teachings of the New Testament is summed up in the so-called ‘Great Commission’ that Jesus gave to his followers in Mark 16:15:

³ A.D. 6 and 9 respectively.

⁴ Augustus was so shocked that he advised his successor Tiberius to keep within established boundaries. (Tacitus, *Annals* 1.11; cf. Dio, *Roman History* 56.33)

⁵ In Livy’s phrase ‘in immensum crescente’ (*In urbe condita*, 4.4)

⁶ Psalms 96:3

‘Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.’⁷

The onus is not on Christians to convert those they encounter (that still rests with God), but to diffuse the message as widely and to as many people as possible;⁸ it is a clear and unambiguous imperative which could not do anything other than change the general dynamic of worship towards a more proactive role for believers. This is the basis of the universal ethos of the Church and the impetus for world mission. It may even, or it may not, be the provenance of the term ‘Catholic’ itself,⁹ but this is immaterial in one sense, because the ambiguity of the word lent itself to an interpretation that favoured the universal sense, regardless of the precise meaning, and which helped to imbue the Christian Church with a worldwide vision.

Universality for the Roman Empire and the Christian Church was both an indication and a measure of their ambition, respectively, to exercise dominion on a world scale. It was an idea that presupposed the elimination, or at least the subjugation, of rival claimants to that dominion, and it implied a moral superiority on which their claim to supreme power was justified. It was also an idea that assumed separate spheres of command and control, and indeed separate identities. Of course, the relationship between the state and traditional (polytheistic) religion had been a complementary one, and Christianity, like Judaism, was monotheistic; but Christ’s admonition to his followers to ‘render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s’¹⁰ had made a distinction between the political and the spiritual that was intended to keep them separate, and obviate the kind of religio-political conflict that had afflicted the monotheistic Jews.¹¹ With the coming of Constantine, however, distinctions blurred and ambitions of conquest and mission tended towards harmony.

Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea to Ambrose, Bishop of Milan

For those pagans who might take issue with a Christian rationale for universal empire, Eusebius offers the powerful incentive of universal peace:

⁷ Cf. Matthew 28:19

⁸ Romans 10:14-17

⁹ From the Greek ‘kata holos’ meaning ‘whole’ or ‘universal’. First mentioned by Ignatius of Antioch, but meaning not entirely clear. (Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Smyrnaeans, 8.2, ‘ekklēsia kata holos’)

¹⁰ Mark 12:17

¹¹ Cf. 2 Corinthians 6:17

‘Before this, at least, independently, one dynasty ruled Syria, while another held sway over Asia Minor, and others yet over Macedonia. Still another dynasty cut off and possessed Egypt, and likewise others the Arab lands. Indeed, even the Jewish race ruled over Palestine. And *in city and country and everywhere*, just as if possessed by some truly demonic madness, *they kept murdering each other*, and spent their time in wars and battles. But two great powers – the Roman Empire, which became a monarchy at that time, and *the teaching of Christ* – proceeding as if from a single starting point, at once *tamed and reconciled all to friendship*.’¹²

He was too circumspect, of course, to mention that the Roman Empire itself had been convulsed in a fifty year period of anarchy not too long previously, but this is something that his auditeurs must have been acutely aware of. Even the twenty year period before the final defeat of Licinius in 324 had been marked by chronic disorder and civil war. Eusebius is taking full advantage, therefore, of a lull in the routine pattern of general violence which marked this era to associate universal peace with one Christian God and one ruler of the Roman Empire.¹³ This was not unusual in itself: Augustan propaganda, also constructed after a prolonged period of strife, had associated the *pax Augusta* with the gods in a way that blurred the distinction between politics and religion, and gave rise to blessings at once unlimited and universal.¹⁴ The irony of Eusebius’ Christian ‘roadmap’ to peace, however, is that it legitimises war for Christian monarchs in much the same way as Roman apologists did for pagan emperors. Before ‘all’ are reconciled to friendship, there are those who have to be ‘tamed’, leading us to understand that these people are contumacious and deserving of rebuke. To be an enemy of Constantine, therefore, is to be an enemy of Christ and vice versa, which is no more than a platform for ‘just war’.

Constantine exploited this idea in the first Christian crusade, which was directed against the Eastern emperor Licinius. Whether or not the catalogue of injuries inflicted on Christians under Licinius’ jurisdiction was a pretext for war,¹⁵ Constantine was alive to the possibilities that defending his co-religionists in the East offered. Taking the moral high ground:

‘...he judged that it would rightly be deemed a pious and holy task to secure, by the removal of an individual, the safety of the greater part of the human race.’

Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, 2.3

¹² Eus. LC. 16.5

¹³ Oration delivered in 335.

¹⁴ E.g. the *Ara Pacis* and statues of *Pax Augusta*. See Zanker (1990).

¹⁵ Eus. HE 10.8; cf. Socr. HE 1.3-4

Constantine's altruistic concern to deliver 'the greater part of the human race' from the tyrannical brutality of his fellow emperor, in the process of expanding his own dominion, is not unlike Augustus' desire to save the republic in the cause of 'liberty'.¹⁶ Socrates Scholasticus imputes just such a sentiment to Constantine with regard to his removal of another emperor, Maxentius, in 312:

'Meanwhile Maxentius tyrannically trampled on the rights and liberties of the Roman people, shamelessly violating the wives of the nobles, putting many innocent persons to death, and perpetrating other atrocities. The emperor *Constantine* being informed of these things, *exerted himself to free the Romans from the slavery under which they were groaning*, and began immediately to consider by what means he might overwhelm the tyrant.'¹⁷

Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.2

As the vicarius of God, however, it is in His service and under His guidance that peoples are liberated and territories extended. When Constantine took advantage of domestic turmoil among the Sarmatians to cross the Danube in 334, Eusebius describes it in terms which are both providential and missionary:

'With respect to the Sarmatians, God Himself brought them beneath the rule of Constantine, and subdued a nation swelling with barbaric pride in the following manner. Being attacked by the Scythians, they had entrusted their slaves with arms, in order to repel the enemy. These slaves first overcame the invaders, and then, turning their weapons against their masters, drove them from their native land. The expelled Sarmatians found that their only hope of safety was in Constantine's protection: and he, whose familiar habit it was to save men's lives, received them all within the confines of the Roman Empire...they themselves acknowledged that their past misfortune had produced a happy result, in that they now enjoyed Roman liberty in the place of savage barbarism. In this manner God added to his dominions many and various barbaric tribes.'

Life of Constantine, 4.6

¹⁶ Res Gestae Divi Augusti 1.1: 'Annos undeviginti natus exercitum privato consilio et privata impensa comparavi, per quem rem publicam a dominatione factionis oppressam in libertatem vindicavi.'

'At the age of nineteen on my own responsibility and at my own expense I raised an army, with which I successfully championed the liberty of the republic when it was oppressed by the tyranny of a faction.'

¹⁷ Cf. Oration of Constantine 'To the Assembly of the Saints', 25.

The necessity of mission as outlined in Matthew 24:14,¹⁸ and its fulfilment in the time of Constantine are adduced as proof of Christian legitimacy,¹⁹ but it is the very act of proselytising and bringing to faith itself that Eusebius now invests with sacral significance in a quite remarkable way. The emperor, disdainful to make payment for benefits bestowed 'by polluting the royal halls in the ancient way with blood and gore, nor by appeasing the underworld demons with smoke and fire and sacrifices of wholly burnt beasts', instead dedicates 'to Him his own royal soul and a mind thoroughly worthy of God.'²⁰ In addition, however, like a good shepherd he also 'makes sacrifice by leading the souls of that human flock he tends to knowledge and reverence of Him.'²¹ The traditional idea of sacrifice, therefore, as a means of requital for divine favour is redefined to reflect the evangelical character of Christianity, and mission is imbued with the sacramental theology that would realise its most extreme form in the Crusades.²²

No previous emperor had been expected to champion religious conformity in the way that Eusebius envisioned for Constantine and his heirs. He chooses to characterise the emperor as an imperial missionary, but in a way that assumes universal dominion has already been achieved, which means of course that the enemies of God and the emperor, for to be an enemy of one is to be an enemy of the other, are no longer to be found outwith the Empire but within. As I have already intimated, this was wishful thinking on the part of the bishop of Caesarea, predicated on the settled political conditions that followed the defeat of Licinius,²³ and on a millenarian interpretation of the Scriptures. Universality was not a *fait accompli*, for either the Roman state or the Christian Church, and only the most optimistic optimist would have even considered it a possibility in light of the traumas that had only so relatively recently been overcome. There were, in fact, enough enemies within and without to challenge the integrity of the Empire and the religion that Constantine had worked so assiduously hard to preserve, who had to be overcome if the idea of universality was not to be vitiated by nonconformists and heretics.

Ambrose of Milan, who was caught up in the Arian controversy from the inception of his episcopacy,²⁴ was accordingly preoccupied with the issue of unity and the need for harmony of

¹⁸ Matthew 24:14, 'And the gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.'

¹⁹ Eus. LC. 16.8

²⁰ Eus. LC. 2.5

²¹ Ibid.

²² Grace and penance as aspects of the Crusades, cf. Riley-Smith (1981), 25-9.

²³ For political conditions post Licinius' death, see Barnes (1981), 62-81.

²⁴ On Auxentius, McLynn (1994), 1-31.

doctrine as a spur for the universal spread of the Christian message. The part of his correspondence that is concerned with political Christianity²⁵ bristles with the dangers of disunity: between Christians; between Catholics; and between monarch and subjects.²⁶ Mission is not a priority in this particular context, therefore, although the need to continually publicise and nurture that faith which ‘only in the most recent times...has spread among the different peoples’ is never far away.²⁷ Referring to an issue that arose at the Council of Aquileia (381), for example, Ambrose asserts that ‘we had to discuss (it) thoroughly in case it could infect the whole body of the Church all over the world, and throw everything into confusion’.²⁸ The worldwide vision is a fundamental objective of the Church and is inviolable. There is a strong sense in the writings of Ambrose, however, that the universal Church must not only conform to Christian values but to Roman ones as well, if it is to be considered as orthodox. What could be more appropriate, therefore, in order to blacken the alternative doctrine of Arianism, than to associate it with the mores of the ‘other’, the barbarians who were beyond the Roman pale. This is what Ambrose did with regard to Julianus Valens, an Arian bishop of Poetovio in Pannonia, who came to Milan in the late 370s and quickly became the leader of the Arians in that city, much to the annoyance of its orthodox bishop. In a letter addressed to ‘The Most Blessed Christian Princes Gratian, Valentinian and Theodosius’, in which the Arian issue is discussed, he characterises him thus:

‘This man, even, so it is said, dared to appear in view of a Roman army wearing a collar and bracelets, dressed in the manner of tribesmen (more gentiliū), being desecrated by Gothic impiety, behaviour which without any doubt is sacrilege, not only in a bishop, but in anybody who is a Christian. For it is inconsistent with the custom of the Romans, even if the priests of Gothic idolatry possibly appear like this.’²⁹

We have here the seed of an idea that universality is synonymous with uniformity, and a sense that the centrifugal forces that disseminated Christianity throughout the known world are in the process of being refracted to focus on a specifically Western, specifically Catholic concept of what constitutes authentic Christianity. He goes on, in fact, in a different letter but in the same vein, to make a remarkable claim for the supremacy of the Roman Church.³⁰ While arguing that

²⁵ Principally Book Ten of his Letters and the *Epistula Extra Collectionem*.

²⁶ E.g. Ambr. Ep. 10.70.2; Ep. ex. Coll. 4.1; 6.4; 9.1.

²⁷ Ambr. Ep. 73.29

²⁸ Ambr. Ep. ex. Coll. 5.2

²⁹ Ambr. Ep. ex. Coll. 4.9

³⁰ Several letters (e.g. 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9) in the Ep. ex. Coll. deal with events at the Council of Aquileia in 381, which was primarily concerned with Arianism and its proponents. Ep. ex. Coll. 10.5 invites the three emperors to repudiate Ursinus, erstwhile candidate for the papacy itself, and an ally of the Julianus Valens mentioned above.

'beasts of that kind' (Ursinus), should not even be associated with, let alone disrupt the Church, he proceeds:

'...to implore your Clemency not to permit the Roman Church, *the head of the whole Roman world*, and with it the sacred faith of the apostles to be disturbed. For it is from there that the laws of the venerable communion flow to all its members.'³¹

This does more than assert the spiritual authority of the Church over the state; it seems to claim temporal authority as well and arrogates it to the bishop of Rome. The role of protector of the faith that Eusebius was happy to bestow upon Constantine, and which he was more than happy to fulfil, has now, in the Ambrosian world-view, devolved upon the Roman Church because it is from there that 'the laws of the venerable communion flow to all its members'. Of course, the emperors have not become redundant; the appeal to preserve orthodoxy is, after all, made to them, but this is nothing more than an appreciation of political reality. Ambrose does not naïvely believe that the Church has the power to ignore the imperial warrant; rather he recognises, and to some degree vaunts, the traditional authority of the Church to govern itself. By placing the Roman Church at the head of the Roman world and not the Christian, he is also implicitly emphasising the universal nature of that authority and laying claim to imperial status.

The Christian Empire that had been developing since the reign of Constantine was never monolithic but orthodoxy begins to take on a decidedly Catholic hue as a result of Ambrose's influence with the emperors, particularly Theodosius; and also as a result of the symbolic importance of the bishop of Rome in a religious and political context. With paganism in retreat and Arianism being tainted by association with the un-Roman 'other', Western Catholic Christianity is ideally placed to exploit its Roman connections in order to legitimise its claims to be the authentic voice of the Church. As Constantinople became the political epicentre of the Empire, it was to the West and to Rome and the papacy that the religious focus increasingly turned, and when the political structures in the West finally foundered in the following century, it was the Roman Catholic Church that was best placed to assume its universal, imperial mantle.

³¹ Ambr. Ep. ex. Coll. 5.4

Augustine, Bishop of Hippo

The heretical agents of disunity and enemies of the Church that so troubled the thinking of Ambrose are characterised by Augustine as forces for good, in that by their wickedness they engender patient endurance, wisdom, and discipline in 'the genuine, catholic members of Christ'.³² As an adjunct to the Biblically inspired prophecy that 'the unity of the Catholic Church would exist among all nations',³³ it must have been vital in reassuring adherents of the Catholic faith in troubled times that the universal kingdom of believers was still part of the manifesto. The fact that 'the city which had taken the whole world was itself taken'³⁴ was also a salutary reminder to the faithful that earthly empires are themselves vulnerable to subjugation and that to yoke the Church too closely to any such power is to make itself a hostage to fortune. This is one reason why Augustine makes such a clear distinction between the universal ambitions of the Roman Empire and those of the Christian Empire; he wants to make it clear that it is not necessarily the desire for empire per se that is wrong, but the unjust lust for power. In this respect, Rome is an exemplar of all previous empires and will meet the same end.³⁵

His philosophical justification for the Christian Empire is that:

'...it is beneficial that the good should extend their dominion far and wide, and that their reign should endure...' ³⁶

For,

'...is it reasonable, is it sensible, to boast of the extent and grandeur of empire, when you cannot show that men lived in happiness, as they passed their lives amid the horrors of war, amid the shedding of men's blood...?' ³⁷

And yet, how could the Romans, or any other power, have extended their dominion as far as they did without continual wars, one following after another.³⁸ They could not; but Augustine argues that 'even when men choose war, their only wish is for victory; which shows that their desire in fighting is

³² Aug. DCD 18.51

³³ Aug. DCD 18.49; cf. Acts 2:1-13 for the Pentecost scene which Augustine's statement is based on.

³⁴ Jer. Ep. 127.12: '...capitur urbs, quae totum cepit orbem'.

³⁵ Aug. DCD 4.4-7

³⁶ Aug. DCD 4.3

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Aug. DCD 3.10

only for peace with glory.’³⁹ The glory of war, therefore, is peace. The pax Romana is not the peace of Isaiah, however; swords are not being beaten into ploughshares, and spears into pruning hooks. Rather, it is the product of an ambition and an arrogance that cannot stop until it arrives at sovereignty:

“This ‘lust for domination’ brings great evils to vex and exhaust the whole human race. Rome was conquered by this lust when she triumphed over the conquest of Alba, and to the popular acclaim of her crime she gave the name of ‘glory’ since ‘the sinner’, as the Bible says, ‘is praised in the desires of his soul, and the man whose deeds are wicked is congratulated’.”⁴⁰

Thus, even the much lauded Roman peace is conceived, nurtured, and brought to fruition in iniquity,⁴¹ and as such, for Augustine, is debased. Christians do not, after all, live for themselves; they live for God, and must repudiate the glory of universal sovereignty and its fruits, no matter how good they appear to be, because they ultimately derive from the sin of pride and love of self. It is the very antithesis of what an earthly Christian empire should be, despite the fact that God himself allowed it to rise and flourish for a period of time.⁴² The difference, therefore, between the earthly City and the heavenly City is ultimately theological:

“We see then that the two cities were created by two kinds of love: the earthly city was created by self-love reaching to the point of contempt for God, the Heavenly City by the love of God carried as far as contempt of self. In fact, the earthly city glories in itself, the Heavenly City glories in the Lord. The former looks for glory from men, the latter finds its highest glory in God, the witness of a good conscience. The earthly lifts up its head in its own glory, the Heavenly City says to its God: ‘My glory; you lift up my head.’ In the former, the lust for domination lords it over its princes as over the nations it subjugates; in the other both those in authority and those subject to them serve one another in love, the rulers by their counsel, the subjects by obedience. The one city loves its own strength shown in its powerful leaders; the other says to its God, ‘I will love you, my Lord, my strength’.”⁴³

In the everyday world of political expediency and religious pragmatism, Augustine’s theological distinctions may have made little practical difference, but at the very least he constructs a

³⁹ Aug. DCD 19.12. Cf. 15.4 of the same work.

⁴⁰ Aug. DCD 3.14

⁴¹ Cf. Aen. 6.851-53.

‘tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento
(hae tibi erunt artes), pacique imponere morem,
parcere subiectis et debellare superbos.’

⁴² Aug. DCD 5.21

⁴³ Aug. DCD 14.28

‘Be these your arts, my Roman;
To hold the nations under your dominion
Enforcing peace till it becomes a custom.’

platform on which those Christians who would disengage themselves from Roman imperial decadence can take a stand; for by the time that the City of God was completed in the mid 420s, the Ambrosian notion of the Church and the state moving forward in concert had been shown to be misconceived. Barbarian incursions in the Western half of the Empire, for example, had led to Burgundians being installed in Germania Prima as *foederati*; Visigoths were granted similar status in Aquitania Secunda; and Vandals were invariably ravaging the provinces in Spain (before moving on to Africa). The Roman Empire in the West was not advancing: it was contracting, and so was its authority. Christians, however, although they did not need to fret over the demise, sooner or later, of their erstwhile imperial protector (how could they lament the demise of an empire inaugurated in wickedness?) should look to emulate the achievements of those who had furthered Roman dominion by the sheer force of their determination and ambition:

‘Accordingly, it was that Empire, so far-spread and so long lasting, and given lustre and glory by the heroic quality of its great men, that gave to them the return they looked for as a recompense for their resolution, while it sets before us Christians examples whose message we cannot but heed. If we do not display, in the service of the most glorious City of God, the qualities of which the Romans, after their fashion, gave us something of a model, in their pursuit of the glory of their earthly city, then we ought to feel the prick of shame.’⁴⁴

What more practical example could Augustine have chosen for Christians to follow in pursuit of their own earthly empire than that with which they were eminently familiar? What better ‘model’⁴⁵ to utilise as a matrix for the heavenly City on earth? Divested of the inherent wickedness that flows from pride and self-love, therefore, the Roman Empire offered to the Church the tradition and the experience of its own universal vision as an adjunct to the missionary project. It would be the Catholics in the West who would make the most of this legacy, because of the extensive loosening of Roman control in this area and the strength of their classical Latin heritage. Perhaps of even greater significance, however, was the symbolic importance of the city of Rome. Although supplanted in the Roman Empire by Constantinople, and even in the west by Ravenna, it lent authority to Catholic claims of universal hegemony and legitimate tradition, and as a result would soon emerge once again as the centre of a universal empire, as well as the expression of Augustine’s heavenly City on earth.

⁴⁴ Aug. DCD 5.18

⁴⁵ Latin text of DCD 5.18, ‘...et nobis proposita necessariae commotionis exempla.’

The Gallo-Roman Bishops

Sidonius Apollinaris, Bishop of Clermont

Sidonius Apollinaris, bishop of Clermont, was a man who revelled in the glory of Rome's universal Empire, but who was altogether more reticent when it came to the universal pretensions of his Church. This is undoubtedly due in part to his personal predilections which, as I suggested previously, were more classical than ecclesiastical, but which must also have been greatly influenced by the demoralising circumstances he found himself in. The bishop's ministry, like his fellow Catholic bishop Ruricius, was discharged, after all, during a particularly difficult period for the orthodox Church in Gaul, deprived as it was of effective imperial patronage and challenged by the very substantial presence of Arians from the eastern provinces of Germania. It is hardly surprising that in a very real sense Sidonius' world became increasingly smaller and more focused on the domestic at a time when political and religious questions of local import were becoming ever more intense. To wonder at the narrowness of his perspective, therefore, is perhaps to underestimate the nature of the context in which he carried out his service.

Predictably, it is in the self-referential world of imperial panegyric that Sidonius the poet employs the vocabulary of universality most often: empire, sovereignty, imperium, provinces, dominion;⁴⁶ and it is the eulogy that allows him to magnify as well as glorify Rome's universal government. In a panegyric delivered to the emperor Majorian at Lyon in 458, for example, he catalogues the fruits of empire in a way that points up the breadth of the Empire:

'So when she (Bellona) had seated her (Roma) on the throne in the midst, all lands flocked to her at once. The provinces display their several fruits; the Indian brings ivory, the Chaldean nard, the Assyrian jewels, the Chinaman silk, the Sabaean frankincense; Attica brings honey, Phoenicia palms, Sparta oil, Arcadia horses, Epirus mares, Gaul flocks and herds, the Chalybian arms, the Libyan corn, the Campanian wine, the Lydian gold, the Arab amber, Panchaia myrrh, Pontus castory, Tyre purple, and Corinth bronzes; Sardinia offers silver, Spain ships...'

Panegyric to Majorian, 40-9

⁴⁶ He wrote three panegyrics for emperors: Avitus (456), Majorian (458), Anthemius (468).

This is the very essence of Roman imperialism, a flavour of the kind of past triumph that the panegyrist exhorts his audience to recall at the very beginning of the eulogy.⁴⁷ And yet only three years earlier, in May 455, Rome itself had been looted and ransacked by the Vandal king Geiseric, an act of imperial irony when contrasted with fruits of empire listed above, and the *coup de grâce*, as it were, to any delusions of universal hegemony that may have existed in the West, outwith the hyperbole of panegyric verse. Sidonius would not have been deceived, however, about the frailties of Roman authority. In his panegyric to Avitus,⁴⁸ he makes reference to the Hunnic incursions ('mighty upheaval') that threatened the Western part of the Empire in 451-52 and turned his native Gaul into a theatre of war:

'...suddenly the barbarian world, rent by a mighty upheaval, poured the whole north into Gaul. After the warlike Rugian comes the fierce Gepid, with the Gelonian close by; the Burgundian urges on the Scirian; forward rush the Hun, the Bellonotian, the Neurian, the Bastarnian, the Thuringian, the Bructeran, and the Frank...'

Panegyric to Avitus, 319-25

The world that Sidonius once looked out on, both literally and metaphorically, had irrupted upon his long established reality and imposed a new reality that did not allow him to look far beyond his own milieu. It is a melancholic Sidonius, therefore, who proclaims Anthemius, in his last imperial panegyric, as:

'...the man to whom our commonwealth, like a ship overcome by tempests and without a pilot, has committed her broken frame, to be more deftly guided by a worthy steersman, that she may no more fear storm or pirate.'

Panegyric to Anthemius, 12-17

With the defeat of the Huns,⁴⁹ Gaul was delivered from the immediate threat of aggression, but the removal of this threat and the chronic weakness of imperial government only served to foster Visigothic territorial ambitions,⁵⁰ ambitions which were heightened under the kingship of Euric (r. 466 – 484). His determination to extend the Visigothic kingdom as far as the Loire and the

⁴⁷ Sid. Ep. 5.1, 'Concipe praeteritos, respublica, mente triumphos.' Trans: 'Picture to your minds, O Roman people, all your past triumphs.'

⁴⁸ Eparchius Avitus, Western emperor 455-6, to whose daughter, Papianilla, Sidonius was married.

⁴⁹ Their defeat at the Catalaunian Plains in June 451 by an alliance of Romans, Visigoths, Franks, Alans and Burgundians.

⁵⁰ The Visigoths had been in Gaul since 418, steadily expanding their territory.

Rhone by 'brute force'⁵¹ put the region of the Auvergne and its capital city, Clermont, in the direct line of fire, and the sieges of Clermont which lasted from 471 until 475,⁵² meant that the newly consecrated bishop⁵³ did not have much time to focus on past glories, either personal or imperial:

'There is a rumour that the Goths have moved their camp into Roman soil; we luckless Arvernians are always the gateway to such incursions, for we kindle our enemies' hatred in a special degree; the reason is, that their failure so far to make the channel of the Loire the boundary of their territories between the Atlantic and the Rhône is due, with Christ's help, solely to the barrier which we interpose. As for the surrounding country, its whole length and breadth has long since been swallowed up by the insatiate aggression of that threatening power.'⁵⁴

There is a sense, however, that, despite his continued attachment to the idea of Rome, his sensibilities were beginning to change. Perhaps because of the unavoidable conclusion that Roman government in the West was petering out, he claimed to 'dread less (Euric's) designs against our Roman city-walls than against our Christian laws.'⁵⁵ This may have been an exaggeration of the Visigothic king's animus,⁵⁶ or a misinterpretation of his motives, but it engendered in Sidonius such a feeling of isolation and persecution that he even began to despair for the future of his Church. Reflecting on the consequences of Euric's interdiction on the appointment of new bishops, he laments:

'What comfort is left to the faithful when not only the teaching of the clergy but even the memory of them perishes? If, when one of the clergy dies, he does not admit an heir to his office by handing on his benediction, then assuredly it is the priesthood that dies in that church, not the priest. And what hope would you say remains when the end of a man's life implies the end of religion?'⁵⁷

It was natural, therefore, surely, that a man who contemplated the end of his religion and his race and his heritage, would look upwards towards heaven and eternity, rather than outwards towards universal empires. His prognosis was too pessimistic, however, and Visigothic control did not

⁵¹ Sid. Ep. 3.1.5

⁵² Stevens (1993), 146-7 argues that it was more of a blockade than a siege, in the sense that we understand it.

⁵³ Circa 470.

⁵⁴ Sid. Ep. 7.1.1

⁵⁵ Sid. Ep. 7.6.6

⁵⁶ The king it may be remembered who Sidonius said found the very word 'Catholic' in his mouth repugnant. (Sid. Ep. 7.6.6)

⁵⁷ Sid. Ep. 7.6.9. Writing to one of the bishops who negotiated the treaty which handed Clermont over to the Visigoths in 475, Sidonius again protested: 'Soon our ancestors will no longer glory in the name of ancestor when they are ceasing to have descendants.' (Sid. Ep. 7.7.5)

spell the end of Catholic Christianity in the Auvergne. Nevertheless, he should not be judged harshly with the benefit of hindsight because he lacked foresight or optimism. His battles were fought during a nadir for the Catholic Church in Gaul when the adversary was in the ascendancy and when survival was a more immediate concern than expansion.

Ruricius, Bishop of Limoges

Sidonius' status as a symbol of Catholic orthodoxy was not lost on his relative and co-religionist Ruricius:

*'I desire, therefore, My Lord, I desire, I say, to be replenished by your nourishment, to drink at your fountain, to be satiated by your feasts, to be fattened at your banquets: if any guest at your table, with you serving did not taste this fare with the tip of his tongue, but gulped it down, craving it with the innermost parts of his spirit, and departed in order to ponder it later in the privacy of his heart, he would begin to burst forth with incessant belches in praise of the omnipotent lord, replenished in his heart although starving in his mouth, while satiated he is hungry and being hungry he is satiated, to be satiated yet more in rebirth. Nor can nourishment be lacking whose fodder is in your word. Therefore, through your patronage, provide that I shall be a partaker in these delicacies, and summon supporters for me as I struggle beyond the limit of my abilities, and likewise pray that I will not be found separated from the sheepfold entrusted to you. Restore this errant sheep from the pastures of the world to the folds of the Lord, for I have faith that by your intercessions it is possible for one who merits being your disciple to become your lamb.'*⁵⁸

This letter was written a decade or more before Ruricius became a bishop⁵⁹ and suggests that he is moving towards his religious vocation. Beyond the bombast, there is a clear recognition that Ruricius is keen to imbibe the traditional Catholic doctrines that Sidonius represents and entreats him to 'summon supporters' to nurture him in his faith. One of the supporters (auxiliatores) that Sidonius recommended may have been Faustus, bishop of Riez, who occupies the first two places in the corpus of letters written by Ruricius, and who was the author of five other extant letters written to Ruricius.⁶⁰ The first of these letters contains, at least in part, a reaffirmation of the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity; while in the second Faustus who, like Sidonius, was also

⁵⁸ Rur. 1.9.

⁵⁹ Mathisen (1995), 118 dates this letter to c. 472/3.

⁶⁰ This is suggested by Mathisen (1995), 119 n.5, and is entirely plausible.

banished by Euric,⁶¹ commends Ruricius on his adoption of the religious life and recommends that the exilic life be seen as an opportunity to win souls:

‘...as we acquire new citizens⁶² through the commerce of charity, as we rejoice over the salvation of those acquired, positioned among these benefits we scoff at our present exile, and we recognise that we have not lost our homeland but transformed it.’⁶³

Ruricius’ developing faith is being fashioned and heightened in a context in which Catholicism, out of favour politically in Visigothic Gaul, reverts to its traditional form of mission, fortified by orthodox doctrine, in order to maintain and strengthen a position which might otherwise degenerate into decline. It was at once a pragmatic response in uncertain circumstances and a recognition that the universal mission of the Church can only be considered when domestic difficulties have been addressed. As will be seen when we look at Avitus, it was the next generation of Catholic leader in Gaul who found the confidence to look at the Church beyond his own borders.

Ruricius was faithful to his mentors. Of the eighty-two letters that make up the collection thirty-four cite or allude to Scriptural passages,⁶⁴ while others refer to Christian festivals,⁶⁵ Catholic literature,⁶⁶ and related religious themes.⁶⁷ He employs his correspondence to comfort, encourage, rebuke, and instruct in the faith, thereby nurturing devotion to the Catholic Church in his addressees. A certain Taurentius, in reply to an admonitory epistle from his bishop, demonstrates just the kind of response that Ruricius’ style of ministry could elicit:

‘The letter of Your Sanctity has aroused me, nourished by its spiritual food, to hope for the future, and your words, shining with prophetic clarity, have blazed forth with the purest light and have dispersed the clouds of errors. I recognise an affection full of charity, and I embrace the sincerity of your pious reproof.’⁶⁸

Devoid of much of the lugubrious pessimism of Sidonius, Ruricius concentrates on the spiritual aspects of his ministry and instils in his constituents an optimism that looks forward to the future rather than dwelling on the past or the challenging conditions of the present. It is a

⁶¹ He was in exile from c. 477 – 485 and it appears it has commenced at the time of this letter, c. 477.

⁶² An allusion to Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei*.

⁶³ Faustus, *Epistula ‘Propitia divinitate’* (SG no.2). Found in Mathisen (1995), 96.

⁶⁴ E.g. Rur. 1.7; 1.17; 2.2; 2.3; 2.4

⁶⁵ E.g. Rur. 1.14; 2.45; 2.64

⁶⁶ E.g. Rur. 1.6; 1.8; 2.17

⁶⁷ E.g. Rur. 2.3; 2.24; 2.33

⁶⁸ Taurentius, *Epistula ‘Litterae sanctitatis’* (SG no.8). Found in Mathisen (1995), 168.

remarkable feature of his correspondence, in fact, that he makes no direct reference to the Roman Empire in a body of work that stretches from c. 475 to c. 506. This, and the heavy focus on Catholic themes that fill his epistles, suggest that as far as Ruricius was concerned Roman Gaul was no longer as important as Catholic Gaul, and that the promotion of its own 'core values' was the best way for the Church to come to terms with the territorial particularism and local self interest that the diminishing Roman Empire had thrust upon it. In practice, however, the Catholic Church was fighting to establish its authority at a provincial level, in order to uphold its claim to speak with a universal voice.

Avitus, Bishop of Vienne

The main turning point in this period for the Catholic Church in Gaul came when Clovis, king of the Franks, converted to Catholicism from Arianism; but it would be a mistake to assume that this signalled the end of the political uncertainty or that the orthodox faithful felt secure about the future. In letters to his Catholic monarch Sigismund, for example, Avitus betrays his anxiety that security for Catholics may depend on Sigismund's survival and asks him to forgive his 'cowardice for its excessive fear'.⁶⁹ He was also reluctant to appropriate Arian churches that had been turned over to Catholic use, lest the Catholics lose their princely protector and:

'...some heretic might reign and whatever persecution he instigates against people or places, he will be said to have done it, not out of sectarian bigotry, but as retaliation.'⁷⁰

And yet there was no question that Clovis' conversion boosted Catholic confidence and altered the political configuration of the region. 'Your faith is our victory',⁷¹ is a clear indication that Avitus saw the religious struggle in terms of a 'winner takes all' contest in which the Catholics, 'a people, up till recently captive',⁷² had prevailed. Which is why he did not give a great deal of thought to the idea of religious pluralism, preferring instead to make the most of this change in fortune by expanding abroad and protecting the purity of the orthodox Church at home. It is in the spirit of Eusebius to Constantine, therefore, that he makes this request of Clovis:

⁶⁹ Avit. Ep. 91 & 92. For the dates, see the concordance of letters in Shanzer and Wood (2002), 238-40.

⁷⁰ Avit. Ep. 7, addressed to Victorius, bishop of Grenoble.

⁷¹ Avit. Ep. 46, in which Avitus writes to Clovis congratulating him on his recent conversion and baptism.

⁷² Avit. Ep. 46

‘There is only one thing that I would like to be increased. Because God has made your race completely his own through you, please offer the seeds of faith from the treasure-house of your heart to more distant races too: since they still live in their natural ignorance, no seeds of heresy have corrupted. Do not be ashamed or find it troublesome even to take the step of sending missions for this purpose to build up the party of the God who has raised up yours so greatly.’⁷³

To Stephanus, bishop of Lyon, he advises caution when dealing with a Donatist⁷⁴ seeking acceptance into the Catholic Church:

‘However much care servants devote to the fields of the Lord, among their repeated efforts to plant, there inevitably spring up things that ought to be cut down. Therefore a fine interest-payment consisting of salvation to be acquired through these works accrues to your vigilant and careful efforts. But among the tares of Arian seed which, to make matters worse, have been scattered far and wide in their manifold corruption, I cannot guess whence this enemy seed, far from new to be sure, but, at least, rare, has shown its face, or what wind brought this foreign contagion to a clean world.’⁷⁵

The sentiments expressed in these two excerpts are those of power and dominion. The former assumes the quiescence, indeed the passive obedience, of those peoples who live in ‘darkness’; while the latter taints alternative views as subversive, inimical to the truth, ‘foreign’. Both excerpts contain the language and the precepts of imperialism, and in the assumption of superiority provide the justification for a universal warrant.

There is no hint of coercion in Avitus’ evangelical agenda, and in fact he commends and recommends, as above with Clovis, the idea that monarchs lead by example rather than compel.⁷⁶ The import of what he writes is no less hegemonic, however, than that of any secular imperialist and his aspirations are no less universal. His appeal to Clovis demonstrates that by this juncture the position of the Catholics in Gaul had improved enough to reignite ambitions that had been in abeyance for several decades, and signalled that the spiritual and necessarily apolitical approach of Ruricius had been replaced by the expedient of political reality. Avitus was shrewd

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ The Donatists were a Christian sect in North-West Africa in the 4th and 5th centuries, who differed from orthodox Catholics in some areas of doctrine, to such a degree that they alone considered themselves to be the one true Church.

⁷⁵ Avit. Ep. 26

⁷⁶ In the fragment of a letter (Ep. 8) to a pope (perhaps Symmachus), Avitus refers to an unknown king who converted to Catholicism who, ‘like a standard-bearer for the Christians took up the banners of truth to carry them before his people, by enticing everyone by his encouragement, but compelling no one by force, he gained his own people by his own example...’. See Shanzer and Wood (2002), 220-223.

Avitus also hoped that Gundobad could bring his people to fruition in salvation by his ‘Intelligence or Eloquence’ (Ep. 30).

enough to recognise, therefore, as did other Catholic bishops no doubt, that the ambition of a universal empire rested to a large degree on the support of the political power. If his fear was proportionate to his ambition, it was because he was acutely aware through experience of just how important this patronage had become to the Church.

Conclusion

With the demise of the Roman Empire in the West, the Latin Church in Gaul found itself in the incongruous position of being a universal institution hamstrung by local rulers. In this context, the threat to its authority from its Arian adversary should not be underestimated, and can only be discounted with the benefit of hindsight. Hindsight is not necessary, however, to recognise how critical it is to proselytise members of the local elites in such circumstances, and this is something which makes Avitus' correspondence with the Catholic monarchs Sigismund and Clovis, as well as the Arian Gundobad, a valuable source of information. Unsurprisingly the letters contain elements of sycophancy, didacticism, and admonition, but the tenor is overwhelmingly geared towards the Catholic cause. When Avitus thirsts for Gundobad's salvation,⁷⁷ it is so that he in turn can bring his people 'to fruition in salvation';⁷⁸ his praise for Clovis' conversion is accompanied by an exhortation 'to take the step of sending missions';⁷⁹ he enjoins the eastern emperor Anastasius, in the name of Sigismund, 'to let religion be promoted by the exercise of power'.⁸⁰ The implication of what he writes is that Catholic monarchs have a responsibility to use their power in the service of the Catholic Church.⁸¹ This is a principle that allowed the Church to transcend the physical barriers that were imposed on it with the break-up of the Roman Empire in the West, because it put the onus of mission on the ruler within each territory and did not necessarily require an ambitious imperialist to cross borders and establish religious conformity. Borders were good, in fact, because they emphasised the geographic limitations of the temporal power, which threw the universality of the Church into relief, a contrast which also enhanced the political authority of the latter. Nor was the ruler any longer a high priest of the order of Melchizedek, or even Constantine. The growing power of the bishop of Rome had also narrowed the scope for

⁷⁷ Avit. Ep. 4

⁷⁸ See note 69 above.

⁷⁹ Avit. Ep. 7

⁸⁰ Avit. Ep. 93

⁸¹ Cf. Augustine in DCD 5.24, 'We Christians call rulers happy...if they put their power at the service of God's majesty, to extend his worship far and wide.'

doctrinal interference,⁸² which again saw authority and influence ebb away from the temporal power. The Church was now in a strong position to enhance its universal status and inherit the mantle of the Roman Empire.

⁸² In Ep. 39, Avitus refers to the pope as 'highest priest of the Roman church', which Shanzer and Wood (2002) believe to be one of the earliest, if not the earliest, surviving expressions of papal primacy in doctrinal matters to have come from outside Rome (pp. 123-124).

III

Monarchy & Christian Leadership

To trace fully the origins of sacral monarchy, or divine kingship, one must journey through a vast continuum of space and time, and across a somewhat problematic historical landscape. Evidently, that is not possible here.¹ What is possible is the brief consideration of some aspects of its origins, in particular those elements which transferred directly into or influenced the Roman imperial monarchy, before passing into the Romano-Christian monarchy inaugurated under Constantine. Arguably the most influential of these was the phenomenon of the absolute ruler which arose in the Hellenistic kingdoms of the third century BC following the death of Alexander the Great and the apportionment of his extensive empire.² Antigonos Monophthalmos ('the One-Eyed') is widely recognised as the first of these Hellenistic kings, the so-called Diadochoi, assuming the title of basileus in 306.³ Others were soon to follow, with Ptolemy assuming the same title in 304, followed immediately by Seleukos, Lysimachos, and Kassandros.⁴ As the first to adopt this status, Antigonos had the greatest influence on the nature of Hellenistic kingship, fashioning an imperial office which fused intimately the military and the political with the religious. For example, his introduction of divine honours for a living monarch and cult epithets were to become standard features of Hellenistic kingship.⁵ And it was such ideas, and such an elevation to 'superhuman' status, that the emperor Augustus sought for himself when he constructed and dedicated temples and sacrifices to Divus Augustus.⁶ Despite some scholarly claims that there was no divine worship of Augustus in his lifetime, Gradel has, in my opinion, shown this dogma to be misguided, highlighting that the sources, namely Dio and Suetonius, only claim the absence of a state temple in Rome, not the absence of a private cult.⁷ Even so, however, evidence has been set forth for the presence of a state temple in Rome.⁸ What cannot be denied is the Augustan legacy of emperor worship and/or divine monarchy manifest in many epigraphic finds which prove that later emperors were often worshipped in private cults.⁹

¹ For a far more in-depth study of divine kingship and one which does attempt (successfully, I think) to cover this vast space/time continuum, see Oakley (2010).

² For this discussion, I am heavily indebted to the erudition and research of Hahn (2005); Billows (1997); Oakley (2010).

³ Hahn (2005), 459; Billows (1997), 157-60

⁴ Billows (1997), 159

⁵ Billows (1997), 323

⁶ Gradel (2002), 77; cf. Al-Azmeh (2001), 24-8; 44

⁷ Gradel (2002), 74-5

⁸ Gradel (2002), 75

⁹ Ibid.

Arguably the most significant of these emperors was Diocletian (284 – 305), who emerged following the so-called ‘Fifty Year Anarchy’, and whose period of rule signified the end for any republican pretensions, transforming the Empire into an undisguised military despotism.¹⁰ Given the self-conscious nature of this transformation, it is unsurprising that the ideology of Hellenistic kingship should have appealed to Diocletian, who in turn also proceeded to adopt the traditional regalia, ritual and exotic ceremonial associated with the Persian royal court, in the same way Alexander the Great did six centuries earlier.¹¹ Eastern practices such as *adoratio* and *proskynesis* (acts of obeisance in the presence of a god-king, or godlike king) became commonplace in the Roman court. Evidently, therefore, it would be naïve to suggest that such a significant and far-reaching concept like sacral kingship could derive from a single source. The conspicuous form which it assumed under Diocletian’s revival was a subtle (and not so subtle) amalgamation of many different kingship theories and the result of much ancient scholarly and philosophical deliberation on the institution of the monarchy.¹² One can even find substantial evidence of sacralised kingship as far back as the tenth century BC in ancient Judaic kingship, which, although only a local and tribal phenomenon,¹³ was geographically and historically proximate enough to have an important role in the fashioning of a new kingship model for the first Romano-Christian emperor, Constantine, with whom this chapter begins.

Eusebius and Constantine

With the reign of the first Christian emperor Constantine ‘the Great’, the concept of the sole ruler (Greek, ‘*mon-archos*’) was to assume a new direction. Of course, the ‘sole ruler’ was by no means a new political figure; and, as has been mentioned above, the representation of this sole ruler as ‘divine’ or as possessing god-like qualities and characteristics was distinctly unoriginal. It is true, therefore, that Hellenistic kingship theory, with its quasi-divine rulers, and the conspicuous revival of some of their practices by the Roman pagan emperor Diocletian at the end of the third century, afforded Christianity an exemplar which was helpful in facilitating the integration of its own peculiar ideas of divine kingship into the pre-existing Roman political system. Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, encapsulates this new theory in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*,

¹⁰ Oakley (2010), 15; see also Jones (1964), 37-42, for more in-depth analysis of Diocletian’s politics.

¹¹ See Oakley (2010: 33) for Alexander’s use of Persian court ceremonial. For Diocletian’s inevitable adoption of popular practices associated with divine kingship, see *ibid.* 35: ‘The influence of this sacral vision of kingship, along with the general process of Hellenisation of which it was but one aspect, was to reach its peak toward the end of the third century AD.’

¹² Al-Azmeh (2001), 24-5

¹³ Al-Azmeh’s observation (2001), x

establishing the monarch, imbued now with the sovereign authority of Christ, as the divinely-ordained representative of God on Earth:¹⁴

‘Thus, it was not only those honoured with the high priesthood, anointed with prepared oil for the symbol’s sake, who were distinguished among the Hebrews with the name of Christ, but the kings too; for they, at the bidding of God, received the chrism from prophets and were thus made Christs in image, in that they, too, bore in themselves the patterns of the kingly, sovereign authority of the one true Christ, the divine Word who reigns over all.’¹⁵

Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 3.6

And indeed, the bishop develops this thread further in his *In Praise of Constantine*, albeit within the more grandiose and hyperbolic context associated with imperial panegyric, both pagan and Christian.¹⁶ Far from presenting the emperor as a lay Christian believer or as a regular monarch, Constantine is said to be ‘present everywhere and watching over everything’,¹⁷ managing ‘affairs below with an upward gaze, to steer by the archetypal form’.¹⁸ He also ‘grows strong in his model of monarchic rule, which the Ruler of All has given to the race of man alone of those on earth’.¹⁹ In short, Constantine is an emperor ‘invested...with a semblance of heavenly authority’,²⁰ whose role as leader transcends that of an earthly administrator. He is an exemplar to his subjects;²¹ the shepherd and watchman of his flock;²² an interpreter to the Word of God;²³ the high priest of the Christian religion;²⁴ the chief missionary;²⁵ a new prophet for a new age of Christian domination.²⁶

It could be argued that Eusebius’ vision for Constantine varied only slightly from the Roman paradigm which preceded it, that is the model of emperorship which was set forth during the rule of the emperor Augustus. He too intended his reign to appear divinely-ordained, foretold hundreds of years before his own birth, and claimed direct descent from the traditional Roman goddess Venus. Book Six of Vergil’s *Aeneid* is an enduring record of his attempts to be

¹⁴ Aalders (1975), 26-7

¹⁵ Translation taken from Williamson’s 1989 edition.

¹⁶ On Eusebius’ medium of panegyric, see Young (2005), 650.

¹⁷ Eus. LC. 3.4

¹⁸ Eus. LC. 3.5

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Eus. LC. 3.3: ‘...a model of piety and truth to all on earth.’

²² Eus. LC. 2.5: ‘...and just as the good shepherd...’; cf. LC. 6.2

²³ Eus. LC. 2.5. Constantine the emperor is the key figure at church councils like Nicaea in 325, not the clerics or bishops. It was he who offered a creed that would be the statement of belief for all the Christians within the empire. Constantine, therefore, assumes much responsibility for the church’s success or failure; he proactively influences the church, something which some Christians did not approve of.

²⁴ Eus. LC. 6.1-2

²⁵ Eus. LC. 2.5

²⁶ Eus. LC. 6.18-20

represented as the 'favoured one' of the gods, their representative on earth.²⁷ Perhaps a less hackneyed example of Augustus' quest, however, can be found in the poet Horace's *Carmen Saeculare*:²⁸

'Hac arte Pollux et vagus Hercules
Enisus arcis attigit igneas,
Quos inter Augustus recumbens
Purpureo bibet ore nectar, ...'

'By this virtue Pollux and wandering Hercules
In this struggle touched the fiery citadels,
Among whom reclining Augustus
Will drink nectar with ruddy lips...'²⁹

Carm. 3.3.9-12

And also,

'Caelo tonantem credidimus Iovem,
Regnare: praesens divus habebitur
Augustus adiectis Britannis
Imperio gravibusque Persis.'

'We have believed that thundering Jupiter reigns
In heaven: Augustus will be considered a god
Among us when the Britons and troublesome
Parthians are added to the empire.'

Carm. 1.1.1-4

Where, however, Augustus was primarily a political figure who manufactured his claims to be the gods' earthly representative for the legitimacy and propagandistic value traditional Roman religion could afford him,³⁰ the Christian monarch, as portrayed by Eusebius, was to be chiefly a religious leader – the head bishop, as it were – whose rule was imbued with religious significance beyond the mere symbolic or political, and whose role was taken directly from the text of Scripture. He is depicted as a new 'Moses', leading his people out from the darkness of paganism and into the freedom and light of Christianity.³¹ Hence, just as Moses journeyed up to Mount Sinai to speak to God alone,³² so Constantine is shown to be in sole communion with his heavenly master, who in turn instructs the monarch personally with regard to how he should lead his expectant and often wayward flock. Eusebius' oration is, therefore, not a celebration of

²⁷ Cf. *Aen.* 1.254-296; for the iconography so vital to the successful dissemination of such an idea, cf. Zanker (1990).

²⁸ See Putnam (2000: 45-50). I can hardly do justice here to Putnam's exquisite analysis of the complex relationship between Horace, as poet, and Augustus, as emperor.

²⁹ Both translations taken from Putnam (2000), 46-7.

³⁰ For this widely-held belief, cf. Zanker (1990); Schneid (2005), 176-177; Gradel (2004), 110.

³¹ Eusebius compares Constantine to Moses directly in his *Life of Constantine* (VC 1.12, 20). See Barnes (1981: 271) for more reasons on why Moses was a favourable, and appropriate, comparison.

³² *Exodus* 19:20-25

Constantine's political achievements; neither is it a flattering appraisal of the latter's majestic character and status, even though it may at first seem to exaggerate the 'special relationship' between the emperor and God.³³ Rather Eusebius' oration is focussed on the person of God himself. For this reason, where Horace embellishes Augustus with an aura of divinity and bestows glory (as appropriate) on the emperor for his successes,³⁴ Eusebius relays the glory for all of Constantine's achievements over his thirty-year reign to God alone, because God is the source of and the reason for his successes and his authority. Eusebius' high commendation, therefore, is directed towards the institution of the Christian monarchy, not towards the monarch himself.

Centuries later, a similar comparison can be made with the emperor Diocletian, who established himself as the vice-regent of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on Earth.³⁵ If subtle political manoeuvring can be argued for in terms of Augustus' sacralisation of his monarchical position, then the same cannot be said for the emperor Diocletian, who unashamedly declared himself 'divine', either for the sake of vanity or for some modicum of personal protection.³⁶ As previously discussed, Diocletian's adoption of Eastern practices such as proskynesis demonstrated a clear attempt by the emperor to associate himself with the model of sacral kingship which came to prominence under the Hellenistic rulers of the fourth and third centuries BC. Heather's position that kingship under Rome had always been sacralised, however, with only a change in nomenclature under Christianity, is surely to misinterpret Eusebius' *Fürstenspiegel* and the position which it takes on the significance and role of the Christian monarch 'within the system'.³⁷ It is indeed true that both forms of monarchy, pagan and Christian, were sacralised, but on distinctly differing terms.³⁸ The key difference is surely in the method of justification for the monarch's authority. The traditional values of kingship theory, values which could give a king divinely-sanctioned authority [phusis (descent) and to dikaion (legitimacy)] – and those values which Hellenistic kingship was specifically based on, i.e. the ability to command an army and handle affairs competently, were now held in theory to be far less important, given that the validation for the Christian monarch's power could now be found in the pages of the Bible.³⁹ A good king

³³ Eusebius is helping to create a Christian monarch whose rule and moral conduct would merit or be worthy of a Christian successor.

³⁴ Horace can afford to, as Putnam states (2000: 47), 'eulogise Augustus...only when the emperor deserves such recognition'.

³⁵ Jones (1964), 38; cf. Garnsey (2005), 411.

³⁶ Jones (1964), 40

³⁷ Heather (2006), 123

³⁸ For Constantine's retention of all the pagan courtly ceremonial associated with sacral kingship, albeit without the idolatrous aspects of the imperial cult, see Al-Azmeh (2001), 28-9.

³⁹ Constantine's position as God's representative is conferred upon him by a Church who has universal authority. Diocletian's position is conferred upon himself. Constantine's position as divine representative is inherently

was now a king who obeyed God's will, and those who opposed the king, simultaneously opposed the will of God.⁴⁰

Furthermore, Eusebius' kingship model should, in theory, be both unalterable and transferable, because it is based on Scripture, which never changes in either its content or its ideals. His frequent references to Constantine's sons and heirs whilst describing his vision for the Church, illustrate the point.⁴¹ And, of course, the *Fürstenspiegel* which Eusebius presents in his panegyric to Constantine is entirely compatible with the model of the king which is found in Scripture, particularly with the exemplar offered by the Old Testament King David, with whom implicit comparisons are regularly drawn within the text. Even Eusebius' discussion of the Romano-Christian monarch's authority in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* mentioned above, uses vocabulary and phrases similar to those found in the Old Testament, and recalls the anointment by the prophet Samuel of King David in 1 Samuel 16.⁴²

In many ways, therefore, the text of the Bible constituted a pre-existing *Fürstenspiegel* for Constantine's reign. If there was ever any doubt regarding the legitimacy of Constantine's Christian emperorship, as there undoubtedly would have been, one would only have to open Scripture to confirm the empyrean source of his authority. David's statement in Psalms would have been more than appropriate: '...for kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations...'⁴³ Constantine is God's proxy, God's anointed in the same way David was; for this reason, Eusebius includes a discussion of the virtues of 'the Monarchy' within his *In Praise of Constantine*.⁴⁴ His erudite audience would unquestionably have detected and understood the implied link between God's favoured constitutional system and the man who had been 'providentially' put forward to head it; in the sense that Christian leaders like Constantine (in theory) could not become kings by their own merit: they had to be put in place by God.⁴⁵ The traditional use of 'divinity' by Hellenistic kings to legitimise their position becomes, therefore, an afterthought for Christian kings. Their rule is as legitimate as the source of their power; their authority, gained not from the winning of battles or the capturing of territory, but bestowed upon them via the will of God; their actions based on the moral code of Scripture, and not on the arbitrary, limitless

stronger, therefore, and should, in theory, require less justification; Eusebius' *In Praise of Constantine* is in essence explaining why Constantine's position should not require explanation or justification.

⁴⁰ MacCormack (1981: 150), 'In the Christian empire of the fourth century the enemy of religion and the enemy of the state were explicitly united as one.' In other words, Rome's enemy was God's enemy, and vice versa.

⁴¹ Eus. VC. 1.1: 'On earth I behold his sons, like some new reflectors of his brightness...now, being invested with his very self, and graced by his accomplishments, for the excellence of their piety they are proclaimed by the titles of Sovereign, Augustus, Worshipful, and Emperor.'

⁴² 1 Samuel 16:8

⁴³ Psalms 22:28

⁴⁴ Cf. Al-Azmeh (2001: 44), 'Imperial monarchy and Christianity were born as one and together; they eradicated principles of provincialism and nationalism in favour of empire.'

⁴⁵ As opposed to Hellenistic kings, of course, who could become kings by their own merit: see Aalders (1975), 21-2.

absolutism which characterised the Principate from the time of its inception. This was the beginning of the divine right of kings.

For Eusebius, however, the hopeful, almost triumphant, tone of his panegyric to Constantine masks the stark reality of the uncertainty of the times in which he lived. The panegyric, in celebration of Constantine's thirtieth year as emperor, was at the same time a gentle reminder of the limited period of rule the emperor had remaining. The horrific Diocletianic persecutions would have been etched into the mind of many a Christian bishop,⁴⁶ and given the recent history of intense political upheaval and instability in the Western half of the Empire, it was not unrealistic to assume that the progress made by Christians under Constantine could be eradicated dramatically with the accession of a new pagan emperor following the latter's death. Indeed, Julian's successful but short-lived pagan revolution in 361 is proof enough, in my opinion, that the emerging Christian church of the 330s would have struggled to retain its hold on power in the event of a new pagan emperor.⁴⁷ Eusebius' main concern, therefore, must have been the search to find a role for the Church within the Empire. Fortunately for him, and for Christians, Constantine was succeeded by his son Constantius II, a fellow Christian, which guaranteed favour, or at least no persecution, for another extended period of time. Eusebius' successors, or fellow bishops, however, were to face a more difficult challenge, as the religious landscape adapted to a continually fluctuating set of historical and political circumstances.

Ambrose and Theodosius

If Eusebius' duty as a leading Christian bishop was to find a role for the Church within the Empire, it would not be entirely untrue to suggest that Ambrose, the 'reluctant' bishop of Milan,⁴⁸ sought to achieve the reverse. His appointment in 374 to the bishopric came at a time when the Western Christian Church was only just recovering from a period of persecution under the pagan emperor Julian.⁴⁹ The reign of the emperor Valentinian I (364 – 375) had brought some stability but, although an orthodox Christian, he cared little for doctrinal differences and

⁴⁶ For Diocletian's persecution and its effect on Christian worship, see Jones (1964), 71-6.

⁴⁷ For the contrary view, see Barnes (1981), 255: 'Constantine carried through a religious reformation which could never be undone'. I personally disagree with this sentiment, given the fact that Julian successfully instigated his own religious revolution in 361. Had he not been killed, it would surely be a realistic possibility that Constantine's reformation may have been undone.

⁴⁸ Neil McLynn's expression.

⁴⁹ Cf. Jones (1964: 120); Julian 'the Apostate' had long hated the religion which condemned his Hellenic passions as sinful vanities.

was notoriously unwilling to interfere in church affairs, or intervene in church disputes.⁵⁰ Notwithstanding his infamous divination trials,⁵¹ Valentinian's religious policy (or lack of) demonstrates how much the focus of imperial religious policy in general had changed since the time of Constantine. Indeed, Cameron has arguably proven that paganism, despite a momentary attempt at revival under Julian, had petered out even before the Battle of the River Frigidus in 394.⁵² It is unsurprising, therefore, that Ambrose, like the emperor, in the last decades of the fourth century, should have been primarily concerned not with eradicating traditional paganism,⁵³ but rather with suppressing the unorthodox views of Christian 'heretics', particularly those who espoused Arian doctrines.⁵⁴ The monarch's role in this process was just as important as the bishop's, and he was expected not only to take Christian mission out, but also to persecute rigorously heretics, Jews⁵⁵ and adherents to traditional religion, whilst simultaneously safeguarding and promoting the interests of 'real' Christians.⁵⁶

It is clear, therefore, that, since the time of Eusebius' writings, the position and objectives of the Christian monarchy have been altered in line with the political power of the Church. Eusebius' representation of Constantine as an almost perfect 'son of God', second only to Jesus Christ, is, it seems, a distant memory for Ambrose, whose writings often smack of frustration at the conduct of the Roman emperor. To suggest that Ambrose systematically outlines his own criteria for the ideal Romano-Christian king, however, would be wide of the mark, and it is often difficult to garner his opinions on even the most basic issues from his surviving volume of correspondence.⁵⁷ Thus, it is often more productive to discuss the actions he took as bishop, which are often more enlightening in terms of gauging the ever-changing dynamic of his relationship with the emperors, particularly Theodosius, at the end of the fourth century.

⁵⁰ For the contrary view, i.e. that Valentinian did take an interest in church affairs, see Barnes (2002) 233-5, with a specific focus on his letter of reply to the churches in Illyricum. For the text of the letter itself, see Theod. HE 4.8.

⁵¹ Amm. Marc. 28.1.10-12; cf. Jer. Chron. 246b

⁵² For a thoroughly detailed and insightful analysis of why paganism was finished long before the Battle of the River Frigidus, cf. Cameron (2011) in its entirety; the introduction (pp. 1-13) captures the main thrust of his argument. More specifically, for the Battle of Frigidus and its relative lack of 'religious' importance, cf. pp. 93-131.

⁵³ Theodosius' anti-pagan legislation issued between 391 and 392 has often been seen as the 'death sentence' for Roman paganism; for an explanation of why it was not a complete ban on paganism, and therefore not a reaction to any so-called 'pagan revival', see Cameron (2011), 59-63.

⁵⁴ For an argument in favour of the strength of Arianism at the end of the fourth century, see Williams (1995); for this sentiment expressed in one line, see p.102 of the same work. It is widely known that Ambrose was a fierce opponent of Arianism. He wrote hymns to teach his congregation the orthodox Catholic doctrines during the midst of the Arian controversy; the most famous of these is probably the *Te Deum* which is still sung today.

⁵⁵ Ambr. Ep. 40 (74). 22-26. As Cameron notices (2011: 96), Ambrose implies that God allowed Theodosius to defeat Maximus because he was lenient on Jews (a warning to Theodosius not to follow the same path).

⁵⁶ Christian rulers are called to be mission-minded. Cf. Romans 19b-21. Romans 15 is probably the most mission-minded chapter in all of Scripture. The king is no longer the vehicle by which Christianity can reach all corners of the earth. The bishop is now the interpreter of God's word, the preacher of the gospel which brings life, and after all, it is preaching which brings people under the power of Christ. The Christian monarch, therefore, is now, in theory, viewed as subordinate to the Christian bishop.

⁵⁷ Oakley (2010: 113) agrees.

Ambrose's letter to Theodosius on the massacre at Thessalonica, sent in 390, is powerful and significant with regards to the tone the bishop takes towards the emperor who holds absolute power. Theodosius' act was undoubtedly an atrocity, as shocking to his court as it was to the man himself. Indeed, the emperor attempted to have the order revoked, but his command came too late.⁵⁸ Ambrose, therefore, although respectful of Theodosius' position as the divinely-ordained Christian monarch, is fully aware and critical of the emperor's fallibility. Addressing Theodosius as 'august emperor', and acknowledging that he is 'zealous for the faith',⁵⁹ Ambrose proceeds to outline his predicament as a Christian bishop, and his reasons for admonishing his emperor:

'And what about the text stating that if the priest will not admonish the wrongdoer, the wrongdoer will die in his guilt, but the priest will be liable to punishment because he did not warn the wrongdoer?'⁶⁰

It is evident, therefore, that, as a bishop of the church – one of God's new earthly representatives – Ambrose feels charged with as much, if not more, responsibility than Theodosius. Ambrose is reminding Theodosius here that he, as monarch, is as much subject to the authority of the church as any other true Christian, all of whom are 'wrongdoers' or 'sinners' in equal measure.⁶¹ Theodosius the emperor is now, at least in Ambrose's view, the lay believer that Eusebius claimed Constantine the emperor was not. And so, he must uphold the common moral and spiritual standards expected of any Bible-believing Christian. This is why David's predecessor King Saul is never employed as an exemplar of a good Christian king; although divinely-appointed, his disobedience of God's representatives (i.e. the prophets) led to his downfall, and he was deprived of his kingly glory.⁶² King David, as previously shown, is the paradigm from Scripture which a Christian monarch must meet, or risk finishing up like the character of Saul. However, where Eusebius identified the emperor with David because of the latter's manifest righteousness and love for God,⁶³ Ambrose includes David for a different reason, demonstrating that, even in disobedience and error, he is the exemplar to be copied.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ According to Ambrose anyway, Ep. ex. coll. 11.6. Cf. Barnes (1994), 315-6.

⁵⁹ Ambr. Ep. ex. coll. 11.4

⁶⁰ Ambr. Ep. ex. coll. 11.3

⁶¹ Ambrose is primarily concerned with the monarchy as an instrument for God's glory, not with the character of the monarch per se; he has this in common with Eusebius. Cf. McLynn's comments (1994), 292.

⁶² For Saul's disobedience of the prophet Samuel, cf. 1 Samuel 15:24-26, "Then Saul said to Samuel, 'I have sinned. I violated the Lord's command and your instructions.' (NIV)" For the stripping of Saul's glory, cf. 1 Samuel 16:14, 'Now the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul...' (NIV).

⁶³ For David's faith and courage, see 2 Samuel 17:26, 34.

⁶⁴ For another example of David's sin, see 2 Samuel 11; 12; for his repentance before the prophet Nathan, see 2 Samuel 12; Psalm 51. The fact that Ambrose discussed King David at length in another work, *Apology of David*, highlights his status as a role model.

The bishop cites, in his letter to Theodosius, David's sin of killing a poor man's only sheep, stating that 'he (David) recognised that in this he himself was being accused...and he said: 'I have sinned against the Lord'';⁶⁵ and following another indiscretion, David 'made himself more acceptable to the Lord...by (an) act of humility'.⁶⁶ The precedent, therefore, is set for Theodosius' actions, and in absence of God's close presence which Old Testament monarchs may have enjoyed, the emperor must approach humbly and remorsefully the closest thing to God – his earthly representative, which by this time is evidently the bishop.⁶⁷

The fact that Theodosius did penance and humbled himself in public before Ambrose demonstrates quite conclusively that the latter's spiritual authority – and resolute personality – did not go unrecognised.⁶⁸ More importantly, it also proves that the emperor's reign was no longer sacralised unquestionably, as Eusebius argued in his *In Praise of Constantine*.⁶⁹ Neither is the king untouchable, in the sense that he is now under the spiritual authority of the Church; and his kingship, although maintaining its sacral quality, continues to be sacral (or divinely-approved) only for as long as the bishop allows it to be. To flaunt his authority openly by disobeying a bishop is to oppose God directly, an action which could in itself lead to temporary excommunication or even eternal damnation.⁷⁰ But Ambrose understands Theodosius' predicament: 'You are a man and temptation has come your way'.⁷¹ Evidently, the emperor is no longer the shepherd for his flock; merely a ram within the herd of Christian sheep; an elevated, but entirely sinful, individual.

Any thought that Ambrose's main concern in subduing Theodosius, however, is the gaining of political power is shown to be misguided. His sole concern, it would seem, is the emperor's righteousness:

'I have written these things not to embarrass you but so that these examples involving kings may induce you to lift this burden of sin from your kingship; and you will lift it by humbling your soul before God.'⁷²

⁶⁵ Ambr. Ep. ex. coll. 11.7

⁶⁶ Ambr. Ep. ex. coll. 11.9

⁶⁷ For Theodosius' willingness to do penance before Ambrose, see *Vita Ambr.* 24, Paulinus' account of bishop Ambrose's life.

⁶⁸ For the details of Theodosius' public penance, see McLynn (1994), 326-8. For a description of the penance in Ambrose's own words, see *De obitu Theod.* 34.

⁶⁹ Perhaps a comparison can be drawn here with the appointment of a dictator in times of extreme danger during the Roman Republic. Constantine's wielding of such spiritual authority was a necessity at a time when the church was young and fragile. However, with the establishment of firmer roots, the Church was in a position to take (back) the power which it viewed as rightfully hers, under God and according to the text of Scripture.

⁷⁰ For Theodosius' vulnerability, or superstitious piety which left him susceptible to Ambrose's threats, see Jones (1964), 165-169.

⁷¹ Ambr. Ep. ex. coll. 11.11

⁷² *Ibid.*

Theodosius, therefore, as the 'king', is expected to continue to respect Roman law and to apply it appropriately, but only insofar as his application of Roman law stays within the confines of Christian law. When he strays beyond his spiritual jurisdiction, as he did with the Thessalonians, the bishop's task is to 'persuade, request, encourage and advise'⁷³ the monarch so as to 'preserve peace', whilst simultaneously continuing to 'uphold the faith and tranquillity of the Church'.⁷⁴ After all, Theodosius must be more careful than most: as a divinely-appointed ruler, he is judged more harshly for failings in his character or his actions.

By the time of Ambrose, the Christian bishop can afford to be more self-consciously 'Christian' in his outlook and his criticism of the monarch's character and actions can now be less Biblically-based. This is perhaps a sign of the growing confidence which Christian bishops had in their own spiritual authority; the case of Theodosius and the destruction of the synagogue at Callinicum by rioting monks in 388 is a fitting example. Ambrose's verdict, that no Christian bishop should have to pay for the (re-)construction of a non-Christian place of worship, is not taken directly from Scripture, and does not therefore proceed directly from the mouth of God. Ambrose is, nevertheless, clearly still advising the king on what would be a favourable course of action before God, as Eusebius was. However, the menace attached to the 'advice' which Ambrose gives Theodosius in this letter – advice which appeals to some Biblical precedents, but which is essentially Ambrose's independent pro-Catholic understanding of an unfamiliar legal situation – is a feature which is clearly lacking from Eusebius' output. When Theodosius then proceeds to disobey his judgement, Ambrose has enough spiritual authority to be able to prevent the emperor from partaking of the Christian communion rites.⁷⁵ The bishop is now powerful enough to combine authentic Biblical teachings with his own spiritual views. This is in stark contrast to Eusebius, whose kingship theory and interaction with Constantine was based almost solely on his understanding of Biblical instruction. In short, there is no scope now for a single omnipotent monarch who takes counsel from his bishops as and when it suits his situation. Indeed, there can be only one source of power on earth, as there is only one source of heavenly power; and so, having engineered its independence from the emperor, the Church is now focussed on controlling him also.⁷⁶

⁷³ Ambr. Ep. ex. coll. 11.12

⁷⁴ Ambr. Ep. ex. coll. 11.14

⁷⁵ For the embarrassment of Ambrose's rejection of Theodosius' communion request, see McLynn (1994), 298.

⁷⁶ McLynn (1994), 292

Augustine, Constantine and a New Way of Thinking about Christian Leadership

The belief, held by both Eusebius and Ambrose, that the rise of the Roman Empire was a 'divinely engineered *praeparatio evangelica*' through which Christ's purposes as outlined in Scripture would be fulfilled, dominated (Roman) Christian thinking right up until the sack of her eponymous 'first city' in 410 by the Visigoths.⁷⁷ Indeed, even Augustine, whom one would associate with quite the opposite opinion, conformed to this belief in his youth.⁷⁸ And why not? The idea that the Roman Empire was the intended instrument for God's will, with the emperor as head, crushing foes and heretics whilst remaining obedient to the divinely-instructed Christian bishop, must have appealed to many Christians, particularly the bishops. The reality, however, was far less structured, and it became clear to Augustine following Rome's sack that the Empire's social and political institutions and her Roman leaders had, as Bathory states, 'by and large' failed in their task of offering guidance and encouragement.⁷⁹ Augustine's realisation that Roman interests and Christian interests were fundamentally different, however, did not proceed solely from the obvious historical state of play; it was firmly rooted in the text of Scripture. See, for example, the famous prophecy in the Old Testament book of Daniel concerning the transience of all earthly empires:

'In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.'

Daniel 2:44

The setting out of a theoretical framework for Christian leadership until Christ's second coming is, therefore, Augustine's primary aim in the *De Civitate Dei*. However, although proposing a separation from the past, Augustine is careful not to condemn as 'false prophets' the Christian emperors like Constantine who antedated him, for to do so would be insensitive to them and inconsistent with the patent success of the Christian experiment. It would also be dangerous territory theologically, as Augustine himself concedes when describing the reasons for Constantine's success as Roman emperor; for if it was not God who had 'granted him [Constantine] the honour of founding a city',⁸⁰ and it was not God who had given him 'worldly gifts such

⁷⁷ Oakley (2010), 117

⁷⁸ Oakley (2010), 118; see Augustine, *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali* 2:18.

⁷⁹ Bathory (1981), 119

⁸⁰ Constantinople, of course.

as no one would have dared to hope for', then it was surely the work of 'demons'.⁸¹ Eschewing this idea, therefore, Augustine holds Constantine to have been a good Christian, who was given the earthly responsibility of managing the Roman Empire; his success in the imperial office is ascribed solely to the fact that he was a man 'who worshipped only the true God'.⁸² In other words, Constantine was not a good Christian leader, but rather a leader who was a good Christian. The difference here between the thinking of Eusebius and Augustine could not be more striking. There are no references to 'God's earthly representative', and none of the undertones which one would associate with Eusebius' kingship theory survive Augustine's treatment. Nevertheless, we do see some glimmers of continuity in Augustine's theory of leadership. The concern of the Christian king should still, in spite of everything, be 'to extend his (God's) worship far and wide' and to propagate belief, as both Eusebius and Ambrose argued. Christian kings should also, according to Augustine, rule with justice, and not be 'inflated with pride, but remember that they are but men'.⁸³ The influence of Ambrose's teaching here is apparent. Other elements from Augustine's description of a 'happy ruler', or a good ruler, are identical to those which would be expected of all monarchs, whether they be Hellenistic, Roman, or Christian. All kings should be slow to anger, and quick to pardon; taking swift vengeance on wrong in order to protect the state, and not to satisfy some personal animosity.⁸⁴

Not only is Augustine respectful, therefore, of Rome's history of good but non-Christian leaders, but he is also accepting of the fact that they ruled according to God's will. Indeed, as he states in DCD 5.21, it was 'the same God (who) gave the throne to Constantine the Christian, and also to Julian the Apostate', and it is the 'one true God... (who) rules and guides these events, according to his pleasure'. There is no suggestion that this is unjust, and Augustine is adamant that the Roman monarchs were placed on their thrones by God for a specific purpose. Although they may be ungodly, therefore, to question their authority is to question God's purpose for both the earthly City and the heavenly City. This does not, however, connote that Augustine 'sweet-talks' Roman leaders in the way Eusebius did, or admires them in the way Sidonius Apollinaris was to; for a monarch, a truly Christian monarch, was, like all Christians, an exile in the earthly City, with unbreakable allegiances and loyalty to the heavenly City which awaited him following his release by death; and of course, according to Augustine, all the earthly kingdoms, Rome included, would be crushed by the arrival of Christ's kingdom in the last days.

⁸¹ Aug. DCD 5.25; see also Matthew 12:30, 'Whoever is not with me is against me.'

⁸² Aug. DCD 5.25

⁸³ Aug. DCD 5.24

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Sidonius and the Barbarian Kings

With Roman power and influence all but gone in the Western half of the Empire,⁸⁵ the period during which the Gallo-Roman aristocrat Sidonius Apollinaris (c. 430 – c. 489) lived was one of tremendous upheaval. Not since the pre-Rome era had 'Europe' witnessed so many or such dramatic changes in its borders and hegemony.⁸⁶ Whether these historical changes were for the better is, perhaps unsurprisingly, an issue still fiercely debated by modern scholars.⁸⁷ It would, however, be incorrect to read the nine books of Sidonius' correspondence with this in mind. A truly objective view of history is, after all, only possible when one views it from a considerable distance, and to one living in the midst of it, therefore, personally affected by the rise of the 'barbarian' kings and their new territories, the situation and the future may have appeared considerably more perilous than it does to us now. It is understandable, therefore, that the bishop should attempt to make a virtue from what was ultimately a sad situation, especially for one who felt as Roman as the Caesars themselves.⁸⁸ This is nowhere more evident than in Sidonius' remarkable letter to his brother-in-law Agricola, describing in detail the appearance and character of the barbarian, Arian king of the Visigoths Theoderic II (r. 453 – 466). For a proudly Roman and Catholic bishop like Sidonius, Theoderic was representative of everything he hated, the very antithesis of both the bishop and his Catholic friends.⁸⁹ Sidonius' determination, however, not to wallow in his melancholy, as one may have reasonably expected from a man in his situation, is indicative of his own strong disposition. As a creature of survival, one who had spent his whole life adapting and adjusting to ensure the continued existence of his kind,⁹⁰ Sidonius Apollinaris was more qualified than most to deal with the 'problem' of Theoderic's supremacy via the process of accommodation and assimilation. In short, Sidonius ascribes to Theoderic important Roman values, because Roman values are the kind of values which one would usually associate with a good king. Theoderic II is shown to be diligent and efficient in

⁸⁵ I recognise the small contradiction here.

⁸⁶ An anachronistic term, but one which is extremely useful for designating the vast landmass north of the Mediterranean.

⁸⁷ For the grand narratives and discussion of this major issue, see Wickham (2009), Ward-Perkins (2006), Heather (2005), to name but a few.

⁸⁸ E.g. Sid. Carm. 7.6-7; 7.501; 7.502-3.

⁸⁹ Ep. 7.14.10 for Sidonius' hatred of even 'good' barbarians (cf. Stevens 1933: 49, for discussion); Ep. 8.2.2 for Sidonius' description of the barbarians as 'an unconquerable and alien race' and for his belief that his literary sophistication elevated him above the vulgar herd.

⁹⁰ Stevens (1933: vii) is undoubtedly correct when he states that Sidonius should be considered the 'last representative of the educated Roman aristocracy'.

office (1.2.4); outwardly pious (1.2.4);⁹¹ modest with humble pleasures (1.2.6); disciplined and ordered at home (1.2.6); temperate, even in the face of misfortune (1.2.7); but at the same time, striving always for victory (1.2.7); approachable, hospitable and social in his own time (1.2.8);⁹² but entirely professional (1.2.9). Visually, descriptions of Theoderic's appearance deliberately resemble those of Julius Caesar in Suetonius' *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*.⁹³ Theoderic is depicted as possessing a strong torso with sturdy limbs (1.2.1; 3); his frame is powerful and masculine (1.2.1; 3); he is of tall stature (1.2.2), and is also overly concerned with his personal grooming and his hair (1.2.2). The comparison which Sidonius is leading his audience to make is explicit. Here, in Theoderic II, exists a traditional Roman leader, in all but name and ethnicity.⁹⁴

But what does this tell us about Sidonius and his concept of leadership? Is he merely a delusional character, pining after the glories of an imperial Roman yesteryear,⁹⁵ or is he a subtle tactician who is self-consciously seeking to influence the accepted leadership model with intellectual ingenuity, much in the same way Eusebius did with Constantine? From reading Sidonius' letters, it is evident that there is no definitive answer to this question; and to attempt to provide one, would be to underestimate the complexity of his output. It is surely undeniable, however, that Sidonius' sense of 'Roman-ness' was heightened as the barbarians attained an ever-increasing proportion of power, and this, rather than his Christianity, seems to dominate his idea of a good king. This is notable in the case of Theoderic above: where Eusebius measures Constantine's reign and character against that of King David, Sidonius measures the reign and character of Theoderic II against that of the Caesars. Not only is he a patriotic Roman at heart then; but he is also a Roman who is clearly searching for a way to modify artificially what it means to be a Roman, and what it mean to be a 'Roman leader' in the case of Theoderic, in his own age. As a member of a swiftly dwindling social type, however, the bishop's scope for engineering change on a wider scale within his community and beyond is reduced considerably, forcing Sidonius, as Harries states correctly, to confront 'the slow ebbing of Roman power with a framework of reference reassuringly derived from the past but shaped by the present'.⁹⁶

⁹¹ More important than actually being pious; in this case, it works to Sidonius' advantage. If Theoderic II had been more pious and, by implication, more Arian, Sidonius would probably not have enjoyed the favour of his court. (Cf. Harries 1994: 127)

⁹² Notice how Sidonius implies a distinction here between Theoderic's 'profession' of being king, and the time he spends away from governing. He is able to identify with the regular, working Roman citizen. Harries (1994: 127) also notices Theoderic's pursuits, all of which would have seemed familiar to a Roman emperor: hearing petitions, hunting, dinner, dice, etc.

⁹³ Suet. Jul. 45

⁹⁴ Cf. Harries (1994), 248

⁹⁵ I would go further than Harries (1994: 90) does and argue that, on a general note, Sidonius is looking back even further into the Roman past, back to the 'Golden Age' of the Julio-Claudians, rather than only to the period immediately before Theodosius I.

⁹⁶ Harries (1994), 19

Perhaps the best known of all Sidonius' works, at least when Stevens was writing,⁹⁷ is the 59-verse hendecasyllabic poem concerning Euric – the treacherous brother of Theoderic II who succeeded to the Visigothic throne in 466 – enclosed in a letter to the bishop's friend Lampridius (Ep. 8.9.5). For a man who claims to shun barbarians 'even if they are good' (Ep. 7.14.10), Sidonius is remarkably at ease with eulogizing the Visigothic king Euric, telling in detail of how representatives of all the barbarian tribes thronged around his throne in the hope of receiving patronage and protection from the powerful king. But the most remarkable feature of the poem is unquestionably the fact that 'the Roman' also 'seeks salvation', so that 'the Garonne, on whose banks Mars dwells, may defend the dwindled Tiber' (8.9.5). It is in this poem, therefore, that we can view Sidonius' acceptance both of the unadorned political reality (i.e. that Rome was finished), and of Euric's premiership, in a work which was intended to be circulated amongst his peers.⁹⁸ Euric's status as an Arian who detested Catholics, put him directly at odds with Catholic bishops like Sidonius; but with the Roman leader now firmly in submission to the might of the barbarian ruler of Gaul, it would seem that Sidonius has been left with no option but to 'play ball' with the new representative of Gaul. Any talk of 'God's hand' in these events is, however, omitted, and the model of the good Christian leader which Augustine defined, perhaps unsurprisingly, does not feature within Sidonius' correspondence. Rather Sidonius expresses only a sadness that his culture has now vanished, and seems to recognise, finally, that Augustine's theory of separation was indeed to be trusted. What Sidonius would have failed to believe, therefore, was that his Church – and his 'Roman' culture – would experience a revival and within a few decades have accrued more power than at any other stage in its history.

Avitus and the Rise of the Papacy

Avitus' historical position as one of the first extant authors whose writings post-date the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West, has made him an invaluable source of information for those Catholic ideas of kingship and leadership which were only able to fully develop in Rome's absence. Indeed, direct allusions to Roman culture and traditions are noticeably scarce, unlike the correspondence of Sidonius, but there can be no doubt that his language and vocabulary is of the kind one would traditionally associate with an aristocrat, and a Roman one at that.⁹⁹ A tone of superiority, therefore, is still present, as is to be expected, especially given the Catholic Church's

⁹⁷ Stevens (1933), 165

⁹⁸ Harries (1994), Chs. 1-2; cf. Heather (2005), 380

⁹⁹ See Introduction to Shanzer and Wood (2002).

growing confidence in the stability of its own political position. This confidence is a theme which permeates much of Avitus' correspondence. See, for example, his letter to Clovis (Ep. 46), in which the bishop states that 'whatever foreign pagan peoples there are...they are ready to serve you for the first time *because of the rule of your religion*'. Clovis' Catholicism is enough, it would seem, to ensure hegemony over all other peoples, so long as he continues to 'take the step of *sending missions*...to build up the party of the God who has raised yours so greatly'.¹⁰⁰ With the generation prior having learned to accept and accommodate the barbarians, it was the task of Avitus' generation to find, once again, a means by which the Catholic Church could continue their divinely-appointed mission, and disseminate the Roman Catholic faith throughout the world. It was of course the obtaining of patronage from the leading barbarian kings which allowed them to achieve this.¹⁰¹ Avitus is interested in the gaining of political power and influence, therefore, but only in as far as it was required to allow Catholic goals to be fulfilled. This is the reason why the conversion of monarchs was so important to Avitus, as has been previously discussed, because it is they who lead others to Catholic faith by example of their public character. And so, there is no sense in Avitus' writing that the presence of the barbarians constituted 'enemy occupation' at an elite level, as Sidonius would no doubt have argued (at least at first). No, the barbarian kings are now part of God's plan for the spread of His universal Imperium Christianum, ready and sometimes willing to be proselytised by the persistent Catholic bishop. And of course, this method was successful in the case of Sigismund, whose conversion in c. 502 significantly impacted the Catholic Church.

The conversion of barbarian kings was, however, not the only concern of a Catholic bishop like Avitus. Nevertheless, as they held the greatest proportion of military and political power, they were required for the scattering of the Catholic seed throughout the world. But true Christian leadership, in the spirit of Augustine, was to be found in the rise of a distinctly new institution, that of the Roman Pope. As the first surviving proponent of the Pope's primacy within the Roman Catholic church and indeed the world,¹⁰² Avitus had an important role in the future security of an institution which has endured, thus far, almost twice as long as the lifespan of Rome's Western Empire, and which now is unrestricted in her quest for universal influence and universal salvation.¹⁰³ Indeed, the Church is no longer 'bounded by the fixed limits of kingdoms' (Avit. Ep. 34). For Roman Catholics, however, who take a wider view of the historical narrative, the Church and the Roman Empire do seem to form a unbroken chain of Romano-Catholic

¹⁰⁰ This is, according to Shanzer and Wood (2002), 373 n.3, one of the earliest examples of missionary theory extending beyond what had been the boundaries of the Roman Empire.

¹⁰¹ See Harries (1994), 39, on how the ideology of Roman patronage was gradually adapted to Christian purposes.

¹⁰² Avit. Ep. 34; 'If the pope is rejected, it follows that not one bishop, the whole episcopate threatens to fall.'

¹⁰³ See the mission statement of any major Roman Catholic organisation.

domination. Although more powerful at some times than other times throughout its long history, the papacy has always borne a remarkable resemblance to the kind of power and ritual which one would associate, not with grounded vision of Ambrose, nor with the pessimism of Sidonius, but more with the opulence of Eusebius' grand vision for Christian hegemony led by a Christian ruler who functioned as a mediator between God and man.

Conclusion

By covering a period of over two hundred years in this thesis and six different, prominent Christian thinkers, it has been possible to track closely the development of Christian political thinking and of the Imperium Christianum over a period which witnessed numerous epoch-changing historical events. The accession of the first Christian emperor; the establishment of orthodox Christianity as the official religion of the Empire; the sack of Rome; the collapse of the Western Roman Empire; and the conversion of the Frankish King Clovis would each fall into this category. And indeed, all of the bishops discussed provide a unique and fascinating insight into the period during which they lived. However, despite their obvious differences, they all have only one thing in mind: Christian triumph in the Western sphere, whether that be independent of Rome as Augustine of Hippo argued, or intimately attached to it as Eusebius would argue. What must also be appreciated, however, is that an empire is not an instantaneous formation; rather it is a phenomenon which must necessarily be cultivated and desired in equal measure, assisted in its growth through a sequence of entirely serendipitous and shrewdly engineered historical events.

What can only be described as 'engineered' is the way in which the Romans used imperium as a means of justification for their past actions; indeed, it was the political ethos of the Empire, the concept which made it 'the greatest', and so it is understandable that Christians sought to attach themselves to it, at first, before adopting and adapting it specifically for their own spiritual, as well as temporal, advancement. The difference between Roman imperium and Christian imperium, however, can be found in the importance which Christianity placed in its three constituent elements, all which I have discussed at length in this thesis. For Christian believers, they represented stand-alone and highly significant concepts within their faith, with each able to be justified using the text of Scripture; but imperium was greater than the sum of its parts, as it invested the beholder with an authority that was difficult to challenge. Where Roman imperium was dependent on sheer physical force, however, Catholic imperium was often (but not always) more nuanced, providing an enhanced moral authority that was difficult to challenge because it constituted no real physical presence or visible threat. This is why the sacralisation of imperium was so significant for the development of the idea of the Imperium Christianum.

For the bishops discussed, the concept of the Imperium Christianum failed to reach its full manifestation during their lifetime. Periods of stability and Christian unity were often mistaken for its imminent arrival, when, in fact, they were only indications that it was a future possibility. This possibility was, however, to be finally realised approximately three hundred years later under

the reign of Charlemagne, the first emperor in Western Europe since Rome's collapse. According to the Carolingian scholar Alcuin, 'Europe' was now the *Christianitatis Regnum* or *Imperium Christianum*, a universal empire which transcended nationality, which united the *populus Christianus* under the spiritual guidance of the Pope, and which enjoyed, in Charlemagne, the protection of a powerful God-fearing Catholic monarch.¹ It would seem that the process of sacralisation was now complete.

¹ Alberi (1998: 14-5)

Bibliography

Ambrose of Milan, *Political Letters and Speeches* [trans. J. H. W. G. Liebschuetz; contains Book Ten of Ambrose's Letters, including the oration on the death of Theodosius I (*De obitu Theodosii*); letters outside the Collection (*Epistulae extra collectionem*); letter 30 to Magnus Maximus; the oration on the death of Valentinian II (*De obitu Valentiniani*)] (Liverpool University Press, 2005)

Ambrose of Milan, *On the Mysteries* (trans. T. Thompson) (London, S.P.C.K., 1930)

Ambrose of Milan, *Explanatio symboli, De sacramentis, De mysteriis, De paenitentia, De excessu fratris Satyri, De obitu Valentiniani, De obitu Theodosii* – ed. Otto Faller 1955, Vol. 73

Ambrose of Milan, *Epistulae et acta* – ed. Otto Faller (Vol. 82/1: lib. 1-6, 1968)

Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God* (trans. H. Bettenson) (Penguin Books, 1972)

Avitus of Vienne, *The Fall of Man: De spiritalis historiae gestis libri I-III*. Edited by Daniel J. Nodds. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1985 (Toronto Medieval Latin Texts, 16)

Avitus of Vienne, *Selected Letters and Prose*. Translated by Danuta Shanzer and Ian Wood. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002. (Translated Texts for Historians)

Eusebius of Caesarea, *Vita Constantini*, in F. Winkelmann, *Eusebius' Werke 1.1*² (GCS, 1975).

Eusebius of Caesarea, *Oratio de Laudibus Constantini 1-10, Panegyric to Constantine*
Greek text: I. A. Heikel, *Eusebius' Werke 1* (GCS 7, 1902), 195-223.

Eusebius of Caesarea, *Oratio de Laudibus Constantini 11-18, Treatise on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre*
Greek text: I. A. Heikel, *Eusebius' Werke 1* (GCS 7, 1902), 223-259.

Translation of *Oratio de Laudibus Constantini* in its entirety can be found in:
Drake, H. A., *In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius' Tricennial Orations* (Berkeley, 1976), 83-127

Eusebius of Caesarea, *The History of the Church* (trans. G. A. Williamson) (Penguin Books, 1989)

Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, in K. Lake, *Loeb Classical Library vol. 1* (1926), vol. 2 (1932), with English translation (vol. 2 translated by J. E. L. Oulton)

Holy Bible (New International Version), available freely online.

Holy Bible (English Standard Version), available freely online.

Ruricius of Limoges, *Letters*, found in Mathisen, R. W. (trans.), *Ruricius of Limoges and friends: a collection of letters from Visigothic Gaul: letters of Ruricius of Limoges, Caesarius of Arles, Euphrasius of Clermont, Faustus of Riez, Graecus of Marseilles, Paulinus of Bordeaux, Sedatus of Nîmes, Sidonius Apollinaris, Taurentius and Victorinus of Fréjus* (with introduction, commentary and notes) (Liverpool University Press, 1999)

Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmina & Epistulae*, in W. B. Anderson, *Sidonius: Poems and Letters* (Harvard: Loeb Classical Library, 1965), 2 vols.

Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, in P. Maraval, *Sources Chrétiennes* series.

Aalders, G. J. D., *Political Thought in Hellenistic Times* (Adolf M. Hakkert, Amsterdam, 1975)

Adler, E., *Vergil's Empire: Political Thought in the Aeneid* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003)

Al-Azmeh, A., *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian, and Pagan Polities* (I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2001)

Alberi, M., 'The Evolution of Alcuin's Concept of the Imperium Christianum', 3-17, in Hill, J., & Swan, M., *The Community, the Family and the Saint: Patterns of Power in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout, Brepols, 1998)

Barnes, T. D., *Constantine and Eusebius* (Harvard University Press, 1981)

Barnes, T. D., 'Valentinian, Auxentius and Ambrose', in *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, Bd. 51, H. 2 (2nd Qtr., 2002), pp. 227-237

Bathory, P. D., *Political Theory as Public Confession: The Social and Political Thought of St. Augustine of Hippo* (Transaction Books, New Brunswick, 1981)

Billows, R. A., *Antigonos the One-Eyed and the Creation of the Hellenistic State* (University of California Press, 1997)

Brown, P., *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992)

Brown, P., *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (University of California Press, 1989)

Burns, T. S., *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome: A Study of Roman Military Policy and the Barbarians, ca. 375-425 A.D.* (Bloomington, 1994)

Burns, J. H. (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought, c. 350-c.1450* (Cambridge University Press, 2010)

Cameron, A., *The Last Pagans of Rome* (Oxford University Press, 2011)

Deferrari, R. J., *Theological and Dogmatic works: Saint Ambrose* (The Catholic University of America Press, 1963)

Drake, H. A., *In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius' Tricennial Orations* (Berkeley, 1976)

Drinkwater, J., & Elton, H. (eds.), *Fifth-century Gaul: a crisis of identity?* (Cambridge University Press, 1992)

- Galinsky, K. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus* (Cambridge University Press, 2005)
- Garnsey, P., 'Introduction: the Hellenistic and Roman periods', 401-415, in Rowe, C., & Schofield, M. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2005)
- Gradel, I., *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2002)
- Hahn, D. E., 'Kings and constitutions: Hellenistic theories', 457-464, in Rowe, C., & Schofield, M. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2005)
- Halsall, G., *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568* (Cambridge University Press, 2007)
- Hardie, P. R., *Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford University Press, 1989)
- Harries, J., *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome, AD 407-485* (Oxford University Press, 1994)
- Heather, P., 'The barbarian in late antiquity: image, reality, and transformation', 234-259, in R. Miles (ed.), *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity* (Routledge, 1999)
- Heather, P., *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History* (Macmillan, 2005)
- Jones, A. H. M., *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey*, 2 vols. (John Hopkins University Press, 1964)
- Lenski, N., *Failure of Empire: Valens and the Roman State in the Fourth Century A.D.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002)
- MacCormack, S., *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1981)
- Markus, R. A., 'Introduction: the West', 83-92, in J. H. Burns (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political c. 350-c. 1450* (Cambridge University Press, 1988)
- Markus, R. A., 'The Latin Fathers', 92-123, in J. H. Burns (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political c. 350-c. 1450* (Cambridge University Press, 1988)
- Markus, R. A., *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of Saint Augustine* (Cambridge University Press, 1970)
- Matthews, J. F., *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (Duckworth, London, 1989)
- Matthews, J. F., *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court, A.D. 364-425* (Oxford, 1990)
- Mathisen, R. W., 'For Specialists Only: The Reception of Augustine and His Teachings in Fifth-Century Gaul', 31-41, in Lienhard, J. T., Muller, E. C., Teske, R. J. (eds.), *Augustine: Presbyter Factus Sum (Collectanea Augustiniana)* (Peter Lang Pub Inc, 1993)

- Mathisen, R. W. (trans.), *Ruricius of Limoges and friends: a collection of letters from Visigothic Gaul: letters of Ruricius of Limoges, Caesarius of Arles, Euphrasius of Clermont, Faustus of Riez, Graecus of Marseilles, Paulinus of Bordeaux, Sedatus of Nîmes, Sidonius Apollinaris, Taurentius and Victorinus of Fréjus (with introduction, commentary and notes)* (Liverpool University Press, 1999)
- Mathisen, R. W. & Sivan, H. S. (eds.), *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity* (University of Kansas, 1995)
- McCormack, M., *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge University Press, 1990)
- McLynn, N. B., *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (University of California Press, 1994)
- Miles, R., 'Introduction: Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity', 1-15, in R. Miles (ed.), *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity* (Routledge, 1999)
- Morino, C., *Church and State in the Teaching of St. Ambrose* (Catholic University of America Press, 1969)
- Morrison, K. F., *Rome and the City of God: An Essay Concerning the Relationships of Empire and Church in the Fourth Century* (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, New Series, 1964)
- Oakley, F., *Empty Bottles of Gentilism: Kingship and the Divine in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Yale University Press, 2010)
- Putnam, M. C. J., *Horace's Carmen Saeculare: Ritual Magic and the Poet's Art* (Yale University Press, 2000)
- Rapp, C., *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (University of California Press, 2005)
- Richardson, J. S., 'Imperium Romanum: Empire and the Language of Power', 1-9, in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 81 (1991)
- Riley-Smith, J., *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991)
- Rousseau, P., 'In Search of Sidonius the Bishop', in *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, Bd. 25, H. 3 (3rd Qtr., 1976), pp. 356-377
- Schneid, J., 'Augustus and Roman Religion: Continuity, Conservatism, and Innovation', in K. Galinsky (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus* (Cambridge University Press, 2005)
- Shanzer, D. & Wood, I., *Avitus of Vienne: Letters and Selected Prose* (Liverpool University Press, 2002)
- Sivan, H. S., 'Sidonius Apollinaris, Theodoric II, and Gothic-Roman Politics from Avitus to Anthemius', 85-94, in *Hermes*, 117. Bd., H. 1 (1989)
- Shea, G. W. (trans. & comm.), *The Poems of Alimus Ecdicius Avitus* (Tempe, Arizona, 1997)

- Smith, J. M. H., *Europe After Rome: A New Cultural History* (Oxford, 2005)
- Stevens, C. E., *Sidonius Apollinaris and his Age* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1933)
- Ullmann, W., *The Church and the Law in the Earlier Middle Ages* (Variorum Reprints, 1975)
- Van Dam, R., *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (University of California Press, 1985)
- Villegas Marin, R., 'Lucidus on Predestination: The Damnation of Augustine's Predestinationism in the Synod of Arles (473) and Lyons (474)', 163-7, in *Studia Patristica: Vols. XLIV-XLIX*, ed. by J. Baun, A. Cameron, M. Edwards and M. Vinzent (Peeters, 2010)
- Ward-Perkins, B., *The Fall of Rome: and the End of Civilization* (Oxford University Press, 2006)
- Wickham, C., *The Inheritance of Rome: Illuminating the Dark Ages, 400-1000* (Viking, 2009)
- Williams, D. H., *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Nicene-Arian Conflicts* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995)
- Young, F., 'Christianity', 635-57, in Rowe, C., & Schofield, M. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2005)
- Zanker, P., *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (trans. A. Shapiro) (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1990)