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Hillsdale College's Blake Center for Faith and Freedom Hosts Lecture on Augustine
Professor of History Kenneth Calvert spoke on 'The Importance of Augustine's "City of God."'

HILLSDALE, Mich. — Hillsdale College's Blake Center for Faith and Freedom in Somers, Connecticut, hosted Kenneth Calvert, professor of history at Hillsdale College, on Aug. 15 for a lecture titled "The Importance of Augustine's 'City of God.'"

"Augustine's 'City of God' is one of the most influential books in both Christian and Western thought," said Alan Crippen, executive director and chaplain of the Blake Center. "As we seek to explore the questions of faith and reason at the heart of Western civilization, this classic work has much to teach us. We were honored to host Dr. Calvert for this important lecture."

Calvert said that Augustine, who served as the bishop of Hippo in Africa from 395 to 430, wrote "The City of God" after the Visigoths sacked Rome in 410.

"If you want to think about the most apocalyptic thing in your mind that could possibly happen, that has happened to Rome: a bunch of barbarians have taken the center of civilization, the city of Rome," Calvert said. "These crazy, wild Germanic people who grease their hair with animal fat and wear animal skins and this kind of thing — all of a sudden they've come pouring across, and they've come into Italy, and they've captured the city of Rome. Now he is asked to write this work, 'The City of God,' in response to what's happening in the empire at this moment."

Calvert said that pagans blamed Christianity for the fall of Rome because the Christians did not worship the Roman gods, but Augustine argued that Christianity had benefited the empire by infusing it with grace, mercy, and justice.

"What Saint Augustine is saying here is that what you have Christianity bring to the Roman world is a true understanding of the love of God, and it's in the family and through the family,"

Calvert said. “In fact, when the Christians were persecuted, quite often the magistrates would say, ‘Why are we persecuting these people? They’re good family members; they’re taxpayers; they obey the law except they don’t worship the gods.’ And it always came back around to that thing — that they weren’t worshipping the gods, and so, OK, they need to die.”

Calvert said that Augustine acknowledged both the fallen human nature that necessitated earthly government and the earthly peace and prosperity the empire brought.

“And so Augustine says those are good, and the Christians can participate in that; the Christians can be part of that,” Calvert said. “The heavenly city, or rather the part of it which sojourns on earth and lives by faith, makes use of this peace only because it must, until this mortal condition which necessitates it shall pass away. And so the heavenly city will be a part of this earthly city, part of this empire, part of this human politics, until such a time when it no longer needs it. And understand something: that ‘The City of God’ is popular reading among Christians in every form of government around the world, because any form of government that you can think of, Christians can talk about being part of it and yet sojourners within it.”

Dr. Kenneth Calvert is professor of history and director of the Oxford Study Abroad Program at Hillsdale College, where he has taught since 1996. He received his B.A. from Wheaton College, his M.Div. from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, his Th.M. from Harvard University, and his Ph.D. from Miami University of Ohio. In addition to his professorial duties, Calvert served as headmaster of Hillsdale Academy from 2002 until 2018. His research interests include Hellenistic Greece, the Roman Republic, the rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire, and the early history of Islam.

For photos from the event, click [here](#). For photos of the Blake Center, click [here](#). For a high-resolution copy of the Hillsdale College clocktower logo, click [here](#).

About the Blake Center for Faith and Freedom

Philanthropists Prestley and Helen Blake donated the buildings and acreage of their estate in Somers, Connecticut, to Hillsdale College in 2019. The Blake Center for Faith and Freedom is a religious institution that includes an exterior replica of Monticello, Thomas Jefferson’s renowned neo-classical home in Virginia. The College utilizes the property to host events that further its mission, focusing on the foundational principles of faith and freedom. To this end, most events held at the Blake Center have clear religious themes, focusing on topics relating to Christianity, man’s relationship to God, and faith generally.

About Hillsdale College

Hillsdale College is an independent, nonsectarian, Christian liberal arts college located in southern Michigan. Founded in 1844, the College has built a national reputation through its classical liberal arts core curriculum and its principled refusal to accept federal or state taxpayer subsidies, even indirectly in the form of student grants or loans. It also conducts an outreach effort promoting civil and religious liberty, including a free monthly speech digest, *Imprimis*, with a circulation of more than seven million. For more information, visit hillsdale.edu.

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