

FRIDAY,
NOV. 18, 2022
3 P.M.
HUM 1109



David Dusenbury, PhD

*Visiting Senior Fellow,
Danube Institute, Budapest, and
Visiting Professor, Vita-Salute San
Raffaele University, Milan*



CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
BAKERSFIELD
School of Arts and Humanities

How the Roman Trial of Jesus Shaped History: From Ancient Africa to Early Modern Europe

In Thomas Hobbes's iconic book of political theory, *Leviathan* – which he wrote in a time in which religious wars convulsed much of Europe – we read this remarkable line: “Faith hath no relation to, nor dependence at all, upon Compulsion.” In this lecture, we will ask: How did Hobbes come to claim that faith – which occasioned so many devastating conflicts in early modern Europe – had no relation to compulsion? How did he and other philosophers succeed in decoupling religion and violence – at least, theoretically – in early modernity? And I will argue that, surprisingly, it is a *religious* event – or, rather, a highly influential *interpretation* of a religious event – which led to the emergence of a culture of religious toleration in modern Europe. Which event, we might ask? The Roman trial of Jesus, as it is narrated in all four canonical Gospels. And which interpretation? The one put forward by Augustine of Hippo, in Roman Africa, in the 400s CE. In this lecture, I will try to show that Augustine's reflections on Jesus' legal ordeal helps to inspire the first theory of “secular” rule in Europe, in the fourteenth century – and, later, the first theories of “toleration” in Europe, in the seventeenth century. At the heart of European modernity, in other words, lie certain legal and political impulses which emerge from an ancient African interpretation of the trial and death of Jesus.

Free and open to the public