

Abstract

For over a century there has been a robust research tradition centered on early Christian uses of the Greek term *evangelion*, or "Gospel." Focusing on this key term has provided invaluable insights into the ways the earliest Christians identified themselves, understood their message, and related to their world. However, that scholarship has mainly focused on the first two centuries of Christian development, and rarely ventured beyond the Greek speaking world. Applying definitions and models from that era to texts from later periods and in different languages obscures the continued development of the Christian understanding of "Gospel," masking crucial dynamics of theology and rhetoric. This is certainly true in the case of Latin texts in Late Antiquity. For Latin Christianity, the fourth through sixth centuries represent the first formative period of an increasingly independent tradition, during which Latin authors began to rely on their own language and literary background to develop a strand of Christianity which was distinctly Western. These centuries were also a time of enormous transition in the Western Roman Empire politically, materially, and intellectually. They began with the reign of Constantine and his initial patronage of Christianity in a consolidated Roman Empire and ended with the West divided between Germanic kingdoms with Christianity as the main unifying force. In the process the very acts of reading, writing, and thinking were transformed and repurposed in ways which laid the foundation for the next thousand years of intellectual culture.

This dissertation tracks the Latin term for Gospel (*evangelium*) and its variations through Late Antiquity and analyzes the ways they are used and understood in texts which reflect and constitute major developments in Latin Christianity. Through this period of transformation, *evangelium* as a term and concept remained central to the way Christian authors understood and articulated their work. Using cognitive linguistics to model the relationship between expressions and concepts, this investigation explores different uses of Gospel language as components of an interrelated radial category. The ways authors navigated the nuances of that category, building on its consistencies and reconciling its conflicts, were a source of immense creativity and potent rhetorical force. Taking *evangelium* as a focal point, this study revisits some of the central works of seven foundational authors: Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Cassiodorus, Benedict, and Gregory the Great. Doing so not only offers fresh perspective on familiar texts, but also provides a new

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model for the development of Latin Christianity in Late Antiquity, particularly regarding matters of identity, rhetoric, materiality, and intertextuality.