**Research Project: *The Church at War in Late Antiquity***

When Pope Gelasius I (492-96 CE) first led the Church of Rome in 492 CE, Italy had just emerged from a devastating civil war and a severe famine. The pope witnessed first-hand the effects of these crises on communities: mass migrations, typically into fortified cities such as Rome, which, like all late ancient cities, were unequipped to deal with a refugee crisis; epidemic illness, brought on by denser than usual living arrangements and the consumption of rotting food and polluted water; and the disruption of revenue streams, upon which early Christian churches relied for maintaining clergy, buildings, and service to the poor. In fact, the Italian churches lost more than money during the war. Reports were pouring into Rome about shortages of clergy to perform the liturgy, including stories of severely mutilated priests. What began as a confrontation between two warlords and their armies had quickly turned into a catastrophe for local churches and Christians.

*The Church at War in Late Antiquity* is the first study of the relationship between war, crisis, and the formation of Christian institutions in Late Antiquity (ca. 250-700 CE). Focusing primarily on the fourth to seventh centuries and on the western regions of the late Roman Empire (i.e. Britain, Gaul, Spain, Italy, and North Africa), the book examines how a series of catastrophic events and crises shaped the development of churches and monasteries both culturally and materially. These crises included armed sieges and invasions, many related to the political and military fragmentation of the western Empire and the emergence of barbarian governments; severe famines linked to the dust-veil event of 536 CE; and the Justinianic Plague, which intermittently ravaged Europe, North Africa, and the Near East from 541 to 750 CE. For Gelasius, war and famine were not only problems of deformed, dead, and displaced bodies, though they were certainly that. War and famine were also opportunities to formulate new ecclesiastical ideals, which in Gelasius’ case meant a more sharply hierarchical church order as well as expanded power and authority for the pope. In other contexts, crisis and trauma created the conditions for people to invent new forms of religious practice and space. The first hospitals in the western regions of the late Empire, for instance, appeared in the fifth and sixth centuries. Scholars have exclusively linked this development to shifting practices of Christian charity and episcopal power. This project explores whether their emergence is also tied to continuous periods of warfare, changing patterns of food distribution and availability, and to large-scale epidemics. Monastic communities were also directly affected by war, famine, and disease, and this book demonstrates how many “classical” features of early Christian monasticism, such as material self-sufficiency, hospitality, and an ideology of “enwalled” separation from the world, were born out of the trauma of warfare and famine.

*The Church at War* will engage directly with the environmental, bodily, and economic contexts and effects of war on religious institution building. In so doing, the book will contribute to a larger rethinking of the whole narrative of “Christianization” as a process that was driven not only by new discourses of power and identity but also by events and developments in the physical world, from agriculture to the body. More broadly still, the book could help elucidate a deep historical context for the roles played by crisis and trauma in the rise of modern extremist religious organizations, such as the Branch Dividians and ISIS.