Apr 12th, 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

"Prison as a Home": Christian Perception of Imprisonment in the Age of Martyrs

Mary Olson
Illinois Wesleyan University

Jason Moralee, Faculty Advisor
Illinois Wesleyan University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/jwprc

Part of the History Commons

Olson, Mary and Moralee, Faculty Advisor, Jason, ""Prison as a Home": Christian Perception of Imprisonment in the Age of Martyrs" (2008). John Wesley Powell Student Research Conference. 2.
http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/jwprc/2008/oralpres5/2

This Event is brought to you for free and open access by The Ames Library, the Andrew W. Mellon Center for Curricular and Faculty Development, the Office of the Provost and the Office of the President. It has been accepted for inclusion in Digital Commons @ IWU by the faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.
Oral Presentation 05.2

"PRISON AS A HOME": CHRISTIAN PERCEPTION OF IMPRISONMENT IN THE AGE OF MARTYRS

Mary Olson and Jason Moralee*
History and Greek and Roman Studies Departments, Illinois Wesleyan University

Prisons in the Late Antique world were intended, by those in power, to function as a sort of halfway house for the accused awaiting trial or the condemned, awaiting death. Legal understanding of prison was not, however, what resulted for all classes and social groups. Though it was unintentional, prisons became yet another form of punishment to the masses. The Digests of Justinian outlined what prisons were intended to be and how they should be used. Treatment of detainees, however, differed due to class. The fourth-century author Libanius rallied against prisons, deplorable conditions, and the suffering therein. Though the pagan author Libanius was reform-minded, it is with the Christians that prison shifts from a place of suffering to a locale for salvation. Spiritual revelation became the main purpose of prisons; prisons were thereby transmuted into theoretical havens that assisted the transition into the next world. By reading matyrologies and saints, lives in comparison with Roman legislation, we will see how prisons were conceived officially by the state and its representatives as well as how Christians transmuted the punitive purpose of imprisonment into a spiritual reckoning. Although prisons changed little during Late Antiquity, the perception and the understanding of prisons varied by social groups; from the law-makers to the common man, but it was the Christians who applied a higher spiritual meaning to what was an inconvenience to some and an unintentional form of suffering to others.