**Chapter Six Overview Video Transcript**

Chapter 6, Rhetoric in Christian Europe and North Africa, considers the theory and uses of rhetoric that characterize the era of church dominance, running from about the 5th century to the 14th century. Now, when we left off with chapter 5, the Roman Empire had essentially crushed the study of rhetorical theory. And yet, all these years later, here you sit taking a class on rhetorical theory. So what happened?

In chapter 6, we put forth religious rhetoric as an answer to that question. We argue that the Christian Church came to control nearly every aspect of public and private life, growing into the largest and most influential institution in Europe, and for us, emerging as a consequential external force shaping the history and theory of rhetoric.

The chapter begins with the conversion of Constantine. It's important to recognize at the outset of chapter 6 that Constantine was a savvy emperor and a savvy ruler, and he quickly saw that one way to consolidate political power is to wield the power of the state and the power of growing religious influence, and more specifically, the growing influence of the religious church, of the Christian Church. And so there we have kind of the first origins of the blending of religion, rhetoric, and power into this consequential state church that still impacts some of our religious, political, and social institutions today.

The chapter focuses also a little bit specifically on St. Augustine of Hippo, lived between 353 and 430 CE. St. Augustine, or Augustine, was the greatest and most influential of the early church fathers. These early church fathers were a group of theologians that wrote between about 180 and 450 CE, and they did much to shape Christian theology.

Now, St. Augustine was interesting because not only was he a devout religious man, at least later in life, but he was also an accomplished rhetorician. And so one of his primary contributions to our study of rhetorical theory today was that he rescued rhetoric from the ill repute that was kind of left over after the Roman Empire crushed the study of rhetoric.

And you can kind of understand why, from his perspective, a devout, pious, at least later in life, religious man, he was concerned with spreading the gospel. He was concerned with evangelizing and proselytizing. But he also knew, because he was an accomplished rhetorician, an accomplished teacher of rhetoric, that the techniques of rhetorical theory would be incredibly useful in spreading the gospel. So again, we kind of have the intersection there of religion and rhetoric.

Another way to put that is St. Augustine didn't want to fight with one hand tied behind his back. He thought if one of his primary goals in life, divine mission from God, was to spread the gospel, he may as well use the best available tools that he had at his disposal. That being rhetorical theory and practice.

So how does chapter 6 relate to what we're still learning today? Well, the obvious connection would be between how religious rhetoric still dominates public discourse today. Now, when we think about religious rhetoric, both in chapter 6, but also in how we talk about the rhetoric of religion today, we're not focused so much on kind of an internal or personal spiritual force. We're focused more on how religious rhetoric, how religion and God broadly defined is and are used as sources of rhetorical invention.

By that we mean if a rhetor can attach a God, some kind of divine influence to their message, that adds a lot of power. That adds a lot of resonance. So if your arguments can be evidenced or supported by God, boy, that makes you or can make you a pretty powerful rhetor. After all, as the saying goes, When God is for you, who can be against you?