ABSTRACT

The Contours of Donatism:
Theological and Ideological Diversity in Fourth Century North Africa

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It has been tempting for many historians of fourth century North Africa to view the Donatist church as a monolithic movement. This is not, however, an accurate picture. Donatism exhibited varied contours during its period of ascendancy in North Africa, differences in theological and ideological beliefs which often led to tension, even schism, within itself. The purpose of this thesis is to discuss these varieties within the Donatist movement. Accordingly, it will first examine the evolution of Donatism over time by comparing the concerns of the original schism with those of the movement at the Council of Carthage in 411. The paper will then turn to the great divergences which characterized the late Donatist movement by focusing on the radicals on its right and left flanks—the Circumcellions and Rogatists/Maximianists, respectively. By doing so, a picture of Donatism will be presented that truly appreciates the theological variety within the movement.

The Contours of Donatism:
Theological and Ideological Diversity in Fourth Century North Africa

by

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DEDICATION

To Katie (belle)

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Unlike many other early schismatic movements, the Donatist Church of North Africa was fortunate enough to occupy a major place in the writings of its contemporaries. North Africans such as Optatus of Milevis and Augustine of Hippo, along with a host of other authors, both African and transmarine (to use a quintessentially Augustinian term), devoted much effort into discussing the movement. Through their writings it is possible to reconstruct much of Donatist history and theology. It is true, however, that caution must be exercised when attempting to illumine the inner life of a movement based on the observations of admittedly non-sympathetic sources. It is thus an even greater boon to modern researchers of Donatism that comparatively many Donatist primary sources have survived to provide an authentic glimpse into their worldview—from the highly-influential *Book of Rules* by Tyconius to various Donatist martyrologies, homilies and even world-chronicles preserved through their inclusion in Catholic polemic or under pseudonyms. While historians of the movement cannot help but feel a deep sense of loss upon reading Jerome's statement that "many" of the writings of Donatus the Great were still extant in his time,[1] or when Gennadius notes the literary contributions of several Donatist writers and mentions *four* extant books of Tyconius (rather than the two

[1] Jerome, *On Illustrious Men*, 93, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* Second Series, Vol. 3: *Theodoret, Jerome, Gennadius, Rufinus: Historical Writings*, translated by Ernest Cushing Richardson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994), 380.

which remain, and one painfully reconstructed at that),[2] the records which have survived are quite excellent in comparison with other schismatic movements of that time-period.[3]

It was for good reason that the Donatist Church was given such preeminence in the writings of contemporary polemicists, for at its apex it constituted the primary feature of the North African ecclesial landscape. Indeed, it was often the Catholics who were, for much of the history of this time period, a minority group.[4] Nevertheless, the faction which ultimately prevailed was the Catholic side, and it was their works which for the most part survived to tell the tale of the "inveterate schism."[5] The most widespread perception of the movement for the greater part of its subsequent treatment in history has been the viewpoint of the victors: Donatism has been viewed as an intractable, monolithic movement characterized by unnecessary rigorism and violent excess, a particularly disagreeable if relatively short-lived schismatic disturbance. It is interesting to note that just as scholarship today highly distrusts the surface impression of Donatism as narrated by its Catholic opponents, for many years the situation was the other way around: no statement of the Donatists was to be taken seriously without Catholic corroboration.

The late nineteenth-century historian Karl von Hefele provides an interesting example of this phenomenon. While he was a product of the progressive Tubingen

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[2] Gennadius, *On Illustrious Men*, 4, 5, and 18, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* Second Series, Vol. 3: *Theodoret, Jerome, Gennadius, Rufinus: Historical Writings*, translated by Ernest Cushing Richardson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994), 386-87, 389. The two works of Tyconius which survive today are the *Book of Rules* and the *Commentary on Revelation*, the latter of which has been preserved in fragmentary form through numerous allusions and quotes by later authors.

[3] Compare for example the paucity of Novatianist or Luciferian primary sources.

[4] See W. H. C. Frend, "Donatus "paene totam Africam decepit": How*?"* in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 48 (October, 1997), 611 for a discussion of Donatist numerical strength.

[5] See Augustine, *Contra Cresconium Grammaticum Donatistam Libri IV*, II.8.10, in *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, Vol. 43.445-594, edited by Jacques Paul Migne (Paris, 1844-94), 472.

school of thought, Hefele viewed Donatist records as inherently untrustworthy and the movement itself as a "miserable schism."[6] Two passages in particular may serve to highlight how such an attitude affected an excessive hermeneutic of suspicion in regards to Donatist testimony. In the *History of the Councils of the Church*, Hefele notes the possible existence of what he calls the "Pretended Synod of Sinuessa," a synod in which the Roman bishop Marcellinus was condemned for having offered sacrifices to the gods during the Diocletianic persecution, which he feels as having little "pretension to authenticity."[7] The reason for Hefele's reservations are simply that "it is beyond all doubt that this document is an amplification of the falsehood spread by the Donatists about the year 400 . . . a falsehood which Augustine and Theodoret had already refuted."[8] But when discussing the contemporary council of Cirta, he castigates the Donatists because after they had been "so indulgent towards themselves" at that synod, they dared to become "the chiefs of the rigorous and exaggerated party of the Donatists, who saw *traditores* everywhere, even where there were none," unquestioningly repeating standard Augustinian polemic almost word for word.[9] For Hefele, as for the majority of historians of the movement up through the nineteenth century, the Donatists were to be seen solely through the lens of Catholic orthodoxy.[10]

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[6] Charles Joseph Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church, from the Original Documents,* Vols. 1-2., translated by Henry Oxenham (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1896), Vol. I, 173.

[7] Hefele, *History Vol.I,* 127-128.

[8] Ibid. The account of the Council of Sinuessa that survives is indeed a forged document, but not for the reasons that Hefele gives. See Chapter Three below, page 68, note 92.

[9] Ibid, 130.

[10] This includes even those writers who were personally sympathetic towards the Donatist side, as indeed many Protestant historians were during the nineteenth century. Note for example August Neander, *General History of the Christian Religion and Church, Vol. II,* translated by Joseph Torrey (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1854), 182-217; Henry Wace, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature,*

It was W. H. C. Frend who substantially shattered these views for the English-speaking world. In his landmark study *The Donatist Church*, he overthrew the old paradigm of denigrating Donatist sources and instead subjected their opponents to intense scrutiny, while at the same time analyzing the movement from a social and economic standpoint. The result was a radically reconfigured sympathetic portrait of Donatism which focused on the economic and nationalist aspects of the movement while at the same time highlighting the genuine theological differences that separated Donatists from Catholics. Frend's substantial overwrite of the movement was such a success that it has replaced the earlier "orthodox" model as the standard view of Donatism for English-speakers, and modern works on the subject invariably note *The Donatist Church* in their bibliographies. Modern scholars of the movement have followed Frend's lead and adapted a hermeneutic of suspicion toward Catholic sources that has allowed the inner complexities and theological depth of the movement to be highlighted. Through the work of these scholars, most notably Maureen Tilley and Pamela Bright, the study of the Donatist church has gone in new and exciting directions.

In this thesis, I wish to extend the reach of modern scholarship on Donatism by focusing on the theological and ideological diversity within the Donatist Church. This will be accomplished by highlighting the evolution of Donatist theology and focusing on major factions and subgroups within the movement. The first part of the paper will focus on how the Donatist church can be seen to have evolved over *time*; it will first discuss the early years of the schism and then look at the movement as it stood around the time of the 411 council of Carthage. The findings of these two chapters will then be compared to

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Sects and Doctrines, *Vol. 1: A-D* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1877), 881-896; and Henry Guericke, *A Manual of Church History*, translated by William Shedd (Andover: W.F. Draper, 1857), 278-283.

highlight what beliefs changed, which remained the same, and which new emphases were introduced into the movement. The second part of the paper will then discuss the tensions within the Donatist church *spatially*, focusing on the right and left wings of the movement at a particular period in time (the late 4th century). There existed throughout the history of the Donatist church two great opposing tendencies which for the sake of typology will be called the *Church of the Martyrs* and the *Church of the Pure*. As typological designations, these stand respectively for the tendency of Donatists to emphasize persecution or martyrdom as the primary difference between themselves and the Catholics and the contrasting tendency to focus on the purity of the church, its non-communion with sinners as the central differentiating factor. These opposing tendencies are best exemplified by several Donatist sub-factions which represented in extreme form the tensions within the movement itself, such as the Circumcellions on one end of the spectrum, and the Rogatists and Maximianists on the other. By discussing the theological characteristics of these three movements it will be possible to highlight the conflicts within mainstream Donatism itself.

There are several limitations and delimitations which must be addressed. As Tilley states, "Anglophones have been less fortunate"[11]—French patristic scholars have focused more attention to the Donatist Church, including translating the relevant primary texts, than have their English counterparts. Their direct contributions will be mediated through English translations and summaries. Furthermore, the whole of Augustine's works has yet to be translated into English, and his anti-Donatist polemics have particularly suffered neglect in this area. While a new translation of Augustine's writings

[11] Tilley, introduction to *Donatist Martyr Stories*: *The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa,* vii (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996).

(*The Works of St. Augustine* by New City Press) has promised to rectify this issue, their translation of his anti-Donatist writings is projected to come out in 2009—far beyond the terminus of this paper. My own Latin translations have been necessary to fill in some of the gaps when crucial portions of Augustine's untranslated texts needed to be consulted. Latin works which do not exist in English will be referred to in the bibliography by their Latin names. Furthermore, while the Donatist schism endured for over 400 years,[12] detailed patristic sources on the schism did not continue under (and after) the Vandal occupation. For practical reasons, therefore, this discussion of the evolution of Donatism must necessarily end at the council of Carthage in 411.

It is my hope that this paper will bring to light the theological and ideological diversity within Donatism, and present a nuanced perspective of its distinctive aspects. While ancient writers commonly equated the Donatist movement with schism rather than heresy, Donatism's answers to the questions of sin and sacraments, church and state, and the validity of schismatic baptism all gave the movement a unique theological spin that differed from Catholic perspectives. Furthermore, the movement itself never rotated around a single unified theme, but exhibited tensions within itself that at times erupted into outright schism. By focusing on the diverse theological impulses within Donatism

[12] Beginning at 311, and lasting until the Islamic invasions—Frend finds possible evidence for Donatist inscriptions in 637 and notes that in 722 Pope Gregory II warned of "African rebaptizers" who had fled to Italy, indicating that the movement had survived in some form until the eighth century. See Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 313. R. A. Markus disagrees with this assessment in his article "Donatism: The Last Phase" in *From Augustine to Gregory the Great: History and Christianity in Late Antiquity* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1983), 118-126, arguing Donatists and Catholics had amalgamated together under the Vandal persecution and that subsequent references to them reflect a misunderstanding on the part of outsiders to the region. His thesis appears to be contradicted, however, by the testimony of Fulgentius, a Catholic bishop in North Africa under Vandal dominion during the sixth century, who clearly distinguished at that late date between his own party (whom he calls, in contrast to the Arians, "homoousians") and the Donatists. See Fulgentius, *Letter 9*.4, in *Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 95: Fulgentius, translated by Robert B. Eno (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 386.

and how they played out in the development of several intra-Donatist schisms, I will present a view of Donatism that highlights the large amount of diversity within the movement.

CHAPTER TWO

Preliminary Considerations

"Let no-one be surprised to hear me call those people brethren who cannot fail to be brethren. We and they, indeed, share one spiritual birth, but our actions are contrary."

–Optatus of Milevis

The Character of Donatism

In this study of Donatism, I am indebted to the work of Maureen Tilley, J. S. Alexander, Robert Eno, and R. A. Markus. Each of these scholars has responded to Frend's portrait of Donatism by focusing on the religious aspects of the movement, and their work within this paradigm has resulted in a much more rounded, nuanced portrait of Donatism than the efforts of their predecessors. Their emphasis on the religious life of Donatism, however, has not been mirrored by everyone. While the shift to a hermeneutic of suspicion with respect to the writings of their opponents has allowed the study of Donatism to branch out in new directions, it also brought about other approaches to understanding the Donatist Church which sidelined the religious causes of the schism in favor of a more secular dynamic. Some scholars have even gone so far as to state that the religious bases for Donatism served as merely a cloak for underlying nationalistic or economic grievances. As this thesis will be examining the Donatist schism from a specifically religious angle, it will be necessary to take some time to discuss such alternate views of the movement which have dominated the perception of Donatism in other studies.

Is Donatism a Socio-Economic Phenomenon?

W. H. C. Frend himself popularized a socio-economic interpretation of the Donatist movement in *The Donatist Church*. While later on in life he appeared to move away from this view and focus far more on the religious aspects of the movement,[1] *The Donatist Church* itself bases its enormously influential argument along nationalist and economic lines. In brief, Frend demonstrated what R. A. Markus calls "a considerable degree of coincidence" between the areas where Donatism had its greatest strength and the areas where the Berber language continues to be spoken today, seen particularly in the fact that the area in which the Donatists always had their greatest numerical superiority, the province of Numidia, was the least-Romanized province in North Africa.[2] What this implied to Frend was that Donatism took root in the non-Romanized, poorer classes of North Africa and represented a religious-based rebellion against all things foreign and upper-class. Both economic distress and incipient nationalism on the part of the native Berber population thus accounted for the prevalence of Donatism and the tenacity with which it was defended.[3] As it is baldly stated in *The Donatist Church*, "In the resulting social conflicts, the Donatists and Catholics took different sides."[4] While genuine religious differences are certainly discussed in depth in *The Donatist Church*, the ultimate driving factor in Donatism, for Frend, could not be religion, but the above

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[1] See, for example, his highly sympathetic account of the religious causes of the schism in "The Donatist Church and Saint Paul," in *Epistole paoline nei manichei, i donatisti e il primo Agostino* (Rome: Sussidi Patristici 5, 1989), 85-123. The role of religion is emphasized at the expense of other factors.

[2] See R. A. Markus' assessment of Frend's work in "Christianity and Dissent in Roman North Africa: Changing Perspectives in Recent Work" in *Schism, Heresy, and Religious Protest,* edited by Derek Baker (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1972), 23; also J. S. Alexander's article on "Donatism" in *The Early Christian world*, Vol. 2, edited by Philip F. Esler (New York: Rutledge, 2000).

[3] See Frend, *Donatist Church*, 60.

[4] Frend, *Donatist Church*, 61.

concerns. Frend's subtitle for his work, "A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa," quite accurately summed up his interpretation of what the Donatist movement was all about: a protest against the *traditores*, certainly, but on a more fundamental level a protest against Roman occupation and endemic poverty. Religious differences were thus reduced to a catalyst. This theory would prove highly influential, fitting as it did a number of previously unexplained facts into a neatly-organized hypothesis, and offering an explanation understandable to twentieth-century minds as to why a movement founded on a disputed episcopal succession would obstinately endure for over three hundred years, when other similar movements had petered out soon after their inception.[5] Markus notes that "it is no wonder that *The Donatist Church* should have come to dominate the landscape of scholarship in this field."[6] Whether one agrees or disagrees with Frend's hypothesis, his conclusions have had an enormous impact on research into the movement.

Frend's belief that the Donatist Church represented a clash between the proletariat and bourgeoisie had been previously advanced by Continental scholars, notably by F. Martroye, who believed that Donatism represented a revolutionary uprising of the poor against the rich.[7] This line of thought was espoused by a number of Marxist historians and sociologists who saw in the schism a clear case of a class struggle which used

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[5] Such as the Luciferian and Meletian schisms had. The Novatianist schism is of course a major exception to this trend. But the Novatianists never made up a majority of the population in any region, unlike the Donatist schism, which for the first hundred years of its existence was the majority church in North Africa.

[6] Markus, "Christianity and Dissent," 24-25.

[7] His article, "Une tentative de revolution sociale en Afrique, Donatistes et Circoncellions," in *Revue des Questions Historiques* 32 (1904), 353-416 and 33 (1905), 5-33, 389 appears to be the flagship article for such a viewpoint; it is cited as such by both A. H. M. Jones (*Were Ancient Heresies Disguised Social Movements*? (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 26) and B. H. Warmington (*The North African Provinces from Diocletian to the Vandal Conquest* (Cambridge, University Press, 1954), 79).

religion as a mere cloak.[8] The fact that Donatism appeared to have primarily taken hold among the native (and thus allegedly poorer) population, while the more Romanized (and thus allegedly richer) inhabitants adhered to Catholicism was taken as a sure marker of its underlying social foundations. It is not the Donatists proper, however, but rather their radical wing, the Circumcellions, that provide the basis for much of the contentions of these historians; their case will be discussed separately in Chapter Seven.

The position which saw Donatism primarily as a nationalist movement had also gained popularity on the Continent prior to Frend's work. Indeed, this view has a bit more credence than economic factors as a motivating force for the average Donatist, especially after Frend's study, which seemed to show a direct link between the non-Romanized population and the prevalence of Donatism. Alan Greenslade, in his book *Schism in the Early Church*, for example, states that after Caecilian had been confirmed in his episcopal chair by Constantine, "the Catholics must have been judged imperialists by any nationalists who existed on the other side."[9] While Greenslade elsewhere admonishes Frend for going too far with the nationalist hypothesis,[10] his own assessment of Donatism's success takes into account a nationalist motivation. Indeed, he even goes so far as to state that one major reason why few Donatists were converted to Catholicism was that "However strong the arguments against Donatism, as such, men with keen

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[8] See, for example, Karl Kautsky's treatment of Donatism in *Foundations of Christianity: A Study of Christian Origins* (New York: International Publishers, 1925), 449.

[9] S. L. Greenslade, *Schism in the Early Church* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1953), 58.

[10] Greenslade, *Schism*, 59, note 1. The irony is that it is in fact Greenslade who makes more baldly nationalist assessments than Frend, who was always careful to couch his observations with nuances. While he might see the Donatist movement as an expression of incipient nationalism among the Berber tribes, Frend will also caution (against Greenslade) that Donatist support of Firmus or Gildo ought not to be construed as a genuine rebellion against Roman authority: "The Roman Empire was to them the symbol of the imperfection of the present transitory phase. There is no evidence that they envisaged its overthrow even in Africa." (*Donatist Church*, 171).

nationalist feelings could not return to catholic unity without compromising their patriotism."[11]

Nor is this nationalist interpretation unsupported by the history of the schism; both Augustine and Optatus regularly denounce the Donatists for their support of the rebellions of Firmus and Gildo against the Roman government.[12] Both usurpers received enthusiastic collaboration from at least certain segments of the Donatist population, and both actively supported the Donatists in their struggles against the Catholics and others. So it is that Greenslade concludes that "the fact that Africa Proconsularis remained largely catholic while Numidia became largely Donatist, though not wholly attributable to nationalism, is significant of its influence."[13]

Nationalism has also appeared in post-Colonial interpretations of the Donatist schism, where it has been vigorously defended as an example of indigenous Christianity opposed to the centralizing tendencies of what one author calls the "Empire-cult."[14] M. P. Joseph, in his article "Heresy of the Majority: The Donatist Critique of the Church-State Relationship," states that the theological issues which caused the schism were quite secondary to other concerns: "Thus the protest against the Catholic Church by the Berbers was not a monolithic protest against the theological core of the Catholic faith, but more basically against the State and the complementary relationship between Church and State." According to his view, the Donatist critique of this "complementary relationship"

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[11] Greenslade, *Schism*, 61.

[12] Firmus was a North African chieftain who revolted against the corrupt *comes Africae* Romanus in 372 after having been blocked in his attempt to appeal for redress to the emperor, while Gildo, his brother, was a *comes* himself who attempted (unsuccessfully) to secede from the Empire in 398.

[13] Ibid, 59.

[14] M. P. Joseph, "Heresy of the Majority: Donatist Critique of the Church-State Relationship," in *Bangalore Theological Forum* 26 (June, 1994) 70.

revolved especially around "African nationalism and the rights of the poor against Roman imperialism."[15] The Donatist church was primarily concerned with African nationalism vis-à-vis Roman attempts to forcibly impose their faith on the conquered "Moors," and as such should be viewed as a positive precursor to the indigenous religious movements in Africa today.[16]

While many of these points will be incidentally discussed during later chapters (especially when dealing with Donatist views towards Church and State), it is necessary to state at the outset the opposition of this paper to an overbearing nationalist or economic interpretation of the Donatist schism. Not that these views are completely false; indeed, there were what may be termed "nationalist" and "economic" currents which periodically surfaced within the history of the schism. However, it appears highly unlikely that these currents were the central impetus behind the Donatist movement.

In the case of nationalism, it would not be reading too deeply into the texts to state that the Donatists occasionally allied with those who seemed able to best advance their interests, and in this limited way to state that the Donatist schism invoked at least some political repercussions. Their support of both Firmus and Gildo ought to be seen as an example of this tendency. But then again, the numerous appeals of the Donatist church to imperial judges ought also to be given their due weight here. After all, in the case of the Maximianists, a dissident Donatist group which broke communion with the main body, the Donatists were not afraid to use the power of both imperial judges *and* the

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[15] Joseph, "Heresy," 72.

[16] Joseph, "Heresy," 73. The article is highly derivative and exhibits several embarrassing mistakes. For example, M.P. Joseph erroneously takes a statement facetiously made by A. H. M. Jones in his essay *Were Ancient Heresies Disguised Social Movements?* ("We are Africans and hate the Roman government. . .") as an example of authentic Donatist polemic and includes it among his list of proofs that the Donatists were anti-Roman.

usurper Gildo to force the schismatics out of their basilicas—a fact that Augustine never tires of pointing out to them.[17] Indeed, Augustine even mentions in disgust that the *comes* of Africa in 377, a man named Flavian, was a Donatist himself.[18] Furthermore, even the so-called "nationalism" of Firmus and Gildo themselves has been called into doubt. B.H. Warmington notes that it was rather the incompetent rule of Romanus, the *comes Africae* at the time of Firmus, that drove Firmus to revolt.[19] His brother Gildo, in fact, supported the Romans against him at that time. Gildo's own revolt looks suspiciously more like an attempt to further his own personal ambition than as a banner of Berber nationalism.[20] And while Gildo was personally sympathetic to Donatists, it is best to remember that as *comes Africae* at the time of his revolt, all of Africa was implicated in Gildo's secession—Augustine records no attempt on the part of the Catholics to rebel against him, and surely his support was not limited solely to Donatists. While Augustine often reproaches the Donatists for the actions of one of their bishops who explicitly allied himself with Gildo, the fact remains that his irritation stems more from the fact that they took advantage of the situation than that they were anti-Roman.

It would be well to remember also that popular support of usurpers in North Africa was by no means limited to the Donatist faction. Heraclian, the Catholic *comes*

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[17] See, for example, Augustine, *Contra Cresconium* III.60.66 (PL 43.532) and IV.25.32 (PL 43.565), and Augustine, *Letter 51*.3 and *76*.4, in *Letters, 1-270*, in *The Works of Saint Augustine, Part II Vols. 1-4*, translated by Roland J. Teske, S.J. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2001-2005), Vol. I, 199-200 and 299).

[18] Augustine, *Letter 87*.8 (Teske, Vol. I, 348).

[19] Warmington states that it was only after Firmus was prevented from presenting a case to the Roman emperor Valentinian by Romanus that he revolted, counting on the support of the populace because of Romanus' inept and corrupt governance. While there were certainly other factors in the revolt, to see it primarily in nationalistic terms seems to be taking much more liberty with the text than is warranted. (Warmington, *North African Provinces*, 10).

[20] Jones, *Heresies*, 6, and Warmington, *North African Provinces*, 11.

Africae who in 411 and 412 enforced the decisive imperial edicts against the Donatists, revolted against the Emperor in 413 and invaded Italy with the great corn fleet which was at his disposal.[21] And in 427, the *comes Africae* Boniface, a friend of Augustine's, refused to return to the imperial court in order to account for his actions and defeated a Roman expedition sent against him. He was reconciled to the emperor through the influence of Augustine, but unfortunately he had already invited the Vandals into Africa to aid him against the Romans.[22] Warmington concludes in light of these and other factors that Donatism "clearly did not express any deep anti-Roman feeling among the native population."[23] Jones is even more caustic: "What the sectaries actually said in public, so far as our record goes, was . . . . 'The Donatist church is the true Catholic church, and we will never communicate with *traditores*,' but what they thought, we are asked to believe, was: 'We are Africans and hate the Roman government; we will have nothing to do with the Romans and will maintain our African church and if possible set up our African state.'"[24] While one can certainly state that certain segments of the Donatist clergy took advantage of several rebellions against Roman rule in order to gain support for their faction, it seems that an overarching nationalist hypothesis reads too much into the text.

Neither should it be said that social or economic factors were completely absent in relation to the popularity of the Donatist movement among the poorer elements of the

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[21] Warmington, *North African Provinces*, 13.

[22] Ibid, 13-14. This first incursion of Vandal tribes into Africa, of course, served as a precursor to the full-scale invasion which ended classical Rome's dominion over the North African provinces, although there was no way that Boniface would have known this.

[23] Warmington, *North African Provinces*, 99.

[24] Jones, *Heresies*, 3.

North African population and its tenacity in less-Romanized areas. But rather than implying some sort of class warfare consciousness between Donatists and Catholics, such demographics can be more easily explained by the widespread observation that the countryside is always more traditionalist-oriented than urban areas.[25] New ideas and movements which are eagerly adopted in the cities take much longer to percolate out into the countryside (which is one reason for the early rapid expansion of Christianity into the cities and its later, slower diffusion into non-urban areas—a process which was not at all complete in North Africa by Augustine's time[26]). It is at this point that references to Donatism as a "schism" inevitably taint the picture. As will be explored in depth in Chapter Three, it was not Donatism that represented a break with the past belief and practice of the North African Church, but rather Catholicism. Indeed, as R. A. Markus notes in his article "Christianity and Dissent in Roman North Africa," the very notion of a Donatist "movement" is misleading. As he states, "If there was a religious 'movement' in late Roman Africa, it is that of Catholicism."[27] While in this thesis I will be attempting to show that Donatism did, in fact, evolve significantly over the first one hundred years of its existence and certainly developed ideas and doctrines which had only been present in nascent form at the outset of the schism, Markus' point is well-taken. He further states that viewing Catholicism as the innovator rather than Donatism fully accounts for Frend's earlier correlations between non-Romanized areas and the prevalence of Donatism:

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[25] On this observation, see Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 14-15, and Ramsay MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 15ff.

[26] See, for example, Augustine's *Letter 232*, written to the leaders of a predominantly pagan village.

[27] Markus, "Christianity and Dissent," 30.

Catholicism was stronger in the urban areas precisely because it was these areas which were "most exposed to 'overseas' influence and pressure . . . . There is no need to explain Donatism as the religious expression of pre-existing tensions in order to appreciate why it should have survived longest and in greatest concentration in areas less susceptible to such influences."[28]

It would be misleading, furthermore, to baldly state that all Donatists were on one side of the economic divide and all Catholics on the other. This is the impression given by Frend and other proponents of a socio-economic interpretation of Donatism, but such a belief is quite misleading. Rather, it can be shown that many members of the Donatist church were in fact influential members of Roman society. Instead of positioning themselves in opposition to Roman culture and civilization, the Donatist leadership clearly walked in the upper echelons of that society. The case of the *comes Africae* Flavian has already been noted. In addition, despite Augustine's numerous attempts to portray the Donatists as uniformly denizens of the lower-class (and thus, as ignorant rustics in no way comparable to the splendor of the Catholic church), his letters often betray a different story. Augustine wrote a friendly letter to Celer, a wealthy landowner in Hippo Regius, who was a member of the Donatist communion.[29] Also, Augustine on several occasions harangued Donatist landowners for forcibly rebaptizing the Catholics on their lands.[30] Crispinus, the Donatist bishop of Calama, was apparently so wealthy

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[28] Ibid, 30-31.

[29] Augustine, *Letter 56*.2 (Teske, Vol. I, 237).

[30] See Augustine, *Letter 66*.1 (Teske, Vol. I, 257) and *Against the Letters of Petilian* II.84.184, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* First Series, Vol. 4: *St. Augustin: Against the Writings of the Manichaeans and Donatists*, translated by J. R. King (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994), 73 for examples.

that he had bought the lands of the tenant farmers of Mappala and rebaptized them into the Donatist faith.[31] Interestingly, it was these originally *Catholic* farmers who were so ignorant of Latin that they would have required the proposed debate between Augustine and Crispinus to be translated into Punic, as opposed to their Donatist overlord, who exhibited all the tendencies of a wealthy Roman landowner.[32] The *Theodosian Code* as well attests several times to Catholic slaves who were forced into the Donatist church by their landowners.[33] The *Theodosian Code* also discusses the financial penalties which were to be imposed on those who had refused to give up their Donatist allegiance after the 411 council of Carthage. Included in this list were "persons of Illustrious rank . . . Respectable rank . . . Senators . . . Most Noble rank" and "civil priest."[34] Such ranks imply that Donatism was by no means confined to the lower echelons of North African society.[35]

Donatism as a Religious Phenomenon

The advice that A.H.M. Jones gave in his assessment of Donatism in "Were Ancient Heresies Disguised Social Movements?" is well taken: while the topic of religion

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[31] Augustine, *Letter 84* (Teske, Vol. I, 339-40).

[32] Augustine, *Letter 66*.2 (Teske, Vol. I, 257): "If the people of Mappala went over to your communion of their own will, let them hear both of us so that what we say is written down and, after it has been signed by us, let it be translated into Punic."

[33] *The Theodosian Code and Novels, and the Sirmondian Constitutions*, XVI.6.4.1-2, translated by Clyde Pharr (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 464.

[34] *Theodosian Code*, XVI.5.52 (Pharr, 459): "Illustres singillatim poenae nomine fisco nostro auri pondo quinquaginta cogantur inferre, spectabiles auri pondo quadraginta, senatores auri pondo triginta, clarissimi auri pondo viginti, sacerdotales auri pondo triginta. . ."

[35] Which was why the imperial financial penalties enacted after the Council of Carthage against the Donatists had such effect. See Augustine, *Sermon 296*.14 (in *Sermons on the Saints, 273-305A*, in *The Works of Saint Augustine*, Part III, Vol. 9, translated by Roland J. Teske, S.J. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1994)), for the story of one of the many Donatists who converted in order to preserve their property.

or doctrine does not resonate with modern academia as a major passion as much as nationalism or socioeconomic issues, the fact is that religious fervor was far and away the primary cause and rationale for the Donatist schism.[36] Maureen Tilley points out that the problem with Frend's socioeconomic approach was that "their strategy failed to provide a specifically religious context for the Donatist-Catholic schism. . . . they neglected the one factor most important to the participants: religion."[37] The problem with other approaches is that, while well-intentioned, each must adopt a hermeneutic of suspicion not only with regards to their Catholic interpreters, but also to the authentic Donatist passages themselves. Nowhere do Augustine and his Donatist opponents argue about anything but the theological bases of the schism. Alan Greenslade's statement that the Donatists "could not return to catholic unity without compromising their patriotism" is not derived from any surviving Donatist texts, but rather from a commitment to a pre-existing theory. Such other views also have difficulties with several untidy facts which Tilley notes, such as how Donatism remained a viable option even in the most Romanized of areas and the fact that the schism, while allegedly appealing to the poor, was certainly not poverty-stricken itself.[38] It is because of these issues that even Greenslade admits that while he "would go a long way . . . in recognising the importance of personal, nationalist and social elements in the schism," he cannot completely eliminate the theological issues: "the questions are really difficult."[39] For her part, Tilley presents her book *The Bible in*

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[36] Jones, *Heresies*, 27.

[37] Maureen Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa: the Donatist World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 11.

[38] Ibid, 11-12.

[39] Greenslade, *Schism*, 119.

Christian North Africa as a direct contrast to Frend's work that instead "privileges the specifically religious character of the Donatist controversy, which was the construction both sides gave it at the time."[40]

In my own treatment of Donatism throughout this thesis, I will emphasize the religious character of the Donatist movement as well. It does not appear to be the case that Donatism was primarily a symptom of social unrest or incipient nationalism on the part of the native population. It was, in fact, above all a theological and ideological dispute. The Donatists, much like the Quartodecimans in Asia Minor, saw themselves as continuing in the tradition of their ancestors.[41] Their temporary alliances with usurpers against imperial authority should not be construed as nationalist in motivation. Instead, they should be seen as latching onto the temporary power of the usurpers to achieve positions of power over the hated Catholics. The movers and shakers of Donatism were apparently very Roman indeed, and stand in the Latin, rather than the Berber, tradition. The assertion that the countryside largely supported Donatism rather than Catholicism (which, while true, was by no means uniform) has more to do with the traditionalist nature of Donatism than any overt feelings of class conflict.[42] Donatism began as a schism over the nature of personal holiness, it flourished as an authentic expression of North African traditionalist faith, and it retained its power long after the initial schism due to genuine theological differences.

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[40] Tilley, *Bible*, 3.

[41] Unlike the majority of Christian churches in the later patristic era, the Quartodecimans adhered to a calculation of the date of Easter which tied it to the Jewish Passover rather than the nearest Sunday. Their rationale for this peculiarity was that they were following an unbroken line of tradition dating back to the apostles themselves, and always observed Easter in that way. See Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, V.22, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* Second Series. *Vol. 2: Socrates, Sozomenus, Church Histories*, translated by A. C. Zenos (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1999), 130.

[42] Frend, *Donatist Church*, 52.

Donatism is not Theologically Monolithic

It could be argued that discussions of Donatism as a religious movement could be construed as a step back into the past. After all, isn't this precisely the view that the old orthodoxy-based arguments always assumed? While it is certainly true that most pre- and early-modern approaches also viewed the movement from a religious angle, they generally caricatured it as a movement monolithic in its theology, intransigent in its few legitimate points of contention, and hopelessly outdated since the coming of the Christian emperors. Indeed, even newer discussions of Donatism still assume much the same things about its general monolithic nature. The point of this thesis, however, is that Donatism was an ideology that could not be simply explained by a few buzz-words and catch-phrases. Rather, it was a multi-faceted movement in both space and time. The Donatists of the original schism were not the same as the Donatists at the council of Carthage, while the excesses of the Circumcellions strikingly contrast with the rigoristic pacifism of the Rogatists, their contemporaries.

This point has been noted by supporters of a religious-based view of Donatism, such as Robert Eno and Maureen Tilley. Both note that it is no wonder that Donatism has been portrayed, in Tilley's words, as "an intransigent, monolithic, and millennialist sect of Christianity which never adjusted to the end of the Roman persecutions," as this is precisely the color that their Catholic opponents wished to paint them.[43] As will be discussed below, however, the Donatist leadership was by no means comprised of a rustic, ignorant mass of intransigent bishops. While the lines of the original schism were

[43] See page viii of Maureen Tilley's introduction to *Donatist Martyr Stories*. Also note Eno's discussion of the issue in his article "Some Nuances in the Ecclesiology of the Donatists" in *Studia Patristica 14* (1976), 417-421.

drawn due to a split between traditional North African theology on the one side and newer innovations on the other, Donatism, like all factions that survive beyond their founding years, soon matured along quite different theological tendencies than did its Catholic counterpart. Alan Greenslade notes that while there are certainly movements which clearly merit the title of either heresy or schism, the line between heresy and schism itself is more vague than one might expect precisely because "most schisms raise serious theological issues . . . and there was no consistent usage which determined when a difference of opinion constituted a heresy rather than a schism."[44] When dissenting parties are caused by rival claims to a bishopric, as happened many times within the Roman bishopric during the patristic era and beyond, they may easily be labeled "schism" rather than "heresy." But when the rival claimants base their arguments on quite different interpretations of what the Scriptures have to say for their times, then the classification of "schism" is harder to accept. In the case of the Donatists, perhaps much has been clouded by the fact that the Catholics never seem to have believed the Donatists to be genuinely outside of orthodox belief and practice, and thus that they constituted a "schism" rather than a "heresy."[45] This belief, which assumes that the Donatists were

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[44] Greenslade, *Schism*, 29. Maureen Tilley, in "When Schism Becomes Heresy in Late Antiquity: Developing Doctrinal Deviance in the Wounded Body of Christ" (in *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 15:1 (Spring 2007), 1-21), also notes the "fluidity between schism and heresy" which existed throughout the patristic era and indeed continues today. The line between "schism" and "heresy" was rather fuzzy during patristic times, and often we find one party which in the judgment of later writers constituted a "schism" being denounced for "heresy" (as was the case with the Novatianists at times; see Tilley, "Schism," 9). In this paper, I define the terms as the Catholics did within the context of the Donatist movement: a "schism" occurred when a part of the church seceded from the wider body due to what Tilley terms a "disparity in practice or discipline" (Tilley, "Schism," 1), such as a disputed election or accusations of moral impurity, while a heresy was born from doctrinal divergences (the Donatists defined these terms in the same way, but believed that both schism and heresy required a similar remedy, i.e., rebaptism; see Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, I.12). Due to the fact that many elections were disputed precisely because of issues of doctrine, the line between "schism" and "heresy" is often difficult to measure in practice.

[45] See Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, I.12, translated and edited by Mark Edwards (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), 11-12, and Augustine, *Heresies*, LXIX.1, in *The Works of Saint*

carbon-copies of the Catholics in every way but their disputed succession, has unfortunately obscured the fact that their theology evolved considerably in later years.

This evolution was partly due to the fact that, unlike popular portrayals of the movement, Donatist leaders were neither uneducated nor theologically-obtuse. In this case, Eno's negative assessment of Donatist intellectualism is incorrect; rather than "never [being] a hotbed of intellectualism" (Eno's words), Donatism was in fact the primary force of North African theology during the years between the schism and the rise of Augustine.[46] Indeed, B.H. Warmington concludes that "Such is the abundance of Donatist literature, compared with that from the Catholic side before Augustine, that were this our only evidence we might suppose that *Catholicism* was the religion of the unlettered, while Donatism had won over the educated. It is clear that for much of the fourth century Donatism attracted the best intellects among the African Christians."[47] The eponymous leader of the schism, Donatus the Great, was acknowledged by all opponents to be a cultured man. Optatus states against him that "because of his knowledge of secular literature . . . [he] was in love with the age and because of his knowledge seemed to himself wise."[48] Both Augustine and Jerome grudgingly admit that

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Augustine, Part I, Vol. 18: Arianism and Other Heresies, translated by Roland J. Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1995), 50. While I will endeavor to show in my paper that Donatism, at least in its later years, had become much more than a mere schism in terms of doctrine and in its worldview substantially differed from the Catholics, I will continue to use the word "schism" to refer to the inception of the Donatist church. This is because at the outset of the dispute the Donatist movement indeed resembled more a "schism" in that it was primarily concerned with the moral impurity of its opponents rather than matters of doctrine, because both parties viewed the events which occurred in 311 as a "schism," and finally because the term "heresy" remains a loaded word which ought not be applied to any divergent movement without careful consideration. It would be wise to remember, however, that while both parties agreed that what had occurred in 311 was a "schism," they disagreed as to whom the "schismatics" were: the Donatists were emphatic in their belief that it was the *Catholics* who had torn themselves away from the true church.

[46] Eno, "Nuances," 418.

[47] Warmington, *North African Provinces*, 92.

[48] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, III.3 (Edwards, 66).

he was quite eloquent and had "deceived almost all Africa and especially Numidia by his persuasiveness,"[49] while Jerome adds that he was a prolific writer.[50] Gennadius fills in the gaps not covered by other Catholic authors when he records that the Donatist Vitellius Afer wrote "excellent doctrine" ("except in speaking of us as persecutors"!).[51] Of Macrobius, later to become the Donatist bishop of Rome, Gennadius writes that he was "distinguished first in our party in Africa and afterwards in his own," writing works "of very necessary doctrine."[52] Frend concludes from these statements that Donatist writings were apparently quite popular in south Gaul (where Gennadius hailed from) at the end of the fifth century.[53] Of Tyconius, reckoned by the Catholics as the Donatists' greatest product (and their greatest nemesis, according to Augustine), numerous articles have been written. Certainly his twin surviving works, the *Book of Rules* and his *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, had a profound effect on subsequent Catholic authors, including Augustine, who cited the *Book of Rules* multiple times in his writings.[54] According to a "Praedestinatus," Parmenian, the successor of Donatus the Great, was said to have composed many books and even made "new psalms" against the Catholics,[55] suggesting that Augustine's *Abecedarium* against the Donatists might have actually been written in

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[49] Jerome, *Illustrious Men*, 93 (NPNF(2) 3, 380). Also Augustine, *Heresies*, LXIX.2 (Teske, 50).

[50] Jerome, *Illustrious Men*, 93 (NPNF(2) 3, 380).

[51] Gennadius, *Illustrious Men*, 4 (NPNF(2) 3, 386).

[52] Ibid, 5 (NPNF(2) 3, 386-87).

[53] Frend, "Decepit," 619.

[54] *Letter 41, Letter 249, Questions on the Heptateuch* (found in Augustine's *Retractations*, II.81.3, in *Fathers of the Church, Vol. 60*, translated by Mary Inez Bogan (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1968), 242), and especially his explicit use of the Rules in *Teaching Christianity*.

[55] "Praedestinatus," *De Haeresibus* 44, in *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina,* Vol. 53.587-672, edited by Jacques Paul Migne (Paris, 1844-94), 601A.

order to co-opt Parmenian's success. Augustine himself, when it suited him, mentioned the intellectual merits of Petilian ("conspicuous among them for learning and eloquence"[56]) and Emeritus ("someone endowed with a good mind and educated in the liberal arts"[57]), among others. From these portraits painted even by their opponents, it is clear that the Donatist leadership was well-equipped to evolve along with the times and develop differing nuances on the issues that held their movement together. With such leaders as these, it was impossible that Donatist theology would remain static or monolithic throughout the century of its dominance.

The use of the term "monolithic" as it is used in this paper, however, has a two-fold meaning. The first, the view that Donatism always held doggedly to the same tendencies throughout the years of its existence, has been discussed above. The second is an implicit assertion common to many scholars that Donatist theology formed a unified front, i.e., that all Donatists in a particular time-period held to substantially the same views. In her book *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, Maureen Tilley has done a thorough and excellent job of discussing the changing theologies and ideologies of the movement by following the evolving Donatist use of Scripture throughout its existence. In this area, my work is intended to complement hers. However, even Tilley does not give sufficient explanation to how much variety can be seen *within* Donatism itself. When discussing her view of the Donatist church as the *collecta* of saints, for example, or its beliefs concerning the universal church or church-state relationships, she seems to take for granted that all Donatists of a particular time period spoke with one voice and held the

[56] Augustine, *Against Petilian*, I.1.1 (NPNF(1) 4, 520)

[57] Augustine, *Letter 87*.1 (Teske, Vol. I, 344).

same opinions. As my paper will endeavor to show, this was not the case. There was much theological diversity within the movement. Donatism was never a lock-step phenomenon; it exhibited nuances and even opposite poles of thought which at times threatened to tear the movement apart.

Indeed, while it is Maureen Tilley's work that this thesis will be especially paralleling, she exhibits another tendency that I wish to correct within the context of this paper. This is her well-developed hermeneutic of suspicion, laid out in detail in the introduction to *The Bible in Christian North Africa*. While her hermeneutical limitations are excellent tools that this thesis will certainly follow,[58] at times a rigid application of these rules allows her to pass lightly over certain facets of Donatism which are quite heavily stressed in Augustine or Optatus, such as the question of the universal church or the Donatist relationship with the state. It is in precisely those areas where Tilley discounts arguments by Augustine or Optatus in order to present her unified vision of

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[58] See Tilley, *Bible*, 4-5. Her limitations are explained as follows. *Multiple attestation of sources* means that a reference to a presumed Donatist practice by Catholic authors is not to be taken as representative of the movement without other passages which corroborate it, the more the better. *Congruency* refers to passages which show similarities with other known aspects of Donatist thought, thus making their veracity more likely. *Extrapolation* refers to the doubtful legitimacy of passages which appear to be Catholic extrapolations of Donatist beliefs (Tilley's example is "You *would* say" vs. "you say"). *Dissimilarity* means that passages in Catholic polemics which seem to be irrelevant to the argument or even to undermine their own case probably reflect genuine Donatist concerns, since they would have had no polemic value. Finally, *strength* refers to the amount of space a Catholic polemicist spends refuting a particular Donatist argument. The more strenuous and extended the objections, the more likely that the original argument constituted a genuinely Donatist line of reasoning. The necessity of a hermeneutic of suspicion when reading the history and beliefs of a movement through the polemics of its opponents cannot be overemphasized. For example, Optatus accuses his opponent Parmenian of being intractably opposed to the legitimacy of the churches outside North Africa: "Why do you deny him [God] the Christian peoples of the east and north, even of all the western provinces and innumerable islands, against which you alone, a handful, are in rebellion, and with whom you have no dealings in communion?" (Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, II.11 (Edwards, 41)) From Augustine, however, we find that Parmenian's assessment of the status of the transmarine churches was more nuanced than Optatus would lead us to believe: Parmenian actually said "We *do not know* whether there may be good Christians through such a great number of people of the transmarine world." (Augustine, *Contra Epistolam Parmeniani Libri III*, II.2.4, in *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, Vol. 43.33-106, edited by Jacques Paul Migne (Paris, 1844-94), 51-52, emphasis mine) Without Augustine's unintentional corrective, one would naturally conclude that Parmenian belonged to a more rigorist shade of Donatism than he actually did.

Donatism which seem rather to show evidence of tensions within the movement itself. So, for example, when Augustine records both that Donatists argue that they recognize the universal church and simultaneously that they view the church outside North Africa as damned, Tilley wishes to disprove one point and highlight the other. However, these contradictory assertions appear to evidence instead two *different* traditions within the Donatist movement which were genuinely in conflict. Furthermore, her attempt to portray Donatism as a unified ideology also leads Tilley to completely discard the contributions of the Circumcellions to the Donatist movement. This stems out of her view of the Circumcellions as a whole (she views them as "religiously conservative migrant agricultural laborers" only loosely affiliated with Donatism[59]), a view which I will attempt to show is fundamentally flawed in Chapter Seven. In that chapter, I will argue that the Circumcellions were in fact closely bound to Donatism, and represent one major option within the movement's multi-faceted theological tendencies.

Linguistic Considerations

The Terms "Donatist" and "Catholic"

Finally comes the question of terms. How should one refer to the two factions whose disputes plunged North Africa into controversy for years? Up to this point we have been referring to one side as "Donatist" and the other as "Catholic," but these designations are not historically accurate as regards the faction under discussion in this paper. After all, the Donatists clearly considered *themselves* to be the Catholic party in name, as amply attested to by both Donatist and Catholic sources. Augustine was

[59] Tilley, *Bible*, 94.

continually frustrated by the fact that when Donatists appealed to imperial authority, they invariably called themselves Catholics.[60] The Donatist *Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs* plainly shows this understanding of their party; the narrative is said to have been given in order that "one will be able to recognize which church is the Catholic Church, if the pestiferous defect of the traitors is revealed for all ages by their impious deeds as well as by the judgment of the martyrs."[61]

Furthermore, both Donatists and Catholics were agreed in their general terminology for each other—while their own side constituted the Catholic Church, the other was defined as "schismatic." It is clear from the very beginning that the Donatists thought of the Catholic side as "schismatic," albeit in harsher terms than did the Catholics: Optatus strongly contrasts his own party's differentiation between schism and heresy to Parmenian's indiscriminate joining of the two together.[62] To Optatus, Donatist baptism was valid, though schismatic, but to Parmenian, the Catholics were no better than heretics and thus required the rite of baptism upon entrance into the Donatist Church

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[60] Augustine, *Expositions in the Psalms*, Psalm 57.15, in *The Works of Saint Augustine, Part III, Vols. 15-20*, translated by Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2000-2004), Vol. 17, 136-37. Certainly the Donatists did not mean precisely the same thing by the term "Catholic" as did their opponents: while Catholics understood the term to mean "universal in extent," the Donatists defined the term "Catholic" in terms of doctrinal purity, i.e., in keeping the "whole" doctrine of the church. Hence Petilian can state "If you declare that you hold the Catholic Church, the word 'catholic' is merely the Greek equivalent for entire or whole. But it is clear that *you* are not in the whole, because you have gone aside into the part." Augustine, *Against Petilian*, II.38.90 (NPNF(1) 4, 554), italics mine.

[61] *The Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs*, 19 in *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa,* translated by Maureen A. Tilley (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), 44. See also Chapter 22 (Tilley, 47) which connects "the glorious lineage of the blessed martyrs" to the "one, holy, and true church."

[62] In this belief, Parmenian was simply following the theology of Cyprian, who in *Letter 69.*1 had stated "Likewise, the blessed Apostle John himself did not point out any heresy or schism, nor did he propose any especially separate, but he called antichrists all who had gone out from the Church. . ." (text and letter numbering from *The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage, 1-81* in *Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 51, translated and annotated by Rose Bernard Donna, C.S.J. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1964), 244. See also *Letter 74.*7 (Donna, 290).

(which the Catholics distressedly labeled "rebaptism").[63] Nevertheless, Donatists preserved the nomenclature of "schismatic" in reference to the Catholic party. Petilian shocked Augustine's sensibilities when he explicitly turned Augustine's own arguments against him, stating that it was in fact the *Catholics* who had separated themselves from the true church: "I say this to you who are unrighteous, is Christ divided, that you should separate yourselves from the Church?"[64]

The Donatist leaders certainly did not think of themselves as schismatics, reserving that name for their opponents; their own name for themselves was simply the Catholic Church.[65] Furthermore, during the time period covered in this study, the movement entertained hopes of becoming the recognized Church of North Africa, acknowledged by the emperors. These hopes were not necessarily far-fetched—while an in-depth discussion of the attempts on the part of the Donatist Church to secure imperial recognition must wait until Chapter Three, it will suffice to say that until the rise of Augustine there was a real possibility that it might achieve its goal. Certainly the Donatists comprised a majority of the inhabitants of North Africa for most of the period under review in this thesis. Both Possidius and Optatus record that before the 400s the Catholic church was, in the words of Possidius, "seduced, oppressed, and

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[63] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, I.10 (Edwards, 9-10). For the sake of practicality I will continue to refer to the Donatist practice of baptizing converts from the Catholic side as "rebaptizing," although the Donatists (and Cyprian) would have insisted that it was not a "rebaptism" at all, as the original Catholic baptism was but a farce of the sacrament.

[64] Augustine, *Against Petilian*, II.42.99 (NPNF(1) 4, 556).

[65] Interesting examples of the Donatist use of the term "Catholic" or similar terms in intra-Donatist documents (i.e., without the need for anti-Catholic polemic) occur in both the Primianist council of Bagai and the Maximianist council of Cebarsussa: the council of Bagai states that Donatus had "asserted the sanctity of the Catholic Church from heretical error," (Augustine, *Contra Cresconium*, III.56.62 (PL43.529)) while the council of Cebarsussa alludes to the condemnation of the "Church of God" against all who remained in communion with Primian (Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 36(2).20 (Boulding, Vol. 16, 124)).

overpowered."[66] Optatus, in the heat of battle against Parmenian, was forced to admit that although the Catholic Church had the advantage of maintaining communion with the outside world, in Africa itself it possessed "few members."[67] Even Augustine found it necessary to state that before his own tenure at Hippo Regius, the number of Catholics in the city was so "scanty" that the Donatist bishop Faustinus was able to socially ostracize them from the marketplaces.[68] B.H. Warmington states on the basis of these texts and others that "by the end of the century [Donatism] numbered in its congregation perhaps over half the Christians in Africa."[69] W. H. C. Frend, while remarking on Jerome's comment that Donatus "deceived nearly the whole of Africa," went even further: "Donatism was the most important single movement in fourth-century north Africa, permeating nearly every aspect of north African society."[70] It can thus be seen that Donatism was by no means a minor contender for the Catholic title. Furthermore, the purpose of this paper is to focus on the inner life of the Donatist movement. In order to do this, it must delve deeply into their own worldview, view their theology from their own perspective. Because of this aim and the above-mentioned facts, it would be inappropriate to simply term one party "Donatist" and the other "Catholic" throughout the rest of this paper.

What then ought to be the designations for the two parties? We cannot simply call both parties by their own names for themselves, as two "Catholic" parties in North

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[66] Possidius, *Life of St. Augustine*, 7 in *Fathers of the Church, Vol. 15: Early Christian Biographies*, translated by Mary Magdeleine Muller (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc, 1952), 81.

[67] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, VII.1 (Edwards, 127).

[68] Augustine, *Against Petilian*, II.84.184 (NPNF(1) 4, 573).

[69] Warmington, *North African Provinces*, 76.

[70] Frend, "Decepit," 627.

Africa would hopelessly confuse everything. Brent Shaw has proposed retaining the term "Catholic" for the party which ultimately triumphed and renaming the Donatist faction "African Christians."[71] This is because he views the term "Donatist" as intrinsically denigrating to the movement, since it was coined, according to him, by the victors.[72] He states that although the North African Catholics were also properly "African Christians," it was their theology which was alien to the region, thus negating their claim to such a title.[73] While such a label is, in his own words, "somewhat bland," he believes that the term would have been acceptable to the leaders of the Donatist faction.[74]

While Shaw is on the right track here, his redefinitions are ultimately too nebulous and denigrating to the Catholic side to be used in this paper. The term "African Christians" is irritatingly imprecise—after all, what, then, would one call the Church before the schism, or the overwhelmingly dominant Catholic Church that emerged in the years after the council of Carthage? While it was probably not Shaw's intention, the effect of the term "African Christians" is to stigmatize the Catholics as a mere faction (as opposed to the *true* "African Christians"), thus falling from the opposite side into the same error that he was originally trying to correct. Furthermore, it forces a term of potentially wide applicability into a narrow time-slot, for the Donatist Church only remained dominant enough to claim the label of "African Christianity" for approximately one hundred years. While it endured long after the 411 council of Carthage, its days of

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[71] Brent D. Shaw, "African Christianity: Disputes, Definitions, and 'Donatists'" in *Rulers, Nomads, and Christians in Roman North Africa,* 5-34 (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1995), 8.

[72] Shaw, "African Christianity," 8.

[73] Ibid, 8-9.

[74] Ibid.

ascendancy were over. What, then, should one call the Catholic form of Christianity that flourished outside the sphere of Roman influence in Mauretania after the Vandal invasions if not "African Christianity"?[75] While Shaw is correct in that the Catholic form of Christianity in North Africa represented a shift away from the historic dogmas of Tertullian and Cyprian, the term "African Christians" is too nebulous to be of use in this paper.

Furthermore, Shaw's post-modern tirade concerning the inherent linguistic evils which come from adopting the victor's term for her defeated opponent conveniently overlooks an inconvenient point; that while they preferred the term "Catholic," the Donatist party was not unwilling to use the term "Donatist" to refer to themselves. Indeed, as far as can be gleaned from the records, the first appellation of the "pars Donati" to the Donatist faction came from their own pen.[76] Augustine and Optatus, while habitually referring to their opponents as "Donatists," reproach them multiple times for referring to *themselves* as the "party of Donatus" vis-à-vis the Catholic party, as, according to the Catholics, the Donatists should only take the name of Christ (Optatus, at least, believed this to be an excellent polemic point).[77] Indeed, in Augustine's response to the Donatist Cresconius, we find an interesting linguistic wrangling of acceptable

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[75] See Frend, *Donatist Church*, 301.

[76] See the first letter of the Donatists to Constantine preserved in Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, I.22 (Edwards, 23): "Datae a Luciano, Digno, Nasutio, Capitone, Fidentio et caeteris episcopis *partis Donati*." (italics mine) While it is not certain that the *pars Donati* was the original term used (Augustine's *Letter 88*.2 (Teske, Vol. I, 352) preserves the title of presumably the same letter which was said to be "submitted by the sect of Majorinus"), the point is that the early Donatists had no qualms about identifying themselves by the name of their leader.

[77] Citing 1 Corinthians 1:12. Optatus, *Donatists*, III.3 (Edwards, 65): "Moreover, whereas, before his proud behaviour, all who believed in Christ used to be called Christians, he [Donatus] had the audacity to divide the people with God, so that those who followed him were no longer called Christians but Donatists. . ." See also Augustine, *Letter 49*.3 (Teske, Vol. I, 196).

terms for the Donatist party—but not what Shaw would lead us to expect. Instead, Cresconius quibbles with Augustine's use of the term "Donatistae" (a Latin declension) to describe the Donatist party, insisting that the correct term was actually "Donatiani" (a Greek declension, which indeed was how most Greek writers referred to them).[78]

In light of these points, this paper will utilize a modification of the traditional Catholic/Donatist paradigm, in accordance with Shaw's intention but not his lead. The term "Donatist" was apparently not intrinsically offensive to the Donatist leadership (though of course the term "Catholic" was preferred), and yet it would not be acceptable to accentuate the schismatic status imposed upon them by their opponents by labeling the two parties "Donatist" and "Catholic." Thus, while the term "Donatists" will be retained for the Donatist faction in this paper, in the interest of impartiality the Catholics will also be denoted by the name of their original leader, as "Caecilianists." This puts both sides on an equal verbal footing, an essential consideration when studying the schism during the years of its dominance.[79] While the Catholic Church of North Africa never referred to itself as "Caecilianist," its use is attested to many times in Donatist literature as an epithet.[80] But this particular epithet, unlike the term "Macarians," (also a common Donatist label)[81] would have been something that the Catholics could accept; they were,

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[78] Augustine, *Contra Cresconium*, II.1.2 (PL 43.467-68).

[79] These designations are perhaps not as advisable when viewing the schism from the viewpoint of the aftermath; unlike Shaw, I am not interested in denigrating the fact that the Catholic (Caecilianist) side was ultimately decisively victorious. It appears to be in this way that J. J. O'Donnell uses the term "Caecilianist" in his recent book *Augustine, Sinner and Saint: A New Biography* (London: Profile Books, 2005), even to the point of calling Augustine's campaign against the Donatists a "putsch" (The title of Chapter 8). I do not follow his negative assessment of Augustine or the Catholic church.

[80] See *Sermon on the Passion of Saints Donatus and Advocatus,* 8, in *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa,* translated by Maureen A. Tilley (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996) 57, for example.

[81] See Augustine, *Letter 49*.

after all, prepared to follow in Caecilian's footsteps. They, as did the Donatists, certainly wished first and foremost to be called "Catholic"—as in the aftermath of the controversy they certainly were—but if it came down to it, the Catholic side could wear a "Caecilianist" badge with honor. Macarius they could disown as being not explicitly affiliated with their party,[82] but Caecilian they would defend.[83] In light of this, Petilian's petition at the 411 council of Carthage that if his party was to be designated as "pars Donati," then his opponents should be called Caecilianists rather than Catholics makes perfect sense, [84] as the point of the entire conference was to establish who had legitimate claim to the term "Catholic." Because the focus of this paper is on the years between the schism and the council, it will use Petilian's terminology to refer to both parties.

"Circumcellions" or "Agonistici"?

Similarly, the name "Circumcellion" as a term for the extreme right wing of the Donatist movement will be kept to a minimum in this paper, in favor of the term they actually called themselves, "Agonistici." Augustine has left a memorable record of the debate surrounding the two names in his sermon on Psalm 133. From this sermon, we hear that the Donatists opposed the term "Circumcellion" as derogatory (indeed, it had been shortened to the even more offensive slang "Circellions" by Augustine's time[85]). The Donatists state this explicitly in 133.6: "Our people aren't called Circumcellions, it is

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[82] See Augustine, *Letter 44*.3.5 (Teske, Vol. I, 176); *49*.3 (Teske, Vol. I, 196).

[83] Note Augustine's defense of Caecilian in *Letter 185*.2.10 (Teske, Vol. III, 185).

[84] *Gesta Collationis Carthaginensis*, III.3, in *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, Vol. 149A*, edited by C. Munier (Turnholti: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1974), 187. See also Maureen Tilley, "Dilatory Donatists or Procrastinating Catholics: The Trial at the Conference of Carthage" in *Church History* 60.1, (March 1991), 12.

[85] Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 132.3 (Boulding, Vol. 20, 177).

you who give them that abusive name. We don't call them that."[86] The Caecilianist term for the mendicants stemmed, according to Augustine, from the fact that they "wander around chapels . . . roaming about, with no fixed abode."[87] In opposition to this, the original Donatist name for the Circumcellions was Agonistici, which signified their perceived status as warriors for Christ (a term that Augustine promptly states "would be an honorable name—if only the reality matched it!").[88] Again, because this thesis proposes to look at Donatism from within, the term by which the Circumcellions were known to the *Donatist* community, that of Agonistici, will be used.

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[86] Ibid, Psalm 132.6 (Boulding, Vol. 20, 180).

[87] "Circumcelliones dicti sunt, quia circum cellas vagantur: solent enim ire hac, illac, nusquam habentes sedes." Ibid, Psalm 132.3 (Boulding, Vol. 20, 177).

[88] Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 132.6 (Boulding, Vol. 20, 180).

CHAPTER THREE

The History and Theology of Early Donatism

"*One must flee and curse the whole corrupt congregation of all the polluted people and all must seek the glorious lineage of the blessed martyrs, which is the one, holy, and true church, from which the martyrs arise…*"

–The Abitinian Martyrs

In this chapter, I will discuss the contours of early Donatism from its pre-schism origins up to the Macarian persecution in order to examine what characterized Donatist theology in its earliest forms. Although this paper is not primarily intended to be a discussion of the history of Donatism, it should be recognized that historical circumstances are often the real impetus behind many distinctive theological innovations. Nowhere is this better seen than in the early history of the Donatist schism. Given this consideration, this chapter will discuss the early history of the schism as well as the theological tendencies of the first generation of Donatists.

Early History

The Diocletianic Persecution

On February 24, 303, the Diocletianic persecution officially broke out. On this date, the emperor Diocletian issued an edict (known within the context of the persecution as the First Edict) which commanded the destruction of Christian churches and their sacred books. The Diocletianic persecution and its attendant echoes represented the last major attempt on the part of the pagan emperors to stamp out what they regarded as a

subversive Eastern myth before it could undermine the fabric of Roman civilization.[1] Carefully planned and executed, it aimed for the leaders and symbols of the Christian faith rather than the ordinary adherent. As such, prominent bishops and churches were especially targeted. A unique feature of this last great persecution was the initial special concern to confiscate and destroy the sacred writings of the Christians in order to leave them bereft of their divine oracles. Unlike earlier persecutions, then, the emphasis was on the institutions and icons of the Christian faith.[2] It was thus often possible for even bishops to survive without directly denying Christ, as long as they complied with the edicts demanding the destruction of the churches and the confiscation of their sacred objects. While in 304 the Fourth Edict, which required all Christians to offer incense to idols under threat of death, greatly intensified the great persecution, the voluntary retirement of Diocletian and (more reluctantly) Maximian, his co-regent in the West, in 305 largely negated the immediate threat in North Africa. Under the rule of Constantius and Severus, their direct successors, the persecution was not actively enforced. While the laws were still theoretically in place, in practice the persecution was over.

What it lacked in duration, however, the persecution in North Africa made up for in its severity. In some areas, most notably the environs of Carthage where the proconsul Anulinus ruled, the officials were unwilling to go further than they had to and often left loopholes which allowed Christians who kept their heads down to remain relatively

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[1] On the general reasons for the animosity of the pre-Constantinian Roman Empire towards Christianity, see Geoffrey de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?" in *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy*, edited by Michael Whitby and Joseph Streeter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 105-152. On the specific rationales behind the Diocletianic persecution itself, see W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 477-490. The emperor Julian would later attempt to actively undermine Christianity in favor of paganism, but his efforts were curtailed before they could be fully implemented by his sudden death in 363.

[2] See Frend, *Martyrdom*, 495.

unmolested. In other places, however, the persecution was much worse. This was particularly the case in Numidia, where the governor Florus apparently delighted in enforcing the Edicts of Diocletian. Optatus of Milevis records his name as the consummate example of the dire effects of persecution in North Africa.[3] There were thus differences in the scale of the persecution which coincided with the various provinces of North Africa. The presence of a sympathetic proconsul in Africa Proconsularis left Christians there able to survive without directly renouncing their faith as long as they *appeared* to comply with the imperial edicts.[4] In Numidia, however, there was no sympathetic enforcer to ease the effects of the Edicts.

There was already a precedent, set by earlier North African Christians, on how to react to persecution for the Christian faith. Indeed, the earliest martyrologies in Christian literature come from North Africa. The *Acts* of the Scillitian Martyrs are well-known: no compromise was reached with the Roman officials. While the accused Scillitians would argue that their exemplary lives ought to be sufficient proof of their loyalty to the emperor, they would entertain no thought of complying with the orders to deny their faith.[5] Even more alike to later Donatist martyrologies was the *Acts of Perpetua and Felicitas*, which celebrated martyrdom and inspired generations of North African Christians.

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[3] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, III.8 (Edwards, 76).

[4] Note for example how Mensurius records Anulinus' reluctance to question him further after he had given up certain heretical works (recorded in the letter of Mensurius to Secundus in Augustine, *Breviculus Collationis cum Donatistis*, III.13.25, in *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, Vol. 43.613-650, edited by Jacques Paul Migne (Paris, 1844-94), 638). Such uneven application of the Edicts was typical within the empire: the degree to which they were enforced at a local level might vary considerably depending on the personal attitudes of the immediate authorities towards their Christian constituents.

[5] Frend, *Martyrdom*, 313-314.

Besides these and other martyrologies, there also existed more official directives on how to deal with persecution. Approximately fifty years before the Diocletianic persecution, a council was held in Carthage under bishop Cyprian to decide what ought to be done with those who had apostatized during the persecution under Decius, hitherto the last significant persecution which the church had undergone. In that council, it was determined that bishops and other clergymen who had succumbed to the persecution were to be forever excluded from their ecclesiastical offices. While they were allowed back into the church if they were willing to undergo penance, they were not permitted to return to their previous positions. This council of Carthage under Cyprian is significant for the later Donatist schism because it did not confine itself to condemning only those who had actually sacrificed; also included under the ban were those who had received certificates *stating* that they had sacrificed, even if, through bribery or trickery, they had managed to avoid actually committing the act.[6] These men, called *libellatici*, were regarded as guilty alongside those who had unequivocally sacrificed. The reason for their inclusion, according to Cyprian, was that by appearing to have complied with the authorities the *libellatici* had implicitly denied Christ, for "how can he be with Christ, who either blushes or fears to belong to Christ?"[7] By appearing to submit to the command to sacrifice, they had "obeyed human authority rather than God."[8] While they "might have

[6] Edward Landon, *A Manual of Councils of the Holy Church, Vols. 1-2* (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1909), Vol. 1, 4.

[7] Cyprian, *The Lapsed*, 29, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 5: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian*, translated by Ernest Wallis (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 445.

[8] Ibid.

sinned less . . . by not polluting [their] hands with the deadly sacrifices," those who had succumbed in this way were "not free from crime."[9]

During the persecution under Diocletian, many North Africans took Cyprian's words to heart. When the command came to surrender the holy books over to the authorities, they refused to give them up, claiming that, in the words of one bishop, "It is better for me to be burned in the fire than the sacred Scriptures, because it is better to obey God than any human authority."[10] To many, surrender of the Scriptures was seen as tantamount to apostasy, for it involved a direct denial of the holy text. Equally guilty were those who had not actually surrendered the Scriptures but had complied with the authorities by giving up spurious materials such as medical books or heretical works. These were seen as modern-day *libellatici* who had implicitly denied the Lord by complying with a hostile secular order. Both were called *traditores*—i.e., those who had "surrendered" the holy books, and were equally despised by those who had refused to comply. The martyrologies of this period are replete with instances of obstinate preservation of the Scriptures. For example, Felix, bishop of Thibiuca in Africa Proconsularis, answered the curator Magnilianus' order to turn over any holy books in his possession by bluntly stating "I have them but I won't turn them over."[11] He was martyred on July 15, 303 by a reluctant Anulinus.

Another striking example comes from the *Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs*, which concerns the collective actions of the local congregation of Abitina in the Proconsular

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[9] Ibid, 27 (ANF 5, 444-45).

[10] *The Acts of Saint Felix Bishop and Martyr*, 3 in *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa,* translated by Maureen A. Tilley (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), 10.

[11] Ibid (Tilley, 9)

province. Their record attests to the importance attached to the Scriptures in the eyes of the average North African, and to the condemnation of those who would lightly surrender them. When their own bishop dared to turn over the Scriptures, a miracle occurred: rain poured down and extinguished the fires prepared to destroy them. The congregation quickly deposed their bishop and was taken into custody *en masse* by the officials. While in prison, they issued dire warnings against communion with those who were guilty of the crime of *traditio*, basing their contention on the book of Revelation. "It is written," they asserted, "in the Apocalypse, 'Whoever adds to this book one part of a letter, to him will the Lord add innumerable afflictions. And whoever blots them out, so will the Lord blot out his share from the Book of Life.'"[12] In the eyes of these confessors, soon to become martyrs,[13] there was no higher sin than surrendering, and thus giving up for destruction, the holy texts. Those who gave into the Edicts were guilty of breaking an explicit command of Scripture and of denying the Christ whose doctrines that Scripture expounded. According to the confessors from Abitene, "all those who handed over the divine testaments and the honored laws of the omnipotent God and of the Lord Jesus Christ to be burned in profane fires should be tormented in the eternal flames of Gehenna and inextinguishable fire."[14] Anyone who dared to surrender the Scriptures was worthy of eternal damnation.

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[12] *Abitinian Martyrs*, 21 (Tilley, 46).

[13] Confessors were those who had "confessed" their allegiance to Christ in the face of imperial persecution, and had subsequently suffered for it. Most were interned in the prisons and many eventually ended up as martyrs. Due to their status as faithful witnesses, they were highly revered within the Christian community.

[14] *Abitinian Martyrs*, 21 (Tilley, 46).

Nor was this the only warning which the Abitinian confessors gave concerning the *traditores*. Relying on their confessor-status to state authoritative oracles of God, they stressed that those Christians who currently aligned themselves with the surrenderers of the Scriptures must break off communion with them in order to be free from their "filth and contamination": "If anyone communicates with the traitors, that person will have no part with us in the heavenly kingdom."[15] Those who knowingly joined themselves to *traditores* shared in their sins, since by accepting them as fellow-believers they implicitly approved of their actions.

In opposition to this mentality stood the current bishop of Carthage, Mensurius. Unlike the Abitinian martyrs and others who refused to even appear to comply with the Edicts, Mensurius did not regard the warnings of Cyprian as binding on his own time. While he would not himself countenance the actual surrender of the holy books over to the secular authorities, he did not view the appearance of compliance to be intrinsically damning. Frend sees this shift in Carthaginian theology from Cyprian to Mensurius as the result of approximately forty years of relative peace and quiet on the part of the Christian church.[16] Between the time of Decius[17] and Diocletian the Church had largely been left to its own devices by the imperial authorities. It had grown from being a rigorist minority to an established and powerful feature of the North African landscape. While Frend makes the valid point that "with this missionary triumph a certain amount of

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[15] Ibid (Tilley, 46).

[16] Frend, *Donatist Church*, 3-4. See also Frend, "St. Paul," 92.

[17] Not counting a short but violent persecution under Valerian in 268 which claimed the life of Cyprian, among other bishops.

the earlier zeal tended to disappear,"[18] i.e., that with the increasing popularity of the Christian faith it tended to become more quiescent and willing to compromise, it should also be remembered that Mensurius was faced with a difficult pastoral decision. Anulinus, the proconsul, was willing to look the other way at the actions of the Christian congregations at Carthage and even forbid his soldiers to trouble them further if Mensurius outwardly cooperated with the authorities.[19] If Mensurius openly defied the proconsul, however, Anulinus would certainly have been forced to investigate the Christians of Carthage more thoroughly.

Optatus of Milevis, while writing from the viewpoint of approximately half a century after Mensurius, includes in his seventh book of *Against the Donatists* a defense of both collaboration and traditorship which probably echoes Mensurius' own beliefs. In Chapter Two of that book, he states quite openly that "it is more serious to deny the One who spoke than to have handed over the words that he spoke."[20] Indeed, he ridicules Donatist qualms against surrendering the Scriptures, claiming that their overwhelming emphasis on the preservation of the sacred texts would make someone who accidentally stored the Scriptures near mouse-holes or under dripping water equally worthy of censure: "Let the one who stored it negligently be condemned, if we are to condemn the one who when a book was demanded gave it up in terror."[21] This rather physicalist philosophy is supplemented by Optatus' view that the person who gave up the books "in

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[18] Frend, *Donatist Church*, 3.

[19] In the letter of Mensurius to Secundus, found in Augustine, *Breviculus Collationis,* III.13.25 (PL 43.638-39), Anulinus refuses to allow his soldiers to re-investigate Mensurius' house even when an informer stated that Mensurius had earlier given up only heretical writings to the authorities.

[20] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, VII.3 (Edwards, 139).

[21] Ibid, VII.1 (Edwards, 135).

terror" was not a direct party to their destruction, and therefore not guilty of denying Christ: "If the one who received it handed it over to the flames, the sin is in the one who burned it rather than in the one who handed it over."[22] His light view of the Scriptures was not shared by the proto-Donatists, for whom it was rather what the act *signified* (a collaboration with the authorities and the denial of Christ) than the actual material destruction that mattered. It is quite plausible, however, that Mensurius held to this Optatian point of view: the books were merely material objects, and as such, were not examples of denying Christ. If the imperial authorities demanded them, they could be given up without condemnation. In the words of Optatus once again, "The Law and God are not one. If it was a duty to die for God, who is able both to raise the dead and to award the prize, a book not handed over cannot do either one of these two things."[23]

This was not the only issue that Mensurius had to deal with. In his letter to Secundus, Primate of Numidia, he states that there were many Christians who voluntarily sought out martyrdom at the hands of the imperial authorities,[24] and several quotes from the *acta* of the period make his accusations ring true. In the *Passion of Saints Maxima, Donatilla and Secunda*, the third-mentioned woman is said to have jumped off a balcony to voluntarily join the first two confessors on their way to martyrdom.[25] Likewise, the *Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs* portrays its worldview in terms of martial imagery, stating that "these enormous battle lines of confessors flew into the field of combat from all

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[22] Ibid (Edwards, 136).

[23] Ibid (Edwards, 135).

[24] Augustine, *Breviculus Collationis,* III.13.25 (PL 43.638).

[25] *The Passion of Saints Maxima, Donatilla and Secunda*, 4 in *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa,* translated by Maureen A. Tilley (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), 21. Maxima warned her of the difficulties ahead, saying, "People nowadays are weak," but Secunda insisted on accompanying them.

sides, and where any of them found the enemy, there they pitched the camp of the Lord."[26] From Mensurius' point of view, however, these voluntary martyrs were fanatics and dangerous to the peace of the church, for their intemperate actions could bring the wrath of the Edicts down on his own precariously-situated flock. He forbade anyone to be honored as a martyr if they "voluntary said that they had the Scriptures from whom nobody had sought,"[27] and in his defense of this action to Secundus insinuated that many of them were petty criminals or debtors who hoped to wipe out the remembrance of their misdeeds by achieving martyrdom, or even worse, poor rascals who hoped to benefit from the high status of confessors and receive gifts of food from sympathetic Christians.[28]

Secundus, automatically primate of Numidia due to his age,[29] profoundly disagreed with Mensurius' defense. While in his reply to Mensurius he did not directly attack the Carthaginian bishops' position, Secundus' letter contained a pointed note of praise for the courage of the martyrs. In contrast to Mensurius' apparent materialistic philosophy concerning the handing over of the Scriptures, he compared the ardent defense of the holy texts recently carried out by the confessors to the Old Testament figure of Rahab, who would not surrender the two spies hidden under her roof.[30] As for

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[26] *Abitinian Martyrs*, 2 (Tilley, 29).

[27] Augustine, *Breviculus Collationis,* III.13.25 (PL 43.638).

[28] Ibid.

[29] This was a unique system of determining the primate that persisted among both Caecilianists and Donatists for a long while after. Rather than tying the office of primate to one particular town, most North African provinces assigned it to the senior bishop of their province. The one great exception to this system was Africa Proconsularis, which was always governed by the bishop of Carthage.

[30] Augustine, *Breviculus Collationis,* III.13.25 (PL 43.638). The two spies were seen by Secundus to stand typologically for the Old and New Testaments; thus, Rahab's action sent the clear message that the Scriptures were not to be given up to authorities.

his own actions, he stated that when the messengers of the overseer came to him to demand the Holy Scriptures, he had proudly stated "I am a Christian and a bishop, not a *traditor*."[31] Unlike Mensurius, Secundus refused to collaborate with the imperial authorities. When the messengers attempted to persuade him to at least *pretend* to give up the books or surrender other texts, he flatly refused, citing the example of Eleazar the Maccabean, who "was neither willing to pretend to chew the meat of pigs himself, nor to offer an example of collusion to others."[32] This text would become the classic manifesto of the Donatist movement aimed at those who, like Mensurius, had given up false texts in order to seemingly comply with the orders. Just as Eleazar had refused to even pretend to comply with the orders of Antiochus Epiphanes, so it was morally reprehensible for Christians to reach an accord with the imperial persecutors.

This was, in fact, precisely what Mensurius had done. He wrote to Secundus that when the imperial authorities had come to his basilica, he had given up "condemned writings of the New Heretics," after which the intervention of Anulinus, who was grateful, no doubt, for the tact with which Mensurius had handled the situation, protected him and his congregation from further molestation.[33] While Secundus refrained from directly condemning the bishop of Carthage, his implications were clear. Mensurius was, in his and many other eyes, a *traditor*. In contrast to Hefele, who stated that the Donatists

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[31] "Christianus sum et episcopus, non traditor." Ibid (PL 43.639).

[32] Ibid, citing II Maccabees 6:18-31, where Eleazar, "preferring a glorious death to a life of defilement . . . spat out the meat, and went forward of his own accord to the instrument of torture." (II Macc. 6:19, NAB) The Donatists were heavily inspired by the martyrdom-tradition recorded in I and II Maccabees, taking direct cues from such stories as the martyrdom of a mother and her seven sons, who went willingly to their deaths because, as they said, "We are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors . . . it is for his laws that we are dying." (II Maccabees 7:2, 9 NAB)

[33] Ibid (PL 43.638).

had "falsely interpreted what had passed,"[34] the record is clear and defended by the later Caecilianists, including both Optatus and Augustine: Mensurius had indeed handed over books to the imperial authorities. In addition to this, he had apparently given the bishop of Aptunga, a man named Felix, a major role to play in the affairs of the church of Carthage; Frend even names Felix as Mensurius' "right-hand man" during the persecution.[35] Felix, however, was popularly believed to have directly surrendered the Scriptures to the authorities while in his own see. By openly communing with him, Mensurius was implicitly stating that those who had truly offered the holy texts to the authorities had not defiled themselves by this act.

The Abitinian Martyrs did not take such nuances well. They charged "the so-called bishop of Carthage" with *traditio*, even going so far as to state that Mensurius had handed over "divine laws" rather than heretical works.[36] Their earlier-noted pronouncements of judgment upon those who had given up sacred texts were directed at him. The confessors at Carthage appear to have broken off communion with Mensurius, and to have charged the Carthaginian church to have nothing to do with him. The *Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs*, which Tilley dates to the period before Caecilian's election as bishop,[37] gives us our clearest picture of the hostility felt on the part of the confessors to the established church of Carthage. Allowing for exaggerations in the telling of the tale, the basic outlines of the *Acts* tell the story of a church divided against itself. While the

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[34] Hefele, *History Vol. I*, 173.

[35] Frend, "St. Paul," 97.

[36] *Abitinian Martyrs,* 20 (Tilley, 45).

[37] Tilley, Intro to *Donatist Martyr Stories*, 26. She dates it to this time-period because Caecilian is portrayed within the work as still being a deacon, not yet a bishop.

first half of the work discusses the martyrs' valor under the official persecution, the second half vehemently denounces the actions taken by the bishop of Carthage against them. In the actions of Mensurius towards the Abitinian confessors, the tensions between the differing theologies represented by Mensurius and Secundus came to a head. The confessors, Mensurius charged, were indiscriminately rushing towards martyrdom, abandoning all caution, and implicating the rest of the Christian community in their fanaticism. He forbade his congregation to commune with them and strongly condemned their tactics, according to the letter from Mensurius to Secundus.[38] But according to the *Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs*, Mensurius went much further than this. Rather than limiting himself to words, he apparently stationed Caecilian, his deacon, in front of the doors of the prison with orders to refuse entrance to any Christians coming to feed the confessors. When some tried to break through the cordon, they were "struck down left and right"—Christian-on-Christian violence in the midst of the persecution.[39] The confessors, among whom were numbered "bishops, presbyters, deacons and others of clerical rank,"[40] denounced Caecilian as "more ruthless than the tyrant, more bloody than the executioner"[41] and called on the church to "follow the martyrs and curse the treachery of the traitor Mensurius."[42] Tilley notes the existence of a contemporary law which prohibited the feeding of prisoners "condemned to starvation in prison" and states that most likely Mensurius was again attempting to keep his flock safe from their own

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[38] Augustine, *Breviculus Collationis,* III.13.25 (PL 43.638).

[39] *Abitinian Martyrs*, 20 (Tilley, 45).

[40] "Quos erant episcopi, presbyteri, diaconi, caeterique clerici. . ." Ibid, 19 (Tilley, 44).

[41] Ibid, 20 (Tilley, 45-46).

[42] Ibid, 21 (Tilley, 46)

indiscriminate actions, as the penalty for feeding those imprisoned was a similar imprisonment.[43] Whether or not this law was the immediate rationale for Mensurius' actions, his purpose was certainly to preserve his congregation by disassociating them from the radical element of Christian society. Unfortunately, this only compounded his perceived collaboration with the authorities during the persecution. Caecilian, too, would be haunted by his role in the incident, representing the visible face of *Christian* persecution to the North African confessors.

Meanwhile, Secundus was undergoing his own difficulties. On March 5, 305,[44] after the persecution had largely abated in Numidia (but before Christians were allowed to reclaim their basilicas), he convened a synod of fourteen or more bishops in a private house in Cirta in order to consecrate a new bishop for the city.[45] The atmosphere of the occasion was clouded with suspicion, for many bishops had complied with the imperial edicts during the active phase of the persecution. Indeed, the previous bishop of Cirta, Paul, had only escaped death by handing over the articles of the church to the imperial authorities, including the Holy Scriptures (his successor Silvanus, whom the Numidian bishops now gathered to consecrate, was also implicated in this incident, but such specifics were not generally known at the time). The minutes of the council, preserved by Augustine in his work *Contra Cresconium*, convincingly demonstrate the decimation wrought by the persecution. Secundus, as chair of the synod, sought to adhere to Cyprianic principles by removing any bishops who were stained with the taint of *traditor*.

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[43] Tilley, Intro to *Donatist Martyr Stories*, 25-26.

[44] Following Augustine's dating of the event in *Contra Cresconium* III.29.33 (PL 43.513); Optatus of Milevis dates it to March 13 (*Against the Donatists*, I.14 (Edwards, 14)).

[45] Frend, *Donatist Church*, 12.

Many, apparently, were suspected of having turned over the Scriptures, and at least three of the assembled bishops had confessed to some sort of complicity[46] before the next-accused, Purpurius of Limata, questioned Secundus' own actions: "What did *you* do when the Curator and City council demanded the Scriptures from you? . . . They did not release you for nothing."[47] At this point, Secundus' nephew warned him that his relentless inquisition of the presumed *traditores* would lead to worse consequences: "Do you hear what he is saying? He is ready to leave and start a schism, and not only he, but all those whom you have accused; I know they will dismiss you, and pass a sentence against you, and you will remain by yourself, a heretic."[48] In light of this warning, Secundus turned to the few bishops who remained unaccused and asked for their opinion. They answered that the bishops' cases should be left up to God. When Secundus heard this, he stated "You know and God knows. Sit down."[49] The synod then proceeded to elect Silvanus as bishop of Cirta.

This incident has always been a stumbling-block in the studies of Donatism. How could bishops who had just admitted to their own traditorship proceed, in later years, to condemn Caecilian and his associates for the same crime? Both Augustine and Optatus stressed this incident on numerous occasions to mock the Donatist claim to a pure line of

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[46] It appears that Secundus actively questioned only those who were already suspected of betraying the books or offering incense. Of these, the first accused, Donatus of Mascula, denied that he had done anything wrong and had in fact escaped the ravages of Florus. He was still condemned to stand to one side, and the questioning was directed to Marinus of Aquae Tibilitanae, who admitted to giving up medicinal books in place of the actual holy texts. However, following the theology that he had expounded to Mensurius, Secundus condemned Marinus also to stand to one side because of his implicit denial of Christ. The next-named bishop (there appears to be a lacuna in the text), Victor of Russicade, admitted to having burned the Scriptures, but stated that he was forced to have done so by a curator. His case was clearly that of a *traditor*. See Augustine, *Contra Cresconium* III.27.30 (PL 43.511).

[47] Ibid, translated in Frend, *Donatist Church*, 13. Italics mine.

[48] Ibid.

[49] "Secundus dixit: 'Vos scitis et Deus. Sedete.'" Ibid.

succession,[50] and it has been one of the principal reasons why the Donatist case against the Caecilianists was portrayed quite unsympathetically in early histories of the movement. In his article "The Beginnings of Donatism," T.D. Barnes attempts to show that, while the meeting itself presumably occurred, it is quite possible that the preserved *Acta* of the meeting differ considerably from what actually transpired there.[51] He reminds the historian of Donatism that, while both Optatus and Augustine referred to its existence, their writings are ultimately based solely on one source, that of the disaffected Donatist deacon Nundinarius.[52] This man, also responsible for the condemnation of Silvanus in the *Proceedings before Zenophilus* recorded in Appendix One of Optatus' work,[53] was also the sole communicative witness to the 305 synod at Cirta, the original minutes of which are now lost.[54] Barnes states, therefore, that "for our knowledge of what [the synod at Cirta] said and did, we ultimately seem to depend on Nundinarius' word alone. There is, therefore, even at the lowest count, a distinct possibility of deliberate fraud or malicious invention."[55] He castigates present historians for accepting the account as it now stands, saying that they "exploit them as crucial evidence on the nature of the Donatist schism."[56] For the record, the Donatists themselves answered in

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[50] See especially Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, I.14-15 (Edwards, 14-15), and Augustine, *Letter 43*.2.3 (Teske, Vol. I, 158) for examples.

[51] T. D. Barnes, "The Beginnings of Donatism" in *Journal of Theological Studies*, 26 (April, 1975), 16.

[52] Barnes, "Beginnings," 16.

[53] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, Appendix 1.1 (Edwards, 150).

[54] Though well-known to Augustine, who provides an abbreviated account of the minutes in *Contra Cresconium* III.27.30 (P 43.510-11).

[55] Barnes, "Beginnings," 16.

[56] Ibid, 15.

much the same way when confronted with the records of the council at Cirta, declaring that such records were "improbable" to say the least.[57]

While it is certainly possible that the records were at least altered by Nundinarius, the *Acts* themselves as transmitted through Augustine do not appear to be a complete forgery. While several lacunae might conceal certain nuances which could have been potentially damaging to his case, the tone of the minutes as a whole appears quite authentic. Indeed, if the entire work was a forgery, one might expect more explicit admissions of *traditio* on the part of the proto-Donatist side. For example, it is never proved that Secundus actually was a *traditor*; there is merely the unsubstantiated suspicion given by Purpurius to suggest this. The worst that the Numidian bishops admit is a forced giving up of the texts, something that could be plausibly in line with Caecilianist theology according to Optatus.

What we can see represented in the text, however, is a nuance in Donatist theology that separated them from other schismatic movements such as the Novatianists. Unlike such true rigorists as the leaders of the Novatianist movement—indeed, even the example of Cyprian himself—many Donatists were willing to forgive even such sins as apostasy and restore tainted bishops to their posts. For quite some time there was dissension within the movement over how to treat Caecilianists who had converted to Donatism, and it was only in later years that the majority view prevailed which enjoined rebaptism upon them. These nuances will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. For now, it is enough to note that a statement of Augustine in *Letter 43* might hold the key to the knotty issue that bedevils the Synod of Cirta: "We say that sentences

[57] See Augustine, *Letter 43*.3.10 (Teske, Vol. I, 161-162) and *Letter 44*.2.4 (Teske, Vol. I, 175).

were passed by *confessed traditores* upon those who were said to be *traditores*. . . . among them Secundus of Tigisi pardoned, as with a view to peace, their crimes that he knew, and later, when the peace was destroyed, he condemned with them those he did not know."[58] The office of bishop was generally assumed to be a special office which was above regular levels of penance, and bishops themselves were traditionally condemned only by their peers. This is the gist of the minutes when they record that Donatus of Mascula requested Secundus to "send me to God," or that Victor of Russicade stated "Forgive me this fault, and God will also forgive it." Secundus' own nephew urged him to allow their request, stating that "each must give his account to God."[59] What appears to be the crucial difference between the synod at Cirta and the later synod at Carthage in which Secundus would denounce Caecilian was that, in the former synod, each of the bishops had confessed their sins. It was thus within the power of the assembled bishops to pardon them, and refer their sins to God, and this is precisely what Secundus did. That this was the request of at least two of the condemned bishops suggests that such a recourse was by no means unheard of. In contrast, it was felt later on that both Mensurius and Caecilian were not only unrepentant for their *traditor* status (Caecilian only indirectly), but attempted to defend what they had done as righteous. To such men there could be no forgiveness. Such a portrait is different from the traditional painting of the earliest Donatist bishops as duplicitous schemers, but fits in quite well with the expressed theology of later Donatism. Only in the eyes of their Caecilianist opponents were the Donatists believed to be completely unforgiving of the crime of *traditio*.

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[58] Augustine, *Letter 43*.3.6 (Teske, Vol. I, 159). Italics mine.

[59] "Deo habet reddere rationem." Augustine,*Contra Cresconium* III.27.30 (PL 43.511).

The Outbreak of Schism

By the end of the Diocletianic persecution in North Africa, there were two main centers of opposition to the policies of Mensurius. The first and pivotal center was within the city of Carthage itself. While the majority of the church at Carthage appeared to support Mensurius, not all within the congregation agreed with his actions. The wealthy widow Lucilla, so vilified through the writings of Optatus and Augustine,[60] was one example of a segment of the population that revered the martyrs far more than Mensurius or Caecilian. The confessors of Carthage were also apparently united in their disdain for Mensurius' tactics. According to the Abitinian confessors Mensurius had already begged for their forgiveness for having surrendered the Scriptures to the authorities before later turning on them and stopping the flow of sustenance into their cells.[61] Faced with such treacherous tactics, they were certainly not supportive of his bishopric. Also notable were the *seniores laici*, a specialized order of laity who, according to Frend, controlled certain operations of the church.[62] One of their functions was safeguarding and administrating church property,[63] and while Mensurius trusted them enough to leave the mobile wealth of the church in their hands when he was summoned to Italy in 311, on the whole they were apparently quite hostile to his successor.

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[60] See Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, I.16 (Edwards, 15-16) and Augustine, *Expositions,* Psalm 36(2).19 (Boulding, Vol. 16, 119) for their characteristic portrayals of this woman.

[61] *Abitinian Martyrs*, 20 (Tilley, 45): "When Mensurius, so-called bishop of Carthage, polluted by the recent handing over of scripture, repented of the malice of his misdeeds and then began to reveal greater crimes, he who had had to beg and implore from the martyrs' pardon for burning the books, raged against the martyrs. . ."

[62] W. H. C. Frend, "Seniores Laici and the Origins of the Church in North Africa" in *Journal of Theological Studies,* 12 (October, 1961), 280.

[63] Ibid, 281.

The other center of resistance came from the Numidian bishops, all of whom, according to the examples displayed above, viewed actions such as Mensurius had taken during the persecution to be nothing less than traditorship. Due to the confused status of the church during the persecution and the prestige of the see of Carthage, they had tolerated Mensurius while he retained the primacy—but they were not about to allow his lackey to succeed him. The wild card within the Numidian opposition was Donatus of Casae Nigrae, a bishop who had migrated to Carthage during the waning days of the persecution and there openly opposed Mensurius.[64] Taking the admonitions of the Carthaginian confessors to heart, he had rebaptized those who had openly apostatized and laid hands on bishops who had fallen, according to Optatus.[65] It is important to note that the "rebaptism" referred to here did not comprise the issue at the heart of the later Donatist-Caecilianist struggles, as to whether the baptism of schismatics or heretics was invalid. Rather, the rebaptism that Donatus practiced appears to have been a path of re-entrance into the church for those who had truly denied Christ and sacrificed.[66] While this does not appear to have been common in the later Donatist movement (primarily because the nature of persecution after the Christian emperors meant that no explicit denial of Christ would be required), Donatus of Casae Nigrae seems to have practiced it in cases where total apostasy was certain. For *traditor* bishops, who had not explicitly denied Christ but had cooperated with authorities, Donatus' practice reflected the actions taken by the Synod of Cirta: they were restored after due penance by a laying on of

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[64] R. A. Knox, in his work *Enthusiasm* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), 52, believes that his agitation was fostered by the Numidian bishops.

[65] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, I.24 (Edwards, 24).

[66] J. J. O'Donnell, "Augustine the African," (1985), accessed on July 19, 2007. Online: http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/twayne/aug1.html

hands.[67] The fact that Donatus attests to this practice as well shows that the actions taken by the Synod of Cirta were by no means outside the bounds of rigorist theology.

In 311 Mensurius was summoned to Italy to answer for his sheltering of a certain Felix, a deacon of his who had written an inflammatory letter against the emperor Maxentius. He died later that year before returning to Africa, and the church of Carthage gathered to elect a successor. What happened next is somewhat complicated. It seems clear from Optatus that the Primate of Numidia, in this case Secundus of Tigisi, had acquired the customary right to consecrate the bishops of Carthage, and with it, a certain amount of veto power over the candidates.[68] In this particular election, it was guaranteed that Secundus would never countenance the accession of anyone affiliated with Mensurius to the primacy of Carthage. But before he arrived in Carthage to enforce this point, Secundus received word that the Carthaginian church had bypassed him and irregularly ordained Mensurius' old lieutenant-in-arms, the infamous deacon Caecilian. Ironically, this does not appear to have been at the behest of Caecilian himself. Instead, what seems to have happened is that two *other* rivals for the bishopric, Botrus and Celestius, knowing that due to their apparent status as laxists they would never receive the approval of the Numidian contingent, resolved to "fix" the election by holding it before the Numidians arrived. In Optatus' words, "It is said that in Carthage Botrus and Celestius, craving ordination, took pains to ensure that only local bishops should be

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[67] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, I.24 (Edwards, 24).

[68] Note how Optatus presumes that the Numidians were to have been consulted in the original election in *Against the Donatists* I.18 (Edwards, 17). See also W. H. C. Frend, *Saints and Sinners in the Early Church: Differing and Conflicting Traditions in the First Six Centuries* (Wilmington, Delaware: M. Glazier, 1985), 104, and Tilley, Intro to *Donatist Martyr Stories,* xiv-xv.

sought to perform ordinations in Carthage, the Numidians being absent."[69] But in this they were disappointed: instead, the Carthaginian church appointed Caecilian as the successor of Mensurius. Caecilian himself, knowing better than to wait for the Numidians to arrive, was consecrated immediately by Mensurius' former right-hand man, Felix of Aptunga.[70]

Almost immediately he ran into trouble within Carthage itself. Donatus, of course, adamantly opposed the ordination, but he was not a member of the Carthaginian church. More serious was the attitude of the *seniores laici* against Caecilian. When he requested that they turn over to him the moveable treasures of the church which Mensurius had entrusted to them, the *seniores* flatly refused. They refused to recognize him as the rightful bishop of Carthage and withdrew their communion from him. While Optatus attributes their obstinance to avarice ("the aforesaid seniors, who had lapped up the prey committed to their avaricious jaws"[71]), it is unlikely that they truly thought that they might be able to keep the treasures of the church for themselves. More likely, they had aligned themselves with the powerful faction of the confessors, who had earlier characterized Caecilian as "more ruthless than the tyrant, more bloody than the executioner,"[72] and it is most likely from these men that Secundus received news of the irregular election.

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[69] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, I.18 (Edwards, 17).

[70] Ibid.

[71] "Convocantur supra memorati seniores, qui faucibus avaritiae commendatam ebiberant praedam." Ibid.

[72] *Abitinian Martyrs*, 20 (Tilley, 45-46).

Hearing disturbing reports of the actions of the church at Carthage, Secundus and seventy-nine other Numidian bishops journeyed to the city to investigate the matter.[73] They found a church split in its loyalty, their worst enemy already consecrated as bishop without their knowledge, and a tacit acceptance of the laxist view towards *traditores* exemplified in the person of Felix of Aptunga.

It was the last issue that particularly irked the Numidian contingent. While there was nothing to prove that Caecilian himself had been an actual *traditor*, it was widely rumored that his consecrator was. And while later revelations under the interrogation of Aelianus revealed that Felix was in fact innocent, this was not the common belief of the populace at the time. Even Ingentius, the person who later admitted to forging the documents which had seemed to conclusively implicate Felix in the crime of *traditio,* stated that he had originally accused Felix because it was commonly believed that he had been a *traditor*. Only after failing to find any conclusive evidence for the crime, and animated by a wish for revenge against Felix's perceived hypocrisy, did Ingentius resort to forgery to prove what he so desperately wished to be true.[74] His initial investigation, while biased, was hardly based on nothing. And unlike Secundus' actions at the Synod of Cirta, Caecilian showed no disposition to investigate whether or not Felix had actually betrayed the Scriptures. The casual way in which Caecilian allowed himself to be consecrated by a popularly-presumed *traditor* showed to the Numidians more than

[73] Frend, "St. Paul," 96. He notes that this was the "canonical number derived from Judaism for a formal council"—i.e., Secundus was already aware that a synod would probably have to be called.

[74] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, Appendix II.8 (Edwards, 176): "Ingentius said, 'when we had come and the case of Maurus the Bishop of Utica, who had bought back his bishopric was in progress, Felix the Bishop of Abthugni came up to the city to take part, and said, "Let no one communicate, because he has admitted a falsehood.' And I said in opposition to him, 'neither with him nor with you, since you are a collaborator.' For I grieved for the cause of Maurus my host, since in evading persecution I had communicated with him in great jeopardy. Thereafter I went to the territory of that same Felix, and took with me three seniors, so that they could see whether he had truly collaborated or not."

anything else that Caecilian was indeed going to follow along the laxist lines of Mensurius his predecessor. Such a stance was perceived by the Numidians to be a slap in the face of the martyrs, and goes a long way to explain why Constantine's eventual vindication of Felix of Aptunga had so little an effect on the schism. In one (highly-nuanced) sense, the question of whether Felix had been a *traditor* was irrelevant. Even if he had not actually given up the Scriptures to the authorities, his reputation was such that Caecilian should never have allied with him.[75]

Also mixed into the problem was a facet of Cyprian's theology which had been discussed extensively in his letter to the Spanish congregations under Basilides and Martial.[76] In this letter, Cyprian had stated that no one should "flatter themselves as if they could be safe from contagion of sin, communicating with a sinful priest and yielding their obedience to the unjust and unlawful episcopacy of their leader, when the Divine Censure threatens through the Prophet [Hosea] . . . teaching obviously and showing that all are, indeed, involved in sin who have been contaminated by the sacrifice of a blasphemous and unjust priest."[77] Furthermore, "a people who obey the precepts of the Lord and fear God ought to separate themselves from a sinful leader and should not take

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[75] It is interesting to note that nowhere in the proceedings of the interrogation under Aelianus is the question of whether Felix had handed over false texts *in place* of the Scriptures addressed. The most that can be said of him is that "the interrogation of all [witnesses] recorded above has made plain that no Scriptures were found or damaged or burnt" (Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, Appendix II.10 (Edwards, 180)), leaving the possibility wide open that Felix had turned over false documents rather than the Scriptures themselves. As he was well-known to the authorities in the area (see 2.8), the probability is that he rebuffed them by using the same ploy as Mensurius had. While this point would not have concerned the Catholic authorities, the proto-Donatists, as seen above, would have highly objected to this tactic as an instance of *traditio*. It is quite possible, therefore, that the rumors concerning Felix had their basis in fact—Felix had not handed over true Scriptures, but had indeed complied with the authorities by giving them false texts.

[76] Cyprian, *Letter 67* (Donna, 230-239).

[77] Ibid, *67*.3 (Donna, 233).

part in the sacrifices of a sacrilegious bishop."[78] Beyond his own faulty beliefs, Caecilian had directly joined himself to a man widely believed to be a *traditor* by accepting his consecration, and because of this had lost any claim to the bishopric. This facet was to be the linchpin for the Numidian argument that Caecilian's ordination was illegitimate.

Secundus, however, did not immediately take action. Faced with a situation where the Carthaginian church was divided and the particulars of the situation were clearly being narrated by biased participants from both sides, he appointed an interventor, who in Frend's words was "a temporary administrator of the see who would act until the disputes surrounding the election were settled."[79] This would give time for the air to clear and allow the various rumors floating around to be checked against the facts. In fact, the Donatist bishop Fortunius later claimed to Augustine that Secundus had done this "to hush up the guilt of Caecilian in order to avoid a schism."[80] However, the interventor was quickly assassinated by the pro-Caecilianist side, thus ending hopes for a de-escalation of the conflict.[81] Caecilian himself refused to recognize the legitimacy of

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[78] Ibid (Donna, 234).

[79] Frend, "St. Paul," 96.

[80] "Cum cogitarent culpam Caeciliani, ne schisma fieret, quoquo modo velle sopire. . ."Augustine, *Letter 44*.4.8 (Teske, Vol. I, 177). Note once again Secundus' apparent willingness to compromise in order to avoid schism.

[81] Augustine, *Letter 44*.4.8 (Teske, Vol. I, 177): "He also explained that in the very beginning of the schism, when his predecessors thought that they wanted in some way to hush up the guilt of Caecilian in order to avoid a schism, they gave a certain administrator to the people of his community located in Carthage before Majorinus was ordained in opposition to Caecilian. Hence, he said that this administrator was killed by our people in his church." Augustine is the only one to record this facet of the disputed election, and he remained skeptical of its veracity.

the Numidian Primate and ignored repeated summons to do penance and submit himself to re-election.[82]

At this point Secundus decided to decisively settle the issue. He had arrived at the city of Carthage only to find Caecilian ordained irregularly, having the temerity to abandon the traditional custom of ordination by the Numidian Primate in favor of consecration by a suspected *traditor*. His ordination was opposed by a substantial minority within the church, including *all* the *seniores laici* and several presbyters, not to mention the confessor faction. Moreover, the interim administrator he had appointed had just been assassinated by Caecilian's side. In a great council of over seventy bishops (brought with him from the highlands of Numidia), he declared Caecilian's ordination invalid because it had been at the hands of a *traditor*. The bishops then consecrated Majorinus, a lector in the deaconry of Caecilian and not coincidentally a member of Lucilla's household, to the bishopric of Carthage.

Looking back to the events that preceded the actual schism, it can be seen that there were three main reasons behind the deposition of Caecilian. First was the ideological battle of conflicting theologies represented by Mensurius and Secundus. Mensurius was prepared to take a physicalist view of the Scriptures and their surrender. He had no qualms with appearing to collaborate with the authorities by giving up false texts. He was also prepared to denounce the confessors as opportunistic glory-seekers. There would be no triumphalistic statements concerning "battle lines of confessors"[83] from his side—the primary duty of Christians, according to Mensurius, was to survive. If

[82] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, I.19 (Edwards, 18). Note that Optatus' account is extremely hostile to the party of Secundus, portraying the request to Caecilian to submit himself to penance as a farce. The assassination of the Interventor, not mentioned in Optatus, adds a different hue to the story.

[83] *Abitinian Martyrs*, 2 (Tilley, 29).

that meant collaborating, anything short of explicitly denying Christ was acceptable. And while surrender of the Scriptures was not something he was prepared to do himself, Mensurius' and his protégé Caecilian's actions concerning Felix of Aptunga demonstrate that he was willing to countenance the possibility of such an act in the face of necessity. Secundus adhered to a different theological vein altogether. Heir to the later tradition of Cyprian, he emphatically stated that there should be no compromise with the persecutors. Collaboration with the authorities was out of the question: defiance in the face of persecution was mandatory as exemplified by the heroic model of the Maccabees.[84] Turning over false texts, such as medical or heretical books, to appease the authorities, while not as condemnable as handing over the Scriptures, still equally deserved the epithet of *traditor*. The martyrs constituted the vanguard of the Army of the Lord, and as such were to be emulated, not discouraged.

The second rationale was a corollary of the first: these differences in theology revealed themselves in the actions of Mensurius and Caecilian. The *Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs* provide ample evidence of the actions that Mensurius took to ensure that the confessors would not be emulated. Caecilian was the very deacon who had stood in front of the door to the prison with guards and barred the way to the confessors. His actions would not be forgotten. Nor would it be forgotten that Caecilian was the protégé of Mensurius, who in the time of persecution had collaborated with the authorities by giving up allegedly sacred texts. Caecilian's own action in allowing Felix of Aptunga to

[84] Note Secundus' imperious reply to the imperial authorities, "I am a Christian and a bishop, not a *traditor*" ("Christianus sum et episcopus, non traditor"), found in Augustine**,** *Breviculus Collationis,* III.13.25 (PL 43.639).

consecrate him revealed that he was not at all concerned about the possibility that Felix had been a *traditor*.

This particular action partly constituted the third and pivotal reason as to why Secundus deposed Caecilian: he had been ordained irregularly. In contrast to tradition, Caecilian had not waited for the arrival of the Numidian Primate in order to assume the bishopric. While if the Numidians had been present they would certainly have vetoed Caecilian's ordination, his act of going behind their backs in opposition to custom made his own ordination suspect already and offended their pride. Even worse than this was the fact that Caecilian had been consecrated by a presumed *traditor*. It was this action which formed the immediate catalyst for Secundus' decision to depose Caecilian.

The Early Imperial Struggles

After having consecrated Majorinus as the legitimate bishop of Carthage, Secundus apparently returned to Tigisi, leaving the new bishop to defend his claim. He subsequently passes out of the history of Donatism, the reins of the movement that he started having been handed over to the anti-Caecilianist faction at Carthage. The party of Majorinus quickly moved to consolidate the decision of the council, sending letters to all the North African churches which detailed the decisions of the anti-Caecilianist council at Carthage. Optatus reports that all of North Africa quickly became aware of Felix of Aptunga's presumed *traditor*-status.[85] It is quite possible that, given the prevailing temperament of the North African Christians in the areas outside (and even including) Africa Proconsularis in the immediate aftermath of the persecution, the party of Majorinus might have succeeded in officially deposing Caecilian from the bishopric after

[85] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, I.20 (Edwards, 19).

all had it not been for a momentous change that took place at the same time which would radically alter the nature of the church-state relationship. For Caecilian's election and the subsequent dissensions had coincided with the ascension of Constantine as the first Christian emperor, who, by way of making atonement for the ravages of his predecessors, had decided to restore to the Christians their properties and furnish them with the money to rebuild.[86]

For motivations which Frend deems obscure, Constantine implicitly recognized Caecilian as the true successor of Mensurius by awarding to him the funds donated to rebuild the churches in Africa.[87] Most likely, this state of affairs had come about when, immediately after his consecration, Caecilian had sent letters of communion to the transmarine provinces, particularly Italy, thus securing his presumed legitimacy in the eyes of the outside world. It was thus assumed that the Catholic church in North Africa was the Caecilianist church, since it was only much later that the proceedings of the anti-Caecilianist council at Carthage were made known to the outside world. In his first acknowledgement of a schism within the North African church, Constantine reflexively took Caecilian's side, as recorded in his first letter to Caecilian: "I learned that some people who, perchance, are not of sound mind, wish to turn astray the people of the holy

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[86] Whether Constantine sincerely espoused the faith which he so actively supported is ambiguous; Averil Cameron, in *The Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 57ff, argues that his conversion was genuine. Regardless, the term "Christian emperor" is used here to denote the radically-changed attitude of Constantine and his successors towards the Christians.

[87] Frend, *Saints and Sinners*, 104: "For some reason which is not quite clear, Constantine took Caecilian's part from the outset. . ." See the letter of Constantine to Anulinus preserved in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History,* X.5 (in *Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 29, translated by Roy J. Deferrari (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc, 1955), 272-73): "Wherefore, we wish that when you receive this letter, if any of those things which belonged to the Catholic Church of the Christians in the several cities, or even in other places, should now be possessed either by citizens or by any others, you should have them restored immediately to these same churches."

and Catholic Church by some vile deceit."[88] He even gave permission to Caecilian to utilize secular power against them: "Wherefore, if you should observe that some such men are continuing in this madness, without any hesitation proceed to the above-mentioned judges and bring this error before them, so that they (as I ordered them when they were here) may turn these people from their error."[89] Constantine's automatic support for Caecilian was an enormously significant action, one that heralded the changed nature between church and state that would henceforth play a definitive role in the Donatist-Caecilianist struggle.

The party of Majorinus was well aware of this fact, and quickly attempted to regain the initiative. After Constantine implicitly recognized Caecilian as the legitimate bishop of Carthage by forwarding him money to distribute to North Africa on behalf of the churches, the Majorinists appealed to the proconsul Anulinus to forward their own side of the story to the emperor. Along with a dossier explaining their complaints in detail, the Majorinists sent a cover letter to Constantine outlining their request for a church council to adjudicate the affair between Majorinus and Caecilian. Its contents are worth reprinting:

> We petition you, Constantine, best of emperors, since you are of upright stock, as your father did not carry on the persecution in company with the other emperors and Gaul was immune from this outrage, seeing that in Africa there are dissensions between us and other bishops: we petition that your piety should make haste to have judges given to us from Gaul. Given by Lucian, Dignus, Nasutius, Capito, Fidentius and the other bishops of Donatus' party.[90]

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[88] Eusebius, *Church History*, X.6 (Deferrari, 278-79).

[89] Ibid.

[90] Preserved in Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, I.22 (Edwards, 22-23). Note that the ascription of Donatus to the leadership of the party appears to be an anachronism, as Augustine, in *Letter 88*.2 (Teske, Vol. I, 352), states that the cover letter was titled "The book of the Catholic Church with the Charges against Caecilian Submitted by the Sect of *Majorinus*," which would fit better within the timeline proposed. However, not all commentators are agreed that the letter dates from this time (see Mark Edwards, note 92

This letter is interesting on several counts. First, the description of Constantine as "best of emperors," while certainly a traditional perfunctory remark, shows that the party of Majorinus was clearly attuned to the realities of the political situation. Unlike later writers' portrayals of the Donatist party as intransigently opposed to imperial authority and indeed indifferent to its power, the Majorinists were well-aware of the polemical and practical power of imperial recognition. Only within this context do the subsequent struggles to achieve such recognition fit into the overall picture of Donatism. Secondly, the letter holds a detail that tells us much about the early Donatist mindset. They ask Constantine to send them *Gaulish* bishops to judge their case rather than the most obvious transmarine bishopric of Rome, since "Gaul was immune from [the] outrage" of persecution. Their primary reason for wishing to be tried by Gaulish bishops was because they wanted to be judged by bishops who had not come under the taint of *traditor*, as Constantius (Constantine's father) had not enforced the Edicts of Diocletian in his territories.

The request to be tried under Gaulish bishops, not Italian ones, makes further sense according to the proto-Donatist point of view when considering the state of the Roman bishopric during this period. The bishops of Rome had been quite disgraced during the Diocletianic persecution. The bishop alive at the beginning of the persecution, a man named Marcellinus, was popularly believed to have not only given up sacred books but actually apostatized. Unlike Felix of Aptunga, future inquiries only confirmed

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in his translation of Optatus, following B. Kriegbaum's article "Ein neuer Losungsverschlag für ein altes Problem: die sogennanten preces der Donatisten (Optatus I.22)," in *Studia Patristica* 22, 277-82), preferring to date it to after the council under Miltiades. This goes explicitly against Optatus' own chronological placement of the letter, and, following Frend (*Donatist Church*, 147), I choose to follow the Optatian chronology.

his guilt. According to the version of events told in the *Book of Pontiffs*, a council held at Sinuessa determined that Marcellinus had sacrificed to the gods. It states rather matter-of-factly that "Marcellinus also was taken to sacrifice, to offer incense, which he did."[91] Other documents go further, accusing Marcellinus of denying his apostasy before the council three times before finally admitting to the deed.[92] Although according to these accounts he subsequently redeemed himself by martyrdom, the actions of Rome during the persecution seemed much worse than Carthage, for Mensurius, at least, had never actually offered incense to the gods of Rome. Even Augustine tacitly acknowledged the possibility of a *traditor* within the Roman line of succession.[93]

The Roman see fell into confusion after the death of Marcellinus, and only after an extensive interregnum and two rapid turnovers was a bishop elected who could lead the bishopric effectively once more. But this bishop, named Miltiades, was also suspected of committing the crime of *traditio* by the Donatist party.[94] Therefore, the ability of the Roman bishopric to adjudicate in the affairs of the Carthaginian church concerning charges of the same sin was seriously called into question. As J. S. Alexander

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[91] *The Book of Pontiffs* (*Liber Pontificalis*), translated by Raymond Davis (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989), 12-13.

[92] The preserved minutes of the Council of Sinuessa themselves are a forgery dating from the sixth century, but likely preserve a long-standing tradition concerning the traditorship of Marcellinus (Frend, *Martyrdom*, 504). This tradition can be seen in the *Book of Pontiffs* discussed above, which, although written sometime later than the fact (its earlier portions are thought to be written no later than the 540s (Davis, Intro to the *Book of Pontiffs*, xiii)), were written by a *supporter* of the Roman see, not a detractor. Furthermore, Marcellinus' name alone was omitted from the list of bishops in the Roman "Chronograph," first compiled in 336, and Pope Damasus I (d. 384) intentionally ignored him when writing tributes to his predecessors (J. N. D. Kelly, *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 24-25).

[93] Augustine, *Letter 53*.1.3 (Teske, 206): ""Even if during those times some *traditor* crept into the order of bishops that runs from Peter himself to Anastasius, who now occupies that see, it would not bring any harm to the Church or to the innocent Christians. . ."

[94] Augustine, *Breviculus Collationis,* III.18.34 (PL 43.645). This was apparently a Donatist claim from the very beginning of the schism; see Augustine, *Contra Parmeniani,* I.5.10 (PL 43.40).

puts it when speaking of Donatus himself, "To escape condemnation as an instigator of schism by a council whose presiding bishop the Donatists believed guilty of apostasy would have been of dubious advantage to one whom they revered as a martyr."[95]

However, Constantine ignored their wish to be tried in Gaul, and instead the proposed council was moved to Rome, where he resided, although he did allow three of the chief bishops of Gaul to assist at the trial. But it was Miltiades who chaired the council, along with fifteen other Italian bishops. The procedural arrangements were orderly: Caecilian was allowed to bring to the council ten bishops who supported him, and his opponent was entitled to the same number of bishops. By an interesting twist of fate, however, the rival of Caecilian was no longer Majorinus. In contrast to the later leaders of the Donatist movement, all of whom would serve as bishops for extremely long periods, Majorinus himself reigned as leader of his faction for only a few months. He was succeeded by Donatus of Casae Nigrae, who had already made a name for himself in Carthage against Mensurius and Caecilian.[96]

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[95] J. S. Alexander, "The Motive for a Distinction between Donatus of Carthage and Donatus of Casae Nigrae" in *Journal of Theological Studies,* 31 (October, 1980), 540.

[96] It is important to note at this point that the Donatists themselves in later years argued that the Donatus of Casae Nigrae and the Donatus who became Bishop of Carthage were in fact two different people. This distinction, however, was only made at the council of Carthage in 411, in which it was introduced as a novelty. Augustine, in his *Retractations*, records that he had not been aware of the distinction between the two earlier (Augustine, *Retractations*, I.20.3 (Bogan, 91). The critical opinion today is that, as J. S. Alexander confidently states, "The question whether Donatus of Carthage should be distinguished from, or identified with, his namesake of Casae Nigrae is now generally agreed to have been settled. The two may be regarded as one." (Alexander, "Casae Nigrae," 540). Alexander goes on to offer his views on why the Donatists sought to disassociate Donatus of Casae Nigrae from Donatus of Carthage. The fact that neither Optatus nor Augustine, before the council of Carthage, show any sign of being aware of two separate bishops named Donatus, which would have rendered their own polemics weaker if such knowledge was previously widespread among the Donatists, and the fact that the Donatus of Casae Nigrae who headed the delegation to Miltiades' council suspiciously drops out of the picture at the exact moment that Donatus of Carthage emerges into the limelight, renders the Donatist case for a distinction between the two improbable.

Rome, besides being a den of *traditores* in what may now be properly termed *Donatist* eyes, was also the worst possible place for a showdown for the supporters of the council of Secundus. Ever since the famous debates between Cyprian and Stephen, the bishops of Rome had largely viewed matters such as the rebaptism of heretics or schismatics from a theological viewpoint directly opposed to North African practice. Furthermore, the prevailing currents within Roman theology were more disposed to the philosophy espoused by Mensurius than his opponents. The trial now on their hands represented an excellent opportunity for the bishops assembled at Rome to align the North Africans with their views. Accordingly, at the 313 council at Rome the accusations against Caecilian were disregarded as being anonymous and unproven, and the decision of the council under Secundus was negated. What really swayed the Roman bishops toward Caecilian's side, however, were the actions that Donatus had performed during the persecution: he was condemned for rebaptizing the apostates and for laying hands on lapsed bishops, a thing which Optatus records was regarded as "alien to the custom of the church."[97] The decision was unacceptable to the Donatist side, who compared the legitimacy of the fifteen bishops assembled at Rome to the seventy bishops who had deposed Caecilian at Carthage and found the former wanting. They appealed to Constantine once again and requested a fair trial which would vindicate their concerns, stating, according to Constantine, that "it was a few who [at the council under Miltiades] had rendered their opinions and decisions, or even that they hurried to pass a quick and a

[97] "Confessus sit rebaptizasse, et episcopis lapsis manum imposuisse; quod ab Ecclesia alienum est." Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, I.24 (Edwards, 24).

sharp judgment without first examining everything that ought to have been investigated carefully."[98]

Constantine granted them their request, albeit reluctantly.[99] The new council was held at Arles in 314, attended by representatives from all the dioceses under Constantine's dominion.[100] It was a dramatic repudiation of the Donatist faction. The council's verdicts proved significant, not only for the Donatists, but also for the direction of North African theology. As its predecessor, the synod at Rome under Miltiades may be seen as a dress-rehearsal for the council of Arles. In both councils the concept of rebaptism was explicitly forbidden. It is interesting to note that the Donatist schism was apparently used as an excuse to address the rebaptism question: while Donatus had indeed rebaptized apostates (for which he was condemned by Miltiades), the more common Donatist practice of rebaptizing Caecilianists themselves does not appear to have yet come into practice (largely because the parties had not yet solidified). Yet the council at Arles, in Canon 8, declared that

> Now as to Africa, we decided that they should use their own custom of rebaptizing in such a way that, if any heretic comes to the church, they should ask what his creed is: and if they see that he was baptized [in the name of] Father and Son and Holy Ghost, they should merely lay hands upon him; but if on being

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[98] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, X.5 (Deferrari, 276).

[99] He states in a letter to Chrestus, the bishop of Syracuse who was invited to attend the council, "some, forgetting even their own salvation and the reverence due their most holy religion, even now still do not cease to continue their personal enmities, being unwilling to abide by the decisions already rendered. . ." Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, X.5 (Deferrari, 276).

[100] Frend, *Donatist Church*, 150, on the basis of Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, X.5 (Deferrari, 276): "Wherefore it has become a matter of conscience with me to insist that what should have ceased by voluntary agreement after the judgment had been rendered, even now may possibly be ended in the presence of so many . . . we have ordered that very many bishops from diverse and numberless places come to the city of Arles by the first of August. . ."

> asked his creed he does not affirm this Trinity in reply, let him rightly undergo baptism and the rest.[101]

This canon radically modified the concept of rebaptism codified by Cyprian, and while it certainly applied to Donatus and the later practice of rebaptizing Caecilianist converts, the canon was addressed more widely to the entire North African church.

Canon 13 shot more directly across Donatist bows. While acknowledging that those who had "handed over the Holy Scriptures, or church vessels, or the names of their brothers"[102] ought to be divested of their rank if such allegations were proved, it also explicitly stated that "if the same people were discovered to have ordained, and those who have been ordained by them are worthy, and fit to receive holy orders, this should not tell against their ordination,"[103] thus destroying the central Donatist argument against Caecilian.

Both canons struck directly against the Cyprianic teachings which largely structured the Donatist worldview. It was taken for granted that a person who had been a *traditor* could not legitimately ordain or baptize anyone, for in Cyprian's words, "How can he who is himself unclean and with whom the Holy Spirit is not cleanse and sanctify water?"[104] Furthermore, as has been discussed previously, the rebaptism of those who had been baptized earlier by heretics or schismatics was a core North African practice. In

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[101] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, Appendix 4 (Edwards, 188), copying Canon 8 of the Council of Arles: "De Afris, quod propria lege sua utuntur ut rebaptizent, placuit ut si ad ecclesiam aliquis de haeresi venerit, interrogent eum symbolum; et si perviderint eum in Patre, et Filio, et Spiritu sancto esse baptizatum, manus ei tantum imponatur, ut accipiat Spiritum sanctum. Quod si interrogatus non responderit hanc trinitatem, baptizetur." *Concilium Arelatense I*, in *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, Vol. 2, translated by Joannes Dominicus Mansi (Graz: Akademische Druck- U. Verlagsanstalt, 1960), 473.

[102] *Concilium Arlatense I*, Canon 13 (Mansi, 473).

[103] Ibid.

[104] Cyprian, *Letter 70*.1 (Donna, 260).

effect, the council of Arles did not merely decide the status of the Donatists, it also resolved the festering contention between Cyprian and Stephen in favor of the Roman view. The old arguments for rebaptizing Novatianists (or, significantly, Donatists, from a Caecilianist point of view) were cast aside.

What is surprising is that the Caecilianists were prepared to adopt the Roman practice in direct contrast to their own heritage. While it is not certain whether this acceptance was the result of the council of Arles or whether the philosophy of Mensurius and Caecilian had already espoused such a view, it is clear that this change represented a major break from earlier precedent.[105] Indeed, as R. A. Markus states, "Almost overnight, the traditional orthodoxy of the African Church had become heresy."[106] From then on, the Caecilianist side, while enjoying the polemical advantages of communion with the rest of the world, found itself on a divergent track from traditional North African theology. The arguments of Optatus and Augustine fiercely attacking the rebaptism of schismatics, would have sounded heretical themselves to the pre-Arles North African church. Understanding this point is the key to the prevalence of the schism. While the question often asked in Donatist studies is "why did Donatism become such an important part of North African society?," the real question is rather "why did the *Caecilianists* manage to eventually dominate?" Donatism represented a form of North African theology that was home-grown, so to speak, a direct descendant of Cyprianic theory. The Caecilianists, in contrast, had lost several vital facets of that theology at the council of Arles.

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[105] Markus, "Christianity and Dissent," 29.

[106] Ibid, 30.

The Appeal of Donatism

While the appeals to the emperor continued until 316, for the moment the Donatist faction had lost, for all intents and purposes, its attempt to be recognized. Later revelations concerning the innocence of Felix of Aptunga of the crime of *traditio* in 315 and the publication of the minutes of the Synod of Cirta in 320 did nothing to help the Donatist cause in the eyes of the outside world. After being held at the emperor's court for some time, Donatus returned to Africa in late 315 or early 316.[107] He came back to a territory largely ready to accept his leadership.[108] The tendency of the North African populace appears to have been quite rigoristic, tending naturally more towards Donatism than Caecilianism. Several times we read of proto-Donatist congregations arbitrarily throwing their own bishops out because they had been *traditores*. This was the case with the Abitinian martyrs, who had deposed their own bishop Fundanus when he had cooperated with the authorities and continued their services without him.[109] More interesting is the case of the congregation at Cirta, many of whom actively opposed the ordination of Silvanus to their bishopric, shouting that "He is a collaborator."[110] It is significant that many of the people of Cirta were thus more rigorist than the members of the Synod of Cirta under Secundus who had consecrated Silvanus. Given a populace with such a temperament, the success of the Donatist movement within North Africa was assured.

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[107] Frend, *Donatist Church*, 157. Caecilian quickly followed.

[108] Ibid, 169.

[109] *Abitinian Martyrs*, 3 (Tilley, 30).

[110] "Ille traditor est." Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, Appendix I.13 (Edwards, 162). Ironically, the people who opposed Silvanus' consecration on the grounds that he was a collaborator were primarily composed of *higher*-class citizens; his ordination was carried out forcibly by lower classes.

Donatus himself had no small role in rallying the majority of the North African church to his side. By all accounts, he was an extraordinary man, and the one who bears the primary responsibility for turning the Donatist party from an ecclesiastical schism into a fully-developed church in its own right. He was afterwards known as "Donatus the Great" to his followers, who after his death even swore by "the grey hairs of Donatus," according to Augustine.[111] Optatus grumblingly referred to his knowledge of secular literature, saying that he was "in love with the age," while Jerome admitted that he had "deceived almost all Africa and especially Numidia by his persuasiveness."[112] Through his eloquence and many writings he earned the grudging respect of even his enemies,[113] and after his death he was deemed a saint and miracles were attributed to him.[114] Indeed, in his wide knowledge of secular literature and the way he galvanized his movement into a major force in African theology in its own right, Donatus appears as a figure quite similar, ironically, to Augustine himself.

The initial spread of Donatism in North Africa was also aided by the concurrent spread of Christianity itself into the interior of the territory. The evangelization of the countryside in the interior regions was often a Donatist effort, and quite a few pagans were converted directly into Donatism without ever encountering its Caecilianist alternative. As Frend states in *The Donatist Church*, "In many of these areas, the triumph

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[111] Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 10.5 (Boulding, Vol. 15, 164).

[112] Jerome, *Illustrious Men*, 93 (NPNF(2) 3, 380).

[113] Augustine, *Heresies*, LXIX.2 (Teske, 50): "By his eloquence he strengthened this heresy." Jerome, *Illustrious Men*, 93 (NPNF(2) 3, 380) speaks of "many works" of his which were still extant.

[114] Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 54.21 (Boulding, Vol. 17, 74): "'Africa alone has been worthy of this grace through Saint Donatus,' you say," and *Tractates on the Gospel of John,* 13.17.1 (in *Fathers of the Church,* Vols. 78-82, translated by John W. Rettig (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1988-1995), Vol. 79, 60): "Therefore let no one sell you stories: 'Pontius too, performed a miracle, and Donatus prayed, and God answered him from heaven.'"

of Christianity meant the triumph of Donatus' Church."[115] Many congregations also directly became Donatist when their bishops sided with his party in the aftermath of the initial schism. Before the introduction of separate bishoprics in every city by both factions, whether one was Donatist or Caecilianist depended very much on which faction the bishop of one's city supported. As noted by Frend, "Congregations seem in general to have followed the lead of their bishop."[116] Thus Victor, a member of the (Donatist) congregation at Cirta, could state before Zenophilus that "I cannot be fully acquainted with the origin of the dispute [between Donatist and Caecilianist], since our city has always had one church, and, if it ever had a dispute, we were unaware of it."[117]

Theological Complexity

The Party of Cyprian

What did Donatist theology look like during the early years of its existence? While one should be careful not to state that the early Donatists blindly followed Cyprianic theology,[118] the Donatist party clearly stood within that tradition. In later years, they would explicitly claim Cyprian as the foundation of their church, much to the exasperation of Augustine, who had his hands full when attempting to claim Cyprian for

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[115] Frend, *Donatist Church*, 162.

[116] Ibid, 163.

[117] "Inde originem scire dissensionis plene non possum, quoniam semper civitas nostra unam Ecclesiam habet, et si habuit dissensionem, nescimus omnino." Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, Appendix I.1 (Edwards, 1151-152).

[118] Note, for example, the willingness of both Secundus at the council of Cirta and Donatus of Casae Nigrae to restore fallen bishops to their former clerical status. Such leniency did not stem from the Cyprianic tradition, which forbade bishops who had lapsed from ever assuming clerical offices again as defined in the 251 council of Carthage, although such actions probably owed more to the practical necessities resulting from the persecution than any deep theological nuances.

the Caecilianist side in *On Baptism against the Donatists*.[119] Frend compares Cyprian's influence on the Donatist party to Cyril's influence on Coptic Egypt: he was "an inspiration and a father-figure."[120] The fact that he had died a martyr's death only further solidified his status.

Many Donatist arguments were directly dependent on Cyprian, especially in his views concerning the inability of *traditor* bishops to serve a sacramental function. In contrast to the developing Roman theology of his time, which after the council of Arles was subscribed to by the Caecilianists as well, Cyprian believed that sacraments bestowed by bishops who were polluted by sin (primarily apostasy) were intrinsically invalid.[121] The efficacy of the sacraments were dependent on the personal holiness of their administrator; as Cyprian would famously say, "how can one who baptizes grant to another the remission of sins who, himself outside the Church, cannot put aside his own sins?"[122] Hence in his letter to a Spanish congregation which wanted to know if their fallen bishops could legitimately administer the Eucharist, baptism or consecration,

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[119] See Frend, "Decepit," 624, based on *On Baptism Against the Donatists* I.1.1 (in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* First Series, Vol. 4: *St. Augustin: Against the Writings of the Manichaeans and Donatists*, translated by J. R. King (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994), 411).

[120] Ibid, 626.

[121] Latin theology, which would later reach its full flowering in the writings of Augustine, held that the sacraments were gifts of God to the church, and were thus not dependent on the vessel by whom they were given. Hence an apostate bishop or even a heretic could properly administer the sacraments, as long as the sacraments themselves were given in a proper manner. The rift between this type of theology and the concepts of Cyprian, which envisioned the efficacy of a sacrament as being directly dependent on the personal piety of its administrator, fuelled much of the Donatist-Caecilianist conflict. The struggle over rebaptism, for example, reflected the Donatist belief that schismatics, by virtue of their status, were unworthy of properly administrating baptism—therefore schismatic baptism was a farce and a convert to the Donatist church needed to undergo true baptism. In contrast, the Caecilianists maintained that even if their own side was schismatic (which they would never admit, of course), their baptism was valid because it was administered correctly (i.e., using the same rituals as the Donatists), and should therefore be accepted as legitimate.

[122] Cyprian, *Letter 70*.1 (Donna, 260).

Cyprian strongly averred that such bishops had placed themselves outside the fold by their sin and were thus unable to function in the capacity of "bishop": "in vain do such men attempt to usurp the episcopate since it is clearer that men of this type cannot be in charge of the Church of Christ or offer Sacrifices to God."[123] He praised the congregations for having deposed the apostate bishops and elected new ones in their place. An aspect of this theology which would have massive repercussions in the Donatist-Caecilianist struggles of the fourth century was Cyprian's insistence that not only were the apostate bishops themselves unworthy of offering sacrifice on behalf of their congregations, but implicated equally in their sin were those persons who refused to disassociate themselves from communion with them. Thus Cyprian would state that "although there are some of our colleagues . . . who are in communion rashly with Basilides and Martial," the Apostle Paul clearly showed that "they who have been associated with the delinquent become sharers and partakers in the crimes of others."[124] This was why it was so important for a congregation to disassociate itself from an apostate bishop, for not only were his sacramental activities worthless, but those members who "in unlawful communion [mix] with the evil and sinners . . . are polluted by the contacts of the guilty and, as they are joined in guilt, so they are not separated in punishment."[125] This aspect of Cyprianic theology the Donatists would vociferously defend throughout their existence—to commune with *traditor* bishops (or those who themselves communed with *traditor* bishops) was to share in their guilt.

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[123] Cyprian, *Letter 67*.6 (Donna, 237).

[124] Ibid, 9 (Donna, 238).

[125] Ibid (Donna, 239). See also *Letter 69*.9 (Donna, 251): "All who have mixed themselves with irreligious rashness with schismatics against prelates and bishops will be liable both for the guilt and the punishment. . ."

The Donatist movement also owed to Cyprian their views on the rebaptism of schismatics, which quickly became a major issue once the two factions realized that there would be no swift end to the conflict. Henceforth, any convert to Donatism who had been baptized by a Caecilianist bishop (after the events of the schism), would need to undergo baptism again.[126] Cyprian's own views on the matter stemmed, ironically, out of his strong belief in the absolute unity of the church. If the church indeed possessed "one Lord, one faith, one baptism," (Eph. 4:5) there could be no legitimate baptism outside of it. The baptism of heretics or schismatics, no matter how similar to Catholic rites, were nonetheless intrinsically deficient by virtue of the fact that they were outside the confines of the true church. When Jubaian, a Mauretanian bishop, requested Cyprian's comments on the matter, he stated that "we who hold the head and root of the one Church know for certain and we believe that nothing is allowed to him outside of the Church and that baptism which is one is with us."[127] Therefore, the rebaptism of heretics and schismatics was lawful, for "through this those coming to us from adulterous and profane water are not *rebaptized*, but baptized by us."[128] The Donatist party swore wholeheartedly by these directives and quickly applied them to the schismatic Caecilianists, who by stubbornly communicating with a known *traditor* (Felix of Aptunga, among other allegations) had made a schism against the true Catholic church and its rightly-appointed bishops. Donatists would later explicitly quote Cyprian's rebaptismal theology to justify their

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[126] In point of fact, such absolute terms are only representative of later Donatism; as will be discussed, there was much initial disagreement on this point within the nascent Donatist movement.

[127] Cyprian, *Letter 73*.2 (Donna, 269).

[128] Ibid, 1 (Donna, 269). Italics mine.

practice of rebaptizing Caecilianists, as Augustine attests to.[129] While Augustine, in exasperation, even attempted to suggest once or twice that the Cyprianic passages concerning rebaptism had been forged,[130] the Donatist use of rebaptism was clearly a continuation of Cyprianic theology.

The Question of Rebaptism

The rebaptism question came to a head some twenty years after the original split between the two parties, spurred on no doubt because the first generation of those who had been baptized by Caecilianist bishops had grown to maturity.[131] Many of these had subsequently converted to the Donatist faction, and the latent questions concerning the validity of their baptisms concerned them. Despite Cyprian's pronouncements on the subject, belief in rebaptism was by no means uniform among the nascent Donatist party, although the majority supported it. One of the chief obstacles to a uniform commitment to rebaptism among the Donatist movement in its early years was that many Caecilianist

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[129] See Augustine, *Letter 93*.10.36 (Teske, Vol. I, 398). Indeed, the entire work of *On Baptism against the Donatists* was written to respond to Donatist appeals to Cyprian on the subject.

[130] Augustine, *Letter 108*.3.9 (Teske, Vol. II, 73-74).

[131] A case might be made that the Donatist movement indiscriminately rebaptized *everyone* coming to their side without regard as to whether their original baptism had been administered before the schism, and thus properly. This practice would fit in with Donatus' custom of rebaptizing apostates during the persecution, deeming that they had lost their baptismal grace through their fall, since Parmenian argues that there is no essential difference between heretics and schismatics (Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, I.10 (Edwards, 9-10)), and would also explain why Augustine expected the Donatist party to rebaptize all repentant Maximianists (one of his favorite arguments against them). However, Donatist arguments concerning the validity of baptism invariably hinge on the question of whether the *original* baptism had been conducted by a pure bishop or not; significantly, nowhere is it recorded that they advocated the rebaptism of people who had been baptized Donatist but had converted to Caecilianism and then back again. This was the position that Cyprian took on the matter: "It is sufficient to impose hands in penance upon those who, it is evident, have been baptized and have gone from us to the heretics if afterward, having recognized their sin and put aside their error, they return to truth and to their mother." (Cyprian, *Letter 71*.2 (Donna, 263); see also *Letter 74*.12 (Donna, 294)) Cyprian's stance on the subject makes it highly unlikely that Donatists rebaptized those Caecilianist converts whose baptisms had been originally legitimate (i.e., before the outbreak of the schism).

congregations who were sympathetic to the Donatist side were unwilling to join the cause if it meant negating their own baptism. The new frontier in the Donatist-Caecilianist conflict at this time was apparently Mauretania, and both sides were seeking to gain the upper hand there.[132] Allowing for exceptions from the traditional rite of rebaptism would greatly enhance the Donatist cause in the area. Accordingly, many Mauretanian Donatist bishops had strong reservations against forcing rebaptism upon potential converts. A council was held in 335 at Carthage to debate this matter, and was attended by 270 Donatist bishops.[133] At this council, presided over by Donatus himself, arguments for and against the rebaptism of Caecilianists were debated for a period of seventy-five days, according to Tyconius, our sole authority for the council.[134] In the end, a compromise was reached. Rebaptism of new converts was to remain the norm, but congregations who deemed it a major stumbling-block would be allowed to join the Donatist fold without undergoing the rite.[135] According to Tyconius, this practice was deemed acceptable and remained a tool of Donatist missionary efforts until the time of the Macarian persecution, which considerably hardened their attitudes against the Caecilianists.[136]

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[132] The struggle between Caecilianists and Donatists for the Mauretanias appears to have eventually stalemated. B.H. Warmington states when discussing the geographical spread of Donatism that in Southern Mauretania Sitifensis Donatism predominated, while Caecilianism was prevalent in the coastal cities of the north. In Mauretania Caesariensis, far removed from the Donatist heartland, Caecilianism was dominant. (*North African Provinces*, 75, 89). The westernmost-recorded Donatist bishopric was the city of Ala Miliaria in Mauretania Caesariensis, as found in the roll-call in the 411 council of Carthage (*North African Provinces*, 76).

[133] Note the number of Donatist bishops; this was, presumably, the approximate number of bishoprics held by the Donatist side twenty-three years after the original schism.

[134] As transmitted through Augustine in *Letter 93*.10.43 (Teske, Vol. I, 401).

[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid.

This early council concerning the question of rebaptism shows us that while early Donatists adhered to the general spirit of Cyprian's theology, they evidently did not follow him blindly. There were nuances which could be tolerated for the sake of unity and expansion. Furthermore, Donatus responded to the rebaptism question in the same way as Cyprian had: by calling a council to deal with the issue. When it became clear after thirty-five days that the issue was too contentious to adjudicate one way or the other, Donatus preserved the unity of his fledgling movement by allowing a certain ambiguity in cases of rebaptism. If nothing else, the 335 council of Carthage shows that the Donatist church was clearly not a fanatical rigorist sect, and that the language of compromise and elasticity was much preferred to stubborn obstinacy that could split the church.

Sin and Sacraments

Another point of doctrine which defined the Donatist church vis-à-vis the Caecilianists was their beliefs concerning sin and sacraments. While their views concerning the right of tainted bishops (and those who communicated with them) to preside over the sacraments have been heavily discussed, one nuance that has often been overlooked in many discussions of the movement is their willingness to receive back into communion those who had lapsed. In this facet, the Donatists are clearly distinct from other rigorist groups of the time such as the Novatianists, who maintained that once one had become apostate, there was no hope for her soul within the Catholic church—her fate was up to God.[137] Donatist bishops were not true rigorists in this sense, for they were

[137] See for example Cyprian's discussion of Novatian's beliefs in *Letter 51*.18, 22 (Donna, 144, 147-48).

much more willing to forgive fallen brethren. It has been noted earlier that the primary difference in Donatist eyes between the case of the lapsed bishops at the Synod of Cirta and the case of Caecilian and Felix of Aptunga was not one of moral failure (or gross hypocrisy, as the Caecilianists liked to say). Instead, the primary reason why Caecilian was condemned while the earlier bishops had been reinstated was that in the latter case, the *traditores* at Cirta had confessed and submitted themselves (albeit reluctantly) to the judgment of Secundus.[138] The answer of what to do with these and other confessed *traditores* differed—perhaps harsh penance, perhaps, as in the Synod of Cirta, leaving them up to the judgment of God in order to maintain unity.[139] But in any case, since they had confessed their crime and were willing to abide by the judgment of their peers, communing with the lapsed bishops was not tantamount to participating in their crime. It was manifestly different in the case of Mensurius and Caecilian, who refused to admit that the sin of collaboration was intrinsically evil.[140] To the Donatist faction, Caecilian's tacit acceptance of Felix's assumed act of *traditio* was the final straw. The problem with Caecilian's ordination by a supposed *traditor* was not so much that Felix *was* a *traditor*, but rather that Caecilian *knew* the rumors about Felix and still allowed himself to be consecrated by him.

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[138] While Secundus certainly backed down in the face of opposition to his inquisition, it is significant that each bishop who had been convicted (except Purpurius) willingly stood to one side to await his judgment.

[139] Cyprian himself, no laxist, tacitly acknowledged the possibility for a certain amount of leeway when confronting recalcitrant bishops, saying that in some cases one ought not "apply force to anyone, nor do we give any law since each prelate has, in the administration of the Church, the free will of his own volition as one who will render an account of his action to his Lord." (*Letter 72*.3 (Donna, 268)) In their pleas to Secundus to allow them to "send me to God; to him will I give an account," the fallen bishops of Cirta were likely appealing to Cyprian.

[140] Augustine, *Breviculus Collationis* 3.13.25 (PL 43.638).

The *Sermon on the Passion of Saints Donatus and Advocatus*, a Donatist sermon dated, in Tilley's words, to "the first period of the repression of the Donatists (317-321),"[141] shows the Donatist conception of apostasy as it played out during the period where both sides were struggling for the minds of the population. What we find here is a portrait of mercy towards the deluded Caecilianists, not wrath for their erring ways. The primary reason for Donatist anger against the Caecilianist bishops, in this sermon, is not their persecution of the Donatists themselves, but rather their promise of false hope to their adherents. The situation in question is the status of the lapsed, and the Donatist answer to their plight is illuminating:

> The people whom he [the devil] long ago publicly humiliated could have been brought back by penance to Him whom they had denied. The Lord himself does not wish the death of the one who is perishing but rather that that person should return and live. He was ready to receive the confession of those who were sorry. Knowing this, when the contriver came face to face with times of peace, by worldly seduction, he revived the minds he had overcome in battle by fear of torture. He took away their humility, the only way to tame the anger of an indignant God, and he substituted pride, which he knew for certain would gravely offend God.[142]

According to this passage, the primary fault of the Caecilianists was pride—pride in the belief that their apostasies were not after all damnable sins. Against such a posture the early Donatist would raise their standard, but it would be wrong to characterize them as a fanatically rigorist sect. As seen in the above passage, the Donatists were more than willing to reconcile the lapsed as long as they were cognizant of the enormity of their sin.

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[141] Tilley, Intro to *Donatist Martyr Stories*, 51.

[142] *Donatus and Advocatus*, 2 (Tilley, 54).

The Universal Church

While there existed a charged argument among later Donatists about whether the church outside of North Africa had lost its claim to the Christian name because of its communion with Caecilian, during its early years the Donatist movement implicitly recognized the validity of transmarine bishops.[143] "Why do you presume to rebaptize Christians coming from Mesopotamia who have not so much as heard the names of Caecilian and Donatus, and to deny that they are Christians?" asked Augustine of the Donatists of his own era.[144] Ironically, it appears that Augustine's wish, that the Donatists would stop viewing those who had never even heard of Caecilian as schismatics, accurately depicts the essential stance that early Donatism took towards the outside world. While certain sees, especially that of Rome, were considered to be fully cognizant of Caecilian's actions and were thus implicated in his crime (the Roman bishops were also considered *traditores* in their own right), the stance that the Donatist church took towards other bishoprics was essentially neutral.[145] This was an African-on-African schism; it did not concern the outside world as of yet. Such was the stance taken by Fortuanius, a Donatist bishop against whom Augustine debated, as recorded in *Letter 44*. When Augustine challenged him concerning his belief that the rest of the world had lost

[143] The term "transmarine," as used by Augustine, also included the regions of Cyrene and Egypt, which were separated from the North African provinces by long stretches of desert. While the North Africans and Egyptians inhabited the same continent, geographically North Africa had much closer ties to Rome than Alexandria.

[144] Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 10.5 (Boulding, Vol. 15, 165).

[145] This antipathy towards the Roman bishops was the basis for the alternate Donatist bishopric in Rome begun by Victor of Garba (see Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, II.4 (Edwards, 34)). The fact that the Donatists regarded the rest of the church at this time as not culpable in the Caecilianist schism forms one of the many reasons why it never established itself outside of North Africa, unlike the Novatianist movement (although there are rumors of a Donatist colony in Spain; see Augustine, *Against Petilian*, II.109.247 (NPNF(1) 4, 595)).

its claim to the Christian faith, Fortuanius reminded him that such a state of affairs had not always been the case: up to the Macarian persecution of 347, he claimed, the Donatist church had faithfully remained in communion with the transmarine churches.[146] Only after the transmarine churches had "lost their innocence by the savagery of Macarius,"[147] i.e., by condoning the Christian-on-Christian violence exhibited in that persecution, had the Donatist church come to regard them as schismatics as well.[148]

A persistent problem, however, was that while the Donatist movement was willing to recognize the validity of the churches overseas, most of the transmarine churches were not willing to enter into communion with *them*! This fact was exploited by Augustine in his debate with Fortuanius: "I preferred to ask whether, if the overseas churches lost their innocence by the savagery of Macarius from the time when they were said to have consented to it, it is proven that the Donatists remained in unity with the Eastern churches and the other parts of the world at least up to those times."[149] In response to such questions, Donatist leaders of later times often brought out one of their most prized documents: copies of a letter sent out by the 343 council of Serdica to Donatus of Carthage.[150] In this letter, Caecilian's successor, Gratus, was ignored in favor

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[146] The psychological significance of the Macarian persecution on the Donatist consciousness will be more fully explored below.

[147] Augustine, *Letter 44*.3.5 (Teske, Vol. I, 176).

[148] Even then, there was substantial disagreement as to whether the transmarine churches were irredeemably outside the fold or whether they had some claim to Christianity alongside the Donatists; Fortuanius here represents only his own view. For more discussion of the perception of the universal church within later Donatism, see the following chapter.

[149] Augustine, *Letter 44*.3.5 (Teske, Vol. I, 176).

[150] Ibid: "Then he brought forth a certain volume in which he wanted to show that the council of Serdica had issued a letter to the African bishops who were in the communion of Donatus. When it was read, we heard the name of Donatus among the other bishops to whom they had written." Donatist mention of the council of Serdica is also found in *Contra Cresconium* III.34.38 (PL 43.516), and IV.44.52 (PL 43.576).

of Donatus—proof of their recognition by the wider church.[151] The only difficulty was that the council itself was not actually the Western version which had taken place in Serdica proper, but its Eastern counterpart, an alternate council which the majority of the West decried as "Arian."[152] Augustine, after being taken aback in the face of written proof of Donatist communion, quickly discovered the discrepancy.[153]

The problem of its supposed Arian origin was to cause the Donatist side great grief whenever they exhibited the letter of the council of Serdica to later Caecilianists (as Augustine was fond of saying, "You place the Arians now among heretics that are detested by both us and you in your letters; from which there is no need for myself even to disagree with you about that question"[154]), yet the Eastern version of the council of Serdica was not intrinsically "Arian." Indeed, it condemned Arius' teachings in the creed which it produced: "But those who say that the Son is 'out of what was not' or that he is of another substance and not from God, or who say that there was ever time or age when the Son was not: these the holy and Catholic Church condemns as heretics."[155] It did,

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[151] Hilary of Poitiers preserves this conciliar letter in his now-fragmented work *Against Valens and Ursacius* I, Fragment II, Preface (in *Hilary of Poitiers: Conflicts of Conscience and Law in the Fourth-century Church*, translated by Lionel R. Wickham (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), 20): "Everlasting salvation in the Lord to Gregory bishop of Alexandria, to Amfion bishop of Nicomedia, *Donatus bishop of Carthage*. . ." (Italics mine)

[152] For an in-depth discussion of the twin councils of Serdica, see R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 293-306.

[153] But not before a stammered argument that perhaps the "Donatus" referred to in the letter was perhaps not *the* Donatus of Carthage; clearly, the letter had taken him by surprise.

[154] "Tu Arianos iam inter haereticos et nobis et vobis detestandos in tua epistola posuisti; unde mihi tecum nulla necessitas est etiam de hac quaestione confligere." Augustine, *Contra Cresconium,* III.34.38 (PL 43.516).

[155] Hilary of Poitiers, *Against Valens and Ursacius* I, Fragment II.29 (Wickham, 37)

however, reflect the predominantly Eastern aversion to the term "homoousios," which many felt led inextricably towards Sabellianism.[156]

This concern was apparently shared by Donatus, who had composed a work called *On the Holy Spirit* which appeared to approach "Arian" doctrine in the eyes of his Caecilianist opponents.[157] While not quite correct in such assessments (the lost work appears to have held to a more "subordinationist" model of the type advocated by Tertullian and Novatian rather than any truly Arian viewpoint), [158] it probably helped build a rapport between the Easterners and Donatus himself, who likewise had qualms about accepting "homoousios" as an orthodox definition for the relationship of the Trinity.[159] The Eastern council of Serdica had decreed excommunicate the bishops Julius of Rome and Hosius of Cordoba (who, as Constantine's councilor, had prejudiced him against the Donatist party) and all those who associated with them including Gratus, the leader of the Caecilianist faction after Caecilian's death. This action further explains why

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[156] See Hanson, *Christian Doctrine*, 306.

[157] Jerome, *Illustrious Men*, 93 (NPNF(2) 3, 380).

[158] The supposed "Arianism" of Donatus has been subject to various opinions; J. S. Alexander's assessment is that Donatus was not an Arian, but rather followed what would later be termed "subordinationist" views similar to what had been espoused by Tertullian and Novatian (Alexander, "Donatism," 962). Augustine, in *Heresies,* LXIX.2 (Teske, 50-51), states that "There exist writings of his which make it clear that he did not hold the Catholic position on the Trinity, but thought that, though they are of the same substance, the Son was inferior to the Father and the Holy Spirit inferior to the Son," and later, in his exposition of Donatist beliefs to the *comes* Boniface, further clarified the difference between Arians and the beliefs of Donatus: "The Arians say that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit have different substances. The Donatists, however, do not say this but confess that the Trinity has one substance. And if some of the Donatists say that the Son is less than the Father, they do not deny that he is of the same substance. But very many among them say that they believe about the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit the same thing that the Catholic Church believes" (Augustine, *Letter 185*.1.1 (Teske, Vol. III, 180)). Such qualifications, which clearly indicated a subordinationist theology of impeccable Western pedigree rather than Arian sympathies, were ignored by other writers (such as Jerome), who simply painted Donatus as an Arian (Jerome, *Illustrious Men*, 93 (NPNF(2) 3, 380)).

[159] As the council of Nicaea had taken place after the Donatist-Caecilianist schism (Caecilian, in fact, was present at the council), it was not officially recognized by the later Donatist church in any significant way, although Augustine records their unimpeachable orthodoxy with regards to the decisions of council several times (*Letter 185*.1.1 (Teske, Vol. III, 180) is an excellent example)

the Donatist party was eager to side with the Easterners. The Eastern council of Serdica exemplifies a Donatist party eager to court potential communicants in the transmarine provinces. Far from rejecting the idea of a universal church at this time, the early Donatists were actively seeking to be recognized as a part of it.

Attempts at State Recognition

Nor were the early Donatists necessarily against imperial recognition at this time, as has been too frequently leveled against them.[160] On the contrary, they actively sought it. One of the main reasons why early Donatism did not quickly evolve a more negative view of the outside churches was because its adherents continued to believe that they would soon become the imperially-accepted state religion of North Africa. The negative attitude towards imperial interference which characterized Donatism of later years does not appear to have its roots in the early schism.[161] This view is in contrast to the positions of both W. H. C. Frend and A.H.M. Jones, who are otherwise quite critical of each other. Frend believed that Donatist antipathy to the state dated back to the original schism and before it, ultimately deriving directly from Tertullian. He opposed the viewpoint of Jones, who thought that the Donatists evolved a doctrine of church-state separation only after Constantine's decision against them.[162] Both, however, were united in believing that the history of early Donatism was characterized by an antipathy towards the state. Jones is indeed correct in realizing that the initial actions of the Donatist

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[160] See Greenslade, *Schism*, 58; Frend, "Heresy and Schism as National and Social Movements" (Presidential Address) in *Schism, Heresy and Religious Protest*, edited by Derek Baker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 45; and Warmington, *North African Provinces*, 100.

[161] Although it will be shown in the succeeding chapter that this negative attitude has been largely over-rated by many historians.

[162] A view that W. H. C. Frend heavily criticized in "Heresy," 45.

leaders in appealing to Constantine appear quite incongruous with the view that Donatism was necessarily anti-state from the beginning. However, Jones does not go far enough. There are numerous accounts from the early years of the schism which betray a pattern of active attempts by the Donatist party to be recognized by the state as the legitimate church.

We have already noted the attempts by the Donatist faction to secure state recognition under Constantine. These efforts were often noted with sarcasm by later Caecilianist polemicists who noted the incongruity of early Donatist action with their later official stance that imperial recognition had no bearing whatsoever on the legitimacy of a bishop. After all, the Donatist side had appealed at least four times to Constantine before he finally came down decisively in favor of Caecilian.[163] Augustine could later berate them, with a degree of polemical value, for disputing "the judgment that your predecessors chose, that they forced from him by their constant appeals, and that they preferred to the judgment of the bishops."[164]

Indeed, the fact that the Donatists had originally appealed to the *state* rather than church councils to decide the issue between them and the Caecilianists was a facet that the Caecilianists constantly reproached them for. While this criticism was clearly

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[163] First in their request for a Gallic council which was later turned into the council under Miltiades, then an appeal which became the council of Arles. From there the letters of Constantine reveal that the Donatists appealed a third time to him (Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, Appendix VI), and Constantine was sufficiently impressed with the merits of their case to state that "To you, however, I promise that if in his [Caecilian's] presence you by yourselves prove anything with respect to even one crime or offence, I shall act as though all the things you allege against him were seen to be proved." After failing to prove anything particularly damning against Caecilian, they made a final appeal in 315/16 where the two parties agreed to stay in Italy while the bishops Eunomius and Olympius were sent to decide the case "so that, in the absence of both, they might ordain one." (Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, I.26 (Edwards, 26)). But the decision of the bishops Eunomius and Olympius went against them, and on November 10, 316, Constantine ultimately decided in favor of the Caecilianists. (Frend, *Donatist Church*, 159).

[164] Augustine, *Letter 88*.5 (Teske, Vol. I, 354).

employed for its polemical value, Augustine's tirade against the Donatists because by appealing to the emperor they had bypassed the proper channels of authority does seem to reflect a legitimate point of contention for the Caecilianists. It was the Donatist side which had first appealed for state arbitration in a clerical issue.[165] Moreover, it was a role that Constantine himself felt uncomfortable with, as evidenced by his reaction, if genuine, preserved in Appendix Five of Optatus: "What were they thinking, these slanderers of religion, who refusing the judgment of heaven have thought fit to demand my judgment?"[166]

In contrast to A.H.M. Jones, who sees the traditional Donatist antipathy towards the state as dating from the period when Constantine decisively judged in favor of Caecilian and unsuccessfully attempted to force the recalcitrant Donatist leaders to commune with him,[167] there would be at least two other times in which the Donatist party actively sought to gain official imperial recognition during the early years of their movement. The first of these attempts occurred at the previously-mentioned council of Serdica/Philippopolis itself. While Donatist involvement at the council can certainly tell us something of their views concerning the wider church, it must also be noted that the

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[165] Augustine, *Letter 93*.4.13 (Teske, Vol. I, 385): "But we blame them more for this because, on their own initiative, they accused Caecilian before the emperor, whereas they ought, of course, first to have convicted him before their colleagues across the sea. The emperor himself, after all, acted in a far more orderly fashion in referring to bishops a case against bishops that was brought to him." Of course, one could argue that the Caecilianists, by accepting the money distributed by Constantine to compensate them for the persecution, had already implicitly accepted the ability of the state to interfere in clerical matters.

[166] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, Appendix V. The authenticity of this letter, however, has been called into doubt by some scholars; see Frend, *Donatist Church*, 152-3.

[167] Constantine's efforts to repress the Donatist faction lasted from 316 to 321, after which he granted the Donatist faction de-facto toleration, having realized that the schism was not going to be healed by force. It was also during this time of repression that the Donatists first began using the term "Caecilianist" as an epithet against their opponents, as Caecilian had been particularly zealous in repressing his rivals and confiscating their churches within his jurisdiction. On the other hand, the persecution appears to have been rather haphazard outside of the environs of Carthage itself. See Frend, *Donatist Church*, 159-162 for an overview.

attempt at clerical recognition of their bishoprics at the Eastern version of the council of Serdica had its political implications as well. As implied by the controversy over the council, this was a time when the Roman Empire was rent by conflicts over the precise nature of the Trinity. There was no guarantee that the factions which supported the Nicene formula would ultimately emerge victorious; while the true inheritors of the Arian label, the Anomoean faction, were far too weak to seriously contend for the title of orthodoxy, there existed a large majority of Eastern bishops who, in the words of A.H.M. Jones, "though not Arians, were gravely dissatisfied with the Nicene formula," seeing the term "homoousios" as dangerously close to Sabellianism.[168] It was against this diverse group that the Nicene faction, among whom could be counted both Julius, current bishop of Rome, and Gratus, bishop of Carthage after Caecilian, was locked in mortal struggle for the claim to orthodoxy. Both factions recognized that imperial recognition would be an immeasurable asset to their cause. Thus, ironically, at the same time that the Donatist faction in North Africa was striving to obtain imperial recognition, the Nicene faction itself was locked in a struggle for the same goal. While Constans, the emperor in the West, officially supported the Nicene side in the conflict, the emperor in the East, Constantius II, shared the Easterners' distrust of Nicene vocabulary. Unlike the West, which was frequently rent with rebellions and internal disputes (Constans had only just finished overcoming the threat of his western rival Constantine II in 340 and would be overthrown in 350[169]), the East under Constantius II was on the ascendant. Constantius

[168] A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, Vols. 1-2* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), Vol. I, 114.

[169] Ibid, 112-113.

II, in fact, would reunite the two halves of the empire in 353, and would severely repress the Nicene faction during his reign.[170]

Under such circumstances, it may be seen that a Western party willing to make common cause with the Easterners might have some hope of parlaying that alliance into imperial recognition, for continued imperial support of the Nicene faction was by no means assured.[171] At the time of the council of Serdica, the Caecilianist side was firmly entrenched with the Nicene party. Already unrecognized by the emperors, the Donatist party had nothing to lose by siding with the Easterners, whereas if the Eastern side proved to be the dominant face of orthodoxy in the ensuing years, it would not have been unreasonable for the Donatist bishops to expect the emperors to handle the situation in Carthage in the same way as they had in Alexandria: by uprooting the troublesome Nicene supporter (in that case, Athanasius) and putting in his place a loyal supporter of their own creed (Gregory).[172]

It was an impressive strategy, and if the Donatist movement had not already been curtailed by the time that Constantius II took power in the West, it might well have succeeded. Indeed, both Liberius and Restitutus, the current bishops of the sees of Rome and Carthage, respectively, were forced to accede to a compromising creed during the reign of Constantius II. But by this time, the Donatist constituency had already been decimated by harsh repressions under Constans, and thus failed to provide a viable

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[170] It was during the reign of Constantius II, in particular after the council of Ariminum which he called in 359, that Jerome would make his famous statement "The whole world groaned and was astonished to find itself Arian."

[171] W. H. C. Frend briefly notes this facet in passing, although he does not take it up: "At the time, it was by no means impossible that the creed of Eusebius of Nicomedia would be recognized by the emperors." (*Donatist Church*, 170)

[172] Jones, *Roman Empire*, Vol. I, 117.

alternative to Restitutus. The only fruit that the council of Serdica appears to have borne for the Donatist faction was a persistent belief among the Easterners that Donatism represented some sort of hazy subset of Western Arianism.[173] At times, this misguided idea tended to even obscure the original cause of the schism; Theodoret, in his *Compendium Haereticarum Fabularum*, appears to be ignorant of their schismatic origins, identifying them only as "those [who] think with Arius."[174]

The third endeavor to sway imperial support away from the Caecilianist faction and onto the Donatists also proved to be the last such attempt. By the year 346 Donatism was flourishing in North Africa, the faction had been recognized as the legitimate church by the Eastern council of Serdica, and Caecilian was dead. Donatus, however, was in the prime of his life (he would not die until 355), spearheading a movement on the ascendancy. It was time to directly challenge the Caecilianists for control of the see of Carthage. Thus in 346 Donatus requested that the Emperor Constans recognize him as the legitimate bishop of Carthage.[175] The appeal was not without some warrant; as Maureen Tilley notes, the very first council under Miltiades, in an attempt to forestall a further spread of the schism, had stipulated that when there was a dispute between who was the rightful bishop of a given city, the senior bishop, whether Donatist or

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[173] See Epiphanius, *Panarion* LIX.13 (in *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca,* Vol. 43.11-236, edited by Jacques Paul Migne (Paris, 1857-1866), 1038) and Theodoret, *Compendium Haereticarum Fabularum* IV.6 in *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca,* Vol. 83.335-554, edited by Jacques Paul Migne (Paris, 1857-1866), 423, for an example. For a Western view of the Donatists as substantially Arians, see Isidore of Seville, who groups them in with the Arian factions in *The Etymologies* VIII.51 (translated by Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 177).

[174] Theodoret, *Compendium*, IV.6 (PG 83.423).

[175] Following Frend's interpretation (*Donatist Church*, 177), based on Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, III.1 (Edwards, 57).

Caecilianist, was to be given the title.[176] As Caecilian had died some years previously, Donatus was by now technically the senior bishop of the city of Carthage. While his claim to the bishopric was somewhat dubious (after all, Donatus himself had not surrendered his claim when Caecilian had been alive, although Caecilian had been the senior bishop), Donatus appears to have felt secure enough in the strength of his movement to make such a request of the emperor. It was hoped that this appeal would be the crowning triumph of a long and arduous struggle against the Caecilianist schismatics. It led instead directly to the Macarian persecution.

The Psychological Effect of the Macarian Persecution

In the year 347, the emperor Constans sent two commissioners named Paulus and Macarius to settle the dispute. Their purpose was ostensibly to distribute money for the poor of both sides while observing the North African situation.[177] Unfortunately, they quickly showed where their sympathies lay by communing with Gratus and openly siding with the Caecilianist faction. This was unacceptable to Donatus, who repudiated them with his famous saying "What has the church to do with the Emperor?"[178] While highly significant in Donatist theology, this outburst ought not be given the undue emphasis it has been accorded in some circles. It does reflect Donatist policy towards the ability of the emperors to control the church, which is, after all, a hallmark of Western theology, but it should not be construed as the battle-cry for an absolute disassociation with the

[176] Tilley, Intro to *Donatist Martyr Stories*, xvi. There is nothing that explicitly states that Donatus had the council under Miltiades in mind when he lodged his request with Constans, so it remains an open question as to whether Tilley's construction reflects the actual justification given in the case.

[177] Following Frend's interpretation of events as outlined in *Donatist Church*, 177-178.

[178] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, III.3 (Edwards, 62).

state.[179] Donatus then enjoined his supporters not to accept the money given by Paulus and Macarius, which was probably being used to gain support for the Caecilianist side.

There were also darker rumors flying around in Carthage and the surrounding environs concerning the true nature of the commissioners' mission, which evoked sinister memories of the recent persecution under Diocletian. It was rumored that Paulus and Macarius were going to re-institute the cult of the emperors:

> For it was said at that time that Paulus and Macarius would come to be present at the sacrifice, so that, while the altars were being solemnly prepared, they might bring out an image, which they would first put on the altar and thus the sacrifice would be offered. When this reached people's ears, they were stricken in spirit, and everyone's tongue was excited in response to these words, so that all who heard them said, 'The one who tastes of this tastes of a pagan rite.' And what they heard was right, if the true sequel had resembled such a rumour.[180]

These rumors and the ever more likely possibility that Macarius and Paulus were going to imminently pronounce the dissolution of the Donatist church caused great consternation among the Donatist population, and in many places the response to the commissioners grew explicitly hostile. Finally, the inevitable incident occurred which lit the fuse of persecution. Faced with increasing hostility in Numidia, the commissioners requested an armed escort from Sylvester, the *comes Africae* at the time. At the same time another Donatus, the bishop of Bagai, had gathered together the local Agonistici, who were known for their acts of fanaticism, to his church to await the delegation. When advance units of the commissioners arrived at Bagai, they were beaten and thrown out of the city. However much Optatus attempts to disguise it, what happened next was a massacre: "The harassed soldiers returned to their ranks, and what two or three had suffered was a grief

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[179] See Chapter Four, pgs. 113-117, for further elucidation of this point.

[180] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, III.12 (Edwards, 82-83).

to all. All were aroused, and even their captains were powerless to restrain the enraged soldiers. Thus was committed that deed that you have recalled as a way of denigrating unity."[181] After this act, Macarius finally revealed his hand: all Donatists were ordered to unite with the Caecilianists by fiat. The Macarian persecution had officially begun.

It is not necessary to go into the specifics of the Macarian persecution here. Suffice it to say that, unlike the earlier haphazard and quickly-abandoned repression under Constantine, the Macarian persecution represented a pervasive and lasting attempt to coerce the recalcitrant Donatist faction into unity with the Caecilianists. It was intended to permanently end the schism by means of forcible repression, and from 347 until Julian proclaimed himself Augustus Caesar, it continued to be in effect. For the first time since the original schism, the Donatist bishops faced a determined effort to wipe them out. Many fled to the more remote areas of Numidia, while the more prominent leaders of the movement were banished (Donatus among them). Others committed what in Donatist eyes was a modern example of *traditio* and joined themselves to the Caecilianists. And some, such as Donatus of Bagai, were martyred.[182]

The Macarian persecution forms the typological end to the discussion of early Donatism. Before the outbreak of the persecution, the Donatist church was at least ambiguous on the necessity of rebaptism, the relationship of the church to the state, and its relations with the transmarine churches. After the persecution, as will be discussed in the next chapter, there was a re-evaluation of these earlier principles. The Macarian

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[181] Ibid, III.4 (Edwards, 70-71).

[182] See *The Martyrdom of Marculus* and *The Passion of Maximian and Isaac*, in *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa,* translated by Maureen A. Tilley (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), for Donatist accounts of martyrdom during the persecution. While reliable in the general details, it is to be noted that such martyrologies are inevitably tainted by the bias of the author and the demands of the story.

persecution thus represents a psychological break with the past history of the schism. For one thing, it solidified the Donatist-Caecilianist animosity. After the persecution, a common epithet for Caecilianists among the Donatists was "Macarians."[183] Donatist reaction to coerced unification was militantly hostile. In the *Passion of Maximian and Isaac*, a Donatist martyrology dating from the Macarian period, the persecution was conceived as a desperate act against the church by the devil, who "immediately ordered a treaty of sacrilegious unity to be solemnly enacted with tortures as sanctions so that those whom Christ commanded to be received for his sake should be perpetually banished."[184] *The Martyrdom of Marculus*, another Donatist martyrology, characterized the beginning of the Macarian persecution in similar terms:

> But then suddenly, vicious rumblings of the Macarian persecution thundered forth from the tyrannical home of king Constans and from the pinnacle of his palace. Two beasts were sent to Africa, *viz*., the same Macarius and Paul. In short, an accursed and detestable war was declared against the Church, so that the Christian people would be forced into unity with the traitors, a unity effected by the unsheathed swords of soldiers.[185]

The Macarian persecution also ended the period in which the Donatist leaders entertained hopes of gaining imperial recognition. They would continue to claim the title of "Catholic" as their own, but they never again attempted to actively persuade the emperors that their cause was just. In effect, the Macarian persecution forced the Donatists to realize that the Caecilianists had decisively won the battle for imperial recognition. While in later years they would concentrate on local politics, an area in which they would

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[183] Note for example Augustine, *Letter 49*.3 (Teske, Vol. I,196), *87*.10 (Teske, Vol. I, 350), and *Against Petilian* II.39.92 (NPNF(1) 4, 555).

[184] *Maximian and Isaac*, 3 (Tilley, 64-65).

[185] *Martyrdom of Marculus*, 3 (Tilley, 79). Like their Caecilianist counterparts, Donatist primary sources have a flair for demonizing their opponents.

have substantial success (including among their number even a *comes Africae*[186]), and at times ally with usurpers who promised them a return to official power, they would not, except in exaggerated polemics, ever attempt to directly convince the emperors of the validity of their movement.

The persecution also had the ironic effect of galvanizing the schism, essentially giving it the rhetorical apparatus to survive long after all eyewitnesses to the Macarian repression had died out. It showed to the average Donatist that their diatribes condemning the Caecilianists as *traditores* were justified; the Caecilianists were indeed no better than the pagan emperors and did not hesitate to deploy the weapons of imperial persecution upon their rivals. This had excellent polemical value. Petilian would later use the Macarian persecution as a proof-text for his assertion that the Caecilianists necessarily shared in the *traditor*-status of their founder: "Yet someone will be found to say, 'We are not sons of a *traditor*.' Any one is the son of that man whose deeds he imitates."[187] While the Macarian persecution subdued the Donatist faction for many years, it also contained the seeds for a resurgent, defensive Donatism that had evolved considerably from its early years.

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[186] Flavian, mentioned by Augustine in *Letter 87*.8 (Teske, Vol. I, 348).

[187] Augustine, *Against Petilian*, II.11.25 (NPNF(1) 4, 535).

CHAPTER FOUR

The Evolution of Mature Donatism

"Tell us, therefore, traditor*, when you received the power of imitating the mysteries."*

–Petilian of Constantine

Chapter Four will discuss the evolution of Donatist theology in its later years and the diversity contained therein, specifically focusing on Donatist beliefs concerning the relationship of the church to the state, the universal church, eschatology, free will, rebaptism, and sacramental sin. Each of these areas exhibits a decidedly Donatist slant which resulted from their attempts to form a coherent worldview in the light of their historical circumstances. This evolution can be especially observed in the late fourth century emphasis on free will among Donatists, which would profoundly influence their later beliefs concerning rebaptism and sacramental purity. Evidence of diversity within Donatist theology will also be discussed, primarily in relation to their differing views concerning the universal church and eschatology. Donatism in its later years was not a static phenomenon, and had evolved considerably since its inception in 312.

Overview History

For approximately thirteen years, the Donatist church had lain dormant in North Africa due to the effects of the Macarian persecution. While the schism was by no means dead, it flourished during these years, if at all, only in the more rural regions of Numidia, where the imperial arm was somewhat tenuous.[1] Donatus had died in 355 while still in

[1] Frend, *Donatist Church*, 184.

exile, and his successor, a man named Parmenian, did not even set foot in Africa until 361.[2] Parmenian himself was an anomaly within the normally home-grown movement, as he did not originally hail from North Africa. Optatus takes it for granted that Parmenian was a stranger to the region, contrasting his outsider status with the Caecilianist clergy: "Have *we* brought over any Spaniard or Gaul, or ordained an immigrant over those who knew no better?"[3] It appears that he had been converted by one of the exiled Donatist bishops who had been banished to these areas, and had subsequently become so invaluable to the leadership of the movement that he was chosen as Donatus' successor.

Then, in 361, came the moment the exiles had been waiting for: a regime change. Constantius II had died, and in his place reigned Julian, later surnamed "the Apostate." Julian was no friend of Christianity, but he correctly surmised that if he repealed the laws exiling heretics and schismatics which had been promulgated during his predecessors' reign, he could throw the Christian churches into turmoil.[4] Accordingly, when a delegation from the exiled Donatist bishops requested that the banishment imposed on them by his predecessor be revoked, Julian granted their request. Not only did he grant

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[2] Ibid, 181.

[3] "Numquid nos aliquem adduximus Hispanum et Gallum? aut nos ordinavimus ignorantibus peregrinum?" Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, II.7 (Edwards, 39), italics mine. See also I.5 (Edwards, 4-5), where he remarks that "Certain things count for us alone, like your remarks on the unity of the church, and certain things against you through ignorance, because you are a foreigner, like your reproaches against collaborators and schismatics."

[4] See Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, V.5 (NPNF(2) 2, 329-30): "Julian recalled from exile all Christians who, during the reign of Constantius, had been banished on account of their religious sentiments, and restored to them their property that had been confiscated by law." As Constantius II had not been noted for his sympathy to the Nicene party, many of the "heretics" or "schismatics" in this case were of the Nicene persuasion, most famously Athanasius of Alexandria and Lucifer of Cagliari, a fact assiduously avoided by Augustine in his diatribes against the Donatists for accepting Julian's aid. On Julian's antipathy towards Christianity in general and his attempts to diminish its influence by recalling prominent opposition leaders exiled under Constantius II, see G. W. Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 70-71.

them the right to return to North Africa, but, in the words of the rescript preserved for us by Augustine, proclaimed that "those proceedings which were taken to their prejudice wrongly and without authority being all annulled, everything should be restored to its former position."[5] Emerging out of the shadows of the Macarian repression, the exiled Donatist leaders entered North Africa in triumph and forcibly repossessed their sees on the authority of the emperor.

The events of the Macarian persecution were not forgotten, and indeed the impact of the repression upon the Donatist psyche was amply evidenced by incidences of violent triumphalism that frequently accompanied the enforcement of Julian's rescript. Optatus, admittedly not an unbiased author, wrote of the Donatist return that "You drove many into exile from their sees, when, with hired bands, you broke into the churches; many of your number, in many places which it would take too long to tell by name, committed bloody murders so atrocious that an account of these deeds was submitted by the judges of that era."[6] Donatism had not died out under the Macarian persecution, but had been simmering just under the surface in many locales. This is amply evidenced by the accounts of extreme retribution against the hated Caecilianists that ensued. Optatus speaks of returning Donatists pouring out Caecilianist eucharistic vessels and throwing

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[5] "Ut abolitis quae adversus eos sine rescripto perperam gesta sunt, in antiquum statum cuncta revocentur." Augustine, *Against Petilian*, II.98.224 (NPNF(1) 4, 586). They were later severely reproached by Optatus (*Against the Donatists*, II.16) and Augustine (*Expositions*, Psalm 36(2).18 (Boulding, Vol. 16, 117-18), *Letter 93*.4.12 (Teske, Vol. I, 384), *Against Petilian* II.98.224 (NPNF(1) 4, 586)) for appealing to a pagan emperor for redress. While this accusation was not really fair (after all, Athanasius had also benefited from Julian's reversal of his predecessor's policies), it had great polemical value and the rescript from Julian to the Donatist leaders was later ordered by the emperors Arcadius and Honorius to be posted "in the most frequented places" in order to mock Donatist claims (*Theodosian Code*, XVI.5.37 (Pharr, 456)).

[6] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, II.17 (Edwards, 44). Of course, it must be noted that the Donatists, acting under imperial authority, were behaving in precisely the same ways as their Caecilianist opponents had during previous repressions.

out vials of oil of chrismation, acts which were intended to purify the once-Donatist basilicas from any trace of the hated Caecilianist presence.[7] Caecilianist bishops who refused to give up basilicas previously belonging to the Donatists were subjected to forcible removal by Donatist mobs, which resulted in several deaths.[8] To these mobs were often joined detachments of the Agonistici, first encountered at the outset of the Macarian persecution, who provided the muscle necessary for some of the Donatist church's more controversial actions.[9]

For those who had lived under Caecilianist rule and had compromised their faith, periods of penance were ordained.[10] Apparently, Donatist bishops who had lapsed into Caecilianism were allowed back to their sees by a laying on of hands after due penance, a practice that Optatus decried.[11] Nor was the number of re-converts minimal; Optatus recorded with revulsion that "when a [Caecilianist] presbyter or bishop is cast down, the people is thereby taken captive. When could a crowd of people stand firm, having seen

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[7] Ibid, II.19 (Edwards, 46-47). Book VI continues the litany of Donatist desecration of Caecilianist religious items: "I do not fear as a Christian to say what the pagan executive, at your petition, was unable to ignore: you have snatched away the Lord's coverings and instruments, which had long been a common possession; you have snatched away the curtains with the codices; in your own proud judgment you deemed both to be polluted." (VI.5 (Edwards, 123))

[8] Despite Optatus' attempt to paint the Donatist side as bloodthirsty thugs, the worst he can say against them is that during one of these altercations, two deacons were killed while barricading a church against the returning Donatists and that in one town the Caecilianist community was forcibly exiled (Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, II.18 (Edwards, 45)).

[9] The Agonistici, more commonly known as the Circumcellions, were a zealous sub-sect within Donatism devoted to the ideal of martyrdom. As martyrs-in-training, they provided much of the muscle for the more violent of Donatist actions. Their case will be discussed in detail in Chapter Seven.

[10] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, II.26 (Edwards, 56): "You have demanded that the folk do penance; nor was it enacted by anyone, but exacted by you. Nor were there equal intervals of time, but in all your enactments you showed respect of persons, ordering one to do penance for a whole year, another for a month, another for barely a full day. . ."

[11] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, II.25 (Edwards, 55).

its director destroyed by you?"[12] It appears that within a very few years after the recall of the Donatist exiles the church had quickly recuperated from its former losses as congregations which had been nominally Caecilianist during the persecution soon reverted back to Donatism. B. H. Warmington states that "by the end of the century, [Donatism] numbered in its congregation perhaps over half the Christians in Africa."[13]

The nature of the schism had changed, however. While before the movement had been primarily oriented towards reclaiming the bishopric of Carthage from the Caecilianist side,[14] the new form of Donatism that emerged after the Macarian persecution understood that it could not expect imperial recognition as the official North African church, at least in the short term. It evolved instead into an alternate church that sought to crush the Caecilianists not by imperial fiat, but by changing the loyalties of the population. Furthermore, Donatism after its revival under Julian was no longer oriented exclusively towards the see of Carthage. Leading figures in the schism would henceforth hail primarily from Numidia, especially after the death of Donatus' successor, Parmenian. While Primian, the next Primate of Carthage, was certainly accorded respect, during his lifetime the real movers and shakers of Donatism were Optatus of Bagai in the political sphere and Petilian of Constantine (Cirta) in the theological realm.[15] After the 411

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[12] Ibid, II.21 (Edwards, 50).

[13] Warmington, *North African Provinces*, 76.

[14] As shown by Donatus' question of travelers who came to Carthage: "How does my party stand among you?" (Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, III.3 (Edwards, 65)) This statement should not be taken as a sign of arrogance, as Optatus claims, but rather as an insight into the nature of the schism: Donatism at this time was primarily a question as to which bishop was the rightful bishop of Carthage, and those who supported Donatus' claim were "Donatists." Only after the Macarian persecution did Donatism come to stand for an entire alternate system not necessarily centered in Carthage.

[15] Cirta had been devastated by the ravages of Maxentius and was subsequently rebuilt as a magnanimous gesture by the emperor Constantine, who renamed it after himself.

council of Carthage, the movement would survive for at least 200 more years without any appreciable congregation in the city, moving back to the Numidian heartlands where the dissension under Secundus had originally begun. It is thus at the return of the exiles during Julian's reign (362-63) that we can truly call Donatism an alternate system of belief rather than a mere schism.

During the years between the return of the exiles and the time of Augustine, there occurred many events which helped to shape Donatism into the mature form that it exhibited during the 411 council of Carthage. As Donatus had before him, Parmenian held the reins of the movement for many years, about thirty-six in total, and it was under his steady hand that the movement evolved during its later years. Alongside and eventually opposing him was Tyconius, the great Donatist theologian for whom a whole separate course of study has sprung up.[16] In his lifetime he introduced many innovations to Donatist theology, the more extreme of which ultimately resulted in his excommunication from the party in 380.[17] While it is certainly correct to see Tyconius as an anomaly within the Donatist tradition, as Frend does,[18] it should also be emphasized that Tyconius was thoroughly Donatist in his worldview. Even the more extreme of his theological concepts reflect genuine Donatist controversies which were raging during his lifetime. Far from being a lone ranger, Tyconius represents a version of the left wing of

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[16]See Pamela Bright, *The Book of Rules of Tyconius: Its Purpose and Inner Logic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), Paula Landes, "Tyconius and the End of the World" in *Revue des études augustiniennes* 28 (1982), and Charles Kannengiesser, "Augustine and Tyconius: A Conflict of Christian Hermeneutics in Roman Africa," in *Augustine and the Bible*, edited and translated by Pamela Bright (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), for representative scholars in Tyconian studies.

[17] The contributions of Tyconius to Donatist theology are discussed in depth by Maureen Tilley in *The Bible in Christian North Africa,* pgs. 112-129.

[18] See Frend, *Donatist Church*, 205.

Donatism which found adherents in many areas, and this paper will treat his theology as within the Donatist tradition rather than opposed to it.

One group of Donatists which followed many (though not all) Tyconian principles was the Rogatists, who around 365 separated from the main body over the issue of personal holiness.[19] They represented only one of the many sects which began to hive off from mainstream Donatism around the same time, a phenomenon which was facilitated by the Donatist ascendance and increasingly dominant status.[20] Augustine records (ironically, in a letter to the Rogatists themselves) that "in Africa herself, you could not say, if you were asked, how many sects have split off from the sect of Donatus, especially since those who do this think that they are more righteous to the extent that they are fewer and they are, of course, to that extent less known."[21] Most of these sects, such as the Claudianists or Urbanists, indeed are quite obscure.[22] Besides the Rogatists, the only other well-documented schism within the Donatist movement was that of the Maximianists. They formed out of opposition to the policies of Primian, the successor to Parmenian, and constituted a significant minority within the movement (approximately 100 out of 400 Donatist bishoprics initially sided with the Maximianists, primarily in Africa Proconsularis and Byzacenia).[23] Both the Rogatists and Maximianists will be

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[19] Ibid, 197.

[20] "Praedestinatus" notes that "Frequently they [i.e., the Donatists] have had discord between themselves." (*De Haeresibus*, 69 (PL 53.611C))

[21] Augustine, *Letter 93*.8.25 (Teske, Vol. I, 392).

[22] For the Urbanists, see Augustine, *Contra Cresconium*, IV.60.73 (PL 43.588). For the Claudianists, see Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 36(2).20 (Boulding, Vol. 16, 124).

[23] *Augustine, Heresies*, LXIX.5 (Teske, 51).

discussed more fully in Chapter Eight as examples of the wide range of opinions within Donatism.

The welfare of both of these sects was seriously impaired by mainstream Donatism's recourse to the authorities. The Maximianists were often sued in court by the majority party and dispossessed of their sees by imperial order.[24] However much Augustine fulminated against the practice, the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of mainstream Donatism was usually uncontested by the local authorities.[25] Donatist attempts to gain the allegiance of local officials also had its darker side. On two separate occasions (endlessly recounted by their Caecilianist opponents), elements within the Donatist party actively supported usurpers against imperial power in order to gain the political benefits that came along with such support. The revolt by Firmus, a Mauritanian chieftain, against the *comes Africae*, Romanus, was at least tacitly supported by many Mauritanian Donatists. Augustine records that the city of Rusicade was surrendered to Firmus by the Donatist bishop of the city in exchange for the safety of the Donatist population,[26] and the Rogatists were actively repressed by Firmius' troops under the authority of Donatist bishops.[27] Indeed, later Rogatists derogatorily called mainstream Donatists "Firmians."[28]

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[24] See, for example, Augustine's *Letter 51*.3 (Teske, Vol. I, 199-200): "Why did you fiercely attack the same Maximianists through judges sent by those emperors, whom our communion begot through the gospel, and why did you by the roar of controversies, by the power of ordinances, and by the assault of troops drive them from the basilicas which they had and in which they were at the time of the division?" Note also *Letter 108*.5.14 (Teske, Vol. II, 77-78), and *Expositions*, Psalm 57.15 (Boulding, Vol. 17, 136-37).

[25] Augustine was especially irritated that the Donatists called themselves the "Catholic" party when appealing to imperial judges, and even more exasperated when the judges accepted their claim to be the orthodox party in Africa; see *Expositions*, Psalm 57.15 (Boulding, Vol. 17, 137).

[26] Augustine, *Letter 87*.10 (Teske, Vol. I, 350).

[27] Augustine, *Contra Parmeniani,* I.11.17 (PL 43.46).

[28] Augustine, *Letter 87*.10 (Teske, Vol. I, 350): "Remember what I said about the Rogatists, who are said to call you Firmians, just as you call us Macarians."

While Donatists outside the Mauritanias do not appear to have actively supported the revolt, the participation of their bishops within the affected areas was enough to call unwanted attention to the faction, and in 376 the emperor Gratian officially revoked the privileges given to them under Julian and reclassed them as heretics.[29] Such legislation did not take practical effect in most cases,[30] but the law served as a precedent and a warning of future state repression.

In 397, however, a more serious rebellion occurred, that of the *comes Africae* Gildo against the emperor Honorius. While it does not appear that most Donatists sided with him (indeed, Augustine records that many Donatists themselves suffered persecution under his regime[31]), at least one charismatic Donatist leader, Optatus of Bagai, visibly supported the revolt under Gildo. Both Caecilianists and Maximianists suffered in the resulting chaos. Optatus personally led an army against the Maximianist-leaning towns of Musti and Assuras and forced their bishops to return to the mainstream party.[32] While Augustine records that the Donatist party was deeply divided over Optatus' policies, such a nuance was not noted by the emperors.[33] In 405, by order of the emperors, Donatism

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[29] *Theodosian Code*, XVI.5.4 (Pharr, 450); see also Frend, *Donatist Church*, 199.

[30] Interestingly, the imperial edict was suppressed in North Africa by Genethlius, the Caecilianist bishop of Carthage at the time, an act for which later Donatists would praise him. It appears that he was attempting to implement a "live and let live" strategy of coexistence with the Donatist faction, a status quo which largely succeeded until the age of Augustine. See Augustine, *Letter 44*.5.12 (Teske, Vol. I, 179): "From there we somehow or other came to mention Genethlius of blessed memory, the bishop of Carthage before Aurelius, because he suppressed a decree directed against them and did not allow its implementation. They all praised him and spoke of him with great affection."

[31] Augustine records that the persecutions of Optatus under Gildo aroused "the groaning of the whole of Africa *with your groans included*. . ." *Letter 87*.4 (Teske, Vol. I, 346), italics mine.

[32] Augustine, *Contra Cresconium*, III.60.66 (PL 43.532), IV.25.32 (PL 43.565). The fact that Augustine consistently cites these two particular towns throughout his polemic may indicate that the rampages of Optatus did not extend beyond them.

[33] Augustine, *Letter 87*.4 (Teske, Vol. I, 346). See also *Against Petilian* I.24.26 (NPNF(1) 4, 528), where Augustine states: "all this [Optatus' actions] I pass over because there are certain among you who

was proclaimed illegal and severe edicts were decreed to crush it, collectively entitled the Edict of Unity.[34] Alongside the rise of Augustine as a major Caecilianist player, the willingness of the emperors to seriously take action against the Donatist faction in the wake of the Gildonian revolt was a major reason for the ultimate fall of the movement from power.[35] The 411 council of Carthage, which must necessarily constitute the end-point for this discussion of Donatist theology, was primarily the result of a coincidence between the revitalization of the Caecilianist faction under Augustine, on one hand, and the antipathy of the emperors against the Donatist faction in the wake of the Gildonian revolt, on the other. After the decisive events of this council, Donatism was substantially banished from the urban centers by sustained imperial repression. While it survived in its heartlands for much longer, it was no longer considered a critical polemical target in the eyes of Caecilianist (who might now be considered Catholic) authors.

Before delving into the theological nuances espoused by the Donatists of this later era, it would be helpful to discuss the primary sources which form the bulk of our knowledge of late Donatist theology. Chronologically the first major source on later Donatism was the bishop Optatus of Milevis, who first wrote around 366-370 to counter the influence of Parmenian and later added a seventh chapter to his book, probably around 390.[36] He was still in active possession of his see during the time of Augustine,

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cry out that these things are, and have ever been displeasing to them. But they say that they bore with them in the cause of peace, because they could not put them down. . ."

[34] This is contained in the *Theodosian Code,* XVI.5.37-38 (Pharr, 456) and XVI.11.2 (Pharr, 476).

[35] See Tilley, *Bible*, 136-137.

[36] Tilley, *Bible*, 98.

who wrote to him several times around 418-419.[37] He appears to have been the first Caecilianist scholar to delve into the origins of the schism, and his compilation of a dossier of documents relating to the origins of the schism (Appendices 1-10) proved to be useful to both sides—even the Donatist faction would refer to the Optatian records at the council of Carthage.[38] Unfortunately, while Optatus' arguments against Parmenian illuminate much of Donatist theology (or at least Caecilianist constructions of that theology), he did not often directly quote the words of his opponents.

The primary source on almost all aspects of Donatism is bishop Augustine of Hippo, whose verbal sparring with Donatist leaders and laymen alike are preserved in many of his writings, including letters, homilies, and polemical works. Of course, as the implacable foe of Donatism whose influence ultimately resulted in a resurgent Caecilianism that eventually overpowered its opponent, he also bears the blame for the subsequent loss of Donatist literature, most of which did not outlive the schism. However, Augustine's pen recorded many authentically Donatist voices during the course of his debates with them which would otherwise be lost to history. In his writings against Donatist leaders such as Petilian, Cresconius, or Gaudentius, Augustine recorded large chunks of his opponents' arguments in order to refute them, a writing style that has proved invaluable to modern researchers of Donatism. Maureen Tilley remarks that "so extensive were his quotations of the Donatist tracts that Paul Monceaux has been able to reconstruct the texts of the Donatist works behind *Contra litteras Petiliani*, *Contra*

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[37] Augustine, *Letters 190* and *202(A).* Augustine also refers to Optatus in the present tense in *Letter 185*.2.6 (Teske, Vol. III, 183).

[38] Augustine, *Letter 141*.9 (Teske, Vol. II, 295): "For they first of all produced the book of Optatus, as if to prove from it that Caecilian was condemned by the emperor. . ." Also note Augustine's praise of Optatus' anti-Donatist writings in *Contra Parmeniani*, I.3.5 (PL 43.37)

Gaudentium, and the pseudo-Augustinian *Contra Fulgentium*."[39] Through such reconstructions, the Donatist response to Caecilianist arguments can be heard unfiltered by their opponents. Furthermore, Augustine's cautious endorsement of the Donatist theologian Tyconius in *On Christian Teaching* gave rise to the unique perpetuation of a Donatist work under its own author's name.[40] It is due to Augustine's extensive and voluminous correspondence with Donatists of all stripes and sizes that this paper on the variations within Donatist theology is possible.

Donatist Conceptions of Church and State

In light of these background elements, what can be learned about the theology of the Donatist church in its later years? One of the issues which was foremost in the minds of its Caecilianist opponents was the Donatist view of the relationship of the church to the state. Writers such as Augustine were baffled by consistent Donatist rhetoric that demonized any recourse to imperial power as an element of theological "persuasion," and their practical actions, which often included utilizing imperial judges to adjudicate cases against their opponents, both schismatic and Caecilianist. While their theological relationship with the state was certainly complex, Donatists do appear to have followed a (fairly) coherent worldview that alternately allowed for them to appeal to the state on the one hand and oppose it on the other.

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[39] Tilley, *Bible*, 139.

[40] See Augustine, *Teaching Christianity* (*De Doctrina Christiana*), III.30.42—37.56, in *The Works of Saint Augustine,* Part I, Vol. 11, translated by Edmund Hill, O.P. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996), 187-197. The preservation of Tyconius' *Book of Rules* owes much to Augustine's endorsement.

Donatist Opposition to the State

"What have Christians to do with kings? Or what have bishops to do with the palace?"[41] As exemplified by these words from Donatus of Carthage, Donatist rhetoric concerning the power of the state to interfere with their church was overwhelmingly negative. Nor was this attitude necessarily confined to the Donatist faction; the developing "two swords" theory that ultimately prevailed in the West centuries later was birthed out of substantially the same concerns. Jones notes, in defense of Donatist theology, that the Nicene party itself often reverted to similar rhetoric when faced with persecution by Arian rulers.[42] The Donatist movement, however, was the only Western faction that was forced to fully flesh out its position vis-à-vis the emperor in the face of continued imperial animosity towards their church. Because of this, the Donatists could justly lay claim to the first well-developed articulation of the concept of separation between church and state in the world of the post-pagan emperors.[43] The position expressed by the later Donatists with regards to the relationship between church and state was that while the state had several legitimate functions that related to ecclesiastical issues (explored more fully below), it should never use its power for forcible conversion.[44] Furthermore, the state had no right to dictate what was to be considered "orthodoxy": "the orders of kings have nothing to do with preaching religion and

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[41] "Quid Christianis cum regibus? aut quid episcopis cum palatio?" Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, I.22 (Edwards, 22).

[42] Jones, *Heresies*, 5, note 6.

[43] In the period of the pre-Christian emperors, of course, the church's position vis-à-vis the state was clearly laid out, as exemplified by Tertullian in the west. But a precise codification of what the relationship should be between a dissident church and a "Christian" emperor, while independently developed by later Catholic and Protestant theologians, was first explored in depth by the Donatist church.

[44] This position is heavily discussed by Maureen Tilley in *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, 161.

preventing sacrileges."[45] By this argument the Caecilianist claim to legitimacy collapsed. According to Petilian, if "'there is no power but of God,' none in any man of power; as the Lord Jesus Christ answered Pontius Pilate," then Caecilianist reliance on the weight of imperial authority was moot: "tell us, therefore, *traditor*, when you received the power of imitating the mysteries."[46] Caecilianists were constantly castigated for resorting to persecution in order to gain converts to their side. In one memorable line, Petilian contrasted the Caecilianist position with the founder of Christianity: "But I answer you, on the other hand, that Jesus Christ never persecuted any one. And when the apostle found fault with certain parties, and suggested that He should have recourse to persecution . . . Jesus said, 'Let them alone; if they are not against you, they are on your side.'"[47] Petilian further contrasted the Donatists' own position on persecution with the Caecilianist stance, saying that "if authority had been given by some law for persons to be compelled to what is good, you yourselves, unhappy men, ought to have been compelled by us to embrace the purest faith. But far be it, far be it from our conscience to compel any one to embrace our faith."[48] These are high-minded words, and it is certainly correct to state that some Donatist radicals, such as Optatus of Bagai, did not always live up to such precepts when they were themselves in power.[49] Nevertheless, the insistence on the utter inadmissibility of the state to use the apparatus of force to coerce conversion constituted a vital part of later Donatist rhetoric.

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[45] Augustine, *Letter 105*.2.8 (Teske, Vol. II, 57).

[46] Augustine, *Against Petilian*, II.31.70 (NPNF(1) 4, 547).

[47] Ibid, II.81.177 (NPNF(1) 4, 571).

[48] Ibid, II.84.183 (NPNF(1) 4, 572).

[49] A fact that Augustine castigates them for; see, for example, *Expositions*, Psalm 36(2).18 (Boulding, Vol. 16, 118).

In light of such a complete rejection of imperial authority over ecclesial matters, it is somewhat surprising to find that the Donatist conception of the emperors themselves was not nearly as hostile as would be thought. As opposed to their verbal treatment of their Caecilianist opponents, Donatist appeals to the emperors were couched in terms of respect. It has already been noted that the original Donatist appeal to Constantine addressed him as "best of emperors."[50] This deference was carried over into the post-Macarian era. When the Donatist leaders petitioned Julian for the right to return to their homeland, they respectfully stated that "nothing except justice found a home with him," a phrase that was scornfully repeated by Augustine and, indeed, by later emperors.[51] While they harshly decried the persecutions carried out by local officials in the emperors' name, Donatists appear to have shied away from directly condemning the emperor himself for these actions. They appear to have distinguished the persecutions of the Christian emperors from those of their pagan predecessors. Petilian, at least, was very clear on this point. Rather than assuming that imperial persecution formed the natural order of things, i.e., that the state could always be expected to persecute true believers, he perceived the persecutions ordained by the emperors more as a tragic misunderstanding. It is telling that after listing the classic paradigms of persecuting emperors, such as Nero, Decius, or Diocletian, the examples whom Petilian chose to illustrate persecution in the post-Constantinian era were not emperors, but their lieutenants: Macarius and Ursacius.[52]

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[50] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, I.22 (Edwards, 22).

[51] Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 36(2).18 (Boulding, Vol. 16, 118); *Theodosian Code,* XVI.5.37 (Pharr, 456).

[52] Augustine, *Against Petilian*, II.93.202 (NPNF(1) 4, 578). Macarius, of course, lent his name to the Macarian persecution; the *dux* Ursacius had been charged with carrying out the initial repression of the Donatists under Constantine.

While there was clearly a continuity between the earlier and later persecutions, there was also a crucial difference: unlike the pagan emperors, who had persecuted out of their hatred of Christianity, according to Petilian the Christian emperors persecuted because they had been misled by their advisors. These advisors had corrupted the legitimate wishes of the emperors to become Christians and instead had falsely led them to persecute the very body of Christ that they wished to join: "The first Psalm of David would certainly have persuaded them that they should live and reign as Christians; but meanwhile you deceive them, so long as they entrust themselves to you. For you represent to them things that are evil, and you hide from them what is good."[53]

Interestingly enough, the same sentiments were also echoed by the Nicene faction during their times of persecution by the emperors. In a passage remarkably similar to Petilian's, Hilary of Poitiers likewise attributed the hostility of the Arian emperors towards the Nicene faith to their advisors: "They did beguile an ignorant sovereign so successfully that though he was busy with war he expounded their infidel creed, and before he was regenerate by baptism imposed a form of faith upon the churches. . . . I thank God that the Emperor, through your warnings, acknowledged his ignorance, and through these your definitions of faith came to recognize an error which was not his own but that of his advisers."[54] While routinely denouncing the right of the state to force religious conformity on its citizens, many Donatists attempted to spare the emperors from

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[53] Ibid.

[54] Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Councils*, 78, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* Second Series, Vol. 9: *Hilary of Poitiers, John of Damascus*, translated by L. Pullan (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994) 24-25. Soon afterwards, Hilary changed his mind concerning the supposed "conversion" of the emperor and regarded him as a persecutor worse than Nero or Decius (see *In Constantium* in *Hilaire de Poitiers: Contre Constance*, translated by André Rocher (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1987)).

direct connivance in the persecutions. The blood on the emperor's hands was put there by his Caecilianist advisors.[55]

Donatist Use of State Apparatus

If the Donatists were highly resistant to any attempt by the state to coerce conformity to an imperially-endorsed doctrine, they were not nearly as opposed to utilizing the power of the state on more mundane legal issues. This was a nuance which Augustine never seems to have quite understood. It was a point he would hammer on multiple times, growing increasingly frustrated at the alleged Donatist hypocrisy between their rhetoric and their actions: "'What have kings to do with us?' they ask. 'What do emperors matter to us? You are basing your argument on Imperial authority.' Yes, but I will counter that with a similar point: why do you have recourse to proconsuls sent by emperors? Why do you appeal to the law, when emperors have legislated against you?"[56] To the Donatists, the denial that the emperor had any power over the church did not extend to property disputes; opposition to imperial endorsement of Caecilianist bishops was a wholly different matter than utilizing the resources of the state to recover funds or basilicas.[57] This point is especially well-proved by Augustine and Optatus, both of whom wished to highlight the apparent Donatist inconsistency. Optatus records that in the aftermath of the rescript of Julian (and probably later under local officials), Donatist

[55] As Petilian states in Augustine, *Against Petilian*, II.93.202 (NPNF(1) 4, 578), after discussing the dire consequences that Psalm 2 promised to kings who persecuted the Lord's people: "And he warned the kings themselves in the following precepts that they should not, like ignorant men devoid of understanding, seek to persecute the Christians, lest they should themselves be destroyed,--which precepts I would that we could teach them, seeing that they are ignorant of them, or at least, that you would show them to them, as doubtless you would do if you desired that they should live; or, at any rate, if neither of the other courses be allowed, that your malice would have permitted them to read them for themselves."

[56] Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 57.15 (Boulding, Vol. 20, 136).

[57] Tilley, *Bible*, 161.

leaders "thought it right to use secular tribunals and public laws to snatch away the instruments of the divine law through the executive power of officials, wishing to have by yourselves what peaceful times had possessed in common."[58] The forcible reclamation by the Donatists of sees which had been wrested from them during the Macarian persecution certainly appeared to the Caecilianists to be an example of Donatist use of religious persecution. While in some cases it probably was, most of the time Donatists could defend their actions by claiming that they were merely appealing to the state for the recovery of their own property.

This concept was also extended to the decision by mainstream Donatists to pursue legal action against their own schismatics, the Maximianists. This particular issue was one of Augustine's favorite accusations, for here was a point where Donatist actions seemed to radically contradict their own rhetoric.[59] "You likewise often raise as an objection to us that we persecute you by earthly powers. . . . If this is a crime, why did you fiercely attack the same Maximianists through judges sent by those emperors . . . and why did you by the roar of controversies, by the power of ordinances, and by the assault of troops drive them from the basilicas which they had and in which they were at the time of the division?"[60] Superficially (and more importantly, *polemically*), such comparisons made perfect sense. How could Donatists be angered at Caecilianists who cast them out of their basilicas when they had been guilty of the same actions towards the

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[58] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, VI.5 (Edwards, 123).

[59] In one sense, his attacks were justified, as some Donatist rhetoric emphasized the nonviolent nature of the church to the point that they sometimes claimed that they turned the other cheek when Caecilianists took properties from them. As Augustine says, however, "I can read you the passage in your own Acts where you cause an agency to be set up to demand it." Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 36(2).18 (Boulding, Vol. 16, 118).

[60] Augustine, *Letter 51*.3 (Teske, Vol. I, 199-200).

Maximianists? But this was a false comparison, for the two parties had different goals in mind. The persecution by Caecilianists, while practically achieving similar results to the Donatist repression of the Maximianists, was ultimately aimed at a wider goal: the coercion of Donatist adherents back into Caecilianism. Recovery of lost property was not the core issue; indeed, many Donatist basilicas had been built after the schism and so had never been "Caecilianist."[61] In contrast, the mainstream Donatist explanation for their appeal to the judges over the Maximianists was that by their schism the Maximianists had forfeited the right to the Donatist basilicas. It was strictly a property issue; while in official Donatist theology the Maximianists had every right to perpetuate their error, they did not have the right to utilize Donatist property while doing so. This is attested to by Augustine, who specifically notes that the legal decisions sought against the Maximianists by the Donatist party were solely concerned with the recovery of the basilicas: "They declared their adversaries to be heretics, and when the judge demanded proof of this, they read out the decree of the council of Bagai, which condemned the Maximianists. . . . It had thus established that the Maximianists, being condemned as heretics, had no right to possess the basilicas, and the proconsul announced his decision in conforming with the law."[62] Augustine, of course, was eager to show that Donatist repression of the Maximianists was identical to the Caecilianist persecution of Donatists. But in no legal cases did the Donatist party attempt to coerce the Maximianists back into

[61] See Frend, *Donatist Church*, 211-212.

[62] Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 57.15 (Boulding, Vol. 17, 136-37). In every instance where the specifics of Donatist legal action against the Maximianists is given by Augustine, it has to do with recovering Donatist property. See also Augustine, *Contra Parmeniani* I.10.16 (PL 43.45) and *Letter 108*.5.14 (Teske, Vol. II, 77-78).

the mainstream by outlawing the sect itself; the use of state mechanisms was not used for conversion.

There is one major exception to this general rule: Optatus of Bagai, who under Gildo sought to implement the forcible reintegration of the dissidents into the Donatist church. His policies succeeded for the short term (Augustine continually harps on the case of the bishops of Musti and Assuras, who were reconciled through intimidation[63]), but, significantly, were widely deplored by the majority of the Donatist population. Augustine, in his literary debate with Petilian, knew better than to directly accuse all Donatists of having been in league with Optatus, because "there are certain among you who cry out that these things are, and have ever been displeasing to them."[64] In a later section of the treatise, Augustine also found it necessary to qualify his statement that all Donatists supported the repressions of the Maximianists, noting that many were "vexed that the followers of Maximianus should have suffered such conduct at the hands of some of you."[65]

The case of the Maximianists was certainly a sticky case for the Donatist clergy, and it is certain that many within the movement would have supported more Optatian-like measures. But the dominant theology of the movement appears to have been strongly opposed to the idea of using the power of the state to coerce conformity, even against their own schismatics. While it was acknowledged that the state had a right to interfere in ecclesiastical affairs with regards to property issues and related matters (and the Donatists made abundant use of this right, against both the Caecilianists and

[63]Augustine, *Contra Cresconium* III.60.66 (PL 43.532) and IV.25.32 (PL 43.565).

[64] Augustine, *Against Petilian*, I.24.26 (NPNF(1) 4, 528).

[65] Ibid, II.20.45 (NPNF(1) 4, 540).

Maximianists), the state had no power to enforce the establishment of a particular religion.

The Question of the True Church

Another vital theological conundrum which concerned the Donatist movement was the status of the transmarine churches. Were they to be considered legitimate institutions, as their lines of succession (save Rome's) had been presumably untainted by *traditores*, or had they forfeited their claim to the title by maintaining communion with Caecilian and his successors in opposition to the rightful church of North Africa? It has been seen that the early Donatists believed the outside churches to be legitimate; they had appealed to Constantine to send them "Gallic bishops" to arbitrate between Majorinus and Caecilian, and had actively attempted to enter into communion with the transmarine churches at the council of Serdica. These attempts, however, took place before the Macarian persecution, which in this particular area exerted a profound effect on the Donatist psyche. The exiled Donatist bishops, in particular, had been disillusioned, for it had become clear to many of them that the outside churches were solidly on the Caecilianist side. By continuing to commune with the Caecilianist churches despite the brutal repressions of the Donatists under Macarius, many Donatist leaders argued, the transmarine churches had forfeited their claim to the true body of Christ. As Cyprian had said, bishops who communed with their fallen counterparts also communed with their sins. The true Christian church was by default thus confined to Africa.[66]

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[66] Including also the Donatist congregations in Rome and Spain. Note Augustine's statement in *De Unitate Ecclesiae*, or *Epistola ad Catholicos contra Donatistas*, 3.6, in *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, Vol. 43.391-444, edited by Jacques Paul Migne (Paris, 1844-94), 395: "If indeed the holy Scriptures indicate that the Church is in Africa alone and in a few Roman Cutzupitanae or Montenses or also in one house in Spain in the inheritance of one woman. . ."

This was Augustine's understanding of the Donatist position vis-à-vis the wider world, and became a source of powerful polemic value for him. However, even his own writings have preserved an alternate view of the universal church espoused by many Donatists, who were not at all sure that the entire outside world had been implicated in Caecilian's downfall. Just as an emperor could be deceived and so not directly responsible for his own actions, so could the rest of the Christian world remain legitimately Christian, yet in error concerning the rightful bishops of Carthage. The issue was a divisive one within the Donatist party, and represented one of several issues in which Donatist leaders were unable to put up a united front. As such, the question of the universality of the true church is an excellent example of diversity within the Donatist movement.

Spread throughout the World?

There are numerous passages that reinforce the claim that many later Donatists considered their own movement as only a part of the wider church, and indeed, a critique of the old Augustinian insistence that all Donatists viewed the transmarine churches as irrevocably damned has been one of the hallmarks of modern scholars of Donatism. It is no longer excusable to say that all Donatists believed that "the one true church was to be found . . . in that quarter of Africa where the Donatists lived."[67] W. H. C. Frend only hinted at the possibility of Donatist recognition of the transmarine churches in *The Donatist Church*, merely noting that "the question of territorial extent was secondary to

[67] Wace, *Dictionary*, 885.

that of maintaining the purity of the sacraments,"[68] but in later years he would grow more explicit, stating that "Many Donatists there saw their movement not as a schism from the Catholike [sic] but as a movement of much needed church reform, with Donatus as a great reformer."[69] Robert Eno, in his superb article detailing nuances in Donatist theology that could be gleaned from the 411 council of Carthage, noted that the Donatist side at the council was willing to enter into communion with the rest of the church if it received a favorable verdict and cautioned that the Donatist position expressed at the council "does not coincide with Augustine's claim that the Donatists considered the Catholic Church outside Africa as no church at all because it had entered into communion with the African *traditores*."[70] Building on Eno's foundation, Maureen Tilley, in her in-depth discussion of Donatist theology based on their use of the Scriptures, claimed that "they never categorically denied the possibility of orthodox churches outside Africa."[71] In her article "Dilatory Donatists or Procrastinating Catholics?," Tilley went even further:

> The Donatists did not claim that there were no orthodox churches outside North Africa and the orbit of the Donatist allies. They may have even agreed with the quotation used by the Catholics on recognizing the true church by its universality. They merely stated that it was their opinion that those in communion with the Catholics of North Africa were in communion with the wrong party.[72]

While perhaps overstating her case, Tilley's assertion, based on the minutes of the 411 council of Carthage, represents a valid point: there was a movement within Donatist

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[68] Frend, *Donatist Church*, 318. He goes on to say, however, that the question was "not lost to sight."

[69] Frend, "Decepit," 619.

[70] Eno, "Nuances," 419.

[71] Tilley, *Bible*, 114.

[72] Tilley, "Dilatory," 17.

theology that did not view the outside churches as intrinsically condemned because of their tacit support for the Caecilianists.

Within this movement, however, there was great diversity. Most merely kept an agnostic attitude towards the validity of the outside churches, as Parmenian did, saying "We do not know whether there may be good Christians through such a great number of people of the transmarine world."[73] While Augustine endeavored to ridicule it, this argument was actually an effective response to his own polemics. When Augustine castigated them for writing off the rest of the world, the Donatists could remind him that they only explicitly excluded the transmarine churches which they knew to be active supporters of Caecilianism (such as Rome). As for the others, their status was simply not determined. It is also interesting to note, as evidenced by the quote above, that many Donatists were well-aware of the vast numbers of possible Christians outside of North Africa, and that this was a major reason behind their agnosticism concerning the universal church.

Another form of cautious acceptance of the possibility of transmarine Christians can be found in *Contra Cresconium*, where Augustine's Donatist opponent asserted that the council of Serdica proved that the Easterners, at least, constituted a legitimate part of the body of Christ. In an interesting example of revisionist history, the Eastern participants at that council had been transformed in the minds of many Donatists from an anti-Nicene party to an anti-*traditor* faction. They believed that the Easterners had separated from the Western Nicene party at Serdica because they had discovered that the Westerners (among whom were the bishops of Rome and Carthage) were *traditores*, "and

[73] "Nescimus an sint per tot gentes terrarum transmarinarum boni christiani." Augustine, *Contra Parmeniani*, II.2.4 (PL 43.51-52).

for this reason communicated with your Donatus."[74] In this fascinating reconstruction of history, therefore, the Eastern churches, in theory at least, were still legitimate institutions, even though in real history they had long since reconciled with the sees of Rome and Carthage. Augustine's assertion of the Arian context of the council was not well-received by the Donatist side.

A dramatic step up from these cautious assertions was the enthusiastic endorsement of the universal church espoused by Cresconius himself, who, in the context of deploring the pagan religions of the world,[75] lauded the fact that "thanks to the divine Providence, the entire world turns more and more every day to the Christian name."[76] He clearly did not view all of the transmarine churches as no longer worthy of the "Christian name," since they were the ones who were doing the proselytizing. Cresconius' statement is probably the best source for Tilley's assertion that the Donatists viewed only the North African Caecilianists as schismatic, but that the rest of the Christian churches were still considered quite legitimate. Another endorsement of a universal, "Catholic" church (excluding the Caecilianists) was contained in the official minutes of the council of Bagai, which had been convened to rehabilitate the Donatist leader Primian and to condemn his Maximianist opponents. In the council's denunciation of the Maximianist faction, it drew upon what Augustine would have regarded as a distinctively Caecilianist argument to censure its opponents: the assertion that the *whole world* was aligned against them. The statement reflects another example of Donatist revisionist history: "When the

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[74] Augustine, *Contra Cresconium*, III.34.38 (PL 43.516).

[75] Such as "the Barbarian nations with their particular religions: the rituals of the Persians, the astrology of the Chaldeans, the superstitions of the Egyptians, the divining of the wizards" (Augustine, *Contra Cresconium* IV.61.74 (PL 43.589)).

[76] Ibid.

man Donatus of venerable memory asserted the sanctity of the Catholic Church from heretical error, he established a religious observance that has been sustained in his name and practice [throughout] almost the whole world."[77] In the terms of this argument, Donatus of Carthage was viewed as a reformer, not only of the Donatist church, but of the transmarine churches as well. While such an assertion would necessarily be hard to prove, its importance to the Donatist psyche should not be underestimated—they viewed Donatus' message as having been received by a much larger body than the North African churches alone. The council of Bagai assumes further importance from the fact that it was an expression of mainstream Donatism, rather than the idiosyncratic opinion of individuals. For the statement to have been included in the decrees of the council, it had to have been representative of a wide segment of the Donatist church.

However diverse the views concerning the universal church were prior to the great council of Carthage in 411, by the time of the council (and most likely in response to it) they had coalesced into one coherent viewpoint. The dominant view expressed at the council of Carthage was, as Eno has pointed out, that the Donatists were quite willing to enter into communion with the transmarine churches if their side was vindicated by the arbitrator Marcellinus. The point of the council, as Emeritus reminded Marcellinus, was to decide which party would justly receive the name of "Catholic," and he protested the Caecilianist appropriation of this name for themselves.[78] The question of the status of the transmarine churches themselves depended on their response to the council: "Your excellence understands that to us nothing of foreigners, nothing of distant situations is

[77] "Cum Ecclesiae catholicae sanctitatem vir memoriae venerabilis ab errore perfidiae Donatus adsereret, in eius nomen et cultum mundi paene totius observantia nutrita coaluit." Augustine, *Contra Cresconium*, III.56.62 (PL 43.529).

[78] *Gesta Conlationis Carthaginensis,* III.99 (CCSL 149A.204) and III.146 (CCSL 149A.216).

able to be decided beforehand, when this trouble is brandished between Africans; but rather this [verdict] is awaited, in order that whosoever is conquered as a result of truthful knowledge, he may be seen to be rejected by the world."[79] The Donatist bishops assembled at the council were willing to commune with the outside churches if those churches would accept them, and in the council it was made perfectly clear to their Caecilianist opponents that the Donatist party did not categorically reject the validity of the overseas churches.[80]

Confined to Africa?

On the other hand, it would be rash to simply state, as Tilley has, that *all* Donatists theoretically believed in the universality of the church. The Donatist theologian Tyconius is probably our best witness to the intra-Donatist debate that raged concerning the legitimacy of the transmarine bishoprics. Tyconius himself was firmly on the side of those who saw the church as universal in extent, but in the *Book of Rules*, his work describing the proper methods of Biblical exegesis, he bore witness to an alternate viewpoint within Donatist theology. When discussing Daniel's vision of the apocalyptic stone that "filled the whole earth," he maintained that the vision referred to the spread of Christianity throughout the whole world. There were others, however, who said that "the Lord filled the whole earth with his *power* rather than with the fullness of his body," an alternate exegesis which Tyconius could "not report without sorrow," because it offered a

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[79] Ibid, III.99.

[80] Augustine would utilize this admission against them in the years after the council: He would note in *Letter 141*.4 (Teske, Vol. II, 292) that "The Donatist bishops declared in plain language that they had no argument against this Church, and here our victory in the name of the Lord is most evident. For, when they uphold the truth of the Church with which it is clear that we are in communion but they are not, they testify that they have already lost that point." See also *Letter 142*.3 (Teske, Vol. II, 299).

way to undercut any reading of the universal church into the passage.[81] His opponents made this claim, Tyconius stated, "to the dishonor of God's kingdom and of Christ's unvanquished inheritance," because "if this is so, there was no need to say that the mountain *grew* from the stone and took possession of the world by degrees."[82] Clearly, the Donatist opponents of Tyconius were not favorable to a universalist interpretation of the passage in Daniel.

Such statements from Tyconius are ignored by many scholars who wish to exonerate Donatism from the charge of ecclesiastical parochialism. In her book *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, Maureen Tilley goes to some length to show that Augustine cannot be trusted when he accuses the Donatists of denying the validity of the universal church. While it has been noted above that Tilley is certainly correct in discerning a strain within Donatism which did indeed believe in a communion wider than their own, her argument attempts too much when she denies the existence of a rival theology which did indeed look upon the transmarine churches as lost. This stems from her tendency to ignore the multiplicity of Donatist theologies expressed in Augustine's writings. The Donatists that Augustine debated in his letters did not all adhere to a single viewpoint on many subjects, a fact which continuously frustrated the bishop of Hippo and contributed to his view that his opponents were deceitful and opportunistic. Augustine therefore categorically excluded the possibility that Donatists did believe in the universal church, both because it was a useful polemic point and because there were many who indeed

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[81] Tyconius, *Book of Rules*, I, edited and translated by William S. Babcock (Atlanta, GA: Scholar's Press, 1989), 5. Italics mine. Tyconius states that his opponents interpreted the passage to mean that the stone which "filled the whole earth" actually referred to the ability of Christians to offer sacrifice to God anywhere in the world rather than only in Jerusalem, a distinctly non-universalist interpretation.

[82] Ibid, italics mine.

expressed this view. It would be wise, however, not to fall into the opposite error and categorically exclude the many Donatist statements which *do* show a separatist worldview in order to artificially enforce the unification of late Donatist theology.

Tilley's view is that all Caecilianist arguments against Donatist sectarianism constituted "polemically useful overstatement."[83] She believes that the Donatists were not very concerned about the wider church, being much more preoccupied with the situation in North Africa, and unless specifically asked about the status of the transmarine churches, would ignore them.[84] It is by this argument that she attempts to bypass the numerous Donatist statements connecting the true church to "the South." Based on Song of Solomon 1:6 ("Where do you pasture your flocks, where do you make them lie down in the south?"), the use of this metaphor to describe the status of the Donatist church was very widespread. Even Tyconius would use it in *The Book of Rules*, although in his exegesis he dramatically altered the traditional Donatist understanding: "The southern part, certainly, is the Lord's, as it is also written in Job: "from the southern part will your life sprout forth"; the north is the devil's. *And both parts appear in all the world*."[85] Augustine himself records the Rogatist belief that the verse referred to themselves rather than the mainstream Donatists, and mockingly told them that if this was so, then "the Maximianists will surpass all of you, since their schism arose in Byzacena and Tripoli."[86] Tilley, however, is forced to explain the reference away, as it would hurt her belief that

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[83] Tilley, *Bible*, 149.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Tyconius, *Book of Rules*, VII (Babcock, 125). Italics mine.

[86] Augustine, *Letter 93*.8.24 (Teske, Vol. I, 392).

"the Donatists did not claim to be the whole church."[87] Unfortunately, there are too many references to the special status of the South in Augustine's writings to discredit them as a fabrication.[88] Therefore, Donatist use of these Scriptures must "have applied only against North African Catholics and would not have been applicable to the churches overseas."[89] This explanation seems rather tenuous, particularly in the light of Tyconius' deliberate reinterpretation of the verse noted above.

There exist, moreover, records of a debate with a Donatist bishop over the question of the true church, in which the question of the possibility of legitimate transmarine churches is answered with an emphatic negative. They are found in Augustine's L*etter 44*, which contains an account of his debate with Fortuanius, the Donatist bishop of Tubursi.[90] Fortuanius himself was rather liberal for a Donatist, praising Genethlius, the previous Caecilianist bishop of Carthage, for his gentle ways, and deploring the fact that rebaptism was necessary (although he was prepared to defend the practice).[91] But when Augustine asked him "how they could justify their separation of themselves from all other Christians who had done them no wrong, who throughout the world preserved the order of succession, and were established in the most ancient churches,"[92] Fortuanius was uncompromising. The point at which the transmarine

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[87] Tilley, *Bible*, 149.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Tilley does note the existence of this debate, but inexplicably references it as proof for her assertion that "the only group that [the Donatists] ever condemned were Catholic congregations *in Africa*." Tilley, *Bible*, 148, note 64. Italics hers.

[91] Augustine, *Letter 44*.5.12 (Teske, Vol. I, 180): "Then that old man clearly said that the rule had already been made that whoever of the faithful comes to them from us is rebaptized, and it was evident that he said this with as much reluctance and sorrow as possible."

[92] Augustine, *Letter 44*.3.5 (Teske, Vol. I, 175).

churches had lost their innocence, according to him, was at the time of the Macarian persecution.[93] Up until this time, Fortuanius averred, Donatists had indeed been in communion with the rest of the churches as demonstrated by conciliar letter from the eastern bishops at Serdica. But from that time onward, the connection was severed: the transmarine churches had forfeited their right to the body of Christ by their complicity in the Macarian persecution.

Augustine attempted to probe further: "I asked him [Fortuanius] whether he thought Ambrose, the bishop of the Milanese church, a just man and a Christian. He was, of course, forced to deny that the illustrious man was a Christian and just," according Ambrose the same status as the schismatic Maximianists.[94] Fortuanius, at least, clearly viewed the transmarine churches as not true churches at all.

Tilley herself notes the existence of other Donatist claims to be the only true church, remarking that in Augustine's *De Unitate Ecclesiae* Petilian insisted that the Donatists were a model of Enoch, Noah, and Lot, all three having in common the fact that they were a chosen remnant that remained faithful after all others fell away.[95] Petilian also stated that the Donatists were like the two tribes of Israel (Benjamin and Judah) who remained loyal to the Solomonic heirs after the division of the kingdoms, while the majority went their own way under a false king.[96] Concerning these typological examples, Petilian claimed that "The whole world has apostatized; we,

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[93] Ibid (Teske, Vol. I, 175-76): ""He answered that the churches of the regions across the sea long remained innocent until they consented to the shedding of blood of those who, he said, suffered the persecution of Macarius."

[94] Ibid.

[95] Tilley, *Bible*, 151.

[96] *De Unitate Ecclesiae,* 13.33 (PL 43.416-417).

however, remain, just as those tribes, in the temple of God, that is in the Church."[97] Tilley's reaction to these seemingly-conclusive statements is that because these types of exegesis are not found in "the pamphlet of any other Donatist author," they can be safely ignored as credible barometers of Donatist opinion concerning the universal church.[98] However, on the very next page she quotes from the *Liber Genealogicus*, a Donatist world-chronology, which explicitly links the division between the kingdoms of Israel and Judah to the Caecilianist-Donatist conflict: "There was a schism between Rehoboam the son of Solomon, and Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and they waged war all the days of their lives, just as it now happens between true Christians and false Catholics."[99] Furthermore, Augustine notes the Donatist tendency to use Noah as a typological stand-in for themselves, and Tyconius, while putting his own spin on it, attests to the Donatist use of Enoch to typologically stand for the true church.[100] Augustine also notes an apparently common Donatist saying in his *Expositions on the Psalms*, that "Africa alone has been worthy of this grace through Saint Donatus. . . . the Church of Christ has survived only in him."[101] These statements are directed not only to the Caecilianists in North Africa, but especially to the broader world outside.

The distinctively-Donatist exegesis of certain critical biblical passages also attests to a more sectarian view of the universal church. We have already noted Tyconius'

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[97]" Totus mundus apostatavit, nos autem tamquam duae illae tribus in templo Dei, hoc est in Ecclesia, remansimus." Ibid.

[98] Tilley, *Bible*, 151: "Yet this language of righteous men of old is found nowhere in any of the texts in which Augustine was closely following the pamphlet of any other Donatist author, nor has it been part of the Donatist documents studied in previous chapters."

[99] Ibid, 152.

[100] Augustine, *Letter 93*.8.27 (Teske, Vol. I, 393); Tyconius, *Book of Rules*, V (Babcock, 107).

[101] Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 54.21 (Boulding, Vol. 17, 74).

fulminations against those of his church who interpreted the "stone that filled the whole earth" in Daniel as signifying the freedom to *offer sacrifice* anywhere in the world, rather than the triumph of Christ over the nations,[102] and the Donatist belief that "the South" in Scripture referred exclusively to them is testified to by both Augustine and Tyconius.[103] Augustine also discusses a distinctively-Donatist spin on an incident recorded in the Gospels: "For you notice and often repeat, as I hear, what is written in the gospel, namely, that the seventy disciples abandoned the Lord and were left to the choice of their evil and impious dissent, but that it was said to the other twelve who remained, *Do you also want to go away*?"[104] To many Donatist interpreters, this passage signified the fact that even in early Christianity the majority of believers had gone apostate, leaving only a faithful remnant to carry forth the Gospel, thus justifying their belief that the rest of the church was now apostate.

Another point of contention between Donatists and Caecilianists was the etymology of the word "Catholic." While the standard Caecilianist understanding of the word was that it meant "universal" and implied communion with the outside churches, and hence recitations of the creed or biblical references containing the word "Catholic" immensely benefited the Caecilianist cause, Donatists tended to see it as referring to doctrinal purity. Augustine grew exasperated with Rogatist insistence that the term "Catholic" "comes not from the communion of the whole world, but from the observance

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[102] Tyconius, *Book of Rules*, I (Babcock, 5).

[103] Augustine, *Letter 93*.8.24 (Teske, Vol. I, 391-392) and Tyconius, *Book of Rules*, VII (Babcock, 125).

[104] Augustine, *Letter 173*.9 (Teske, Vol. III, 128).

of all God's commandments and all the sacraments."[105] This interpretation was echoed by Petilian in his letters against Augustine, who wrote that since the word "Catholic" was merely Greek for "entire," or "whole," the Caecilianists had no right to claim the term because by their tainted sacraments they were "not in the whole," but had "gone aside into the part."[106] There was thus a persistent trend in Donatist exegesis to minimize the universalist implications of certain passages and words. Tilley is certainly correct to point out that not all Donatists viewed the overseas churches as being schismatic alongside the Caecilianists. However, it is also necessary to recognize the existence of a very strong strain of Donatism that did in fact feel this way, and vied with the other view for supremacy. The multiplicity of Donatist views concerning the universal church shows that in this area, as in others, there was no unified theology which defined the movement.

Eschatology

Donatist use of eschatology that can be gleaned from Augustine and others is closely allied with the question of the true church. While in earlier times eschatological hopes had comforted those under the immediate threat of persecution, a belief that persisted even into the Macarian repression,[107] later Donatists increasingly utilized eschatological themes to bolster arguments justifying their apparent paucity of numbers

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[105] Augustine, *Letter 93*.7.23 (Teske, Vol. I, 391).

[106] "Petilianus dixit: 'Si vos tenere Catholicam dicitis, catholicos illud est quod graece dicitur unicum sive totum. Ecce in toto non estis, quia in parte cessistis.'" Augustine, *Against Petilian*, II.38.90 (NPNF(1) 4, 554).

[107] In the *Passion of Maximian and Isaac*, the martyr Isaac shouted before his death, "Woe to you, world, for you are perishing!" When commenting on his martyrdom, his biographers stated that "Only this has yet to happen: he had prophesied annihilation for the world and we all know he was not lying." (*Maximian and Isaac*, 10 (Tilley, 70))

in the face of the communion with the whole world that the Caecilianists could claim.[108] This use of eschatology ought not to be interpreted as a millennialist fixation. As Tilley notes, an apocalyptic strain does not suffuse extant Donatist writings.[109] Instead, later Donatists used eschatological passages for more apologetic goals. While some Donatist explanations for their small size did not rely on eschatological arguments (such as the Rogatist defense that "If one considers all the parts of the world, in comparison to the whole world the part in which the Christian faith is known is small," a surprisingly modern view that Augustine found wanting[110]), the majority appear to have justified their current small numbers by saying that they represented the fulfillment of prophecy.

In *On Christian Combat*, Augustine discussed a way in which his Donatist opponents used eschatological motifs to undermine his arguments. Augustine had launched into his time-honored contention that the Bible prophesied that Christianity would fill the whole earth, and therefore the Donatist contention that it had died off outside of North Africa was absurd. Rather than attempting to interpret the Scriptures in a non-universalistic fashion, as had those who had opposed Tyconius, these Donatists neutralized Augustine's argument by claiming that he was entirely correct—the church *had* spread into all the nations.[111] The twist, however, was that after this fulfillment of prophecy, a time of apostasy had taken place in which the previously-Christianized world

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[108] These justifications, of course, reflect only that faction of Donatists that did not recognize the validity of the transmarine churches.

[109] Tilley, *Bible*, 54.

[110] Augustine, *Letter 93*.7.22 (Teske, Vol. I, 390). The Rogatists are responding to Augustine's claims that the Caecilianists can claim communion with the whole world, noting that Christianity itself was a minority religion when compared to the total sum of the world's population.

[111] Augustine, *On Christian Combat*, 29 (31), in *Fathers of the Church, Vol. 2*, translated by Robert P. Russell (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1947): "They answer that all those prophecies were already fulfilled before the rise of the Donatist sect."

had relapsed, leaving Africa (and specifically, the Donatists), alone as a faithful remnant.[112] This view is also attested to elsewhere. Donatists claimed the passage "I am with you throughout all days, even to the end of the ages" as their own because it seemed to them to signify a faithful remnant, prompting Augustine's exasperated query as to how they could allege that "the church certainly existed once, but now it has vanished."[113]

Donatist proof-texts concerning the conversion of the nations and their subsequent fall from the faith were many, all derived from an eschatological context. They had at their disposal all of Augustine's own proofs that the nations would convert to Christianity, but in addition to this they found many other passages which seemed to indicate their subsequent fall. The passage in Matthew which stated that in the last days "the faith of many will grow cold" was used to show that a general apostasy would precede the end,[114] and the Rogatists averred that they were the chosen few in whom "the Son of Man will find faith when he comes."[115] It had been prophesied that though many would fall away, yet "the one who endures to the end will be saved."[116]

What emerges from these several passages is a pastiche of Donatist eschatology which heavily emphasized the role of the "falling away" predicted to occur in 2 Thessalonians 2. According to that passage, the end would not come until after a widespread general apostasy. This interpretation was supplemented by the excerpts from

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[112] Ibid: "Afterwards, so they say, the whole Church became extinct, and the remains of it have been preserved only within the Donatist sect." To refute them, Augustine was forced to hastily back off from his assertion that the Church had already spread throughout the world, adding the caveat that "some [nations] still exist that have not yet believed."

[113] Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 101(2).9 (Boulding, Vol. 19, 69).

[114] Augustine, *Letter 76*.2 (Teske, Vol. I, 298), citing Matthew 24:12-13.

[115] Augustine, *Letter 93*.7.23 (Teske, Vol. I, 391).

[116] Augustine, *Letter 76*.2 (Teske, Vol. I, 298), citing Matthew 24:12-13.

the Olivet Discourse discussed above. According to many Donatists, that apostasy had begun at the Caecilianist schism, and now they alone constituted the faithful remnant that the Son would find when he returned. While the precise date of the apocalypse appears to have been a secondary issue,[117] it does appear that many Donatists viewed the Caecilianist schism as God's way of separating the proverbial wheat from the weeds.[118] In this way they could justify their small numbers and view themselves as a chosen remnant called forth in the last days in opposition to the false believers, the "weeds" who claimed to be part of the Christian communion, but in fact were spies and traitors.

This particular eschatological interpretation, while widespread, was obviously biased towards a non-universalist interpretation of the church, and as such, would not have been acceptable to more ecumenically-minded Donatists. It is for this reason that Tyconius' own views concerning eschatological matters are interesting, for they represent a form of Donatist eschatology that does not concern itself with justifying exclusivity. While Tyconius wrote a book specifically concerning Revelation (his *Commentary on the Apocalypse*), it has not survived intact throughout the centuries, coming to us only in fragmentary form.[119] There is in the *Book of Rules*, however, much that illuminates Tyconius' own eschatological interpretations.

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[117] The later editor of the *Liber Genealogus* would equate the Vandal persecution with the time of the end and attempt to show that the Vandal king Genseric's name totaled to 666, but this was under extenuating circumstances. See Paula Landes, "Apocalypse and Redemption in Early Christianity," in *Vigiliae Christianae,* Vol. 45, No. 2 (June, 1991), 167.

[118] See Augustine, *Letter 76*.2 (Teske, Vol. I, 298): "He said, *The field is the world*; he did not say, "The field is Africa." He said, *The harvest is the end of the world*; he did not say, "The harvest is the time of Donatus."

[119] See *The Turin Fragments of Tyconius' Commentary on Revelation*, edited by Francesco Lo Bue (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963) for an attempted reconstruction of the text.

Many scholars, including W. H. C. Frend, have viewed the *Book of Rules* as an eschatologically-oriented book, stating that "the emerging pattern of the Book of Rules is eschatology, the urgent belief that the End was approaching."[120] Frend believed that the main concern of the *Book of Rules* was to emphasize the imminent End, a sort of final warning to Caecilianists and Rogatists that the time to separate from the false church was now, rather than in an apocalyptic future.[121] Tilley substantially follows Frend's interpretation, emphasizing that Tyconius' concern was to urgently invite schismatics to return to the church. However, her interpretation of Tyconius views his eschatological passages as typological, as a deliberate de-eschatologizing of apocalyptic texts in order to apply them to the present. Therefore, "even future events described in eschatological passages had contemporary antitypes."[122] For instance, when discussing the apocalyptic persecution discussed by Daniel, Tyconius stated that "What Daniel mentioned is happening now in Africa, and *not* at the time of the end. But because this was going to happen, although not at the time of the end, yet under the same heading, he said, "then," i.e., when similar things happen through the world."[123] Tyconius certainly believed in a literal fulfillment of prophecy, but by pointing out that apocalyptic texts were represented in contemporary life by "types," he focused on their moral application to the present.[124]

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[120] Frend, "Decepit," 622.

[121] Ibid.

[122] Tilley, *Bible*, 124.

[123] "Quod autem Danihel dixit in Africa geritur, neque in eodem tempore finis. Sed quoniam, licet non in eo tempore finis, in eo tamen titulo futurum est, proptera 'Tunc' dixit, id est cum similiter factum fuerit per orbem. . ." Tyconius, *Book of Rules*, VI (Babcock, 111). Italics mine.

[124] Tilley, *Bible*, 123.

In this interpretation, Tilley agrees with Paula Landes, who in her article "Tyconius and the End of the World" also argued aggressively that Tyconius did not intend to provide a timetable for the apocalypse but rather to expand the eschatological imperative into all of time.[125] Indeed, in that article she attempted to show that Tyconius laid the foundation later expounded on by Augustine which freed the book of Revelation *from* a millennialist interpretation. Tilley is certainly correct in her belief that Tyconius sought to make the apocalyptic texts typologically relevant to his own time. However, it seems that Landes goes too far when she denies that Tyconius taught a literal end which was slated to occur at some point in the near future. While Tyconius clearly indicates in the *Book of Rules* that the end is not *imminent*, there are many passages which suggest that he believes it to be lurking around the corner.

In the *Book of Rules*, Tyconius elaborates on the common Christian belief of the time that the world would last six thousand years from its creation, culminating in Christ's return. According to Tyconius (and many others), the present age comprised the last 1000 of those years.[126] Once those last 1000 years were finished, the end would come: "For just as he made that world in six days, so he makes the spiritual world, which is the church, in the course of six thousand years; and he will stop on the seventh day, which he has blessed and made eternal."[127] In accordance with Rule II, which allowed for the Church to be typologically represented by Christ, Tyconius interpreted the

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[125] Paula Landes, "Tyconius and the End of the World" in *Revue des études augustiniennes* 28 (1982).

[126] Tyconius, *Book of Rules*, V ((Babcock, 91): "The world's age is six days, i.e., six thousand years. In what is left of the sixth day, i.e., of these 1000 years, the Lord was born, suffered and rose again. Similarly what is left of the 1000 years is called the thousand years of the first resurrection. For just as what was left of the three days that the Lord was in the tomb—so what is left of the greater sixth day on which the church rose from the dead is reckoned as a whole day, i.e., 1000 years."

[127] Ibid, 101.

prophecy that "the Son of Man must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things at the hands of the leaders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and rise again after three days" as a reference to the Church.[128] The three days described here were correlated with another passage in Revelation where it was written that the two witnesses (who again, according to Tyconius, stand for the church) were to be left for dead for "three and a half days," and those days were interpreted to mean 350 years.[129] Tyconius makes this interpretation clearer when explicating Rule V, concerning the prophetic significance of the number four: "Nevertheless, so often as there is mention of periods of time, the number four in particular represents the time from the Lord's passion to the end. Moreover it is the number four whenever it appears either in full or as part of a fourth after three, for example 350 or three and a half."[130] Interestingly enough, 350 years after the passion of Christ translated to between 379 and 383 A.D., putting the possible "end" within Tyconius' lifetime.[131] Landes' argument against this interpretation is that while it is clear that Tyconius "does appear to be saying that the year 350 from the Passion is a crucial date in Church history, but this is not ipso facto an eschatological date."[132] As she neglects to inform the reader what other event this could refer to in the context of an apocalyptic text, her argument appears flimsy here. Rather, Tyconius does seem to be saying that 350 years after the crucifixion the end would come and the Donatists would

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[128] Ibid, 99-101.

[129] Ibid: ""Likewise one day sometimes represents a hundred years, as when it is written of the church that, "for three and a half days," it will be left for dead "in the city where" its "Lord, too, was crucified."

[130] Ibid, 107.

[131] Landes, "Tyconius," 62.

[132] Ibid.

be vindicated. Landes is certainly correct in that Tyconius did not emphasize this point; he was far more interested in the apocalypse for its typological implications for the Donatist church at the present than for its possible immediate fulfillment. Indeed, the passages which have been culled together to illuminate his position are found scattered throughout his text rather than forming one coherent narrative. It ought not be denied, however, that Tyconius did have a view of the end which, while not emphasized, certainly pointed towards its imminent fulfillment.

Just as in other Donatist eschatological interpretations, Tyconius' concept of the Apocalypse also hinges on the correct interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 2:3, which refers to the "falling away" of the church.[133] In a move radically differing from his fellow Donatists, however, Tyconius chose to translate the "falling away" as a "departure," which referred positively to the true church rather than negatively to the pretenders. Furthermore, this "departure," the final separation of the true church from its false members, was still to come rather than already past. The false members within the church were represented by the Temple of Satan that would be destroyed at the end of time, but until that time would continue to be present within the church: "we must remain on guard until the church shall depart 'from the midst' of it."[134] Tyconius equated the church as it existed in the present with Sodom, which contained a pure minority (Lot) and a defiled majority. Once the eschatological departure took place, the sinners would be revealed for who they really were: "For there is a time when these things [the children of the Devil] may be said not in riddles but openly, as that 'departure' approaches which is

[133] Tilley notes that six of Tyconius' seven rules mention 2 Thess. 2:3-4 (*Bible*, 116).

[134] Tyconius, *Book of Rules*, I (Babcock, 15).

the revelation of the 'man of sin,' when Lot departs from Sodom."[135] This departure was what would occur at the end of the 350 years, and its occurrence signaled the time of the end. Once the true church had been revealed, then the eschatological judgment would begin: "'I will bring fire from your midst; and it will consume you.' The fire is the church; and when it departs from the midst 'of the mystery of lawlessness,' then the Lord will rain fire from the Lord down from the church. . . . But this is a prophecy of the departure to come." While other Donatists equated the separation with the schism between the Caecilianists and Donatists in 312 (and used the term "departure" to refer to the Caecilianists), Tyconius took special pains to stress that the final departure was still to come.[136] It is likely, however, given his propensity to relate contemporary events typologically to the time of the end, that he viewed the Caecilianist schism as a pre-enactment of the final separation. Indeed, he explicitly saw the contemporary persecutions that Donatists were undergoing at the hands of the Caecilianists as a typological sign pointing to the end.[137]

What can be seen from this overview of the various Donatist assertions concerning eschatological matters is that Donatism actively utilized eschatological literature to defend its existence. Furthermore, this activity was not limited to one faction within Donatism; rather, both universalist and separatist Donatists resorted to eschatological motifs. This emphasis on eschatology should not box Donatism into the

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[135] Ibid, 55.

[136] Ibid, 79.

[137] Ibid, 111: "What Daniel mentioned is happening now in Africa, and not at the time of the end. But because this was going to happen, although not at the time of the end, yet under the same heading, he said, 'then,' i.e., when similar things happen through the world, which is the 'departure' and the 'revelation of the man of sin.'"

label of a millennialist cult, since both sides did not allow the end times to assume paramount importance in their writings. However, each side also saw itself as living under the shadow of the end of time: for the separatist Donatists several prophecies concerning their schism had already been fulfilled, while Tyconius typologically positioned the present circumstances of the Donatists into the landscape of the end.

Free Choice

More than any other feature of the later Donatist theological landscape, the belief in the free choice of humankind dictated the direction of later Donatist theology and affected many previously-held theological positions. The prominence of free will in later Donatist theology is an example of significant evolution within the Donatist community, which at the beginning of the schism had based many of its beliefs on the more physicalist assertions of Cyprian, especially in the areas of rebaptism and the proper administration of the sacraments. The principle of freedom of choice also formed a cornerstone for the Donatist belief that the state should never use coercion as a means to conversion, and it is in this context that most of the Donatist statements concerning free will are to be found. The Donatist attachment to free choice, however, was not only concerned with matters of conversion; indeed, it is difficult to find a Donatist belief from the later period that is not shot through with allusions to free will.

Unlike some of the previously-discussed issues, adherence to the principle of freedom of choice appears to have been undisputed within the Donatist community, being attested to by a variety of sources. Augustine attested to its pervasiveness among the Donatist community when he attempted to convince them to control the Agonistici: "What happens to their usual cry, 'One is free to believe or not to believe. With whom

did Christ use force? Whom does he compel?'"[138] It was also widespread in time: Tyconius alluded to Donatists of his time who were excessively concerned with the issue, and Petilian would later utilize it as a major weapon against Augustine.[139] As has been stated before, the primary way that a free will argument would show up in debate was as a buttress against Caecilianist persecution. Donatus, a Donatist priest (not the eponymous leader of the movement) who had attempted to commit suicide rather than join with the hated Caecilianists in the aftermath of the 411 council of Carthage, argued against Augustine's defense of persecution that "God gave us free choice and that, for this reason, a human being ought not to be forced even to what is good."[140] The Donatist bishop Gaudentius, as well, utilized a free will argument to protest against the post-council repression.[141] Earlier, Petilian had shot a broadside against the Caecilianists which heavily depended on the concept of free choice, noting that the Caecilianist recourse to force in order to convert the Donatists was something explicitly anathematized by Jesus. He ridiculed the concept of attempting to use human means to affect a conversion, since Christ himself had said that "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him."[142] If this was so,

> Why do we not permit each several person to follow his free will, since the Lord God Himself has given free will to men, showing to them, however, the way of

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[138] Augustine, *Letter 185*.6.22 (Teske, Vol. III, 192).

[139] Tyconius, *Book of Rules*, III (Babcock, 39), and Petilian's quote in *Against Petilian* II.85.185 (NPNF(1) 4, 573).

[140] "Dicis Deum dedisse liberum arbitrium; ideo non debere cogi hominem nec ad bonum." Augustine, *Letter 173*.2 (Teske, Vol. III, 125).

[141] Augustine, *Contra Gaudentium Donatistarum Episcopum Libri II*, II.7.7, in *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, Vol. 43.707-752, edited by Jacques Paul Migne (Paris, 1844-94), 745. Maureen Tilley discusses free will in the case of Gaudentius and others on page 161 of *The Bible in Christian North Africa*.

[142] John 6:65, quoted in *Against Petilian* II.85.185 (NPNF(1) 4, 573).

> righteousness, lest any one by chance should perish from ignorance of it? For He said, 'I have placed before thee good and evil. I have set fire and water before thee; *choose which thou wilt*.'[143]

To the Caecilianist measures was contrasted the Donatist position, which refused (rhetorically at least) to resort to force in order to reclaim schismatics or Caecilianists.[144]

An argument appealing to free will also constituted a standard Donatist explanation for why the church had vanished outside of North Africa, or at least why the Caecilianists persisted in denying the validity of the faith. In *De Unitate Ecclesiae*, Augustine questioned the Donatists as to why they believed that the church, having flourished up to their time, had suddenly died out. Their answer was simple: "Because humans do not wish it. With free choice man has been created, and if he wills to, he believes in Christ; if he does not will to, he does not believe. . . . Therefore when the church had begun to grow throughout the whole world, humans were not willing to persevere and the Christian religion became extinct in all nations except the party of Donatus."[145] Tyconius, too, records that the conservative Donatist exegetical response to the biblical passage in which God promised the nations to Abraham was couched in free will: "they, because they want to preserve free will, claim that God did indeed promise all the nations to Abraham but only if the nations were to keep the law."[146] The passage also suggests that Donatist use of free choice was not necessarily always polemical in

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[143] Ibid. Italics mine.

[144] Ibid: "If authority had been given by some law for persons to be compelled to what is good, you yourselves, unhappy men, ought to have been compelled by us to embrace the purest faith. But far be it, far be it from our conscience to compel any one to embrace our faith."

[145] "Quia homines nolunt. Cum arbitrio quippe libero, inquiunt, homo creatus est, et si vult credit in Christum, si non vult non credit; si vult perseverat in eo quod credit, si non vult non perseverat. Et ideo cum coepisset per orbem terrarum crescere Ecclesia, noluerunt homines perseverare et defecit ex omnibus gentibus christiana religio excepta parte Donati." Augustine, *De Unitate Ecclesiae*, 9.23 (PL 43.407).

[146] Tyconius, *Book of Rules*, III (Babcock, 39).

character, but constituted a basic part of the Donatist worldview that they were willing to defend. Tyconius also noted a more explicit example where such a non-polemically based argument is used when he opined against Donatist exegetes who stated that the promise to Abraham had been contingent on whether he would continue to obey God or not (which, they affirmed, he subsequently did). The point that worried these Donatist theologians was the passage's seeming denial of free will: if God's promise was operative *despite* Abraham's possible later actions it could only mean that God had already predefined Abraham's future so as to preclude the possibility of him falling away. In order to fortify the concept of freedom of choice, therefore, they posited that God's promise had been conditional on whether Abraham would *continue* to follow him, and thus had only truly come into effect upon Abraham's death.[147]

Frend notes that this heavy emphasis on free will allowed "no scope for original sin, that would compel wrong choices."[148] Caecilianists had no one to blame but themselves for their predicament, and if they failed to respond to the Donatist message their blood would be on their own hands. This was why persecution was such a major evil: not merely because the Caecilianists were guilty of harming the true Christians but because by their use of force they made it far more difficult for would-be converts to freely exercise their power to choose. This was the message expounded even within early Donatism, as when in the context of the Macarian persecution Donatist polemicists would write that the Caecilianists had "ordered a treaty of sacrilegious unity to be solemnly enacted with tortures as sanctions so that those whom Christ commanded to be

[147] Ibid, III ((Babcock, 41).

[148] Frend, "Decepit," 623.

received for his sake should be perpetually banished and should not struggle against the treaties of so-called 'unity.'"[149] While those who did not join the Donatist church due to the threat of persecution were still responsible for their attachment to Caecilianism, the Donatist church recognized that a theology of complete free will and forced conversion were incompatible. This was why Petilian would state so strongly "far be it from our conscience to compel any one to embrace our faith."[150]

Donatist theologians indeed grappled with the concept of determinism within the context of freedom of choice. Tyconius was among them, although his conclusions concerning divine predestination were radically at odds with those of his later protégé Augustine.[151] Tyconius, while opposing some Donatist theologians for their excessive reliance on free will, "things which we cannot hear without a burning sorrow,"[152] was no antagonist to the concept of freedom of choice. He strenuously opposed a legalistic interpretation of divine determinism, stating that the Scriptures were "designed to keep anyone from thinking that it is by divine disposition, rather than by free will, that some are made for death, some for life."[153] In a phrase reminiscent of Novatian, Tyconius averred that "all things that God made are good; the devil has changed their use, but not their nature."[154] This led him to state that since everyone's talents are good by virtue of

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[149] *Maximian and Isaac*, 3 (Tilley, 65).

[150] Augustine, *Against Petilian*, II.84.183 (NPNF(1) 4, 572).

[151] Augustine would explicitly rebuke Tyconius for his doctrines concerning free will and predestination in *Teaching Christianity,* III.33 (Hill, 190).

[152] Tyconius, *Book of Rules*, III (Babcock, 39).

[153] Ibid (Babcock, 47-49).

[154] "Omnia enim quae fecit Deus bona sunt: horum diabolus usum non naturum mutavit." Ibid (Babcock, 137). Novatian had earlier written: "those things which owe their origin to a good creator cannot be other than good themselves." *On The Trinity,* IV.1, in *Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 67, translated by Russell J. DeSimone (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1974, 31).

their intrinsic nature, it is only by one's choice concerning the use of those talents that they become virtuous or evil.[155]

In order to reconcile the promises of God to Abraham that the world would come to know Christ, however, a feat seemingly impossible if it was intrinsically dependent on free will, Tyconius evolved a very interesting theory concerning the partial predestination of a chosen few. It is unknown how much of this view was ever espoused by the broader Donatist community, but it stands as a unique contribution to the free choice-determinism debate. In Tyconius' view, there were two types of people: the predestined and the free. Those whose fates were determined were predestined to do *good*: "They do not flee the evil out of fear or do the good out of necessity. And they are without the law; they are free. They are the ones who were promised."[156] Because of the existence of these people, God's promise to Abraham was assured. The vast majority of people, however, fell into the broader camp of the free, those who were able to choose good or evil. These were the ones to whom God directed his admonitions.[157] No one could be certain as to whether he constituted one of the "foreknown," since even Paul expressed doubt concerning his own salvation.[158] This theology allowed Tyconius to posit that while there were some people who were intrinsically predestined towards the good, no one was

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[155] Tyconius, *Book of Rules*, VII (Babcock, 137): "all men of outstanding sense and powerful talent are gold and silver and precious stones by nature; but they will belong, by choice not by nature, to the one in whose service they find enjoyment in their powers." Such an emphasis on free will was still prevalent in the West, and very widespread in the East.

[156] Ibid, III (Babcock, 45).

[157] Ibid: "'If you obey me' is addressed to the person who is also able not to obey. How can it pertain to the person of whom God foresaw, even before the world began, that he *would* obey?" Italics mine.

[158] Ibid, III ((Babcock, 47).

predestined towards evil—evil could only result from the misuse of one's freedom of choice.

Rebaptism

The Donatist emphasis on freedom of choice eventually spilled over into their later beliefs concerning rebaptism. The theology behind the practice experienced a particularly circuitous evolution since the early days of the schism. For one thing, the Donatist belief in the necessity of rebaptism had undergone a significant hardening process since the time of the Macarian persecution. No longer was it acceptable to allow converts who strenuously objected to the practice enter into the church without requiring rebaptism, as many Mauritanian bishoprics had initially done.[159] Several times Augustine eagerly pursued rumors of Donatist bishops who had eschewed the custom, only to meet with disappointment as they turned out to firmly support it.[160] While they expressed regret that the issue of rebaptism stood between the Caecilianists and the Donatists, these bishops did not back down. Since the Macarian persecution, there had apparently been Donatist councils concerning the question of rebaptism that tightened the rules established at the 335 council of Carthage, making it mandatory for all converts.[161] The original reason for permissiveness in some occasions had vanished, for the Donatist and Caecilianist communities were now well-entrenched in their respective camps and converts to either side knew what they were getting into. The Donatists of Augustine's day were adamantly opposed to a voluntary interpretation of the critical rite of rebaptism,

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[159] See Augustine, *Letter 93*.10.43 (Teske, Vol. I, 402).

[160] Such as Maximinus and Fortuanius. See Augustine, *Letter 23*.2 (Teske, Vol. I, 64) and *Letter 44*.5.12 (Teske, Vol. I, 180).

[161] See Augustine, *Letter 23*.5.

as it was a particular distinguishing mark between them and the Caecilianists. It had an excellent rhetorical value, as well, in that converts to Donatism symbolically washed away their associations with the Caecilianists.

The original rationale for the necessity of rebaptism had been based along Cyprianic lines: since it was the right of the true church alone to dispense the sacraments, baptisms (or any other rites) conferred outside that church were invalid. Rebaptism, in Donatist eyes, was thus a misnomer: as Petilian would say, "When you in your guilt perform what is false, I do not celebrate baptism twice, which you have never celebrated once."[162] This view was reinforced by Parmenian, who added the significant concept of the *dotes* of the true church, identifying markers which were possessed by the true church alone. One of these *dotes* was the "true font," from which "heretics can neither drink nor give others to drink."[163] Against the Caecilianist contention that baptism depended on the right faith of the believer, Parmenian asserted that it was instead completely dependent on the agent. The watch-word for this belief was "How can he give who has nothing to give?"[164] Such a concept formed the basis for his exegetical commentary on Naaman, who "could not be baptized in his own rivers but had to be baptized in the true font, that is the Jordan, in order for his sins to be taken away."[165] Regardless of the correctness of the rite or the faith of the individual, the sacrament of baptism was valid only if performed by a representative of the true church. The official mantra of the Donatist

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[162] Augustine, *Against Petilian*, II.25.58 (NPNF(1) 4, 545).

[163] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, II.8 (Edwards, 39). Optatus agrees with Parmenian insofar as the ban on the font referred to true heretics and not schismatics (which is why he could hold Donatist baptism to be legitimate).

[164] Ibid, V.4 (Edwards, 104), quoted again in V.6 (Edwards, 107).

[165] Ibid, V.9 (Edwards, 112).

movement up through the time of Parmenian was: "This gift of Baptism belongs to the giver, not the receiver."[166]

This modified-Cyprianic view was partially supplanted in the minds of at least some Donatists by the beginning of the fifth century. Instead of an emphasis on the necessity of the true church, a view concerned more with one's freedom of choice began to circulate. Parmenian's saying that "this gift of Baptism belongs to the giver, not the receiver" was set aside in favor of a theology that in fact put great importance on the conscious decision of the receiver. While this emphasis did not negate the absolute necessity of the true church to baptism, it significantly downplayed its relevance.

The main proponent of this new type of baptismal theology was Petilian of Constantine. When Augustine attempted to refute a circular letter from Petilian to his colleagues, he capitalized on a particular quote by Petilian which seemed to emphasize a Cyprianic view of baptism: "He who has received his faith from one that is faithless, receives not faith but guilt."[167] Here Augustine was in his element, and proceeded to enthusiastically argue against the view that a sinful bishop could not legitimately administer the sacraments. When Petilian read the refutation, however, he sent back a reply that castigated Augustine for misquoting him: "'And where,' he says, 'is the word that I added, *wittingly*? So that I did not say, 'He that has received his faith from one that is faithless,' but, 'He that has received his faith *wittingly* from one that is faithless, receives not faith but guilt.'"[168] For Petilian, the inclusion of the word *wittingly* was

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[166] "Hoc munus baptismatis esse dantis, non accipientis." Ibid, V.7 (Edwards, 107).

[167] "Quisquis fidem sciens a perfido sumpserit, non fidem percipit, sed reatum." Augustine, *Against Petilian*, III.27.32 (NPNF(1) 4, 609).

[168] "Et ubi est, inquit, quod addidi, sciens; ut non dicerem: Qui fidem a perfido sumpserit: sed: Qui fidem sciens a perfido sumpserit, non fidem percipit, sed reatum?" Ibid, III.31.36 (NPNF(1) 4, 611).

crucial, for it signified an entirely different thrust than the old Cyprianic argument. Instead of being based on the more "physicalist" notions of Cyprian and Parmenian which focused primarily on the status of the *agent*, Petilian's concept of the efficacy of baptism hinged on the knowledge of the *receiver*.

This theology opened up a new line of attack on the Caecilianists. In his rebuttal, Petilian queried Augustine concerning his own baptismal experience: "[Petilian] seemed to have no other object, in all that his evil-speaking mouth poured forth, except that he should appear to prove that I had not been ignorant of the misdeeds of those among whom I was baptized, and with whom I was associated in communion."[169] Under Petilian's baptismal theology, it was vitally important for the recipient to understand precisely what communion she was joining herself to. In one sense, it was the beliefs of the recipient which mattered more than the baptizer himself, because the communion that the recipient joined herself to reflected her own beliefs. Therefore, those who were baptized into the Caecilianist church implicitly accepted its beliefs and actions. Unlike either Caecilianist or earlier Donatist theology, which respectively viewed the correctly-administered rite of baptism as efficacious regardless of the administrator's beliefs or saw baptism as the property of the true church alone, both of which focused on an institution or rite rather than the individual, Petilian's theology made it very clear that salvation (in the form of baptismal regeneration) was up to the recipient himself. There could be no hiding behind institutional or ritual walls—the would-be believer *chose* his belief. This was the rationale behind Petilian's assertion to Augustine that "you are bound both to

[169] Ibid, III.26.31 (NPNF(1) 4, 608).

examine your baptizer, and to be examined by him."[170] The efficacy of one's baptism was necessarily contingent on one's own free choice, and therefore one's choice of baptismal font should not be taken lightly.

This theology also explained Petilian's assertion that the Caecilianists shared in the tainted line of their forefathers.[171] Since converts to Caecilianism were expected to fully utilize their right of free choice when deciding which faith to hold, it followed that by siding with the Caecilianists they allied themselves with all the evils perpetuated by that movement, both theological and physical. This was why Petilian would aggressively question Augustine concerning his baptismal roots: if Augustine was acquainted with the evils perpetuated by the Caecilianists and still chose to remain with them, he clearly showed that he agreed with their beliefs; if he was ignorant of them, then he was guilty of neglecting his baptismal obligation to consider the party with which he was about to enter into communion. It was no difficulty, then, for Donatists to believe that new generations of Caecilianists would be just as antagonistic to the true church as their fathers had been. Of course their works would be wicked—after all, they had knowingly joined themselves to a movement that had authorized persecution. This belief also accounted for why Donatists would brand contemporary Caecilianists with the title of *traditor*, as by their communion they were linked with deeds of their forefathers. Donatists believed that the present-day actions of their opponents showed these assertions to be true. As Petilian would state, "Yet some will be found to say, We are not the sons of a *traditor*. Any one

[170] Ibid, III.27.32 (NPNF(1) 4, 609).

[171] Ibid, II.11.25 (NPNF(1) 4, 535).

is the son of that man whose deeds he imitates."[172] Joining oneself to the communion of a church necessarily meant sharing in the deeds perpetuated by that church.

Sin and Sacraments

The same conception was on display when discussing the wider implications of hidden sin for the sacraments. Standard Caecilianist rhetoric claimed that the Donatists expected absolute perfection from all their members, a view which has persisted to this day and has done much in its own way to paint the Donatist movement as an impossibly rigoristic sect. Donatists, however, did not expect every member of their church to be completely free from sin (even bishops), but they did expect that once sin within the church was discovered, it should be dealt with rather than ignored. Augustine often castigated them mercilessly for their ideal of a pure church, asserting that it was impossible for the Donatists themselves to be completely pure and thus that their own supposedly untainted line had surely been broken many times. Against him, Donatists would always assert that unknown sin did not count against their communion. Sin only counted as a sacramental pollutant if, having been made known to the congregation, it was left undealt with.

Both Optatus and Augustine attest to this view among the Donatists, chiefly with regards to the rebaptism controversy. Optatus would note that "you rebaptize after us but after colleagues of your own who are taken in error you do not do this. For you have said that, if a priest is in sin, the gifts can work on their own."[173] Augustine would similarly

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[172] "Petilianus dixit: At enim aliqui dicent: Filii non sumus traditoris. Eius est aliquis filius, cuius facta sectatur." Ibid.

[173] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, II.9 (Edwards, 40).

note that Donatists accepted the validity of the sacramental rites performed by bishops who were later found guilty of a hidden sin. Indeed, he attempted to utilize this facet of Donatist theology to persuade them to join the Caecilianist side: "You do condemn someone who remains unknown for some time and is afterwards exposed and proven guilty, do you not? I ask, then, whether he did not contaminate you during that time when he remained unknown? You will answer, "In no way." He would, then, contaminate no one at any time, even if the sin was always unknown."[174] Both Augustine and Optatus, however, appear to have been unable (or unwilling) to grasp the nuances of Donatist theology in this area, even when it was explicitly articulated by their opponents. Augustine continuously attempted to prove from the Donatist acceptance of their own fallen bishops' sacraments that they had no reason to maintain a hostile stance towards the Caecilianists, since (in his mind) this was the reason that they had separated from the Caecilianists in the first place.

The reality was more complex. In the case of baptism, Petilian's theology referenced above was evidence of a dramatic reconfiguration from earlier Donatist baptismal doctrine in its emphasis on the receiver, although perhaps Parmenian's baptismal theology had prepared the way for it by exalting the necessity of being baptized into the true church at the expense of the individual bishop.[175] By focusing attention away from the baptizer (who might or might not be tainted) to the recipient, Petilian's doctrine freed the Donatist church from the potentially-embarrassing conundrum of explaining the validity of baptisms conferred by bishops who were later discovered to

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[174] Augustine, *Letter 87*.1.1 (Teske, Vol. I, 345).

[175] As Maureen Tilley emphasizes in *Bible*, 101-103, although I would not agree with the lengths to which she takes it.

have been living in sin. If the convert had been unaware of this fact at the time, his baptism was still valid, for what he had *intended* to unite himself with in baptism was the true church, not the sins of the bishop. This principle found a broader application towards any sacramental action that had been administered by a bishop who was later found to have been engaged in sinful behavior.

In this scenario, freedom of choice on the part of the congregation counted for everything. Rather than the somewhat extreme infection theology that has popularly been credited to the movement, it appears that what the Donatists were actually opposed to was the conscious participation in sin by the church. In other words, it was the conscious acceptance of the sin of a bishop on the part of the congregation that made a sacrament void, not necessarily the sin itself. Therefore, a bishop who had secretly apostatized would still be able to administer efficacious sacraments to his congregation as long as the sin was secret, because the sacrament itself was not affected by his sin. Once his failings became known, however, his sacraments also became null and void, because at that time if a congregation communed with the bishop they were also implicitly condoning his actions. Donatists did not hold to an extreme infection theology which intoned that any bishop who had secretly sinned might be administering inefficacious sacraments—there was no magic about the sacraments themselves that was intrinsically subverted by sin. But if a bishop was known to have sinned, then to share in his sacraments was to share in his sin, thus making those rites null and void.

The real differences between the Caecilianist and Donatist sides concerning sin and sacraments were brought to the forefront at the 411 council of Carthage. Augustine had already articulated the Caecilianist viewpoint: the personal morality of a bishop had

no relevance to his ability to administer the sacraments. While a bishop ought to be punished for his transgressions, congregations that communed with him even while his sin was known were not adversely affected. Augustine utilized the example of Judas, who, while known to Christ as a sinner, had still been allowed to participate in the evangelization efforts of the disciples.[176] At the council of Carthage, Donatists would counter that while the omniscient Lord himself might have known the sin of Judas, his fellow disciples had not, and that he had lost his place once his sin became known.[177] The Donatists utilized several of the parables of Jesus at the council to further prove their point that unknown sin did not harm the church, but known sin was not to be tolerated. The Caecilianists had claimed the Parable of the Dragnet for their own because in it both good and bad fish are carried in the same net (which they interpreted as the church) until they reached the land and were separated, which was interpreted as the day of judgment. Donatists countered that the real point of the parable was that while the fish were still in the sea, their true status was not yet known, corresponding with hidden sinners. But as soon as they had been identified they were thrown out so as not to contaminate the rest of the catch, thus proving the Donatist point: "The evangelist spoke of *hidden* things, not of evident things which you wish to be mingled with you."[178] Furthermore, Donatists claimed that the parable of the Wedding Garment supported their position, as the King

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[176] Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 10.6 (Boulding, Vol. 15, 166): "It was Christ who sent his own betrayer with the other disciples to preach the kingdom of heaven . . . and he sent him out to preach in order to show that the gifts of God come to those who receive with faith, even if those through whom they receive are like Judas."

[177] Augustine, *Against Petilian*, II.22.49 (NPNF(1) 4, 542).

[178] "De occultis reis hoc dixit evangelista, non de evidentibus quos tu vis tecum esse permixtos." *Gesta Conlationis Carthaginensis*, III.263 (CCSL 149A.252). Italics mine.

had immediately expelled a guest who had not dressed in proper attire.[179] While the Caecilianist position allowed for a certain amount of leeway in the delicate matter of handling a fallen bishop, the Donatist position was that as soon as clerical sin was detected in the church it must be dealt with. There could be no communion between a tainted bishop and his congregants.

Even Tyconius, who was explicitly showcased by Augustine for having denied that the sin of one person could affect the status of another,[180] on a closer look proved to hold very Donatist views concerning the necessity of complete separation from fallen clerics. Tyconius certainly accepted, as other Donatist bishops implicitly did, that the true church would necessarily contain false members, and, as has been earlier surveyed in his eschatological views, believed that total separation could only come about at the day of judgment. After all, "Jacob, i.e., the church, never comes for blessing without concomitant deceit, i.e., without false brethren."[181] He would even state this view in rather Augustinian terms: "And it is right that 'both grow together until the harvest.' . . . and now, when the new obtains, Hagar continues to give birth and there is no lack of children of slavery, as will be revealed when Christ returns as judge."[182] However, Tyconius did not advocate allowing known sinners to continue within the church. He

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[179] Ibid, III.258.90 (CCSL 149A.245-246): "Ita et latentes et in ecclesia constitui et a sacerdotibus ignorati, in diunio iudicio proditi, tamquam pisces mali a sanctorum consortio separantur, sicut dominus in evangelio de latenti reo qui per obreptionem sacerdotes fefellerat per figurum loquitur dicens: Intrans, inquit, rex videre recumbentes vidit illic hominem non habentem vestimentum nupitale et ait illi: amici, quo modo huc venisti? Ille autem obmutuit et dixit rex ministries suis: auferte illum minibus et pedibus et mittite illum in tenebras exteriors; illic erit ploratio et stridor dentium."

[180] Augustine, *Contra Parmeniani,* I.1.1 (PL 43.34-35); II.21.40 (PL 43.81).

[181] Tyconius, *Book of Rules*, III (Babcock, 51).

[182] Ibid, III (Babcock, 53). This passage is probably where Augustine derived his assertions concerning Tyconius from.

was very explicit on this point: while the apocalyptic harvest which would once and for all divide the church into the sheep and the goats was yet to come, yet typologically such a separation occurred in the present whenever hidden sin was discovered:

> Is it only at the hour when the Lord is revealed in his coming that a person ought not to turn back for his belongings and ought to have remembered Lot's wife—and not also *before* he is revealed? But the Lord commanded that these things be observed at the hour of his revelation not only to enhance the value of the truth . . . but also to show that the *whole time* is the 'day' or the 'hour.'[183]

Indeed, it was the churches' duty to enforce this separation, for this was the fulfillment of the prophecy in 2 Thessalonians which stated that the church would "keep in check" its evil members until the ultimate time of separation.[184] The church of the present was to take the words of the Psalmist literally: "For he did not call the king of the Medes happy . . . but rather the church which 'takes and dashes' the children of Babylon 'against the rock' of the stumbling block."[185] It can thus be seen that even Tyconius, contrary to Augustine's perception of him, agreed with the standard Donatist belief which stated that unknown sin on the part of a bishop did not detrimentally affect his congregation, but once it became known, a strict separation was demanded. The whole issue was couched in the importance of free will: if a congregation continued to commune with a fallen bishop, they were stating by their actions that they agreed with his sin. A congregation loyal to the true church would seek to emulate the deeds of that church, not the deeds of a fallen bishop. This was what the Caecilianists had done by voluntarily joining themselves to a *traditor* and defending his actions. Their continuing defense of such

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[183] Ibid, VI (Babcock, 111). Italics mine.

[184] Ibid, VI (Babcock, 85).

[185] Ibid.

actions proved to the Donatists that they were sacramentally impure, and ought to be shunned.

It can thus be seen that mature Donatism had evolved considerably from its beginnings and as a byproduct of that process experienced difficulty in presenting a united theological front. If many Donatists viewed the transmarine churches as irrevocably damned, there were always those who felt that they constituted a vital part of the universal church. New emphases which do not appear to have been prominent in the original schism, such as freedom of choice, evolved into major components of later Donatist theology. These and other differences between early and mature Donatism will be specifically discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

Comparisons between Early and Later Donatism

"How can he who baptizes give to another remission of sins, who himself, being outside the Church, cannot put away his own sins?"

-Cyprian of Carthage

"I did not *say, 'He that has received his faith from one that is faithless,' but, 'He that has received his faith* wittingly *from one that is faithless, receives not faith but guilt.'"*

–Petilian of Constantine

Chapters Three and Four were concerned with the theological systems characteristic of early and later formations of Donatism, respectively. In this chapter, the degree to which the Donatist church changed over the years will be discussed in order to highlight the range of diversity within the movement. Therefore, the findings of the previous two chapters will be correlated with each other in order to discover which theological issues remained the same, which evolved, and what new innovations occurred within the schism. Only then can a view that truly appreciates the temporal diversity within Donatism be arrived at.

The Significance of the Macarian Persecution

As was discussed at the end of Chapter Three, the typological dividing-line between early and later Donatism in this paper is the Macarian persecution. This is partially due to its temporal position: as major events within the Donatist movement go, the Macarian persecution is close to the midway point, especially if one dates the beginning of Donatism to the feuds which emerged out of the Diocletianic persecution rather than from the actual election of Majorinus. There are thus approximately forty

years between the tensions of Mensurius and his opponents which resulted in the Donatist schism and the outbreak of the Macarian persecution in 347, and precisely fifty years between the emperor Julian's restoration of the Donatist bishops in 361 and the decisive council of Carthage in 411.

There are other reasons for dating the divide between early and mature Donatism to the Macarian persecution. The Donatist party that existed prior to the repression exhibited a decidedly different mentality than did its post-repression heirs. The Macarian persecution functioned as a catalyst between the two eras. In earlier years, the Donatist-Caecilianist quarrel truly deserved the title of "schism."[1] It was primarily concerned with the question of the rightful bishop of Carthage; those who supported Donatus' claim were "Donatists," and those who supported Caecilian's claim were "Caecilianists." While evidence of differing theologies between the two parties is plainly available from the early period, much of what Donatism stood for comprised what might be called traditional North African theology.[2] During this period, it was the Caecilianists who were the primary innovators in terms of theology. This would all change after the Macarian persecution. The rightful bishop of the see of Carthage became a secondary, though still polemically-viable, topic; "Caecilianism" now extended to *all* bishops who had supported the repressions against the Donatists.[3] Likewise, "Donatists" were now bound by much more than a common allegiance to Donatus. While "schism" more or

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[1] S. L. Greenslade has an excellent discussion of the definition of the term "schism" and its often-tangled use in patristic sources: see *Schism*, 17-29.

[2] See Shaw, "African Christianity," 8-9, and R. A. Markus, "Christianity and Dissent," 28-30.

[3] By this I mean that whereas in the early years of the schism "Caecilianists" were only polluted because of their communion with Caecilian and, if necessary, could be accepted into the Donatist fold without rebaptism, in late Donatism "Caecilianists" were considered apostate in their own right, as they had actively participated in the various repressions of the Donatists.

less accurately describes the situation during the early days of the movement, it is much less adequate when discussing its later years. In its attempt to cope with the post-Macarian world, Donatism had evolved considerably in its theology and could by now be considered as a completely alternate worldview from its Caecilianist counterpart.

Furthermore, the psychological effects of the Macarian persecution ought not be underestimated. It ended, for a time, the Donatist supremacy in North Africa, arresting the initial momentum of the movement. It also hardened many aspects of the schism, irrevocably sealing Donatist antipathy towards the Caecilianist side. "Unity," once requested by Donatus himself, now came to have an exclusively negative meaning.[4] The Donatists after the repression, until forced to attempt one last struggle to gain a unification victory at the 411 council of Carthage, were almost unanimously opposed to any sort of reunification plan with the Caecilianists. Even the more moderate Donatists sought only a "live and let live" stance vis-à-vis the Caecilianists.[5] The Macarian persecution forced Donatist theology to evolve in other ways as well. The later Donatist debate concerning the universal church was a direct outgrowth of the transmarine churches' complacence in response to news of the repression, and the question of rebaptism was finally settled in favor of the rigorist point of view. There is no question that the repression also greatly contributed to later Donatist rhetoric which condemned the Caecilianists as inherently persecutors who would always remain hostile to the true

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[4] Note *Maximian and Isaac*, 3 (Tilley, 65) and *Martyrdom of Marculus*, 3 (Tilley, 79) for the Donatist reaction to the term "unity."

[5] Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 21(2).31 (Boulding, Vol. 15, 241), for example: ""Whenever we approach them, and say, 'Let us seek the truth, let us try to sort it out,' they reply, 'You lot keep what you have. You have your sheep, I have mine. Don't annoy my sheep, and I won't annoy yours.'"

church.[6] With such rhetorical weapons as the Macarian persecution supplied to Donatist polemicists, it was Donatism, rather than Caecilianism, which seemed in the eyes of many to exemplify the true nature of Christ's church, which, in the words of Petilian, had been given no right of "any form of slaying, but one of dying only."[7]

Similarities

Before discussing the ways in which Donatism evolved through time, it would be helpful to review the basic continuities that undergirded the movement throughout its existence. The Donatist church did not change so radically over the years as to leave its original roots completely behind, and many facets of Donatist theology which were articulated at the 411 council of Carthage had descended virtually unchanged from their pre-schism origins.

Sin and Sacraments

One issue which always undergirded the Donatist stance requiring total separation from the Caecilianists from the beginning of the schism to the 411 council of Carthage was their belief that communion with Caecilianist bishops necessarily involved sacramental defilement. Such a sense of contagion was clearly articulated as early as the Abitinian martyrs, who expounded that "If anyone communicates with the traitors, that person will have no part with us in the heavenly kingdom."[8] The original opponents of Caecilian's election argued from the same rationale. Cyprian had articulated such a

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[6] Augustine, *Against Petilian*, II.11.25 (NPNF(1) 4, 535).

[7] Ibid, II.88.192 (NPNF(1) 4, 575). Note that Petilian's statement here echoes Cyprian, who in *Letter 58*.3 (Donna, 165) stated that the Christian community consisted of "all who are not allowed to kill but must be killed. . ."

[8] *Abitinian Martyrs*, 21 (Tilley, 46).

concept in the aftermath of the Decian persecution, and his theology was eagerly taken up by these early Donatist leaders. Fallen bishops had forfeited their ability to properly administer the sacraments since, according to Cyprian, the validity of a sacrament was directly dependent on the personal holiness of its administrator.[9] While this particular facet of Cyprian's theology would undergo an extensive evolution within the Donatist movement, its corollary would always remain as a cornerstone of Donatist polemic: not only were apostate bishops themselves sacramentally unworthy, but equally guilty alongside them were those who refused to disassociate with them once aware of their faults. To commune with fallen bishops was to share in their guilt, since by that communion one signified that he agreed with their stance.

Central to the formation of the Donatist movement was that Caecilian had allowed a widely-suspected *traditor* to ordain him. Regardless of the eventual trial which exonerated Felix, his status at the time of Caecilian's ordination was cloudy enough that Caecilian ought never to have submitted to ordination by him. Furthermore, Caecilian's known hostility towards the confessors convinced the proto-Donatist movement that he was a man eminently willing to commune with persons who had collaborated with the Romans, as had his predecessor Mensurius. In the resulting schism, Caecilian's ritual pollution had spread, in Donatist eyes, to those who defended him—by their willing communion with the false bishop of Carthage these North African bishops had forfeited their own claim to sacramental holiness. Most Donatists were willing to look upon the transmarine churches with more leniency prior to the repression under Macarius (save Rome, which had explicitly exonerated Caecilian at the synod under Miltiades), but after

[9] Cyprian, *Letter 67*.6 (Donna, 236-37).

the events of the Macarian persecution a large subset of the Donatist movement came to view the transmarine churches as defiled as well due to their implicit support of the Caecilianist side during those dark times. This belief led to the later doctrine, very potent in large segments of the Donatist community, that the rest of the church had gone apostate and that Donatists alone constituted the remnant of the true church. While more universally-minded Donatists were prone to dispute this belief, even they would categorically affirm that the Caecilianists of North Africa were sacramentally unfit.[10] Throughout the duration of the Donatist movement, those who had allied themselves to Caecilian were seen as polluted vessels; any Donatist who communed with them would share in their fate.

Rebaptism

Born out of the same rationales which undergirded the Donatist doctrine concerning sacramental sin, the belief in the necessity of rebaptism upon conversion into the Donatist church was a facet of Donatist theology which remained constant throughout their existence. Even the very latest possible mention of the Donatist church (c. 722) mentions their defining characteristic of rebaptizing those who had first been baptized in a Caecilianist church.[11] It was always argued that the term "rebaptism" was a misnomer; in Donatist eyes, the Caecilianist rite of baptism had no more significance than bathing. As in the larger context of sin and sacraments, the Donatist position on rebaptism was firmly grounded in Cyprianic theology, and while it was significantly influenced by the later doctrine of free will which emphasized the role of the recipient, Donatist theologians

[10] Augustine, *Letter 44*.5.12 (Teske, Vol. I, 179).

[11] Gregory II, *Letter 4*, quoted in Frend, *Donatist Church*, 313.

never questioned the basic necessity of the rite. In particular, Cyprian's assertion that the ritual of baptism was the exclusive prerogative of the true church and that no other entity possessed the ability to administer a true baptism formed the backbone of Donatist insistence on the practice.[12] Indeed, later Donatists would explicitly refer to Cyprian in defense of rebaptism, and Augustine was forced to devote an entire work to refuting the writings of Cyprian on the subject.[13] Perhaps the only difference between early and later Donatism concerning the necessity of rebaptism was that while in the early years of the schism a certain amount of leeway had been extended to congregations who had converted to Donatism but were reticent to deny the validity of their original baptism, the form of Donatism which predominated in the aftermath of the Macarian persecution absolutely required the rite upon all converts. But even this turn towards rigorism was less an evolution in doctrine than a reassertion of Donatist belief which had been downplayed for a time in order to gain converts during the crucial early years of the schism.

The Universal Church

While there were certainly many Donatists in the later years of the movement who believed that all of the transmarine churches had fallen into apostasy, there always remained within the movement a faction which affirmed the validity of the broader church. Certainly many of the outside churches, following the lead of the council of

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[12] Cyprian, *Letter 73*.2 (Donna, 269).

[13] *On Baptism Against the Donatists*, in which Augustine explicitly states that Cyprian's example was not to be followed. Note, for example, *On Baptism* III.2.2 (NPNF(1) 4, 436), III.4.6 (NPNF(1) 4, 438), or III.7.10 (NPNF(1) 4, 439): "At the same time, also, he warns us that it was not impossible that Cyprian might have held an opinion about baptism at variance with that required by the truth, as held by the Church both before and after him, if even Peter could hold a view at variance with the truth as taught us by the Apostle Paul."

Arles, recognized Caecilian rather than Donatus as the legitimate bishop, but up until the time of the Macarian persecution the Donatists appear to have focused on proving their legitimacy to these churches rather than writing them off. It was for this reason that the decision of the participants in the Eastern council of Serdica to recognize Donatus rather than Caecilian as the true bishop of Carthage was so significant, for it represented in Donatist eyes a major vindication of their arguments and appeared to hold the possibility of swaying other sees. Later Donatists, even those who viewed the rest of the church as apostate in their time, affirmed that the Donatist church had not categorically rejected the validity of the transmarine churches until after the events of the Macarian persecution.[14]

Even after the repression under Macarius, however, a subset within the Donatist church continued to view the status of the overseas churches in much the same way as had their predecessors. Not all were willing to interpret the Scriptures in ways which would deny the prophecies that the church would spread throughout the world. While Tyconius has become by default the major proponent of this subset of Donatism, it is clear that he was not the only Donatist voice advocating the legitimacy of the transmarine churches. While debating Augustine, the Donatist Cresconius would applaud the continued expansion of the Christian faith throughout the world; clearly he did not believe that the whole of the outside church had lost its way.[15] Even more within mainstream tradition stood the council of Bagai in 394, which in its condemnation of the Maximianists affirmed that Donatus had "established a religious observance which has

[14] Augustine, *Letter 44*.3.5 (Teske, Vol. I, 176).

[15] Augustine, *Contra Cresconium* IV.61.74 (PL 43.589).

been sustained in his name and practice [throughout] almost the whole world."[16] This quote achieves its importance not only by the viewpoint it expresses, but also by the fact that it was proclaimed by an official Donatist council.

Interestingly, the image one finds of the Donatist stance towards the transmarine churches at the 411 council of Carthage is almost indistinguishable from the view that was taken during the earliest years of the schism. As Eno has pointed out, the position taken by the Donatists at the council was that the schism was strictly between themselves and the North African Caecilianists—the whole point of the council was to determine which side was worthy of joining into communion with the transmarine churches.[17] While there is certainly a threatening note in Emeritus' assertion that when the erring side would be "conquered as a result of truthful knowledge, he may be seen to be rejected by the world,"[18] the Donatists at the council of Carthage affirmed the validity of the outside churches just as had their ancestors in the years before the Macarian persecution.

Church and State

Likewise, while Donatist appeals to the state varied considerably over the years between the outbreak of the schism and the 411 council of Carthage, certain continuities can be seen which link early and late Donatism in their views of church-state relations. Donatists of all generations appear to have rhetorically asserted the principle that the state ought not coerce conversion to either camp. This point was asserted most convincingly

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[16] "In eius nomen et cultum mundi paene totius observantia nutrita coaluit." Ibid, III.56.62 (PL 43.529).

[17] Eno, "Nuances," 419.

[18] "Ut quiqumque ex veridica cognitione fuerit superatus, his ab orbe videatur esse reiectus." *Gesta Conlationis Carthaginensis*, III.99 (CCSL 149A.204). It does appear that Emeritus probably viewed the council as a sort of final warning for the transmarine churches to back the Donatist side.

by Petilian in response to Augustine, but is also found in pre-Macarian Donatist rhetoric. Petilian's assertion that the true church is distinguished by its martyrdoms, not its coercionary tactics, that "the Lord Christ instituted for Christians, not any form of slaying, but one of dying only,"[19] finds its precedent in the words of Donatus himself from the time of the repression under Constantine: "If you have to resist, you resist with the power of the soul, not with arms; if you fight, it is with faith not force."[20] Throughout its existence, the Donatist movement vocally insisted that the true church could never ally with the state in order to impose its views.

Seemingly at odds with this rhetorical manifesto was the practical tendency of many Donatists throughout the years of the schism to ally with the state or local authorities in order to achieve political dominance. Donatism in its early years repeatedly appealed to the emperors in order to gain for itself the imperial recognition that the Caecilianists had received. The last of these appeals resulted in the Macarian persecution, after which official petitions to the emperor for legitimacy did not occur (the appeal to Julian was for the repeal of their exile and the restoration of their own property, not for the right of recognition as bishop of Carthage). Later Donatism, however, was characterized by continued appeals to the state at more localized levels. Officials who were sympathetic to Donatism or were Donatists themselves existed at all levels of the bureaucratic strata in North Africa, even including the one-time *comes Africae* Flavian.[21] While the attempts of certain Donatists to ally with the usurpers Firmus and Gildo resulted in the proscription of the movement by the Roman state, such attempts clearly

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[19] Augustine, *Against Petilian*, II.88.192 (NPNF(1) 4, 575).

[20] *Donatus and Advocatus*, 14 (Tilley, 60).

[21] Augustine, *Letter 87*.8 (Teske, Vol. I, 348).

portray a pattern of active politicking on the part of the Donatist movement in its later years. Thus in both their doctrine concerning the inability of the state to forcibly engineer conversions and their practical attempts to secure recognition by state officials, Donatists of early and later eras maintained similar stances.

Differences

There were thus many continuities which linked later Donatists with their pre-Macarian predecessors. The Macarian persecution, however, forced a major reevaluation of earlier beliefs within at least certain segments of the Donatist population. Two of these issues were especially significant: the later attitude of many Donatists concerning the state, and their beliefs concerning the universal church.

Church and State

Prior to the events of the Macarian persecution, Donatus had led a movement which actively intrigued to overthrow the current alliance between the imperial authorities and the Caecilianists. This alliance, which had been in place ever since the emperor Constantine had awarded imperial reparation money to Caecilian without realizing that his election had become hotly contested, was the prime impediment which blocked the Donatist party from overcoming their opponents. In an effort to win imperial recognition over to their side, the Donatists appealed on four separate occasions to Constantine. Clearly, they did not believe the imperial government as represented by Constantine to be intrinsically evil, a position which was certainly helped by the fact that neither Constantine nor his father Constantius I had actively enforced the Diocletianic edicts within their domains. Had they won their case before the emperor, it is probable

that the Donatist party, thus integrated into imperially-recognized Christianity, would never have evolved such a comprehensive theory concerning church-state relationships as they did. Regardless, a look at the early years of the party under Donatus reveals a movement continuously involved in attempts to gain imperial recognition.

This ambition changed dramatically in the aftermath of the Macarian persecution. While there were certainly continuities with the past in that later Donatists did not simply view the state as necessarily antithetical to their own interests, Donatism in the post-Macarian era was led by a differing attitude towards imperial power than its earlier incarnation. The repression had finally convinced them that the Caecilianists had for the time being definitively won their case before the imperial government. Henceforth the Donatists would concentrate on winning over local rulers, but they would never again attempt to actively persuade the emperors themselves that theirs was the correct cause. They also attempted to rhetorically distance themselves from their earlier appeals to the emperor, an endeavor which their Caecilianist opponents would repeatedly flaunt against them.[22] Later Donatists did not highlight their predecessors' attempts to invoke imperial arbitration; rather, they focused on continued Caecilianist recourse to imperial power as a primary reason why the Caecilianists constituted an apostate church. Petilian would castigate his Caecilianist adversaries for their perceived belief that imperial recognition legitimized their claim by stating that "'There is no power but of God'—none in any man of power, as the Lord Jesus Christ answered Pontius Pilate. . . . Tell us therefore, *traditor*,

[22] In response to the Donatist argument "what have Christians to do with kings? Or what have bishops to do with the palace?," Optatus stated that "if knowing kings is something to be blamed, the whole opprobrium falls upon you," because, as he went on to state, it was the Donatist side which had first taken the matter to the state (Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, I.22 (Edwards, 22)).

when you received the power of imitating the mysteries."[23] The harnessing of imperial power to Caecilianist interests was explicitly deplored by Petilian, who accused the Caecilianists of subverting the intents of the Christian emperors by their propaganda: "you draw them wholly over to your wickedness, that with their arms, which were provided against the enemies of the state, they should assail the Christians, and should think that, at your instigation, they are doing the work of Christ if they kill us whom you hate."[24] The power of the state itself was not rebuked, nor was Petilian unaware that the current emperors were very different from their pagan predecessors (Petilian even notes that "God forbid" that the current emperors would "desire to be heathens" rather than Christians),[25] but Caecilianist attempts to utilize imperial power to achieve their goals were roundly denounced. Later Donatism, having come to terms with the fact that the Caecilianists had won the battle for imperial recognition, concentrated instead on proving that such recognition was not, after all, vital to the legitimacy of the true church.

The Universal Church

The area in which Donatism would change most profoundly, however, was in its attitude towards the transmarine churches. As has been previously discussed, early Donatists actively attempted to join the communion of the churches outside Africa, and this tendency could be seen as late as the 343 council of Serdica. After the Macarian persecution, however, a powerful faction arose within the Donatist movement which claimed that the transmarine churches had forfeited their titles due to their complicity in

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[23] Augustine, *Against Petilian*, II.31.70 (NPNF(1) 4, 547).

[24] Ibid, II.93.202 (NPNF(1) 4, 578).

[25] Ibid.

the Macarian persecution. While Augustine was to protest later that many of the outside churches had never even heard of such a repression,[26] many within the Donatist party begged to differ. As exiles, many of them had traveled throughout the western portions of the empire and had no doubt argued their cause within many transmarine bishoprics. The first post-Macarian Donatist bishop of Carthage, a non-African named Parmenian, represented the partial success of such endeavors.[27] What the exiles had mainly found, however, was a solid wall of support for the Caecilianist faction within the overseas bishoprics, despite the brutalities committed by the Macarian repression.

The psychological blow dealt by this discovery amply manifested itself in the changed line that many later Donatists took when questioned about their views concerning the outside churches. Mainstream Donatists, as represented by Parmenian, now espoused an ambivalent view concerning the validity of transmarine bishoprics. Instead of attempting to gain their communion, the most they would say was "We do not know whether there *may* be good Christians . . . in the transmarine world."[28] More rigorist viewpoints were also expressed. Many believed that it was indeed possible to state that the outside churches had definitively lost their claim to legitimacy. The prophesied "falling away" had come; henceforth the true church was confined to the south, where the Donatists were abundant. The passage "Where do you pasture your flocks, where do you make them lie down in the South?" was taken by many as a

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[26] See Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 10.5 (Boulding, Vol. 15, 165).

[27] See Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, II.7 (Edwards, 39).

[28] "Nescimus an sint per tot gentes terrarum transmarinarum boni christiani" Augustine, *Contra Parmeniani*, II.2.4 (PL 43.51-52). Italics mine. It is interesting to note that the only transmarine churches that Parmenian would specifically condemn were those of "the Gauls, the Spanish, the Italians, and their colleagues"—places where the Donatist exiles had specifically traversed during the days of the Macarian persecution (see *Contra Parmeniani*, I.2.2 (PL 43.35)).

prophecy of the location of Christ's true flock in the latter ages.[29] Try as they might to reinterpret this passage, more ecumenically-minded theologians such as Tyconius were largely unsuccessful in steering many later Donatists to the more universalist view which had predominated prior to the Macarian persecution.

Furthermore, these more separatist-minded elements within the Donatist communion demonstrated their antipathy towards the transmarine churches by requiring the rite of rebaptism to be performed on any foreigners who had joined themselves to their cause. Both Augustine and Optatus were quick to point out the seeming theological incongruities inherent in rebaptizing Christians from "Colossae, or Philippi, or Thessalonica," who could state, in Augustine's words, ""Do I have no true baptism, I who received letters from the apostle through whom you derived it? Do you presume to read a letter addressed to me, while setting your face against me?"[30] While such melodramatic incidences were no doubt rare, both Augustine and Optatus were able to claim proof of their occurrence.[31] There are enough alternate voices within the Donatist movement to demonstrate that not all Donatists agreed with a more exclusionary view of the transmarine churches, but at the same time it is clear that one major way in which later Donatism fundamentally differed from its earlier counterpart was in its ambivalence towards the overseas bishoprics.

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[29] Song of Solomon 1:6, quoted in Augustine, *Letter 93*.8.24 (Teske, Vol. I, 392).

[30] Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 36(2).23 (Boulding, Vol. 16, 128).

[31] See Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, II.12 (Edwards, 42): "If we displease you, what has the city of Antioch done do you, or the province of Arabia, whose inhabitants, as we can prove, you rebaptize when they come to you?" Also Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 10.5 (Boulding, Vol. 15, 165) and Psalm 36(2).23 (Boulding, Vol. 16, 128).

New Emphases

In addition to the practices and beliefs in later Donatism which evolved directly from their experience in the Macarian persecution, there were also doctrines present in the latter years of the movement which were only indirectly associated with the exile. These newer emphases represented instead the natural evolution of Donatist theology as it adapted itself to the changing milieu of the late fourth-century North African political and theological landscape.

Eschatology

One of the more noticeable of these newer points of doctrine concerned the Donatist use of eschatology as an apologetic weapon. While eschatological motifs had played a role in early Donatism's response to persecution, they had never truly espoused a coherent eschatology that bore distinctive characteristics in its own right. Indeed, as Maureen Tilley states, pre-Macarian Donatists and their immediate predecessors (i.e., the rigorists during the Diocletianic persecution) did not heavily utilize eschatological motifs.[32] This was especially true during the time between the founding of the Donatist movement and its suppression under Paulus and Macarius; eschatological themes are almost never mentioned. Rather, the emphasis is on perseverance through persecution and the glory of martyrdom. This was probably because the Donatist movement during this time had a specific *telos*—the overthrow of the Caecilianist bishopric of Carthage—and therefore apocalyptic overtones would have clashed with the goals of the movement. It is significant that the only explicit correlation of Caecilianist persecution with the

[32] Tilley, *Bible*, 54.

apocalypse occurs during the Macarian persecution, when such a *telos* came crashing down.[33]

In the aftermath of the emperor Julian's rescript allowing the exiles to return home, however, eschatological doctrine began to serve a different function—that of buttressing the claims of many Donatists to be the only true church. The argument that the gospel of Christ had already been preached to all nations, but that due to their (mis)use of their own free will, all of them save for the Donatist faction had since fallen away from the truth,[34] was a very potent doctrine which served as both a rationale for the refusal of the transmarine churches to commune with them and as a source of communal pride. It was exhilarating to believe that this act of separation had been prophesied from the beginning, that the Donatist party constituted the pure remnant that Christ would find when he returned.[35] Verses from Job and Song of Solomon were invoked in an effort to show that the location of this remnant had been pinpointed to the Donatist world: in the South was where the eschatological remnant would abide.[36] When Tyconius utilized the statement "The southern part, certainly, is the Lord's . . . the north is the devil's" as a starting point for his own universalist theology ("*and both parts appear in all the world*"), he was deliberately subverting the standard exegesis of many Donatists.[37] It is clear that despite Augustine's numerous attempts to overthrow this line of reasoning,

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[33] *Maximian and Isaac*, 10 (Tilley, 70).

[34] Augustine, *De Unitate Ecclesiae*, 9.23 (PL 43.406-407).

[35] Augustine, *Letter 93*.7.23 (Teske, Vol. I, 391).

[36] Job 11:7 and Song of Solomon 1:6.

[37] Tyconius, *Book of Rules*, VII (Babcock, 125).

many Donatists in the movement's later years viewed the divide between themselves and the Caecilianists through an eschatological lens.

Interestingly, there is no hint in any of Augustine's polemics (or elsewhere) that this use of an eschatological motif in order to prophetically justify their existence ever spilled over into a millennialist movement within the Donatist camp. The closest example one can find comes ironically from Tyconius, who appears to have believed that the end could be dated to within his own lifetime,[38] but he was far more interested in applying the events of the end typologically into his own time to serve as an example for the present than in starting a millennialist movement. Instead, Donatist use of eschatology during the later years of the movement constituted primarily an apologetic defense of their exclusivity and as such represented a significant evolution in doctrine.

Free Will

The most significant development to evolve in later Donatist theology was a strong emphasis on the necessity of free choice. While later Donatists such as Petilian would probably never have admitted it, in this new emphasis the Donatist party had moved far from its Cyprianic origins. Cyprian, while by no means a determinist,[39] had based his arguments on such subjects as sacramental sin and rebaptism on more physicalist assumptions. Sacraments given by a fallen (or schismatic) bishop were null and void because such a bishop, lacking the Spirit, had no power to bestow them. Likewise, those who joined in communion with such bishops were infected by their sin.

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[38] Ibid, V (Babcock, 107).

[39] c.f. his statement that "the liberty of believing or of not believing is placed in free choice" in *Three Books of Testimonies against the Jews* III.52, found in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 5: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian*, translated by Ernest Wallis (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 547.

Sin was conceived of as a virus which could transfer to others by association; as Cyprian would say, "all are, indeed, involved in sin who have been contaminated by the sacrifice of a blasphemous and unjust priest."[40] Cyprian emphasized the dangerous nature of a fallen bishop, who not only contaminated himself, but could contaminate others as well. Early Donatists had merely extended these arguments to the Caecilianists who, they argued, were schismatics worthy of precisely the same treatment that Cyprian had accorded to the Novatianists.[41] Later Donatists held to the same practical measures concerning the Caecilianists as had their forefathers, but they justified their practices from an entirely different angle: that of free will.

This preoccupation with free choice was widespread among later Donatists. While Petilian forms our main source for Donatist beliefs in the doctrine, Augustine's literary debates with other Donatists testify that free will was a common belief throughout the movement.[42] Tyconius also testifies that free will was a major concern among the Donatist theologians of his day, and while he qualified it with his own theory regarding a limited determinism, he did not negate the doctrine.[43] The absolute freedom of choice granted to humankind was used both positively and negatively in Donatist polemic. On the one hand, it formed the rationale behind their absolute opposition to

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[40] Cyprian, *Letter 67*.3 (Donna, 233). See also *Letter 70*.1 (Donna, 260): "But how can he who is himself unclean and with whom the Holy Spirit is not cleanse and sanctify water? . . . Or how can one who baptizes grant to another the remission of sins who, himself outside the Church, cannot put aside his own sins?"

[41] See Cyprian, *Letter 69*.9 (Donna, 251): "By this example it is shown and proved that all who have mixed themselves with irreligious rashness with schismatics against prelates and bishops will be liable both for the guilt and the punishment."

[42] See Augustine, *Letter 185*.6.22 (Teske, Vol. III, 192), *Letter 173*.2 (Teske, Vol. III, 125), and *Contra Gaudentium,* II.7.7 (PL 43.745) for examples.

[43] Tyconius, *Book of Rules*, III (Babcock, 39).

state coercion in matters of belief; as one of Augustine's opponents would state, "God gave us free choice . . . for this reason, a human being ought not to be forced even to what is good."[44] On the other hand, it was also an explanation for the falling away of the rest of the church, according to many Donatists.[45] Regardless of which use it was put to, the freedom to choose remained of the utmost importance to Donatists, for this was God's original plan: "I have placed before thee good and evil. I have set fire and water before thee; *choose which thou wilt*."[46]

When transferred into the realm of sacramental sin, the doctrine of free will posited a very different rationale for avoiding communion with fallen or schismatic bishops than Cyprian's theology had. In later Donatist theology, the actual sins that such bishops had committed had no direct bearing on their ability to administer the sacraments, which, according to Parmenian, were dependent on the *dotes*, or divine rights, of the church, not the individual worth of a bishop.[47] A bishop who was living in secret sin could continue to administer valid sacraments to his congregation as long as his sin was not discovered.[48] Once it was, however, it was the duty of his congregation to separate themselves from him—not because his sins had the power to contaminate them, but because if they remained in communion with him of their own free will, it could only

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[44] "Dicis Deum dedisse liberum arbitrium; ideo non debere cogi hominem nec ad bonum." Augustine, *Letter 173*.2 (Teske, Vol. III, 125).

[45] "With free choice man has been created, and if he wills to, he believes in Christ; if he does not will to, he does not believe. . . . Therefore when the church had begun to grow throughout the whole world, humans were not willing to persevere and the Christian religion became extinct in all nations except the party of Donatus." Augustine, *De Unitate Ecclesiae*, 9.23 (PL 43.407).

[46] Sirach 15:17-18, freely quoted in *Against Petilian* II.85.185 (NPNF(1) 4, 573). Italics mine.

[47] See Maureen Tilley's argument in *Bible*, 101-103.

[48] c.f. Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, II.9 (Edwards, 40): "You have said that, if a priest is in sin, the gifts can work on their own." See also Augustine, *Letter 87*.1 (Teske, Vol. I, 344-45).

mean that they implicitly condoned his actions, thus sharing in his sin. No outside force was in control of such congregations. They decided for themselves whether to unite themselves to a fallen bishop and thus to *participate* in his sin, or to separate from him and remain pure. While the end result was precisely what Cyprian and earlier Donatists had advocated, the rationale for taking such actions came from an entirely different corner.

Where this intersection between the sacraments and freedom of choice played out most prominently was in the contentious issue of rebaptism. Augustine, in his refutation of Petilian's letters, could not figure out why the Donatist bishop had been so touchy about his leaving out one word from the relevant quote: "Why therefore did he add what he made so much of adding,—the word *wittingly*, which he calumniously accused me of having suppressed?"[49] By removing that particular word, Augustine had in his previous polemic utilized Petilian's quote to argue against the potential absurdities in the old Cyprianic view that a fallen bishop's sacramental functions were null (what if a bishop who had baptized persons for his whole career was found out to have been in sin all along? Were *all* of his baptisms void?). But the inclusion of the word "wittingly" ("sciens") was a crucial plank in Petilian's argument, and represented a substantial difference between Cyprianic theology and his own beliefs. In Petilian's view, the efficacy of one's baptism depended primarily on what baptism one *believed* oneself to be baptized into. Such an emphasis on freedom of choice cleared up some of the issues within the old Cyprianic theology by positing that if a person who had been baptized by a

[49] Augustine, *Against Petilian*, III.27.32 (NPNF(1) 4, 609). Augustine then attempted to show that Petilian's preoccupation with the word *wittingly* played right into Caecilianist hands, entirely misrepresenting the Donatist bishop's doctrine.

bishop who later was found to have been in sin had sincerely believed that he was being baptized into the true church, and had not consciously condoned the sins of that bishop, his baptism was valid.

On the other hand, this freedom of choice carried an enormous weight of responsibility. Petilian aggressively sniped at Augustine regarding his own baptism: had the bishop of Hippo truly inquired as to what communion *he* had been baptized into? If Augustine had carefully investigated the identity of his baptizers, he would have discovered their persecution of the true church, their instigation of coercive measures, their association with *traditores*. Free will in baptism meant that, in one sense, a person could choose her own communion. If she freely chose to be baptized by the wrong group, she contaminated herself as surely as if she had actually participated in their evil deeds. The importance of free will to baptism, therefore, was such that, as Petilian stated to Augustine, "you are bound both to examine your baptizer, and to be examined by him.[50]

Conclusion

The development of a robust emphasis on free will within the Donatist movement represented a major evolution from the theology which had characterized its earlier years. So, too, did the new emphasis on eschatology as an apologetic tool, and the multiplicity of views concerning the universal church and the relationship between church and state which flourished among later Donatists. Donatism had evolved significantly since its initial inception, and the diversity of views which distinguished its later theology from its earlier beliefs reflects the normal path of a movement which had moved beyond the

[50] Ibid.

original rationale for its creation. This is not to say, however, that the Donatist beliefs expressed at the 411 council of Carthage would have been incomprehensible to the founders of the schism. While many of its beliefs inevitably experienced significant evolution, the movement was also characterized by continuity in its core beliefs. While a free will emphasis might approach the issue of rebaptism differently than had the old Cyprianic argument, it would lead to the same practical action. Like the evolution of the Christian church as a whole, late Donatism would have been seen as both radically different and substantially the same to the founders of the movement.

CHAPTER SIX

Two Opposing Tendencies

"Rejoice and exult, holy mother Church. Instructed in heavenly teachings, you struggle unsullied in a battle for which you cannot be blamed. If you have to resist, you resist with the power of the soul, not with arms; if you fight, it is with faith not force."

–Donatus

"They live like robbers; they die like Circumcellions; they are honored like martyrs."

–Augustine

Introduction

Up to this point, the discussion of theological and ideological varieties within the Donatist movement has been confined to a study of the evolution of Donatist theology throughout time. To this end, Chapter Three focused on the beginning and early years of the schism, and Chapter Four on its later development. Chapter Five then juxtaposed the findings of the two previous chapters together in order to highlight how Donatist theology changed over the years. Beginning with this chapter, however, the thesis will take a different direction. Rather than focusing on the temporal variety within Donatism, these later chapters will instead examine its *spatial* diversity—i.e., the tendencies which in political terms might be called the right and left wings of the movement. It will be argued in the present chapter that there existed two distinctive ideologies within the Donatist church, which for the sake of typology will be designated the *Church of the Martyrs* and the *Church of the Pure*, or in abbreviated form as Martyrists and Purists. These two broad worldviews constituted the right and left wings of the Donatist church, respectively, and they appear to have been present from the very beginning of the schism.

The typological designation Church of the Martyrs stands for the well-known tendency of Donatists to place a high value on martyrdom, a preoccupation which ultimately expressed itself in the turbulent excesses of the Agonistici.[1] Its primary rationale for opposing Mensurius and Caecilian was that they had denigrated the martyrs. Martyrists gloried in persecutions and venerated those who stood firm in the face of them. The Church of the Pure, on the other hand, stood for the alternate viewpoint that the primary difference between Donatists and Caecilianists was one of moral purity—Donatism represented a line free from the taint of *traditores*, and the ultimate goal for a true Donatist was a life of holiness, unpolluted by association with defiled members. For them, Mensurius and Caecilian were above all to be censured for their self-defiling associations with *traditores*.

For the most part, these views complemented each other. Certainly, both sides revered the martyrs and each claimed purity, and there exist many Donatist writings which extol both virtues simultaneously.[2] After all, it was a dispute over the sacramental pollution of those who during the Diocletianic persecution had preferred to become *traditores* rather than be martyred for the faith which had led to the schism in the first place. A concern for both martyrdom and purity were thus intrinsically bound into the Donatist movement as a whole. Yet there did exist tensions between the two viewpoints, which stemmed from the fact that each held differing views concerning the ultimate reason for the existence of the movement. The worldview represented by Purist typology

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[1] As will be discussed in the following chapter.

[2] Such as this statement by the Abitinian Martyrs: "They [the martyrs] sealed with their own blood the verdict against the traitors and their associates, rejecting them from the communion of the Church. For it was not right that there should be martyrs and traitors in the Church of God at the same time." (*Abitinian Martyrs*, 2 (Tilley, 29))

relied above all on its status as the undefiled and pacifistic church, and heavily emphasized the tainted clerical lines of the Caecilianists. It viewed the persecutions imposed by the Caecilianists as little more than proof of their apostate status, for the true church "is the one that suffers persecution, not the one that inflicts it."[3] In contrast, the Church of the Martyrs saw its *raison d'etre* as a breeding-ground for the martyrs. It possessed a positive view of persecution, seeing it as a testing ground which allowed worthy individuals to perfect their faith by paying the ultimate price. While for the most part these two tendencies worked side-by-side to form the mainstream Donatist worldview, dissention could arise when adherents excessively emphasized one of these facets to the detriment of the other.

Throughout the history of the Donatist church, one finds evidence of tensions which occurred within the movement when individuals or factions veered too far towards either end of the spectrum for the taste of the mainstream. These tensions stood out most clearly when outright schism occurred on their account, of which the best examples are the Rogatist and Maximianist schisms. In their attempts to separate themselves from even their fellow Donatists on account of their alleged impurity, both schisms veered more towards the Church of the Pure. The opposite disposition may be seen in the often fractious relationship that the mainstream Donatist movement had with the Agonistici, which resulted from the fanatical inclination of the latter towards a Martyrist worldview. Before delving into these more extreme examples of the right and left wings of the Donatist movement, however, it is necessary to examine how the two tendencies affected mainstream Donatism itself throughout its history.

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[3] "Illam esse veram Ecclesiam quae persecutionem patitur, non quae facit." Augustine, *Letter 185*.2.10 (Teske, Vol. III, 185).

The Church of the Pure

The tendency which distinguished itself predominantly by its focus on the purity of the church contributed much to the development of Donatist thought. It was the formal rationale behind the original schism, which based its right to depose Caecilian on the fact that he had consented to be ordained by a presumed *traditor*. While it may be seen from their earlier correspondence that Secundus and Mensurius had also held profoundly different views regarding the status of the martyrs, these disagreements were not officially expressed in any of the appeals to the state. Early Donatist appeals focused rather on the accusation that their adversaries had either been or communed with *traditores*; only in popular pamphlets did another angle emerge which castigated Caecilianist animosity towards the martyrs.[4] This emphasis on purity also gave the Donatist movement one of its most recognizable tenets—that the Caecilianist side was no church at all, having lost its claim by its association with the impure bishopric of Carthage. Donatist *acta* invariably present the Donatist side as the Catholic church or "the Christian people," and its opponents as *traditores* or the forces of Antichrist.[5]

In Purist eyes, any proposed attempts at unification with the Caecilianists were considered less a reconciliation between two opposing sides as a joining of what was pure to what was impure, clean to unclean. "Go out from their midst, and be separate," quoted the Abitinian martyrs, "and do not touch the unclean."[6] Unity with the *traditores* was

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[4] Such as the *Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs*, which while mentioning Mensurius' traditorship with disdain, is far more concerned with the fact that he and Caecilian had actively opposed the confessors.

[5] *Abitinian Martyrs*, 22 (Tilley, 47).

[6] Ibid. They also stated that the confessors and the *traditores* were "as contrary to each other as light is to darkness, life to death, a holy angel to the devil, Christ to the Antichrist." (*Abitinian Martyrs*, 22 (Tilley, 47)).

unthinkable: "it was not right that there should be martyrs and traitors in the Church of God at the same time."[7] Later generations echoed their warnings. Donatus preached during the early Caecilianist repressions that only "one who corrupts holy discipline could violate the chastity of faith under the by-word of unity, i.e., by compelling unity with himself, not with God."[8] The Caecilianist party, in fact, did not truly constitute a legitimate side that could be rejoined, according to Donatists. They believed that the original rift was not so much a schism as a cleansing; those who constituted the true church had continued to uphold the purity of the institution, while those who had betrayed it had simply been expelled. Those who remained with Caecilian after his deposition had joined themselves, not to an alternate church (albeit schismatic), but rather to the party of Satan.[9] Caecilianists were not "inveterate schismatics," as Augustine would claim concerning the Donatist party,[10] but rather the "enemy of salvation."[11] Against Augustine's argument that the Donatists were outside the bounds of the Catholic church due to their lack of communion with the outside world, Petilian would claim that "it is clear that *you* are not in the whole [Catholic Church], because you have gone aside into the part."[12]

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[7] Ibid, 2 (Tilley, 29).

[8] *Donatus and Advocatus*, 5 (Tilley, 56).

[9] See, for example, *Abitinian Martyrs*, 22 (Tilley, 47) and *Donatus and Advocatus*, 2 (Tilley, 53).

[10] Augustine, *Contra Cresconium,* II.8.10 (PL 43.472).

[11] *Donatus and Advocatus*, 3 (Tilley, 54). This epithet was more than Optatus of Milevis, at least, was willing to go. In his arguments against the Donatists, Optatus appears to have envisioned some sort of purgatorial penance in the afterlife for Donatists or at least a diminishment of their celestial rewards, but not damnation. See Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, V.10 (Edwards, 113-114): "For when anyone has consented to be rebaptized by you, there is no denying the resurrection of this person, since has he believed in the resurrection of the body; he will arise indeed, but naked."

[12] "Ecce in toto non estis, quia in parte cessistis." Augustine, *Against Petilian*, II.38.90 (NPNF(1) 4, 554). Italics mine.

So far as the Purist element within the Donatist party was concerned, true "Catholicism" was rather defined as the purity which resulted from unswerving obedience to the commandments.[13] This was at the heart of Purist mentality: the true Christian was defined by her adherence to the Law.[14] There was no question about the importance of the Scriptures to the Donatist faction—their entire schism had been based on the proper treatment of the sacred texts in the face of persecution. When faced with a choice between surrendering the Scriptures and surviving, Donatist heroes, such as Felix of Thibiuca, would inevitably reply "It is better for me to be burned in the fire than the sacred Scriptures, because it is better to obey God than any human authority."[15] And when Fundanus, the former bishop of Abitene, dared to surrender the Scriptures, "rain suddenly poured out of a clear sky . . . hail stones fell and the whole area was devastated by raging weather on behalf of the Scriptures of the Lord."[16] If the physical books were important enough to warrant divine intervention, their contents must surely be obeyed.[17] This was certainly the point that the Abitinian confessors derived from the omen: when

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[13] See Augustine, *Letter 93*.7.23 (Teske, Vol. I, 391).

[14] Maureen Tilley has noted that the characteristic term for the Scriptures among the Donatists was "Law," as opposed to Caecilianists, who differentiated between the different genres of the Bible. This emphasis on the legal character of the entire Bible reflects Purist ideology. See Tilley, *Bible*, 155.

[15] *Acts of Felix*, 3 (Tilley, 10).

[16] *Abitinian Martyrs*, 3 (Tilley, 30).

[17] Stories of miraculous intervention in order to preserve sacred artifacts were a part of the fabric of Christian literature at the time, and were common to both Purist and Martyrist strains. A Martyrist counterpart occurs in *The Passion of Maximian and Isaac*, 13-16 (Tilley, 71-74), in which the bodies of martyrs during the Macarian persecution, weighted down and thrown into the sea to prevent their veneration, miraculously floated back to the waiting Donatist congregation and were given the "interment due them," as Christ "would not permit the bodies of such people to be unburied."

confronting the proconsul, their sole defense for their noncompliance was to take refuge in the Scriptures: "Thus does the Law order. Thus does the Law teach."[18]

In its most distilled form, then, the Purist tendency within Donatism saw its ultimate rationale for existence in faithful adherence to the Law. As Tyconius would later state, "What we want is holiness."[19] This was coupled with the necessity of separating oneself from any who did not keep the Law—*traditores*, unrepentant sinners, and those who communed with them and thus partook in their deeds. Petilian would best articulate this facet when he stated of his fellow Donatists that "they are all bound by this prohibition: 'be not partakers in other men's sins.'"[20] Tyconius, who has often been misrepresented as an opponent of this kind of Purist theology,[21] was in this particular instance staunchly on Petilian's side. While he would never have countenanced the more radical interpretations espoused by some of the more conservative Donatists, such as their denial of the universality of the church, Tyconius was no supporter of a laxist view concerning the necessity of separation from defiled persons. If anything, his theology was even more cognizant of the radical necessity for separation than theirs. Unlike some more idealistic interpretations within the Donatist community which emphasized the Church as a pure remnant in the midst of corruption, Tyconius was keenly aware that defiled persons existed at every level of the Donatist church itself.[22] This depressing fact

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[18] "Lex sic iubet, lex sic docet." Ibid, 11 (Tilley, 35-36).

[19] "Quod volumus sanctum est." This quote is noted several times by Augustine. See *Letter 93*.4.14 (Teske, Vol. I, 385), 10.43 (Teske, Vol. I, 402), and *Contra Parmeniani,* II.13.31 (PL 43.73).

[20] Augustine, *Against Petilian*, II.107.242 (NPNF(1) 4, 594).

[21] Augustine, in particular, attempted to present him in such a light in *Contra Parmeniani,* I.1.1 (PL 43.35). Unfortunately, his characterization has been taken at face-value by many scholars.

[22] See Tyconius, *Book of Rules*, III (Babcock, 51): "Yet Jacob, i.e., the church, never comes for blessing without concomitant deceit, i.e., without false brethren," or I (Babcock, 19): "By no means is the

was not, however, a license to ignore their presence; on the contrary, it was the duty of the true Christian to root such sinners out as soon as they were revealed.[23] The present was the time for such action: "Is it only at the hour when the Lord is revealed in his coming that a person ought not to turn back for his belongings and ought to have remembered Lot's wife—and not also *before* he is revealed?"[24] When it came to the duty of the Church to separate itself from sinners, Tyconius held to thoroughly Purist views.

Pacifist Tendencies

In his plaintive cry "What we want is holiness," Tyconius also bears witness to a by-product of the Purist mindset within Donatism: the tendency to rhetorically emphasize the virtues of absolute pacifism and its integral importance as an identifying marker of Christ's true church. Such emphatic denouncements of the use of force often greatly bemused Optatus and Augustine, who did not appreciate the tensions within the movement between Purist and Martyrist propensities. While there was a tendency within the Martyrist movement towards violent deeds, such actions were decried by those who gravitated more towards Purist theology. The distinction between the two poles within Donatism continuously frustrated Augustine, who caustically noted "You say that you are suffering persecution, and we are being killed by your people with clubs and swords.

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church—"which has no spot or wrinkle," which the Lord cleansed by his own blood—black in any part, except in the left-hand part through which "the name of God is blasphemed among the gentiles."

[23] Ibid, VI (Babcock, 85): "All this happens spiritually, just as it is written of the same Babylon: 'happy is the man who takes and dashes your little children against the rock.' For he did not call the king of the Medes happy . . . but rather the church which 'takes and dashes' the children of Babylon 'against the rock' of the stumbling block. And it 'keeps it in check,' as it is written: 'which now keeps it in check, until it passes from the midst.'"

[24] "Numquid illa hora qua Dominus revelatus fuerit adventu suo non debet quis converti ad ea quae sua sunt et uxoris Loth meminisse, et non antequam reveletur?" Ibid, VI (Babcock, 109-111). Italics mine.

You say that you are suffering persecution, and our homes are destroyed by the pillaging of your armed people. You say that you are suffering persecution, and our eyes are put out by your people armed with lime and acid."[25] The problem with his arguments was that they were aimed at the wrong crowd: his direct opponents were just as scandalized by the conduct of their fellow believers as he was.[26] How little Augustine appreciated the difference between the two tendencies may be especially noted in his letter to Vincent, the Rogatist bishop of Cartenna, where he stated that "You certainly seem to us less fierce, since you do not run wild with the savage bands of Circumcellions, but no wild animal is called tame if it injures no one because it lacks teeth or claws. You say that you do not want to act savagely; I suspect that you cannot."[27] His argument here conveniently ignored the fact that the primary reason for the Rogatist schism in the first place was their absolute commitment to pacifism and their dismay over the violent acts of their brethren.

Testimony to the pervasiveness of pacifistic beliefs within the Donatist movement can be found throughout the years of its existence. Donatus the Great thundered from his pulpit "Rejoice and exult, holy mother Church. Instructed in heavenly teachings, you struggle unsullied in a battle for which you cannot be blamed. If you have to resist, you

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[25] Augustine, *Letter 88*.8 (Teske, Vol. I, 356).

[26] See, for example, Augustine, *Letter 87*.8 (Teske, Vol. I, 348-49): "But our people seek protection from the established authority against the illicit and private acts of violence, acts over which you yourselves, who do not do such actions, sorrow and groan." This is also attested to in *Against Petilian* I.24.26 (NPNF(1) 4, 528). Augustine never quite believed the Donatists when they claimed to abhor the acts of their fellow believers, however; more common was his statement in *Contra Parmeniani,* III.3.18 (PL 43.96), where he implied that the Donatists of his day secretly admired the violent excesses of Optatus of Thamugadi, and only refrained from imitating his deeds at the present because they "were not of so great a strength as Optatus."

[27] Augustine, *Letter 93*.3.11 (Teske, Vol. I, 383).

resist with the power of the soul, not with arms; if you fight, it is with faith not force."[28] His successor Parmenian likewise articulated a pacifist approach to the schism. Optatus records that when faced with Caecilianist polemic which justified their recourse to force during the Macarian persecution by citing the examples of Old Testament patriarchs who had used the sword, Parmenian distinguished between the acts allowed under the Old Law and the New, causing Optatus to complain: "But I see that at this point you distinguish times, making the times before the Gospel one thing, those after it another; in the latter you can say, as it is written, that Peter already put away the sword with which he had cut off the ear of the high priest's slave."[29] In the later years of the schism, numerous Donatists are recorded by Augustine to have vociferously denied the use of force as an acceptable tool for the church. Most prominent among these was Petilian, who would state that "Jesus Christ never persecuted any one. And when the apostle found fault with certain parties, and suggested that He should have recourse to persecution. . . . Jesus said, 'Let them alone; if they are not against you, they are on your side.'"[30]

Associated with this emphasis on pacifism was the Purist belief that persecution constituted an aberration in the normal Christian life. Purists emphasized the negative consequences that persecution had on the freedom of choice essential to belief, arguing

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[28] *Donatus and Advocatus*, 14 (Tilley, 60).

[29] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, III.7 (Edwards, 74) . According to Parmenian, Macarius had rebelled against the guide of Scripture when he drew out the sword that Peter had been told to sheathe (III.8 (Edwards, 74)).

[30] Augustine, *Against Petilian*, II.81.177 (NPNF(1) 4, 571).

that it served as a stumbling-block for many would-be believers.[31] Purists highly revered those who had given up their lives for the faith, to be sure, but they did not believe that the normal state of the Christian church was to be a persecuted minority. They sought, instead, to be legitimized as the Christian faith in the eyes of the state, or at least left alone to freely practice their beliefs. Consequentially, they protested against the Caecilianist persecutions far more than did their Martyrist counterparts.

Examples which show Donatist bishops attempting to dissuade Caecilianists from persecuting their flocks date back to the Macarian persecution. At the outset of that repression, the Numidians sent an assembly of ten bishops to Macarius in order to "dissuade him from such a crime by their wholesome admonitions;" if they failed, then it was their duty that "whatever cruelty might threaten the sheep should first tear at their own limbs."[32] Tyconius strongly reproved the Caecilianists for their reliance on force, stating that "If he believes in Christ incarnate, let him stop hating the members of Christ. If he believes the Word became flesh, why does he persecute the Word in the flesh? . . . He has declared that there is no greater or plainer sign for recognizing Antichrist than a person who denies Christ in the flesh, i.e., who hates his brother."[33] Petilian echoed him, castigating the Caecilianists in similar terms:

> The Lord Jesus Christ commands us, saying, 'When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another. . .' If He gives us this warning in the case of Jews and pagans, you who call yourself a Christian ought not to imitate the dreadful deeds of the Gentiles. Or do you serve God in such wise that we should be murdered at

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[31] See *Maximian and Isaac*, 3 (Tilley, 64-65) for Donatist condemnation of persecution because it interfered with the free choice of would-be adherents.

[32] Note Marculus' rationale for attempting to dissuade the imperial authorities from initiating persecution against his flock in *Martyrdom of Marculus*, 3 (Tilley, 80).

[33] Tyconius, *Book of Rules*, VI (Babcock, 113).

> your hands? You do err, you do err, if you are wretched enough to entertain such a belief as this. For God does not have butchers for His priests.[34]

Persecution was not the normal way of life for the believer, according to the Purist tendency within Donatism. Unlike Martyrist interpretations, therefore, it was to be avoided if possible, and its rhetorical implications were limited to castigating the Caecilianists for daring to use "the sword that Peter had put away in its sheath."[35]

The Donatist "Collecta"

A concept approaching the Church of the Pure typology has been noted by Maureen Tilley in her article detailing the Donatist use of the term "collecta."[36] She noted that this term appears to have had special significance for the Donatist church and that they often utilized it as a means of self-identification. The word itself was derived from the Latin translation of the Old Testament, and most often referred to the people of Israel. In Tilley's words, "The Bible used *collecta* and its synonym *coetus*, for the people of Israel specifically under the aspect of a ritually pure people over and against the surrounding society."[37] Such an image was clearly ripe for appropriation by the Donatist church, which emphasized its pure status vis-à-vis the defiled Caecilianists. Just as Israel had been set apart by God from the surrounding nations, so the Donatists were now called to set themselves apart from the false believers who surrounded them. The concept was taken even further within some Donatist circles, who identified themselves with the pure

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[34] Augustine, *Against Petilian*, II.19.42 (NPNF(1) 4, 539).

[35] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, III.8 (Edwards, 74).

[36] Maureen Tilley, "Sustaining Donatist Self-Identity: From the Church of the Martyrs to the *Collecta* of the Desert" in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 5 (Spring 1997), 21-35.

[37] Tilley, "Collecta," 25.

remnant of Judah which had clung to the Davidic monarchy when the majority of the tribes had rebelled.[38]

A distinctively Donatist use of the term *collecta* can first be found in the *Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs*.[39] In fact, according to Tilley, the term was not used in the West before this time, at least in a positive sense.[40] It was also found in other early Donatist manuscripts, such as a letter from the Donatist bishop Purpurius to the presbyters of Cirta contained in the *Proceedings before Zenophilus*.[41] The word figured most prominently in the 411 Council of Carthage, in which the Donatist leaders repeatedly appealed to the example of the pure assembly (*collecta*) of Israel in order to justify their separation from the Caecilianists.[42] Augustine himself recognized the importance of this typology to the Donatist party, castigating them for their attempts to utilize the falling away of the ten tribes as a type of the conflict between themselves and the Caecilianists.[43]

What is interesting about the Donatist use of the word *collecta* to refer to themselves and their positive identification with the tribes of Israel is that such a concept was foreign to most patristic thought, according to Tilley.[44] The Caecilianists, certainly, did not utilize the term, although Tilley notes that this was probably because it had

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[38] *Liber Genealogicus*, 546 (in Mo*numenta Germaniae Historica Auctores Antiquissimi*, Vol.9: *Chronoca Minora Saec. IV. V. VI. VII*, edited by Theodor Mommsen (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892; reprinted, Munich: Strauss and Cramer, 1981). While Tilley does mention this text in *Bible*, 152, she does not connect it to the "collecta" idea.

[39] See, for example, *Abitinian Martyrs* 7 (Tilley, 33), 11 (Tilley, 35-36) and 13 (Tilley, 37-38).

[40] Tilley, "Collecta," 26-27.

[41] Ibid, 28.

[42] Ibid, 30.

[43] Augustine, *De Unitate Ecclesiae*, 13.33 (PL 43.416-417).

[44] Tilley, "Collecta," 23.

become a Donatist byword and therefore suspect.[45] Most Caecilianist exegesis treated the Israelites in a negative manner, concentrating on their multiple failures. The Donatist movement appears to be unique in its positive use of the term for their own self-identity.[46] By their distinctive utilization of the term *collecta* to refer to themselves, the Donatist party was able to identify itself as the assembly of the pure that existed in the midst of its defiled neighbors.

Tilley's argument that the Donatist church identified itself as the typological *collecta* of Israel fits well with the Purist typology that is discussed in this paper. Unfortunately, she explicitly posits the concept in contradistinction to the Church of the Pure (though in her work the term represents a slightly different typological designation), stating that "separatism, not purity, was the watchword of the age."[47] Part of the problem is that Tilley arduously distinguishes between the early Cyprianic-based theology of the Donatist church, which viewed the church as a pure remnant and did not deal well with the idea of secret sinners within it, from the later, more nuanced theologies of Parmenian and Tyconius, who had evolved means of accepting the possibility of sinners within the church (as demonstrated by her concept of a *collecta*).[48] Such distinctions, while helpful, may be subsumed into the Church of the Pure typology as defined within this paper. Another issue is that Tilley is unwilling to recognize another concurrent tendency which

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[45] Ibid, 33.

[46] Ibid, 23.

[47] Tilley, *Bible*, 179.

[48] Ibid, 178-179. "

had developed alongside the Church of the Pure: that of the Church of the Martyrs.[49] This is because she does not believe that the Circumcellions, or Agonistici, were truly representatives of Donatist theology in their own right, preferring to classify them as migrant farm laborers who were only loosely affiliated with the movement.[50] While it is certainly true that the Agonistici were far more interested in the practical application of their beliefs than in a nuanced articulation of them, it will be argued in this paper that they do indeed represent a valid form of Donatist theology towards which many mainstream Donatists were sympathetic.

The Church of the Martyrs

The primary alternative to the Purist tendency within Donatism was expressed by the Church of the Martyrs. Unlike the Church of the Pure, the Church of the Martyrs represented a militant Church, an "Army of the Lord," to quote the Abitinian martyrs.[51] In most instances, this militancy expressed itself in the spiritual battles fought by the confessors—but often martial imagery spilled over onto the physical plane as well. While reverence towards the martyrs also fit well within Purist ideology, the Church of the Martyrs objectified martyrdom as the ultimate goal of the true Christian. To the Martyrists, persecutions were not the terrible events that the Purists made them out to be; rather than repressing the freedom of choice, they served as the ultimate test of its authenticity. Christ had warned that true Christians would always be hated by the world,

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[49] Tilley does in fact acknowledge the Church of the Martyrs (*Bible*, 178), but strictly limits its influence to the early period of Donatism. After the Macarian persecution, she claims, such a self-designation died away.

[50] Tilley, *Bible*, 94: "The rebellion was joined by many Circumcellions, religiously conservative migrant agricultural laborers who were usually, although not always, Donatist supporters."

[51] "Exercitus Domini." *Abitinian Martyrs*, 2 (Tilley, 28).

that it would persecute them just as surely as it had persecuted Christ;[52] friendship with the world was defined by the Apostle James as enmity towards God.[53] Persecution thus formed an integral part of the life of any true believer, and when during periods of Donatist ascendancy the movement ceased to be actively persecuted by the state, it became necessary to find alternate means to continue the martyr's path.

A major facet of Martyrist theology was its view that persecution was the primary identifying marker of the true church; sacramental purity was only of secondary importance. In Martyrist eyes, a case could be made that the persecuted church formed the only valid church—a church that had made its peace with the world was no church at all. This was the main way that one could distinguish between the Donatist and Caecilianist churches; so long as the Donatist side remained persecuted by the Caecilianists, no other argument was necessary to convince the Martyrists that the Donatists constituted the true church. In his debate with Augustine, the Donatist bishop Fortuanius held to such a stance, claiming of the Donatists that "their followers were Christians because they suffer persecution."[54] Likewise, the Donatists at the 411 Council of Carthage stated that "the true church is the one that suffers persecution, not the one that inflicts it."[55]

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[52] John 15:19-20: "Because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." (NKJV)

[53] James 4:4.

[54] Augustine, *Letter 44*.2.4 (Teske, Vol. I, 175). Fortuanius based his statement on the Scriptural argument that "blessed are those who suffer persecution on account of justice." (Matthew 5:10)

[55] Augustine, *Letter 185*.2.10 (Teske, Vol. III, 185). Such a statement could be interpreted in Purist or Martyrist ways, exemplifying the way in which mainstream Donatism seamlessly combined both tendencies. A Purist reading would emphasize the second phrase ("not the one that inflicts it") in order to castigate the Caecilianists for their resorting to force, while a Martyrist reading would emphasize the first

Another aspect which distinguished the Martyrists from Purists was that their rhetorical tendency to lapse into martial imagery occasionally crossed over to a literal application. For all their talk about how persecution was the defining marker of the true church, Martyrists themselves proved surprisingly less reticent than Purists to retaliate against their oppressors. This was probably due to the highly militant rhetoric of their exhortations, which characteristically portrayed Christians as "the army of the Lord," arrayed in battle against the spiritual enemy.[56] While the *Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs* was careful to note that "this battle was to be fought not so much against human beings as against the devil," this distinction was glossed over by other writers.[57] This rhetorical tendency, along with the zealous fanaticism which often drove would-be martyrs, often led to combat on a more material plane. Willing to voluntarily give up their own lives in order to achieve perfection, many held the lives of others in similar disdain. The actions of Optatus of Thamugadi, who during his brief ascendancy as the familiar of Gildo savagely repressed the Caecilianists and Maximianists under his control, reflect this tendency. Here too belong the well-known actions of the Agonistici, who were repeatedly castigated by Caecilianists as being nothing more than religious terrorists.

Maureen Tilley duly acknowledges the Martyrist tendency during the early years of Donatist existence, but insists that after the end of the Macarian persecution, the

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phrase ("the true church is the one that suffers persecution"), viewing persecution as an intrinsic aspect of the true church.

[56] *Abitinian Martyrs*, 2 (Tilley, 28-29).

[57] Note how Secunda views her persecutors as directly possessed by demons in *Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda* 3 (Tilley, 20), and how the author of the *Passion of Maximian and Isaac* states that the devil "sought out and chose the heart of a judge suited to himself . . . he made himself subordinate to a proconsul who was his equal in desire." (*Maximian and Isaac*, 3 (Tilley, 64)) Such identifications of human authorities with demonic forces blurs the demarcation theoretically established by the author of the *Abitinian Martyrs*.

Martyrists died out.[58] Certainly the end of active persecution for a time forced them to branch into new directions, but the movement was by no means dead during the later years of Donatism. The existence of the Agonistici, who will be discussed in the next chapter, provides outstanding evidence to the contrary. Clearly, the Martyrist path was more of a mindset than a systematic theology. The outstanding theologians produced by the Donatist church leaned more towards Purist ideology, while Martyrist writings tended to show up more in popular format, such as martyrologies and sermons, than in theological treatises. Nevertheless, they constituted an integral part of the Donatist movement, indeed furnishing some of the traits most remembered by its opponents. Even Greek writers who were under the impression that Donatism represented some aberrational form of Arianism had heard of the fanatical tendencies of the Agonistici towards martyrdom.[59]

The tendency towards the Church of the Martyrs is attested to throughout Donatist history. It was especially prominent among the proto-Donatists during the Diocletianic persecution, and certainly contributed to the exacerbation of tensions between Mensurius and the confessors. Mensurius, after all, was not intrinsically opposed to the martyrs. Rather, according to his letter to Secundus, his irritation was aimed at those who deliberately sought out persecution, who "voluntarily said that they had the Scriptures from whom nobody had sought,"[60] thus making it difficult for the rest of the church to lie low. His decision to block the doorway to the prison where the confessors were held was due to his belief that those inside had deliberately provoked the authorities—their blood

[58] Tilley, *Bible*, 178.

[59] See, for example, Theodoret, *Compendium*, IV.6 (PG 83.423).

[60] Augustine, *Breviculus Collationis,* III.13.25 (PL 43.638).

was on their own hands.[61] The *Passion of Saints Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda* amply testifies to this kind of triumphalist spirit towards the persecution. In the narrative, every Christian on their imperial estate, when called to sacrifice, denied Christ save for Maxima and Donatilla, prompting their scornful words "People nowadays are weak."[62] These two women, consecrated virgins, were taken into custody, joined soon after by Secunda, who had jumped off a balcony in order to join them.[63] In response to the admonition of the proconsul Anulinus to "consider your situation . . . lest you suffer torture," they replied, "Your tortures will be very useful to my soul."[64] The Abitinian Martyrs also mirrored such a militant and obstinate response to persecution. The martyrs were revered as "the bravest soldiers of Christ, the unconquered warriors,"[65] and their opposition to imperial edicts was narrated in specifically military terms: "But the army of the lord did not accept such a monstrous order and it bristled at the sacrilegious command. Quickly it seized the arms of faith and descended into battle."[66] The author of the narrative, moreover, stated that his purpose in writing was to encourage Christians to "prepare our very selves for martyrdom by imitating them."[67] The Donatists of the schism were certainly cognizant of

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[61] Ibid. Mensurius believed that many of the so-called confessors were merely opportunists, "who on the occasion of persecution either wanted to be free from the many debts that burdened life, or thought to cleanse themselves, both as though to wash away their crimes, or surely to accrue money, and in prison to enjoy the pleasures of attendance of Christians."

[62] *Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda*, 4 (Tilley, 22).

[63] Ibid (Tilley, 21).

[64] Ibid, 3 (Tilley, 20).

[65] *Abitinian Martyrs*, 1 (Tilley, 27-28).

[66] Ibid, 2 (Tilley, 28).

[67] Ibid, 1 (Tilley, 28).

the fact that their movement was partially founded on veneration for the martyrs and exhortation to imitate their deeds.

The Passion of Maximian and Isaac

Perhaps the best example of the Martyrist tendency within mainstream Donatism is to be found in the *Passion of Maximian and Isaac*, a Donatist martyrology which dates from the Macarian persecution of 347. Of particular importance is the prologue, in which the author makes the curious statement that

> Here at Carthage the savagery of persecution remained dormant. . . . Here alone fears and terrors were keeping silence, so that you might say that the powers of the world had no plans to take action. It excited no venerable ears or hearts. Only the consolation of rumor about your uncounted martyrs of Numidia encouraged the souls of our brothers and sisters. The joy of your glories filled every house as if it were their own, and just as you rejoice today as you would in your own martyrdom.[68]

This was clearly not a Purist account. The congregation actually viewed the fact that persecution had not yet touched their own community as a cause for dismay: "Only the consolation of rumor about your uncounted martyrs of Numidia encouraged the souls of our brothers and sisters."[69] Rather than being seen as a hindrance to faith, persecution was imagined more in terms of a sports arena where the strongest would go to try their strength. This concept is duly borne out by the next passage, in which Christ "immediately chose the hardy soldier Maximian from among the strong men" to do spiritual battle with the apostates.[70]

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[68] *Maximian and Isaac*, 3 (Tilley, 64).

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid. (Tilley, 65).

Maximian received his call to martyrdom through a portent: he saw a crown in his cup that glimmered with "a splendid blood-red color."[71] He was filled with joy at this sight, showing the cup to everyone around him. After receiving this call, he wasted no time: "on the very next day . . . what more can one say? With the speed not of feet but of a well-prepared mind, he quickly sprang up on his own to incite this contest. He scattered the dismal little pieces [of the imperial edict] with his rapid hands just as if he were tearing the devil limb from limb. Immediately he was taken up to the tribunal."[72] Important to note here is the fact that Maximian *voluntarily* chose the martyr's path. The persecution at Carthage was dormant—there were no active attempts to suppress the Donatists there at the time, to judge from the opening statements of the martyrology. Instead, Maximian deliberately provoked the authorities in order to incite their retribution. This would set a precedent for the later actions of the Agonistici.

Furthermore, the view of martyrdom that emerges from this account is essentially inward-oriented. It was no longer a reaction to outward circumstances. Instead, it focused more on the individual's own journey towards perfection; martyrdom was seen as the means of finally triumphing over one's sinful self. The state was merely a necessary accessory to help the martyr attain this status. It was already assumed that the state would be hostile; its role was de-emphasized as a means to an end. Maximian's aim in declaring himself to the authorities was to incite a contest "between his body and the torturers,"[73] a contest which would ultimately lead to his perfection and victory: "He who

[71] Ibid, 4 (Tilley, 65).

[72] Ibid, 5 (Tilley, 66).

[73] Ibid.

went to death in triumph was able to pass the test in his final torment."[74] In this mindset, martyrdom had gone far beyond mere obedience to the command to not renounce Christ under pressure; it was seen positively as the final plateau which would assure the perfection of the martyr. While certainly present throughout the history of the church,[75] the Martyrist element within Donatism took the significance of voluntary martyrdom to new levels.

Instead of mourning Maximian's death, his congregation behaved as if they had just won a great victory:

> The entire community of faith speedily hurried on their joyful way to his corpse. When the burial of his body was denied to them by his executioners, they all held vigils there with great rejoicing during the entire day lest the body be thrown out unburied. At night the exulting people proudly sang psalms, hymns, and canticles

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[74] Ibid. (Tilley, 67).

[75] A tradition that glorified voluntary martyrdom is evident within Christianity from at least the time of Ignatius of Antioch, who famously stated "I am corresponding with all the churches and bidding them all realize that I am voluntarily dying for God—if, that is, you do not interfere. I plead with you, do not do me an unseasonable kindness. Let me be fodder for wild beasts—that is how I can get to God." (*Letters of Ignatius: Romans*, 4.1, in *The Library of Christian Classics,* Vol. I: *Early Christian Fathers*, translated by Cyril C. Richardson (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 104) His actions were echoed within North Africa by many early martyrs, including Felicitas of Carthage, who "was very distressed that her martyrdom would be postponed because of her pregnancy; for it is against the law for women with child to be executed." (*Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*, 15, translated by Herbert Musurillo in *Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 123). Tertullian also attests to the readiness for voluntary martyrdom within his own community in *The Spectacles* 1.5 (in *Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 40: *Tertullian: Disciplinary, Moral, and Ascetical Works*, translated by Rudolph Arbesmann (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc, 1959), 48), while in his last letter Cyprian warned his congregation to "keep quiet and tranquility, lest anyone of you should stir up any tumult for the brethren or offer himself voluntarily to the Gentiles." (Cyprian, *Letter 81* (Donna, 325)) This was not an idle warning, as during his own martyrdom a number of Christian bystanders sought to be beheaded with him (*Proconsular Acts of St. Cyprian*, 5.1, translated by Herbert Musurillo in *Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 173). Alan Dearn, in his article "Voluntary Martyrdom and the Donatist Schism" (in *Studia Patristica* 39 (2003), 27-32), shows that even some Caecilianists of Augustine's time were not immune to the allure of voluntary martyrdom which had animated their forefathers. Clearly, then, the Martyrist element within the Donatist church was drawing from a deep well of Christian fascination with voluntary martyrdom, a fascination which appears to have been particularly widespread in North Africa. For an in-depth discussion of the controversy within the early church over voluntary martyrdom, see A. R. Birley, "Voluntary Martyrs in the Early Christian Church: Heroes or Heretics?" in *Christianesimo nella Storia* 27.1 (2006): 99-127 and de Ste. Croix, "Persecuted?" 129-133.

> in testimony. Every age and sex rejoiced with ardent desire to attend such festivities of thanksgiving.[76]

The work ends with an exhortation to the audience to embrace the martyr's path: "Come on, do it, sisters and brothers. Hurry, the sooner the better, so that we may rejoice in the same way over you."[77] In its appeal to follow the martyrs, the *Passion of Maximian and Isaac* is an excellent example of the Martyrist tendency within mainstream Donatism.

Contrary to Tilley's assertions, this tendency did not die out after the events of the Macarian persecution.[78] Indeed, it could be said that the Macarian persecution prompted an even greater emphasis on the efficacious value of martyrdom within the Donatist church. She is right, however, that the end of that repression caused a dearth in state-sponsored martyrdom.[79] The Agonistici, who had already existed prior to the persecution, now stepped up to lead the Church of the Martyrs into the later years of the Donatist movement. While we must wait until the next chapter to discuss their contributions to the Church of the Martyrs, it is necessary to note in passing that the inclination towards martyrdom was also to be found within the Donatist church during their next period of crisis, the years immediately following the 411 council of Carthage. Augustine records two separate occasions where Donatist priests attempted voluntary martyrdom in the aftermath of the Council. The first concerned Donatus, an aptly-named Donatist priest, who attempted to commit suicide rather than join the Caecilianists by

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[76] Ibid, 12 (Tilley, 71). The specific encounter here described actually concerns Isaac, the other martyr who gave his name to the martyrology.

[77] "Eia agite, fratres, accelerate quantocius, ut et de vobis non aliter gaudeamus." Ibid, 18 (Tilley, 75).

[78] Tilley, *Bible*, 178-179.

[79] Tilley, "Collecta," 22, note 3.

throwing himself into a well.[80] Augustine states that he justified this practice by appealing to the Apostle Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians "even if I hand over my body to be burned," thinking that "he [Paul] also counted it among such goods that anyone might inflict death upon himself."[81] Augustine's caustic summary of Donatus' motives aside, it does appear clear that Donatus believed voluntary death, even suicide, to be a positive good when the alternative was unification with the Caecilianists. The other example was Gaudentius, who rather than acquiesce to Caecilianist domination holed up with his congregation in their basilica and threatened to immolate the building with everyone in it.[82] Such examples show that a Martyrist element survived among mainstream Donatists throughout the entire history of the movement covered in this thesis.

Tensions between the Two Sides

The emphasis of the Martyrists on martyrdom as a positive good, as the pinnacle of the Christian life, was not appreciated by those who leaned more towards Purist ideology. Remaining steadfast under pressure was one thing; deliberately provoking the authorities was another. Ironically, the Donatists of later years were to experience the same frustrations regarding the Martyrist tendency within their own movement as had Mensurius during the Diocletianic persecution. In his polemic against Cresconius, Augustine records that the Donatists themselves had held councils that condemned the deliberate provocation of the authorities in order to achieve martyrdom and forbade the

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[80] Augustine, *Letter 173*.4 (Teske, Vol. III, 126).

[81] Ibid.

[82] See *Contra Gaudentium,* I.1.1 (PL 43.707).

veneration of such "martyrs."[83] While Augustine sarcastically notes that those councils had little enough effect on the number of voluntary martyrs, the passage does prove that the Donatist leadership was clearly concerned about the Martyrist tendency.

The violent acts committed by some of the more fanatical Martyrists were also decried by moderate Donatists. When it suited him polemically, Augustine recorded that many within the Donatist movement did not approve of the acts of their more fanatical brethren. While they did not excommunicate him (a point Augustine used to great polemical effect), many Donatists of Purist tendencies were deeply opposed to the actions of Optatus, the renegade bishop of Thamugadi who terrorized Caecilianists and Maximianists alike.[84] Purists looked upon such violent acts with horror, stating that "these things are, and have ever been displeasing to them," and that they only "bore with them in the cause of peace, because they could not put them down."[85] Tyconius also commented concerning the "superstition" of the Martyrists, stating that their practices were "excessive" and went "beyond the established practices of proper religion."[86] Indeed, in their propensity towards such violent acts, the Martyrists espoused a tendency which repudiated the fabric of Purist theology.

As long as the average Donatist remained within the mainstream of the movement, the two ideologies complemented each other, each contributing to the overall

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[83] Augustine, *Contra Cresconium* III.49.54 (PL 43.526).

[84] Augustine, *Letter 87*.4, 8 (Teske, Vol. I, 346, 348-49), and *Against Petilian* I.24.26 (NPNF(1) 4, 528).

[85] "Sunt in vobis quidam qui haec sibi displicere, ac semper displicuisse proclament; sed ea se dicunt, quia comprimere non possunt, pro pace tolerare. . ." Augustine, *Against Petilian* I.24.26 (NPNF(1) 4, 528).

[86] "Quod sit superflua aut superinstituta religionis observatio." Beatus of Libana, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin*, *Summa Dicendorum*, 26.32, translated by E. Romero (Rome: Typis Officinae Polygraficae, 1985), 51.

makeup of the Donatist church. Once one veered beyond the mainstream towards either inclination, however, tension was inevitable. This chapter has discussed how the two tendencies manifested themselves within the mainstream Donatist community. In order to highlight the profound differences between them, however, it is necessary to focus outside the mainstream of the movement. Later Donatism was not a theologically monolithic faction; this much has been discussed in the previous chapters. The following chapters, however, will discuss just how much diversity characterized the landscape of mature Donatism in the clashes between Purist and Martyrist factions. Specifically, Chapter Seven will focus on the Agonistici, or Circumcellions, fanatical Martyrists who saddled the Donatist movement with some of its most unpleasant aspects. They never quite broke away from the mainstream church, but were often castigated for their actions and forbidden from martyr status.[87] On the opposite end of the spectrum stood the Rogatists and Maximianists, who split off from mainstream Donatism out of their conviction that the broader movement had fatally compromised its status as the Church of the Pure. Their cases will be discussed in Chapter Eight. Through this extended discussion of these subgroups and schisms, the vast amount of spatial diversity within the later Donatist church will be highlighted.

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[87] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, III.4 (Edwards, 69).

CHAPTER SEVEN

Agonistici

"*They are the warriors who fight against the devil and prevail*."

–Donatist Clergy

Introduction

Of all the perceived blasphemies which the Donatist church had introduced into the world, the violent excesses of the Agonistici disturbed their Caecilianist opponents the most. The name referred to a special order within the Donatist church fanatically dedicated to Martyrist theology, whose actions sometimes shocked even their parent movement. When relating incidences of Donatist atrocities, Caecilianist writers such as Augustine never failed to capitalize on the many contemporary scenes of mayhem which had been wrought by the Agonistici. They exemplified what the Caecilianists perceived as a "Jekyll and Hyde" syndrome within the Donatist party, the manifested darker side of the schismatic movement. Donatist arguments decrying persecution and professing absolute pacifism were always critically undermined, in the eyes of their Caecilianist opponents, by the actions of their daughter organization.[1]

The Agonistici were derogatorily referred to by Caecilianists as "Circumcellions" or "Cotopitae," terms which emphasized one of their defining characteristics: an itinerate form of asceticism.[2] Agonistici were not tied down to one locale—they wandered

[1] See Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 36(2).18 (Boulding, Vol. 16, 118); *Against Petilian*, II.39.94 (NPNF(1) 4, 555).

[2] The precise etymology of both names will be discussed in detail below.

throughout the land, refusing to labor.[3] What was worse, they were perpetually willing to undertake violent, fanatical deeds, whether instigated by Donatist clergy or on their own initiative. As these actions frequently entailed the destruction of Caecilianist life and property, Caecilianist authors naturally thought of them as deranged madmen.[4] Further proof of their madness could be seen in their propensity towards suicide by means of drowning, self-immolation, hurling themselves off cliffs—even, at times, forcing Caecilianist travelers at sword-point to kill them.[5] Caecilianist writers darkly intoned that they did these deeds out of a fanatical devotion to martyrdom. Now that the state would not provide the mechanism for voluntary martyrdoms anymore, they had resorted to suicide to fulfill their lust for a martyr's death.[6] Over time, the perceived atrocities and madness of the Agonistici overshadowed their parent organization itself, so that to some Greek writers, *all* Donatists were transformed into fanatical Agonistics.[7]

Donatists themselves viewed the Agonistici in a different light. It was certainly true to state, as Augustine did, that there was friction between mainstream Donatists and Agonistici, but never enough to induce a schism (a fact that Augustine often lamented).[8]

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[3] Augustine, *Contra Gaudentium*, I.28.32 (PL 43.725). Incidentally, their nomadic nature makes it impossible to accurately assess the numerical strength of the movement. Possidius states that "they were very numerous and were organized in bands throughout almost all the regions of Africa" (*Life of Augustine*, 10 (Muller, 84); in the absence of more concrete numbers, his estimate is the best we have.

[4] Augustine, *Heresies*, LXIX.4 (Teske, 51) or *Letter 108*.5.14 (Teske, Vol. II, 78), for example.

[5] See Augustine, *Letter 185*.3.12 (Teske, Vol. III, 186): "Certain Donatists also thrust themselves upon armed travelers in order to be killed, threatening in a terrifying manner that they would strike them if they were not killed by them. . . . It was a daily game for them to kill themselves by steep plunges or by water and flames. . ." ("Quidam etiam se trucidandos armatis viatoribus ingerebant, percussuros eos se, nisi ab eis perimerentur, terribiliter comminantes. . . Iamvero per abrupta praecipitia, per aquas et flammas occidere seipsos, quotidianus illis ludus fuit.")

[6] Ibid.

[7] See Theodoret, *Compendium*, IV.6 (PG 83.423).

[8] See Augustine, *Letter 185*.4.16 (Teske, Vol. III, 188), and *Heresies,* LXIX.4 (Teske, 51).

The Agonistici, in fact, formed an integral part of the Donatist movement, and while some of their actions were clearly the work of fanatics, they were not the work of madmen. Instead, they represented the continuation of the Martyrist tendency which had been present within Donatism since its inception. Under Agonistic leadership, the motifs which had been present in earlier martyrologies such as the *Passion of Maximian and Isaac* were developed into a fully-fledged theological system. Within this system, martyrdom was heavily emphasized and divorced from actual persecution. Indeed, the status of the martyr was stressed to the point that the *means* of one's martyrdom was unimportant—all that mattered was a voluntary death. Rather than being regarded as the ultimate price for holding fast to Christ in the fires of persecution, martyrdom was seen as the final summit of moral purity, the deliberate offering up to God of one's body.[9] Playing by such rules, suicidal behavior was not out of the question; death by fire, drowning, and self-precipitation are all attested to.[10] Many have tended to doubt Caecilianist attestations to this tendency as a gross overstatement.[11] However, Optatus could point to Donatist councils that had attempted to rein in this very tendency.[12]

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[9] For primary sources, see Pseudo-Jerome, *Indiculus de Haeresibus*, 45, in *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina,* Vol.81.636C-646C, edited by Jacques Paul Migne (Paris, 1844-94), 643B-C, and Beatus, *Apocalypsin*, *Summa Dicendorum*, 26.32 (Romero, 51): "Such men as these . . . destroy themselves on the pretended grounds of their love of martyrs, so that by departing from this life violently they might acquire the name of martyrs." (translated by Brent Shaw in "Bad Boys: Circumcellions and Fictive Violence," in *Violence and Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices*, 179-197, edited by H.A. Drake (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 193). For the theory underlying such actions, see Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs: Unintended Consequences of Ancient Violence* (Routledge: New York, 2004), 163-171. Geoffrey de Ste. Croix, while not specifically dealing with the Agonistici, devoted an article to the tendency towards voluntary martyrdom within the early Christian church as a whole: see "Voluntary Martyrdom in the Early Church," in *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy*, 153-200, edited by Michael Whitby and Joseph Streeter (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006).

[10] Augustine, *Heresies*, LXIX.4 (Teske, 51).

[11] See Brent Shaw, "Bad Boys," 180, and Michael Gaddis, *There is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 111-119.

[12] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, III.4 (Edwards, 69).

Indeed, Augustine was so secure in his knowledge of Agonistic suicides that he attempted to argue from their present inclination that Marculus, a Donatist who had been martyred during the Macarian persecution, had in fact committed suicide like the Agonistici.[13] This transformation of the martyr-theory from a witness for Christ to the final mode of Christian perfection represented a major development in Martyrist theology, one which would inevitably come into conflict with the concurrently-developing Purist tradition within Donatism.

In this chapter, the Agonistici will be highlighted as the extreme example of the Martyrist tendency within Donatism. As such, they served as the "virtual theologians" of the Martyrists. Unfortunately, they left behind no identifiable writings to expound on their beliefs, being far more devoted to action than theory. Aside from chance inferences from Donatist martyrologies, then, one must look rather to the deeds of the movement in order to perceive the Agonistic worldview.

Caecilianist descriptions of the Agonistici are replete with tales of violence, rapine, and murder. They also record Agonistic complicity in the freeing of Donatist slaves, forced canceling of debts, and ferocious attacks on landowners (Agonistic partisans were almost uniformly rustics).[14] Because of these actions, the Agonistici have often served as the prime examples for a socialist or economic interpretation of Donatism. Many have argued that the Agonistici were more social revolutionaries

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[13] Compare Augustine's account of Marculus' suicide in *Contra Cresconium* III.49.54 (PL 43.526) with the Donatist martyrology *The Martyrdom of Marculus* (Tilley, 78-87).

[14] See Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, III.4 (Edwards, 68-69) and Augustine, *Letter 108*.6.18 (Teske, Vol. II, 81) and *Letter 185*.4,15 (Teske, Vol. III, 188).

obsessed with overturning the established social order than religious fanatics.[15] At times, some historians have extended this description to all Donatists,[16] while others have pointed to dissensions between the two movements to prove that the Agonistici represented a form of popular Donatism that went far beyond the original intentions of the Donatist leadership.[17] Both of these interpretations agree, however, that the reason for the popularity of the Agonistici (and Donatism) among the populace of North Africa was not their religious arguments, but their subversion of the social order.

It will be argued in this chapter that such interpretations substantially miss the point. Certainly, the Agonistici were guilty of many of the actions imputed to them by Caecilianist authors, and undoubtedly some used their status as religious holy men to settle old grudges. But to impute a program of social revolution to the Agonistici is to radically misunderstand their purpose. As will be further elucidated below, it was religious fanaticism that drove the individual Agonistic, not social reform.

The ultimate aim of this chapter, therefore, is to build a constructive image of the theology and ideology of the Agonistici, one that securely roots them within the Donatist church, yet realizes their unique contributions to that church. It will be argued that the Agonistici represented an itinerate order within Donatism that emphasized their status as modern-day confessors and sought martyrdom as the summit of a life devoted to God. The Agonistici embodied the ultimate flowering of the Martyrist tendency within the

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[15] See Jean Daniélou and Henri Marrou, *The First Six Hundred Years* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 247, Salisbury, *Martyrs*, 158.

[16] Martroye, "Revolution Sociale," 396, Joseph, "Heresy," 72-73.

[17] Greenslade, *Schism*, 60, R. Pierce Beaver, "The Donatist Circumcellions," in *Church History*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (June 1935), 125.

Donatist church, and as such serve as excellent examples of the spatial diversity within the movement.

Overview History

The origins of the Agonistic movement are obscure.[18] Our first substantiated record of their existence comes from Optatus, but by the time they appear in his writings they appear to have been present for many years previously. Optatus specifically notes the existence of Agonistici prior to the Macarian persecution around the year 340 and names their leaders as Axido and Fasir.[19] Here for the first time one finds the classic Caecilianist description of the Agonistici, one calculated to show that such men were beyond the pale of civilized behavior. They were said to have negated debts owed to creditors and terrorized the landowners: "By the verdict and bidding of these men the conditions of master and slave were transposed."[20] Their desire for martyrdom was also attested: "To this class had belonged those who, in their false desire for martyrdom, used to bring assailants on themselves for their own destruction. From this source also came those who used to cast their vile souls headlong from the peaks of the highest mountains."[21] The goal of voluntary martyrdom thus appears to have been present among the Agonistici from the very beginning.

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[18] Though dated, Beaver's "The Donatist Circumcellions" is still the most comprehensive and detailed history of the Agonistici in English. His article, which deals solely with the Agonistici rather than the larger Donatist movement, records their actions in far more detail than the overview history here presented.

[19] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, III.4 (Edwards, 68-69): ""For when, before the establishment of unity [under Macarius], people of this kind were roving from place to place, when Axido and Fasir were being called leaders of the saints by these same maniacs, no one could be sure in his own possessions."

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid (Edwards, 69-70).

The only specific record of Agonistic deeds prior to the Macarian persecution comes from a passage in Optatus, in which he emphasized an incident where the mainstream Donatist party had appealed to the secular authorities to curb their own subgroup. Apparently, the Donatist leaders had grown disillusioned with the more fanatical actions of the Agonistici, and had ordered them to desist. They refused to do so, and so the Donatist leadership appealed to the *comes* Taurinus, stating that "men of this kind could not be corrected within the church."[22] He intervened decisively: in the village of Octaviensis, "hosts were killed and many decapitated," a scene that was apparently repeated throughout the North African provinces.[23] The dead Agonistici were honored as martyrs by many within the Donatist fold, and buried as such within the churches. However, this practice was explicitly opposed by the higher Donatist clergy, who forbade honoring the dead Agonistici as martyrs and actually forced the disinterment of those who had already been buried.[24] Interestingly, in later years such distinctions were forgotten and the *comes* Taurinus was regarded by later Donatists as a persecutor of the

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[22] Ibid (Edwards, 69): "And when they showed spleen against the bishops of your party, the latter are said to have written to Taurinus, then the count, that men of this kind could not be corrected within the church, and required that they receive chastisement from the aforesaid count."

[23] Ibid. That the town of Octaviensis was in Numidia or Byzacena, while another locale mentioned, Subbulensis, was in Mauretania Caesarea, attests to the wide extent of the suppression.

[24] Ibid: "When the burial of some of this number had commenced, Clarus the presbyter in the locus Subbulensis was compelled by his bishop to undo the burial. This revealed that what had happened had been ordered to happen, since it was forbidden even to give them burial in the house of God." Frend notes that archaeological evidence shows that such prohibitions appear to have had little effect: "The Donatist bishops forbade the practice, but in vain. To judge from discoveries made in the chapels of southern Numidia, the burial of bodies within the precincts of the church and the dedication of *mensae* to Circumcellions and other 'unofficial' martyrs were almost universal." (Frend, *Donatist Church*, 176-77) For an excellent overview of the archaeological discoveries concerning Donatism and the Agonistici within North Africa, see Frend's *The Archaeology of Early Christianity*: *A History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 229-232.

faithful.[25] Thus, the earliest evidence of Agonistic activity relates both their propensity towards martyrdom and their at times problematic relationship with mainstream Donatism.

The next incident, however, demonstrates the close ties between the Donatists and the Agonistici, a relationship which caused much consternation to their Caecilianist opponents. The Macarian persecution itself was touched off by the actions of a recalcitrant Donatist priest (Donatus of Bagai), who responded to the initial approach of Macarius' delegation by sending heralds out to the Agonistici, calling them to join him at Bagai. Such was the reputation of the Agonistici even at this point in time that their presence in Bagai prompted the Macarian delegation to request additional troops as they made their way to the city. What happened next was typical of Agonistic interaction with imperial authorities: the emissaries of the delegation were rebuffed from the city with beatings and threats, and in response the imperial soldiers stormed Bagai and massacred the Agonistic participants.[26]

Presumably many similar incidents occurred during the years of the Macarian repression of the Donatists, but the next specific mention of the Agonistici comes after the reestablishment of Donatism in North Africa under Julian. Apparently the worst excesses of the period of triumphalism which accompanied the return of the exiles were committed by Agonistici, who were given clearance by the Donatist leadership to retake formerly Donatist basilicas from the Caecilianists. Optatus records in this vein, "Why should I recall your hiring of a host of abandoned people, and the wine that you gave as

[25] See Augustine, *Against Petilian*, III.25.29 (NPNF(1) 4, 608): "He quotes Mensurius, Caecilianus, Macarius, Taurinus, Romanus, and declares that 'they acted in opposition to the Church of God.'"

[26] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, III.4 (Edwards, 70-71).

wages?"[27] Sacrilegious acts such as the violent breaking up of Caecilianist altars and smashing of religious vessels may be attributed to their hands.[28] Once again, such actions went beyond what the mainstream movement was willing to countenance, and in later years the policy of completely destroying Caecilianist sacred objects was discouraged.[29]

During the years between the return of the exiles under the so-called apostate emperor Julian in 361 and the rise to prominence of Optatus of Thamugadi, a period of about thirty years, Agonistic violence appears to have died down apart from their suicidal tendencies. In the 390s, however, they burst back onto the scene in dramatic fashion. Optatus of Thamugadi, the Donatist bishop who secured a measure of political power by allying with the usurper Gildo, recruited the Agonistici to assist him and used them as shock troops in his personal campaigns against the Maximianists and Caecilianists.[30] Indeed, under his rule the Agonistici appear to have adopted several innovations, including the relaxation of a sacred rule precluding them from bearing arms.[31] The downfall of Gildo led to the repression of Donatism as the imperial government began to view the excesses of the Agonistici as representative of the Donatist church as a whole. Repressive measures, however, only drove the Agonistici to greater violence. In Augustine's era, attacks on Caecilianists and Donatist converts were commonplace,

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[27] Ibid, VI.1 (Edwards, 116).

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid (Edwards, 117): "Therefore it is agreed that you have both broken and leveled altars, How is it that in this matter your madness seems, as it were, to have subsequently languished? For we see that you later changed your policy and now you no longer break or level altars, but merely remove them. If this was enough, you too indicate that those things that you formerly did should not have been done at all."

[30] See Augustine, *Contra Parmeniani*, I.11.17 (PL 43.46).

[31] Ibid. Augustine testifies to their earlier aversion towards bearing weaponry in *Against Petilian,* II.89.195 (NPNF(1) 4, 576) and *Expositions*, Psalm 54.26 (Boulding, Vol. 17, 78). As will be discussed below, this taboo did not prevent them from utilizing cudgels, which they termed "Israels," to deadly effect. (Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 10.5 (Boulding, Vol. 15, 164) and Psalm 95.11 (Boulding, Vol. 18, 433))

leading him to remonstrate vociferously against the Donatists for their continued communion with the Agonistici.[32] The more moderate Donatists of Augustine's era were clearly opposed to the excesses of their radical brethren, but were unwilling to renounce communion with them. Instead, they attempted to curb Agonistic violence through councils,[33] public condemnation of their conduct,[34] and restoring goods and property seized through Agonistic actions.[35]

In response to escalating missionary efforts to convert the Donatist heartland led by Augustine and his associates, the Agonistici mounted an increasingly savage campaign against such missionaries and their Donatist converts. Possidius, the Caecilianist bishop of Calama, was nearly killed by Agonistic partisans in 404,[36] and Augustine himself narrowly escaped an Agonistic ambush when his guide took the wrong path.[37] Other Caecilianist bishops were not so lucky. Augustine wrote that the Agonistici in his area "laid ambushes for our bishops on their journeys, struck our fellow clerics with the cruelest blows, inflicted upon lay people most serious wounds, and set their buildings on fire."[38] Special violence was reserved for Donatists who had converted to Caecilianism. When Maximian, the Donatist bishop of Bagai, sensationally joined with the Caecilianists and attempted to take over other Donatist chapels in the region, he

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[32] Note, for example, *Heresies,* LXIX.4 (Teske, 51), *Expositions*, Psalm 95.11 (Boulding, Vol. 18, 433), and *Against Petilian*, II.39.94 (NPNF(1) 4, 555).

[33] Augustine, *Contra Cresconium*, III.48.53 (PL 43.525).

[34] Augustine, *Letter 108*.5.14 (Teske, Vol. II, 78).

[35] Ibid, 6.18 (Teske, Vol. II, 81).

[36] Augustine, *Contra Cresconium* III.46.50 (PL 43.523).

[37] Augustine, *Enchiridion*, XVII, in *Fathers of the Church*, *Vol. 2,* translated by Bernard M. Peebles (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1947), 382.

[38]Augustine, *Letter 88*.6 (Teske, Vol. I, 354).

was surrounded by Agonistic partisans, beaten, and left for dead.[39] An even more serious case was that of Restitutus, an ex-Donatist priest who was tortured and displayed in public in a cage for twelve days before being found and released by a Donatist bishop. He later died from his wounds.[40]

Interspersed with, and largely in reaction to, such incidents came further governmental legislation condemning the Agonistici and outlawing Donatism itself as a heresy.[41] Indeed, while Augustine had sought a definitive council against the Donatists for a long time, it was ultimately the violence of the Agonistici which goaded imperial authorities to crack down on the Donatist movement as a whole. The sect was outlawed, and anyone known to have joined the Agonistici was fined ten pounds of silver.[42] Donatist bishops in whose dioceses the movement was known to operate were fined ten pounds of gold.[43]

This was the situation up to the decisive 411 council of Carthage, after which the Agonistici were so severely persecuted that their attacks dramatically lessened, and Augustine turned his polemics elsewhere. That they had not, however, been completely pacified can be inferred by a canon in the 419 Council of Carthage, in which Agonistic violence was again denounced and the Caecilianists requested imperial protection from

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[39] Augustine, *Letter 185*.7.26-27 (Teske, Vol. III, 194-95), *Contra Cresconium,* III.43.47 (PL 43.521). Maximian's personal appeal to the emperor while unveiling his scars convinced the imperial government to pass the 405 Edict of Unity, which proscribed Donatism as a heresy.

[40] Augustine, *Letter 88*.6 (Teske, Vol. I, 354-55), *Contra Cresconium,* III.48.53 (PL 43.525).

[41] Most prominent was an edict in 405 by Emperor Honorius outlawing the sect. See *Theodosian Code,* XVI.5.37 (Pharr, 456), 6.4-5 (Pharr, 465), and 11.2 (Pharr, 476).

[42] *Theodosian Code,* XVI.5.52 (Pharr, 459).

[43] Augustine, *Letter 88*.7 (Teske, Vol. I, 355).

further attacks.[44] The last mention of the Agonistici as an active organization is noted by Augustine in 419, who exulted in the fact that earlier that year the village of Fussala, despite desperate attacks by the Agonistici, had been pacified.[45] After this final incident, the Agonistici pass out of history,[46] although their parent organization continued to attract the attention of Catholic writers until the eighth century.[47]

Were the Agonistici Social Revolutionaries?

> What master was not forced to fear his slave if his slave sought refuge under the protection of the Donatists? . . . Who was able to demand a reckoning from a slave who consumed his provisions or from a debtor who asked the Donatists for help and defense? Out of a fear of clubs and fires and imminent death the records of the worst slaves were destroyed that they might go free. Lists of what they had extorted from creditors were handed over to debtors. . . . The homes of the innocent who had offended them were either razed to the ground or destroyed by fires. Some heads of families, men nobly born and educated, were carried off barely alive after their attacks and chained to a mill stone; they were forced by beatings to make it turn, as if they were mere animals? . . . What official breathed easily in their presence? What banker was able to demand what they were unwilling to pay?[48]

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[44] 419 Council of Carthage, Canon 93 (CCSL 149.212): "It is well known how often the vile gatherings of the Circumcelliones have been forbidden by the laws, and also condemned by many decrees of the Emperors, their majesties' most religious predecessors. Against the madness of these people it is not unusual nor contrary to the holy Scriptures to ask for secular protection. . ."

[45] Augustine, *Letter 209*.2 (Teske, Vol. III, 393-94). The Agonistici had attempted to kill the presbyters sent to establish a Caecilianist presence in the region.

[46] R. Pierce Beaver attempts to prove their existence during the Vandal period by citing a law found in Victor of Vita's *History of the Vandal Persecution,* III.71 (translated by John Moorhead (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992), 67) which mentions penalties for joining the Circumcellions, but his case is doubtful. The law in question was a Vandal attempt to bring the Catholics under the same penalties as they had themselves once applied to the Donatists and other heretics (the Vandals were Arians), and as such copies the proscriptions found in the *Theodosian Code,* XVI.5.52 (Pharr, 459) almost word for word. It was intended to have an ironic value, and as such the mention of "Circumcellions" ought not be taken as evidence of their continued existence. After all, there was no danger of *Catholics* joining the fanatical movement.

[47] See Frend, *Donatist Church*, 313.

[48] Augustine, *Letter 185*.4.15 (Teske, Vol. III, 188). While in this letter he seems to indict *all* Donatists for such deeds, other letters make it clear that it was the Agonistici who carried out these specific actions.

From indictments such as these delivered by Augustine and Optatus,[49] many historians of the movement have argued that the Agonistici were in fact social revolutionaries who envisioned a radical overturning of the existing social order.[50] The fact that most of them were rustic peasants who knew no Latin certainly reinforced such views.[51] The view presented by many historians is that the Agonistici represented a revolutionary uprising of the peasantry against the landed classes of North Africa.[52] Justifying their actions under the cover of Donatist millennialist rhetoric,[53] they sought to forcibly restructure the existing social order. That they were associated with the Donatist church at all was due to the fact that the Caecilianists, by relying on imperial power, were seen as allies of the landed classes. Depending on the author, the Agonistici might not even necessarily be associated with the Donatists in any meaningful way.

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[49] Optatus wrote in a similar vein in *Against the Donatists*, III.4 (Edwards, 69): "The records of debts had lost their force, no creditor at that time had the freedom to enforce payment, all were terrified by the letters who boasted that they had been leaders of the saints; and if there was any delay in obeying their behests, a raging multitude suddenly flew to their aid, and, as terror went before them, besieged the creditors with dangers, so that those who should have had suitors on account of their loans were forced into groveling prayers through fear of death. Each one hastened to write off even his greatest debts, and reckoned it a gain if he escaped injury at their hands. Even the safest journeys could not take place, because masters, thrown out of their vehicles, ran in servile fashion before their own retainers, who were sitting in their masters' place. By the verdict and bidding of these men the conditions of master and slave were transposed."

[50] Although events in recent history have caused several current historians to explore the role of religion within such a social goal. See Salisbury, *Martyrs*, 159: "The Circumcellions linked this social revolution with the love of martyrdom and a separate church of the martyrs. This was their innovation; martyrdom justified terror, and this association resurfaces in modern headlines from the Middle East and elsewhere."

[51] Augustine, in *Letter 108*.5.14 (Teske, Vol. II, 78), records an incidence when Donatist clergymen chastised the Agonistici using Punic interpreters, as none of them spoke Latin.

[52] See Frend, *Martyrdom*, 461-62, 556.

[53] Although, as has been noted earlier, the Donatist movement does not appear to have been especially concerned with millenarian views. Instead, in an example of somewhat circular reasoning, the older description of Donatism as a monolithic millennialist movement owes much to Agonistic actions which were assumed to be representative of Donatism as a whole.

Historians have expressed the above scenario in a number of varying interpretations. In his article "The Donatist Circumcellions," Beaver argued that the Agonistic movement in fact represented the popular form of Donatism among the masses. However much the original schism had been about religious issues, the Donatist church found its staying power in its identification with the lower social classes, a fact reflected in the popularity of the Agonistici. In Beaver's view, therefore, the Agonistici represented not so much a specific movement *within* Donatism as the popular face *of* Donatism.[54] Within this scenario, the religious causes of the movement, while clearly present,[55] merely served as a rationale for a broad underlying dissatisfaction with the social conditions of the later Roman Empire. Religious principles served a social agenda, which in turn prompted the oppressed populace to flock to Donatism rather than Caecilianism.[56] Thus the rationale for the formation and duration of the Agonistic movement was not ultimately religious, but social: "From the beginning Circumcellionism took and kept the character of a *jacquerie*, a social rebellion of the peasantry. Goaded by economic misery and slavery, the Circumcellions attempted to reform society."[57]

Like Beaver, W. H. C. Frend also adhered to a socialist interpretation of Agonistic motives. He believed that the Agonistic movement represented "the union of social and

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[54] Beaver, "Circumcellions," 125: "Perhaps it would be more correct to say that the distressed element of the population saw in the Donatist cause a spiritual and moral justification for its insurrection, and Donatism made willing use of that revolt which had not been a part of its original policy. This revolt took the form of Circumcellionism."

[55] Beaver will note that, regardless of their underlying social concerns, "the Circumcellions were first and foremost not social revolutionists, but religious fanatics." ("Circumcellions," 131)

[56] Beaver, "Circumcellions," 124.

[57] Ibid, 130.

religious discontent in the Donatist movement."[58] Frend was willing to go much further than Beaver in appreciating the religious angle of the movement (as will be discussed below), but ultimately the appeal of Agonistic religious beliefs was made to rest on its socialist emphasis. He ascribed to the Agonistici "an egalitarianism based on the Gospel, in which princes and lords would lose their traditional roles,"[59] and attributed the genesis of the movement to the social situation of the North African peasants, which had become "yearly more miserable."[60]

A variant theory which took its queue from a socialist interpretation of the Agonistici saw the movement as only nominally affiliated with the Donatist movement and animated by only the most tenuous of religious reasons. According to this hypothesis, the Agonistici were to be seen as migrant agricultural laborers who were easily stirred to violence by Donatist clerics. Their propensity to wander throughout the land, attested to by so many Caecilianist authors, was seen as evidence for this sort of interpretation. B. H. Warmington, in his book *The North African Provinces*, espoused such a view.[61] To him, it was clear that the Agonistici were migrant laborers: "We may say that they were free, agricultural workers who went from estate to estate offering their labour. Such a class of people had long been known in Africa. Their general attachment

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[58] Frend, *Donatist Church*, 176. Many scholars have followed this interpretation of the Agonistici. Among those who acknowledge a sincere religious dimension to the Agonistic movement but maintain that it also included a robust program of social revolution are Joyce Salisbury (*Martyrs*, 158-159), and Jean Daniélou (*First Six Hundred Years*, 247).

[59] Frend, "Heresy," 48.

[60] Frend, *Donatist Church*, 176.

[61] While dated, Warmington's view is important because he gave an in-depth argument for his views concerning the Agonistici, unlike many the many later historians who rely on him. Other historians who espouse the view that Agonistici were primarily agricultural laborers include Tengström, *Donatisten und Katholiken*, 52, (Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia xviii, Göteborg, 1964). Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 220, and Ramsay MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest, and Alienation in the Empire* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 200.

to Donatism and increasing violence very likely result from pressure by the authorities and the landowners to fix them to the soil; a change of status would soon mean loss of personal freedom."[62] Once again, the ultimate rationale for the formation of the Agonistici was socialistic rather than religious—they identified with Donatism only because the Caecilianists appeared to be lackeys of the imperial government.[63]

Relying heavily on the Caecilianist name for the movement, Warmington believed that the term "Circumcellion," as defined by Augustine ("Circumcellion" = "circum cella"[64]), referred to their agricultural activities, interpreting the ambiguous term "cella" to mean "barn."[65] This is in fact a popular interpretation of the name; Frend records that "Scholars have preferred the more traditional interpretation of cella = barn, particularly in view of the renewed interest in the economic role and legal status of the Circumcellions."[66] Frend's own rebuttal to such an interpretation will be discussed below; however, the belief that the "cellae" from which the word "Circumcellion" derives referred to barns or storehouses continues to attract adherents.

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[62] Warmington, *North African Provinces*, 87-88.

[63] Greenslade is also an adherent of this hypothesis (*Schism*, 60), and J. R. Palanque *et al*, in *The Church in the Christian Roman Empire,* Vol. I, translated by Ernest C. Messenger (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne LTD, 1949), 263 and 271, even argue that the Agonistici, as "redoubtable bandits of the African mountains," had absolutely no collusion with the Donatist movement.

[64] Augustine, *Contra Gaudentium*, I.28.32 (PL 43.725): "Who indeed is ignorant of this sort of men from their terrible deeds of tumult, unoccupied by useful work, most cruel in hostile deaths, most worthless among themselves and especially intimidating in the country, idle from agriculture, *and for the purpose of their own provisions surrounding rustic cellas, from which also they receive the name of Circumcellion*, the most famous of African errors, a reproach with the whole world?" (italics mine) See also Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 132.3 (Boulding, Vol. 20, 176-77).

[65] Warmington, *North African Provinces*, 87. Another popular interpretation was that the "cellas" were rustic houses ("cellas rusticanas"—see *Contra Gaudentium,* I.28.32 (PL 43.725)); see L. Duchesne, *Early History of the Christian Church, Vol. II* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1950), 189.

[66] Frend, "Circumcellions and Monks," in *Journal of Theological Studies* 20 (October, 1969), 542.

Finally, Warmington argued that the Agonistici represented a specific class of agricultural laborers because they were grouped together with other social classes in the Theodosian Code: "decurions, five pounds of gold; tradesmen, five pounds of gold; plebeians, five pounds of gold; Circumcellions, ten pounds of silver each."[67] This constituted proof for him that "the circumcelliones were a distinct social class, and recognized as such by law."[68] Such an interpretation was certainly plausible within the context of the Theodosian Code, despite the fact that no Caecilianist writer ever referred to the Agonistici as agricultural laborers, nor did any secular author incidentally note hiring "circumcellions" to work the fields come harvest-time.[69]

Such interpretations which joined the Agonistici only incidentally with the main Donatist party have endured to the present time. Maureen Tilley, in her otherwise excellent work *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, makes the significant mistake of completely ignoring the contribution of the Agonistici to the Donatist movement, dismissing them as "religiously conservative migrant agricultural laborers who were usually, though not always, Donatist supporters."[70] Altogether, the portrait proposed by many scholars of the Agonistici has been one of a movement animated more by social

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[67] *Theodosian Code*, XVI.5.52 (Pharr, 459).

[68] Warmington, *North African Provinces*, 87.

[69] Frend notes sarcastically that Augustine himself had once stated that "the Circumcellions were 'idle' as far as honest work was concerned. Never once does he imply that their peregrinations had anything to do with the needs of the Numidian olive-harvest." ("Monks," 545) See also Gaddis, *Crime*, 123, n.81, who heavily criticizes the notion that the Agonistici constituted an institutionalized *ordo*: "*C.Th*. 16.5.52 of 412 has misled some scholars into presenting the Circumcellions as a legally constituted *ordo*, just below plebians and tradesmen and above *coloni* and slaves... But surely this neat and legalistic scheme of classification is more representative of the outlook of the imperial bureaucrats in Ravenna, who drafted the edict, than of any North African reality."

[70] Tilley, *Bible*, 94. This is also the primary criticism that W. H. C. Frend made of her work in his review of *The Bible in Christian North Africa* in *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 51.1 (Jan. 2000), 122.

than religious underpinnings. While such scholars disagree as to the extent to which the movement was identified with the Donatist church (some seeing Donatism itself as an extension of the Agonistici, others viewing the two as essentially separate movements), they are uniform in their agreement that the popularity of the movement was due to its revolutionary overturning of social constructs rather than its fanatical devotion to a Martyrist theology.

A Religious-Based Argument

Despite the apparent program of social revolution which a cursory reading of the text appears to indicate, it will be argued in this paper that the notorious exploits of the Agonistici can be attributed to religious, not social, motives. Making the movement out to be only tangentially-based on religious concerns ignores the description of the party by Donatists themselves, who insisted that the Agonistici were "soldiers of Christ."[71] Augustine, in his diatribe against the Donatists, recorded their own view of the movement: "We give them that name because it derives from *agon*. They engage in a contest, and the apostle says, I have fought the good fight. They are the warriors who fight against the devil and prevail. Therefore these soldiers of Christ are called *agonistici*."[72] Against this, Augustine wryly noted that "They call them *agonistici* or 'warriors,' and we agree that it would be an honorable name—if only the reality matched it!"[73] Clearly, the Donatists themselves associated their sub-group with a specifically religious agenda. Such a tradition among the Donatists is hard to reconcile with

[71] "Milites Christi." See Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 132.6 (Boulding, Vol. 20, 180).

[72] "Sic eos, inquiunt, appellamus propter agonem. Certant enim; et dicit Apostolus: 'Certamen bonum certavi.' Quia sunt qui certant adversus diabolum, et praevalent, milites Christi agonistici appellantur." Ibid.

[73] Ibid.

Warmington and Tilley's view of the Agonistici as primarily migrant agricultural workers.

Furthermore, Warmington's argument that the Agonistici ought to be seen as primarily agricultural workers on the basis of the term "Circumcellion" rests on very tenuous grounds. While the etymological basis of the name will be discussed below, it is enough to note for now that it was, in fact, a *Caecilianist* epithet, not a name used among the Donatists. This fact was attested to by Augustine: "And when we reply, with much better reason, 'What does the name 'Circellions' mean?' they say. . . . 'Our people aren't called Circumcellions; it is you who give them that abusive name. We don't call them that.'"[74] If the original term for the movement had been "Circumcellions," perhaps the proposed etymology linking them to agricultural workers would have been more appropriate, but in fact the Donatist name for their sub-group was "Agonistici," a word with explicit overtones of religious militancy. In this case as elsewhere, it is best not to be misled by Caecilianist interpretations of the movement. Focus ought rather to be put on what the Donatists themselves argued, and, as shown in the statement above, their testimony was that the Agonistici were primarily a religious organization.

A Closer Look at Agonistic Atrocities

Perhaps those who wish to see the Agonistici as primarily social reformers are putting too much weight on the more generalized accounts of their deeds as put forth by Augustine and Optatus. It ought to be remembered that both are hostile witnesses, and as such are interested in presenting their opponents in the worst possible light. Statements

[74] Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 132.3 (Boulding, Vol. 20,177). The term "Circellions" was a diminutive for the more common name "Circumcellions," as Augustine goes on to explain.

such as "the conditions of master and slave were transposed" or "the records of debts had lost their force"[75] admirably suit their purpose. When one looks at the specific examples that Augustine or Optatus record, however, a different picture emerges. Often, the "creditor" turns out to have been a Caecilianist bishop; the "wealthy landowner" whose slaves were freed is found out to have been attempting to force those slaves to convert to Caecilianism. For example, Augustine, in a typical statement, complained in Letter 111 that "in our region of Hippo, which the barbarians have not reached, the robberies committed by Donatist clerics and by the Circumcellions ravage the churches so that the actions of the barbarians seem perhaps less severe."[76] Such a statement, by equating the actions of the Agonistici with those of the barbarians, is calculated to induce the idea that the Agonistici and the barbarians were two sides of the same coin. But note the next part of Augustine's complaint: "By threatening others with such things, they force many also to be rebaptized. The day before I dictated these lines to you, it was reported to me that in one place forty-eight souls were rebaptized as a result of such acts of terror."[77] Clearly, the intent of such rapine was religious in nature—to intimidate the Caecilianists and convert wavering souls. This argument is further buttressed by Augustine's testimony concerning ex-Agonistici, whose rationale for their violent actions was clearly religious: "They condemn their former life and wretched error, because of which they thought that they did for the Church of God whatever they did in their restless rashness!"[78]

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[75] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, III.4 (Edwards, 69).

[76] Augustine, *Letter 111*.1 (Teske, Vol. II, 88-89).

[77] Ibid.

[78] Augustine, *Letter 93*.1.2 (Teske, Vol. I, 378).

When painting the movement in broad swathes, Augustine and Optatus at times implied that the "mad" violence of the Agonistici was indiscriminately directed towards any masters, creditors, or landowners. However, whenever they discussed the specifics of an Agonistic attack, it invariably fell into one of three categories: anti-Caecilianist, anti-convert, or anti-pagan. Predictably, the most emphasis is spent on anti-Caecilianist atrocities. Evidence of such religious-based violence abounds. The letters of Augustine are filled with complaints to the Donatist leaders concerning the actions of their sub-group, such as the breaking up of altars and invasions of basilicas.[79] Indeed, many of the "estates" that the Agonistici were accused of disrupting proved to be those of Caecilianist bishops, and Augustine records that once their rightful owners had been driven off their lands, the Agonistici presented these abandoned estates and basilicas to Donatist priests, although the mainstream Donatist movement had some ambiguity about keeping them.[80] It appears, however, that the Agonistici did not generally attack Caecilianist landowners without a specific reason. Moreover, it was a reason well-known to the landowners themselves: attempting to convert their Donatist tenants to Caecilianism would inevitably result in Agonistic reprisal.

Around 401, Augustine wrote a congratulatory letter to Pammachius, a wealthy Caecilianist landowner,[81] congratulating him for having "admonished with such

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[79] See Augustine, *Letter 29.*12 (Teske, Vol. I, 100)

[80] Augustine, *Letter 108.*6.18 (Teske, Vol. II, 81): "As a result, to avoid the hatred of human beings, after having gathered your people [the Circumcellions] and questioned them, you promise that you will return the estates to those from whom they were taken. . . . They boast of their previous merits in your regard, pointing out and enumerating, prior to this law because of which you rejoice over the freedom restored to you, how many places and basilicas your priests held by means of them, [the Circumcellions], while ours were assaulted and put to flight. And so, if you wanted to be severe with them, you would be seen as ungrateful for their benefits."

[81] He was in fact a Roman senator who held large estates in Numidia.

language" his Donatist tenants that they had converted to Caecilianism.[82] This was indeed good news to Augustine, for despite his numerous exhortations to the landowners to convert their tenants, very few had implemented such tactics.[83] The reason for this noncompliance on the part of most landowners is telling: they feared the retaliation of the Agonistici, the "ambushes of the heretics" which were certain to occur if they pressured their tenets to convert.[84] Augustine acknowledged this fear, but reminded Pammachius that the ultimate "estate" that he ought to be concerned with was the "estate of Christ, which is your soul,"[85] and requested that he forward Augustine's letter to other landowners, so that "they will believe from your action that there can be done in Africa what they are perhaps slow to do because they think that it cannot be done."[86] A. H. M. Jones states on the basis of this letter that "from this it would appear that Donatist peasants were generally content to pay their rent to their landlords even if they were Catholics, and that the circumcellions would normally only take action against Catholic landlords if they tried to seduce their tenants from the faith."[87]

The argument that such attacks represented a program of social revolution under the guise of religious piety thus becomes harder to maintain when the only specific examples of such actions prove to have been invariably directed against the estates of prominent Caecilianist bishops or landowners who attempted to force Caecilianism on

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[82] Augustine, *Letter 58*.1 (Teske, Vol. I, 239).

[83] Ibid, *58*.3 (Teske, Vol. I, 240): "Oh, from how many other senators like you and sons of the Church like you we in Africa desire the sort of action that we rejoice over in your case!"

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Jones, *Heresies*, 27.

their Donatist tenants. Furthermore, it ought to be noted that there were many *Donatist* landowners in North Africa, and that the Agonistici, significantly, are not recorded to have attacked any of their estates. Like their Caecilianist counterparts, Donatist landowners often attempted to force their religion on their own tenets, a fact that Augustine constantly decried[88] and the imperial government condemned.[89] Ironically, the imperial government's solution to the forced conversion of Donatist slaves was the same as that of the Agonistici: Donatist landowners caught forcibly rebaptizing their slaves were subject to "the confiscation of all their property"[90] and their slaves were allowed to take refuge in Caecilianist churches.[91] In their depredations against Caecilianist landowners, then, Agonistic atrocities differed only in legal status from governmental persecution.

Caecilianist proselytizers in majority Donatist territories were special targets of the Agonistici, and it has already been noted in the overview history that both Augustine and his biographer Possidius narrowly escaped death at their hands.[92] One common means of humiliating both Caecilianist missionaries and their converts was to blind them with lime and vinegar, an action laden with sacramental overtones.[93] So blinded, the

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[88] See Augustine, *Against Petilian* II.84.184 (NPNF(1) 4, 573), for example: "Why, even lately, as I myself recall with mourning to this day, did not Crispinus of Calama, one of your party, having bought a property, and that only copyhold, boldly and unhesitatingly immerse in the waters of a second baptism no less than eighty souls. . ."

[89] *Theodosian Code,* XVI.6.4 (Pharr, 464).

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid, XVI.6.4.2 (Pharr, 464).

[92] Augustine, *Contra Cresconium,* III.46.50 (PL 43.523); *Enchiridion*, XVII (Peebles, 382); *Letter 88*.6 (Teske, Vol. I, 354-55).

[93] See Augustine, *Letter 88*.8 (Teske, Vol. I, 356), *Letter 111*.1-2 (Teske, Vol. II, 88-89), *Contra Cresconium,* III.42.46 (PL 43.521); Possidius, *Life of Augustine*, 10 (Muller, 84).

stumbling Caecilianists would serve as a potent object lesson for the metaphorical blindness of the Caecilianist party. This type of torture, so uniquely common to the Agonistici, appears to have been wholly religious in nature, and the victims confined to Caecilianist clergy or converts.

The Agonistici appeared to have particularly concentrated their attacks against Donatist apostates, who had become numerous by the early 400s as a result of increased imperial persecution.[94] In one particularly embarrassing case, the Donatist bishop Maximian of Bagai, a Donatist stronghold which had only several years earlier hosted a major Donatist council,[95] defected to the Caecilianist side. If he had thought that such a move would bring an end to persecution, he was wrong; Agonistic partisans surrounded him, beat him, and left him for dead.[96] Such incidences were widespread—when attempting to convert a Donatist friend, Augustine found that the chief impediment to his conversion was the fact that he would mark himself as a target for the Agonistici.[97] More directly impinging on a social reconstruction of Agonistic actions was their propensity to terrorize the Maximianists, schismatic Donatists who hated the Caecilianists just as much as the mainstream Donatist movement.[98]

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[94] Augustine's *Letter 105*.2.3 (Teske, Vol. II, 55-56) contains a long list of Agonistic atrocities against converts to Caecilianism.

[95] The Council of Bagai, which had condemned the Maximianist schism and rehabilitated Primian as Primate of Carthage (Augustine, *Contra Cresconium,* IV.4.5 (PL 43.549-551). Augustine attested to the city of Bagai's importance to Donatism in *Expositions*, Psalm 21(2).26: "And they still have the audacity to pretend, 'Our church is the great assembly too.' What, Bagai and Thamugadi?"

[96] Augustine, *Letter 185*.7.26-27 (Teske, Vol. III, 194-95), *Contra Cresconium,* III.43.47 (PL 43.521).

[97] Augustine, *Letter 57*.2 (Teske, Vol. I, 238).

[98] The Agonistici are associated with the campaigns of Optatus of Thamugadi against the Maximianists in Augustine, *Against Petilian* II.20.45 (NPNF(1) 4, 540) and *Contra Parmeniani,* I.11.17 (PL 43.46) and III.3.18 (PL 43.96).

In their campaigns against the Maximianists, the Agonistici exhibited a tendency that can only be characterized as religious in orientation. This was also evident in their frequent attacks on another non-Caecilianist group, the pagan populace of North Africa. J. S. Alexander notes that "as reported by Augustine, their efforts were directed as much against paganism as against African Catholicism."[99] He refers to Augustine's assertion that the Donatists, whenever they could, broke down the temples and "basilicas" of the pagans,[100] and his graphic discussion of "long columns" of Agonistic crowds which charged pagan feasts, seeking to destroy their idols.[101] While such attacks appear to have been ultimately aimed at achieving martyrdom at the hands of the enraged pagan populace,[102] they also show that the fury of the Agonistici was not limited to upper-class citizens, as the inhabitants of pagan villages were most likely rural native farmers of the same social class as the Agonistici themselves.

Agonistici and Donatists

Before proceeding into a constructive discussion of Agonistic theology, it would be best to clarify the relationship between the movement and mainstream Donatism. Many scholars have seen the Agonistici as primarily a separate movement based on social reform and only incidentally allied with the Donatists. Their "general attachment" to Donatism, as postulated by Warmington and Tilley, resulted only from a coincidence of enemies, for the Agonistici loathed the Caecilianist landowners for economic reasons

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[99] Alexander, "Donatism," 961.

[100] Augustine, *Contra Gaudentium*, I.38.51 (PL 43.737): "neither the pagans, whose temples you broke down, whose basilicas you destroyed where you could. . ." See also *Sermon 63B*.17.

[101] Augustine, *Letter 185*.3.12 (Teske, Vol. III, 186) and *Contra Gaudentium* I.28.32 (PL 43.725).

[102] Ibid.

quite as much as the mainstream Donatist movement loathed them for religious ones.[103] As suggested in the preceding discussion, the relationship between the Agonistici and the mainstream Donatists appears to have been much closer than a mere coincidence of aims. They were often incited and led by Donatist clerics, showed just as much vigor in persecuting Donatist schismatics or pagans as they did Caecilianists, and viewed their own movement more in terms of a religious "crusade" than a social uprising.[104]

It is true, however, that the term "Agonistici" was not merely another name for the Donatist movement. While all Agonistici were enthusiastic Donatists,[105] many Donatists harbored ambivalent feelings toward the sect. Their many protestations to Augustine and Optatus that they were quite unhappy with the actions of their daughter-group ought to be taken seriously. In one of his more candid moments, Augustine wrote of the Agonistici that "such persons do not find favor with most Donatists"[106] and that their "deeds were looked upon with horror by many who were firmly rooted in the same superstitious heresy."[107] He also attests to several Donatist councils that were held to curb the violence of the Agonistici by forbidding voluntary martyrdom.[108] In several cases, it was the intervention of Donatists which stopped the torture of Caecilianist converts,[109] and Optatus provides testimony that Donatists before the Macarian

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[103] Warmington, *North African Provinces*, 87-88, and Tilley, *Bible*, 94.

[104] Augustine, *Letter 93*.1.2 (Teske, Vol. I, 378).

[105] Maureen Tilley's assertion in *Bible*, 94 that the Agonistici were "usually, though not always, Donatist supporters" is without basis. There is no evidence of any non-Donatist Agonistici.

[106] Augustine, *Heresies*, LXIX.4 (Teske, 51).

[107] Augustine, *Letter 185*.4.16 (Teske, Vol. III, 188).

[108] Augustine, *Contra Cresconium,* III.49.54 (PL 43.526).

[109] Augustine, *Letter 88*.6 (Teske, Vol. I, 354-55), *Contra Cresconium,* III.48.53 (PL 43.525).

persecution actually called on the *comes* Taurinus to intervene against the Agonistici, stating that they had gotten out of control.[110] After his repression, these same Donatists forbade the Agonistici from being honored as martyrs and disinterred their remains from the churches.[111]

The often-contentious relationship between mainstream Donatists and the Agonistici is nowhere better exemplified than in Augustine's Letter 108, which contains a graphic account of a dispute between the two groups in his own city of Hippo Regius:

> When you [the Donatist bishop] entered this city, their leaders accompanied you with their gangs, shouting "Praise be to God," ["Deo Laudes"] amid their songs, and they used these cries like trumpets of battle in all their brigandage. On another day, they were struck and stirred up by the goads of your words, which you hurled at them through a Punic interpreter with an honest and genuine indignation filled with frankness, and you were angered by their actions rather than delighted by their services. They tore themselves from the midst of the congregation, as we were able to hear from those who were present and recounted it, with the gesture of madmen.[112]

The letter certainly exemplifies the tensions evident between mainstream Donatists and their Agonistic brethren, and that the two movements were not always delighted by each other's actions.

On the other hand, Augustine's statement that on the first day "their leaders accompanied you with their gangs" shows that, however they deplored some of the more fanatical actions of the Agonistici, Donatists felt comfortable maintaining communion with them. In the same letter, Augustine noted that "if you wanted to be severe with them, you would be seen as ungrateful for their benefits."[113] This was true—while most

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[110] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, III.4 (Edwards, 69).

[111] Ibid.

[112] Augustine, *Letter 108*.5.14 (Teske, Vol. II, 78).

[113] Ibid, 6.18 (Teske, Vol. II, 81).

mainstream Donatists decried Agonistic violence, the temptation was always there to utilize the Agonistici in order to further Donatist objectives. Optatus of Thamugadi, whom Augustine particularly enjoyed parading before Donatist eyes, is an excellent example of this tendency.[114]

Beyond a mere convenient association, evidence abounds that the Donatists themselves considered the Agonistici to be an intrinsic part of their movement. The fact that they held councils concerning the status of self-inflicted martyrdoms or that they appealed to Taurinus to repress the rogue Agonistici itself indicates that mainstream Donatists felt themselves responsible for the actions of their daughter-movement. In his writings, Augustine frequently relied on accusations of Agonistic violence when attempting to counter Donatist claims of Caecilianist persecution, demonstrating that he certainly felt the two movements to be intrinsically linked.[115] Certainly there is some point to saying that such ties may have been exaggerated for their polemical value. However, his writings also contain many *Donatist* statements which tell the same story. Several times the Donatists are seen defending their association with the Agonistici despite their violent actions "for fear of sundering the sect of Donatus,"[116] a point that Augustine gleefully emphasized again and again as it only proved that the Donatists ought not to have separated from Catholic unity in the first place. Such assertions on the part of the Donatists show that they themselves considered the Agonistici an essential part of their movement. A Donatist friend of Augustine apparently felt this way also, as

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[114] See Augustine, *Letter 87*.4 (Teske, Vol. I, 346) and *Against Petilian*, I.24.26 (NPNF(1) 4, 528).

[115] See Augustine, *Letter 88*.6-8 (Teske, Vol. I, 354-56) and *Expositions*, Psalm 36(2).18 (Boulding, Vol. 16, 118).

[116] Augustine, *Letter 52*.3 (Teske, Vol. I, 203) and *Against Petilian* I.24.26 (NPNF(1) 4, 528).

he identified the Agonistici as "certain violent men of his party" whose threats formed the primary reason for his unwillingness to convert.[117]

One of the more definite pairings of Donatism with the Agonistici comes from Possidius. In his *Life of Augustine*, Possidius devoted a chapter to the Agonistic movement. When discussing the Agonistici, he notes that "these Donatists had in almost all their churches a strange group of men, perverse and violent, who professed continence and were called Circumcellions. They were very numerous and were organized in bands throughout almost all the regions of Africa."[118] What this appears to show is that the movement was structured and supported around local Donatist congregations, fitting part-and-parcel within the religious makeup of the movement. The rationale for their violent actions against the Caecilianists, according to Possidius, was that "the congregations of their sect were growing smaller" due to Caecilianist conversions.[119]

Finally, incontrovertible evidence that the Donatists believed the Agonistici to be bound up with the larger movement comes from Augustine's comments concerning the origin of the term *Agonistici* discussed above, in which he records that the Donatists regarded the Agonistici as "soldiers of Christ," "warriors who fight against the devil and prevail."[120] Far from being an essentially separate phenomenon, the Agonistici represented the fanatical edge of the Donatist movement.

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[117] Augustine, *Letter 57*.2 (Teske, Vol. I,238).

[118] "Habebant etiam iidem Donatistae per suas pene omnes Ecclesias inauditum hominum genus perversum ac violentum, velut sub professione continentium ambulantes, qui Circumcelliones dicebantur. Et erant in ingenti numero et turbis per omnes pene Africanas regiones constituti." Possidius, *Life of Augustine*, 10 (Muller, 84).

[119] Ibid.

[120] "Quia sunt qui certant adversus diabolum, et praevalent." Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 132.6 (Boulding, Vol. 20, 180).

A Reconstruction of Agonistic Theology

It can thus be seen that the Agonistici were not primarily social revolutionaries obsessed with overturning the existing social order, and that they were far more closely allied to the mainstream Donatist movement than has often been admitted. That their vaunted attacks were primarily religious in nature and chiefly directed against the opponents of Donatism (Caecilianist bishops and converts, schismatics, and pagans) has been discussed in detail. What, then, could one say about the inner life of the Agonistici, of their theology, such as it was? At this point, it would be well to remember that most of what we know of Agonistic "theology" is based on their deeds, rather than their words. The Agonistici were as a rule much more interested in actualizing their beliefs than in writing them down. Nevertheless, much can be gleaned from the nature of their actions. Furthermore, the testimony of their fellow Donatists concerning the nature of the movement and the attestations of multiple Caecilianist authors can also help in reconstructing Agonistic beliefs.

In the ensuing reconstruction of Agonistic theology, I will be substantially paralleling the views of J. S. Alexander and W. H. C. Frend. Both of these authors held to the view that the Agonistici expressed themselves first and foremost as a religious phenomenon, and both viewed the Agonistici as a special order intrinsically tied to the Donatist movement. While Frend, as discussed above, did believe that the religious beliefs of the Agonistici grew out of their underlying social motivations, he went to great lengths to establish that their religious attachment to Donatism was not merely

coincidental, and that any reconstruction of Agonistic ideology had to take their sincere religious beliefs into account.[121]

Following the interpretation taken by Frend and Alexander, the Agonistici ought to be seen as "the religiously zealous wing of Donatism, disciplined by asceticism and dedicated to martyrdom."[122] The Agonistici thus represented the institutionalization of the Martyrist tendency within Donatist theology, a special order of Donatists who were fanatically devoted to the concept of martyrdom.[123] As such, they are comparable to the monastic movement which had developed around the same time in the East and which was gradually spreading to the West.[124] Unlike the Eastern concept of monasticism, however, which *replaced* the travail of the martyrs with the asceticism of the monks,[125] the Agonistic movement represented the *continuation* of the martyrist drive within Christianity. The Agonistic life was oriented around the glory of the martyrs. They spent their lives in preparation for their own martyrdom, in the meantime taking up vows of continence and engaging in perpetual pilgrimages to the martyr's shrines. When the time came (usually marked by dreams or visions), the Agonistic would voluntarily seek his (or

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[121] It is important to note that Frend appears to have substantially evolved toward a more religious-based explanation for the Agonistici after the publication of *The Donatist Church* in 1952. This progression can especially be seen in his article "Circumcellions and Monks" in 1969 and culminates in "The North African Cult of Martyrs: From Apocalyptic to Hero-Worship" in 1982.

[122] Alexander, "Donatism," 960.

[123] As Possidius appears to have described them (*Life of Augustine*, 10 (Muller, 84)).

[124] Monasticism appears to have begun in earnest around the same time as the Diocletianic Persecution was fading, c. 310. See Frend, *Martyrdom*, 548. Daniel Caner, in *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 230-235, finds much within the Agonistic movement to compare to the many divergent forms of popular monasticism practiced in the East at the time.

[125] Ibid, 547-48. Frend asserts that this idea was held even within its own time-period: "'Monasticism,' we are told, 'arose from men's desire to become martyrs in will, that they might not miss the glory of them who were made perfect by blood.'"

her) own martyrdom, a move that markedly contrasted with the sensibilities of mainstream Donatists, who held several councils to explicitly condemn the practice.[126] If no true persecutors existed, the would-be martyr would engineer his own martyrdom by provoking Caecilianist (or pagan) retribution or even committing suicide, a practice which has been vividly portrayed to us by the simultaneously horrified and titillated Caecilianists. By thus willingly giving up their lives in service to Christ, the Agonistic "confessors" ensured their ultimate perfection and were honored as martyrs by their comrades and, to a significant extent, by the average Donatist.[127]

Augustinian Monasticism and the Agonistici

This portrait of the Agonistic as an itinerate ascetic has met with several pointed objections, not the least of which is that Petilian himself explicitly denied that the Donatists had any form of monks:

> In the next place, he [Petilian] has gone on, with calumnious mouth, to abuse monasteries and monks, finding fault with me [Augustine], as having been the founder of this kind of life. And what this kind of life really is he does not know at all, or rather, though it is perfectly well known throughout the world, he pretends that he is unacquainted with it.[128]

In her article "Managing the Rejection of Marriage," Maureen Tilley, upon reviewing Petilian's statement, asks a relevant question: "The Donatists had ascetics, didn't they?"[129] She answers in the affirmative: "Donatists did indeed have a monastic

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[126] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, III.4 (Edwards, 69), Augustine, *Contra Cresconium,* III.49.54.

[127] Optatus (*Against the Donatists*, III.4, Edwards, 69)) provides an especially good example of this tendency.

[128] Augustine, *Against Petilian*, III.40.48 (NPNF(1) 4, 616).

[129] Maureen Tilley, "Managing the Rejection of Marriage: North African Asceticism," (2000), accessed on August 3, 2007. Online: http://people.vanderbilt.edu/~james.p.burns/chroma/marriage/tilleymar.htm.

tradition," despite Petilian's objection.[130] Evidence abounds that the Donatist movement mirrored the Caecilianists in many monastic tendencies, such as their encouragement of "consecrated virgins," whether male ("continentes") or female ("castimoniales" or "sanctimoniales").[131] This class was connected with specific rites, such as anointing with oil and a distinctive head covering, both of which practices Optatus and Augustine reference in connection to Donatist consecrated virgins.[132] More intriguingly, Tilley notes that "there is some evidence that gyrovagues or wandering monks were not unknown"—in other words, that the kind of perambulatory asceticism that the Agonistici were famous for was not foreign to Africa.[133] While evidence of Donatist itinerates outside the Agonistic order is lacking, it is does seem that "gyrovagues" were not a new development in North African Christianity by the time of the Donatist schism.

Furthermore, in their arguments against the Caecilianists, the Donatists explicitly correlated their movement to the monastic tradition introduced by Augustine, an argument that Augustine attempted to undercut: "As soon as you begin to revile the heretics, and with justification, about their Circellions, in the hope that their very shame may lead to their amendment, they fling back at you similar insults about monks. But

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[130] Ibid.

[131] Ibid.

[132] See Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, II.19 (Edwards, 47), VI.4 (Edwards, 122), and Augustine, *Letter 23*.3 (Teske, Vol. I, 65) and *Letter 35*.4 (Teske, Vol. I, 123): "For the daughter of a tenant farmer of the Church who had been one of our catechumens was won over to those people against the will of her parents, and she also donned the habit of a nun ["formam sanctimonialis"] where she had been baptized." Slightly before the outbreak of schism, but certainly within the Donatist mentality, the famous martyrs Donatilla and Maxima, were said to be "beautiful consecrated virgins" (*Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda*, 2 (Tilley, 18)).

[133] Tilley, "Managing," http://people.vanderbilt.edu/~james.p.burns/chroma/marriage/tilleymar.htm, note 10.

consider first whether the two groups are comparable. . ."[134] Indeed, the whole argument centered on whether Augustine's version of monasticism could lay claim to Biblical tradition. Basically, the Donatists were accusing Augustine of introducing a foreign term ("monachis," transliterated from the Greek "Μόνος," meaning "one") and a foreign concept (monasteries).[135] They themselves claimed to have derived the name for their own movement, "Agonistici," from the word "Agon," which the apostle Paul used when stating "I have fought the good fight" ("Bonum agonem certavi").[136] What emerges from this word game is that the Donatists considered the type of monasticism introduced by Augustine to be a perversion of true "monasticism," which they claimed to hold in their "Agonistici."[137] Otherwise, their quibble concerning the biblical basis for "monachis" as opposed to "Agonistici" or their reactionary insults against monks whenever their own movement was impugned makes little sense.

It appears, therefore, that Petilian's diatribe against "monks" ought to be taken as a reaction against the form of monasticism introduced by Augustine, not as a sweeping condemnation of all ascetic movements in general. Even without the inclusion of the Agonistici, the Donatists had monastic movements of their own, such as their

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[134] Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 132.3 (Boulding, Vol. 20, 176-77). He proceeds to state "Only let drunkards be compared with the temperate, the reckless with the circumspect, fanatics with open and straightforward people, vagrants with those who live in communities." Cenobitic monasticism does not seem to have taken root within the Christian communities of North Africa until the time of Augustine, who appears to have been the first to introduce it to that region. It had been known in the West, however, since the 350s. Ambrose of Milan, under whom Augustine was converted to Christianity, had established a cenobitic community within his own city.

[135] Ibid, 133.6: "Notice in passing how they challenge us: 'Show us where the name 'monks' occurs in scripture.' Well, come to that, let them show us where scripture uses the term *agonistici*!"

[136] Ibid.

[137] The term "monasticism" is often nebulous. In this paper, I take Tilley's broad definition of the term, which simply refers to a somewhat-institutionalized religious asceticism. The Donatists, of course, would not have utilized the term "monasticism" itself, as the term had been coined after the schism and only widely adopted in North Africa at the time of Augustine.

"continentes" and "sanctimoniales." Augustine's introduction of Catholic Eastern-style monasteries to North Africa, however, indeed the whole concept of cenobitic monasticism, was new, foreign, and therefore suspect.[138] Petilian's rejection of the term "monk" ought not prejudice historians of the Donatist movement against the fact that the Donatists indeed possessed what today would be termed a type of "monk": the itinerate ascetics of the Agonistici.[139] However, the concept had developed independently from the monastic movement which emerged from the East, and the Donatists therefore rejected the Eastern terminology ("monachis") and practice (cenobitic monasticism) as a Caecilianist innovation.

Linguistic Evidence

What proof can be offered to substantiate this picture of Agonistic belief and practice as a form of itinerate asceticism? First, there is the fact that the Agonistici were notorious in their own era for their tendency to migrate in groups around the North African landscape, traversing the land in perpetual pilgrimage.[140] This point is often

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[138] See Maureen Tilley, "Managing," http://people.vanderbilt.edu/~james.p.burns/chroma/marriage/tilleymar.htm. The picture grows even more complicated, however, by the fact that the primary practitioners of asceticism in North Africa in the late 300s were Manichaeans (see Samuel N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 146-47). Augustine's introduction of organized asceticism, therefore, was seen by his Donatist opponents as proof that he had never truly left behind his Manichaean ways (Note Petilian's snide remarks about Augustine's hidden allegiance in *Against Petilian*, III.17.20 (NPNF(1) 4, 604)).

[139] Tengström (*Donatisten und Katholiken*, 58-60) wishes to deny this hypothesis on the basis of terminology. Within this paper, the term "monastic" carries a practical rather than specific character. While certainly the Agonistici would have denied that they were "monks" based on the etymology of the term, they in fact exhibited profoundly monastic tendencies. Over-precise terminology need not sidetrack the central contention: on a practical level, the Agonistici resemble above all a form of itinerant monasticism.

[140] This portrait ought to be modified slightly by pointing out that some Agonistici are attested by Optatus and Possidius to having remained in the same general area and being attached to particular local congregations. Such local attachments, however, do not preclude their much more publicized tendency to

emphasized by those who wish to see the Agonistici as migrant agricultural laborers, but the evidence seems to point in another direction. Their wanderings were abnormal, that much is clear.[141] As Frend points out, "their wandering from place to place that has caused some recent critics so much trouble is precisely the activity, apart from their violence and revolutionary outlook, that most impressed contemporaries."[142] Such perambulations were not considered normal by ancient authors, unlike what would be expected if the Agonistici were merely comprised of migrant agricultural workers.

The very epithet "Circumcellion" was a Caecilianist derogative describing such an inclination. Augustine records that "They are called Circumcellions because they wander around 'cellas'; this is their custom, always to be roaming about, with no fixed abode."[143] His etymology raises another relevant question: what, precisely, are these "cellas" that the Agonistici were reported to frequent? Augustine mentions them another time in *Contra Gaudentium*, where he states "for the purpose of their own provisions [they surround] rustic 'cellas,' from which also they receive the name of Circumcellion, the most famous of African errors, a reproach with the whole world."[144] From these two

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stray beyond fixed boundaries. See Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, III.4 (Edwards, 68) and Possidius, *Life of Augustine*, 10 (Muller, 84).

[141] Caecilianist authors who highlight the basic fact that the Agonistici roamed around the countryside included Augustine (*Expositions*, Psalm 54.26 (Boulding, Vol. 17, 78), Psalm 132.3 (Boulding, Vol. 20, 177)), Cassiodorus (*Expositiones in Psalmos*, Psalm 132.1 in *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, Vol. 70.25-1056, edited by Jacques Paul Migne (Paris, 1844-94), 955B), Tyconius (quoted by Beatus, *Apocalypsin*, *Summa Dicendorum*, 26.32 (Romero, 51-52)), and Isidore (*Etymologies*, VIII.53 (Barney, *et al*, 177).

[142] Frend, "Monks," 544.

[143] Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 132.3 (Boulding, Vol. 20, 177): "Nam circumcelliones dicti sunt, quia *circum cellas* vagantur: solent enim ire hac, illac, nusquam habentes sedes."

[144] Augustine, *Contra Gaudentium*, I.28.32 (PL 43.725): "et victus sui causa cellas circumiens rusticanas, unde et Circumcellionum nomen accepit, universo mundo pene famosissimum Africani erroris opprobrium."

references, one can see that the "cellae" that the Agonistici frequented appear to have been in some way related to their sustenance, and that they were important enough to the movement for the Caecilianists to derogatorily term them "Circumcellions," a term which simply meant "circum cella," or "around the cellae."

A common interpretation of "cellae" is "barn" or "storehouse," thus buttressing the contention that the Agonistici were primarily agricultural laborers. Thus, their frequenting the "cellae" for their sustenance means nothing more than that they received their food from the storehouses on the Numidian olive plantations, which were indeed referred to as "cellae oleariae" by contemporary sources.[145] As Warmington says, "Both of these descriptions [the Augustinian quotes referenced above] indicate that they were no more than agricultural labourers of a sort. *Cellae* were almost certainly barns, storehouses and so on."[146]

As elaborated above, however, identifying the Agonistici with agricultural laborers appears to be a gross misinterpretation of their true purpose. In his article "The Cellae of the African Circumcellions," Frend offered an alternate view of the disputed "cellae" which gave them a much more religious orientation.[147] In a later article, "Circumcellions and Monks," he presented his case in an updated form, arguing that the "cellae" of the "Circumcellions" were actually martyrs' shrines, to which the Agonistici would make frequent pilgrimages and would be fed by the devout.[148] He offered this

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[145] See Frend, "Monks," 543, quoting Tengström's theory as discussed in his work *Donatisten und Katholiken* 195-200.

[146] Warmington, *North African Provinces*, 84.

[147] Frend, "Cellae of the African Circumcellions" in *Journal of Theological Studies* 3 (April 1952), 87-89.

[148] Frend, "Monks," 542.

hypothesis on the basis archaeological findings of numerous Donatist chapels which boasted curious features, such as numerous rooms and grain silos, as well as housing relics of the martyrs.[149] Frend notes that "The comparison between Circumcellions and monks becomes more interesting as these buildings had both a religious and an economic purpose. The churches housed relics of martyrs and the surrounding rooms provided ample means of sustenance for temporary or semi-permanent inmates."[150]

This view received a boost in credibility when an inscription honoring the Donatist martyrs Lucilla and Lucianus was discovered which named the shrine that had been built in their honor as a "cella martyrum."[151] Furthermore, the *Commentary on Revelation* of Tyconius, substantially preserved through the Catholic writer Beatus of Libana, also testified to the tendency of the Agonistici to make pilgrimages to martyr's shrines: "They travel around the provinces, since they will not allow themselves to live in one place with their brothers with a single purpose in order to live a life in common—as with single heart and spirit they might live in the apostolic manner. Rather, as we have said, they wander around diverse lands and visit the tombs of holy men, as if for the well-being of their souls."[152] A chance reference from Optatus also corroborates the view that the term "cellae" referred to martyr's shrines or chapel complexes. When Donatus of Bagai summoned the Agonistici to his city to resist the Macarian delegation, he utilized the resources of his church to feed them: "They [the Donatist bishops] had there an

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[149] Ibid, 547-48.

[150] Ibid, 548.

[151] Ibid, 546: "It seems quite clear that the building erected in their honour was called a 'cella martyrum' (cel/lam martyrum vocavit Luciani et Lucillae)."

[152] Beatus, *Apocalypsin*, *Summa Dicendorum*, 26.32 (Romero, 51-52): "ut diximus, diversas terras circuire et sanctorum sepulcra peruidere, quasi pro salute animae suae," helpfully translated by Brent Shaw, "Bad Boys," 194.

innumerable mob of those they had summoned [the Agonistici], and it is agreed that sufficient supplies of grain had been prepared; they made, as it were, public barns from the church."[153] From these examples, it does appear that Frend is right: the "cellae" that the Agonistici frequented seem to have been martyr's shrines or Donatist chapels, a theory which would fit with the fact that as itinerate ascetics, they could expect to be provided for by the offerings of the devout.[154] And as martyrs-in-training themselves, frequent pilgrimages to the martyr's shrines of the type attested to by Tyconius would not be extraordinary, nor would the willingness of the average Donatist to supply them with food. In fact, Theodoret, although admittedly one step removed from the actual scene of events, testifies to precisely this occurrence:

> For they call violent death martyrdom; and are eager to obtain this appellation by whatever means. They signify it a long time before to companions of their own faith. These truly accompany them with all zeal, and will bring each kind of food, as if they are victims they are fattened and [prepared]. However, after they have been living in these luxuries for a considerable while, they compel those whom they come upon by roads to wound them to death by their own sword.[155]

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[153] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, III.4 (Edwards, 70). While the word used for "barns" is "horreum" (= "barn, granary, storehouse"), not "cella," the point, that the Agonistici expected to be fed from the "public barns" of the church, is relevant.

[154] Most modern historians now agree with Frend that the "cellae" of the "Circumcellions" were martyr's shrines, not rural barns or storehouses. This has led to somewhat tangled results, however, since many historians still view the Agonistici as primarily agricultural laborers, despite their disavowal of one of the primary arguments for such a theory. See Chadwick, *Early Church*, 220, Salisbury, *Martyrs*, 158-159, and MacMullen, *Enemies*, 200-201. Gaddis (*Crime*, 127, note 103), Alexander ("Donatism," 960), and Peter Brown (*Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 225), have tended to agree more fully with Frend's assessment of the Agonistici as itinerant ascetics and have seen the "cellae = martyr's shrines" argument as conclusive evidence in this regard.

[155] Theodoret, *Compendium,* IV.6 (PG 83.423). While Theodoret was not personally familiar with the Agonistici, his description here tallies well with the direction of Agonistic theology. Unfortunately, Theodoret's source for this passage is unknown; no other source mentions the sacramental "fattening" of Agonistic martyrs-to-be. His description, therefore, must remain conjectural (see Birley, "Voluntary Martyrs," 125).

Thus the Agonistici may be seen as having frequented the chapels and martyrs' shrines both for the purposes of pilgrimage and for sustenance, just as Augustine testifies.[156]

Further linguistic evidence in support of the view of Agonistici as itinerate ascetics comes from other epithets applied to the movement. In his *Liber de Haeresibus* written in the late 380s, Philastrius, bishop of the Italian city of Brescia, simply called them "Circuitores," or "wanderers."[157] Another common name for the movement was "Cotopitae."[158] Isidore, writing in the seventh century, stated that "The Circumcellians are so called because they live out in the open; people call them Cotopitae."[159] Pseudo-Jerome, an anonymous writer whose heresy-list preceded Augustine's,[160] calls them "Gotispitai," evidently a corruption of the term.[161] And Tyconius, once more preserved through Beatus of Libana, testified that "these men, whom we call Circumcellions in Latin, because they are rough countrymen, are called Cotopitai in Greek."[162]

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[156] Augustine, *Contra Gaudentium*, I.28.32 (PL 43.725).

[157] Philastrius, *De Haeresibus*, 85, in *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, Vol. 12.1111-1301, edited by Jacques Paul Migne (Paris, 1844-94), 1197B-1198A: "In Africa sunt qui Circuitores dicuntur."

[158] Interestingly, Augustine uses the similar term "Cutzupitae" to denote the Roman faction of Donatists, who were more commonly known as Montenses. The similarity between the term "Cutzupitae" and "Cotopitae" may not be accidental, as Henry Wace notes (Wace, *Dictionary*, 733), although the Roman Donatists do not seem to have had any direct relation to the Agonistici. See Augustine, *Letter 53*.1.2 (Teske, Vol. I, 205), and *De Unitate Ecclesiae,* 3.6 (PL 43.395).

[159] Isidore, *Etymologies*, VIII.53 (Barney, *et al*, 177).

[160] Shaw, "Bad Boys," 182.

[161] Pseudo-Jerome, *De Haeresibus*, 45 (PL 81.643B-C). Interestingly, the PL omits the term "Gotispatai" from its translation, perhaps on the grounds that it seemed nonsensical. See Shaw, "Bad Boys," note 10.

[162] "Hi graeco vocabulo cotopitae dicuntur, quos nos latine Circilliones dicimus, eo quod agrestes sint." Beatus, *Apocalypsin*, *Summa Dicendorum*, 26.32 (Romero, 51-52). Translated by Brent Shaw, "Bad Boys," 193.

Interestingly, the meaning of the term "Cotopitai" is shrouded in mystery. While Tyconius believed that it was Greek in origin, no Greek word corresponds to the term. The fact that Pseudo-Jerome was able to offer such a variant reading of the word as "Gotispitai" appears to substantiate the evidence that its meaning was obscure even to contemporaries. A theory proposed by Salvatore Calderone and adopted by Frend attempts to solve this linguistic conundrum.[163] He proposed that the term "cotopitai" was actually derived from Coptic, not Greek, although as an Eastern term it might be automatically seen as "Greek" in the eyes of Western authors. In Coptic, the word Kote/ket meant "to wander" or "to move around," while the word "aouet" referred to a "cenobitic monastic settlement," a common feature in the Egyptian landscape.[164] Combined together, the words would have been pronounced "ketaubit" and could easily have been transliterated in Latin as "Cotopita."[165] Such an etymology has clear monastic implications; as Frend states, the use of martyr's shrines as centers of Agonistic activity "could have brought to mind a comparison with the host of small monasteries that were springing up at this period in the Egyptian countryside, and hence the application of the term 'Cotopitae' to them."[166] However obscure its origin, the term quickly caught on among Caecilianists (and later Catholics), who continued to use it long after the original meaning had been lost. Thus, the term "Cotopitai" appears to provide further evidence for the monastic tendencies of the Agonistici.

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[163] Frend, "Monks," 543, relying on Calderone, "Circumcellions," in *La Parola del Passato*, fasc. cxiii (1967), 102.

[164] Frend, "Monks," 544.

[165] Ibid.

[166] Ibid, 548.

Inferential Evidence

Further evidence that the Agonistici represented a type of perambulatory asceticism devoted to martyrdom comes from what can be gleaned of their day-to-day activities as recorded by Augustine. We know from Possidius that the Agonistici professed continence, becoming an extension of the "continentes" and "sanctimoniales" already present within the Donatist church.[167] The Agonistic way of life was apparently open to both genders as long as they remained continent, a fact that comprised one of Augustine's main diatribes against them. In most of his descriptive harangues against the Agonistic movement, Augustine decried the fact that the "sanctimoniales" who accompanied the movement "shamelessly refused to have husbands," which Augustine darkly attributed to a "fear of having any discipline."[168] Indeed, Augustine was far less charitable in his description of the Agonistici than Possidius, stating that the female devotees were "unmarried but not uncorrupted women."[169] In their vow of continence, however, the Agonistici of both genders appear to have been following a form of monastic "rule."

Another aspect of Agonistic life that scandalized Augustine was their propensity to feast and drink to excess at the martyr's shrines. Augustine castigated them for their frequent drunkenness on numerous occasions, often insinuating that they indulged in such

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[167] Possidius, *Life of Augustine*, 10 (Muller, 84): "Now, these Donatists had in almost all their churches a strange group of men, perverse and violent, who professed continency and were called Circumcellions."

[168] Augustine, *Letter 35*.2 (Teske, Vol. I, 122).

[169] Augustine, *Contra Parmeniani,* III.3.18 (PL 43.96). See also *Against Petilian* II.89.195 (NPNF(1) 4, 576).

excesses solely out of pleasure and wild abandon.[170] Indeed, along with their propensity towards violence and their acceptance of female "sanctimoniales," Agonistic "drunkenness" constitutes Augustine's essential picture of the movement.[171] Only once does he hint that there might be something more to their feasting and drunkenness beyond a mere orgy of gluttony:

> They are even greater murderers, the people who take up the bodies of the cliff jumpers with honor, who collect the blood of the cliff jumpers, who honor their graves, who get drunk at their tombs. I mean, when they see this sort of honor showered on the cliff jumpers, others are fired with the ambition to jump over cliffs themselves; the former get drunk over them on wine, the latter get drunk on madness and the worst possible error.[172]

Seen from this (albeit exaggerated) perspective, the drunkenness of the Agonistici fits into a long-standing North African pattern of commemorating the martyrs at their shrines through feasts and drunkenness. In fact, when not castigating the Agonistici for participating in such rites, Augustine constantly had to discipline his *own* side for the same excesses. In a letter to Aurelius, the bishop of Carthage, Augustine complained of such practices: "Feasting and drunkenness, after all, are considered permissible and licit to the point that they are committed even at celebrations in honor of the blessed

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[170] See Augustine, *Letter 35*.2 (Teske, Vol. I, 122): "And now along with gangs of Circumcellions . . . he proudly exults in orgies of detestable drunkenness, happy that the freedom for an evil way of life has been opened up most widely for him," or *Against Petilian* II.89.195 (NPNF(1) 4, 576): "Amid the free license of assembling together, wandering in the streets, jesting, drinking, passing the whole night in company with women who have no husbands. . ."

[171] See Augustine, *Contra Parmeniani,* III.3.18 (PL 43.96), *Against Petilian* II.39.94 (NPNF(1) 4, 555), or *Expositions*, Psalm 132.3 (Boulding, Vol. 20, 177).

[172] Augustine, *Sermon 313E*.5, in *Sermons on the Saints, 306-340A*, in *The Works of Saint Augustine, Part III, Vol. 10,* translated by Roland J. Teske, S.J. (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1995). Note that the Agonistic "suicidists" were themselves honored as martyrs whose shrines became centers of pilgrimage.

martyrs."[173] Augustine, however, realized that the practice was ingrained in the North African psyche, and would not be easily uprooted.[174] He pleaded that it at least be kept from the martyr's shrines,[175] but recognized that "carnal and ignorant folks often regard these drinking bouts and dissolute banquets in the cemeteries as not merely honors paid to the martyrs, but also as consolations for the dead,"[176] and as such would not be easily uprooted. Indeed, his own mother, Monica, had enthusiastically supported the practice.[177]

Augustine's remonstrances against the custom of his own side sheds more light onto the proverbial drunkenness of the Agonistici. Such imbibing of wine and partaking of feasts at the martyr's shrines was not considered morally wrong by the majority of Christians in North Africa—Caecilianist and Donatist alike. Indeed, it was a ritual means of honoring the martyrs and as such constituted a major feature of North African religious

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[173] Augustine, *Letter 22*.3 (Teske, Vol. I, 59). Such practices among the Caecilianists are also reported in *Letter 29*.3-5 (Teske, Vol. I, 95-97) and *Tractates on the First Epistle of John,* 4.4 (in *Fathers of the Church,* Vol. 92, translated by John W. Rettig (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 177).

[174] An excellent article concerning the broader North African cult of martyrs is W. H. C. Frend's "The North African Cult of Martyrs: From Apocalyptic to Hero-Worship" in *Jenseitsvorstellungen in Antike und Christentum* (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1982), 154-167.

[175] Augustine, *Letter 22*.3 (Teske, Vol. I, 59): "At least let this great disgrace be kept from the tombs of the bodies of the saints; at least let it be kept from the places for the sacraments, from houses of prayer. For who dares to forbid privately what is called the honor of the martyrs when it is celebrated in public?"

[176] Ibid, 22.6. He does appear to have been successful in uprooting the practice within his own diocese, at least. See Augustine, *Sermon 252*.4: "In this very city, my brothers and sisters, didn't we experience what your holinesses can recall as vividly as I can, what risks we ran when God expelled drunken celebrations from this basilica?"

[177] Augustine, *Confessions*, VI.2, translated by Rex Warner (New York: New American Library, 2001), 100-101: "There was an occasion when my mother had brought, as was her custom in Africa, cakes and bread and wine to some of the chapels built in memory of the saints. . ." Her actions were of great embarrassment to Augustine; in the rest of the chapter, he went to great lengths to stress that a.) she herself had never gotten drunk on the commemorative wine and that b.) she willingly gave up the practice when admonished by the Christians in Milan.

life. As a movement dedicated to the martyrs and to a great extent even identified with them by the average Donatist, such "martyr's feasts" would have played a large role in Agonistic life.[178] It is probably correct to infer that the "sustenance" that the Agonistici obtained from their "cellas" consisted of such ritual feasts, presumably offered by local Donatists. Theodoret's description of the "fattening" of would-be martyrs also fits such a picture.

The Witness of Contemporaries

Finally, the case for the Agonistici as a form of monastic order is strengthened by contemporary witnesses besides Augustine. Foremost among these witnesses is the Donatist Tyconius, whose *Commentary on Revelation* was largely preserved by the seventh-century bishop Beatus of Libana in his own *Commentarium in Apocalypsin*. When discussing the nature of the "pseudoprophets" which would accompany the Beast,[179] Tyconius discussed four different types of false prophets who could deceive the church: heretics, schismatics, superstitious men, and hypocrites. Under his discussion of "superstitious men," Tyconius explicitly references the Agonistici, arguing that their practices were "excessive" and went "beyond the established practices of proper religion."[180] Tyconius is the primary witness for the fact that the Agonistici's wanderings were actually pilgrimages, for he states that "they wander around diverse lands and gaze

[178] Alexander, "Donatism," 960.

[179] Revelation 16:13.

[180] Beatus, *Apocalypsin*, *Summa Dicendorum*, 26.32 (Romero, 51). Interestingly, Augustine also views Agonistic beliefs within the paradigm of a "superstitious heresy" in *Letter 185*.4.16 (Teske, Vol. III, 188), thus corroborating Tyconius' understanding of the movement.

on the tombs of holy men, as if for the well-being of their souls."[181] Moreover, this tendency was correlated with the well-known propensity of the Agonistici to commit suicide, as they "destroy themselves on the pretended grounds of their love of martyrs, so that by departing from this life violently they might acquire the name of martyrs."[182] Thus, Tyconius is a witness to both the peripatetic tendencies of the Agonistici and their Martyrist beliefs.[183]

Another contemporary author was "Praedestinatus," an anonymous author who apparently wrote his work, a heresy-list, around the 430s.[184] Brent Shaw finds this particular author interesting because he draws on pre-Augustinian sources to complete his picture of the Donatists.[185] His portrait of the Agonistici thus becomes all the more important. In his description of the movement, "Praedestinatus" wrote that "in the two Numidias there are men who live like monks whom we call Circumcellions," a clear

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[181] "Diversas terras circuire et sanctorum sepulcra peruidere, quasi pro salute animae suae." Ibid.

[182] Ibid.

[183] Brent Shaw, in "Bad Boys: Circumcellions and Fictive Violence," attempts to prove that any allusions to the Agonistici as "monks" (as well as attestations to their suicidal tendencies) were based on wild exaggerations on the part of their opponents. It is therefore imperative to him that the attribution of this passage in Beatus to Tyconius is proven false. He states in this vein that "Whatever the source of this particular passage might be, from the contents alone it is not possible to accept that Tyconius was its author." (193) His primary rationale for this belief, however, are that "It shares the same precise phraseology . . . common to the tradition of them as wandering monastics. It presents the circumcellions as suicidal martyrs who are simultaneously false monks. A strange term is offered as a designation and is claimed to be a *vocabulum Graecum*. All of this unmasks a fundamental ignorance about who these men were and what they were doing. . ." (194) This appears to be an oddly circular argument, given that the question of whether the Agonistici were "wandering monastics" and "suicidal martyrs" is precisely the point up for debate. For Tyconius to bear witness to this tendency does not impugn *his* credibility, but rather Shaw's. The statement about the "*vocabulum Graecum*" concerns Tyconius' belief that the term "Cotopitai" was a Greek word. As discussed above, it was entirely probable that the originally Coptic term was perceived as Greek by Westerners.

[184] Shaw, "Bad Boys," 186.

[185] Ibid. One of the ways in which this can be seen is when "Praedestinatus" notes that the Donatists were also called "Parmenians," after their second leader, a fact that Augustine never discussed (*De Haeresibus*, 44 (PL 53.601A)).

indication that as early as the 430s authors outside of Africa were beginning to draw an explicit correlation between the Agonistici and their own monasticism.[186]

Later witnesses continued the tradition of viewing the Agonistici in representatives of itinerate monasticism. While these later authors were certainly dependent on their predecessors, above all Augustine, for their information, they bear witness to the fact that the Agonistici were believed to be a type of heretical monastic order. Cassiodorus, in his own *Exposition on the Psalms* written in the sixth century, stated in his discussion of Psalm 132 (the same Psalm that Augustine had argued with the Donatists over the etymologies of "Monachos" and "Agonistici") that the command of the Lord for monks "to dwell in unity" "excludes circumcellions who wander about here and there with a purpose that is vacillating and quite different from that found in a monastic community."[187] Not only does this statement attest to the view that the Agonistici represented a sort of itinerate ascetic, but it also appears to show that the term "Circumcellion" had become so identified with wandering monastics that it had begun to apply to *Catholic* itinerates as well.

The seventh-century bishop Isidore of Seville, although he was aware of the more popular view of the Agonistici as suicidal Martyrists,[188] also attested to this belief,

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[186] "In utriusque Numidiae partibus habent veluti monachos, quos Circumcelliones vocamus." "Praedestinatus," *De Haeresibus*, 69 (PL 53.611B), translated by Brent Shaw, "Bad Boys," 186. Shaw disagrees with this assessment, arguing that in fact "Praedestinatus" was a major innovator who began the whole tradition that equated the Agonistici with monks: "What we see in this southern Italian source of the mid-fifth century, therefore, is a further elaboration of the caricature with the critical invention of the idea—no doubt based on local realities, as well as the debates and the discourses in which the writer himself was involved—that the circumcellions were a species of wild and dangerous monk." ("Bad Boys," 187-188) Given the attestations of Augustine and Tyconius discussed above, this conjecture seems unlikely.

[187] Cassiodorus, *Expositiones*, Psalm 132.1 (PL 70.955B), translated by Brent Shaw, "Bad Boys," 188.

[188] He includes them in his heresy list in *Etymologies*, VIII, 53.

identifying "Circellions" as those "who in the cover of monks wander everywhere, carrying off their pretence for personal profit, wandering around the provinces, not having been sent by anyone, and not having any fixed place of abode, never staying anywhere nor having settled homes."[189] He then proceeded to give a long list of "Circellion" characteristics, such as growing out their hair (so that they would look like Samuel or Elijah, according to Isidore), selling martyr's relics, wearing distinctive habits, and begging for their living.[190] If accurate, this passage would greatly augment what is known of the Agonistici, and indeed Frend, in his wish to elaborate on Agonistic practices, takes Isidore at face value.[191] Unfortunately, Shaw is correct here in pointing out that Isidore's list copies almost word-for-word Augustine's negative description of wandering monks in *On The Work of Monks*, which has nothing to do with the Agonistici per se.[192] Instead, the value of this passage to the present argument is simply that the Agonistici were so identified with a type of monastic movement that Isidore was able to assume that Augustine was referring to them in *On the Work of Monks*. Furthermore, the "Circellions" are once again not only confined to a rogue Donatist movement. Instead, they form the fifth category of monks within *Catholic* circles. As Shaw states, after Isidore the term "Circumcellion" lost its association with the Donatists and instead began

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[189] Isidore, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, XVI.7 in *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, Vol. 83.737-826, edited by Jacques Paul Migne (Paris, 1844-94), 796A-799A, translated by Brent Shaw in "Bad Boys," 189.

[190] Ibid.

[191] See Frend, "Monks," 349, *Donatist Church*, 174.

[192] Shaw, "Bad Boys," 190. See Augustine, *The Work of Monks*, 28.36, in *Fathers of the Church, Vol. 16: St. Augustine: Treatises on Various Subjects*, edited by Roy J. Deferrari (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc, 1952), 384.

to be applied to any form of wandering monk.[193] After their demise in North Africa, the Agonistici continued to attract interest as the prime examples of all that was wrong with itinerate monasticism.

The Martyrist Tendency

What emerges from the above discussion is a picture of the Agonistici as a kind of itinerate monasticism, a special movement within the Donatist church that practiced continence, made frequent pilgrimages to martyr's shrines, and were sustained at such places by devotees. However, a life of pilgrimage was not the end goal of the Agonistici, nor were their supporters offering them sustenance merely out of concern for their well-being. Rather, they were perceived as martyrs-in-training, and their entire *telos* was wrapped up in the concept of their own voluntary martyrdom. The food offerings were those traditionally offered at feasts in honor of the martyrs, and as such had tremendous ritual significance. The Agonistici were, in short, a form of monastic order dedicated to training for and eventually consummating their own martyrdoms.

It appears that the individual Agonistic lived a life in contemplation of the martyrs, seeking to devote his life solely to God. This was augmented by frequent actions in defense of the true faith, whether against pagans, Caecilianists, or Donatist apostates. Fanatically devoted to their own martyrdoms, opposition to these groups was seen as a necessity, and they carried ritual cudgels named "Israels" for this task. While in later years Augustine records that they largely abandoned the traditional prohibition on

[193] Shaw, "Bad Boys," 191.

other weaponry,[194] for most of their existence the Agonistici seem to have been allowed to bear only clubs in their attacks.[195] With their traditional cry of "Deo Laudes," or "Praises to God," they would attack enemies using these cudgels.[196] The reason behind the general taboo against other weapons besides cudgels has never been fully explained, although it might be simply due to Christ's prohibition of the use of a sword.[197] It does seem that the Donatists themselves traditionally drew a theoretical distinction between swords and cudgels, as during the Macarian repression they took special pains to reassure the devout that people beaten to death by soldier's cudgels had still attained the status of martyrs.[198] Presumably, the central issue in that case involved the shedding of blood, the traditional symbol of the "martyr's baptism." Regardless, the Agonistic reliance on cudgels clearly had some sort of ritual significance, as a symbol of their status as the "soldiers of Christ" ("milites Christi").[199]

Despite their frequent actions against dissident faiths, the focal point of the Agonistic life was not to defend Donatism against its enemies. Strictly speaking, the

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[194] See Augustine, *Against Petilian*, II.89.195 (NPNF(1) 4, 576), and *Expositions*, Psalm 54.25 (Boulding, Vol. 17, 78): "If only he carried nothing worse than a cudgel! But no, he carries a sling, he carries an axe, and stones, and a lance."

[195] Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 10.5 (Boulding, Vol. 15, 164). The rationale for the term "Israel" is unknown; Frend conjectures that it might be a corruption of "Azael," meaning "strength of God" (*Donatist Church*, 174, n.9).

[196] See Augustine, *Letter 108*.5.14 (Teske, Vol. II, 78), *Expositions*, Psalm 132.6 (Boulding, Vol. 20, 180) and *Sermon 313E*.6. Indeed, it was said that the war-cry of "Deo Laudes" was more feared among the Caecilianists than a lion's roar.

[197] See Matthew 26.52.

[198] *Donatus and Advocatus*, 6 (Tilley, 57): "Against innocent hands stretched out to the Lord, their right hands were armed with cudgels. But it may be said that whose who were not slaughtered by the sword were no less martyrs for having been beaten to death in this impious massacre."

[199] Frend records this term from Donatist inscriptions in the North African town of Henchir Bou Said which read "Donatus Miles Christi." The term is also indirectly attested to in Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 132.6 (Boulding, Vol. 20, 180): "milites Christi agonistici."

attacks on other groups were special circumstances caused by crises within the Donatist church, and not an intrinsic part of Agonistic life. While those who died in such attacks were certainly counted as martyrs,[200] it was not necessary to perish in an anti-Caecilianist operation in order to attain this status. Having reinterpreted the theology of martyrdom until it stood more for the final perfection of the believer than as a symbol of defiance against ungodly powers, Agonistic theology construed martyrdom in such a way that Caecilianist (or pagan) opposition was not necessary in order to define it. When pressed, even what others perceived as suicide could be an acceptable means of martyrdom.

It appears that the individual Agonistic deliberately sought martyrdom after a dream or revelation showed him (or her) that his time was at hand. Theodoret recorded that the Agonistici "signify [their upcoming martyrdom] to associates of their faith long before the time," at which point they would be honored just as the Abitinian confessors were by gifts of food.[201] Though admittedly a Greek writer and thus removed from the immediate scene of events, his report accords well with what we see in the *Passion of Maximian and Isaac*, where the titular hero, receiving what he interpreted as an omen of his upcoming martyrdom (a crown in his cup that glimmered with "a splendid blood-red color"), deliberately provoked his own martyrdom by tearing down a copy of the imperial edict responsible for suppressing Donatism.[202]

For the Agonistic, the call to martyrdom could be fulfilled in a variety of ways. While they were apparently prohibited from directly committing suicide by actively

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[200] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, III.4 (Edwards, 69); Augustine, *Letter 88*.8 (Teske, Vol. I, 356).

[201] Theodoret, *Compendium*, IV.6 (PG 83.423).

[202] *Maximian and Isaac*, 4-5 (Tilley, 65-66).

killing themselves,[203] more passive forms of suicide were deemed acceptable, including goading Caecilianist travelers to kill them,[204] rushing in on pagan festivals, overturning their idols, and allowing the enraged pagans to slay them in retribution,[205] or even allowing their own death to occur via precipitations from high cliffs or drowning.[206] While self-precipitation or drowning seem to veer quite close to self-inflicted suicide, Frend records archaeological evidence which seems to show Donatist monuments to the Agonistic martyrs who cast themselves off cliffs.[207] Pseudo-Jerome records that before throwing themselves over the edge, the martyrs-to-be would say a prayer.[208] Such actions were completely in line with the Martyrist theology which viewed martyrdom as a triumph over the worldly life, as the ultimate glory of the Christian. In the words of the *Passion of Maximian and Isaac*, "One miserable man was enough to fight so gloriously against so much torture and against such a multitude of the enemy that in this one contest,

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[203] See Gaddis, *Crime*, 113.

[204] Augustine, *Letter 185*.3.12 (Teske, Vol. III, 186: "Certain Donatists also thrust themselves upon armed travelers in order to be killed, threatening in a terrifying manner that they would strike them if they were not killed by them," and also *Heresies,* LXIX.4 (Teske, 51); Theodoret, *Compendium*, IV.6 (PG 83.423).

[205] Augustine, *Contra Parmeniani*, I.10.16 (PL 43.45), *Contra Gaudentium*, I.28.32 (PL 43.725), *Letter 185*.3.12 (Teske, Vol. III, 186).

[206] Augustine, Letter 185.3.12 (Teske, Vol. I, 186), *Contra Gaudentium,* I.28.32 (PL 43.725), *Heresies,* LXIX.4 (Teske, 51); Philastrius, *Haeresibus*, 85 (PL 12.1197B-1198A); "Praedestinatus," *De Haeresibus*, 69 (PL 53.611B).

[207] Frend, *Donatist Church*, 175-6: "Between 1937 and 1940 exploration of the mountainous country around Nif en-Nisr, near Ain Mlila on the High Plains, brought to light a collection of roughly hewn inscriptions. Some of these were simply boulders lying at the foot of a precipice. Each was marked with a name, the calendar month, and the word *reditum* or *red(itum)*. It is thought that this may mean 'ransom' or 'rendering' of the soul to God, and that we have at this site evidence of Circumcellion ritual suicides." Indeed, the term *reditum* appears to buttress the argument that the Agonistici viewed their voluntary martyrdom as the means to obtaining ultimate perfection.

[208] "Semetipsos interdum oratione facta aut praecipitio, aut incendio, aut alios ad sui necem invitantes, gladio perimunt." Pseudo-Jerome, *De Haeresibus*, 45 (PL 81.643C).

the enemy could not report a single victory. He who went to death in triumph was able to pass the test in his final torment." [209]

The picture one finds of the Agonistici is thus one of itinerate asceticism militantly devoted to the concept of martyrdom. In this tendency, the Agonistici represented the extreme right wing of Donatism, fanatically dedicated to Martyrist theology. Constant opposition by the Donatist leadership indicates that the mainstream church was not nearly as comfortable with such a position, although their reluctance to excommunicate the Agonistici shows that the movement was perceived as intrinsically Donatist. Certainly, the average Donatist parishioner was enthralled with the tales of the Agonistici and despite opposition from the leadership venerated them as true martyrs. [210]

The Agonistici were not primarily concerned with the purity of the church or the ritual uncleanness of the Caecilianists. However, even more than the average Donatist, they would never have joined with the "official" church of North Africa. This was because the Caecilianists had lost the concept of martyrdom, indeed, had blocked the faithful from supplying the confessors during the Diocletianic persecution. A church without martyrs was no church at all. In their fanatical devotion to the martyrs, the Agonistici provide an exaggerated illustration of the ideological divide between the Martyrists and the Purists, and as such, serve as the prime example of the Martyrist tendency within the Donatist church.

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[209] *Maximian and Isaac*, 5 (Tilley, 67).

[210] Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, III.4 (Edwards, 69); Augustine, *Letter 88*.8 (Teske, Vol. I, 356).

CHAPTER EIGHT

Rogatists and Maximianists

"*What we want is holiness*."

–Tyconius

Introduction

The fanaticism of the Agonistici gives ample testimony to the distinctiveness of the Martyrist impulse within the Donatist church. In their pursuit of the martyr's crown, they espoused a theology that based the legitimacy of the church directly on the blood of its martyrs. The Caecilianists had no current martyrs; indeed, they had actively persecuted the Abitinian confessors during the Diocletianic persecution, according to Donatist rhetoric. Therefore, theirs was not the true church. While other factors certainly played a role, the primary Martyrist rationale for secession from the Caecilianists was that they had made their peace with the world, and had thus turned from a church of martyrs to a church of persecutors.

As discussed in Chapter Six, however, there existed within the Donatist church another theology, very different in its emphases. Instead of focusing on its repository of martyrs, it extolled sacramental purity as the primary distinguishing mark of the true church.[1] The church was defined by its purity. It was an elite assembly of the righteous, the "the one, holy, and true church,"[2] blameless before God and quick to separate itself

[1] It is appropriate to be reminded at this point that both Martyrist and Purist tendencies often blended seamlessly within mainstream Donatism, allowing Donatist writers to simultaneously extol both the martyrs *and* the purity of the church.

[2] *Abitinian Martyrs*, 22 (Tilley, 47).

from unrepentant sinners. Within the Purist tradition, the sanctity of the church came before the unity of the church. If part of the church had fallen into decay, it was better to separate from it than to remain and catch its infection. Because of this mindset, Augustine's arguments concerning the paramount importance of the unity of the church often flew past his Donatist opponents. After all, unity with a sacramentally-impure church was not true unity at all, but an unholy association of assemblies which were as dissimilar to each other as "light is to darkness, life to death, a holy angel to the devil, Christ to the Antichrist."[3] This overwhelming emphasis on purity was a hallmark of the original schism, and it continued to be seen throughout the later history of the movement.

With such an emphasis on the holiness of the church, it was inevitable that schisms would arise within the Donatist movement. Augustine attests to this tendency, noting that "in Africa herself, you could not say, if you were asked, how many sects have split off from the sect of Donatus, especially since those who do this think that they are more righteous to the extent that they are fewer and they are, of course, to that extent less known."[4] Most of these schisms, such as Urbanists, Claudianists, or Arzuges,[5] were indeed extremely obscure, and their rationales for splitting from the Donatist church are unknown. There were, however, two schisms which particularly rocked the Donatist world, to which Augustine would often point to as prime examples of Donatism's

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[3] Ibid (Tilley, 47).

[4] Augustine, *Letter 93*.8.25 (Teske, Vol. I, 392). See also "Praedestinatus," *De Haeresibus*, 69 (PL 53.611C): "Frequently they have had discord between themselves."

[5] For the Urbanists, see Augustine, *Contra Cresconium,* IV.60.73 (PL 43.588) (All Augustine tells us is that they existed "in certain parts of Numidia"). The Claudianists are slightly better known. It is assumed that they derived from Claudian, the Donatist bishop of Rome who was expelled by Gratian (see Greenslade's discussion of the Claudianists in *Schism*, 192-194 and Frend's in *Donatist Church*, 206-207). For the Arzuges, see Augustine, *Letter 93*.8.24 (Teske, Vol. I, 392), where they are said to exist in Byzacena and Tripolitania.

tendency to split itself apart.[6] Unlike their less-successful counterparts, these schisms seriously called into question whether the Donatist movement could survive as a unified whole.

The Rogatist schism was the first to break away from mainstream Donatism. Its leaders believed that the wider movement had irrevocably compromised itself by its communion with the Agonistici, whose fanatical excesses were well-known and despised by Purist activists. When Augustine derided the Donatist church for maintaining communion with the Agonistici despite their violent propensities, he was merely echoing Rogatist criticisms. In this readiness to break with mainstream Donatism over questions of purity, the Rogatist movement prefigured the greatest challenge to the unity of the Donatist church: the Maximianist schism. Here, the aftermath of a hotly-contested election led to accusations that the new Bishop of Carthage, Primian, was sacramentally unfit for office. Over one hundred bishops (nearly a quarter of the Donatist church as a whole[7]) condemned him and consecrated the deacon Maximian to take his place. The clashes which followed between the larger Donatist movement (with Primian at its head) and the dissident Maximianists afforded Augustine many lines of attack.

In their willingness to sunder the unity of the Donatist church to safeguard their sacramental holiness, both schisms provide excellent examples of the Purist tendency within Donatist theology. By discussing their underlying beliefs and emphases and contrasting them with the Martyrism espoused by the Agonistici, a holistic picture of the

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[6] Several times Augustine cites the Rogatists and Maximianists as the principal examples of schism within Donatist ranks: see *Tractates on John*, 10.6 (Rettig, Vol. 78, 217-218) and *De Unitate Ecclesiae*, 3.6 (PL 43.395).

[7] Augustine claims this ratio in *Heresies*, LXIX.5 (Teske, 51).

Donatist church can be attained that truly appreciates the wide variety of convictions within the movement.

The Rogatists

Overview History

The Rogatist schism began sometime around the year 364 within the environs of the Mauretanian city of Cartenna.[8] The immediate rationale for their secession from the Donatist church is obscure, but Frend and Tilley are probably correct when they say it had something to do with "a misuse of church property by drunken Circumcellions."[9] This conjecture is arrived at by their denunciations of Agonistic violence as recorded by Augustine,[10] and their explicit disapproval of clerical drunkenness (a concern that Augustine also shared). Indeed, Augustine makes a special point of sarcastically attesting to this conviction: "But pardon me; I was mistaken when I wanted to convince you about the drunkard who baptizes; it had slipped my mind that I was dealing with a Rogatist, not with just any sort of Donatist. For you can perhaps in your few colleagues and in all your clerics find not a single drunkard."[11]

Against such perceived sacrileges of the Agonistici, then, the Donatist bishop of Cartenna, Rogatus, declared that the true Donatist church consisted only of those who had truly taken the pacifistic statements of its founder to heart. As Donatus himself had said, "If you have to resist, you resist with the power of the soul, not with arms; if you

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[8] For the date, see Frend, *Donatist Church*, 197.

[9] See Tilley, *Bible*, 95, and Frend, *Donatist Church*, 197.

[10] Augustine, *Letter 93*.3.11 (Teske, Vol. I, 383).

[11] Ibid, 11.49.

fight, it is with faith not force."[12] Rogatus fiercely defended this pacifistic position to the point that he declared excommunicate anyone who dared to defile himself by communing with the Agonistici or emulating their violent example.[13] As the wider Donatist church could not bring itself to cast out its Agonistic adherents, Rogatus and the bishops whom he had converted to his cause seceded from the larger church.[14] From their center in Cartenna, the Rogatists became a serious threat to the Donatist movement in the province of Mauretania Caesariensis.

Unfortunately for the nascent movement, Rogatus had picked the wrong time to secede. Determined to reintegrate the dissident movement with itself, the mainstream Donatist movement appealed to the authorities to confiscate Rogatist basilicas. Rogatus strenuously opposed them.[15] While little seems to have come of these efforts, the mainstream Donatists found a much more powerful ally in Firmus, a Mauretanian chieftain who had revolted against Romanus, the *comes Africae* at the time.[16] In return for the de-facto allegiance of the Mauretanian Donatists, Firmus repressed the Rogatists

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[12] *Donatus and Advocatus*, 14 (Tilley, 60).

[13] On this point, see Tilley, *Bible*, 95.

[14] The number of Rogatist bishops at the beginning of the schism is not known. Frend (*Donatist Church*, 197), believes that there were nine bishops who initially supported Rogatus. His estimate, however, is based on Augustine's description of the Rogatist movement in his own day, which had already been decimated by persecution. For it to warrant such a major persecution from the Donatists so soon after its inception, the number of bishops who initially supported Rogatus was in all probability much higher than the nine who remained by Augustine's time.

[15] Augustine mentions the Donatists' legal recourses against Rogatism in *Letter 93*.3.11 (Teske, Vol. I, 383-84), but does not give a time-period for them. They may, therefore, have taken place after the Firmian repression rather than before it.

[16] Firmius' revolt appears to have been occasioned primarily by Romanus' ineptness and heavy-handed rule, as well as excessive taxation. The immediate trigger for the revolt was apparently an attempt by Romanus to cut Firmius off from communication from the emperor. See Warmington's discussion of Firmus and his revolt in *North African Provinces*, 10-11.

severely.[17] The Rogatists never let their former colleagues forget this fact; henceforth, they reviled mainstream Donatists as "Firmians."[18] The dissident movement never seems to have recovered from this early repression, and, thwarted in its bid to take over the Donatist movement, settled down as a small, but intensely dedicated, Purist movement.

The persecution had decimated the Rogatist movement to the point that by Augustine's time, there were only ten or so Rogatist bishops left, all hailing from the vicinity of Cartenna.[19] While it is unknown how far the Rogatist schism had penetrated in the years before its repression, Augustine could confidently state that Cartenna and its environs held the only trace of Rogatism left on the earth.[20] It was, however, highly influential, and drew converts attracted to its uncompromising message of personal purity from all over North Africa. Indeed, Rogatism gained the moral high ground in its later years, as it remained aloof from the violence which characterized the Donatist-Caecilianist struggles and prided itself on its reputation as the persecuted church which did not strike back at its enemies.[21] Vincent, who was known to Augustine from when they were both young men at Carthage, succeeded Rogatus as leader of the movement,[22] and under his leadership Rogatism continued its adherence to a rigorously Purist interpretation of Donatism. So uncompromising were they in their stance against

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[17] Augustine, *Letter 93*.4.12 (Teske, Vol. I, 384) and *Contra Parmeniani,* I.10.16 (PL 43.45).

[18] Not unlike the Donatist epithet of "Macarians" for the Caecilians. See Augustine, *Letter 87*.10 (Teske, Vol. I, 350): "Remember what I said about the Rogatists who are said to call you Firmians, just as you call us Macarians."

[19] Augustine, *Letter 93*.6.20 (Teske, Vol. I, 389).

[20] Ibid, 7.22.

[21] Ibid, 3.11.

[22] Ibid, 1.1.

violence that when Augustine attempted to justify his policy of persecuting the Donatists and Rogatists, he could find no examples of Rogatist clashes with the Caecilianists. Frustrated, he could only say that "You say that you do not want to act savagely; I suspect that you cannot."[23]

The persecution that the imperial government unleashed against the Donatists after the 411 Council of Carthage was prosecuted vigorously against the Rogatists as well, since in the eyes of the law they constituted merely another variety of Donatism. Under the withering effects of persecution, the Rogatist movement appears to have died out, but not before leaving a final testament to its ideal of purity. When Augustine wrote *On the Origin of the Soul* in 319, the target of his polemic was Vincent Victor, a converted Rogatist who now, though a Caecilianist, espoused views on the corporeal nature of the soul and infant baptism which went beyond what Augustine was prepared to accept.[24] While Victor had indeed converted from Rogatism to Caecilianism, he retained such respect for the now-deceased leader of the Rogatist movement that he had prefixed his own name (Victor) with the Rogatist leader's (Vincent), Augustine's horrified disapproval notwithstanding.[25] Indeed, Victor claimed that his views concerning the soul had come to him in a vision, in which the glorified Vincent had dictated to him "the

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[23] Ibid, 3.11.

[24] See *The Nature and Origin of the Soul*, I.2.2 and III.2.2, in *The Works of Saint Augustine*, Part I, Vol. 23, translated by Roland J. Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), 473 and 515-16: "On inquiring of those who knew you, and were probably your associates in opinion, who Vincentius Victor was, I found that you had been a Donatist, or rather a Rogatist, but had lately come into communion with the Catholic Church." Victor's views concerning the corporeality of the soul may reflect a prevalent Donatist belief, as Tyconius as well was said to have "maintained the angelical nature to be corporeal." (Gennadius, *Illustrious Men*, 18 (NPNF(2) 3, 389)).

[25] Ibid, III.2: "Additional information was given me by your friends which caused me sorrow amid my joy, to the effect that you wished to have the name Vincentius prefixed to your own name, inasmuch as you still held in affectionate regard the successor of Rogatus, who bore this name, as a great and holy man, and that for this reason you wished his name to become your surname."

precise topics and arguments which you were to write about."[26] Such a high regard for the Rogatist leader even after Victor's conversion to Caecilianism amply testifies to the moral force exerted by the Rogatist movement among its contemporaries.

Theological Tendencies

In 407 or 408, the current leader of the Rogatist movement, Vincent, wrote to Augustine concerning the Caecilianist church's willingness to resort to persecution in order to crush the Donatist movement. He appealed to a variety of arguments, including the fact that persecution failed to produce true converts,[27] that Christ himself had ordered Peter to sheathe his sword,[28] and that "neither in the Gospels nor the Letters of the apostles is there found a case in which something was asked for from the kings of the earth in defense of the Church against the enemies of the Church,"[29] to dissuade Augustine from persecuting his sect. Stung by this charge, Augustine wrote a lengthy letter back to him explaining his reasons for acquiescing to the persecution of the Donatists.[30] This letter, *Letter 93*, is our principal source for evaluating the theology of

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[26] Ibid. Indeed, Augustine claims that Victor had taken the name "Vincent" as his own prefix to signify that through Vincent, he had "conquered" error: "And yet your thought was an astute and skilful one, when you designated the books, which you wish us to suppose were dictated to you by his inspiration, by the name of Vincentius Victor; as much as to intimate that it was rather he than you who wished to be designated by the victorious appellation, as having been himself the conqueror of error, by revealing to you what were to be the contents of your written treatise." (III.2)

[27] Augustine, *Letter 93*.1.3 and 5.16 (Teske, Vol. I, 379, 387).

[28] Ibid, 2.7 (Teske, Vol. I, 381)

[29] Ibid, 2.8 (Teske, Vol. I, 382). Vincent also claimed that when the church utilized imperial power in order to force conversions, "the name of God may for a longer time be blasphemed by the Jews and pagans." (8.26)

[30] Ibid, 5.17 (Teske, Vol. I, 387). Augustine had initially decried any form of persecution when dealing with the Donatists, but later came to see persecution as acceptable if it was carried out within strict boundaries. He references his change of heart in this letter: "I yielded, therefore, to these examples, which my colleagues proposed to me. For my opinion was originally was that no one should be forced to the

the Rogatist faction. Its existence is most fortunate, since elsewhere the Rogatists are referenced only in chance comparisons or brief asides. Unfortunately, the lack of comparable sources necessarily means that the portrait of Rogatism that emerges from *Letter 93* must remain tentative.

One of the more prominent themes of the Rogatist church found in *Letter 93* is their zealous commitment to absolute pacifism. Unlike the mainstream Donatist movement, which often resorted to similar rhetorical statements but failed to keep their Agonistic partisans or even their own clergy in check, pacifism formed a central cornerstone of Rogatist practice. Augustine was forced to acknowledge the practical effectiveness of their stance, although he attributed it to their small size:

> But with regard to yourselves, who are not only generically called Donatists after Donatus, but also are specifically called Rogatists after Rogatus, you certainly seem to us less fierce, since you do not run wild with the savage bands of Circumcellions, but no wild animal is called tame if it injures no one because it lacks teeth or claws. You say that you do not want to act savagely; I suspect that you cannot.[31]

Their theological rationale for this behavior was also attested to, albeit skeptically, by Augustine: "Let us suppose that you understand the sentence of the Gospel where it is written, *If someone wants to take your tunic and to take you to court, give him your coat as well* (Mt 5:40), and let us suppose that you hold this idea in the sense that you think you should resist those who persecute you, not only with no injury, but not even by means of the law."[32] About the worst that Augustine could lay against them in this respect was to remind the Rogatists that their founder had once appealed to the secular

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unity of Christ, but that we should act with words, fight with arguments, and conquer by reason." See Brown, *Augustine*, 229-239.

[31] Ibid, 3.11 (Teske, Vol. I, 383).

[32] Ibid.

authorities to win back the basilicas which had been taken from him by the Donatists.[33] Against this accusation, the Rogatists replied that they only utilized the resources of the state to recover their own goods "and not to accuse someone in order that he might be coerced"—that seeking to restore stolen property was intrinsically different from forcibly converting someone with God-given free will.[34]

Along with their emphasis on a pacifistic response to persecution, the Rogatists also heavily stressed the fact that they alone constituted the true church. The Purist tendency that Rogatism represented laid great emphasis on the fact that only those who truly obeyed all the commandments and sacraments of God could comprise the true church. The Caecilianists, by their association with *traditores* and willingness to persecute, had already shown themselves to be a false church; now the Donatists, in their own willingness to resort to violence through the arms of the Agonistici, had lost the title as well.[35] They cited the example of Noah, who, along with his own family, alone was saved when the world was destroyed the first time,[36] and correlated this example with the question that Christ had posed: "When the Son of Man comes, do you suppose he will find faith on earth?"[37] This question was especially poignant to the Rogatists, who believed that even their own parent movement had fallen away from the true faith.

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[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid, 4.12 (Teske, Vol. I, 384). In this case, their argument paralleled the larger Donatist movement.

[35] See Augustine's disbelieving critique of their position in *Letter 93*.6.20-21 (Teske, Vol. I, 389-90): "For, when repentance is preached, as he said, in his name in all the nations, unless anyone roused by this preaching in any part of the world whatsoever seeks out and finds Vincent of Cartenna hiding out in Mauritania Caesariensis or one of his nine or ten companions, he cannot have his sins forgiven."

[36] Ibid, 8.27 (Teske, Vol. I, 393).

[37] Ibid, 7.23 (Teske, Vol. I, 391). The quote is from Luke 18.8.

To the witness of the Bible, they added the evidence of contemporaries. Apparently, Vincent was well-read in Caecilianist literature: he knew, at least, of Hilary of Poitiers' statement in *De Synodis* that "except the bishop Eleusis and his few comrades, the greater part of the ten provinces of Asia, in which I am still staying, really know not God," and utilized it to prove that even some Caecilianists themselves believed that the true church had suffered mass apostasy in the East.[38] If the collapse of the Eastern church, where Christianity itself had first been preached, into "Arianism" had caused Nicene authors to despair of its salvation, it was not so far-fetched to assume that the true church could indeed die out in many regions. Interestingly, the Rogatists did not, apparently, utilize an eschatological defense to rationalize their belief that the true church remained solely in Cartenna for the time being. Instead, they undercut Augustine's argument that one of the identifying markers of the true church was its universality by pointing out that "if one considers all the parts of the world, in comparison to the whole world the part in which the Christian faith is known is small."[39] This critically weakened Augustine's argument by reminding him that even Caecilianism itself, though much larger than its Rogatist opponent, could cite no claims to true universality either.[40]

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[38] Hilary, *On the Councils*, 63 (NPNF(2) 9, 21), referring to the many Eastern bishoprics which supported a Homoian position during the Nicene-Arian conflicts. See *Letter 93*.7.22 (Teske, Vol. I, 390) and 9.31 (Teske, Vol. I, 390). Hilary was apparently serious in his assessment, and Augustine was hard-put to it to defend him: "For you in that way slander a learned man who severely reprimanded the fainthearted and timid whom he was bringing to birth once again until Christ would be formed in them. After all, who does not know that at that period many people of poor judgment were deceived by obscure language so that they thought that the Arians believed what they themselves believed?" (*Letter 93*.9.31 (Teske, Vol. I, 396))

[39] "Quantum ad totius mundi pertinet partes, modica pars est in compensatione totius mundi, in qua fides christiana nominator." Augustine, *Letter 93*.7.22 (Teske, Vol. I, 390).

[40] Augustine retorted that "You either do not want to consider or you pretend that you do not know to how many barbarian nations the gospel came in so short a time that even the enemies of Christ cannot doubt that in a short while there will occur what he replied to his disciples who were asking about the end of the world." (Ibid) Interestingly, Augustine would later backtrack on this argument in a letter to a Caecilianist bishop who postulated that the end was near because of just such proofs. In *Letter 199*.12.46-49 (Teske, Vol. III, 350-51), Augustine, ironically, mirrored the Rogatist argument: "I have established by

Their insistence that the rest of the Christian world had fallen away from the true church, that even within the Donatist movement itself, only those aligned with Rogatus were to be considered worthy of the Christian name, arose from the Rogatists' extreme actualization of the Purist tendency within Donatism. To the Rogatist, sacramental and personal purity was key—a pure church was the true church, and an impure church was no church at all. Within this milieu, the universality of the church became almost irrelevant.[41] Rogatists defined the term "Catholic" by sacramental purity, not universality. As Augustine stated, "you think that you say something clever when you explain that the name "Catholic" comes not from the communion of the whole world, but from the observance of all God's commandments and all the sacraments."[42] It was obvious to the Rogatists that the Caecilianists constituted an impure church: they engaged in active persecution of their enemies and were founded upon a line of *traditores*. It was equally obvious to them that the Donatist church had irrevocably tainted its own purity by its willingness to utilize the Agonistici in violent confrontations with the Caecilianists.

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certain proofs that what Your Reverence thinks was already accomplished by the apostles is not the case. For there are among us, that is, in Africa, countless barbarian nations where the gospel has not been preached. . . . (47) How, then, was this preaching completed by the apostles since there are still nations—and this is completely certain for us—in which it is now beginning and in which it has not yet begun to be completed?"

[41] It is necessary to note here that the concern of the Rogatists (and the Donatists as a whole) was the preservation of the true church as an institution, not whether those outside of the true church were eternally damned (as is usually the predominant question among Protestants today). It is possible that the Rogatists, much as the Catholic church of today, did not entirely deny the possibility that eschatological salvation might be granted to those outside the true institutional church. At the very least, they distinguished between "Christians" (meaning, in context, Caecilianists) and pagans. Augustine quotes Vincent's original letter to him to this effect: "You [Vincent] said: 'Since I know very well that you [Augustine] were for a long time separated from the Christian faith and were once dedicated to literary studies and a lover of quite and goodness and since you were later converted to the Christian faith, as I know from the report of many persons, and devoted your energy to questions of God's law. . .'" (*Letter 93*.13.51 (Teske, Vol. I, 406-407))

[42] "Acutum autem aliquid tibi videris dicere, cum Catholicae nomen non ex totius orbis communione interpretaris, sed ex observatione praeceptorum omnium divinorum, atque omnium sacramentorum." Augustine, *Letter 93*.7.23 (Teske, Vol. I, 391).

Theirs was a high standard, nothing less than what Tyconius had written concerning the larger Donatist church: "What we want is holiness."[43] Although Tyconius, despite living during the same time-period as the Rogatists, did not join their communion, his goal for the Donatist movement was the same as theirs.[44] And while within the larger Donatist movement the practical fulfillment of such an idealist goal of absolute purity, both personal and sacramental, would have been nearly impossible, within the restricted Rogatist communion it appears to have been reasonably successful. The Rogatists enforced strict codes of conduct among their clergy, and were not averse to excommunicating them if they were found to be living in sin. Indeed, one of Vincent's major complaints in his letter to Augustine was that the Caecilianists sometimes welcomed excommunicated Rogatists into their own communion, thus lessening the blight of the punishment.[45] Augustine's closing tirade against the Rogatists, while deeply sarcastic, provides a compelling picture of how the Rogatist movement would have seen itself:

> But pardon me; I was mistaken when I wanted to convince you about the drunkard who baptizes; it had slipped my mind that I was dealing with a Rogatist, not with just any sort of Donatist. For you can perhaps in your few colleagues and in all your clerics find not a single drunkard. For you are the people who hold

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[43] Ibid, 4.14 (Teske, Vol. I, 385) and 10.43 (Teske, Vol. I, 402).

[44] Among other things, Tyconius would have certainly disagreed with the Rogatist belief in the non-universality of the church.

[45] Augustine replies to this concern in *Letter 93*.10.38 (Teske, Vol. I, 399) with studied skepticism: "Whoever welcomes someone whom you [the Rogatists] cast out for some scandal or grave sin in the same way as they are welcomed who have lived among you without serious sin, except for the error that separates you and us, meets with our disapproval. But you cannot easily prove these points, and if you should prove them, we tolerate some whom we cannot correct or punish." His reply is deeply ironic, since earlier he had berated the Donatist bishop of Hippo, Proculeian, for the exact same offense: "Let him demand that Primus [an apostate Caecilianist] be removed from his communion since he chose that communion only because he had lost clerical status in the Catholic Church on account of his disobedience and depraved conduct." (*Letter 35*.2 (Teske, Vol. I, 122)) Indeed, *Letter 35* is a scathing attack on the Donatists for having allowed excommunicated Caecilianists into their communion. It appears from *Letter 93*, however, that the church-swapping went both ways.

> the Catholic faith, not because you are in communion with the whole world, but because you observe all the commandments and all the sacraments. In you alone he will find faith when the Son of Man will come when he will not find faith on earth.[46]

Even Augustine's sardonic wit attests to the intense value that was placed on absolute purity within the Rogatist movement. As was stated in the historical overview, the Rogatists appear to have lived out their ideal of a pure remnant fairly successfully. For a Caecilianist convert to prefix his own name with the name of the last Rogatist leader and to state that Vincent had appeared to him in visions was high praise indeed, and a fitting epitaph to the Rogatist attempt to model what, to them, were the essential characteristics of the true church.[47]

The Maximianists

Overview History

Approximately thirty years after the Rogatist schism, another rift disturbed the peace of the Donatist church. Unlike its predecessor, this new schism threatened, for a time, to tear the movement apart.[48] Parmenian, the successor of Donatus, had led the Donatist church through its triumphal return under the auspices of Julian and had been a stabilizing force throughout the rest of his tenure. Indeed, his influence was such within the later Donatist movement that outsiders sometimes took to calling the Donatists

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[46] Augustine, *Letter 93*.11.49 (Teske, Vol. I, 405).

[47] Augustine, *Nature and Origin*, III.2 (Teske, 515-16).

[48] The main account of the Maximianist schism is recorded in Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 36(2).20 (Boulding, Vol. 16, 120-125), in which he copies word-for-word the entire conciliar letter that the Maximianists sent out after deposing Primian at the council of Cebarsussa. The fourth book of *Contra Cresconium* also furnishes additional details.

"Parmenians."[49] After his death in 391 or 392,[50] however, there was much dissension as to who would succeed him as bishop of Carthage (and thus Primate of Africa). Primian, whom Frend describes as "a man of extreme views and ruthless violence, less able than his predecessor, but secure in the favour of the Carthaginian crowd and the Numidian bishops,"[51] eventually emerged as the legitimately-ordained bishop of Carthage. Soon after the election, he attempted to take action against his rivals. Chief among these was the deacon Maximian, a descendant of Donatus the Great himself,[52] who had apparently been his primary opponent for the Carthaginian bishopric.

Maximian, however, was not one to be lightly tangled with. He had the support of an influential faction within the church, including a rich matron who, according to Augustine's snide remarks, played "a second Lucilla."[53] When Primian attempted to force the presbyters of the Carthaginian church to "immediately promise him their consent to the condemnation of four deacons," foremost among whom was Maximian, they refused to join him.[54] Heedless of their disapproval, Primian proceeded to

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[49] See Praedestinatus, *De Haeresibus*, 44 (PL 53.601A), and Philastrius, *De Haeresibus*, 83 (PL 12.1196A).

[50] Frend, *Donatist Church*, 213.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Augustine, *Letter 43*.9.26 (Teske, Vol. I,171).

[53] See Augustine, *Letter 43*.9.26 (Teske, Vol. I, 171) and *Expositions*, Psalm 36(2).19 (Boulding, Vol. 16, 119).

[54] Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 36(2).20 (Boulding, Vol. 16, 122). The presbyters described his actions thus: "Shortly after his ordination he [Primian] put pressure on the priests of the aforesaid people to commit themselves by oath to join him in an ungodly conspiracy: with questionable right he demanded of them that they should immediately promise him their consent to the condemnation of four deacons, outstanding men, of good repute for their excellent qualities, namely Maximian, Rogatian, Donatus, and Salgamius."

excommunicate the four deacons without regard for ecclesial rules: Maximian was excommunicated without a hearing, while lying sick in bed.[55]

Beyond such direct power-consolidation tactics, Primian offended his congregation in other ways. He exercised his power tyrannically: when a priest, Fortunatus, defied his orders and baptized certain enemies of Primian who were near death, he was "thrown into a sewer" for his troubles.[56] With gangs of armed men (Agonistici?), Primian harassed those who had opposed him in their own homes.[57] Worst of all, he began admitting sacramentally-impure persons into communion. His congregation was painfully aware that he had allowed the Claudianist schismatics to rejoin the church without due penance, and there were persistent rumors that people who had defiled themselves through incestuous relationships were being allowed to join in the communion of saints.[58] When the *seniores* complained to Primian concerning this serious breach of the sacramental holiness of the church, he had them beaten.[59]

These combined atrocities were more than the *seniores* of the church were willing to allow. Clearly, Primian had proven himself unworthy of the office of bishop, and just as the original leaders of the Donatist schism had found it necessary to depose the sacramentally-unworthy bishop of Carthage of their own day, so it was now necessary for

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[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid (Boulding, Vol. 16, 124).

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid. The Claudianists were an obscure group of Donatist schismatics, probably named after Claudian, the exiled Donatist bishop of Rome. It is important to remember that the information concerning Primian's atrocities comes solely from the Maximianists themselves, through Augustine's preservation of the official circular letter produced at the Maximianist Council of Cebarsussa, and thus contains only their construction of the events.

[59] Ibid.

their descendents to remain true to the ideals of the movement by deposing Primian. They pleaded for neighboring bishops to intervene against the rogue bishop.[60]

In 392, forty-three bishops met in Carthage and opened an inquiry into the misdeeds of Primian. They requested for him to present himself to defend against the charges laid against him by his *seniores*, but Primian refused to accept their summons. Instead, he procured the permission of the imperial authorities to block the assembled bishops from meeting in the primary Donatist basilica in Carthage.[61] Their emissaries were rebuffed, and the bishops were hounded from place to place. After hastily passing a preliminary condemnation of Primian's conduct, they retired to their own towns and summoned a formal council to meet the following year.[62]

On June 24, 393, the promised council met in the Byzacenan town of Cebarsussa. Over a hundred bishops, primarily from the provinces of Africa Proconsularis and Byzacena, assembled there to decide the fate of Primian.[63] The council was presided over by the Primate of Byzacena, Victorinus of Munatiana, whose presence ensured an

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[60] Ibid (Boulding, Vol. 16, 123): "The elders of the aforesaid church were deeply distressed by these events, and they dispatched letters and legates to all the clergy, begging us with tears to come to them as soon as we possibly could, in order that the matter might be duly weighed and his intentions investigated, and so the reputation of their church restored."

[61] The circular letter sent from the later Council of Cebarsussa describes his actions thus: "When in accordance with the request of the aforementioned persons we came, he was seething with rage and absolutely refused to confront us. In every possible way he maintained a stubborn, defiant attitude and kept to his evil course, even to mustering a troop of desperados who, after obtaining permission from the authorities, blocked the doors to the basilicas in order to deny us the possibility of entering and celebrating the liturgy." (Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 36(2).20 (Boulding, Vol. 16, 123)).

[62] See Augustine, *Contra Cresconium*, IV.47.57 (PL 43.579).

[63] So estimates Augustine in *Heresies*, LXIX.5 (Teske, 51) and *Expositions*, Psalm 36(2).23 (Boulding, Vol. 16, 128). The circular letter sent out by them contains only 53 signatures, however. It is possible that the other 47 bishops acceded to the council but did not attend it.

air of authority.[64] As Primian refused to appear before the council, the assembled bishops quickly found him sacramentally unfit for office and deposed him. They then communicated their reasons for doing so in a circular letter, fortunately preserved for us by Augustine.[65] In it, they laid out their three-fold rationales for condemning Primian: he had sidelined ecclesial law by irregularly excommunicating his opponents, had utilized undue violence to enforce his will, and had broken the purity of the church by allowing tainted individuals to join in its holy communion. Maximian, the original center of opposition to Primian, was consecrated as the new bishop of Carthage. They gave the rest of the Donatist party six months to join their cause; after this time-period, "no one of them can be restored to the Church except through penance, assuming they are aware of our decree."[66]

Almost all of the province of Byzacena was pro-Maximian, as was the more distant province of Tripolitania; the Proconsular province was more evenly divided between the two sides. Only one bishop of any standing from Numidia, however, sided with the Maximianists—Perseverantius of Theveste.[67] The overwhelming Numidian rejection of the summons to Cebarsussa testifies to the fact that the deposition of Primian was not as simple as it appeared. This was no obscure bishop who had been caught in a compromising situation and deposed by his colleagues—Primian was the bishop of Carthage, which made him Primate of Africa and, theoretically, the leader of the Donatist

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[64] Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 36(2).20 (Boulding, Vol. 16, 125). See Frend's construction of the event in *Donatist Church*, 215-216.

[65] The letter is contained, along with Augustine's comments, in *Expositions*, Psalm 36(2).20 (Boulding, Vol. 16, 120-125).

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid; note the signatures at the end of the document.

movement. His condemnation would not be easily accepted. What was more, in order to officially obtain his bishopric, he had to have been approved by the Numidian Primate. It was the right of the Primate of Numidia to formally consecrate the bishop of Carthage; a failure to observe this custom had led to the original Donatist schism in the first place.[68] The current Primate of Numidia, Gamalius, therefore, could be counted on to support Primian. It was, after all, his own consecration that the Council of Cebarsussa had declared invalid.[69] Most of Numidia, therefore, adhered to the position laid out by their leader, as did the more distant Mauretanian provinces, who looked to him for guidance.

Deposed within his own province by the Council of Cebarsussa, Primian fled to Numidia to rally support for his cause. His alliance with Gamalius paid off; by April 24, 394, a new council met in Bagai. The Maximianists had failed in their bid to take over the Carthaginian bishopric; by the end of the six month grace-period, over three hundred bishops remained in communion with Primian.[70] They were all summoned to the Council of Bagai to pronounce sentence on his accusers. At Bagai, the Council of Cebarsussa was ignored; Primian, in fact, sat alongside Gamalius as an arbitrator. The Council's purpose was not to reverse the decisions of Cebarsussa, but to condemn those who had dared to bring Primian to trial in the first place. The Maximianists were considered

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[68] See Frend, *Saints and Sinners*, 104, for a discussion of the right of consecration by the Numidian Primates. It should be noted that, as Parmenian had been ordained during the Donatist exile occasioned by the Macarian persecution, Primian's consecration was the first ordination in which normal customs would have prevailed since the consecration of Donatus himself (c. 315).

[69] Gamalius' name appears first on the Council of Bagai's circular letter, followed by Primian's (See Augustine, *Contra Cresconium*, III.53.59 (PL 43.528)). It is certainly probable that, given the tensions in the Carthaginian atmosphere in the aftermath of what appears to have been a highly disputed election, Primian had been elected primarily due to the overt support of the Numidian Primate (see Frend, *Donatist Church*, 213).

[70] See Augustine, *Heresies*, LXIX.5 (Teske, 51): At Carthage Maximianus was ordained in opposition to Primianus [Primian] by almost one hundred bishops of this same error and condemned with the fiercest accusations by the remaining three hundred."

schismatic, and subjected to abusive verbal treatment as such.[71] Like "the pestilential rottenness of a wound," the Maximianists themselves were to be cut off from the communion of Christ until they repented.[72] They were in turn given until Christmas of 394 to return to the church, after which they would be considered excommunicate.[73]

In the meantime, the Donatists attempted to enforce their control over the Maximianist schismatics by forcibly wresting their basilicas back from them. As was foreshadowed by his initial actions against the party of Maximian, Primian apparently enjoyed the support of the imperial authorities. Foremost among his targets was Maximian himself, who was quickly expelled from his home by the authorities;[74] his basilica was destroyed by a Primianist mob.[75] Just as the Rogatists before them, the Maximianists had chosen the wrong time to revolt.

Augustine would later take great pleasure in pointing out the basic Donatist inconsistency in decrying Caecilianist persecution when the events of the 390s proved that they were just as willing to resort to imperial pressure to force the Maximianists out of their basilicas.[76] He could cite numerous times when the Donatists had utilized

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[71] They were compared to Korah and Dathan, who had rebelled against Moses and were swallowed up by the earth, and to "poisoned asps," "adulterers of truth" who were "swift to shed blood" (see Augustine, *Contra Cresconium*, IV.4.5 (PL 43.549-50)).

[72] Augustine, *Contra Cresconium*, IV.4.5 (PL 43.550).

[73] Frend suggests that this interim period was meant to ironically mimic the similar concession in the Council of Cebarsussa (*Donatist Church*, 218). Maximian himself, along with twelve of his most influential followers, were already considered excommunicate.

[74] Augustine, *Contra Cresconium,* IV.47.57 (PL 43.579).

[75] Ibid, III.59.65. The fact that Maximian's own basilica was destroyed implies that Primian had probably retained control of the central basilica in Carthage.

[76] See Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 57.15 (Boulding, Vol. 17, 136-37). The Maximianists served two valuable planks in Augustine's stock of anti-Donatist arguments: first, that the Donatists had invalidated any legitimate claim to being a "persecuted church" when, in fact, they had actively persecuted their own schismatics, and second, that they had no right to require rebaptism upon Caecilianist converts

imperial authority to crush Maximianist bishops.[77] The bitter irony was that the imperial laws invoked by the Donatists to enforce their will had in fact been enacted to counter heretics, which according to Augustine included the Donatists themselves.[78] He was therefore particularly infuriated by the fact that when Donatists made use of these laws, they presented themselves as the "Catholic" church and the Maximianists as "heretics."[79] Unfortunately for Augustine (and the Maximianists), the argument was compelling enough to the imperial authorities that the mainstream Donatists had no trouble invoking the aid of the law against the schismatics.[80]

Part of the reason for their success was that the co*mes Africae* during the time of the Maximianist schism was Gildo, who, while not particularly Donatist himself,

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when they had welcomed in ex-Maximianists without requiring a second baptism (Augustine was particularly fond of the examples of Praetextatus and Felicianus, who had been forcibly restored to mainstream Donatism by Optatus of Thamugadi). In the first polemic point, Augustine is substantially correct—the Maximianists were indeed hounded by the Donatists, just as the Rogatists had been before them. He was, however, mistaken in his belief of Donatist theology concerning the rebaptism question. The Donatists viewed the Maximianists (and vice versa) as schismatics, not *traditores*. Their baptisms, having been originally administered within the Donatist church, were valid, unlike the Caecilianists, who suffered from a tainted line. Penance, not rebaptism, was required of those who had a true baptism but had fallen away. The Council of Cebarsussa itself testified to this fact: "if they do not [reconcile before the deadline], they must know that no one of them can be restored to the Church except through penance, assuming they are aware of our decree." This stance was consistent throughout Donatist history (Optatus records that Donatist bishops who had fallen away during the Macarian persecution and subsequently repented were required to undergo penance, not rebaptism in *Against the Donatists*, II.25 (Edwards, 55), and was ultimately based on Cyprianic teaching: "It is sufficient to impose hands in penance upon those who, it is evident, have been baptized and have gone from us to the heretics if afterward, having recognized their sin and put aside their error, they return to truth and their mother . . . but if he who comes from the heretics was not first baptized in the Church . . . he must be baptized." (Cyprian, *Letter 71*.2 (Donna, 263))

[77] See Augustine, *Letters 51*.3 (Teske, Vol. I, 199-200), *76*.4 (Teske, Vol. I, 299-300), and *108*.5.14 (Teske, Vol. II, 77-78) for examples.

[78] See Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 57.15 (Boulding, Vol. 17, 136).

[79] Ibid; see also Psalm 21(2).31: "They contested before judges, and recounted the decisions of their council, as though they were putting up name-plates to make themselves look like bishops."

[80] See Augustine, *Letter 51*.3 (Teske, Vol. I, 199-200): "You likewise often raise as an objection to us that we persecute you by earthly powers. . . . If this is a crime, why did you fiercely attack the same Maximianists through judges sent by those emperors, whom our communion begot through the gospel, and why did you by the roar of controversies, by the power of ordinances, and by the assault of troops drive them from the basilicas which they had and in which they were at the time of the division?"

certainly supported the dominant ecclesial group in North Africa. Contemplating his own secession from the imperial government, he was in no mood to alienate the majority of his constituents by siding with a schismatic minority.[81] In 397, Gildo openly declared himself in rebellion against the emperor Honorius. He needed the support of the population, and many Donatists, embroiled in their own disputes with the Maximianists, were not slow to offer him their allegiance in return for his assistance.

A de-facto alliance, much decried by Augustine, came into being between Gildo and Optatus, the Donatist bishop of Thamugadi. Optatus used his new-found power to the utmost extent; heading an army of Gildonian soldiers, he hastened to force the allegiance of the remaining dissidents.[82] Foremost among these were the bishops of Musti and Assuras, who had defied several court orders to vacate their basilicas.[83] Facing certain destruction if they did not obey, their congregations forced them to comply with Optatus' wishes, and following their example, many other Maximianist strongholds followed suit.[84] While Optatus' actions were condemned by later Donatists,[85] they certainly worked well in the long run; the power of the Maximianists was broken.[86] The downfall of Gildo in 398 prevented the complete destruction of the Maximianist party[87]

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[81] Frend states that Gildo had been gradually moving towards secession since 392 (*Donatist Church*, 220).

[82] Augustine, *Contra Cresconium*, IV.25.32 (PL 43.565).

[83] See Frend, *Donatist Church*, 219, citing *Contra Cresconium,* III.56.62 (PL 43.529-530).

[84] See Augustine, *Contra Cresconium,* III.60.66 (PL 43.532) and IV.25.32 (PL 43.565): "The cities of Musti and Assuras testify to this . . . fearing the army of Gildo, according to the threat of Optatus, they forced their bishops to return to the communion of Primian."

[85] Augustine, *Against Petilian*, I.24.26 (NPNF(1) 4, 528).

[86] See Augustine, *Contra Cresconium,* III.60.66 (PL 43.532).

[87] Optatus, rightly seen by the imperial government as a Gildonian partisan, was executed soon after (Augustine, *Against Petilian*, II.93.209 (NPNF(1) 4, 583)).

(indeed, the Donatists were never again able to appeal to imperial judges against their enemies), but they never again gained enough clout to seriously challenge the legitimacy of the mainstream Donatist party.[88] The Caecilianists also appear to have ignored them as a serious threat; at no time did Augustine ever directly write to a Maximianist bishop.

The Maximianists had not, however, vanished from the historical scene. The persecution under Optatus had been incomplete, and the provinces of Byzacena and Tripolitania, if not Africa Proconsularis, were still heavily Maximianist.[89] While little of their later history has been recorded, certain incidences show that the Maximianist party had by no means disappeared from the world. In one of his later writings, *Answer to Julian*, Augustine ridiculed Julian of Eclanum's attempts to force a council over the Pelagian controversy by comparing him to the Maximianists: "you are more like the Maximianists; they wanted to find consolation over their small numbers at least in the honor of a debate. In that way they hoped to appear important in the eyes of those who held them in contempt because they were permitted to enter into a hearing with us."[90] From this statement it can be inferred that at some point during Augustine's attempts to

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[88] Augustine would state of the Maximianists that few remained in his day: "I also mentioned that he [Maximian] suffered such persecution and that his church was destroyed to its foundations." (*Letter 44*.4.7 (Teske, Vol. I, 177))

[89] Augustine always equated the Maximianism of his day with Byzacena and Tripolitania: see *Letter 93*.7.23 (Teske, Vol. I, 391) and *De Unitate Ecclesiae*, 3.6 (PL 43.395): "[If the church is in] a few provincials from Tripolitania and Byzacena, come to the Maximianists." While Tripolitania was not prominently featured in Augustine's writings, lying on the extreme south-east of North Africa, it is interesting that the bishops of every major Tripolitanian city (Sabratha, Oea, Leptis Magna) had sided with the Maximianists. As the furthest south that Optatus had penetrated was Byzacena, presumably Tripolitania emerged from the time of Gildo without having undergone any major persecution. It may therefore have served as a haven for the Maximianist cause. A Donatist presence in the area was quickly reestablished, however: at the Council of Carthage, each city was represented by a Donatist bishop. On the other hand, the names are different from those bishops who signed the circular letter of the Council of Cebarsussa, indicating that the Maximianist bishops did not, at least, reconvert to the Donatist church.

[90] Augustine, *Answer to Julian*, III.1.5, in *The Works of Saint Augustine,* Part I, Vol. 24*: Answer to the Pelagians II*, translated by Roland J. Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1998), 341.

force the Donatists to a definitive council (efforts which ultimately culminated in the 411 Council of Carthage), the Maximianists had eagerly approached the Caecilianists with an offer to debate them. The Caecilianists did not deign to respond: "We turned them down despite their demands, their submission of a document, and their challenge."[91] This attempt might, as Augustine theorized, have been undertaken merely for the purpose of name recognition,[92] although the Maximianists could perhaps have stood a better chance than the Donatists in the ensuing debate. They, at least, did not have to worry about any awkward questions concerning their appeals to the state, as they had never done so.[93]

Unlike the Rogatists, we have no definite end-date for the Maximianist schism. The latest mention of the Maximianists dates from the same years as the last pre-Vandal mentions of the Donatists. Canon 67 of the 419 (Caecilianist) Council of Carthage provides an intriguing glimpse into late Donatist-Maximianist antagonisms, recording that North African judges ought to "enquire and record in the public acts . . . what has taken place in those places in which the Maximianists, who made a schism from them, have obtained basilicas."[94] Apparently the Maximianist schism had made a minor resurgence and had begun taking back Donatist basilicas in the years after the momentous 411 Council of Carthage, when the Donatists themselves were on the defensive. With

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[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid: "They, after all, wanted to have the honor of a debate more than they feared the loss of the debate. They did not hope for the glory of victory, but sought the prestige that comes from a conference, because they did not have the prestige that comes from a large number." Note Augustine's assessment of the Maximianists of his day as a small splinter group.

[93] See Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 54.26 (Boulding, Vol. 17, 79).

[94] "Quid gestum sit in omnibus locis in quibus Maximianistae basilicas obtinuerunt, qui ab eist schisma fecerunt, inquirant, et Gestis publicis, propter firmam notitiam omnibus necessariam, faciant inhaerere." 419 Council of Carthage, Canon 67, in *Concilia Africae, A. 325 – A. 525,* in *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, Vol. 149*, edited by C. Munier (Turnholti: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1974), 199-200.

this last record, the Maximianists pass out of historical knowledge. Whether they weathered the Vandal invasion or succumbed to its power must remain unknown; they do not turn up again in the scattered references to Donatism beyond the fifth century.

Theological Tendencies

Unlike the Rogatists, the Maximianists never consciously set out to be radicals opposing the established form of Donatism. The Maximianists felt themselves to be orthodox Donatists, faithful to the original ideals of the movement. In their own eyes, they had not seceded from the larger Donatist movement; it was the Donatist church which, by inappropriately overturning their own legitimately-ordered council (presided over by no less than the Primate of Byzacena), that had seceded from *them*. Nevertheless, their movement serves as an example of the Purist tendency within Donatism because of the concerns which led them to depose Primian.

In their concerns over Primian's conduct, it is clear that the Maximianists used as their model the proto-Donatists of the original schism. They, too, had been faced with the question of what to do with a sacramentally-impure bishop. In the original schism, it had been the *seniores* of the Carthaginian congregation who had alerted the wider church about the sacramental unfitness of their bishop, just as had the *seniores* of the church in Primian's time.[95] Both times, the bishop in question had refused to appear before a council, and had instead attempted to forcibly crush his opposition. And in both conflicts, the primary concern was over purity and the belief that the current Carthaginian bishop was sacramentally unworthy of his title. There were in fact many parallels between the Maximianists and the Donatists of the original schism, and they were not

[95] See Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, I.19 (Edwards, 18).

limited to the rather superficial similarities that Augustine highlighted for his own polemical purposes.[96]

The Maximianist preoccupation with the sacramental purity of the church can best be seen in their rationale for deposing Primian as expressed in the circular letter of the Council of Cebarsussa. Primian was condemned primarily because he had acted in a manner unworthy of a bishop. He had usurped proper authority within the church by excommunicating his rival Maximian without a trial, and had attempted to force the presbyters of the church to accede to his actions.[97] He had unduly utilized the power of the church, especially the threat of excommunication, to aid him in his attempts to bully his clergy into line,[98] and even resorted to violence to enforce his wishes.[99] But what finally impelled the *seniores* of the church to call for a council to condemn Primian was not his violent methods or power-consolidation tactics, but his breaking of the ritual purity of the church:

> In contravention of the law and conciliar decrees he was in the habit of admitting to the holy fellowship of all the priests men who had committed incest, and since the majority of the people were opposed to this practice, it was agreed in letters emanating from even the most distinguished elders that he must himself correct what he had done. But in his arrogant defiance he disdained to put matters right. The elders of the aforesaid church were deeply distressed by these events, and they dispatched letters and legates to all the clergy, begging us with tears to come to them as soon as we possibly could, in order that the matter might be duly

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[96] Augustine loved to highlight the apparent similarities between the Maximianist schism and the original Donatist schism, speaking of Primian as "a new Caecilian": see *Expositions*, Psalm 36(2).19 (Boulding, Vol. 16, 119-120) or L*etter 43*.9.26 (Teske, Vol. I, 171) for examples.

[97] Augustine, Psalm 36(2).20 (Boulding, Vol. 16, 122).

[98] Ibid (Boulding, Vol. 16, 124): "[he] has persistently refused communion with the priest Demetrius in order to persuade him to disinherit his son . . . has deemed innocent clerics worthy of condemnation."

[99] Ibid.

> weighed and his intentions investigated, and so the reputation of their church restored.[100]

Later in the narrative it is mentioned that Primian had also "caused elders of the community to be beaten in the basilica because they objected to the Claudianists being admitted to communion."[101] The fact that Primian had "introduced unchaste persons into the communion of the saints"[102] was the primary reason for the Maximianist secession. Indeed, it is tempting to theorize that the main reason that the bishops ordained Maximian to replace Primian was partly to show their solidarity with the original ideals of the Donatist movement, as Maximian was a descendant of the Donatus who had led the movement through its formative years.[103]

The Purist tendency within Donatism is also demonstrated by the phrases which the Maximianists invoked in their condemnation of Primian. Explaining their rationale for his deposition, the Council of Cebarsussa claimed that "A priest of the Lord ought most certainly to be of such a character that when the people's prayers are of no avail, the priest may deserve to obtain from God what he asks on behalf of the people; as it is written, 'If the people sin, the priest will pray for them; but if the priest sins, who will pray for him?'"[104] Such words invoke the theology of Cyprian concerning the sacramental purity of the overseers of the church.[105] As Primian had defiled himself by

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[100] Ibid (Boulding, Vol. 16, 123).

[101] Ibid (Boulding, Vol. 16, 124).

[102] Ibid.

[103] Augustine, *Letter 43*.9.26 (Teske, Vol. I,171).

[104] Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 36(2).20 (Boulding, Vol. 16, 121).

[105] See Cyprian, *Letter 67*.6 (Donna, 236-37) and *70*.1 (Donna, 259). Cyprian himself did not utilize I Samuel 2:25 ("If the people sin, the priest will pray for them; but if the priest sins, who will pray for him?") to support his thesis, however. This is because Cyprian's version of the biblical text read

his actions and refused to repent, he was no longer fit to be a bishop, and needed to be "cut off entirely."[106] Paralleling orthodox Donatist theology, this decree was necessary "lest through contact with him the Church of God be defiled by any contagion or accusation."[107] Anyone who continued to commune with Primian after having been made aware of his sacramental impurity by the circular letter of the council would be "responsible for his own ruin."[108]

Such phrases show that the Maximianists adhered to an orthodox Donatist view of infectionary sin. This was the point of their six-month grace-period: to spread the word to all Donatists of the crimes that Primian had committed. Communion with Primian was no sin if the participant did not realize the sacramental impurity of the bishop, but once he was warned, it was his duty to disassociate from Primian or fall under the same condemnation.[109] Six months was certainly enough time for the letter to percolate

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instead, "If *a man* sin by offending against one another, they shall beseech the Lord for him; but if *a man* sin against God, who shall entreat for him?" Cyprian, therefore, utilized the text in his warnings against idolatry, seeing in it a condemnation of apostasy ("sinning against God"). See Cyprian, *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, 4 (ANF 5, 499). The version of the text that the Maximianists used substituted the term "priest" for "man," thus making the verse relevant to clerical impurity, as the Maximianists clearly interpreted it.

[106] Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 36(2).20 (Boulding, Vol. 16, 122).

[107] Ibid. Interestingly, the Council of Bagai legislated against the Maximianists in much the same terms: "We are indeed unwilling to cut off from association as of the particular body. But because the pestilential rottenness of a wound wasting away holds more in the interruption of comfort than in the releasing of medicine, it was found for the sake of health, lest the destructive venom creep into the whole limb, that the wound produced by profitable pain might put an end to it." (Augustine, *Contra Cresconium*, IV.4.5 (PL 43.550)) Both groups held to Purist ideology in forbidding communion with those excommunicated lest they be themselves infected.

[108] Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 36(2).20 (Boulding, Vol. 16, 124).

[109] Ibid (Boulding, Vol. 16, 124-25): "Anyone who attempts to violate this our decree by disregarding it will be responsible for his own ruin. However, it has seemed good to us and to the Holy Spirit that a time for change should be allowed to the tardy, so that if any of our fellow-priests, or any clerics, unmindful of their own salvation, shall fail to withdraw from communion with the condemned Primian within the period from the day of the condemnation, that is, from the 24 June, to the 25 December, such persons shall fall under the same sentence."

throughout North Africa, and even after the expiration date, one would only be condemned for continued communion with Primian "assuming they are aware of our decree."[110]

Finally, while the Maximianists did not separate solely because of the violent actions of Primian (though they certainly decried them), some evidence, albeit inconclusive, does exist which appears to show a pacifist tendency within the Maximianist party. This was nowhere near as pronounced as the radical pacifism of the Rogatists, but a general aversion to violence does seem to have been a part of Maximianist ideology. In responding to Primian's "mustering a troop of desperados who, after obtaining permission from the authorities, blocked the doors to the basilicas,"[111] they questioned whether "such an action befits a bishop, or is even allowable for Christians, or if the gospels endorse it."[112] Certainly such beliefs constituted the rhetorical ideal for the Donatist movement as a whole (Petilian would later state that "far be it from our conscience to compel any one to embrace our faith"[113]), but the Maximianists are to be distinguished for the fact that they were among the few to have actually deposed their own bishop at least partially because he had violated the prohibitions on violence. Not even Petilian could bring himself to disassociate with the

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[110] Ibid (Boulding, Vol. 16, 125).

[111] Ibid (Boulding, Vol. 16, 123). While not specifically named as such, it is probable that the "desparados" referred to (later on called "gangs") were Agonistici. If this is correct, the Maximianists shared the same disdainful view of the Agonistici as did Tyconius, who had earlier said that they went "beyond the established practices of proper religion." (Beatus, *Apocalypsin*, *Summa Dicendorum*, 26.32 (Romero, 51))

[112] Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 36(2).20 (Boulding, Vol. 16, 123-24).

[113] Augustine, *Against Petilian* II.85.185 (NPNF(1) 4, 573).

more violent elements within his party, averring instead that they must be tolerated "in the cause of peace."[114]

In addition, Augustine attests several times to the non-violence of later Maximianists. In his polemics against the mainstream Donatist party, he would state that the Maximianists, "as far as we hear, never killed anyone in the body,"[115] even challenging the Donatists to "show me one person on whom the Maximianists laid a finger?"[116] One may rightfully remain skeptical alongside Augustine and claim that "they would [not] have refrained from doing so had their numbers permitted."[117] After all, it is certainly understandable that the *seniores* complained about Primian's violent tendencies, seeing as they were primarily directed towards the *seniores* themselves. Nevertheless, the Maximianists bear the distinction of being the only major schism to separate from their bishop due to his violent methods as well as his sacramental impurities. Furthermore, in opposing the mainstream Donatist party, the Maximianists by default opposed the Agonistici, who persecuted them heavily during the time of Gildo and beyond.[118] In ridding themselves of the Agonistic sect, whether deliberately or by default, the Maximianists were able to move substantially closer to the practical application of Purist ideology.

The picture one gets of the Maximianists is that they were conscientious practitioners of orthodox Donatism who were predisposed towards the Purist tendency

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[114] Augustine, *Against Petilian*, I.24.26 (NPNF(1) 4, 528).

[115] Ibid, II.15.35. (NPNF(1) 4, 538).

[116] Augustine, *Expositions*, Psalm 54.26 (Boulding, Vol. 17, 79).

[117] Ibid.

[118] See Augustine, *Against Petilian* II.20.45 (NPNF(1) 4, 540) and *Contra Parmeniani,* I.11.17 (PL 43.46) and III.3.18 (PL 43.96).

within the movement. Unlike the Rogatists, they were not radicals, but like the Rogatists, their primary concern was for the purity of the church. Donatism had been founded on the concept of ritual purity—if a bishop lost this, he lost everything. The Maximianists saw in Primian a facsimile of Caecilian. In his violent methods and admission of impure communicants he had defiled the sanctity of the church. Like their predecessors in the original schism, they held it their duty to separate from the impure, to remove the iniquity from their midst lest it infect them. The Maximianists, in effect, saw themselves as a new Donatist party, upholding the values of the original schism. Ironically, their fate was to mirror in a microcosm the fate of the Donatist party itself.

Conclusion

Both the Rogatists and, to a lesser degree, the Maximianists were preoccupied with the ideal of a pure church, untainted by the stains of the larger Christian church. Caecilianists and even the Donatists themselves were judged wanting when measured against the standard of holiness that was the mark of the true church. The Rogatists were radicals, actively separating themselves from what they saw as the illegitimate use of violence among the Donatists. They were renowned throughout North Africa for their uncompromising rigorism, and while they remained small, their reputation was strong enough for even converted Caecilianists to retain their respect for the schismatic movement. In contrast, the Maximianists never set out to intentionally oppose the Donatist church, but instead attempted to remain true to the original ideals of the movement, its commitment to absolute purity and nonviolence. They were unceremoniously expelled from the larger movement due to their insistence on this Purist interpretation.

Both churches actively attempted to live up to the ideal of absolute purity. Both saw in the Donatist church a fatal flaw of ignoring its own rhetoric, of making claims to sacramental purity and pacifism and then failing to enforce them. In their obstinate adherence to an uncompromising moral code, the Rogatists and Maximianists attest to the vitality of the Purist tendency within the Donatist church.

CHAPTER NINE

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to highlight the large degree of diversity which existed within the Donatist movement, both in temporal and spatial terms. Chapters Three through Five concerned themselves with the evolution of Donatist theology over time, from the beginnings of the schism to the 411 Council of Carthage. In these chapters, it was established that while Donatist theology as a whole exhibited a basic continuity throughout its history, it was not a static or rigid movement. Donatist beliefs were not stagnant: in its innovative use of eschatology to legitimize its existence or the growing importance of the doctrine of free will to the polemic of the movement, Donatism added new colors to its theological palette. Neither was it monolithic: the initial unity of the anti-Caecilianists was quickly rent by discussions over the necessity of rebaptism during the early years of the movement and the contentions which broke out regarding the legitimacy of the transmarine churches in its later years. While Caecilianist polemic liked to portray Donatism as an intractable movement severely outdated in the era of the Christian emperors and anachronistic in its claims of martyrdom,[1] it is clear that Donatism evolved significantly throughout its existence. Indeed, as the majority

[1] Note, for example, Augustine's castigation of the Donatists in *Letter 185*.2.8 (Teske, Vol. III, 184), because they refused to recognize that a new era had dawned with the conversion of the emperors to Christianity (Augustine's argument is that in these changed times, imperial persecution is not necessarily evil), or in *On Baptism Against the Donatists*, III.4.6 (NPNF(1) 4, 438) in which he declares their adherence to Cyprianic principles to be severely outdated (although his argument more specifically castigated them for adhering to something that the "vast weight of authority" of the wider church had rejected—Augustine would of course not presume to say that Caecilianist beliefs were recent in *origin*).

(even, at times, institutionalized) church throughout most of the fourth century,[2] its theological concerns necessarily extended much further than merely reacting to Caecilianist developments.[3]

This evolution was influenced greatly by the 347-61 Macarian repression, which has been presented in this paper as the typological dividing-line between early and later Donatism. This was done primarily because the repression was understood as a typological watershed by the Donatists themselves.[4] It marked the end of their attempts to be recognized by the emperor as the legitimate church of North Africa, and it confirmed for many of them that the transmarine churches had indeed lost their way. Furthermore, the psychology of Donatism was altered. It has been noted that the term "schism" does not accurately apply to the form of Donatism which was seen at the 411 Council of Carthage;[5] in its doctrines and emphases, the movement differed considerably from its Caecilianist counterpart. This, too, was a result of the Macarian repression. In the early years of the movement, Donatism could indeed be termed a "schism"—"Donatists" supported the claims of Donatus to the Carthaginian bishopric, "Caecilianists," Caecilian's. In the aftermath of the Macarian repression, however, such distinctions faded. No longer was the schism concerned solely with a particular bishopric, a fact that Augustine found out to his immense irritation. While the topic was

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[2] See Frend, "Decepit," 611.

[3] Several examples of intra-Donatist theological discussions which were not concerned with polemicizing against Caecilianism include Donatus the Great's work *On the Holy Spirit* (which expounded his doctrine of the Trinity), Macrobius' work *To Confessors and Virgins* ("a work of ethics indeed, but of very necessary doctrine as well and fortified with sentiments well-fitted for the preservation of chastity" (Gennadius, *Illustrious Men*, 4 (NPNF(2) 3, 386)), Vitellius' writings *On Ecclesiastical Procedure*, and Tyconius' *Book of Rules* and *Commentary on Revelation*.

[4] See, for example, Augustine, *Letter 44*.3.5 (Teske, Vol. I, 176).

[5] See above, 14-15 and 91-92.

still polemically-viable, the Donatists of Augustine's day were not intrinsically concerned with the status of the current Caecilianist bishop of Carthage. Instead, "Caecilianism" encompassed a completely alternate worldview, one which had been present in only a nascent form at the outset of the schism. The Donatists of the late fourth and early fifth centuries, in their rejection of the right of the state to interfere in ecclesial matters, their continuing martyrdoms, and their adherence to traditional North African theology espoused a very different worldview from the Caecilianists indeed.

The second half of the thesis focused on the range of diversity that could be found within Donatism itself during the mature years of the movement, the "spatial" variety that can be seen in what may be roughly termed the right and left wings of the movement. In this discussion, it was proposed that there existed two distinct ideologies within Donatism, the Purist and Martyrist strains. For the most part, they blended together seamlessly—most Donatists castigated their Caecilianist opponents both for their rejection of the martyrs (and their status as persecutors) and for their sacramental impurity. There was, however, always a danger that one ideology might be over-emphasized to the detriment of the other. When this happened, dangerous breaches within the Donatist communion, even to the point of schism, were inevitable.

Chapter Seven concerned itself with the Agonistici, who represented the extreme form of the Martyrist tendency within Donatism, and sought to correct certain alternate views as to their origin and purpose. It has been shown that, far from being "agricultural laborers" with only tenuous ties to Donatism or revolutionary fanatics obsessed with overturning the existing social order, the Agonistic impulse represented the evolution of the Martyrist tendency. It developed to fill in the void created by the cessation of active

persecution by the imperial government after the emperor Julian's rescript. Building on the theories of Frend, Alexander, and Calderone, the Agonistici ought to be seen as martyrs-in-training, dedicated to the ideal of a life perfected by the martyr's crown. In their devotion to such a life, the Agonistici largely paralleled the monastic movement in the East. They were vowed to continence, engaged in perpetual pilgrimage to the shrines of the martyrs, viciously opposed the enemies of Donatism with ritualized weapons. Their only true difference from the type of wandering monastic which was developing around the same time in the Catholic world was their devotion to the ideal of a literal martyrdom, which was to be attained at any cost.[6]

Representing the other end of the spectrum, and demonstrating just how much variety existed within the Donatist movement as a whole, stood the Rogatists and Maximianists. The Rogatists were fanatics, in their own way as ideologically radical as the Agonistici themselves. Dedicated to the Purist ideology of sacramental holiness, pacifism and separation from all forms of uncleanness, all rhetorically present within the wider Donatist movement but often ignored in practice, the Rogatists seceded from the Donatist church because the larger movement was deemed itself impure. Their communion was miniscule, but their reputation was legendary. The Maximianists as well emphasized purity as the defining hallmark of the Donatist movement. Attempting to remain true to the ideals of their predecessors, they deposed the bishop of Carthage because he had, in their opinion, become sacramentally impure. In their emphasis on an absolute standard of personal and corporate holiness and in their unwillingness to

[6] In contrast, the Catholic form of asceticism developing concurrently in the East saw the ascetic's life as a kind of "metaphorical" martyrdom, which attained the same goal as the martyr by denying the flesh.

compromise on these fundamental issues, both schisms attested to the draw of the Purist tendency within the Donatist church.

Such widespread diversity within the Donatist church contradicts older assumptions of the static and monolithic nature of the movement. Donatism was never as simplistic as its Caecilianist opponents wished it to be: the wide gulf between the Agonistic martyr's fanaticism and the zealous pacifism of the Rogatists amply attests to this. It is hoped that, by focusing on the differences within Donatism from both a temporal and spatial perspective, this paper has presented a nuanced portrait of the movement which reflects the true nature of Donatism as closely as possible. It is important to arrive at such an accurate portrayal of historic Donatism, for the questions that plagued the Donatist church are still with us today, and the overriding emphasis on purity over unity which characterized mainstream Donatism is very much a modern concern. In the Donatist schism, we have an encapsulated portrait of how such issues played out in one historical context. As Mark Twain once said, "History never repeats itself; but it often rhymes." The history of the Donatist schism has many lessons to teach Christianity in subsequent ages, if it will listen.

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