The Church's Unity and Authority: Augustine's Effort to Convert the Donatists

Gavril Andreicut
Marquette University

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THE CHURCH’S UNITY AND AUTHORITY: AUGUSTINE’S EFFORT TO CONVERT THE DONATISTS

by

Gavril Andreicuț, Licentiate in history, M.A.

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School, Marquette University, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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This dissertation is about Augustine’s views on Church unity and authority and is primarily based on the letters that he wrote against the Donatists. Although Augustine is one of the Fathers most enthusiastically and thoroughly researched, his letters are less studied than his other works. As a significant number of Augustine’s letters were written as part of his effort to unite the Donatists with the Church, they are especially relevant sources for his views on the unity and authority of the Church.

While no single work of Augustine covers the entire period of his dealing with the Donatists, the letters witness to Augustine’s activity against the Donatists from the time he became a priest up to 418. Since through his letters Augustine appealed to imperial officials, Catholic landowners, and the Donatists in order to unite the latter with the Church, in the letters Augustine is presenting himself to readers in a uniquely practical and social context, which his other works do not do. Since there is no work based on Augustine’s letters that treats the subject that I propose to discuss, the present work will assess the views on Church unity and authority Augustine developed in the period in which he devoted his special attention to eliminating the schism in North Africa. While this dissertation will place Augustine in the circumstances of his daily activities, his letters will expose one to Augustine’s entire theological development regarding Church unity and authority during the time he wrote letters treating issues connected with the schism.
This dissertation is a diachronic analysis of key themes present in the letters. The analysis will reveal in context the theological views on Church authority and unity that Augustine developed during his controversies with the Donatists. This endeavor will be supplemented by references to Augustine’s other works, as well as modern works pertaining to the text of the letters.

In his letters that treat the Donatist schism, the unity of the Church was Augustine’s center of interest, indeed the supreme goal for which he fought with great determination.
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Gavril Andreicuț, Licentiate in history, M.A.

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ABBREVIATIONS


ACW  Ancient Christian Writers


ANF  Ante-Nicene Fathers

App.  Appendix

BA  Bibliothèque Augustinienne, Oeuvres de saint Augustin. Paris : Desclée, 1949-.


CSEL  Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, Vienna, 1866-.


FC  The Fathers of the Church


Mand.  Mandate


NPNF  Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers

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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Par./Sim.</td>
<td>Parable/Similitude</td>
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<td>SC</td>
<td>Sources Chrétiennes</td>
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<td>Vis.</td>
<td>Vision</td>
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<td>WSA</td>
<td>The Works of Saint Augustine</td>
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INTRODUCTION

Although Augustine is one of the Fathers most enthusiastically and thoroughly researched, the immense corpus of Augustine’s writings has not yet been exhausted. In fact, Hubertus Drobner, evaluating the writings of Augustine, makes the statement that “there is far more material than the average scholar will be able to read” and mentions the “little-studied corpus of Augustine’s letters.”¹ As a significant number of Augustine’s letters were written in order to eliminate the schism in North Africa, they are especially relevant sources for his views on the unity and authority of the Church and need more detailed attention.

The purpose of this dissertation is to assess the views on Church unity and authority Augustine developed in the period in which he devoted his special attention to eliminating the schism in North Africa.² I will try to show that the unity of the Church, as it can be discerned from the letters that regard the Donatist schism, was for Augustine the center of his interest, indeed the supreme goal for which he fought with great determination, and this determination to defend Church unity came from a combination of his background, his position as a bishop, the social, political and religious context, and particularly the evolution of the schism. In order to achieve unity, he needed to establish—by arguing from the obvious unity of the Church in the

² By “unity” I mean the communion of the Christian churches throughout the world, that is, throughout the Roman Empire. According to Augustine the authority of the Church follows from the obvious unity or communion of the churches throughout the world. As it is one, united, universally recognized and consequently true, it evidently follows that the Church should have authority to assert and impose its doctrinal and restraining authority against those who oppose it. For Christians the ultimate authority is God, revealed in Jesus Christ, and interpreted by the community of his disciples, that is, by Christians. In my dissertation, the word “authority” is used to underline how the Christian community understood it and, especially after the Church was identified with organized society, the Church’s right to enforce Christian unity through temporal penalties. According to Augustine, the Church has authority to judge in matters of faith and to discipline its members, and this fact is supported by the Bible and confirmed by the fact that it is united and in communion with the apostolic—and all other—churches throughout the world.
Empire, scriptural passages and Christian tradition—that the Church has authority to realize Christian unity by using the authoritative power of the State, now Christian and supporting the Church’s cause.

**Present Status of the Problem**

Within the entire corpus of Augustine’s works, which count approximately five million words, the letters are indispensable sources for Augustine’s views on Church unity and authority because no single work of Augustine covers the entire period of his dealing with the Donatists. Although there are doubts about Augustine’s authorship, I believe, as most scholars do, that the *De unitate ecclesiae* is Augustine’s tract. It deals with the Church’s unity and authority, which he anchors in the universal communion of Christian churches. According to this work, it is clear that ecclesiastical unity, rooted in charity, has precedence over the purity claimed by schismatic groups. Augustine says here that the true Church is catholic and universal because it is in communion with overseas churches. This work was written in circa 401, approximately seventeen years before Augustine stopped writing letters that dealt with the unity and authority of the Church against the Donatists. Thus, although *De unitate ecclesiae* is an important glimpse into Augustine’s view on the issue of unity and authority at that point in time, the work naturally could not cover the remaining period of Augustine’s dealing with the Donatists, from 401 to 418. The anti-Donatist treatises of Augustine, especially those against Parmenian (400) and Petilian (400/403) do concern Christian unity in North Africa, but they are also written long before Augustine ceased writing on unity and authority in his letters; therefore, they speak just for a short period of the controversy. The multitude of his sermons was intended for a wide audience.

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and with the purpose of exhortation to a godly life, indeed a Catholic life. Thus, in these sermons, Augustine “avoided the relentless polemic” that could be unpleasant for those who wanted to hear “the most accomplished theologian and the most trustworthy pastor of their times,” as a good number of his contemporaries believed. Consequently, it is evident that the sermons were not especially intended to treat the very controversial issue of unity and authority, though the subject did come up in Augustine’s homilies.

Augustine’s other works that touch on unity and authority do not cover the whole period of his work against the Donatists, because they are written in certain circumstances, with certain goals that he defended and pursued, and at certain points in time. Theologically, therefore, they represent only a partial and circumstantial view of his theology, since they were written with the goal to defend the true faith against his opponents, an endeavor that he pursued at times in “extreme terms.” These works, of course, are all important for a comprehensive view of Augustine. And besides the letters as the main source in my dissertation, I will use other works of his that are helpful for proving my case. I should mention that the letters are not systematic treatises that defend point-by-point unity and authority, but Augustine’s personal opinions and answers to various practical situations that concerned the Christian community in North Africa.

The role and importance of the Church, of its unity and authority in Augustine’s theology has not passed unnoticed by Augustinian scholars and others from different specialties of theology and history. At the present moment, there is common consent among scholars that Augustine maintained the Church in high esteem, as the surest place of salvation.

Émilien Lamirande asserts that Augustine considers the Church as “the one dwelling place of truth on earth.” Peter Brown sees the controversies that Augustine faced as a sign of loyalty, “his sincere wish to serve a new respublica, the Catholic Church….The persuasive force
of this venerable, international institution, seemed to be able to hold and purge the minds of men.”⁸ W. H. C. Frend, mentioning Augustine’s assertion that only a member of the Church could be righteous, noticed that Augustine’s “emphasis is on the Church,” on its unique role in humans’ salvation.⁹ For Daniel Doyle’s Augustine “the Church continues in the same line of authority as the predictions of the prophets which were fulfilled as foretold in the person of Christ, who commissioned the apostles and their successors, the bishops, to speak for him up to the present-day Church.”⁰ Although these reputed scholars recognize the role of the Church in Augustine’s thought, their purpose is not to treat Augustine’s view on Church unity and authority in connection with the Donatist controversy.

Since Augustine is well-known for his philosophical and theological works, naturally many modern studies concentrate on Augustine’s works from the point of view of philosophy and theology.¹¹ The histories written on Augustine’s life and theology deal with his views on Church authority and unity only as much as it is possible and necessary in order to present a comprehensive view of his life, his theology, and his works. I believe that the letters have been read less often and deeply than his other works because they are neither clearly philosophy or theology, nor history in the proper sense. But the letters—mostly motivated by his duty as bishop—contain substantial theological ideas on Church unity and authority, ideas that are applied to a social context, to events and facts that Augustine’s works present nowhere so descriptively as in the letters.

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For example, the *De Trinitate* is an extraordinary work of devotion, a book in which Augustine seeks to understand faith for practical reasons.\(^{12}\) The *Confessions* is a work that overpowered his contemporaries, and still overpowers us, through its spiritual insights.\(^{13}\) *De Civitate Dei* is a book on the philosophy of history, not very concerned with the schism in his community. Despite the importance of these works for our knowledge of Augustine’s thought and person, Augustine did not intend them to deal with unity and authority in the context of the Donatist controversy. O’Donnell suggests that, in order “to see him in other lights” than those found in the *Confessions*, we should find other ways of reading his narrative and of getting close to a proper portrayal of Augustine.\(^{14}\) Since Augustine should be understood as a man of his time and place, the letters, since they speak of him in all the controversies he was dealing with and in many other situations that took up his time, cover a variety of subjects related to Church and society and to his activities as a bishop.\(^{15}\) James O’Donnell recognizes that Augustine “succeeded in his letters at shaping not only the affairs of his time but the representation of himself in those affairs to his contemporaries,” that the letters made Augustine known “where his voice could not reach,” and that he appears in them “overwhelmingly as a figure of authority.”\(^{16}\) However, O’Donnell states that the letters are the texts of Augustine least studied among modern scholars.\(^{17}\) He also notices the need for more thorough work on Augustine’s letters, since in them Augustine is presenting himself to readers in a uniquely practical and social context, which his other works

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do not do.\textsuperscript{18} It is exactly such not fully explored material in Augustine’s letters about Church unity and authority that my dissertation plans to treat.

Trying to understand Augustine’s condemning attitude toward Donatists, G. Bonner states that to understand and to know Augustine, the theologian needs to be well acquainted with “the spirit of Augustine’s work as a priest and bishop” on a daily basis, and not just with his theological and intellectual treatises.\textsuperscript{19} Peter Brown agrees. Speaking about the importance of the letters, Brown states that in them we find Augustine “caught up in the seemingly endless, day-to-day business of the Catholic Church of Africa,” even as Brown recognizes that his own \textit{magnum opus} “had not paid sufficient attention to his sermons and letters.”\textsuperscript{20} The letters especially reveal Augustine’s invariable capacity for “self-sacrifice” in the cause of “the defence of his Church.”\textsuperscript{21} Brown’s honesty, as his admirable scholarship, should be admired since he quite often cited the letters, more than anyone I know before the work of Doyle was published.

Daniel Doyle’s book, \textit{The Bishop as Disciplinarian in the Letters of St. Augustine}, is the only work on Augustine’s letters about the application of discipline in the Church. It is of a remarkable value for the subject pursued in it, but it is not about Augustine’s view on Church unity and authority. It is not even a thorough study of all Church discipline in the letters. Doyle intended to “study the function of Church discipline in the ministry of Augustine…to reflect on its theological significance and the function it plays in allowing the bishop to fulfill his responsibility to lead his people in holiness and truth.”\textsuperscript{22} Doyle discusses the nature of discipline, but he clearly mentions that he did not “take up the delicate question of collaboration between Church and state in the exercise of discipline,” a subject that he considers controversial.\textsuperscript{23}

Therefore, I understand that his interest was internal Church discipline and its significance, not

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Ibid.}, 492.
\item Daniel E. Doyle, \textit{The Bishop as Disciplinarian in the Letters of St. Augustine}, xviii-xix.
\item \textit{Ibid.} xx-xxi.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
external aspects of discipline applied to enforce unity by involving the State. The relation between Church and State, specifically Augustine’s justification of the State’s intervention in the defense of the Church, is vital for a proper understanding of his views on Church unity and authority. Since unity, as I already mentioned, is the communion of the Christian churches throughout the world, the fact that the Church was a part of the Christian empire was for Augustine an invariable point of reference in justifying its public recognition and authority; therefore, the role of the State in defending the Church’s interests pervades my dissertation.

Doyle’s rightly noticed the importance of the letters and the need for a more attentive study: they reveal, he said, “the rationale the bishop employs in trying to promote the Christian life. They enable us to see the actual means the bishop has at his disposal for bringing about compliance with the Christian ideal.” 24 Here I would specifically add that the letters illuminate the way and the circumstances in which Augustine defended the unity and authority of the Church, as well as Augustine’s view regarding the Church in the world. Doyle also agrees that the letters present Augustine in “operation,” in real and practical situations in which he acted concretely to promote the Christian life by maintaining good discipline and order. 25

Augustine, because of his position as bishop, had the chance to touch on almost all subjects of theology; therefore, the contemporary scholarly works on Augustine and his writings are as broad as the range of subjects treated in his works.

However, the studies related to Augustine’s life and theology, especially those on Donatism, Church and State, philosophy of history, and schism and heresy, have a wider scope than my focused intention of analyzing chiefly the letters in order to depict Augustine’s view on Church unity and authority. 26

25 Ibid., 2.
The letters are very important because they reveal Augustine’s ordinary dealings with various situations and cases that he had to solve and settle as a bishop as well as his theological and biblical arguments in defense of Church unity and authority. The Donatist controversy determined Augustine to write a significant number of his letters in defense of the Church. Thus, we have from his pen a theology of the Church born out of concrete divisive issues. The Donatist controversy occupied him longer than any other controversy during his lifetime, approximately thirty years.\(^{27}\) It is necessary to mention that, while from the legal point of view, his actions against Donatists ended with the Conference of 411, when the Donatists were outlawed by the Emperor’s decrees, he continued to debate with them in letters until 418, basically the end of the period that my account covers. Not only does the duration of this controversy reveal its historical significance, but the length and the character of the controversy also made an ineluctable impact upon the theology of Augustine, who as a bishop saw as his duty to defend the unity and authority of the Church. Debating with the Donatists, Augustine found “the widest public for his writing and speaking,”\(^{28}\) and what is remarkable about Augustine is what eventually “Donatism does to him. The Augustine we know is emphatically the Augustine who has been transformed by Africa.”\(^{29}\) Peter Brown appreciates that the outcome of the Donatist debate determined “the form

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\(^{27}\) G. G. Willis, *Saint Augustine and the Donatist Controversy*, xi.


taken by the Catholic domination of the Latin world until the Reformation,” \(^{30}\) while Carol Harrison does not make such an extensive judgment but asserts that the Donatist controversy “contributed a great deal to the substance of the *City of God.*” \(^{31}\)

**Contribution of This Study**

First, as I have already shown by referring to the opinions held by other scholars, there is more work to be done in order to understand Augustine better in the context of his daily activities. I am specifically referring to the various cases in the letters where Augustine expressly defended Church unity and authority, cases that have not been given sufficient attention. Second, there is no work based on Augustine’s letters that treats the subject that I propose to discuss. The present work will be a treatment of Augustine’s views on Church unity and authority, a treatment that places Augustine in the circumstances of his daily activities. It will show that his view on Church unity and authority and his final decision to enforce unity \(^{32}\) were the result of multiple causes: his past experiences and background, the social and political situation of the empire, Christian tradition, scriptural exegesis, his position as bishop, and the evolution of the Donatist controversy itself. I will also show that he tried to work out the best solution allowed by these factors.

My contribution to understanding Augustine’s theological views on Church authority and unity is also original and justified by the threefold manner that characterizes my treatment of all these themes. While theologically it focuses on Augustine and Donatists, historically it covers the time of Augustine’s episcopacy and priesthood until 418. Literally, however, my dissertation

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covers primarily Augustine’s letters because, on the one hand, scholars have expressly recognized the need for a more attentive study of the letters and, on the other hand, these letters most thoroughly cover the subject from 391 to 418. There is no work that considers Augustine’s view on unity and authority in the threefold manner that I propose, with his letters as the chief source.

By referring to particular cases Augustine encountered during the controversy, my dissertation will show how Augustine, a very influential leader in a position of authority, altruistically gave himself to the goal of achieving Church unity in North Africa through the authority the Church had acquired according to the scriptures. The corpus of Augustine’s letters best illustrates this. Augustine wrote the anti-Donatist letters with a practical purpose in mind, that is, to eliminate the schism. The theology found in the letters obviously answers the religious concerns occasioned by concrete events that have taken place in his community. Thus, the letters expose one “to the whole” of Augustine’s theology, since his theology cannot be separated from the community that he shepherded. The letters expose one to Augustine’s entire theological “development over time.”

We would not understand his emphasis on unity if we did not realize that he thought the lack of unity was the most chronic problem of the Catholic Church in North Africa. In order to resolve this problem successfully, he used arguments found in any source available to him—scripture (which is the base for the other arguments), the relevance of Christianity in the Empire, the history of the schism, theological arguments of his North African predecessors, and the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist.

**Methodology and Outline**

I will pursue a diachronic analysis of the texts that will reveal in context the theological views on Church authority and unity that Augustine developed during his controversies with the

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Donatists.34 This endeavor will be supplemented by references to modern works pertaining to the text of the letters. My dissertation will treat the subject within a well-delimited historical, theological and literary context; therefore, I do not propose to exhaust the literary sources and to seriously touch on all possible ideas related to the subject. My dissertation deals with Augustine’s views on Church unity and authority within a clearly delimited historical context, from the time he became a priest in 391 until his last writing against the Donatists in 418. It deals exclusively with Augustine’s theological views on Church unity and authority as they are revealed in his dealings with the Donatists. The primary literary resource for my research is his letters, which reveal how Augustine concretely acted in the circumstances when the unity and authority of the Church were challenged by the Donatist schism.

Letters were understood in the ancient world to function as a substitute for the author’s presence and as a form of communication for those who could not meet. They could be private or official, intended for public audience or publication. While in the first case, a letter could deal with very personal matters, in the latter case it could treat issues of general interest for a community. While this classification is pertinent and helpful, today the scholarly preference is for more flexible classification that includes a spectrum of possibilities. Usually, an ancient letter consisted of a greeting and introduction, a body, and a closing. Letters were usually delivered by slaves or other kinds of domestic or administrative personnel who could also provide oral information, or by traveling acquaintances.35

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34 When I am referring to the Church as a whole, I will use the word “Church.” I use the word “Catholic” for the Church that had communion with the Church of Rome and with the churches of the Empire, the Church declared orthodox at the ecumenical Councils at Nicea (325 A.D.) and Constantinople (381 A.D.) before Augustine started to debate with the Donatists. However, I will use it only in distinction from the Donatist Church and its members. In other contexts, the word “Church” will be used for the Church from which the Donatists separated. “Donatists” is a term that I use in my dissertation because it was the name which Augustine used for the schismatic Church of North Africa, so named after the very charismatic and capable, second leader of the schismatic Church, Donatus. It is, I believe, a pertinent choice as the Donatists, though Christians, by their willed schism separated from the Catholic Church. 35 Hubertus Drobner, The Fathers of the Church: A Comprehensive Introduction (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 174-79.
Since travel in the ancient world was slow and since Augustine had to attend to the practical needs of Hippo and all of Africa, in which he had become famous and accepted as an authority, letters became a very important way for him to communicate with others. His letters are a rich source of information about the daily life of Augustine and his church and about the controversies that he tackled as a priest and bishop. More generally, Augustine’s letters are an invaluable source for the study of Church history during his time, of the development of dogma, and of social and political history in late antiquity. While Augustine usually dictated his letters to a stenographer, his signature showed the authenticity of the letters. As a bishop with a chancery that took care of the administrative issues of his bishopric, Augustine used to send his letters by one of his priests or by traveling acquaintances. While the letters often have a more personal character than others of Augustine’s works, some of them were intended by him for a wide audience—that is, purposely given by him to others to be copied and transmitted in different parts of Africa. In addition to letters to friends such as Nebridius and Paulinus of Nola, very important are the letters in which Augustine dealt with controversies having to do with Arianism, Pelagianism, and Donatism. The Donatist controversy was the occasion for many letters. This controversy appears in letters not written to Donatists, although the anti-Donatist letters were frequently intended as contributions to a dialogue between Augustine and his opponent Donatists. Since the Donatists refused to dialogue with the Catholics, Augustine’s letters show his determination to eliminate the schism and to unite the Donatists with the Church.36 While it is perhaps impossible to classify Augustine’s anti-Donatist letters according to certain theological aspects of his thought, we could find in them theological, polemical, liturgical, ecclesiastical, moral, philosophical, historical, and personal information together with the theme of unity, which pervades all the anti-Donatist letters. Thus, while Augustine’s anti-Donatist letters are focused on uniting the Donatists with the Church, they contain all of the above types of information,

according to the particular issues Augustine had to address or solve. This variety of information, in addition to Augustine’s detailed, careful, and determined will to make his point clear and to edify his correspondents—and the audience that he meant to hear most of his letters read out in public—shows his erudition and made those who read or heard his letters believe that Augustine had authority. Unlike the anti-Donatist treatises, which address general issues, the letters are more personal and pastoral because they address “specific individual and cases.”

Indeed, the anti-Donatist letters are more pastoral than the anti-Donatist treatises. In the former, we find Augustine less polemical or aggressive that in his doctrinal treatises. As a result, his explanations of doctrinal, ecclesiastical, and disciplinary issues in his anti-Donatist letters and other works of an epistolary nature offer “more balanced formulations for many of his theological positions.”

Acquaintance with the historical background is an essential part of my proof that Augustine’s theology is socially and politically conditioned. This does not mean that the circumstances radically change a man. In fact, it is true that the “central elements in Augustine’s thought have been shown to be remarkably stable.” However, in this stable frame, characterized by his desire to faithfully worship God in the unity of the Church, one cannot escape noticing changes due to the circumstantial controversies and dispute which, of course, caused him to explore facts and theological ideas which he interpreted the best he could and according to the concrete realities of the Church.

After the present introductory chapter, the first chapter will provide a background to early Christianity and to North African Christianity regarding the theological themes that we will encounter in later chapters. This background will help us to understand the context of the controversy and Augustine’s position within early Christian traditions on the Church’s unity and authority. Though the schism cannot be directly historically linked with Tertullian and Cyprian,

there are theological themes that connect the Donatists to the thought of Tertullian and Cyprian: the nature of the Church (authority, unity and holiness), the nature of baptism and the Eucharist, confessors’ authority, and a clear division between Church and State. The schism started over the issue of holiness in a context of clear opposition between Church and State and over the authority of the confessors, but the themes mentioned above characterize emphatically the entire period of the conflict, and were differently understood by the Catholics and Donatists. After the time of Tertullian and Cyprian, these themes were adjusted in the Catholic Church according to the changes made by the Church in order to fit into the social structure of the empire, but the conceptions of these themes continuing in the schismatic Church of the Donatists remained largely unchanged.\textsuperscript{41} If this is so, then the Donatists were, as they believed themselves to be, the followers of their own theological tradition about the nature of the Church “in the light of the remembered events of the great persecution.”\textsuperscript{42} Since the Donatists believed that they were the true Church in North Africa because they were the followers of Tertullian and Cyprian, Augustine often felt obliged to comment on, and to argue against, their historical and theological claims. Therefore, in order to grasp well the nature of the conflict and the opposing theologies, it is necessary to see the schism through the eyes of two distinct Christian traditions, Catholic and Donatist, and I will treat the issue of unity and authority in this context.

During the time of Diocletian’s persecution the schism started to take root, whereas during the reign of Constantine the Great, it amplified and became a stable division. One needs to know about the intricacies of the relationships between the Donatists and the Catholic Church at this time in order to understand the nature of the schism as well as Augustine’s constant references to it. It is during this time that the relation between Church and State changed radically, as the State officially started to support and to favor the Church. Augustine will use this truth of history, which he sees as a fulfillment of God’s prophecy, in his arguments for Church


\textsuperscript{42} Robert F. Evans, \textit{One and Holy: The Church in Latin Patristic Thought}, 69-70.
unity and authority and against the Donatists. J. P. Brisson sees, though perhaps exaggeratedly, the development of the Donatist schism as the simple result of Constantine’s alignment of the Church with the Empire.\textsuperscript{43} But Constantine’s support of the Church did provoke and exacerbate the rigorist tradition in North Africa against those who supposedly compromised with the persecuting Empire.

I will present three important theologians, Optatus, Tyconius and Parmenian, to whom Augustine often refers. Since Optatus is the only anti-Donatist Catholic apologist before Augustine, the latter will use widely Optatus’ arguments and information to defend the Church. Carol Harrison rightly notices that Optatus was Augustine’s main source for the early history and theological polemic of the schism.\textsuperscript{44} Even though a Donatist, Tyconius wrote works that furnished Augustine with theological ideas that supported his arguments for unity and contradicted the Donatists’ arguments. Tyconius’ works helped Augustine to evidence that even one of the Donatists argued against their theological claims about unity and authority. Parmenian, one of the best Donatist leaders, is significant for a proper understanding of Donatist theology, of which he was a major representative during his own time and episcopacy. He is also important because of his opposition to the views of Tyconius that Augustine favored. In order to defend Tyconius’ theological view regarding unity, Augustine wrote a work to defeat Parmenian’s theological and historical claims regarding unity and authority.

After a chapter presenting his incipient religious formation from his early years at Thagaste until the decisive experiences at Milan, the third chapter is regarding the reciprocal authority of the Bible and the Church in Augustine’s thought. The fourth chapter of this study is dedicated to his activities—in councils, discussions, disputations, treatises—that will illustrate Augustine’s effort to achieve Christian unity in North Africa. Then I will proceed to present in chapters five, six, seven, and eight major themes in his letters: Church unity and authority;


\textsuperscript{44} Carol Harrison, \textit{Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity}, 149.
coercion and conversion; the true Church not consisting of saints alone; and the sacrament of baptism.

The first theme, that the Church’s unity and authority reveal the true Church, affirms that the unity of the Church and its amazing expansion and recognition throughout the Empire are the fulfillment in history of the Old Testament prophecies. Arguing from the Old and New Testament, Augustine claims that the Empire is now Christian by God’s providence, and its Emperor, divinely ordained, has full rights or authority to correct those who oppose the unity and authority of the Church. Since the Church is spread (according to prophecy) throughout the world, the true Church is the Catholic Church. The Donatists, who claim to be the true Catholic Church, are in fact a schismatic group insignificant geographically and numerically, in comparison with the extensive and numerous Catholic Church in communion with the churches throughout the world and officially endorsed by the Empire. Therefore, Augustine argues, the Donatists should submit to the unity of the Church, where they can rejoice in the bond of charity as part of the Church which enjoys a thorough recognition in the world.

The second theme, that of unity achieved by forced conversion through the authority that the Church has according to the scriptures, shows that for Augustine unity seemed to be more important than a sincere conversion. As Christ used violence against Paul (Acts 13: 9), Augustine said, the Church is following Christ in coercing the Donatists. By using force, Augustine argues, Christ made Paul a far better disciple than the others who became Christians by their own will, thus Augustine expected the same in the cases of forced conversion to the unity of the Church.

The third theme, that of the Church not consisting of saints alone, emphasizes that Church unity is what matters even if within the boundaries of this unity there are deplorable Christians. Augustine was criticized because he advocated conversion to the Catholic Church by force. He knew that among both Church laity and clergy, there were many who behaved in an ungodly way. Augustine nevertheless asserts that no matter how Church members and leaders behave, true worship can exist only in the unity of the Church; the bad will in the end be
separated from the good. However, Augustine recognized that within the numerous Church
spread throughout the world, there is another Church or small group which is always
distinguished in heart and morals—that is, through their way of life—from the Church of the
multitudes. Augustine urged conversion to the Church of the multitudes, to the Church in
communion with the churches throughout the world, and he hoped for a subsequent sincere
conversion of those united to the Church. Augustine thought that, though many fake Christians
were brought into the Church by laws threatening punishment, there were in the Church good
Christians, distinct from the bad ones, and known to the world through their way of life. No
theologian until Augustine defended so determinedly the existence of the good and bad in the
Church. In comparison with the Donatist tradition at Carthage regarding the nature of the Church,
Augustine’s view, though it remained continuous with previous Christian thought, was attuned to
the new conditions of the Church in the empire.

The fourth theme is the sacrament of baptism, which played an important role in
Augustine’s claim that the Church should be one. According to the theology developed in Rome
separately from Carthage, baptism could be validly administered in the name of Christ even by
schismatic and heretic Christian groups, but was effective, according to Augustine, only in the
communion of the churches throughout the world, a communion that expresses the charity of the
united Christian community or Church.

Presenting the above-mentioned themes in chronological order and in the context of the
relevant historical circumstances will allow me to conclude that for Augustine, according to his
letters written in the Donatist debate, unity is the most important Church quality. Certainly,
Augustine would not have elaborated his theology of the unity and authority of the Church if he
had not been confronted by the concrete situation of the Donatist schism, by the status of the
Church in the Empire, and by his official position of leadership, which required action to protect
his flock. Augustine came to believe that the Church was living during what he called “Christian
times”; therefore, he thought the Church should have authority to enforce unity through the help
of the Christian State. These times, when the whole world became a choir praising Christ, were different, he said, from the times of the early Church, when the Church was persecuted by the State. Certainly these “Christian times” gave him support and encouragement to assert that Church unity should be imposed through the authority the Church had in virtue of its fulfillment of the scriptures. These prophesied about the Emperor’s duty, as the head of the Empire and as a Christian, to defend the Church and to oppose novelty.

Augustine should be understood in the context of particular theological work and dispute. Augustine’s letters should be understood in their immediate context. Augustine’s readers should also be aware that in that context two different theological traditions, one of the Catholic Church, the other of the Donatists, were fighting each other. Whereas the Catholic Church fought to assert its religious authority, the Donatist church fought to maintain its identity. Augustine wrote to defend the Catholic tradition against the Donatist tradition. By acknowledging the religious and social context of the controversy and the particular agendas of each Christian group, my study will help us to understand and to appreciate two Christian traditions, each one with its own understanding of itself and each one in its own way trying to live life within the bounds of Christian charity.
I. THE CHURCH IN NORTH AFRICA UNTIL AUGUSTINE: AUTHORITY AND UNITY

A. The First Two Christian Centuries

1. Unity and Authority

Because the Church began to exist in a world with religious values very different from its own, from the start it had to demonstrate its foundation in truth and authority, which it proclaims through its life and teaching. In addition, since soon after its inception, Christian communities consisted of people from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, the Church had to work assiduously to maintain the unity of its teaching, that is, the unity of orthodoxy, as well as the unity of its body. Indeed, both these unities proved necessary for the Church’s survival because they were the source and foundation of its credibility and authority: The Church could not have authority without the unity of the truth it proclaimed and without the unity of its body. However, conceptions of this authority and unity continually developed and evolved according to the particular and concrete state of the Church in relation to its internal situation as well as to the world around it: “unity and catholicity were never absolute, except by definitions which have not stood the test of time.”

Jesus and His disciples started a movement that would later call its members “Christians,” that is, Christ’s disciples, partisans, or adherents. The Twelve were pillars who could authenticate the transmission of the teaching of Jesus. Since they had seen Jesus and had

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been taught by him, it was normal that they should be considered authorities who teach what Jesus taught through words and deeds. The Twelve, the representatives of Jesus to bring renewal to all of Israel, judges on the twelve thrones of Israel, will judge the twelve tribes together with the Son of Man.

Because Christianity spread in the Roman world, in a Hellenistic environment, the Twelve could hardly exercise their authority effectively among Christians born in a Greek environment for they did not consider the entire Jewish tradition as binding. Although Hellenistic Christianity considered itself related to Jerusalem Christians, it developed independently to a considerable extent. For example, the churches founded and led by Paul were not prepared to embrace all Jewish observances regarding circumcision, certain food regulations, and the Temple cult. The fact that Paul and his Gentile converts rejected or ignored many Jewish observances proved a matter sufficiently divisive that it prevented the development of a single Christian theological outlook as well as an effective authority from Jerusalem.

There is no doubt among scholars that the mark by which the earliest Christian communities could be identified was the allegiance these communities witnessed to Jesus of Nazareth. This was not primarily an intellectual assent or a validation of a large corpus of theoretical percepts, but the faith that with Jesus, the bearer of God’s Kingdom, a new life had already begun. This certainly implied that those who followed Jesus should live in the light and footsteps of their master. The earliest Christians did not first decipher how Jesus performed acts of wonder and then, after the conclusion had been reached, proclaim their faith; the relationship

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5 Acts 6:2, 4, 15:2, 6.
with Jesus meant to step into faith rather than to wait for a definitive enlightenment.\(^8\)

Consequently, as the whole movement was centered and depended on Jesus, he was the paradigm of authority and unity.\(^9\) But, since in the beginning the Jesus tradition circulated orally, it was certainly received slightly differently from place to place; when its different versions were put together, the result did not lack tension and disagreement. Indeed, Rowan Williams asserts that Christian unity “is perceptible mostly in negative terms, in its tormentedly complex relation to the Jewish cult, law and scriptures, but has some positive content simply by focusing of that new complexity upon the words and acts and fate of Jesus.”\(^{10}\) Moreover, the same scholar states that Church unity “lies primarily, if not absolutely and simply, in a shared attention to the questioning story of a crucified and resurrected Lord.”\(^{11}\) So, whether or not we are able to simplify questions about Jesus by focusing our faith on his actions and activity, it is reasonable to believe that he is the simplest and the surest way toward religious consensus and unity in the Church. However, because of the diversity of Christian traditions, and the different backgrounds of those who accepted Christianity, they could hardly understand it in a single clearly defined way.\(^{12}\)

According to Robert Grant, for the Church of the Apostolic Fathers, its own unity was the most important problem to handle.\(^{13}\) In this context we should understand the appearance of what we call today “heresy,” which can express itself in a form of “a progression” away from the accepted teaching, or “retrgression” toward a now antiquated teaching.\(^{14}\) However, we should know that “many heretics, whose opinions the Church had to condemn, were men of saintly character,

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\(^{10}\) Rowan Williams, “Does It Make Sense to Speak of Pre-Nicene Orthodoxy,” in *The Making of Orthodoxy*, 9-10.

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 18.


actuated only by the sincere desire to promote the true religion of the Lord Jesus.”¹⁵ But Hegesippus tells us that serious damage to the Church was done not so much by false opinions as by the desire for power.¹⁶ The issue of division, caused by false opinions and the desire for power, is a theme that characterizes the works of other Apostolic Fathers, too.

In the Church of Corinth, to which the letter attributed to Clement of Rome is addressed, it seems that unity was the main issue. A significant part of the Church in Corinth opposed the presbyters and joined a group led by other capable leaders.¹⁷ According to the Letter of Clement, the unity in the Corinthian Church was lost because of the envy and jealousy of the rabble against the respectable, folly against wisdom, youth against its elders.¹⁸ Besides the fact that the Church in Corinth still dealt with the problem of self-identification and cohesion within a secular culture,¹⁹ there were dissensions over the title of the bishop.²⁰ The letter addresses the immediate problem of rivalry, unruliness, and schism.²¹

The main concern in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch was also the theme of unity, that is, the unity of the Christian community around its ministers, especially around its bishop.²² Simon Tugwell observes that Ignatius is most of all interested in opposing “anything that would disrupt the unity of the Church.”²³ The reason Ignatius does not stop mentioning the benefit of unity is the existence of heresy which he is strongly opposing.²⁴ But in order for the Church to have strong unity, a firm authority is needed. The bishop plays now a decisive role; one never should

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¹⁵ Alan Richardson, Creeds in the Making, 33.
¹⁸ Clement to the Corinthians 3, in ECW, 24.
²⁰ Clement to the Corinthians 44, 42, in ECW, 41, 40; Harry Maier, The Social Setting of the Ministry as Reflected in the Writings of Hermas, Clement and Ignatius (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1991), 92.
²¹ Clement to the Corinthians 13,14,15, in ECW, 28-29.
²⁴ Hans von Campenhausen, Ecclesiastical Authority and Political Power, 99.
act independently of the bishop.\textsuperscript{25} Urging the congregation to renounce factionalism, Ignatius states that the congregation rightly gathers where the bishop gathers.\textsuperscript{26} The word “catholic” finds here its first mention in reference to the Church. Although it means “universal,” a meaning which it always carried, in Ignatius it could not have been used in a geographical sense as if the Church had been found everywhere. Here the term is referring to the Church which is orthodox, non-schismatic, and opposed to division, the Church which therefore finds its united wholeness.\textsuperscript{27}

Early Christian literature presents in a positive light the early Church that we deem now as orthodox. Hegesippus,\textsuperscript{28} Origen,\textsuperscript{29} and Tertullian\textsuperscript{30} maintain the priority of orthodoxy over heterodoxy and see heterodoxy as a later product, an alteration of the right faith that occurred several decades after Jesus Christ. The book that challenged the classical view of ancient Christian orthodoxy in an unprecedented way was written by Walter Bauer in 1934.\textsuperscript{31} According to him, it cannot be clearly evidenced that orthodoxy is prior to heresy. It is rather contemporary with orthodoxy, not viewed originally as a heresy, and in some places it even constitutes the majority view.

To Bauer’s thesis responded reputable scholars.\textsuperscript{32} I believe with H. E. W. Turner that in early Christian orthodoxy one may see the “tension” and “interaction” that exist between

\textsuperscript{26} Ignatius of Antioch, The Epistle to the Smyrnaeans 8, in \textit{ECW}, 103.
\textsuperscript{28} Eusebius. \textit{HE} 4.22, 129.
\textsuperscript{29} Origen, \textit{The Song of Songs Commentary} 3.4, in \textit{ACW}, vol. 26, 178.
“flexible” and “fixed” elements and traditions. These together represent or embody the fullness of Christian orthodoxy, whose paradigm is Jesus Christ. For Christians the ultimate authority is God, revealed in Jesus Christ, experienced and interpreted in the Church through the Holy Spirit, which is always done in the light of the Scripture, the word of God. While Christians are united because of their recognition that Jesus Christ is the Lord, they are divided because of different interpretations of the Scripture as well as because of the lack of consensus as to the way the authority should be exercised.

2. Church and State

The Church-State relationship during the first two Christian centuries is characterized by two main practical alternatives or views. Whereas sometimes the State is seen as God’s providential establishment for men and therefore the proper object of obedience, sometimes it is seen as Satan’s reign since the State opposes the people of God, that is, the Church. These alternatives depend on the situation of the Church in the secular world. If the State challenges and persecutes the Church, the State represents the antithesis of the Church’s nature and goals. On the other hand, if the Church’s affairs fare well within political society, the State can be seen as neutral and providential, or even favorable to the Church’s well being. There are some biblical statements about the Church-State relationship. Considering that the Church is not only a religious institution but also a social one, these statements have their most important value when they are interpreted according to the conditions the Church passed through in its relationship with the secular world. The Church did not oppose the State simply for the sake of a biblical statement that indicates their different natures. The irreconcilable attitude on the side of the Church toward


the State appears only when the Church’s status and goals are asked to be altered or compromised in order to fit with the norms of the State’s establishment. Although there is truth in Oscar Cullmann’s opinion that the Church-State relationship arises because of the very essence and presuppositions of the Christian faith, I believe that the New Testament references or allusions to the Church-State relationship reflect certain contingent historical conditions. Once we see the New Testament’s statements about the State in their various historical contexts, the diversity of these statements—positive and negative—will not “appear” to be contradictory, as Cullmann assumes, but different responses to respectively different situations. The State could be neutral and providential, calling on Christian patience. But because it could also undermine the goal and the mission of the Church in the world, it should be resisted.

Jesus’ attitude toward the State is an ambivalent one but one that stresses distance from the State’s affairs. While Jesus recognizes the status of the State as a reality that cannot be denied and thus should be given the honor it deserves, he nevertheless sharply criticizes the evils of the State. Jesus’ teaching on the State can be generally summarized with Mark 12:17, which implies that one should pay the State due obligations, whereas God has to be honored according to the honor God deserves.

Since the New Testament attests different attitudes regarding the State, we would not be surprised to find the same ambivalence as to the State and the world after the New Testament: two attitudes, one firmly opposing the claims of the secular world, and another one more

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35 Ibid., 5.
accepting of the State’s influence on Church life or members. Opposition to the State appeared especially when the State occasioned a time of distress and trial for the Church.

Ignatius of Antioch opposes strongly the State. He died as a martyr during the reign of Trajan, probably in about 107-108 for reasons that we do not clearly know, except that his own words indicate voluntary martyrdom. As L. Barnard said, Ignatius knew the Gospel of Matthew, Paul’s letters, and the Fourth Gospel, and his attitude reflects his reading of these New Testament writings. Moreover, Bowersock suggests that the concept of martyrdom is Christian and based on the stories of Jesus’ life and death. A few years later, in about 110-113, Pliny put Christians to death simply because they were carrying the name “Christians.” But it was the Christians’ contumacia or obstinacy in refusing to submit properly to the Roman religious observance and the political authority it sacralized that usually proved to be fatal or deadly for Christians. Near the middle of the second century, Polycarp is put to death because he, the mob in the arena shouted, “is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, the destroyer of our gods, who teaches many not to sacrifice or worship.” Asked to swear by the genius of Caesar and to curse Christ, Polycarp answered simply that he could not deny his king who saves him for eternity. Justin Martyr, asked if he is expecting to ascend to heaven for certain rewards because of his


41 G. W. Bowersock, Martyrdom and Rome, 13-16.


44 The Martyrdom of Polycarp 12.2, in AF, 237.

45 The Martyrdom of Polycarp 9-10, in AF, 235.
unshakable faith and the acceptance of death, answered: “I do not think…but I have accurate
knowledge and am fully assured of it.”

On the positive side, although Polycarp was so determined to firmly defy the demands of
the State, he also affirmed that Christians “have been taught to pay proper respect to rulers and
authorities appointed by God, as long as it does us no harm.” The same is true for Justin who,
after explaining Matthew 22:21, said: “Wherefore, only God do we worship, but in other things
we joyfully obey you, acknowledging you as the kings and rulers of men, and praying for you
that you may be found to have, besides royal power, sound judgment.” Approximately one
decade after Justin, Melito of Sardis writes an apology to Marcus Aurelius, which is mentioned
by Eusebius. Melito asks the emperor to act justly toward Christians, against the malicious
informers. He tells the Emperor that the Empire will continue to prosper only if he will continue,
as his ancestors did, to protect the Christian philosophy.

Although not everything is history in early Christian accounts of martyrdom, the core of
these narratives, which usually show a strong faith and a rejection of the State’s contradiction of
it, cannot simply be denied. On the other hand, the Christian recognition of the State’s role and
authority in society is a step toward seeing it as God’s providential instrument in supporting and
advancing the Church’s mission in the world.

46 The Martyrdom of the Holy Martyrs Justin, Chariton, Charito, Evelpistus, Hierax, Paeon, and
Liberian 5, in ACM, 53.
47 The Martyrdom of Polycarp 10, in AF, 235.
48 Justin Martyr, The First Apology 17, in The Fathers of the Church, trans. T. B. Falls (New
49 Eusebius, HE 4.26, 133-34.
B. The Church in North Africa from the Scillitan Martyrs and Perpetua to Tertullian and Cyprian

This chapter is intended to show the development of North African tradition about the Church from its inception to Cyprian. There could be noticed two Church traditions or attitudes regarding the secular world and the Empire, which was the political system that ruled the secular world. Since the State or the Empire and the secular world have the same values, and the former dictates the rules of society, the secular world and the State or Empire are not different from each other intrinsically for the purposes of a discussion of these two traditions. One tradition opposed the secular world and the State because their values were not God’s and Christians’ and, moreover, as enemies of Christian values, they opposed and persecuted the Christians from outside the Church. The other tradition, while it also saw the Empire’s persecution of the Church as the Devil’s act and thus opposed it, believed that the Church consists of both saints and sinners, that is, that the secular world could be found within the Church, to some extent.

1. Christian Origins and the Scillitan Martyrs

There is no clear information regarding when or how Christianity began in Roman North Africa. In about 180, when Irenaeus wrote his Adversus haereses, mentioning the territorial areas where Christianity existed at this time, he did not mention “Africa,” a noun used by Romans for Africa Proconsularis, roughly modern Tunisia.¹ He did mention, however, “Libya,” a word that for Greek speakers meant all African territory west of Egypt.² However, the adjective “Lybian”

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² Irenaeus, Against Heresies 1.10.2, in ACW, vol. 55, 49.
was solely used by both Greeks and Romans for Africans living on Carthaginian territory. So, if Irenaeus wrote as a Greek from Lyon, then he probably was referring to African land west of Egypt. Because he did not use the word “Lybian,” or “Africa,” we cannot conclude that he did not refer to the Christians in Carthage. In fact, it is likely that his word meant to include the Christians in Carthage.

Despite the lack of certain information regarding the origin of Christianity in Roman North Africa, there were probably Christians in Carthage several decades before the end of the second century. Scholars have suggested various origins for Christianity in Carthage—Rome, Greek communities that immigrated from the east, or Carthaginian Judeo-Christian communities. Carthage was a cosmopolitan and commercial center where Christians could have been established during the second century. Missionaries from Rome or the Greek East could have propagated Christianity there since missionary activity was quite vigorous in the middle of the second century. It is likely that fervent North African Christianity was significantly influenced by Greek Christianity, perhaps from western Asia Minor or Anatolia, where biblical-based ideas related to suffering and death by martyrdom were more common than in more western Christian areas. It is also likely that it was influenced by Roman Christianity. Carthage was the second most important city of the Empire after Rome, whose strong influence in North Africa can hardly be denied. Rome’s commercial relationship with Carthage, as well as Rome’s heavy colonization and Romanization of North Africa could not have excluded Christians. Tertullian should be

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trusted as speaking the truth when he said to the proconsul of Carthage: “We are sailors along with yourselves; we serve in the army; we engage in farming and trading.”\(^8\)

Christians were not mentioned in North Africa before approximately 180.\(^9\) Of course, it is likely that they had not existed there for a long time before the aforementioned date: Tertullian mentions in his *Apologeticus*, in about 197 that “we are but of yesterday.”\(^10\) Since this saying of Tertullian is not precise and allows flexibility as to what “yesterday” means, it is still probable that Christians did not suddenly appear on the scene of history in the region the first time they were documented as being condemned to death at Scillitum. Although Christianity was originally an urban movement, which is true of the typical or classic Christianity in Roman North Africa, the first documented Christians in Scillitum lived in a rural area. This tells us that the movement probably existed in some rural areas before the Christianity we know from the Carthaginian Tertullian, which was an urban Christianity in an environment controlled by the Romans.\(^11\)

Tertullian affirms that Vigellius Saturninus was the first to use the sword against Christians in North Africa.\(^12\) It is now generally accepted that the year that Saturninus raised the sword against Christians is 180,\(^13\) and the month and the day of the trial are provided by the *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*: July 17.\(^14\) The story told in the *Acts* is of decisive importance for this dissertation because it underlines “the dominant motif of African Christianity: uncompromising rejection of an alien world.”\(^15\) For these Christians, the supreme authority belonged to God and

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\(^8\) Tertullian, *Apology* 42.1, in *FC*, vol. 10, 106.


\(^12\) Tertullian, *To Scapula* 3, in *FC*, vol. 10, 155.


Jesus Christ, and it was to be held in the highest honor when challenged by the authority of the State.

During the reign of Marcus Aurelius’s son, Commodus, Christians enjoyed a period of general peace, so it is likely that Christians were not sought out by authorities, but were reported by a hostile population. Although the circumstances under which the Christians at Scillium were brought before the Roman proconsul are not known, we do know that he asked them to swear “by the Genius of our lord the emperor,” which, along with the prayers for his health, was a part of the simple religiosity of the Romans.

The answer the martyrs gave shows two attitudes toward the emperor and his empire: While one attitude is neutral, the other firmly opposes the authority of the emperor and of his empire. While Speratus mentions that he—and other Christians too—did not steal, had never done wrong, had never lent themselves to wickedness, and paid the tax on each purchase, Donata says that Christians “pay honor to Caesar; but it is God we fear.” Speratus mentions that Christians hold their “own emperor in honor,” and he asserts, “I do not recognize the empire of this world. Rather, I serve that God whom no man has seen, nor can see, with the eyes.” Further he mentions that he—and the other Christians too—pay the tax and avoid doing wrong, “for I acknowledge my lord who is the emperor of kings and of all nations.” Here we see that God was the authority on which the martyrs based a conditioned recognition of imperial authority, as it was his authority that provided the basis for their rejection of the State. Their Christian faith in God and his rewards was exceedingly strong. Although the proconsul gave the martyrs thirty days to reconsider and to renounce their obstinacy by sacrificing to the emperor, they refused by saying, in the words of Speratus, that in such “a matter there is no need for consideration.” Refusing the proconsul’s proposal, they unanimously affirmed their being Christians and living in accordance

16 Eusebius, *HE* 5.21, 169.
with the Christian rites; therefore, they were condemned to be executed by the sword. The martyrs’ response was: “We thank God! Today we are martyrs in heaven. Thanks be to God!”20—the last expression resembles the Circumcellions’ “Praise to God.”21

2. Perpetua

Twenty-three years after the Scillitans stood against the authority of the Empire, in approximately 203, Perpetua and other Christians were martyred in Carthage, possibly on March 7, the birthday of Geta, younger son of Septimius Severus and Caracalla’s younger brother.22 Like the story of the Scillitan martyrs, the story of Perpetua and of her friends is also evidence that the authority of God and Jesus Christ was upheld against any challenge by the authority of the State or by other human values and that an uncompromising Christian faith and a rejection of everything that opposed this faith was the most important characteristic of Christianity in North Africa.

According to Eusebius, during the reign of Septimius Severus (193-211), martyrdoms had taken place “in every land,” though he mentions only Egypt and Alexandria—very likely because of his interest in Origen.23 However, since there was a period of “internal well-being” for the Church in the empire between 180 A.D. and 235 A.D.,24 it is likely that this Severan persecution of which Eusebius speaks was not generally intended to find and condemn Christians. There is no reason not to believe Tertullian, who noted that Severus was graciously mindful of

20 Ibid., 89.
23 Eusebius, HE 6.1, 79.
the Christians and openly opposed the population raging against them. But it is very likely that Septimius Severus wanted to stop conversion to Christianity and its propaganda. He did not primarily intend to do away with Christians, but to halt conversion to Christianity, although Eusebius inaccurately saw him as sponsoring a general persecution against Christians. We should see Perpetua’s trial and death in this context. Since conversions could not always be stopped, as in the case of Perpetua, martyrdom followed.

The *Passio*, generally speaking, is a story of martyrdom and a witness to the vitality of the still very young and growing African Church at the beginning of the third century. Its images and strong emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit show that it is an apocalyptic text. Since apocalyptic ideas easily supported a strong perseverance in faith and martyrdom when the faith was challenged by the State, the *Passio* tells us how Christians saw the relation between Church and State in such circumstances. The *Passio* specifically rejects the power of the State when it undermines faith because the *Passio* rejects everything that hinders faith.

The redactor was an eye-witness to the deeds of faith performed by Christians who faced suffering and death. Although the redactor realizes that the ancient deeds of faith may have more prestige because of their antiquity, he assures his readers that “the more recent events should be considered the greater, being later than those of old, and this is a consequence of the extraordinary graces promised for the last stage of time.” This is what those Christians “of weak or despairing faith” who are willing to “restrict the power of the one Spirit to times and seasons” should know and realize. While the redactor does not tell us who restricts the power of the Spirit—and how these Christians restrict it—there is here an indication that there were Christians who at least looked suspicious or hostile to those who believed they were living in the last stage

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27 The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas 1, in ACM, 107.
28 Ibid.
of time when the Spirit was still powerfully active and the coming of Christ was near. Indeed, R. Markus states that during the Montanist crisis, in the “great church there came to be a powerful emphasis on the ending of the age of miracle and revelation now that the last of the twelve apostles was dead.” While the Montanist emphasis on the last stage of the Church, that is, that of the Paraclete, and its claim of prophetic inspiration and authority was perceived as a threat by Catholic writers, the Empire itself had every reason to look suspiciously at acts and groups that, through stubborn innovations, were disrupting the customs and values that were integral to its unity and perpetuity. Such a stubborn attitude was seen in Perpetua and her friends.

Perpetua’s life depended on a very simple and easily performed act. All that she was asked to do was to refuse to attest to being a Christian and to sacrifice for the welfare of the emperors. But Perpetua replied to her father that she could not deny she was a Christian since, in fact, she was. To the governor’s question about whether she was Christian, she replied shortly, “Yes, I am.” As simple as the sacrifice to the emperor looks, it had deep significance for the martyrs. Since the emperors were considered quasi-divine persons, the guarantors of peace and of society’s well-being, sacrificing to them meant that one recognized their authority before the gods on behalf of their people and realm. It was certainly the authority of the Empire that required them to compromise their faith that these Christians did not want to accept or to acknowledge. Perpetua mentions that her fight was in fact not with wild animals, but with the Devil, who was represented by the political system which opposed Christians, and that the wild animals were just the instruments of the diabolical system.

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Opposed to the authority of the State and society stood the authority of Jesus. Perpetua tells us that the fight with the wild animals, that is, with the political system, in the visions or dreams she had, will not harm her because she fights “in the name of Christ,” and it is the authority of this name, of course, on which her firm and defiant attitude toward the State is based. Since the grey-haired shepherd in Perpetua’s vision presented in the *Passio* symbolizes the Lord, he himself is greeting her as she arrives in the garden of heaven; the Lord is also “the trainer” who said that she had to defeat the Egyptian, who prepares her for the fight with the wild beasts, and who gives her “the branch” of victory and greets her as she came victorious to the places promised by the Lord. The Lord granted her, asserts Saturus, what he promised, that is, a new life of “intense light,” which is like a garden and opposed to the life of darkness and sin symbolized by the Egyptian that she had to defeat in order to be victorious and receive the branch of victory. Once she arrives in the presence of the Lord, Perpetua recognizes that she is happier than she was in the flesh. Although these events unfold in visions, they symbolize two different worlds as these were seen by these martyrs of faith, that is, the world of the Christians who have God as their Lord, and the secular world that has the Emperor as its lord.

It was the authority of Jesus and the rewards he promised to those who persevere in the flesh that helped Perpetua determine to defy the values dearest to people, that is, the loving and authoritative bonds of family. The crying of her aged father was a cause of deep sorrow for Perpetua, but it was not sufficient reason to renounce her Christian convictions. It appears that she saw even her father’s arguments as diabolical instruments used by Satan. Whereas her father underlines the serious repercussions that her refusal to renounce Christianity would bring on her

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34 *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* 4, 10 in ACM, 111, 119.
37 *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* 12, in ACM, 121.
family—“You will destroy all of us! None of us will ever be able to speak freely again if anything happens to you”—she assured him that she and her companions were not left to themselves but were all in the Lord’s power.\(^{39}\)

Perpetua and Saturus were “natural” leaders\(^{40}\) invested with authority not through the ceremony of ordination, but in virtue of their extraordinary faith. The expression of this faith in ardent prayer healed Dinocrates, Perpetua’s younger brother, of cancer.\(^{41}\) Saturus tells us about an episode that evidences the martyrs’ authority to intervene on behalf of their loved ones and fellow Christians. As in Saturus’ vision Perpetua and Saturus went out from the garden of heaven for a walk, we are told that the martyrs’ leaders, Optatus the bishop and Aspasius the presbyter, were outside of it, “each of them apart and in sorrow.” When they saw Perpetua and Saturus, they threw themselves at the feet of the martyrs and asked the martyrs to make peace between them. Perpetua and Saturus replied, “Are you not our bishop, and are you not our presbyter? How can you fall at our feet?” Immediately the angels intervened and asked Optatus and Aspasius to allow the martyrs to rest and to “settle whatever quarrels you have among yourselves….You must scold your flock. They approach you as though they had come from the games, quarreling about the different teams.”\(^{42}\)

This event tells us that martyrs had authority to mediate and make peace between quarreling ordained leaders of the Church. However, as the angels stated, the leaders should take care of the Church and not allow quarrelling and worldliness in their churches. Although these visions present a symbolic world, it undoubtedly tells us something about the truth, that is, that there were in the Christian community in Carthage factious rivalries, as the aforementioned citation suggests. Since overseeing the inculcation and practice of Christian morality and

\(^{39}\) *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* 5, in *ACM*, 113.

\(^{40}\) Marta Sordi, *The Christians and the Roman Empire* (Norman, OK, and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 190; "natural" is Sordi’s term.

\(^{41}\) *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* 7-8, in *ACM*, 115-17.

\(^{42}\) Ibid.; *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* 13, in *ACM*, 121-23.
discipline was the duty of the bishop, he should have resolved this matter. Because he could not, the elders challenged him.\textsuperscript{43} Lane Fox is right that the angels were not attacking the accepted principle of leadership: “it was a call for proper leadership from those appointed to power.” However, because they were not able to discipline their flock, “it was left to two martyrs, one of whom was an unbaptized woman, to try to settle their differences.”\textsuperscript{44} Indeed, W. H. C. Frend asserts that bishops—whose office was regarded mainly as one of administration and disciplinary functions, directed to keeping the congregation free from compromise—were not as spiritual as the martyrs, unless, like the martyrs, they accompanied their flock to the appointed end.\textsuperscript{45} In the \textit{Passio} neither the bishop nor the elder goes to heaven; indeed, Tertullian emphasized that special importance of the martyrs: “how it is that the region of Paradise which was revealed in the spirit of St John as being ‘under the altar’ contains no other souls but those of the martyrs? How is it that Perpetua, the bravest martyr of Christ, on the day of her death saw only the souls of the martyrs in Paradise…?”\textsuperscript{46} While the martyrs, as the agents of the Holy Spirit, held a strong prestige during the time of Perpetua and Tertullian, the tradition of confessors’ spiritual authority will be very strong even during the time of Cyprian.\textsuperscript{47}

3. Tertullian

Tertullian’s theology should be seen in the light of the above-mentioned North African Christian tradition that considered that the standards of Christian faith should not be lowered

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{45} W. H. C. Frend, \textit{The Donatist Church}, 117; Frend quotes here \textit{The Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs} 4 (see DMS, 31-32) in which is related how the presbyter Saturninus, when the Proconsul asked Christians who is their leader, in joining the martyrs, identified himself with them rather than with the prestige of his position or office. The author relates how in the midst of severe tortures, while Saturninus affirmed that Christians are tortured because they kept God’s percepts, he prayed God to free His servants form the captivity of this world (see Maureen Tilley, \textit{The Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs} 4, in \textit{DMS}, 31-32); Robin Lane Fox, \textit{Pagans and Christians}, 494-95..
\textsuperscript{46} Tertullian, \textit{On the Soul} 55.4, in FC, vol. 10, 299.
\textsuperscript{47} Robin Lane Fox, \textit{Pagans and Christians}, 494-9.
when that faith was challenged by the State’s authority or other human values, but we should be mindful of the specific circumstances he was encountering. Needless to say, Tertullian’s theological view was always supported by his belief that both Scripture and Jesus Christ, whom the Scripture reveals, are “the determining factors in all philosophical and theological constructions.”

a. The Church as a Disciplined Society

Tertullian was born in a pagan family during the second half of the second century, between ca. 155 and 170. In his surviving words, he did not specifically mention when and how he became a Christian. However, he was converted between 190 and 196, perhaps in 193. Since he was born pagan, he lived a pagan way of life, for he mentions that he attended the cruel spectacles of gladiators and committed adultery. According to Tertullian’s own testimony, the striking contrast between the pagan life and the life of the Christians that endured martyrdom is what decisively contributed to his conversion. It was also this firm Christian attitude of rejection of everything that challenged the faith on which Tertullian built his view of Christian discipline: any kind of compromise that endangered Christians’ loyalty to God was not fit for people who claimed to follow a holy God, and it is this spirit that, according to Pierre de Labriolle, makes Tertullian, “a convert who exchanged a very free manner of living for the rigors of Christian discipline.”

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52 T. D. Barnes, Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study, 245-46, in which Barnes quotes several works in order to show Tertullian’s reason for conversion.
Indeed, Tertullian was not only later in his career a theologian who emphasized the importance of discipline in the life of Christians, “from the start he was concerned about the behavior of Christians, and constantly wrote on practical subjects such as repentance, prayer, baptism, fasting, behavior in persecution.” According to him, a Christian life in the middle of a pagan society is indeed difficult: “Pagan life is the domain of the demons”; therefore, we should not be surprised about the seriousness with which he took his Christian role in a world different than that desired by God.

The power of the Christian life lived by example, especially the example of martyrdom, is what convinced him—and other people—to convert to Christianity. In his Apology, Tertullian suggests that a radical change from the natural way of life characterizes Christians: “We are from your ranks: Christians are made, not born,” or, as David Wright translates fiunt non nascantur Christiani, “Change, not birth, makes people Christians.” The change of which Tertullian speaks is based on the word of God. The written revelation of God, the Scriptures, which are for the purpose of attaining more authoritative knowledge of him, should lead those who seek, find, and believe him, to complete obedience and service. Obedience requires a mode of faith that follows Christ in life as in death. It requires faith in “a God who is real and encountered in history; a God who has died and lives forever.”

The change that Christians needed in their lives was best exemplified by the noble faith he noticed in the detachment with which the Christian martyrs defied worldly authority. He

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argues to Scapula that the Christians have no master but God alone. The secular authorities regarded as masters over men are only men and must die, but the community of Christians will never perish because God, who cannot be hidden, makes it stronger at the very moment when it seems to be cut down. Indeed, Tertullian asserts that those who witness the martyrs and, then, inquire about the reasons behind their action, are ready to become Christians: “whoever beholds such noble endurance will first, as though struck by some kind of uneasiness, be driven to inquire what is the matter in question, and, then, when he knows the truth, immediately follow the same way.” Martyrdom was such a powerful example of faith that even among the educated pagans, it lifted high the standard of virtue. But the words of the philosophers that urge courageous death for noble truths did not find as many courageous disciples as did Christianity because Christians taught through their deeds, not through words as did the pagans. Moreover, Tertullian is convinced that, since Christians were martyred for the sake of Christ, the giver of eternal life, they became more numerous every time they were martyred: “the blood of Christians is seed.” Since the object of Christians’ worship is the One God, Christians should look not to the Capitol or the world but to heaven in order to find the right way to worship Christ. Ultimately, as Christ conquered the devil in the flesh through the supreme obedience of death, Christians should faithfully follow him even in martyrdom, for it is the clearest and most direct way to participate in the sufferings of Christ.

The steadfast faith of the martyrs had a role to play in the insistence, throughout his whole literary corpus, on polarity between a strong faith, which he urges all to have, and an easy and dubious one. Thus, assertions that he changed his mild theological attitude to a rigorist one

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62 Tertullian, Apology 50.13, in FC, vol. 10, 125.
63 Tertullian, Apology 17.1, in FC, vol. 10, 52.
when he became a Montanist may be exaggerated.\textsuperscript{65} It is better to see him as part of the dominant Christian tradition of North Africa that emphasized a strong unity of discipline in a secular world that lacked discipline: his theological progress is in the same direction, without changes that would radically contrast with his general attitude and at pace with the events and circumstances which he encountered.\textsuperscript{66}

Tertullian did not write any book titled “The Church,” nor did he write a whole work simply on the Church. Nevertheless, almost all his treatises are on subjects of immediate and practical importance for the Church. This fact reflects his most important interest in theology, which is practical, not theoretical, and his desire to eliminate sin from the Church and from the lives of Christians,\textsuperscript{67} for, he asked, “what would God wish other than we should act in accordance with his direction?”\textsuperscript{68} Robert Evans rightly notes that Tertullian understands “discipline” as “encompassing ethics, penitential practice, and in fact everything that falls under the traditional heading of ‘ecclesiology.’”\textsuperscript{69} Cahal Daly asserts that, for Tertullian, “the Church is…primarily a disciplinary institution, the teacher of moral law, the strict guardian of moral conduct.”\textsuperscript{70} Indeed, as Tertullian’s work thoroughly emphasizes the importance of discipline, it is not exaggerated to believe that the Church was seen by Tertullian as a moral society whose precepts pervaded all of its aspects; Tertullian believed that since God was a holy God, what God most required from His people was discipline and holiness, which were taught by the Scripture. In fact, it is interesting to see how Tertullian emphasized the importance of discipline—common religious feeling, hope, and way of life—and holiness in his Apology, from which I quote just a short passage:

\textsuperscript{65} David Rankin, \textit{Tertullian and the Church} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 42-3.
\textsuperscript{67} Cahal B. Daly, \textit{Tertullian the Puritan and His Influence: An Essay in Historical Theology} (Dublin: Four Court Press, 1993), 11.
\textsuperscript{69} Robert F. Evans, \textit{One and Holy: The Church in Latin Patristic Thought}, 27.
\textsuperscript{70} Cahal B. Daly, \textit{Tertullian the Puritan and His Influence}, 6.
Now I myself will explain the practices of the Christian Church, that is, after having refuted the charges that they are evil, I myself will also point out that they are good. We form one body because of our religious convictions, and because of the divine origin of our way of life and the bond of common hope. We come together for a meeting and a congregation, in order to besiege God with prayers, like an army in battle formation. Such violence is pleasing to God....We assemble for the consideration of the Holy Scriptures, [to see] if the circumstances of the present times demand that we look ahead or reflect. Certainly, we nourish our faith with holy conversation, we lift our hope, we strengthen our trust, intensifying our discipline at the same time by the inculcation of moral precepts. At the same occasion, there are words of encouragement, of correction, and holy censure. Then, too, judgement is passed which is very impressive, as it is a deeply affecting foretaste of the future judgement, if anyone has so sinned that he is dismissed from sharing in common prayer, assembly, and all holy intercourse. Certain approved elders preside, men who have obtained this honor not by money, but by the evidence of good character.\footnote{Tertullian, \textit{Apology} 39, in FC, vol. 10, 98-102.}

It is an important passage because in it, almost a decade before Tertullian became a Montanist, he emphasized the divine origin of Christian life, and that Christians tried to live as much as possible according to its divine nature by intensifying discipline, correction, and censure, and even dismissing known sinners from the congregation’s activities. In the light of this \textit{disciplina}, which was of first interest in Tertullian’s theology, one can differentiate two Christian attitudes implied in Tertullian’s work. These are part of the same North African Christian tradition. However, one can discern that, while one attitude sees a great opposition between the Church and society, the other one is more open to society’s values, which must not alter one’s faith intrinsically. We have here—in a germinal state—attitudes that will fight each other and will later become two separate groups of the same Christian tradition: one rigorist, one more flexible. No Donatist claimed to be in a direct line of succession from Tertullian. But the substance of the rigorist tradition was already in Tertullian’s thought and continued to the time of Cyprian and, then, of Donatus.\footnote{W. H. C. Frend, \textit{The Donatist Church}, 124.} Certainly, it had to be strong in order to survive a time in which Christians with a more open and confident view about the state of the Church within a secular society tried to come up with a common denominator with society.
It is very likely that Tertullian exaggerates by saying in his Apologeticum (written about 196-198) that almost all inhabitants of some cities are “followers of Christ” and “multitudes” of Christians fill all areas of social life, after he mentions that they are very new in North Africa: “We are but of yesterday.” However, there is truth in what he says. North African Christianity did not consist only of the kind of Christians who defied worldly society and its authorities as did the Christians presented in the Passio of Perpetua or in the story of the Scillitan martyrs. There were Christians who were more open to society’s values and who did not attract the attention of the State’s authorities or its citizens through their odd comportment. Tertullian tells us that in Carthage, the second metropolis of the West after Rome, heavily Romanized and acculturated Christians were found in every social location—cities, islands, fortresses, towns, market place, camp, tribes, town councils, the palace, the senate, the forum—except for the temples. Of course, Tertullian was not happy to mention that Christians were part of all sectors of life, including contexts in which they could compromise their faith. But, since Tertullian wrote his Apologeticum to defend the Christians before the Roman authorities in North Africa, in order to prove that they were peaceful and reliable citizens rather than enemies of the Empire, he tells about how Christians cohabited with their fellow non-Christian people. However, Christians tried to maintain their faith and its values as untouched as they could in a world whose values did not match theirs.

Tertullian wrote with one agenda when he addressed the officials of the secular power and with a different one when he addressed his fellow Christians. Thus, in contrast to Apologeticum, which was addressed to the Empire’s officials, in De idolatria, in which Tertullian dealt with a dispute among Christians about how they would fit in the administrative

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73 Tertullian, Apology 37.4, in FC, vol. 10, 95.
posts of the Empire, he did not see such a post as indicative of a good Christian life. Whether *De idolatria* is written in his pre-Montanist or Montanist period, it shows a strong opinion against the worldliness of the pagan life in the Empire as strong as that, for example, featured in his *De spectaculis*, which was clearly written before he became a member of the Montanist Christian group. The idolatry of the secular society of the Empire distracted Christians from attention to their Christian life. Thus, Tertullian’s strong disciplinary theology did not originate with his conversion to Montanism, but he always nurtured an attitude of detachment from the secular life as he had seen in the martyrs. He did not believe that a good Christian could occupy a position in the administration of the Empire.

We can do our duty to magistrates and authorities like the patriarchs and other men of old, who attended upon idolatrous kings only so long as they could keep outside the confines of idolatry. A dispute arose recently on this point. Can a servant of God undertake an administrative office or function if, by favour or ingenuity, he can keep himself clear of every form of idolatry, as Joseph and Daniel, in royal purple, governed the whole of Egypt or Babylon, performing their administrative offices and functions without taint of idolatry? Grant that a man may succeed in holding his office, whatever it may be, quite nominally, never sacrifice, never authorize a sacrifice, never contract for sacrificial victims, never delegate the supervision of a temple, never handle their taxes, never give a show at his own expense or the State’s, never preside over one, never announce or order a festival, never even take an oath; and on top of all that, in the exercise of his magisterial authority, never try anyone on a capital charge or one involving loss of civil status (you may tolerate inflicting a fine), never condemn to death by verdict or legislation, never put to death a man in irons or in prison, never put to torture—well, if you think that is possible, he may hold his office!

Tertullian saw a great discrepancy between some Christians ready to die for the faith and other Christians who lived as the pagans did. Since Christians made a solemn promise that they would follow God, they should have examined—before being baptized—“the conditions of faith, the reason inherent in truth, the law of and of our discipline, which, along with all the other errors of

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the world, takes from us also the pleasures of public shows.  

In addition, the Scriptures certainly condemn the amphitheatre’s cruelty, impiety, and brute savagery. To the Christians tempted by the heathens’ view that earthly pleasures do not offend God, that the pleasure of the eye and ear are external enjoyments that do not affect one’s religion, Tertullian responds firmly that the enjoyment of the shows are not consistent with true religion and true obedience to the true God. He argues that there are some non-Christians who believe that the Christians are the sort of men who are ready to die for their faith and to refrain from all pleasures of life. This attitude is the result of training during which Christians empty themselves of earthly pleasures. Now, since some Christians cannot refrain from attending the pleasures of the public shows, these people will be confused and think that Christians who die for their faith shows mere human ambition rather than performing an act based on a “divine command.”  

Thus, since the shows were entirely for the devil’s sake, prepared by the Roman administration for its pagan citizens who enjoy the stories of the pagan gods, Tertullian urged baptized Christians to have no connection with these spectacles. Since the author of truth loves no falsehood, all that is connected with spectacles is wrong:

How many lines of argument have we pursued to show that nothing connected with the games pleases God? But does a thing befit the servant of God, which does not please his master. If we have established our point that the spectacles one and all were instituted for the devil’s sake, and equipped from the devil’s store (for the devil owns everything that is not God’s or does not please God), why, here you have that “pomp of the devil” that we renounce when we receive the “seal” of faith. But what we renounce, we have no business to share, be it in deed or word, sight or anticipation. But by such acts we really renounce and unseal the “seal,” by unsealing our witness to it.

Tertullian adds that the rejection of the pleasures of the shows is the main sign through which pagans recognize that a man has adopted the Christian faith, which starts at baptism.

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Christianity could not have survived long as a sect by refusing to integrate itself within the social structures of Roman society. But baptism was an important decision for Christians, a moment when they promised obedience to Christ and renounced evil and everything connected with it. Tertullian’s doctrine of baptism excluded sin from the life of the believer. Therefore, those Christians who claimed they had to keep jobs that served the expansion of idolatry in order to support their families should have thought about how they would support their families before their faith was sealed by their baptism, according to Tertullian. Referring to Luke 14:28-30, Tertullian asked what kind of man did not think before he started doing something. He expressed his sorrow as he acknowledged that Christians came into the Church from their idolatrous places of work, that is, “from an enemy workshop into the house of God.” He is surprised that Christians whose profession is that of idol-maker could pray to God while they made idols to be worshiped by others.

According to Tertullian, Christians worked in pagan places in order to secure their existence; the problem was that these places had been a potential place of temptation or sin and, moreover, brought blame on Christians from their non-Christians fellow citizens. Tertullian mentioned that all opponents of the Christians tried to win them on their side because many of the Christians were inexperienced, weak, and unstable when they faced challenge. Even more sinful and grave was the fact that “idol-artificers are chosen even into the ecclesiastical order.”

It was impossible to live in a world and not to be part of it. Tertullian wanted to preserve the faith as pure as possible because God was holy and required holiness. However, his

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82 Eric Osborn, *Tertullian, First Theologian of the West*, 1-26, 173.
84 Tertullian, *On Idolatry* 7, in *Early Latin Theology*, 89.
87 Tertullian, *On Idolatry* 7, in *Early Latin Theology*, 89.
Christianity proved not to be viable for the long term: his unrealistic view of a Christian sect in total contrast to society put him at odds with other Christians who were more open to society.

b. The Church as a Disciplined Society: Debates

Because of the intransigent attitude Tertullian had against the secular world, especially against those Christians who did not see the Church as totally incompatible with the secular world, he came to relate poorly with a certain segment of the Church and its leader. While Tertullian became a Montanist in about 207, his sharper criticism against this segment of the Church came about one decade later. In *De pudicitia* Tertullian tells us that the rigor of Christian purity, which originates from heaven, is unstable and in decline. Tertullian mentions an edict about which he has heard: “I even hear that an Edict has been issued, indeed a peremptory one (nor could I permit it to pass unnoticed) which opposes this rigor. The Pontifex Maximus, forsooth—I mean the ‘bishop of bishops!’—issues this pronouncement: I forgive sins of adultery and fornication to those who have performed penance.”

Who is this “bishop of bishops”? Since there is not a scholarly consensus as to a precise date when Tertullian wrote *De pudicitia*, in which he uses these titles, there is also not a consensus regarding the identity of “the bishop of bishops.” While a clear answer to this question could illuminate whether Tertullian was disagreeing with the episcopal authority at Rome or Carthage, Tertullian was certainly opposing the exercise of authority used in what he treats as a peremptory manner when Christian discipline was at stake.

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I am inclined to believe that “edict” was issued after 217 and before De pudicitia was written, either by Callistus of Rome or Agrippinus of Carthage. It could be Callistus because he is known to have admitted into the Church after due penitence Christians who had committed grave sins, and he became bishop at Rome in about 217, before De pudicitia was written. It is also possible that Agrippinus is the bishop to which Tertullian refers, because the council of Carthage during his episcopacy dealt with the issue of rebaptism and penance, and it is believed to have taken place sometime between 218 and 222.

Tertullian’s works previous to De pudicitia evidence his sharp criticism of the North African Church. We can therefore think that the statement about the “Pontifex Maximus,” “the bishop of bishops,” and the entire criticism against those who favored a lowered standard of discipline speaks primarily of the moral and penitential problems that existed in North Africa. Agrippinus, aware that many Christians cannot live entirely without sin in the middle of a pagan world, adopted the penitential policy promoted previously at Rome by Callistus, who, according to Hyppolitus’ Refutation of All Heresies 9.12, “first invented the device of conniving with men as to their pleasures, saying that sins were forgiven to everyone by himself.” The main issue was that mentioned in De pudicitia 1 by Tertullian, that is, the proclamation of forgiveness of great sins. Agrippinus’ penitential policy was endorsed in North Africa during the time of the council previously mentioned and about which Cyprian tells us. Agrippinus’ policy would

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90 Robin Lane Fox, Pagans and Christians, 308-9.
92 Cahal B. Daly, Tertullian the Puritan and His Influence, 50-1.
93 David Rankin, Tertullian and the Church (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 14, n. 27; Cahal B. Daly, Tertullian the Puritan and His Influence, 49.
94 Hyppolitus’ passage is taken from Stuart G. Hall, Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church, 80-82; Cahal B. Daly, Tertullian the Puritan and His Influence, 50-51; Johannes Quasten, Patrology, vol. 2 (Utrecht, Holland: Spectrum; reprint, Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1995), 163-64, 204-07.
remain representative of the Catholic policy in North Africa after him.\textsuperscript{96} It is very likely that Tertullian knew about Callistus’ penitential policy in regard to Christian morality, and a certain degree of disagreement existed between Tertullian and the Roman Church, disagreement that became more evident as Rome promoted a relaxed discipline that influenced Carthage.

Thus, the sharp criticism Tertullian addressed in \textit{De pudicitia} can be seen in the larger context of the problem of Christian discipline and penitence at Rome and in North Africa. Because Christianity attracted a wide spectrum of adherents from paganism and received back within its walls members of different Christian sects and heresies, the strict discipline of primitive Christianity was increasingly harder to maintain; indeed, it was an almost impossible task. Thus, what Tertullian called an “edict” was, in fact, responding practically to the moral and social problems that more and more challenged the Church as part of the secular world and tried to give a second chance to those who committed grave sins.\textsuperscript{97} In opposition to this view, Tertullian emphasized the importance of Christian discipline, which “prescribes a way of life” that saves through its rigors.\textsuperscript{88}

The \textit{Apologeticum, De spectaculis, De idolatria} and \textit{Scorpiace} showed us that Tertullian’s strict attitude toward Christian discipline was not new with \textit{De pudicitia}, and this is also true about his disagreement with a segment of the Church. While I do not intend to clarify whether Tertullian officially separated from the Church,\textsuperscript{99} it is clear that a form of separation surely existed between, on one hand, Tertullian and his group and, on the other hand, the Christian majority in Carthage. It likely began as he became more acquainted with the Montanist group in Carthage, from about 207.\textsuperscript{100} Tertullian’s Christianity was based on strong Christian

\textsuperscript{96} Robert F. Evans, \textit{One and Holy: The Church in Latin Patristic Thought}, 49.  
\textsuperscript{97} J. E. Merdinger, \textit{Rome and the African Church in the Time of Augustine}, 33.  
\textsuperscript{99} For a discussion which maintains that Tertullian did not leave the Church, see David Rankin, \textit{Tertullian and the Catholic Church}, 27-38.  
disciplina such as that which he had noticed in the Christian martyrs and in the Scriptures. The “code” of morality and authority that for a while he found in mainstream Christianity no longer seemed observed enough for his standards; therefore, he became a member of a group that fit better with his rigorist character: “In keeping with this character he became a Montanist.” The episode he describes in *De pudicitia* is the apex of his criticism of the Church, an episode that took place about one decade after he became a Montanist.

Almost at the same time as he became a Montanist, in *Adversus Marcionem*, which he began in about 207-208, Tertullian mentions a problem that concerns the work of the Holy Spirit, namely, the way ecstasy should properly manifest itself in a Christian environment. He could not arrive at a consensus with some people in the Church about this matter. Thus, “there is a disagreement between us and the natural men,” says Tertullian. If the contrast between “us” and “the natural men” cannot mean schism, it surely means a certain degree of opposition of the two groups implied in Tertullian’s statement.

According to what we see in *Adversus Praxeas*, dated about 213, it seems that the issue between the two groups had become more serious. The problem was the same. But it seems that, after the New Prophecy had been validated by a Roman bishop, it was forbidden by the same Roman bishop under the influence of Praxeas. After Praxeas committed two evil acts at Rome—“he drove away prophecy, and he brought heresy”—Tertullian says that his group, the Montanists, withdrew from the Church that prohibited the New Prophecy: “We indeed, on our

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101 Pierre de Labriolle, *The History and Literature oh Christianity from Tertullian to Boethius*, 91.
107 Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 1, in *Tertullian’s Treatise Against Praxeas*, 131.
part, subsequently withdrew from the carnally-minded on our acknowledgement and maintenance of the Paraclete.” Since in both cases Tertullian dealt with the work of the Holy Spirit and the manifestation of ecstasy, and since the expression “carnally-minded” also appeared in both cases, it is very likely that the group with which Tertullian’s group had a question to settle in the *Adversus Marcionem* is the group from which they later “withdrew,” that is, the Church that opposed the New Prophecy in both Carthage and Rome. These churches that opposed the New Prophecy, from both Rome and Carthage, were supportive of each other in eliminating the emphasis that the Montanists put on the work of the Holy Spirit and on the revelations it discloses.

In *De pudicitia*, while the same difference is made by Tertullian between the spiritual and sensualist or carnally-minded Church, the main issue is the forgiveness of grave sins, adultery and fornication, that “the bishop of bishops” asserts are forgivable after due penance. It is likely that the carnal Church here is the same Church which opposes the prophecy in the works against Marcion and Praxeas because both are referred to with pejorative epithets of the same nuance: “carnally-minded” and “sensualist.” Moreover, both cases are about the role and the place of the Holy Spirit. In the works against Marcion and Praxeas, the Church opposed what it thought were the exaggerations of the Montanists about the new spiritual revelations that anticipate the imminent return of Christ, and in *De pudicitia* Tertullian maintains that the true Church is a spiritual Church. If his opponents in *De pudicitia* are not the same as those in *Adversus Marcionem* and *Adversus Praxeas*, it means that besides the great Church there was another group in the Church with which Tertullian dealt, but there is no information to confirm that. In any case, it is impossible to reconstruct Tertullian’s life and works in all their details. The point is that Tertullian and his group emphasized the work of the Spirit, which for him meant a strict

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110 David Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church*, 23.
discipline, in a way that differed from the group that he opposed in the Church. However, Tertullian recognizes in *De pudicitia* that he is opposing now “an opinion” that he formerly held while he was in the company of Sensualists.¹¹¹ This “opinion” means that Tertullian, in his desire for a rigorous discipline, did not agree anymore with the larger group of the Church regarding penitential discipline. As Rankin asserted, the matter of discipline caused two different views, “indicating a division into “majority” and “minority” positions over the matter of penitential discipline, the former supporting a less rigorous position.”¹¹²

According to *De paenitentia*, a work Tertullian had written before his adoption of the New Prophecy, there is a second and last repentance that is able to wash away even the greatest sins.¹¹³ In *De pudicitia*, written at least fifteen years later, Tertullian criticizes a bishop who publicly proclaims that he is able to forgive grave adultery and fornication. Since penance was a certain way to avoid damnation, this public and official proclamation was seen by Tertullian as a license to sin, almost as an invitation to sin because serious transgression can be forgiven after due penance. Certainly this public proclamation to forgive sins is what Tertullian opposed and considered unacceptable because it seemed to him to reduce the importance of discipline, in a Church that should have preached the gravity of sin and how it should be avoided. In *De pudicitia* Tertullian did not oppose the penance itself; where he opposed the bishop’s proclamation, he still believed that the Church could forgive sins: “The Church can forgive sins, but I will not do it lest others also sin….The Spirit of truth can, indeed, grant pardon to fornication but will not do it when it brings harm to many.” Tertullian also mentions that those who forgave grave sins gave proof of their severity as well.¹¹⁴ In other words, Tertullian thinks that, while the Church can forgive sins, it should also discourage any lenience toward sin, as Paul did in in Gal 6: 1-14, where he argued against repeated and continuous sin. However, Tertullian, perhaps for the reason

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¹¹² David Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church*, 31.
of avoiding the propagation of sin through forgiveness, also stated that mortal sins—adultery, fornication, idolatry, and apostasy—are remitted by God alone.\textsuperscript{115}

The North African rigorist attitude, as in the Scillitan martyrs, Perpetua and Tertullian, lived on in North Africa. Following Callistus’ policy regarding discipline, the council presided over by Agrippinus in about 218-222 in Carthage was an event that officially recognized the need of being more flexible toward the weaker members of the Church. Cahal Daly believes that at the aforementioned North African council, although Tertullian’s arguments rejecting the reconciliation of certain sinners “were approved by a section of the bishops, they were rejected by the majority of the council, led by the primate, whose declaration of moderate policy heralded the defeat of penitential rigorism in Africa.”\textsuperscript{116} While it cannot be exactly stated what “moderate policy” meant for the council, along with adultery and fornication—which Tertullian mentioned that the “bishop of bishops” claimed power to forgive—apostasy and idolatry were sins seriously condemned by Christians in North Africa.\textsuperscript{117} I will show that the larger group of bishops and the Christian majority in North Africa were the precursors of the later Catholic tradition there. I will also show that the minority of bishops and Christians were precursors of Donatist dissent there; the ideas and the thought we met in the martyrs and Tertullian will be taken up by the Christian dissent in North Africa.

4. Cyprian

By the time of the episcopates of Cyprian at Carthage and Cornelius and Stephen at Rome, while the martyrs’ tradition and Tertullian’s theology of the Church were still alive and


\textsuperscript{116} Cahal B. Daly, \textit{Tertullian the Puritan and His Influence}, 51.

\textsuperscript{117} Christine Trevett, \textit{Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy}, 114-16.
maintained by a segment of the Church in North Africa, they did not entirely fit anymore with a Church which realized that neither could all Christians become martyrs whenever persecutions occurred, nor should the Church excommunicate sinful or lapsed members immediately. The Church is one and consists of both vessels of clay and wood as well as of silver and gold, but this is not a reason for the unity of the Church to be broken by rigorist Christians.

a. Cyprian and the Decian persecution

Between 25 and 30 years after the events Tertullian mentions in *De pudicitia*, Cyprian, a man of prestigious social status and a successful rhetorician, became the bishop of Carthage. Attracted to Christianity through the works of Tertullian and Minucius Felix, Cyprian had then been offered a more detailed guidance into Christian teaching by the priest Caecilianus, who had been instrumental in his conversion, which had taken place around 245-46. About one year later, the neophyte was advanced to presbyter and was elected bishop sometime between May 247 and May 249.\(^\text{118}\) Thus, from the time of his conversion, it took Cyprian approximately three years to become the main leader of the Church in Carthage and of all Christian Africa. But this is not a big surprise since men of high social status, with economic potential and influence, were popular among men of lower social status who needed the help and protection of powerful men and who comprised the majority of the Christian assembly that chose its own bishop.\(^\text{119}\)

Indeed, Cyprian was elected bishop because of the enormous support given by Church members from the lower social strata and against the will of a majority of the presbyters, who


viewed his rapid advance circumspectly. The presbyters’ complaint was not wholly unjustified since there were leaders in the Carthaginian Church with a better knowledge of Christianity and more extensive experience than Cyprian. But, because Christians were still a dubious minority, their communities needed good administrators, and this is what the Christian community at Carthage had in Cyprian.

It should be said that, although Cyprian was greatly influenced by Tertullian’s theology of the Church, he was in many respects different from his “teacher,” as Jerome tells us in his De viris illustribus 70.53 that Cyprian liked to call Tertullian. Except for the period of his hiding, Cyprian maintained throughout his episcopacy a middle policy, one that combines the qualities of an administrator, pastor, and theologian and that shows a great ability to adapt his theology to the realities that confronted his Church from within and from the secular society outside it. Thus, Cyprian was able, by compromising here and there, to satisfy a Church that struggled to respond to its divine call in a world of values different from its own.

By being willing to maintain a middle policy, Cyprian adapted his initial theological view regarding the reconciliation of the lapsi to the critical realities that the Church faced; it was now difficult, indeed, almost impossible, for a leader in the Church to maintain both a strong rigorist attitude and a strong view of Church unity. While in hiding and immediately after, Cyprian thought that serious penance had to be done by those Christians who sacrificed, and their restoration to the Church should not be made in hurry, but after the bishop could be certain about the penitential process of the lapsed Christians and about their repentance. Thus, according to this view of Cyprian, the repentance of those who lapsed during the persecution was a process which could not happen overnight and, therefore, the restoration of lapsed Christians was a process.

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120 Patout J. Burns, Cyprian the Bishop (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 1; Michael Sage, Cyprian, 141-42.
during which the lapsed should prove their repentance. In about 251, after the first council that took place following his return from retirement, Cyprian stated that he “yielded to the urgent needs of the time and considered we ought to make provisions that would bring salvation to many.”

In other words, Cyprian was faced with an immediate and urgent situation in which he had to reconcile some of those who had lapsed before he could verify their repentance in a serious penitential process. This act was an attempt to prevent wholesale defection by those who had failed in persecution. A distinction between “the sacrificers” and “the certified” allowed the latter to be immediately admitted to communion if they affirmed that had been practicing penance—which, as I already mentioned, could not be verified, a fact which is implied in Cyprian's mention that he yielded to the urgent needs of the time—whereas the former were advised to do penance and promised to be reinstated to communion as death approached.

At about the same time, while he acknowledged that the Church is one, he also emphasized that the existence of tares and vessels of wood and clay within the Church is no reason to break the bonds of unity established for the Church by the Gospel.

Soon after his advancement to the position of bishop, trouble had seemed inevitable. Decius defeated Philip the Arab in 249 and became the Roman emperor, a position he maintained until 251, when he was defeated by the Goths who were trying to cross the Roman borders. Two years after the Roman millennial celebration of 247, desiring to consolidate the Roman traditions, Decius had wanted to restore the Roman religious and sacred rites that protected and secured the existence and the supremacy of the Roman people. Therefore, on January 3, 250, Decius solemnly sacrificed to Jupiter on the Capitol and presented the imperial supplications for the year, and he ordered that his example be followed throughout the Empire. Decius’ main intention was to enforce and secure a total adherence to the Roman religious values and to the gods that had

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123 Patout Burns, Cyprian the Bishop, 5.
protected the empire for a millennium. Therefore, he had punitive measures taken against the leaders of the Church, which opted out of this religion, and then he had promulgated a universal order to sacrifice to the gods.\textsuperscript{125}

The persecution was so well organized and universal that there was no way to escape the eyes of those who were against the Christians. Even the public figures, who would have been able to use their resources and positions to escape the terror, were incapable of doing anything. Eusebius tells us: “Anyway, terror was universal, and of many public figures some at once came forward through fear, others who were in state employment were inducted by professional reasons, others were dragged forward by the mob. Summoned by name, they approached the unclean, unholy sacrifices.” And even worse, “others ran more readily toward the altars, trying to prove by their fearlessness that they had never been Christians.”\textsuperscript{126} Christianity was still an illegal sect within the persecuting empire, and the rigorist tradition was very much alive. But the time was also one of ambiguity and accommodation to the secular world, where Christians maintained ambivalent attitudes toward the world. We see an example of this ambivalence in the cases of Fabian of Rome and Cyprian of Carthage: The bishop of Rome, Fabian, died in this persecution, whereas Cyprian thought it fitting for one in his position to hide from the beginning of the persecution until it was over.

Of course, Cyprian’s action was seen by many as unfitting and stigmatized him for life. The presbyters and the section of the Church that viewed Cyprian’s election as hasty and not carefully thought out were later discontented by his hiding. Therefore, during Cyprian’s hiding, they took measures to receive the lapsed Christians back to communion through the authority of the confessors. The same attitude of discontent was adopted by the Church at Rome. In a letter sent to express its disappointment with Cyprian’s attitude, the leaders of the Church at Rome, where a replacement for the late bishop Fabian had not yet been ordained, argued that those who

\textsuperscript{126} Eusebius, \textit{HE} 6.41, 211-12.
resist during the persecution receive God’s crown, and those who fail, those who are negligent shepherds, receive the judgment of God. Furthermore, the leaders stated in the letter, “now we are clearly the church leaders and it is accordingly our duty to keep watch over the flock,” while those leaders who failed to do their duties could be called neglectful.\(^ {127}\)

Since he was not with his community while he was in hiding, his communication with it was not continuous and efficient. Thus, the leaders who resisted the temptation to retire, with the support of the confessors of the persecution, took the necessary actions within the Carthaginian community. According to Cyprian, the confessors, in order to restore peace and unity in community, had issued certificates that restored the lapsed provided that their repentance was found, after a proper examination, to be satisfactory.\(^ {128}\) However, this is not entirely true since the emission of certificates for the lapsed was mainly in order to restore peace in community, and the restoration of the lapsed Christians was based on the merits of martyrs, not a sign through which repentance of the lapsed was guaranteed. Thus, Patout Burns is right that traffic in martyrs’ letters developed because lapsed Christians were restored on the basis of the merits of the martyrs.\(^ {129}\)

The attitude of the confessors was not something new. As people of a special spiritual character, they were “accustomed from earlier days to come to decisions of their own accord in the name of the Spirit and of the Church”: Perpetua mediated for her brother, and both Perpetua and Saturus were asked by their leaders to make peace between them.\(^ {130}\) Cyprian opposed the confessors’ attitude and the leaders who supported them and believed that he would deal with the issue in a proper and disciplined manner after he returned to his community. Therefore, he urged the leaders not to take any measures in the case of the lapsed until he returned.\(^ {131}\) But it was almost


\(^{128}\) Cyprian, Letter 27.1.1, 27.2.2, in ACW, vol. 43, 112-14.


\(^{131}\) Cyprian, Letter 20.3.3, in ACW, vol. 43, 103.
impossible to avoid doing so because many of the fallen Christians sincerely and insistently sought reconciliation with the Church. The Church was in great turmoil; measures had to be taken because people were dying without being reconciled and peace needed to be restored in the community. At home most of the leaders ignored Cyprian’s authority and acted to release the pressure. In addition, the Church of Rome, itself without a bishop after Fabian had died, had pressed for aid to be given to the lapsed who were ill and desired communion and, thus, to restore peace and order within Cyprian’s community.\textsuperscript{132}

Therefore, after a period when he opposed the clergy that had restored fallen Christians without his authority and without proper scrutiny, Cyprian writes to the clergy at Rome that he agrees with their policy to restore on their deathbed the lapsed who had obtained a certificate from a confessor, in order that their actions and his would be seen “to be united and in harmony on every issue.”\textsuperscript{133} However, Rome did not require a certificate from a confessor in order to restore a lapsed Christian on his deathbed. Of course, the confessors’ tradition at Rome had never played as important a role as it had played in North Africa. But the lapsed in Rome were not received into communion as easily as the confessors in Carthage intended the lapsed to be received there. Except in the cases of dying Christians, the fallen Christians at Rome were to follow a sustained penitential program.\textsuperscript{134} Cyprian, too, as in Rome and against the priests in Carthage, initially opposed an easy rehabilitation for fallen Christians and denied reconciliation to the Church for Christians who sacrificed easily. Thus, the Church at Rome and Cyprian at Carthage maintained a serious penitential policy in the case of Christians who compromised their faith during persecution.

Actually, the issue for Cyprian was not so much the reconciliation of the \textit{lapsi} as the proper authority to do it, that is, his own episcopal authority to restore them after a judicious

\textsuperscript{132} Michael Sage, \textit{Cyprian}, 216-218.
\textsuperscript{133} Cyprian, Letter 20.3.1-2, in ACW, vol. 43, 102.
\textsuperscript{134} Patout J. Burns, \textit{Cyprian the Bishop}, 2.
discernment in this matter. After a period of hard critique of the leaders who had reconciled these people on the basis of the authority of the confessors and after he returned from his hiding, he arrived at the point of offering reconciliation to all categories of fallen Christians. Thus, although both Cyprian and the leaders he criticized tried to restore unity and peace in the community, Cyprian asserted his authority against that of the leaders who had restored fallen Christians on the basis of the confessors’ authority: none of these could act without the bishop’s advice. While the Church in North Africa was now “entirely episcopal,” Cyprian worked hard to assert his authority against the authority of the confessors. Between 253 and 255, after Cyprian found that Puppianus, a confessor of the Decian persecution, had challenged Cyprian’s morals and conduct, Cyprian writes a famous statement about the authority of the bishop: “the bishop is in the Church and the Church is in the bishop, and whoever is not with the bishop is not in the Church.”

In his De lapsis, written shortly after his return from retirement, about 251, Cyprian emphasized the gravity of sin in the Church as well as the gravity of restoring the lapsi to the Church. He thus implicitly underlined his position that the sinners cannot be reconciled to the Church easily, as well as his view that the leaders and the confessors who had done that against his will had acted wrongly. The persecution took place because the Church was not in a healthy state and in order that it might be brought back to a state of godly faith through punishment. Cyprian asserts that before the persecution Christians, forgetful of the apostolic times, had applied themselves to increasing their possessions. Among the priests there was no devout religion; in their ministries no sound faith, in their works no mercy, in their morals no discipline….There were crafty frauds to deceive the hearts of the simple, subtle schemes for circumventing the brethren. They joined with infidels in the bonds of matrimony; they prostituted the members of Christ to the Gentiles. They not only swore rashly, but committed perjury also; they looked down with haughty arrogance upon those placed over them; they maligned one another with stubborn hatred. Many bishops, who ought to be a source of encouragement and example to the rest, contemned their divine charge, came

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137 Hubertus Drobner, The Fathers of the Church, 170.
under the charge of secular kings; after abandoning their thrones and deserting the people, they wandered through foreign provinces and sought the market places for gainful business; while their brethren in the Church were starving, they wished to possess money in abundance; they seized estates by crafty deceits; they increased their capital by multiplying usuries. What do not such as we deserve to suffer for such sins, when already long ago divine censure warned us and said: “if they forsake my law and walk not in my percepts, if they violate my statutes, and keep not my commandments, I will punish their crimes with a rod, and their sins with stripes.”

Because of this decadence of faith, the Lord had allowed “a heavenly rebuke,” which seemed like “an examination rather than a persecution.” Since a long period of peace had corrupted Christian discipline, the Lord chose to prove his family through a time of persecution. However exaggerated Cyprian’s words in the aforementioned passage are, as in the case of Tertullian’s truth revealed through persecution, Cyprian asserted that “the truth must be kept, and the gloomy darkness of the cruel persecution ought not have so blinded our senses that nothing of light and clarity has remained whereby the divine precepts can be perceived.” Although times of trial had been predicted by the law handed down to Christians, they could have been avoided, but because Christians had been unmindful of the law, the severe remedies and corrections of persecution were intended to test their faith. Since many Christians failed the test, readmission into the Church must not be easily offered.

Cyprian’s description of the ease with which Christians sacrificed to the Roman gods is very eloquent. Cyprian asserts that:

immediately at the first words of the threatening enemy a very large number of the brethren betrayed their faith, and were laid low not by the attack of persecution, rather they laid themselves low by their own voluntary lapse. What so unheard of, I ask, what so new had come, that, as if with the rise of unknown and unexpected circumstances, the pledge to Christ should be dissolved with headlong rashness?

He continues:

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140 Ibid.
Many were conquered before the battle, were prostrated without a conflict, and they did not leave this for themselves—to seem to sacrifice to idols unwillingly. Moreover they ran to the market place, of their own accord they hastened to death, as if they formerly desired it, as if they were embracing an occasion granted to them, which they had cheerfully desired. What violence can such a one plead as an excuse, with which to purge his crime, when he himself rather performed the violence that brought about his ruin? When of their own accord they came to the capitol, when they freely approached yielding to their dire crime, did not their footsteps falter, their sight darken? Could the servant of God, who had already renounced the devil and the world, stand there and speak and renounce Christ.  

How could the Church easily reconcile to itself such Christians? In *De lapsis,* intended by Cyprian as an orderly program of reconciliation of fallen Christians after his return to his community from hiding, he could not see an easy remedy for those who had deliberately sacrificed. Since only God can grant pardon for sins committed against Him, the martyrs do not have such a great power. Consequently, the *sacrificati* were bound to do penance for the rest of their lives. However, Cyprian thought that an easy advance to forgiveness and reconciliation should be given to those who sacrificed under torture and unbearable suffering. Those who bought certificates, the *libellatici,* could not be restored but should do penance because, even if their sin had been less scandalous and public, no one could evade the eyes of God. Even those who thought about sacrificing or buying certificates should do penance.  

However, in accordance with the decision of the council of 251, he later admitted immediately within the community those who had bought certificates and affirmed that they had been practicing penance. Only a year later, when Cyprian was addressing the bishop of Rome, Cornelius, about his opponents who tried to compromise him through the letters they addressed to the bishop of Rome, Cyprian, for the sake of unity, asserted that there is nothing that he cannot

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142 Cyprian, *The Lapsed* 8, in FC, vol. 36, 63-64.  
147 Cyprian, Letter 55.17.3, in ACW, vol. 46, 43.
forgive: “For my part, in my zeal and longing to reunite our brotherhood, there is nothing that I
do not forgive, there is much that I deliberately overlook. Even sins committed against God I do
not investigate with the full and rigorous scrutiny that religious duty demands.” 148 Indeed, he
mentions further that, although he may condemn himself through this leniency, he will welcome
in the Church those who return in the spirit of repentance. Shortly after this letter, since Gallus’
reign was foreseen as a time of renewed persecution, 149 Cyprian stated that reconciliation of all
the lapsed Christians was a measure that would fortify the Church and help it to fight better
against the enemy, that is, the State’s persecution. He justified his policy here by saying that, if
they, the shepherds of the Church, do not seek the sick, injured and scattered sheep, the Lord will
demand back the sheep entrusted to them. 150

b. Continuing to Debate

Cyprian changed his policy regarding admission of the lapsi from a careful disciplinary
one, which reconciled the lapsed Christians with the community after a period of penance and
assurance of the penitent’s repentance, to one that favored unity. The case was different when
discipline concerned clerics. In the dispute that took place approximately between 254 and 257
about two Spanish bishops, Basilides and Martialis, who lapsed during Decius’ persecution,
Cyprian believed that the lapsed bishops had lost their right to keep their office. Because they
were defiled by idolatrous certificates, they “were fit neither to govern their bishoprics not to
perform their sacred offices as priests of God.” 151 Therefore, the communities led by these two
fallen bishops had lawfully elected other leaders in their communities. The deposed bishops

149 P. Keresztes, Imperial Rome and the Christians, vol. 2 (Lanham, MD: University Press of
America, 1989), 64-65.
sought reinstatement from the Bishop of Rome, Stephen, who sided with the deposed bishops. Cyprian was against Stephen’s decision and believed that the two bishops, because of their failure to lead their churches without sacrificing and because of the risk of the contamination with their wickedness, did not have the right to lead their communities as bishops. Simply because Basilides’ position was validated by the bishop of Rome, one could not conclude that it was approved by God: “if Basilides may have succeeded in imposing upon men, upon God he cannot so succeed.”152 Moreover, Cyprian, urging separation from the fallen bishops, stated on this occasion a principle that would be taken seriously by the Donatist rigorist tradition in North Africa:

Separate yourselves, He said, from the tents of those hardened and evil sinners, and touch nothing of the things that are theirs lest you perish along with them in their sin. And this is why the faithful who are obedient to the Lord’s commandments and stand in fear of God must separate themselves off from their bishop if he is a sinner; they must have no part in the sacrifices of a priest who is sacrilegious, especially as they have in their own hands the power both to select bishops who are worthy and to reject those who are unworthy.153

In about the same period another incident took place, this one involving Bishop Marcian of Arles, Cyprian of Carthage, and Stephen of Rome. Marcian was a rigorist bishop. Because Marcian refused to restore lapsed Christians to his community, Cyprian tells Stephen that it is his duty to write letters to the faithful of the province, to excommunicate Marcian and to see that someone else be elected instead.154 Cyprian wrote to Stephen after a period in which the bishop of Rome did not take any measures against Marcian, probably because he expected that Stephen would act on this issue since the Roman policy was moderate and mild toward sinners. In addition, recognizing that it was Stephen’s “duty” to settle the case155 was a good way for Cyprian to improve his relations with Stephen. However, for Stephen the bishop’s position was stable in virtue of ordination, and the bishop could not be removed from his office because he was

153 Cyprian, Letter 67.3.2, in ACW, vol.47, 23 (see Nm 16:26 for Cyprian’s quotation).
not morally perfect. Cyprian seems to want a perfectly moral bishop but one that would reconcile the lapsed within his community. If he does not, for the sake of unity, reconcile the lapsed, he must be excommunicated. Thus, a bishop should be replaced if he is a sinner and if he does not reconcile sinners. In reality, Cyprian was afraid that the rigorist community at Arles could make common cause with the rigorist groups in Rome and Carthage, in which case the unity of his Church could be affected.

Unity was one of the most important theological themes for Cyprian because there was not full unity in his community. While a group of leaders had been unfavorable to Cyprian since his election as bishop, his hiding during the persecution worsened his relationship with these leaders.\(^{156}\) During his absence they took control of the community at Carthage and affirmed that reconciliation which the confessors granted to the lapsed could not be delayed simply because Cyprian wanted it. Replying to a group of fallen people that had been reconciled and had written to him “in the name of the Church,” Cyprian replied that the Church “has been established upon the bishop, the clergy and all those who remain faithful” and that it is inadmissible that “a band of the lapsed should be called ‘the Church.’ For it is written: God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.”\(^{157}\) Michael Sage rightly noticed that the challenge of his opponents determined Cyprian to develop his view on the power of the bishop.\(^{158}\) Although his policy toward the lapsed had been endorsed by Rome and Novatian, who wrote a letter in the name of Roman clergy,\(^{159}\) Cyprian’s rivals were not stopped by this. Therefore, in order to consolidate his position, he nominated three people as clerics; an act that he knew was not according to the rules of clerical appointment.\(^{160}\)

\(^{158}\) Michael M. Sage, Cyprian, 226.
Very early in 251 the differences between Cyprian and his opponents, the presbyters and their group, deepened. Cyprian sent charitable alms to be distributed according to people’s age, circumstances, and merits and mentioned that he wanted to be fully informed about people so he might promote those who were “suitable, humble and meek to the duties of ecclesiastical office.” This plan brought opposition from Felicissimus and a large group of Carthaginian Christians. He seriously destabilized the community; Cyprian mentions that he “set a section of the people at loggerheads with their bishop, that is to say, he worked to separate the sheep from their shepherd, and to scatter the members of Christ.” Felicissimus and the leaders supporting him were immediately excommunicated by Cyprian’s leaders at Carthage, who announced that those who joined Felicissimus would not be in communion with the Church led by Cyprian. Cyprian’s attempts to reduce the influence of this group in Carthage did not succeed. Patout Burns asserts that Cyprian’s position was so insecure that he “could count on the support of only three of eight presbyters remaining in Carthage and of a minority of the faithful laity.”

Soon after his return to Carthage, the issue of unity became more complicated. After Fabian had died as a martyr January 20, 250, the Church in Rome had no bishop, and it is likely that Novatian became the main leader there. Cornelius was elected the bishop of Rome, and Novatian formed his rival church there. In the meantime Novatus, one of the leaders of the lenient group at Carthage that rivaled Cyprian, travelled to Rome and sided with Novatian, who was a rigorist. Peter Hinchliff may be right that Novatus, despite maintaining a policy toward the lapsed Christians that differed from Novatian’s, allied himself with him simply because they both were supported by confessors. Cyprian’s gradually increasing willingness to reconcile sinners with the Church served him well. Going in this direction Cyprian weakened substantially the influence

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162 Ibid.
164 Patout Burns, Cyprian the Bishop, 4.
of the majority that maintained a lenient position\textsuperscript{166}; they no longer had reasons to complain since Cyprian’s policy matched theirs. But since Cyprian’s initial strict attitude toward the lapsed became too lenient for many Christians, discontent arose among those who had supported him exactly because of his firm position in this matter. Since Novatian was known for his rigorist attitude, the rigorists at Carthage who did not agree with Cyprian’s lenient policy formed a group that supported Novatian’s rigorist position. Thus, because of disputes regarding the policy toward the lapsed, Fortunatus, one of Cyprian’s presbyters, became the bishop of the lenient group at Carthage, while Maximus, a man in agreement with Novatian, was named the bishop of the rigorist party at Carthage.\textsuperscript{167} So there were at Carthage three Christian churches and each of them maintained a different view as to how the lapsed should be treated. While the lenient group, as I already mentioned, gradually lost its influence because of Cyprian’s growing indulgence toward the fallen Christians, the rigorist group at Carthage, which was supported by Novatian at Rome, was a serious threat to unity because it denied reconciliation to the lapsed.

During the dispute with Novatian, Cyprian developed a view on unity that would influence all subsequent theology on the unity of the Church, especially that of Augustine, who brought it to completeness. Since Cornelius was consecrated lawfully by sixteen bishops, Novatian, who was made a bishop at the hand of renegades, could not claim that he was the rightful bishop at Rome.\textsuperscript{168} Because rightful ordination was the sign of rightful office and authority, Cyprian underlined that Cornelius was made bishop by a large number of bishops who were present at that time in Rome and who have sent to us on the subject of his appointment testimonials which acclaim his honour and esteem and cover him with glory by their praises. Moreover, Cornelius was made bishop by the choice of God and of His Christ, by the favourable witness of almost all of the clergy, by the votes of the laity then present, and by the assembly of bishops, men of maturity and integrity. And he was made bishop when no one else had been made bishop before him.\textsuperscript{169}

\textsuperscript{166} Michael M. Sage, \textit{Cyprian}, 281-282.
\textsuperscript{167} Patout Burns, \textit{Cyprian the Bishop}, 7.
\textsuperscript{169} Cyprian, Letter 55.8.4, in ACW, vol. 46, 37-38.
Since the position had been filled by the will of God and the appointment had been “ratified by the consent of us all,” one who wanted to be made bishop could be so only outside of the lawful Church.\textsuperscript{170} Novatian, by founding a different church besides that of the lawfully ordained bishop Cornelius, failed to maintain charity with his brethren and unity with the Church. Therefore, Cyprian concludes, “he cannot be Christian who is not inside the Church of Christ…and he is outside of the Church and consequently no Christian.”\textsuperscript{171}

\textit{De catholicae ecclesiae unitate} is a work in which Cyprian defends the unity of the Church against the schismatic Novatian at Rome and Maximus and Fortunatus at Carthage.\textsuperscript{172} In this work he clearly asserts that whoever is separated from the unity of the Church is separated from God’s promises and has no salvation.\textsuperscript{173} Since the unity of the Church is indissolubly connected with the divine sacraments which are dispensed in the true Church and by the true bishop, one cannot break this unity except if “he is a stranger; he is profane; he is an enemy. He cannot have God as a father who does not have the Church as a mother.”\textsuperscript{174} Therefore, by rebaptizing Christians who came to his Church, Novatian was in fact only imitating what the true Church did: “Novatian is behaving as apes do: they try to mimic human actions, though they are not humans themselves. Thus Novatian is wanting to claim for himself the authority and truth of the Catholic Church, though he is himself not in the Church.”\textsuperscript{175} Because Novatian is outside of the true Church, his baptism is not the true one; “being outside the Church, he has power to do nothing and that baptism—and there is only the one—is with us.”\textsuperscript{176}

While the controversy with Novatian determined Cyprian to defend Church unity and authority against division and separation, it also caused the great dispute between Cyprian and

\textsuperscript{170} Cyprian, Letter 55.8.4, in ACW, vol. 46, 38.
\textsuperscript{172} Hubertus Drobner, \textit{The Fathers of the Church}, 170-72;
\textsuperscript{173} Cyprian, \textit{The Unity of the Church} 6, in FC, vol. 36, 100-101.
\textsuperscript{174} Cyprian, \textit{The Unity of the Church} 6, in FC, vol. 36, 100-101.
\textsuperscript{175} Cyprian, Letter 73.2.1, in ACW, vol. 47, 55.
\textsuperscript{176} Cyprian, Letter 72.2.2, in ACW, vol. 47, 55.
Stephen of Rome over the issue of baptism. Many Christians who allied with Novatian gradually realized that a rigorist Church was not viable. Therefore, as many members who had been baptized in Novatian’s Church sought to be received back in the mother community, the question arose: Should the schismatics who come to the Church be baptized?\textsuperscript{177}

Stephen believed that they should not be baptized anew because schismatics baptized in the name of Christ received grace\textsuperscript{178} and, therefore, Cyprian claims, “he has forbidden that anyone who comes from any heresy whatsoever should be baptized in the Church.”\textsuperscript{179} This custom, Stephen said, was based on a tradition that had been handed on to him: “And so, in the case of those who may come to you from any heresy whatsoever, let there be no innovation beyond what has been handed down: hands are to be laid on them in penitence.”\textsuperscript{180}

However, Cyprian judged that Stephen’s position regarding baptism was “arrogant, irrelevant, ill-considered, and inept.”\textsuperscript{181} If the Church is one, there should be one baptism in the Catholic Church. Although it is likely that the tradition of rebaptizing heretics and schismatics was not uniform throughout North Africa, as is indicated by the question posed in this regard by other bishops,\textsuperscript{182} Cyprian argues that this question was “determined long ago by our predecessors”\textsuperscript{183}:

\begin{itemize}
  \item as bishops of God who through his grace are the appointed leaders of his Church, we should be convinced that forgiveness of sins can be granted only in the Church and that the enemies of Christ cannot lay any sort of claim to a share in His grace. This is certainly the conclusion also reached by Agrippinus of happy memory in company with the rest of his fellow bishops who were at that time governing the Church of the Lord in the provinces of Africa and Numidia.\textsuperscript{184}
\end{itemize}

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\textsuperscript{177} Cyprian, Letter 69.1.1, in ACW, vol. 47, 32.
\textsuperscript{179} Cyprian, Letter 74.2.1, in ACW, vol. 47, 70.
\textsuperscript{180} Cyprian, Letter 74.1.2, in ACW, vol. 47, 70.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{183} Cyprian, Letter 70.1.2, in ACW, vol. 47, 45-46.
\textsuperscript{184} Cyprian, Letter 71.3-4, in ACW, vol. 47, 50-51.
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Supported by this tradition, Cyprian asserts at the meeting held in Carthage in 254 or 255 that, since no one can baptize efficaciously outside of the Church, those unbaptized who seek communion in the Church should be baptized and thus renewed: “can a man give what he does not have? How can a man who has himself lost the Holy Spirit perform actions of the spirit? That is why those who come uninitiated to the Church are to be baptized and renewed.”\(^1\) However, Cyprian would not impose his view about baptism of those baptized by schismatics and heretics on a church that was in the unity of the Church but chose not to baptize schismatics or heretics who came to the Church:

> We are aware that there are some who refuse to lay aside notions acquired in the past and do not readily change their viewpoint; they keep as their own certain practices adopted amongst them in the past but without, however, rupturing the bonds of peace and harmony with their colleagues. We are not forcing anyone in this matter; we are laying down no law. For every appointed leader has in his government of the Church the freedom to exercise his own will and judgment, while having one day to render an account of his conduct to the Lord.\(^2\)

The tradition of baptizing schismatics and heretics not previously baptized in the Catholic Church, which Cyprian mentioned had long ago been settled by precedent bishops, certainly had logical consequences for Church unity and authority. According to Cyprian, if rebels or schismatics cannot baptize efficaciously, they must return to the unity of the Church where baptism is valid: “When, however, they [rebels or schismatics] realize that there can be no baptism outside the Church nor can there be forgiveness of sins granted outside, they come rushing to us all the more keenly and promptly, begging for the gifts and privileges of their mother, the Church.”\(^3\)

In the letter written to Stephen in the spring of 256 in order to keep him posted about the decisions taken at the council at Carthage that treated the issue of “episcopal authority and the unity as well as the dignity of the Catholic Church as laid down and instituted by God,”

\(^1\) Cyprian, Letter 70.2.2, in ACW, vol. 47, 47.
\(^2\) Cyprian, Letter 72.3.1-2, in ACW, vol. 47, 53-54.
\(^3\) Cyprian, Letter 73.24.1, in ACW, vol. 47, 68.
it is said that in the case of those who have been bathed beyond and outside the Church and have thus become stained and polluted by the unholy water of heretics and schismatics, when they come to us and the Church (which is one), they must be baptized. And the reason is that it is not sufficient just to lay hands upon them for receiving the Holy Spirit, unless they also receive the baptism of the Church.\textsuperscript{188}

Since heretics and schismatics do not have baptism, “by this baptism,” we do not rebaptize, said Cyprian, “but rather baptize all who, coming as they do from spurious and unhallowed waters, need to be washed clean and sanctified in the genuine waters of salvation.”\textsuperscript{189}

The debate became so bitter that the peace between Stephen and Cyprian was gravely challenged, to the point that Cyprian was threatened with excommunication.\textsuperscript{190} When in the autumn of 256 a council gathered at Carthage to decide what must be done regarding the issue of baptism, the bishops unanimously decided that schismatics and heretics must be baptized. Two delegates eloquently expressed their view in council about the matter of baptism. Their speech is found in Sententiae 2 and 33, from which W. H. C. Frend quotes two passages. The first delegate asserted,

I know only one baptism in the church, and none outside of the church. This one will be here, where there is the true hope and the certain faith. For thus is written, “One faith, one hope, one baptism” (Eph 4:5), not among the heretics where there is no hope, and the faith is false, where all things are carried on by lying.

The second delegate asserted:

Heretics can either do nothing, or they can do all. If they can baptize, they can also bestow the Holy Spirit. But if they cannot give the Holy Spirit, because they have not it themselves, neither can they spiritually baptize. Therefore, we judge that heretics must be baptized.\textsuperscript{191}

\textsuperscript{188} Cyprian, Letter 72.1.1, in ACW, vol. 47, 51-52.  
\textsuperscript{189} Cyprian, Letter 73.1.1, in ACW, vol. 47, 54.  
While no correspondence between the two leaders after the Council of September 1, 256, on the issue of baptism has survived, the opinion of the African Church was very clear in this regard. The council was, as Hincliff put it, “in one sense, a great moment of triumph. North Africa had come solidly once more behind Cyprian and his policy. In another sense it was not triumph at all but a complete deadlock. Neither Cyprian not Stephen would give way. Each was committed to an entrenched position from which he would not shift.”\(^{192}\) Since Stephen did not excommunicate Cyprian, unity was preserved between the Church at Carthage and that of Rome, and Cyprian’s view of baptism prevailed in Carthage unchallenged until Diocletian’s persecution in 303. Then, the African Church divided and, while one group maintained Cyprian’s view of baptism and bishop’s integrity, the other maintained the Roman view maintained by Stephen.

C. The Church and the Donatists from Diocletian to Augustine

The rigorist tradition was mainly expressed during times of trial as is shown in the cases of persecution of the Scillitan martyrs, Perpetua and Decius’ reign. In addition, the rigorist tradition was supported by people like Tertullian, who thought that the Church’s ideals and goals should differ radically from those of the society and state of the day. Indeed, Christians, who were to live holy lives, were not at all to be involved in the ideals or goals of a society that worshipped false gods and demons. Besides the rigorist attitude or tradition, there was another one, a more open way of conceiving how Christians should live within the secular world. While this tradition also opposed the pagan world’s ideals and goals, it believed that the Church’s ideals and goals could be realized without the Church having to separate from the secular world. In addition, according to this second approach, the Church is composed of saints and sinners because it is part of the secular world. These traditions continuously struggled latently with each

\(^{192}\) Peter Hincliff, *Cyprian of Carthage and the Unity of the Church*, 96.
other during the first three centuries, but serious and irreconcilable tension appeared when opposition and persecution struck the Christians. Of course, this tension did not stop with Constantine or Theodosius, who made Christianity, respectively, a legal religion and then the official religion of the Empire. Indeed, it has continued for the entire subsequent Christian history. While before Constantine the tension between these traditions took place in an environment hostile to both, that is, within a pagan Empire, after Constantine the tension took place within a society on the way to being Christianized. Although these traditions reciprocally and continuously criticized each other, the history of Christianity shows that the more open attitude toward society was supported by the Christian State, whereas the rigorists, criticized by both political and religious authorities, saw themselves at the margins of society as political rebels and religious dissenters.

1. Diocletian’s persecution and the Origin of the Sect of Donatus

Diocletian’s persecution caused unprecedented distress among Christians. First, it represented in itself an unprecedented trial and suffering. Second, it was the root of the longest schism in the history of the early Church up to that point and had acute effects on Christian theology and history. Common to all the times of persecution already treated in this study—those suffered by the Scillitan martyrs and by Perpetua and Decius’ persecution—is the tradition of the authority of martyrs or confessors. While Perpetua had the power to heal through her prayer and to rebuke the leaders of the Church who quarreled with each other, the confessors during the time of Cyprian claimed the authority to reconcile sinners with the Church. Because Cyprian tempered his rigorist attitude during his episcopate, there was a rigorist group displeased with his leniency. The confessors from Diocletian’s persecution stand in the line of the rigorist tradition in North Africa.
In 284 Diocletian became Emperor of the Roman Empire. After about forty-three years of relative peace from the end of Valerian’s persecution in 260, terror and persecution wreaked havoc among Christians approximately nineteen years after Diocletian took over the reign of the Empire.\(^1\) Like Cyprian during the Decian persecution, Eusebius gives us the theological reason why persecution occurred: The Church needed to be disciplined because it was not in the spiritual state in which it was supposed to be.

But increasing freedom transformed our character to arrogance and sloth; we began envying and abusing each other, cutting our own throats, as occasion offered, with weapons of sharp-edged words; rulers hurled themselves at rulers and laymen waged party fights against laymen, and unspeakable hypocrisy and dissimulation were carried to the limit of wickedness…; and as if we had been a lot of atheists, we imagined that our doings went unnoticed and unregarded, and went from wickedness to wickedness. Those of us who were supposed to be pastors cast off the restraining influence of the fear of God and quarreled heatedly with each other, engaged solely in swelling the disputes, threats, envy, and mutual hostility and hate, frantically demanding the despotic power they coveted. Then, then it was that in accordance with the words of Jeremiah, the Lord in his anger covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud, and cast down from Heaven the glory of Israel; He remembered not the footstool of His feet in the day of His anger, but the Lord also drowned in the sea all the beauty of Israel, and broke down all his fences.\(^2\)

In addition to this reality, there was suspicion that Christians in the army might not be reliable.\(^3\) Galerius, one of Diocletian’s Caesars, was a convinced pagan and tried to convince his Emperor that Christians were not reliable soldiers. While they were both consulting the oracle of Apollo, they were told by pagan priests that Christian sacrifices hindered a reliable message from the Roman auguries: “the just [Christians] upon the earth hindered him [the oracle] from declaring the truth and… this was the cause of false oracles.”\(^4\) Thus, the Christians were posing a threat to the unity and security of the Empire, and the Empire reacted by issuing four Edicts that

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\(^2\) Eusebius, *HE* 8.1, 257.

\(^3\) Ibid.

brought a terrifying persecution. Eusebius informs us that the persecution was so intense that the persecutors had to be released periodically because of the exhaustion caused by the unceasing executions of those Christians who refused to comply with the Edicts’ requirements.

While many Christians, both clergy and laity, suffered through the trials of persecution, there were countless others ready to sacrifice to the Roman gods at the first request to do so. Among the stories of persecution during Diocletian’s reign, a remarkable one—and important for Donatist beginnings—is that of the martyrs of Abitinia, a village near Carthage in North Africa, who had been brought before the Roman Proconsul in 304. The redactor of the story tells us that, because of the faith and condition of the Church, he is forced to “omit neither the arrogance of the lapsed nor the impudence of the traitors”; indeed, he is committed “to omit nothing” that happened in 304 at the trial of the Christians in Abitinia. This account, moreover, will help one “to recognize which Church is the Catholic Church,” according to the redactor.

Arrested and thrown into prison, the martyrs gathered as a council and ordained on the authority of the “divine Law,” that is, the Bible, a “heavenly decree” that the martyrs were bound to preserve for themselves and their descendents: no circumstances could justify the Christians’ surrender of the Scriptures and the compromise of faith of those who collaborated with the persecutors of Christians. In a rejection of the impious deeds of those who turned over the Christians’ sacred books for destruction by the persecutors, the martyrs judged that the Catholic Church should consist of those who upheld the Law of the Lord and did not renounce it, as had traditores like Mensurius, so that “the eternal peace of the Christian Name might shine ever more

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6 Eusebius, *HE* 8.8, 265.
8 *The Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs* 19, in *DMS*, 25-6, 44.
9 Ibid., 20, in *DMS*, 45. Since the phrase “gathered as a council” is proper for bishops and other clerics and expresses their authority to settle doctrinal or disciplinary issues, it is worth noticing that, in this context, it is used to express the confessors’ authority.
pure and more serene." We also find here that Mensurius, the bishop of Carthage, after repenting of his recent handing over of the Scripture, while explaining what he did, raged against the martyrs instead of imploring pardon from them. But more ruthless than he was his deacon, Ceacilian. He, we are told, armed with whips and lashes, stood before the doors of the prison and turned away people who brought food and drink to the martyrs in prison.

In North Africa the persecution left the Christian community deeply divided over the question of the nature of the Church and how to identify the true Church in North Africa. Can a compromised cleric, a *traditor*, administer the sacraments of the Church? As the legacy of Cyprian’s rigorist position was still fresh, the rigorist group certainly believed that such a cleric could not exercise this ministry. It took some time after the end of the persecution for the disagreement over the issue of the *traditores* to grow worse, and this change was especially occasioned by the need to ordain the bishop of Carthage.

Mensurius, the bishop of Carthage, was a moderate, suspected of turning over to the authorities the Christians’ sacred books, and known for his opposition to martyrs. Before Mensurius had departed to Rome to defend Felix, one of his deacons, because of a pamphlet that the latter was alleged to have written against the usurper Emperor Maxentius, Mensurius had left some of the Church’s precious vessels with two clerics who were to substitute for him during his journey. In case it would be impossible to return from Rome, or in the event of his death, the vessels were supposed to be given to the newly elected bishop. Indeed, Mensurius died on his way from Rome to Carthage. The leaders who had substituted for him during his absence hurried to elect a new bishop and intended to keep the vessels for themselves. Unfortunately, they were not content with the potential candidates. Two clerics, Botrus and Celestius, offered to be

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10 Ibid., 19-20, in *DMS*, 44-5.
candidates for the position and tried to ensure that the bishops who should perform the ordination be the neighbor bishops, against the custom of inviting the Numidian bishops for consecration. Unfortunately they were not seen as the best candidates by the Christian populace, and, therefore, before the Numidian bishops arrived, Mensurius’ archdeacon, Caecilian, who had won the approval of a part of the Church, was hastily ordained bishop by bishops who were not well-known and by Felix of Aphtungi, a suspected traitor. While Caecilian sent letters to announce his consecration as the bishop in Carthage, the Numidian bishops arrived and ordained in the same city another bishop, Majorinus. Thus, Optatus tell us that, in the same city, one Church remained rooted with the whole world, the other tore itself away. While the Christian group which supported Caecilian remained in communion with all Christians and was known as the Catholic Church of North Africa, whose status was legally recognized by the power of the State, those who refused communion with the official Church were those who are known in the history of Christianity as Donatists or as the Donatist Church, after the name of the group’s second leader, Donatus.

The above-mentioned separation between the group of Caecilian and the rigorists had its roots in the persecution; the events that marked the separation are the consequence of the opposition between those who supported the confessors and those who opposed them. Caecilian had a something of a bad record. His actions preventing people from giving food to the martyrs were seen as an act of opposition to those who faced death for God’s sake. Caecilian, through his opposition to the confessors and those who wanted to help them, was seen by rigorists, who supported the confessors and strongly opposed openness to the secular world, to be an apostate

13 Optatus: Against the Donatists 1. 18, ed. and trans. Mark Edwards Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997, 17; Optatus was the Catholic bishop of Milevis, a small town in the North African province of Numidia. He was the author of Against the Donatists (ca.367-85), a work in which he presents the Donatist history and argues against their catholicity and holiness. Since Optatus wrote from a Catholic perspective, intending to support the Catholics’ cause of unity against the Donatists’ arguments for separation, he should be read carefully. More details on Optatus can be found in the small section on him in this chapter; see also Augustine, Psalmus contra partem Donati 40-60, in BA, vol. 28, 156-157; W. H. C. Frend, The Donatist Church, 16.
14 Optatus: Against the Donatists 1.18, 17; W. H. C. Frend, The Donatist Church, 18.
15 Optatus: Against the Donatists 1.15, 15.
who failed to show his allegiance to the members of the Church in a critical situation. Ceacilian’s reluctance to criticize openly the persecuting Empire was also seen by them as an open compromise. Indeed, Maureen Tilley underlines the fact that the Donatists were not so much afraid of suffering as of being assimilated within the social structure of society, which was an evil temptation, hard to resist. Thus, the resentments previously developed among the group of confessors were more emphatically expressed by the rigorists when Ceacilian was to be elected as bishop. The confessors, as a group, were not willing to accept the leadership of one who not only had not stood firm against the demands of the State but even had proven to be hostile toward those who had done so.

Felix of Aphtungi, one of the consecrators of Ceacilian, was believed by the Donatists to be a traditor and therefore the reason why Ceacilian’s ordination was invalid and the schism began. Since there remain no documents to incriminate Felix, it is impossible to make a clear judgment as to his attitude during the persecution and the degree of his compromise. On the other hand, because all the documents that do exculpate him come later and from a side that tried to present him as unsoiled, we should be careful in making definitive assertions about his innocence. Optatus, the main source on the schism, not only began to write about 60 years after the schism began, but should be read cautiously and should not be taken at face value all the time because, as a Catholic bishop, Optatus was writing from a Catholic perspective, which intended to support the Catholic Church against the Donatist dissenters. But, in reality, if Felix had been only connected to leaders condemned of traditio, this could have been, for the rigorist party, enough of a reason to claim that he was a traditor and to separate from him and Ceacilian, who had been ordained by Felix.

Whereas one cannot totally deny the importance attributed by W. H. C. Frend to the role played by social and national factors in the history of the schism, the reading of Scripture and the

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tradition of confessors and martyrdom were what gave the Donatists enough support to resist and to successfully exist until Augustine’s time. The importance of these will be discussed later.

2. The Schism during Constantine’s Reign

With the Emperor Constantine (306-337), events take a decisive turn as the Church becomes his protégé and the Donatists, a stubborn group that refuses to obey the State and to integrate itself within the Church acknowledged by him, become a minority that has to be brought into the unity of the Church. Around the time of Constantine’s open decision to follow the God of the Christians, sometimes between late 312 and early 313, Constantine dispensed his benefactions to the Church of Africa led by Caecilian. In one letter Constantine tells Anulinus, the Proconsul of Africa, to restore to the Catholic Church all property that had been taken from them by the public authorities. But in another letter Constantine directly addresses Caecilian. In it he tells him to give money to the clergy of the Catholic religion, makes him aware that he knows about a group of people that oppose the most holy Catholic Church and, furthermore, advises him to contact imperial officials there, who may turn these people from their error, if the Catholics are in any way hindered. In a third letter, also addressed to Caecilian, Constantine specifically mentions that the clergy over whom he (Caecilian) presides should be exempted from all public duties, so that the worship of God might be duly performed without hindrance.

Intrigued by the benefactions the Emperor sent to their rival group and wanting to claim that they are in fact the Catholic Church in Africa and, therefore, the one that should be supported, the Donatists appealed to the Emperor. They asked that judges from Gaul, where Constantine’s father “did not carry on the persecution in company with the other emperors,”

17 W. H. C. Frend, The Donatist Church, xvi.
18 Eusebius, HE 10.5, 324.
19 Eusebius, HE 10.6, 326-27.
20 Eusebius, HE 10.7, 327.
come to settle the disputes “between [them] and other bishops.”\(^{21}\) Thus, it was claimed by Augustine and Catholics that the Donatists appealed first to the Emperor to do justice.\(^ {22}\) It should be noticed that at this time the first bishop of the rigorist group, Majorinus, had already died and the request made to Constantine to send judges from Gaul to judge between the two divided groups was made by several “bishops of Donatus’ party.” Thus, by the time the rigorists appealed to Constantine, Donatus was the leader of the group and, according to Optatus, they should henceforth be called the “Church/party of Donatus” or “Donatists.”\(^ {23}\)

In the Spring of 313, Constantine acted promptly and decided that, in addition to the ten representatives of the protesting group and the ten representatives of Caecilian, in accordance with the protesters’ requirement, three bishops from Gaul, where the persecution had been of insignificant proportions, should travel to Rome and judge between the contending groups. Miltiades, the bishop of Rome, who was named to preside over the arbitration process, was advised by Constantine that, after a careful examination and in accordance with the most sacred law, he should “leave no schism or division of any kind anywhere.”\(^ {24}\) Miltiades ignored Constantine’s advice about the representation in the arbitration and, by asking other fifteen Italian bishops to be present at the debates, transformed the arbitration process into a council dominated by Italian bishops.\(^ {25}\) This addition to the number of bishops Constantine intended for the arbitration process assured Miltiades that the outcome of the meeting would have the result he desired, namely, one that would be in accord with the Church of Rome’s theology and practice. The council was held at Rome on October 2, 313.\(^ {26}\) As Donatus admitted before the gathered bishops that he had re-baptized lapsed bishops and laity, he was found guilty because it was against the custom of the Italian Church. Caecilian, on the other hand, was pronounced innocent.

\(^{21}\) Optatus: Against the Donatists 1.22, 22-3. 

\(^{22}\) Augustine, Letter 43.13, in WSA 2/1, 163; 88.1, in WSA 2/1, 351-52.

\(^{23}\) Optatus: Against the Donatists 1.22, 23.

\(^{24}\) Eusebius, HE 10.5, 325.


by the nineteen bishops—fifteen Italian, three from Gaul, and Miltiades—that argued in Caecilian’s favor. The Donatist leaders were considered by the bishops gathered at the council trouble-makers who were intensifying the division in the Church in North Africa. In order to stop the division and, consequently, to establish Church unity there, the bishops forbade “these men to return to Africa after this verdict had been pronounced,” according to Constantine’s letter to Aelafius, a Christian and government official in North Africa.

However, the Donatists very soon refused to accept the decision taken at Rome and requested a better scrutiny of the case. They claimed that the arbitration was not fairly done as it was not as they required—that is, formed only of Gallic judges—and the evidence against Felix had not been heard. Constantine was certainly displeased with the outcome and was eager to call another meeting and to terminate the division “once and for all.” He was clearly concerned about the spectacle the Christians were making of their disunity. In a letter to Aelafius, Constantine seems to have taken very seriously his position and believed that, because the bishops were not able to settle the dispute, it was his duty to do so.

The council eventually called by Constantine planned to end the schism and gathered on August 1, 314, in Arles. Constantine was present during the debate and observed it as a layman. Because they judged that the Donatists had neither reasonable arguments nor moderation in their accusations, the bishops at Arles pronounced them, by the judgment of God and the mother Church “either condemned or expelled” in a letter sent to Silvester, the bishop of Rome. The bishops also made clear that those proved to be traditores had to be removed from the

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27 Optatus: Against the Donatists 1.24, 24.
28 Optatus: Against the Donatists, app. 3, 182. The appendices in this work are a collection of documents that concern the Donatist controversy and which Optatus transmitted to us at the end of his work. Among these ten documents, while six were supposedly written by Constantine, we find two proceedings that exculpate the Catholics and inculpate the Donatists, a letter from the Catholic bishops at Arles, and a letter of Petronius, the Praetorian Prefect in Africa.
29 Eusebius, HE 10.5, 325-326.
30 Optatus: Against the Donatists, app. 3, 183-184.
31 Eusebius, HE 10.5, 326.
ranks of the clergy. Furthermore, they declared that the custom of re-baptism had to be stopped: if
heretics who came to the Church could be certified to believe in the Father, the Son, and the Holy
Spirit and to have been baptized in the name of the Trinity, then they would have to be received
into the communion of the Church simply by the imposition of hands.\footnote{Optatus: Against the Donatists, app. 4, 185-88; A. H. M. Jones, Constantine and the Conversion of Europe, 97-98.}

Immediately disappointed, the Donatists appealed again to Constantine. The Donatists’
renewed appeal to the Emperor was based on the claim that they had convincing arguments
against Felix of Aphtungi. In the meantime Constantine had already personally requested further
inquiry into the case of Felix. According to the Donatists’ claims, Felix of Aphtungi might have
been a \textit{traditor} and, therefore, Caecilian’s ordination might have been invalid, according to the
decision of the Council of Arles. Alfius Caecilianus, the officer in charge of enforcing
Diocletian’s Edict of February 303, had addressed a letter to Felix in which he described how he,
the officer, accomplished the task of burning the Scriptures. An addition to the letter mentioned
how Felix, afraid to have his house destroyed if the Scriptures should be found there, had
promised to bring them to the church from which they were to be taken by the authorities. While
the addition was determined to be a forgery by the investigation, the first part was considered to
be relating reliable facts. The Proconsul Aelianus’ investigation into the case of Felix ended with
Felix’s acquittal of the crime of surrendering the Scripture. The arrival of this news convinced
Constantine to summon to Rome for a meeting Caecilian and the leaders of the Donatist party, as
well as Ingentius, who had supposedly seen to the addition which incriminated Felix of Aphtungi.
Because Caecilian did not arrive in time for the meeting scheduled at Rome, reconciliation did
not occur. But as Caeccilian finally arrived in Italy for the meeting, Constantine took advantage of
the situation and detained—perhaps at Brescia—Caeccilian, Donatus, and other Donatist leaders
who had come for the meeting.\footnote{N. H. Baynes, Constantine the Great and the Christian Church, 15.}
Thus, having both leaders of the opposing parties far from home, Constantine ordered two bishops, Eunomius and Olympius, to leave for Carthage to unite the divided people there. The mission failed, Optatus tells us, because the priests of Donatus rioted and because during the rioting, first Donatus arrived home, then Caecilian. Thus, “the parties were renewed for a second time.” The bishops and the councils had not been able to end the division, to promote concord among Christians, and to provide for the due worship of God. Therefore, Constantine considered that it was his mission to intervene in order to end the schism and to unite the Christians. Having found that Felix of Aphtungi was innocent, Constantine sent a letter on November 10, 316, to Eumalius, the vicar of Africa, in which he tells him that Caecilian is innocent, duly performing the duties of his religion and that, though wrong claims have been made against him, no crime has been found in him. Thus, Constantine made up his mind in favor of the Catholic Church. “Then he first issued “a very severe law against the sect of Donatus,” according to which all Donatist “places of assembly were claimed for the imperial treasury.”

After four years of this persecution, in about 321 Constantine saw himself defeated. He said that, because the state’s policy was not able to tame the Donatists, and because “this whole business concerns but a few,” the Catholic bishops in North Africa should practice patience toward the Donatists. However, another attempt to stop the Donatists as a Christian movement took place in about 336, when Gregory, the prefect of Africa during 336-337, tried to enforce unity. The Empire’s attempt to heal the schism was again a failure. Toward the end of Constantine’s reign, the number of Donatists had grown substantially as a council of theirs

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37 Augustine, Letter 105.9, in WSA 2/2, 59.
38 Augustine, Letter 88.3, in WSA 2/1, 353.
39 N. H. Baynes, Constantine the Great and the Christian Church, 16.
40 Optatus: Against the Donatists, app. 9, 196-197.
41 Optatus: Against the Donatists 3.3, 62.
indicates. Augustine tells us that the Donatist leaders were able to gather for that council about two hundred and seventy bishops for seventy-five days.  

3. The Schism from Constantius II to Augustine

Optatus implies that in about 347, Donatus, “who was the next to provoke an attempt to bring about unity,” contacted Constans, the ruler of Africa, Italy, and Illyricum, about the possibility of Christian unity under Donatus’ leadership. Since Caecilian had died, he could claim seniority in the Church of Africa, as had been decided at Rome by Miltiades and the bishops gathered there on October 2, 313. Apart from the quote above, Optatus does not say clearly whether a discussion regarding Christian unity under the leadership of Donatus actually took place between him and Constans. Certainly, an open admission on the part of Optatus that the Emperor agreed to such a proposal would have raised a question as to the Catholic Church’s legitimacy as the true Church, because it is unlikely that Donatus would have accepted unity under Catholic tutelage. Whatever the case may be, Constans sent his people to Africa in the Spring of 347.

Paulus and Macarius were sent, we are told by Optatus, not to bring unity, but to distribute benefactions that would relieve the poor and help the churches; the benefactions were to be distributed without discriminating between the rival churches. In reality, this visit was supposed to bring unity through material relief. They were supposed to touch the hearts and the minds of Donatists—and all other Christians—and thus be able to achieve Christian unity. Unfortunately, the mission did not occur as it has been planned. According to the Donatists, Macarius was a criminal. Since, as I already mentioned, Donatus accepted in principle the idea of

42 Augustine, Letter 93.43, in WSA, 2/1, 402.
43 Optatus: Against the Donatists 3.1, 57; see W. H. C. Frend, The Donatist Church, 177.
45 Optatus: Against the Donatists 3.3, 62.
Christian unity under his leadership, its realization depended less on who the mediators of unity might be than on a decided attitude of Paul and Macarius to achieve this unity on Donatus’ terms. Contrary to Donatus’s expectations, the commissioners attended religious services in the Catholic Church and tried to support the Catholic cause by telling people the history of the schism from a Catholic perspective. Displeased by the way the imperial commissioners accomplished their mission, and echoing Tertullian’s opinion about the God-Caesar relationship, Donatus the Great, the bishop of Carthage, asked: “What has the church to do with the Emperor?”46 In addition to messages to all his people telling them to refuse to communicate with the imperial agents, another Donatus, the bishop of Bagai, organized a resistance that made it impossible for unity to be achieved.47 To the existing fire was added the fuel of rumors about idolatry with the report that Paulus and Macarius, worshiping in the Church Donatus considered a rival, were allegedly going to bring with them the Emperor’s image, “which they would first put on the altar and thus sacrifice would be offered.”48 As the imperial commissioners had failed to achieve unity peacefully and had confronted a population reticent about the Empire, persecution became inevitable.

Although there is no doubt that an edict of unity was promulgated by the Proconsul of Africa, it has not survived and its wording is thus not known.49 The author of the Passion of Maximian and Isaac says that “he [very likely Macarius,50 who was subordinate to the Proconsul], augmenting the legislation of the traitors with his plan of a beastly edict,… 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

48 Optatus: Against the Donatists 3.12, 82-83.
49 W. H. C. Frend, The Donatist Church, 179.
50 The Martyrdom of Marculus 3, in DMS, 79-80.
banished (Mt 10.40-42; cf. Jn 13.20) and should not struggle against the treaty of so-called ‘unity.’” The persecution was seen by the Donatists as a war between the Church (the Donatists) and the Gentiles (the Catholics). While they saw the Catholics as obeying the devil and serving the Antichrist, they considered themselves as the faithful, the martyrs for the heavenly kingdom. In fact, when Paulus and Macarius were sent to Africa, the Donatists believed that “an accursed 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, by signals given by the standard bearers and by the shouts of crowds.” Despite the many harsh measures that the agents of forced unity took against the Donatists, the unity of the Church of the Donatists could not be destroyed: “Christ did not permit the sluggards to divide his own army when the enemy challenged them.”

The Macarian persecution left the Donatist Church seriously shaken. The provision to banish those who refused to join the Catholic communion made many Donatists determined to take the road to exile, whereas others of them saw themselves constrained to accept the Catholic communion in order to avoid being uprooted and suffering harsh penalties. Donatus saw himself obliged on this occasion to go into exile, whence he never returned. In 348 a general council gathered in order to reestablish and proclaim Christian religious unity in North Africa. The council reaffirmed the Catholic principles regarding baptism and martyrdom; it forbade the Donatists from re-baptizing heretics, and the custom of laying hands on the head of a heretic or schismatic returning to the Church was reasserted. The attitude of those who exaggeratedly wanted to prove their faith through martyrdom was to be treated cautiously.

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51 The Passion of Maximian and Isaac 3, in DMS, 64-65; see also The Martyrdom of Marculus 3, in DMS, 79-80.
52 The Martyrdom of Marculus 1, in DMS, 78.
53 The Martyrdom of Marculus 3, in DMS, 79.
54 The Passion of Maximian and Isaac 3, in DMS, 65; see also Optatus: Against the Donatists 3.1, 57.
55 W. H. C. Frend, The Donatist Church, 181.
From this critical time in Donatist history to the time of Julian’s reign, not much is known with certainty about the relations between the Church and the Donatists. But the chance for improvement came with Julian’s ascension to the Imperial throne in 361. Julian restored all religious liberties; thus the pagans, as well as those out of communion with the Catholic community for reasons of doctrine or church structure or discipline enjoyed a period of recovery. However, although he proclaimed religious tolerance for all, he in fact tried to support the advance of paganism at the expense of the Church. The Donatists took advantage of the reversal in the religious situation and appealed to him, asking for liberty of worship and for the restitution of their properties that had previously been taken from them. In the spirit of his policy of liberty and his negative attitude toward the Catholics, Julian agreed to the Donatists’ request.

Unfortunately for the Donatists, the Emperors who reigned after Julian’s death in 363 resumed the support and defense of the Catholics against those deemed schismatics and heretics by the Catholics. In the spirit of the laws that aimed at eliminating schism and achieving unity, Romanus the count of Africa acted aggressively against the Donatists at the beginning of the seventh decade of the fourth century, we are told by Augustine. The Donatists, most of whom were of low and middle social status, received his brutal actions with hatred. Firmus, a chieftain with a certain social prestige who was displeased with Romanus’ policy, instigated a social and political revolt that lasted for about four years, from 371 to 375. It was in these circumstances that in 373 a law was passed prohibiting the practice of rebaptism. In 377 this law was reenacted, but now it expelled from their ministerial order priests who practiced rebaptism, and it restored their

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60 Augustine, *Contra litteras Petiliani* 2.97.224, in BA, vol. 30, 516-19; *Optatus: Against the Donatists* 2.16, 44.
62 “Mandate of Valentinian I and Valens on Rebaptism, 373 (CT 16. 6.1),” in *CLD*, vol. 1, 335.
churches to the Catholic Church, while mandating the confiscation of all illegal churches.\textsuperscript{63} Many Donatists were forced to go into exile. But, since the Empire did not follow closely how its legislation was followed, the Donatists returned home in a short while and did not obey the Empire’s legislation. In fact, the reenacting of a previous decree is a sign that it was not always followed, and until the final defeat of the Donatists in 411, the legislation against them was never consistently enforced.

The revolt of 371-375 caused tension among the Donatists themselves and also gave a reason to the Circumcellions, Donatists marked by a martyr-dominated ethos and by social and nationalist motives, to defend aggressively their religious and national identity against what they considered to be the oppressive Roman attitude. During this time of social unrest and Catholic recovery after Julian’s reign, Firmus and the Circumcellions severely treated the Rogatians, Donatists that had separated from the main Donatist Church between 363 and 370 and took the name of their leader, Rogatus. This schismatic group was a moderate one that avoided violence and the mixing of their religious convictions with the social and political realities with which the main group of Donatists were occupied during this time.\textsuperscript{64}

Besides the Rogatians, another schismatic group was born among the Donatists in 376-377. Claudius, the Donatist bishop of Rome, took advantage of the quarrel that had taken place in Rome between Damasus and Ursinus, who were rivals for episcopal authority there for about a year. Through a serious effort to spread propaganda among the Catholics in Rome, Claudius tried to destabilize the Roman church by pointing to the bloody actions that had made Damasus the Catholic bishop of Rome. After Damasus gained control in Rome, he manipulated Gratian, the Emperor of the western part of the Empire, to order Claudius to return to Africa, the headquarters of the Donatists. Claudius felt himself obliged to do so, but at Carthage the leader of the Donatists


\textsuperscript{64} W. H. C. Frend, The Donatist Church, 197; Allan D. Fitzgerald, “Rogatism,” in AE, 726-27. The first surviving mention of the Circumcellions is found in Optatus, Against the Donatists 3.4. They existed in the time of Augustine as a fringe group of Donatists.
was Parmenian. Since Claudius did not accept submitting to Parmenian’s authority, he broke with Parmenian and formed his own community. Thus, before Augustine became the Catholic bishop at Hippo, besides the main Donatist group, there were also two Donatist schismatic groups: the followers of Rogatus, the Rogatians, and the followers of Claudius, the Claudians. The Circumcellions, continued in existence long enough to prove serious opponents to him and to his efforts for Christian unity in North Africa.

a. Parmenian and Optatus

Parmenian and Optatus are important figures for Catholic-Donatist history. Through Optatus, Augustine gained a glimpse of Parmenian’s theology, which Augustine sought to defeat in order to support Tyconius’ view of the Church against Parmenian. Optatus offered Augustine a history of the schism that greatly helped Augustine prove that the Donatists were the guilty initiators of the schism.

Parmenian was the successor to Donatus the Great. Probably a native of Gaul or Spain, Parmenian became the leader of the Donatist Church in Carthage in 362 or 363, immediately after Julian granted religious liberty to those deemed heretics and schismatics by Catholics and after the long time of exile that followed Macarius’ persecution and the edict of unity. Since Donatism had been proscribed in Africa from 347, when Macarius’ persecution had begun, until the ascension of Julian to the throne in 361, many Donatists had been forced to live in other regions of the Empire during that time, when the Donatist community in Rome was founded. One of the Donatists forced to live in exile was Donatus, who never returned to Africa. During this time of exile Parmenian was elected as Donatus’s successor. Parmenian maintained his leadership

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in Carthage until 391, when Augustine became priest at Hippo. Although Parmenian was a foreigner in Africa, not raised in a Donatist environment, his tenure as a bishop was a success for the Donatist Church. Under his leadership, the Donatist Church grew and consolidated as the Donatists became the majority of Christians in Africa. Like his predecessors at Carthage, Parmenian showed an amazing faithfulness toward Donatist tradition and values, and he defended the view that the Donatist Church was the true Church of Africa.

In his main work, *Adversus ecclesiam traditorum*, Parmenian defended the Church he led by showing how, theologically and historically, the Donatist Church is the true Church of Africa. Unfortunately, this work, which was written in about 362, was lost. Fortunately, we can get a general overview of his theology from the work of Optatus and from Augustine. Still there remains a problem in reading their works. Since both these authors were Catholics and strongly opposed the Donatists, they did not simply want to present what Parmenian wrote. They hoped rather to depict what he had written as wrong. Therefore, Parmenian’s thought cannot be learned from a straightforward exposition of it, but from negative statements that attacked his view of the Church. Optatus, for example, was certainly not interested in presenting Parmenian’s theology for its own sake. Instead, by presenting the history of the schism in a way that ignores or distorts Donatist arguments, Optatus strove to refute Parmenian’s theological claims and to show that the Donatists were a schismatic group. Optatus presupposes that Parmenian wrote his treatise “with no other motive than to administer a shameful beating to the catholic church.”

Optatus wrote only from a Catholic perspective and did not give the Donatists any credit for their beliefs or tradition. In fact, Maureen Tilley asserts that Optatus’ work could be given more credit if he had presented the theological features of the Donatists in a manner that they themselves would have recognized as credible.

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70 *Optatus: Against the Donatists* 1.5. 4.
A consensus could not be achieved between Catholics and Donatists because each of these rival churches believed itself, on the basis of their respective traditions, to be the right Church. Since the presuppositions through which they interpreted their history and theology were based on different views about the Church and how it should fare within the secular world, they could not come to a general consensus about issues affecting the Church. One tradition, that of the Donatists, was based on a North African theology of the Church and on a tradition of surviving imperial persecution, whereas the Catholic tradition was based on the Roman theology of the Church and on a perspective that saw the Empire as providential for the Church’s expansion.

According to Optatus, the five books of Parmenian against the Church of the *traditores* treated, in order, the matter of baptism, the unity of the Church, the unfaithful collaboration of the *traditores* with the Empire, the atrocities performed by the agents of both the Catholic Church and the Empire in their attempt to achieve unity, and the oil and sacrifice of the sinner.\(^72\) The main ideas in this work are that the Church is one and united, is the only place where true baptism is administered, and is uncontaminated by the sin of apostasy and that those who are guilty of the sin of treason or apostasy are therefore not part of the Church and can neither anoint with the oil of ordination nor offer sacrifice on behalf of their congregation. Moreover, as the Church is Christ’s bride, it has some special spiritual gifts that cannot be found anywhere else. They are the following: the “see,” which means the authority of the Church represented by the bishop; the “angel,” which is the angel who hovers over the water of baptism;\(^73\) the “font” of baptism, which is connected to the presence of the Holy Spirit; the “seal” of the font of baptism, which is connected with the right sacraments; and the “altar,” which is connected to a valid and lawfully consecrated place of worship.\(^74\) These gifts, Parmenian contended, could not belong to the Church that followed in Caecilian’s line because it lost them forever through the sin of *traditio*. This is

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\(^72\) *Optatus: Against the Donatists* 1.6, 6.
\(^73\) Ibid., 2.2, 31-32.
\(^74\) Ibid., 2.8, 38-39.
the reason why Optatus emphasized so strongly the history of the schism. He wanted to show Parmenian that, in fact, those who lost the right to be called the true Church are the Donatists.

Having converted to Catholic Christianity from paganism, Optatus became in about 360 the bishop of his place of birth, Milevis, a small town in the North African province of Numidia. By the time he became bishop, he was forty-years old. Therefore, it cannot be doubted that he was well placed to know of the crisis during the Macarian persecution of 347-349 and of the events after it. However, this account of the Catholic-Donatist conflicts can be slanted because he wrote as a Catholic and, most importantly, as a Catholic bishop.

Since Optatus relates the history of the Donatist movement from the beginning to the end, I agree with Maureen Tilley that he could be considered more as an historian than as a theologian. Indeed, what really divided the Donatists from the Catholics were, actually, historical facts and events during the persecution that each group saw and interpreted differently in the light of the Scripture and their respective tradition. Of course, since theology can never be taken from its historical context, the historical facts that caused the schism were the base on which theologies were built. Thus, while historical events caused the division between the Catholics and the Donatists, it was their divergent theological convictions that kept them separated. While the Catholics interpreted the events of the persecution from a theological perspective which they were not willing to renounce, the Donatists interpreted them from another theological tradition which they also were not willing to renounce. This tendentious interpretation is the real problem not only with Optatus, who writes from a Catholic theological perspective, but also with the Donatists, who saw the events from their point of view and tradition. Augustine, for example, constantly reminded the Donatists of the inadequacy of their interpretation of the schism in order to convince them that their criticism of the Catholics is not based on historical facts.


Thus, he wanted to show that historical events did not require the Donatists to separate from Catholics in order to be true to their theological position.

Optatus’ bias is obvious through his use of offensive language against Parmenian and through the judgments he makes. Parmenian is considered by Optatus to be poorly instructed, inept in his theological interpretation; he thinks Parmenian is an ignorant foreigner who made ignorant statements. On the other hand, he never mentions that the Catholics may have acted wrongly. He realizes that, for example, harsh military measures taken by the government were instigated and supported by the Church in order to realize unity, but he always finds excuses for the Church’s support for what was inflicted on the Donatists, such that the Donatists were rightly punished and the Catholic Church is always presented as guiltless in its promotion of the punishment.

Optatus’ work was a response to Parmenian’s *Adversus ecclesiam traditorum*. Through an exposition of the history of the schism and from a theology that saw the Church’s position in the Empire as providential, Optatus tried to prove that the Donatists were in fact a schismatic group and, therefore, their stubborn refusal to join the Church condemned them. It was, however, an unfair treatment, since the author’s conviction that Donatist theological claims were false led him to criticism of the Donatists. Since the Donatists’ theological claims and arguments did not count, Optatus’ history was not written *sine ira et studio* but with the intention to destroy Parmenian’s arguments in favor of his church.

In the first book of his work against the Donatists, Optatus opens his refutation of Parmenian’s work by laying down the issues at stake—baptism, the validity of the sinner’s sacrifice on the Church’s behalf, Church unity, and the use of military force against the Donatists—and he states clearly what Parmenian’s book was about. He starts his debate with Parmenian by providing an account of both the origin of the schism and the Donatists’

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77 Optatus: *Against the Donatists* 1.5, 4-5.
78 Ibid., 3.4, 68-69.
79 Optatus: *Against the Donatists* 1.4-6, 3-6.
condemnation at Rome by Miltiades.\textsuperscript{80} The first book ends with an account of the mission of Eunomius and Olympius to unite the rival groups in Carthage after the failure of Arles and the events immediately following.\textsuperscript{81} In the second book, Optatus asserts that the Church as the bride of Christ is one, and, therefore, it cannot be the church of Parmenian which is not part of “the one that is spread throughout the whole compass of the earth.”\textsuperscript{82} Optatus goes on to discuss here Parmenian’s view on the spiritual endowments of the Church in order, of course, to disprove Parmenian’s view on the Church’s nature and extension, baptism, and holiness, as well as to show that unity is the result of charity, while schism is the result of individualism and a proud attitude.\textsuperscript{83} In other words, though the military force was harmful, it had at its root the intention and the charity according to which all Christians should live together and be united. In the third book Optatus recognizes as true the fact that “the agents of unity took many harsh measures”; therefore, he intends “first to show the errors of the schismatics; then, what was causing unity to emerge; thirdly, who brought it about that a military force was sent,” namely the hard-headed Donatists themselves.\textsuperscript{84}

In the fourth book Optatus wanted to show that Parmenian’s claim of holiness for the Donatists alone is faulty because the Donatist leaders could neither anoint, baptize, nor offer the Eucharist on behalf of their people because these leaders were out of the Church’s communion and thus without the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{85} While in the fifth book Optatus discussed baptism and his belief that it is “the substance of the whole question now in dispute,”\textsuperscript{86} in the sixth one he treated the violent conduct of the Donatists during the schism, which started with the Donatists’ setting

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 1.4, 3-4.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 1.7-28, 6-28.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 2.1-2, 29-31, quoting 2.2, 31.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 2.2-26, 31-56. See also Clement to the Corinthians 48-50, in ECW, 43.
\textsuperscript{84} Optatus: Against the Donatists 3.1, 57.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 2.6-7, 37-39; 4.1-9, 84-95. See also Cyprian, Letter 73.24.1, in ACW, vol. 47, 68; 72.1.1, in ACW, vol. 47, 51-52; 73.1.1, in ACW, vol. 47, 54.
\textsuperscript{86} Optatus: Against the Donatists 5.1, 96.
up a different altar from the one they had left and denied.\footnote{This quotation is from ibid., 5.1, 96; See also 6.1, 115.} The seventh book of Optatus is a reply to a Donatist challenge: since they are considered by the Catholics to be children of traitors, why were the Catholics trying desperately to establish unity of communion with the Donatists? Optatus replied that God was not pleased by the separation, since the members of one body were divided.\footnote{Ibid., 7.1, 127.}

Optatus’ work did not have an important impact during his lifetime. However, it became a great work in the hands of Augustine, who would use Optatus’ work in great detail and with great skill to prove that the Donatists were wrong during their entire history and that, therefore, they should recognize this fact and accept unity with the Catholics. Since Parmenian’s work was about the nature of the Church and the way it could be identified, Augustine intended to show that Parmenian’s ecclesiological arguments were inconsistent. After recounting the history of the schism, Augustine settled for showing that the Donatists’ claims are not credible and therefore their Church is a schismatic Church: the Donatists did rebaptize the schismatics of their own Church, their own people did not conduct themselves as members of a holy Church, and they broke communion with the universal Church. More importantly, in agreement with Tyconius, Augustine contradicts the Donatist thesis that the evil in the Church contaminates it and that the true Church is confined to Africa.\footnote{Augustine, Retractationes 2, 17, trans. Mary Inez Bogan. Fathers of the Church, vol. 60. (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1968), 154-57}

\section*{b. Tyconius}

Of Tyconius’ four works—\textit{De bello intestino}, \textit{Expositiones diversarum causarum}, \textit{Liber regularum}, and a commentary on the Apocalypse—only the \textit{Liber regularum} survives today in
more than fragmentary form.\(^{90}\) Therefore, a significant part of Tyconius’ thought has to be inferred from Augustine, who knew Tyconius’ works. Besides Parmenian, Tyconius is the other Donatist theologian of remarkable stature in the second half of the fourth century. However, because of their different theological views, he did not join forces with Parmenian in defending the Donatist party in North Africa. Although Tyconius’ theology did not entirely please either the Catholics or the Donatists, he remained tacitly faithful for his entire life to the Donatist Church, which he believed to be the true Church in Africa because it was not tainted by the sin of *traditio* and cooperation with a persecuting Empire. Since he never wanted to leave the Donatist Church, the simple fact that he categorically refused to become a Catholic after he was condemned by his own Church is an obvious sign that Tyconius’ heart was Donatist. Since Tyconius was excommunicated by Donatists and refused to become a Catholic, he did not have another choice but to live without an official Church. I agree with Maureen Tilley that “Tyconius never rejected his roots…for his theology was thoroughly Donatist.” “In short, although Tyconius’ beliefs on evil in the Church would have been too Catholic for the Donatists, the urgency with which he advocated repentance would have been too Donatist for the Catholics.”

Since Tyconius agreed that the Church exists throughout the world, Augustine criticizes Tyconius for staying apart from the Catholics: “though he says such things about the Church spread throughout the whole world and claims that the sins of others stain no one in its unity, he removed himself from the contagion of the Africans, as if they were *traditores*, and became a

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\(^{91}\) Maureen Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World*, 114. But see Kenneth Steinhauser, “Tyconius: was he Greek?,” *Studia Patristica* 27 (1993): 395-96: “after his excommunication from the Donatists, Tyconius did not attempt to join the Catholics but chose instead to remain without official church membership until his death because he could identify with neither group.” Tyconius, as a Donatist, actually identified himself with the Donatists, which he never wanted to leave. Disagreement with his church certainly does not mean incompatibility with it.
member of the sect of Donatus.”

Tyconius realistically saw that it was impossible that the only true Christians should be confined to Africa and to the Donatist group, but, according to Augustine’s version of Tyconius’ words, the latter believed that the Church should strive toward higher standards of holiness. Indeed, Tyconius’ Book of Rules, as Pamela Bright asserts, is especially “concerned with the scriptural call to repentance of the sinful members the Church,” because of the growing evil in the Church. Since the coming of the Lord was imminent, Tyconius considered his time as the time of repentance: “behold, now is the day of salvation… behold, now is the acceptable time.” Since all people were called to repentance, eternal life was available to all. Eventually, as W. H. C. Frend argues, “it was penance, or the continuing striving to do God’s will, which divided the true from the false Christians.” Thus, the former part of the Church consists of people who will have eternal life if they persevere, while the latter part consists of people who are headed to eternal damnation. Nevertheless, since the separation between the two parts of the Church was not to become visible until the end, the two groups would exist side by side until then, and the sin of the one part would not be contagious for the other.

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92 Augustine, Letter 93.10.44, in WSA 2/1, 402; since Tyconius was born in the Donatist Church, Augustine’s assertion that he removed himself from the Church in order to become a Donatist should be seen as unreliable. But about Tyconius’ opinion that “the sins of others stain no one in its unity,” Augustine is right. See also Maureen Tilley, “From Separatist Sect to Majority Church: The Ecclesiologies of Parmenian and Tyconius,” Studia Patristica 33 (1997): 261-262.

93 Augustine, Letter 93.10.43, in WSA 2/1, 402, quoting Tyconius: “All we want is holiness.”


In the line of the North African tradition of martyrs, Tyconius believed that Christians that persecute or hate other Christians were dead Christians: “anyone who claims that he is in the light and hates his brother is still in the dark...is a liar...let him do no evil to Christ in flesh, i.e., in his servants. For the Lord and the church are ‘one flesh.’ If he believes that a person is in that flesh, why does he not love him or—crueler still—why does he hate him, when it is written, ‘anyone who does not love’ his brother ‘remains in death,’ and ‘anyone who hates his brother is a murderer.’” 98 Indeed, R. Markus believes that the main reason why Tyconius did not become a Catholic was his abhorrence for the entire development of the persecuting Church since Constantine. 99 While Tyconius thought that the Church consists of good and bad and therefore could not be perfect in this life, he expected from his fellow Christians that they not persecute each other or collaborate with persecutors of the Church. Although in Tyconius’ opinion the Church was spread throughout the whole Roman world and in it the good and bad Christians intermingled together, sin could not be transmissible because it was not contagious by a simple touch or by being a member of an infected group. However, the Donatists thought that the structure and foundation of a religious group infected by the sin of traditio were by that fact undermined and therefore such a group should be avoided by those uncontaminated by the sin of traditio. 100 Since the Donatists did not counsel separation from ordinary sinners but only from Catholics, the kind of infection the Catholics received by the sin of traditio and co-operation with the coercive State was deemed grave by Donatists. 101

Tyconius’ ecclesiology was certainly against the theology that Parmenian maintained at that time in line with the Donatists’ theological legacy. We are told by Augustine that, because of

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Tyconius’ views on the extent of the Church and the reality of the sin in the Church, Parmenian “held him trapped” and a council under his leadership excommunicated him in about 380.102 Augustine took advantage of Tyconius’ balanced judgment regarding the nature of the Church, and not only did he use it as a weapon against the Donatists, but he also developed a theology of the nature of the Church that was significantly influenced by Tyconius’ thought.

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II. AUGUSTINE AND THE BEGINNINGS OF HIS VIEW ON AUTHORITY AND UNITY

This chapter is about Augustine’s life from his childhood until his arrival at Thagaste, especially his early years up to 386.¹ Thus, since Augustine’s Confessions covers mainly the aforementioned period, this chapter will deal primarily with his life as we find it described by him in that work, which he had begun about eleven years after his conversion to Catholic Christianity in a garden of Milan and about six years after he had became a priest in Hippo. However, this chapter is not intended to present a full description of his life during the aforementioned period; rather, the chapter will emphasize the events and circumstances that were formative of Augustine’s views on the authority of the Church.

Augustine wrote the Confessions between 397 and 400, when he was in his mid-forties and had recently been made a bishop. The Confessions is not an autobiography; it is rather Augustine’s retrospective analysis of his early life up to his conversion from a viewpoint that matured considerably after his conversion and in his position as a priest and bishop of the Church. It is not a proper history, which he indeed had not intended. But it shows what most seriously preoccupied him at the time when he was writing the Confessions: events and facts that Augustine considered providential in his finding God and His Church. Indeed, for our purpose, which is to signal facts and events that contributed to his view on authority, Augustine’s emphasis on what he considered key or authoritative in his conversion helps us more than a history would have.

As a Church leader, Augustine considered it appropriate “to answer critics both inside and outside the Catholic Community,” critics who for different reasons considered him unworthy

¹ The events from Augustine’s conversion in a Milanese garden up to his arrival in Thagaste and ordination as a priest are only sketchily mentioned in this chapter. The chapters that follow will make succinct mention of events influencing his attitude toward unity and authority of the Church. For a thorough analysis of Augustine’s ecclesial ideas between 386 and 391, see David Alexander, Augustine’s Early Theology of the Church: Emergence and Implications, 386-391 (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008).
of his position. Thus, in the *Confessions* he tried to show his critics—though he never mentioned the Donatists, for example, in this book—how God, through various circumstances, brought him to the Church and changed him from an opponent of Christianity to a defender of the true faith. In recounting his life, the mature Augustine saw the role which authority played in his life, including the importance of obeying authority, first and foremost the authority of the Church. A short discussion of the ideas and events that marked his view on authority, as they are recounted in the *Confessions*, helps one to see how Augustine’s early years until his conversion at Milan influenced his matured thought, or, at least, how he interpreted these years in light of the circumstances in which he wrote the *Confessions*. Each section of this chapter will show how he was disappointed in his untiring search for the true meaning of life. In each section we will also see the role he attributed to authority in his discovery of the meaning of life, that is, God, and in his view of the Church. Since Monica’s authoritative character and teaching about God and His Church played a marked and indelible role in Augustine’s life and view of authority, the first section of this chapter is about Monica and her influence on Augustine.

A. Augustine’s Early Years and Monica’s Influence

Augustine was born in Numidia, a Roman province in North Africa, in the small town of Thagaste, on November 13, 354. Although Numidia was a Roman province where all free people of the Roman Empire had obtained citizenship through the Edict of Caracalla in 212, the Romanization of North Africa was not complete, especially in the rural and most remote areas.

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Still in the time of Augustine, the Christianity which had begun in North Africa during the second half of the second century, as was already mentioned in the first chapter, existed along with the old pagan religious traditions and customs, which Augustine as a priest and bishop would try to eliminate. The residues of old animistic religious beliefs still captured people’s minds, and the local gods appeared now under the newly adopted, syncretic names of the Roman gods.\(^5\) Christianity, a foreign and imported religion in the African land, continued to struggle to eliminate the ancestral customs that to a certain degree could still be found among those who converted to Christianity.\(^6\) Since Christianity was not able to purge all pagan customs, the Christians in North Africa lived under continuous fear of the malefic influence of the evil spirits that existed in the world along with the good ones. Augustine mentions that, when he was born, he was dedicated to God by being “signed with the sign of the cross and seasoned with salt.” The cross symbolizes Christian victory over the powers of this world, while the salt was used in the act of exorcism, which was intended to expel evil spirits and assure further protection. Indeed, both the cross and the salt were considered as having curative, protective and preserving effects.\(^7\)

Since the world in which Augustine lived was one in which the forces of good and evil were in a continuous and persistent struggle and men believed they were caught in these struggles, the question which no one could escape was how one could find a serene and meaningful way of life. In the *Confessions*, we see Augustine’s effort to find the meaning of life by exploring different ways of life. None of these efforts fulfilled him. Indeed, he intended in the *Confessions* to recount and examine before God his past in light of a matured thought, to confess the good and the bad, and to dedicate himself more deeply to God’s will. Indeed, Augustine


mentioned that everything that was good in his life was God’s gift, while his sin consisted in the fact that he sought pleasure and truth not in God but in his creature.

I existed, I lived and thought and took care for my self-preservation (a mark of your profound latent unity whence I derive my being). An inward instinct told me to take care of the integrity of my senses, and even in my little thoughts about little matters I took delight in the truth. I hated to be deceived, I developed a good memory, I acquired the armoury of being skilled with words, friendship softened me, I avoided pain, despondency, ignorance. In such a person what was not worthy of admiration and praise? But every one of these qualities are gifts of my God…My sin consisted in this, that I sought pleasure, sublimity, and truth not in God but in his creatures, in myself and other created beings.  

Henry Chadwick asserts in the introduction to the *Confessions* that the book is in part recognition of mistakes: “the *Confessions* is a polemical work, at least as much a self-vindication as an admission of mistakes. The very title carries a conscious double meaning, of confession as praise as well as of confession as acknowledgment of faults.”  

According to the events he recounted in the *Confessions*, it seems that the qualities he had were God’s gifts, while the good actions he had performed in his past had come mainly from his obeying authorities—and especially the main authority, that is, God—which he naturally did not want to obey; and his faults and mistakes opposed to the good role of authority is a motif met throughout the first nine books of his *Confessions*.

In the light of the facts and events which Augustine recounts regarding his search for religious truth and his stubborn discontent with Christianity until his conversion, one could be misled about Augustine’s early education in Christianity, the years spent at Thagaste with his devout mother, Monica, and believe that these were all of little or no significance. In fact, these years were very important ones, during which Augustine learned so much about the Christian way of life that it resonated in his mind constantly and thus did not allow him to become totally estranged from the Christianity of his youth. O’Meara rightly observes that Augustine’s early

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10 For example, Augustine, *Confessions* 3.8.16, 46; 6.5.7-9, 95-97; 6.11.19, 105-06.
years significantly influenced his theology: “Few authors have so clearly depended on their own experiences to generate their teaching as did Augustine: his life, but above all, his early life, profoundly influenced his teaching.” And Peter Brown asserts that “what Augustine remembered in his Confessions was his inner life; and this inner life is dominated by one figure—his mother, Monica.” Indeed, even if for a while he found himself seeking wisdom in religious or philosophical systems other than Christianity, Augustine was always a Christian.

When I was still a boy, I had heard about eternal life promised to us through the humility of our Lord God, coming down to our pride, and I was already signed with the sign of the cross and seasoned with salt from the time I came from my mother’s womb. She greatly put her trust in you. You saw, Lord, how one day, when I was still a small boy, pressure on the chest suddenly made me hot with fever and almost at death’s door. You saw, my God, because you were already my guardian, with what fervor of mind and with what faith I then begged for the baptism of your Christ, my God and Lord, urging it on the devotion of my mother and of the mother of us all, your Church. My physical mother was distraught. With a pure heart and faith in you she even more lovingly travailed in labour for my eternal salvation. She hastily made arrangements for me to be initiated and washed in the sacraments of salvation, confessing you, Lord Jesus, for the remission of sins. But suddenly I recovered. My cleansing was deferred on the assumption that, if I lived, I would be sure to soil myself; and after that solemn washing the guilt would be greater and more dangerous if I then defiled myself with sins. So I was already a believer, as were my mother and the entire household except for my father alone. Though he had not yet come to faith, he did not obstruct my right to follow my mother’s devotion, so as to prevent me believing in Christ.

Augustine may have retrospectively thought that Monica, through her intrusive and excessive advice, contributed in a decisive way to his conversion. Indeed, Harold Coward asserts that the Christian conscience which Augustine developed as a child was strongly influenced by his mother and the Church in which he was a catechumen. To her, Augustine wrote, “I owe all

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13 Augustine, *Confessions* 1.11.17, 13-14.

Augustine asserts that, “this name [of Christ], by your mercy Lord (Ps. 24: 7), this name of my Savior your Son, my infant heart had piously drunk in with my mother’s milk, and at a deep level I retained the memory.” Augustine realizes that even, as he searched for truth, in a rebellious refusal to obey God, He spoke to him through the words of his mother:

Wretch that I am, do I dare to say that you, my God, were silent when in reality I was travelling farther from you? Was it in this sense that you kept silence to me? Then whose words were they but yours which you were chanting in my ears through my mother, your faithful servant? But nothing of that went down into my heart to issue in action….These warnings seemed to me womanish advice which I would have blushed to take the least notice of. But they were your warnings and I did not realize it. I believed you were silent, and that it was only she who was speaking, when you were speaking to me through her. In her you were scorned by me, by me her son, the son of your handmaid, your servant (Ps. 115: 16).

Since his mother was his only Christian parent, since only his mother was making efforts for his salvation, teaching him to acknowledge God as his true father, and since he begged baptism based on the devotion of his mother and the mother of all Christians, that is, the Church, it is implicitly clear that his early education about Christ and the Church was provided entirely by his mother. Moreover, Augustine states clearly that his father did not overrule the influence his mother’s piety exercised over him, by making any attempt to stop him believing in Christ.

Of course, Monica’s faith was not an elaborated faith, at which she arrived after a thorough intellectual search of religious alternatives. Instead, Monica learned the faith as it was rendered to her by a rigorous education received when she was a young girl, especially from an aged servant of the household: “She was trained ‘in your fear’ (Ps 5:8) by the discipline of your Christ, by the government of your only Son in a believing household through a good member of

16 Augustine, *Confessions* 3.4.8, 40.
17 Augustine, *Confessions* 2.3.7, 27.
18 Harold G. Coward, “Memory and Scripture in the Conversion of Augustine,” in *Grace, Politics and Desire*, 20; Colin Starnes, *Augustine’s Conversion: A Guide to the Argument of Confessions I-IX*, 13-14; “Monica had already told him of the eternal life promised by Christ and had explained how the promise was made only to those who belonged to the Church…so Augustine begged Monica, with great favor and faith, to have him baptized. The rest of his conversion can be seen as Augustine’s attempt to discover whether and how this hope was justified.” For the influence of Monica in Augustine’s life, see also *Confessions* 2.3.7, 27; 3.11.19, 49-50; 3.12.21, 50-51.
your Church…So she was brought up in modesty and sobriety.”

While “Monica relied upon her faith, and her faith proved powerful,” Peter Brown states that “what Augustine says about Monica throws as much light on his character as on that of his mother….Occasionally, we glimpse a genuinely impressive woman-very much what her son would have liked himself to be, as a bishop: restrained, dignified, above gossip, a firm peacemaker among her acquaintances, capable, like her son, of effective sarcasm.”

Augustine’s firmness in faith, character and fatherly attitude was to a great extent due to the years spent around his mother, who brought him up according to the Christian teaching in which she herself was brought up. As a child Augustine was influenced by the patterns and teachings of his mother, who continuously urged him to become a Christian. Because the deep influence of his mother was interiorized by Augustine before becoming a Christian, the conscience he developed was strongly influenced by his mother. Indeed, later in his life, he did not forget her determination to see him a Christian, to live her life according to the traditional practices of his time and place, and to submit to authority. Indeed, immediately after his conversion, Augustine was ready to speak about the authority of the Church. Of course, in addition to what he learned about the Church from Ambrose, Simplicianus, and Ponticianus, Monica was his first educator about the Church and the Bible. Thus, the foundation for his ideas on the authority of the Church was put by Monica, a foundation on which he then built whenever he had the chance.

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21 Augustine, Confessions 9.9.22, 170.
22 Augustine, The Usefulness of Belief 9.21, in Augustine: Earlier Writings, 308; Of True Religion 6.9-10; 3.5; 7.13, in Augustine: Earlier Writings, 228-232; Confessions 7.7.11, 119; 6.11.19, 105; see also F. Van Fleteren, “Utilitate credendi, De, in AE, 861-62.
23 For the powerful and authoritative influence Monica had in Augustine’s life regarding her teaching about Christianity and a godly life, see also Confessions 1.11.17, 13; 1.11.18, 14; 1.19.17-18; 2.3.7, 27; 3.11.19, 49-50; 3.12.21, 50-51; about a powerful resemblance between the mature Augustine and
Later in his life, during the Catholic-Donatist controversy, Augustine, by arguing from the obvious unity of the Church in the Empire, scriptural passages and Christian tradition, asserted that the Church has authority to realize Christian unity by using the coercive power of the State now Christian and supporting the Church’s cause. Thus, the proper authority has a right to bring to obedience those who are disobedient, and Augustine argued this constantly and often; see also the first and the second page of the Introduction of this dissertation, where I defined what authority means in this work.

As a young child, Augustine tells us in his *Confessions*, he realized how important a role authority plays in the process of education. His mother believed that a good education was not a hindrance for a follower of Christ, but quite a considerable help. However, as a child, Augustine did not realize the importance of education simply because he “did not understand for what such knowledge is useful.” Whenever he was lazy in learning, he was seriously punished by his school teachers. Surprising to him was the fact that his parents—and all adults—who did not want anything harmful to happen to him, laughed at him and approved painful methods of disciplining and promoting learning. Thus, he and his colleagues were compelled to learn what they did not want or like through the disciplinary methods of authorities like parents and teachers. But these punishments that enforced learning, which he considered at that time to be bad, turned out to be good because for the first time he started to pray to God, that He would not allow his teacher to beat him anymore. God did not hear this prayer, “which was so as ‘not to give me to foolishness,’ (Ps. 21; 3).” In the *Confessions* Augustine expresses the voice of the conscience which he developed based on the authoritative teaching of his parents and teachers: “Lord my God, I sinned by not doing as I was told by my parents and teachers. For later I was able to make good use of

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25 Augustine, *Confessions* 2.3.8, 28.
letters, whatever might be the intention of my adult guardians in wanting me to learn them.”

Indeed, Augustine realized that the compulsory methods were not in themselves good and did not have as their goal finding and obeying God. However, as God is the “orderer and creator of all things in nature,” Augustine knew that He worked His way through the harsh methods through which he was forced to learn and that God turned them to Augustine’s advantage:

I had no love for reading books and hated being forced to study them. Yet pressure was put on me and was good for me. It was not of my own inclination that I did well, for I learned nothing unless compelled. No one is doing right if he is acting against his will, even when what he is doing is good. Those who put compulsion on me were not doing right either; the good was done to me by you, God. They gave no consideration to the use that I might make of the things they forced me to learn. The objective they had in view was merely to satisfy the appetite for wealth and glory….But you, by whom ‘the hairs of our head are numbered’ (Matt. 10: 30), used the error of all who pressed me to learn to turn out to my advantage. And my reluctance to learn you used for a punishment which I well deserved: so tiny a child, so great a sinner. So by making use of those who were failing to do anything morally right you did good to me, and from me in my sin you exacted a just retribution. For you have imposed order, and so it is that the punishment of every disordered mind is its own disorder.

Although Augustine believed here that his teachers did not apply discipline for the right reason, since their objective was their glory and wealth, God used their error to Augustine’s advantage. However, in the Catholic-Donatist controversy, Augustine considered that the Christian emperors, who used the force to bring the Donatists into the Church, acted according to God’s will. Since Augustine’s teachers did not have as their objective God and His Church, their objective could not be directed in the right way.

His experience of learning Latin taught Augustine that curiosity has greater power to stimulate learning than coercion has. Yet, since curiosity may be not directed toward good ends, “the free-ranging flux of curiosity is channeled by discipline under your laws, God. By your laws

28 Augustine, Confessions 1.10.16, 12.
29 Ibid.
30 Augustine, Confessions 1.12.19, 14-15. Although Augustine’s teachers, in forcing him to learn, were not motivated by the sake of their students and learning, Augustine believed that what is commonly and publicly held as good comes from God.
we are disciplined, from the canes of schoolmasters to the ordeals of martyrs.”

Therefore, Augustine prays to God that his soul may not collapse under His discipline. While his mother, through her obedience to the Church and the traditional way of life, taught him indirectly that obeying authority means obeying what is commonly considered as good, Augustine’s teachers reinforced her teaching since he realized that coercive discipline and correction have as their result under God’s providence the final good of the corrected person. Indeed, as we will see later in his dealing with the Donatists, Augustine considered that right discipline and correction has the goal of obedience to God and His Church.

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B. **Augustine in Search of Religious Truth**

At the beginning of his *Confessions*, Augustine wrote: “you [God] have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”¹ This chapter is about Augustine’s search for religious truth, about his disenchantment with a position or view which he had made his own but which he later abandoned, only to move to another one until he finally converted to Christianity. Although Augustine was always on the move, continuously questioning himself, and driven by intellectual curiosity, a constant of Augustine’s thought in the *Confessions* was the influence on him of Monica’s attitude generally and of her teaching about Christ and His Church especially.² Indeed, the main reason the religious systems he experienced did not please him was that they did not have the name of Christ, about whom he had certainly heard first from Monica. Finally, after events and experiences that did not please him religiously and intellectually but taught him that the wide-spread opinions of reliable people—such as his friends and many others who accepted Christ and His Church with confidence—about the Church were true, Augustine realized that he had to let his armor be the Lord Jesus Christ and become a Christian. Built on what he learned from Monica about the Church and its authority, the experiences recounted in this chapter reconfirmed what he learned from her. In fact, in Milan Augustine came to the conclusion that the Church is indeed the place where people could find God and the meaning of life, since people of all levels of society embraced the Church and its views on God and life’s meaning. Augustine, too, wanted to be part of the Church that enjoyed the recognition of the whole world.

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¹ Augustine, *Confessions* 1.1.1, 3.
1. From His Early Conversions to Milan

After a three-year stay for education in Madaura (366-69) and a year home, Augustine moved in 370 to Carthage for further studies, where he took a mistress. Apromaximatively two years after this union—which continued until 385 when Monica arrived in Milan, where Augustine had been appointed official Orator—when he was 18 years old, a very important and profound event took place in his life: his first religious conversion. The study of rhetoric was of major importance for an educated man so Augustine read one of the finest books of Cicero, *Hortensius.* Certainly, his interest in rhetoric is the reason why he read an exhortation to philosophy. This book was an exhortation to philosophy, that is, to “love of wisdom,” and it caused his first serious conversion: “The book changed my feelings. It altered my prayers, Lord, to be toward you yourself. It gave me different values and priorities. Suddenly every vain hope became empty to me, and I longed for the immortality of wisdom with an incredible ardor in my heart. I began to rise up to return to you.”

The way toward wisdom, as it was presented by Cicero, pleasantly impressed Augustine. The truth could be found not only through the one way described by his mother or the Church’s authorities, that is, the bishops, who thought that their authority stemmed directly from the Scriptures. Instead, the way Cicero described toward truth was more flexible and open, not rigidly marked: One was “not to study one particular sect but to love and seek and pursue and

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hold fast and strongly embrace wisdom itself, wherever found.’”7 By living the life of philosophy, that is, in pursuing wisdom and being less involved in the faults and errors of man, the human soul would have an easy “ascent and return to its heavenly country.”8 Indeed, Cicero’s exhortation to love of wisdom and to a life as much as possible free of errors was “not vain philosophy; it illuminated what clearheaded Christianity truly affirmed.”9 In addition to his enthusiasm for the content or substance he found in Cicero’s Hortensius, which suddenly gave him different values and priorities, Augustine thought it was an amazingly erudite and well-written book.10

However, Augustine was not entirely pleased by Cicero’s Hortensius. He states: “One thing alone put a brake on my intense enthusiasm—that the name of Christ was not contained in the book. This name, by your mercy Lord (Ps. 24; 7.), this name of my savior your son, my infant heart had piously drunk with my mother’s milk, and at a deep level I retained the memory. Any book which lacked this name, however well written or polished or true, could not entirely grip me.”11

Therefore, Augustine turned his attention to the Holy Scriptures and discovered what they were like. He found them both easy and characterized by mountainous difficulty.12 He also found that the name of Christ, “Wisdom himself, was introduced by long, and contradictory, genealogies.”13 In addition, Augustine found the Bible to be an unpolished book from a literary point of view, in comparison with the writing of classical authors. He found most disturbing the immorality and the cruelty that some Old Testament stories presented; thus he asked himself, “Can those be considered righteous who had several wives at the same time and killed people and

7 Augustine, Confessions 3.4.8, 39.
10 Augustine, Confessions 3.4.7. 39.
11 Augustine, Confessions 3.4.8, 39-40.
12 Augustine, Confessions 3.5.9, 40.
13 Peter Brown, Augustine of Hippo. A Biography, 31
offered animals in sacrifice?” Hence, another disappointment followed: “In my ignorance I was disturbed by these questions, and while travelling away from the truth I thought I was going towards it.”

Although Augustine found Christ in the Scriptures, a fact which pleased him, he was still not content with the Bible’s morality, because as he was reading the Bible literally, he was wandering away from God and ready to immerse himself in a different religious experience.

In about 372-373 Augustine decided to convert to a form of Christianity called Manicheism. The Manichean system was based on the teaching of Mani about Christ. Mani, who was born in Babylonia on April 14, 216, called himself an apostle of Jesus Christ, and his followers thought of themselves as being the only true Christians, considering Catholics to be only semi-Christians. They were proud men, Augustine said in his Confessions: “In their mouths were the devil’s trap and a birdlime compounded of a mixture of the syllables of your [God’s] name, and that of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that of the Paraclete, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. These names were never absent from their lips.”

However wrong Augustine considered the Manicheans when he wrote his *Confessions*, at the age of eighteen or nineteen, he believed that they had Christ and responded to the problem of evil in a manner he considered reasonable and favorable to himself. He deceived himself because he was looking to understand the Scripture and God through the carnal mind: “In seeking for you, I followed not the intelligence of the mind…but the mind of the flesh….For me ‘to see’ meant a physical act of looking with the eyes and of forming an image in the mind….Moreover, I was wholly ignorant of what it is in ourselves which gives us being, and how scripture is correct in

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14 Augustine, *Confessions* 3.7.12, 43.
15 Augustine, *Confessions* 3.6.11, 42-43.
17 Augustine, *Answer to Faustus, a Manichean* 1.2-3, in WSA 1/20, 69-70.
18 Augustine, *Confessions* 3.6.10, 40.
saying that we are ‘in God’s image’ (Gen. 1:27).”  

Because Augustine did not learn at this time to interpret the Scripture, he was not able to grasp it according to the way he learned later from Ambrose.

After three years in Carthage, Augustine, now a Manichean for about a year, returned to Thagaste to teach rhetoric. His mother was so ashamed of his decision to become a Manichean that she refused to allow him to stay with her. However, Augustine recalls how, during this time, Monica struggled to refute his errors and bring him to the Catholic Church. She desperately sought help from the Church’s servants and prophets whom she asked to refute Augustine’s errors. Nevertheless, Augustine confesses that God let him go on turning over and over again in that darkness in which he found himself.

During this period Augustine was disturbed by the death of a dear friend who had been baptized by his family during a serious illness while he was unconscious. After baptism, he had recovered for a while and Augustine had had the opportunity to speak with him. At that time Augustine believed baptism was of no importance, and he believed that since his friend had been unconscious, it would not have had any effect. He therefore dared to speak rudely about it with his friend. Augustine was surprised to learn how seriously his friend took his baptism, which he knew about only from those who had administered and witnessed it. Augustine was warned by his friend, who had started to see him as an enemy, to stop talking discourteously about the sacrament if he wanted his friendship. When that friend later died, Augustine was gravely affected by the death and believed that he had become a vast problem to himself. Death was a sinister thought, and his uncertainty as to where truth could be found contrasted drastically with the assurance and confidence his friend had about the saving power of Christian baptism.

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19 Augustine, *Confessions* 3.6.11-7.12, 42-44.
21 Augustine, *Confessions* 3.10.18, 48.
22 Augustine, *Confessions* 3.11.20, 50.
23 Augustine, *Confessions* 4.4.8, 57.
24 Augustine, *Confessions* 4.4.9, 57.
this period of profound crisis, he asked: “Where should I go to escape from myself? Where is there where I cannot pursue myself? ... And so from the town of Thagaste I [he] came to Carthage.”

There, although he felt himself a completely educated man, his view on Manicheism was challenged by Vindicianus, an able and prestigious doctor, who had discovered the Manicheans’ “astrology to be utterly bogus,” since their predictions were based on “the power apparent in lots, a power everywhere diffused in the nature of things.” For this reason, Augustine had to think more seriously about the Manichean belief that heavenly bodies play a role in man’s salvation. In addition, Faustus of Milevis, the great leader of the Manicheans, speaking about his religious system in Carthage, deeply disappointed Augustine, who was not allowed to ask questions publicly and discovered that Faustus’ “knowledge was of a conventional kind.” Thus, Augustine did not find the Christ he was seeking because he could not be found in the places Augustine was looking for Him. Indeed, Augustine mentioned the bitter difficulties of seeking God in religious systems in which He could not be found in order to emphasize the Church, whose authority is visible through the fact that it attracts numerous people to her and because it is a respectable place where people find God.

2. Decisive Years at Milan

In 384, after the experience with Faustus, Augustine went to Rome, where he felt he had a better chance of continuing his intellectual querying. Although the Manichean system had disappointed him, he still held on to it. Augustine, with the help of his Manichean contacts, was able to convince the prefect of Rome, Symmachus, to offer him the vacant chair of rhetoric at

25 Augustine, Confessions 4.7.12, 60
26 Augustine, Confessions 4.3.5, 55; 4.16.30, 70; 6.6.8, 117.
27 Augustine, Confessions 5.6.11.78.
28 Augustine, Confessions 6.6.9, 97; 6.11.19, 105; 7.7.11, 119.
Milan. In the fall of the same year that he went to Rome (384), he departed for the political capital of the Empire, “to Milan to Ambrose the bishop, known throughout the world as among the best of men.”

If, until his arrival in Milan, Augustine doubted Christianity because the Bible seemed to him unpolished and Christ introduced by it through long genealogies, the experiences he had in Milan convinced him that Christianity is the true religion and the Church the only place of salvation; therefore, he decided to become a Christian. Indeed, as Peter Brown asserts, the idea of the Church that Augustine maintained as a priest and bishop was the “Catholic Church as it appeared to him in Milan and Rome. It was not the old church of Cyprian, it was the new, expanding church of Ambrose, rising above the world, rising above the Roman….[I]t was a confident, international body, established in the respect of Christian Emperors, sought out by noblemen and intellectuals capable of bringing the masses of the known civilized world [to its truth]….a church set, no longer to defy society, but to master it.”

Ambrose received him with kindliness worthy of a bishop and Augustine liked him, so Augustine started to attend Church because of the attention given to him by the famous and powerful bishop, not because he considered him a teacher of truth. Augustine did not look for religious instruction from Ambrose, but Augustine was impressed by the bishop’s rhetorical technique when he delivered sermons, which were carefully modeled on Cicero and influenced by the contemporary exponents of Plato, that is, by the Neoplatonists. Gradually, Augustine noticed the allegorical manner in which Ambrose interpreted Scripture, and this changed his outlook on the Bible. The heroes of the Old Testament books were seen in a different perspective. Augustine learned that Scripture must be read through a divine, spiritual and inspiring agency working in the human mind, the only true way according to which the words achieve real significance. Thus, the words of the Bible assumed a spiritualized sense transformed in conformity with the Spirit which gives life (1 Cor. 3:16). He came to understand “the most

29 Augustine, Confessions 5.13.23, 87.
30 Peter Brown, Augustine of Hippo: A Biography, 221.
31 Ibid., 61.
important and virtually the only cause” of his “inevitable error” as a Manichean, namely the mistaken belief that God has a material form, “an immense size,” or human form as was understood by the Manicheans from Genesis 1:26-27.\(^{32}\) Instead, Augustine realized now that God is a spiritual substance.\(^{33}\) Regardless of the role Ambrose had in introducing Augustine to Neoplatonism, Ambrose borrowed freely from Plato, Cicero, Philo, and Plotinus, although he invariably preferred the authority of the Scripture.\(^ {34}\) The impact Ambrose had on Augustine was huge. Augustine learned that since “‘the letter kills, the spirit gives life,’” the Bible must not always be read literally but with a spiritual eye; thus, its violent stories and its supposed depiction of God as evil changed for Augustine in accord with Ambrose’s interpretation.\(^ {35}\)

Despite significant progress, Augustine said that he could not understand or imagine at all what sort of spiritual substance God could be.\(^ {36}\) In addition, he was still reticent to become a Christian and believed that Catholic faith was not something he had to accept, even though the Church had “educated people who asserted its claims and refuted objections with abundant argument and without absurdity,” which he apparently realized during this time.\(^ {37}\) However, while Augustine looked for a religious system able to answer questions of life rationally and intelligently, he believed that even if the Catholics were not defeated in their disputes with pagans, heretics and schismatics, they were also not clearly victorious.\(^ {38}\) He had no hope that the truth could be found in the Church.\(^ {39}\)

Desiring to find something more intellectually reliable, Augustine considered the philosophy of skepticism that he had found through the information offered by Cicero’s


\(^{33}\) Augustine, *Confessions* 6.3.4, 93.


\(^{35}\) Augustine, *Confessions* 6.4.6, 94.

\(^{36}\) Augustine, *Confessions* 6.3.4, 93.


\(^{38}\) Augustine, *Confessions* 5.14.24, 89.

\(^{39}\) Augustine, *Confessions* 5.10.19, 85.
Augustine stated that he came to a period of time when he doubted everything, and he decided that he must leave the Manichees. But soon, he realized that the truth cannot ever totally elude people and that it should be grasped in some form, since men act according to certain rules that guide people and are good. He also realized that the truth may be found not through pure intellectual inquiry but “would have to be accepted from some divine authority. It remained to inquire what that authority might be.” He abandoned the skeptics because he was looking for something certain that could guarantee him a life according to the truth and, most importantly, because the skeptics “were without Christ’s saving name.” Thus, as the most relevant truth resonating invariably in his mind was the truth that his mother taught him about Christ’s Church, Augustine decided to be a “catechumen in the Catholic Church, which the precedent of my parents recommended me, until some clear light should come by which I could direct my course.”

What was the best decision he could have taken at this time? His contact with Ambrose, who had been able through the authority of his religious position to bend the supreme political authority of the Emperor Theodosius, was of a huge importance. Ambrose met two needs Augustine had at this time. He was a Christian of high “prestige among the powerful,” speaking with an intellectual eloquence and erudition worthy of respect, and he was able to make the stories of the Old Testament seem reasonable to Augustine. Augustine said that he even opened his heart to the eloquence Ambrose used in his sermons: “There also entered no less the truth which he affirmed, though only gradually.”

41 Augustine, Confessions 5.14.25, 89.
42 Augustine, The Usefulness of Belief 8.20, in Augustine: Earlier Writings, 307.
43 Augustine, Confessions 5.14.25, 89.
44 Ibid.
After attending the church where Ambrose preached, Augustine realized that pure reasoning could not grasp the truth without the aid of some authority; therefore, it needed “the authority of the sacred writings.” But since these sacred writings are in the Church’s possession, it followed, for Augustine, that the Church also has authority, an authority that should be followed. The eminent authority of the Bible supported the authority of the Church. The Bible’s authority was supported by the fact that the Scripture was diffused through all lands and open to everyone to read, both the simple and the highly cultivated. Augustine saw that man does not always act according to reason alone but accepts the beliefs of others. For example, belief, not reason, tells us that the parents we live with are truly our parents. So, “since we were too weak to discover the truth by pure reasoning,” Augustine believed that he should trust what we are told by honorable predecessors: “I considered the innumerable things I believed which I had not seen, events which occurred when I was not present, such as many incidents in the history of the nations, many facts concerning places and cities which I had never seen, many things accepted on the word of friends, many from physicians, many from other people.” In fact, he explained, this is the way we have knowledge about the past—by believing that what we have heard are true and reliable facts. In the same way, we should believe what we heard and hear from the Church, which at that time was the most powerful and recognized religious authority in the Empire. Augustine therefore confessed: “From this time on….I now gave my preference to the Catholic faith.” Augustine confessed that he believed that God laughed at his worldly ambitions and through His mercy allowed him fewer occasions “to find sweet pleasure in what was not you.” However painful it had been for Augustine to accept this mercy through which God guided him toward the way of truth, he realized now that both authority and discipline are God’s instruments

47 Augustine, Confessions 6.5.8, 96.
49 Augustine, Confessions 6.5.7-8, 95-96.
50 Augustine, Confessions 6.5.7, 95.
51 Ibid.
52 Augustine, Confessions 6.6.9, 97.
to guide people to His Church. Augustine believed that God had used unpleasant events, unfulfilling achievements, as well as people and events that constantly reminded him about God’s way in order to bring him to the Church and to make him realize that our grasp of truth is based on authority and faith: faith in the authorities that speak and witness to the truth in a unified and concordant way.\textsuperscript{53}

In 386, in Milan, Augustine came in contact with Neoplatonism, in the form of books translated by Marius Victorinus. If Augustine was introduced to Platonism through Ambrose’s sermons, this more intimate relation with “some books of the Platonists [Plotinus and Porphyry], translated from Greek into Latin” came later through a man “puffed with a monstrous pride,” perhaps the Christian Neoplatonist Manlius Theodorus.\textsuperscript{54} Although Augustine grasped from Ambrose that God is incorporeal, this fact was emphasized anew in the discussions he had with Theodorus: “For I marked, and that frequently, in the sermons of our Bishop [Ambrose], and sometimes also in your words [the Bible] that when we think of God nothing absolutely must enter there that gives corporeal shape; so also of the soul, for the soul is the one thing in this world most like to God.”\textsuperscript{55} However attractive these books were, Augustine could not be content with them because, while he read in them about God and how the Word was born out of nothing worldly or human, but of God, he did not read there “that ‘the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us’ (John 1: 13-14).”\textsuperscript{56} Neoplatonic philosophy lacked a theology of history, which was possible only through the incarnation of the historical Christ.\textsuperscript{57}

Although Augustine did not think it necessary to mention in the \textit{Confessions} the authors of the Platonist books or the precise content of these works, he certainly wanted to show that

\textsuperscript{53} Augustine, \textit{On True Religion} 3.4-5, in Augustine: Earlier Writings, 227-29; 7.12, 232.
\textsuperscript{54} Augustine, \textit{Confessions} 7.9.13, 121, parentheses are mine; see also the notes 13 and 14 on page 121; Michele Renee Salzman, \textit{The Making of a Christian Aristocracy: Social and Religious Change in the Western Roman Empire} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002),104; E. TeSelle, \textit{Augustine the Theologian}, 33-34.
\textsuperscript{55} Augustine, \textit{De Beata Vita} 1.4, 11.
\textsuperscript{56} Augustine, \textit{Confessions} 7.9.14, 121.
there he had found material contained also in the Scripture, that they helped him to think about God and the soul in the holy books as spiritual realities and helped him to progress toward a better understanding of God. Augustine realized also that men of high intellectual standing and position, as, for example, Theodorus, were able to embrace Christianity and to make logical sense of it. Theodorus was an educated man, “an enthusiastic student of the work of Plotinus,” and held illustrious political positions. 58 Thus, we might have an idea why Augustine called Theodorus a man of “monstrous pride”; perhaps Augustine thought this pride was rooted in the knowledge Theodorus acquired and that he tried to comprehend God more in Platonist than in Scriptural terms, that he gave Christ, the Word, equal to God who humbled himself to take on human flesh, a less important role than that given him by the Scriptures. Regardless of the details about Augustine’s involvement with the Platonists at Milan, Augustine “must be understood within that ‘continuous Neoplatonic tradition’; not simply as using Plotinus or Porphyry, but as effecting a profound conversion of Platonic theology.” 59 More importantly, Augustine was so much influenced by these wise and prestigious Neoplatonist Christian philosophers that his conversion story, as it is told in the Confessions, may be put into a perspective that sees it “as one event among many in the intellectual life of a brilliant capital.” 60 Indeed, his acquaintance with the Neoplatonism at Milan started a process in which he realized that Christianity was a viable philosophy embraced by honorable people.

He realized once more that continuous seeking and reasoning in order to find truth is not the proper solution. Instead, people should believe in the authorities that witness most eloquently to the truth, as well as in the truth that is most unanimously accepted by people. The Church was the religious institution recognized widely in the Roman Empire as best maintaining the truth about God and man’s salvation, and at this time Augustine started to feel the same about it:

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59 R. Crouse, “Paucis Mutatis Verbis: St Augustine’s Platonism,” in Augustine and His Critics, 43.
60 P. Brown, Augustine of Hippo: A Biography, 82.
It is not for nothing, not empty of significance, that the high authority of the Christian faith is diffused throughout the world. The deity would not have done all that for us, in quality and quantity, if with the bodily death the soul’s life were also destroyed. Why then do we hesitate to abandon secular hopes and to dedicate ourselves wholly to God and the happy life?\(^6\)

Indeed, several examples—which we will discuss next—of honorable people who converted to Christianity suddenly or without much time for deliberation impacted Augustine decisively on his way toward conversion and his view of Church authority. And as the Church was the Church of the Empire and penetrated every sector of life and all strata of society, its authority was widely spread and recognized at the time of Confessions; therefore, the Church had to be respected and followed, according to Augustine.\(^6\)

3. Augustine’s Conversion to Christianity and Return to Thagaste

After having tried to find the truth in a way which could satisfy his restless personality, and especially after the encounters and clarifications he made at Milan, Augustine felt that the word of God was firmly implanted in his heart. Certain about eternal life, and not needing more assurance about God, Augustine was intellectually on a sure road toward God. However, despite these certainties, Augustine was still fragile morally. He mentioned that he was definitely and irreversibly attracted to God’s way but that he also needed to be more stable in God and felt that he could not yet walk on God’s “narrow paths.”\(^6\) At this point, Augustine was powerfully impacted by the conversions of illustrious and important men, who realized that the Church is the place where one can find God and thus has authority that should be followed.

Inspired, as he later wrote, by God, Augustine visited Simplicianus to get counsel and help from him. Simplicianus was a man who radiated grace and who from his childhood lived in

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\(^{61}\) Augustine, Confessions 6.11.19, 105.
\(^{63}\) Augustine, Confessions 8.1.1, 133.
complete dedication to a Christian way of life. In addition, as Simplicianus was a man with vast experience, Augustine hoped that by telling him about his troubles he would get appropriate advice as to his disturbed condition. Simplicianus was the spiritual father of Ambrose, whom he had baptized at Milan.  

With the purpose of inculcating in Augustine the humility of Christ, Simplicianus proceeded to tell Augustine how he had helped Marius Victorinus, perhaps the most educated Platonist at the time, to convert to Christianity. Simplicianus realized that Augustine admired the erudition and translations of Victorinus and believed that, because of the similarities between Augustine’s and Victorinus’ literary careers, Augustine would identify with Victorinus’ conversion story and “yearn to repeat Victorinus’ choice.” The story of Victorinus’ conversion certainly did make a powerful impact on Augustine. In addition to observing the example of conversion of a learned man such as Victorinus, he learned that to become a Christian one must become a member of the Church, confess the faith publicly, and renounce earthly advantages and positions—characteristics or points which Augustine embraced in his own teaching later on. Despite Augustine’s difficulty in coming to a more positive view of Christianity, he realized more and more that, if men of high reputation embraced Christianity, it must be true and its authority should not be doubted.

Another significant episode that greatly influenced Augustine’s way to conversion and his view of Church authority is the discussion he had with Ponticianus. Indeed, Augustine said that through this discussion and the subsequent episode in the garden, where a decisive experience took place and led him to conversion, “you [God] delivered me from the chain of

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68 Augustine, *Confessions* 8.5.10, 139-40; 8.2.4, 135-36.
sexual desire.” Thus, whereas Augustine himself mentioned that nothing stood in his way to Christ and His Church except his inability to restrain himself from the desires of the flesh, the events in Milan were episodes that liberated him of the last and most serious bond of sin and marked his conversion.

Ponticianus, a Christian himself, told him the story of a friend who had converted to Christianity after reading from Athanasius’ biography of Saint Anthony of Egypt. As in the story of Victorinus’ conversion, Augustine learned from Ponticianus’ story that earthly achievements are futile, that God should be honored and trusted more than earthly positions, that conversion should not be postponed indefinitely and occur after long deliberations, and that the best way of life is one dedicated entirely to God. Marius Victorinus had become a Christian by reading the Bible, and Ponticianus’ friend—who was followed in his decision of conversion by his comrade—had converted upon hearing how Anthony’s reading of the Bible had led to his conversion. Victorinus had received help from Simplicianus, who had told him that he could not be a Christian until he became a member of the Church. However, except for Victorinus’ question for Simplicianus, the conversion of Victorinus and Ponticianus’ friend occurred without moments of indecision and were immediately followed by total dedication: this reality made Augustine detest himself; he was incapable of acting decisively. Now, after hearing the examples of conversion without much time for deliberations and postponement, his conscience challenged him to make the final step toward God and His Church.

After Ponticianus had left him, Augustine was deeply disturbed by his own vileness and Augustine went out into the garden, where he converted to God in the way Ponticianus’ friends had turned to God: by applying to his own person a single passage of the Bible. After reading Romans 13: 13-14, Augustine rejected his way of life and embraced a new one. Although

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69 Augustine, *Confessions* 8.6.13, 141; parenthesis is mine.
70 Augustine, *Confessions* 8.6.15, 143-44.
71 Augustine, *Confessions* 8.7.17-18, 145.
Augustine had before found himself invariably caught between his spiritual and carnal will, on this occasion his ambivalent will was reduced to silence by God who converted him\textsuperscript{73}. “At once…it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled.”\textsuperscript{74}

These conversion stories implicitly tell us that Augustine convinced himself that conversion meant not a full understanding of God, but a full trust that the Church is the authoritative place where God and sound doctrine are found.\textsuperscript{75} Since reputed and intelligent people did not hesitate to become Christians and members of the Church, its authority could not be denied by the limited power of the mind, or avoided because of the limited power of the will.\textsuperscript{76} Multitudes became Christians because God allowed His Church to spread extensively for their salvation; naturally, their example should be followed.\textsuperscript{77} As people of the same social or intellectual strata influenced one another, Augustine received an immense help from his friends who told him about turning to Christianity based on faith and believing that the Church is the authoritative institution where the true faith is professed.\textsuperscript{78} Augustine mentioned that he began to believe in the authority of the sacred Scriptures were spread throughout all lands and were open to everyone to read.\textsuperscript{79} Indeed, while his friends strengthened his conviction regarding the authority and respectability of the Church, Augustine was finally converted to Christianity by the

\textsuperscript{73} Augustine, \textit{Confessions} 8.10.22, 148; 8.12.30, 153.
\textsuperscript{74} Augustine, \textit{Confessions} 8.12.29, 153; see also Nicholas Wolterstorff, “God’s Speaking and Augustine’s Conversion,” in \textit{Augustine’s Confessions: Critical Essays}, 164-65.
\textsuperscript{75} A suggestive story about the importance of the Church in conversion is in \textit{Confessions} 8.2.4, 135-36, where Simplicianus tells Victorinus that he is not Christian until he becomes a member of the Church; see also Augustine, \textit{Confessions} 6.5.8, 96; 6.11.19, 105; 7.19.25, 129.
\textsuperscript{76} Augustine, \textit{Confessions}, 6.5.8, 96; 8.5.10-11, 139-40. While Augustine tells us in the first passage that we are too weak to discover the truth by pure reasoning, he tells us in the second passage that his two wills, one carnal, the other spiritual, were in conflict with each other. Augustine asserts in \textit{Confessions} 8.8.19 that even “uneducated people,” who instead of deliberating about becoming Christians, trust God, “are rising up and capturing heaven (Matt.11:12) and we with our high culture, without any heart—see where we roll in the mud of flesh and blood. Is it because they are ahead of us that we are ashamed to follow?”
\textsuperscript{77} According to Augustine, \textit{Confessions} 6.11.19, 105, the high authority of the Church diffused throughout the world urged him—and Nebridius—to abandon secular hopes and dedicate themselves to God; see also Augustine, \textit{On True Religion} 3.4-5, in \textit{Augustine: Earlier Writings}, 227-29.
\textsuperscript{79} Augustine, \textit{Confessions} 6.5.8, 96.
Bible, that is, by reading it and by applying a passage of it to his life, as others he knew of had done. As an adolescent Augustine did not find God because his will was not focused on the voice of God in the Scripture. However, because he was directed toward the Scripture by people who found God through the Scripture, God also revealed Himself to him through his word. Thus, the role the Church played in Augustine’s conversion because of its authority in matters of faith, a comparable role was played by the authority of the Scripture, which is the Church’s possession and the authoritative word of God. As we will see later, for Augustine the Church and the Bible have a reciprocal authority.

The garden episode, in which his final hesitations were defeated through the reading of Romans 13:13-14, was the crown of a long experience of trying to find God. Augustine’s conversion was a long process. Indeed, as L. J. Daly asserts, “Augustine’s conversion in not a product but a process, a series of events constituting a dialectic encounter over time between self and society that was rooted in his past and reached into his future.”

This series of events comprise the process: Augustine’s childhood and Monica’s influence, Ambrose’s sermons and his authoritative position; the Christian Platonism of Manlius Theodorus; Marius Victorinus’ translations and conversion; the reading of Paul’s epistles and of the stories of holy monks, and the conversion of Ponticianus’ friends. During this long process, Augustine learned that one may arrive at knowledge by first believing in a truth and authority that are widely accepted: Could God allow the Church to spread so extensively if it were not God’s?

After the garden experience, because of his strenuous teaching load and some symptoms of illness, especially in his lungs, Augustine believed that he had two options, either to renounce his job or to take some rest while maintaining his post. A solution came when Verecundus,

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81 John Matthews, Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court, 219-220. Matthews does not mention Hortensius’ role in Augustine’s conversion to Christianity because the goal of his book is the intricacies of religion and politics at the imperial court in Milan.
82 Augustine, Confessions 9.2.4, 157.
himself a teacher, invited Augustine to his villa at Cassiciacum for a short retreat.\footnote{Angelo Di Berardino, “Cassiciacum,” in \textit{AE}, 135.} During his stay here, because of his health problems, and because he believed that conversion meant a total surrender to a life committed to the service of God, Augustine decided resign from his post as public orator in order to devote his life to serving God.\footnote{José Oroz Reta, “Conversion,” in \textit{AE}, 239-242} At the same time, Augustine wrote to Ambrose to inform him of his past errors and present intention of baptism, as well as to ask advice regarding what reading he should pursue before his baptism; the book of Isaiah, which he had recommended, was incomprehensible to Augustine.\footnote{Augustine, \textit{Confessions} 9.5.13, 163.} The stay at Cassiciacum prepared him for baptism, which he received in spring of 378. Baptism sealed in Augustine the process of conversion and also freed him of the guilt of the “past sins, which had not yet been forgiven through…baptism.”\footnote{Augustine, \textit{Confessions} 9.5.12, 163; John Rist, \textit{Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized}, 4; we will refer to the period between his conversion and his ordination as a priest in the following chapters. For a detailed treatment of his stay at Cassiciacum and the years until he became a priest, see David C. Alexander, \textit{Augustine’s Early Theology of the Church}, 29-319.}

Marked by the events of his past, which he never discarded, Augustine, at the time when he wrote the \textit{Confessions}, was convinced that listening and obeying parental and legal authorities is the first step toward receiving knowledge and right guidance in life, that believing in God and in the authorities that witness to Him is the first step toward understanding God and Christianity, and that in order to be Christian one must become a member of the Church.\footnote{Robert Markus, \textit{Conversion and Disenchantment in Augustine’s Spiritual Career}, 3.} The Scripture, the word of God and the pillar that, through its prophecies, supports the Church, played an important role in Augustine’s conversion. The Scriptures and the Church were the main authorities for Augustine. Scripture was also Augustine’s main source in his defense of the Church against the Donatists. Therefore, Augustine’s view on the relation between the Church and Scripture is the subject of next chapter.
III. RECIPROCAL AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE AND THE CHURCH

Since Augustine customarily used Scripture in order to defend the unity of the Church against the Donatists’ separatism, this chapter is about the relation between the Church and Scripture. I hope to show that Augustine believed in the reciprocal authority of Scripture and the Church. Since Augustine constantly used Scripture to defend the Church, I consider it important to introduce here Augustine’s view of the relation between Scripture and the Church. While, according to Augustine, Scripture supported his view of the Church, the Scriptures are best used and interpreted in the Church.

Augustine believes that for Christians, the ultimate authority is God revealed in Jesus Christ and in the Scriptures and interpreted by the community of his disciples, that is, by Christians in the Church. Scripture is tied to the authority of the Church because the Church clarifies Scripture’s confusing passages and, moreover, maintains the orthodox teaching drawn from Scripture in a united Church. “The Scriptures are prior by nature but the Church is prior in time,” since Augustine considered all the faithful before Christ belonging to the same Church of which he was a member.¹ According to Augustine, while Scripture speaks “more clearly about the Church than about Christ,”² “the excellence of the canonical authority of the Old and New Testaments…has been confirmed from the times of the apostles through the successions of bishops and through the spread of the churches.”³ The age of the Church, the apostolic authority and tradition, and the possession of the Scriptures make it the best source as to what is important and necessary in matters of faith and salvation. Therefore, in the light of such background and authority, the Church can at times convey an inestimable respectability to the world. Most importantly, the fact that the Church is one and spread throughout the world, flooded with people

³ Augustine, Answer to Faustus, a Manichean 11.5, in WSA 1/20, 118-19.
who become its members, is a sign which confirms that it is the true Church and, therefore, has authority in matters of faith.4

When the Bible was preached and explained by the Fathers, the difficult and obscure texts received different interpretations.5 Thus, since Scripture was a diversely interpreted document, concern arose about authoritative interpretation of the Bible so that the Church could maintain its theological unity.6 In addition to the Rule of Faith, which summarized the core of Christian truth and was, therefore, the key to interpreting Scripture, the allegorical method was a way of escaping from the tyranny of the letter and an instrument of progress in interpreting difficult passages of Scripture.7 Indeed, this method helped in this regard because it gave meaning to unclear or symbolic words and passages, but it was also a method not without risks as it could twist texts in a way that almost rewrote the Bible and ignored the historical character of the letter.8

Augustine dealt with the same issues when he approached Scripture. Augustine, after a period of searching for the truth, came to believe that the right interpretation of Scripture, which was in the service of the Church, can take place only in the Church. He also believed that reading Scripture should be followed by a sincere submission to the teaching of the Church. Augustine

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4 Augustine, The Advantage of Believing 17.35, in WSA 1/8, 146-47. Since Scripture is the authoritative word of God and since the unity and the universal spread of the Church is claimed in Scripture, it is natural that the Church that is united and spread throughout the world is the true Church and, therefore, has authority in matters of faith. See Augustine, Sermon 374.10, in WSA 3/11, 397-98 for the authority of Scripture and Sermon 358.2-3, in WSA 3/10, 190-92 for evidence from Scripture on the universality of the Church.


8 E.R. Dodds, Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety, 130.
was disappointed when, after reading Cicero’s *Hortensius*, he did not find Christ in its pages. But when, as a seeker of the truth, he turned to Scripture, where he found Christ, he found he had a deep distaste for the Bible’s inconsistencies and dubious morality. He also found the Bible “a text lowly to the beginner” but also open to everyone to read; however, on further reading, it was veiled in mystery and, indeed, of a mountainous difficulty. This difficulty was finally overcome when, after meeting Ambrose, who in his sermons often referred to Paul’s 2 Corinthians 3:6, he believed that Ambrose carefully stated the principle of exegesis: “The letter kills, the spirit gives life.” It was then that Augustine, unable to find the truth by pure reason, turned to the authority of the sacred writings: “I now began to believe that you would never have conferred such pre-eminent authority on the scripture, now diffused through all lands, unless you had willed that it would be a means of coming to faith in you and a means of seeking to know you.” He later discovered Paul’s books, where every truth was inseparable from God’s grace, given through Jesus Christ. Indeed, he recognized that none of the books he read until then was like Paul’s, since in them he found tears of conversion, a troubled spirit, a contrite and humbled heart.

Before Augustine’s baptism, Ambrose had recommended that he read the Bible. He began to read more confidently from Scripture after his conversation with Simplicianus, who told him that Victorinus read Scripture; indeed, Augustine tells us that, after Simplicianus’ insistence on the importance of becoming a member of the Church and after reading Scripture, Victorinus had decided to confess Christ publicly. Indeed, Scripture played a decisive role in the lives of the

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9 Augustine, *Confessions* 3.7.12, 43.
10 Augustine, *Confessions* 3.5.9, 40; 6.5.8, 96.
12 Augustine, *Confessions* 6.5.8, 96.
14 Augustine, *Confessions* 9.5.13, 163.
Milanese people who converted to Christianity, and in Augustine’s conversion, too.\textsuperscript{16} However, Simplicianus’ story of Victorinus’ conversion implied that reading of Scripture must be followed by a humble submission to the authority of the Church: Victorinus was not a full Christian until he humbly became a member of the Church.\textsuperscript{17}

After he was ordained a priest, Augustine asked Valerius to allow him to devote time to a study of the Bible. Since his role as a priest and bishop implied teaching the members of his church and defending the Church before schismatics, heretics, and pagans, Scripture assumed a central role in Augustine’s life and thought.\textsuperscript{18}

Soon after conversion, in his book \textit{On Free Will}, Augustine asserted that Scripture excels all other books because it has divine authority.\textsuperscript{19} And in a famous discussion with Jerome, Augustine put Scripture on the highest pedestal as an authority. He tells Jerome, who believed that Paul did not tell the truth in Galatians 2:14 about the quarrel between him and Peter, that “certain of and secure in its truth, I shall read the Holy Scripture, which has been placed at the highest and heavenly peak of authority.”\textsuperscript{20} He was concerned that, if Scripture lies, God’s character is at stake, since a lying Scripture means a lying God, which is an impossibility. Indeed, if God is the author of this book, then, Augustine thought, everything in it must be worthy of God.\textsuperscript{21}

In addition, after a life searching for truth, he believed that he had found it in Scripture, which is the Word of God, about the Word of God, and about what He has done for the salvation

\textsuperscript{17} Augustine, \textit{Confessions} 8.2.3-4, 134-36.
\textsuperscript{20} Augustine, Letter 82.2.5, in WSA 2/1, 317.
\textsuperscript{21} Van Der Meer, \textit{Augustine the Bishop} (London and New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), 443.
of the human race.\textsuperscript{22} Since Scripture is about God and about His Son Jesus Christ and since Jesus Christ is God and therefore wisdom and truth,\textsuperscript{23} Scripture cannot contain other than truth. Indeed, for Augustine, truth meant specifically the Son of God.\textsuperscript{24} Augustine asserted explicitly his conviction that the truth is Jesus Christ of the Bible: “For the Truth itself, speaking as Man to men, says to those who believe in him: “‘if ye abide in my word ye are truly my disciples, and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free’” (Jn 8:31-31).\textsuperscript{25} For Augustine, Christ was identified with the Church, which is the body of Christ and the main witness of Christ to the world.\textsuperscript{26} It is this fundamental consideration of the Church as the body of Christ with Christ as the head of the Church that gave rise to his Christological exegesis, asserts Carol Harrison.\textsuperscript{27} Since the Church is the body of Christ and the best witness of Christ to the world, it can be inferred that, for Augustine, the Church has an authority equal to that of Scripture, which witnesses to both Jesus Christ and His Church.

Augustine considers Scripture as the authoritative word of God. Since Augustine implicitly realized that the Christians could be easily misled regarding the faith, he warned the faithful in the Catholic Church not to let themselves be deceived with poisoned food or by false teaching and suggested that Christians are led to the truth by the faith and teaching maintained by the Church.\textsuperscript{28} Indeed, Augustine knew well that even Scripture contains unclear and obscure

\textsuperscript{22} Augustine, Sermon 346A.2, in WSA 3/10, 71-72; True Religion 7.13, in WSA 1/8, 38.


\textsuperscript{25} Augustine, De libero arbitrio 2.13.37, in BA, vol. 6, 242-43; On Free Will 2.13.37, in Augustine: Earlier Writings, 158; Roland Teske, “Libero arbitrio, De,” in AE, 694-95. While Augustine finished the first book of On Free Will on his way to Africa, he completed the second and the third book after his ordination as a priest, possibly between 395 and 396.

\textsuperscript{26} Augustine, Letter 55.3, in WSA 2/1, 217; Sermon 183.11, in WSA 3/5, 341.

\textsuperscript{27} Carol Harrison, Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity, 128.

passages and that these needed a correct interpretation.\textsuperscript{29} Moreover, since erroneous interpretations were causes of heretical and partisan interpretation of Scripture, there was, indeed, imperative need for a unanimous rule of interpretation in order to avoid false thought and heresy. This rule of faith, according to Augustine, consists of the clearer passages of Scripture and the authority of the church.\textsuperscript{30} The Church was in a position of authority to differentiate between orthodox and heretical teaching as well as to maintain the right teaching; thus, Scripture had to be read and understood within the framework of the life and doctrine of the Christian community.\textsuperscript{31}

According to Augustine, when passages of Scripture treated without full clarity some customs and observances maintained in the Church, the latter had authority to clarify the right interpretation of these passages and, consequently, the way of observing customs or observances treated in them. To prove this point, Augustine referred to baptism because it was observed by the Catholics differently than by those whom he called schismatics and heretics and because the Catholic observance was not clearly mentioned in Scripture. Augustine referred to the schismatic or heretical baptism. Neither Augustine (nor the Catholics) had Scripture to defend his view that baptism should not be repeated even if it was received outside the Church, nor did the schismatics have Scripture that said that baptism received in a schismatic or heretical community was invalid. However, Augustine argues that the Catholics observed baptism according to the custom of the Church, whereas the schismatics did not. Augustine asserts that the Catholic custom may be supposed to have its origin in apostolic tradition, just as there are many things which are observed by the whole Church, and therefore are fairly held to have been observed by the apostles, which


are not mentioned in their writings.\textsuperscript{32} Thus, Augustine believed that, even if a Church observance or custom was not validated in a council, if the universal Church had always held it, it should be believed to have been handed down by the authority of the apostles.\textsuperscript{33} Therefore, even if Scripture was sometimes unclear on such an observance or custom, because it was validated by the apostles and had canonical authority, it “should remain true and indubitable in every respect,”\textsuperscript{34} and therefore should be thought to be consistent with the proper interpretation of Scripture. Conversely, interpretations which contradict the teaching and the custom held by the universal Church are wrong. Augustine’s view of the Church as the right interpreter of Scripture and his view of the way one can tell that custom has its origin in apostolic tradition will help him construct his case against the Donatists. Augustine believed that the Donatists and the Catholics shared a correct interpretation of Scripture regarding Christ, but not regarding the Church. Since the Donatists did not see in Scripture the Church as it is seen by the universal Church, the Donatists were certainly wrong.\textsuperscript{35}

Augustine knew that Scripture was divinely inspired but he also knew that it consisted of words that are part of the finite world and is, therefore, susceptible to different interpretations.\textsuperscript{36} Because in the hands of heretics and dissenters, Scripture became an instrument of false teaching, the Church taught authoritatively from it the orthodox doctrine that the apostles had taught. Thus, for Augustine, Scripture was an authority that was to be read within the Church tradition.\textsuperscript{37} The canonical authority of the Scriptures was established in the Church and by the Fathers of the Church and the Rule of Faith. As a guide to the right interpretation of Scripture, the Rule of Faith

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\textsuperscript{32} Augustine, \textit{De baptismo} 5.23.31, in BA, vol. 29, 383-84.
\textsuperscript{33} Augustine, \textit{De baptismo} 4.24.31, in BA, vol. 29, 313.
\textsuperscript{34} Augustine, Letter 82.2.7, in WSA 2/1, 318.
\textsuperscript{35} Augustine, Letter 185.1, in WSA 2/3, 180-81.
\textsuperscript{37} In Sermon 51.5-6, in WSA 3/3, 23-24, although Augustine recognizes that the Scriptures disagree with each other in certain places, he explains to the faithful how fortunate are they for being taught the Scriptures and fed with spiritual food. See also Augustine, \textit{De baptismo} 5.23.31, in BA, vol. 29, 382-85; J. Rist, \textit{Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 8.
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draws precepts from Scripture under the authority of the Church: “we must consult the rule of faith, as it is perceived through the plainer passages of the scriptures and the authority of the church.”38 Therefore, the tradition of the Church, which was drawn in part from Scripture, has a similar authority to that of Scripture, since the Church alone certifies that Scripture has a divine authority.39 Augustine asserts that one must respect and honor Scripture, which is free from error, because it has canonical authority, that is, because it is validated as authoritative by the Church.40 That one needs Scripture in order to find the truth in matters of faith is indisputable for Augustine. However, if someone wants to prove something by the authority of Scripture, he needs also to bring “forth proofs from the scriptures that have been accepted as authoritative by the Church.”41 In *The Usefulness of Belief*, Augustine tells Honoratus, a Manichaean and former friend of Augustine, that Honoratus and the Manichaeans should learn to read the Scriptures from their own interpreters, that is, from the Church, especially from its leaders: “What is more rashly proud than to be unwilling to learn to understand the books of the divine oracles from their own interpreters.”42 According to some of his aforementioned statements, it seems that the Church has an authority superior to that of Scripture.43 The following passage gives us the same impression:

> “Believe the Scriptures.” But if any new or unheard-of writing is produced or commented by a handful of people without reasonable confirmation, we believe not it but those who produce it. Wherefore if you [the Manichaeans], being so few and unknown, produce Scriptures, we are unwilling to believe…At long last restrain your obstinacy and your wild lust to propagate your own sect, and advise me rather to consult leaders of the great mass of believers [the Christians]. This I shall do most diligently and with the greatest possible efforts, so as to learn

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something about these Scriptures from men apart from whom I should not know there was anything to learn.  

Indeed, for Augustine, the Church, because of its recognized respectability and wide confirmation in the world, commanded or inspired authority. Although he was seeking to find Christ in the books he studied before his conversion and Christ was central in his thinking, Augustine asserted that he would not have believed the Gospel unless he had been moved by the authority of the Catholic Church.  

However, although it is quite true that for Augustine the Church had an immense authority, it should not be forgotten that Augustine wrote the statements about the authority of Scripture and the Church in different contexts and in pursuit of different goals. Indeed, Gerald Bonner rightly asserts that “we must allow for the exaggeration produced by the [Manichaean] controversy.” Thus, in accordance with the importance Scripture or the Church had in his discussion, Augustine emphasized the importance of one or the other. Augustine placed both Scripture and the Church on the same pedestal of authority. While their authority depended on each other, “the authority of Bible and Church rested on reciprocal support. Usage in the churches had determined the limits of the canon. Bible texts established the divinely constituted nature of the Church.” However, for Augustine, because Scripture is in the Church for the expansion of God’s Kingdom, how Scripture is to be interpreted is a matter decided in the unanimous consensus of the Catholic Church. Therefore, Augustine asserted, for example, that Cyprian’s writings that contain his theological view on baptism, which opposed the view that was the norm and practice of the Church, should not be considered valid.  

“After all, writings of this sort are, first of all, to be distinguished from the authority of the canonical books. For we do not read them as if a testimony is drawn from them so that we are not permitted to hold a contrary view, if those

45 Augustine, Answer to the Letter of Mani Known as the Foundation 5.6, in WSA 1/19, 236-37.  
47 Henry Chadwick, Augustine: A Short Introduction, 38.  
writers perhaps somewhere held some view other than the truth demands.”  

49 However, Augustine believed that Cyprian either did not hold such a view on baptism or had corrected it according to the Rule of Truth, which is the standard of faith drawn from Scripture by the authority of the Church, “or he covered over this view like a birthmark on his most pure heart with the richness of his love, while he both most amply defended the unity of the Church that was growing through the whole world and most perseveringly maintained the bond of peace.”  

50 The Donatists claimed fairly to be Cyprian’s heirs because he had clearly asserted that there is no baptism outside the Church. Augustine asserts here that the authority of Cyprian’s writings on baptism, or that of any writing of another Christian, should be distinguished from the authority of Scripture. A non-scriptural work was not to be considered as a probative testimony for a correct scriptural interpretation on a point of Christian doctrine or practice if it opposed the norm and practice of the Church. However, Augustine thought that Cyprian might have changed his view on baptism according to the Rule of Faith, that is, the faith drawn from Scripture by the authority of the Church. Augustine sent to the Donatists the same message: since they held a view that contradicted the practice of the Church, they were certainly maintaining a view on baptism that contradicted Scripture; we will discuss later in more detail this dispute on baptism.

Something similar can be said in regard to the Donatists’ view of the Church: since they did not see in the Scripture the Church spread throughout the world, which most people believed in, the Donatists held a view in regard to the Church that was opposed to Scripture. The subject of the Church’s worldwide extension we will discuss in greater detail, as well.

49 Augustine, Letter 93.10.35, in WSA 2/1, 398.
50 Augustine, Letter 93.10.40, in WSA 2/1, 400.
IV. AUGUSTINE’S EFFORT TO UNITE THE DONATISTS TO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH (391-418)

In this chapter I will deal with Augustine’s career as a priest and bishop in the context of the Donatist controversy until 418. I will present the main historical events between 391 and 418 and thus lay down the context in which Augustine dealt with the Donatists in order to achieve unity in North Africa. By presenting his activities, letters and treatises related to his effort against the Donatists, I introduce the reader to Augustine’s world and especially to his works intended to eliminate the schism in North Africa. Augustine’s works and activities directly or indirectly emphasize that the Catholic Church is the true Church, with an authority recognized throughout the world and supported by both the Scriptures and Christian tradition; from this emphasis Augustine concludes that the Donatists should join the Catholic Church. Since this dissertation emphasizes Augustine’s letters against the Donatists, they will be succinctly introduced, before treating them thematically and diachronically in the next chapters. The events and the facts of this chapter will be presented chronologically so that the reader will be able to notice the development of schism generally and the particular events that precipitated drastic measures against the Donatists.

A. Augustine the Priest: From 391 to 395

In 391, three years after Augustine had arrived at Thagaste from Italy, a friend from Hippo, a coastal town in Africa, told him that he would like to find information about the Christian faith with the hope to embrace it and then enter a monastery. Augustine went to Hippo where he even looked for a place for a monastic settlement, but his friend was unwilling to embrace the Christian religious life. Something unexpected happened, however. Since some time had passed since his arrival in Thagaste, Augustine had become well-known and respected on the
coast of North Africa for his wide knowledge and the life he pursued in his religious community. But, as Augustine did not want to become a priest and did everything he could “to assure my salvation in a lowly position, and not to incur the grave risks of a high one,” he avoided churches that he knew did not have a bishop.\(^1\) However, knowing that the Church in Hippo had a bishop, he visited the church in Hippo without fear. It is very likely that Augustine did not have all facts concerning the community there, especially the fact that Valerius, a Greek who did not speak eloquent Latin and hardly understood the Berber dialect of the province and was also of advanced age, was looking for an able man to help him in his daily duties as a bishop. Valerius took advantage of the occasion of Augustine’s presence in his church and expressed publicly their need for a presbyter. Augustine, contrary to what he had said, was persuaded by the congregation to accept the nomination to be a priest at Hippo. Touched by the unexpected event, and reluctant to accept their proposal, Augustine burst into tears, an event that produced rumors that he was not content with the position he was offered. In fact, Augustine felt inadequate for the job since he had scorned and judged God’s priests. Therefore, Augustine felt that through his appointment as a priest, God was punishing him.\(^2\) Although he knew that he could not undo his past, Augustine acknowledged the responsibility of the new position and therefore tried to do the best he could in order not to disappoint God and His Church. After Augustine accepted his duty as priest in 391, he was a busy man because Valerius, who was unable to deal with all the Church’s problems, conferred on Augustine a heavy load of duties; he even asked Augustine, a presbyter, to preach, which was against the custom in Africa, where only the bishop customarily had authority to preach and explain the word of God from the pulpit.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) Augustine, Sermon 355.2, in WSA, vol. 3/10, 166. The presentation of the letters—and of other epistolary literature of Augustine—follows the order and the chronology used by the translators of the Works of Saint Augustine.


The beginning of Augustine’s career as priest at Hippo corresponded with a period of change within both churches, the Catholic and the Donatist, and also with a moment of division in the history of the Donatists. Both the Catholic bishop (Genethlius) and the Donatist bishop (Parmenian) of Carthage died in 391. Thus, Aurelius, a good organizer who had been a friend of Augustine since the latter’s arrival in North Africa from Italy, was elected the bishop of the Catholic Church at Carthage. In the Donatists’ camp, Primian, a violent and unpopular man among his own people took on the leadership of the Donatists at Carthage. Both bishops, Aurelius and Primian, were primates of their respective churches in Africa. While Aurelian brought unity to his Church, Primian’s leadership proved damaging for the Donatists because a Donatist group led by Maximian separated from the main Donatist Church.

Two years after Augustine was ordained a priest in Hippo, in the Donatist camp events took place which were fully exploited by Augustine at the opportune time. Two years after Primian’s election, an opposition group gathered around Maximian—one of Primian’s deacons and a relative of the second Donatist leader, Donatus—because of the discontent Primian was causing within his fold. Since Maximian was an able and educated man, Primian considered him a possible threat and, therefore, tried to get rid of him by ordering his close subordinates to find an alleged fault that would incriminate him. However, they did not want to conspire against him, so Primian excommunicated Maximian at a time when he was ill and unable to defend himself. The excommunication brought the inevitable schism. One of the reasons for discontent was the fact that Primian accepted into the communion of his Church, without penance, the schismatic Claudianists, the followers of Claudius, the Donatist bishop in Rome, whom I have mentioned in a previous chapter. In addition, his attitude was too authoritarian, almost despotic, as he wanted

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6 Augustine, Psalm 36.2.19-21, in WSA 3/16, 118-126.
7 Augustine, Psalm 36.2.19-21, in WSA 3/16, 118-126; Letter, 43.26, in WSA 2/1, 172;
all things to be done his way, and without his being challenged. Primian’s approach to leadership generated indignation and deep discontent among his opponents; therefore, Primian was asked to defend his action before a council. Since he was the primate, he did not accept the opponents’ request, but secured the help of civil powers and tried to forcibly prevent the Maximianists from gathering in council. However, they could not be stopped and, gathered in a private house on June 24, 393, at Cabarsussa, they “condemned [Primian] in perpetuity…lest through contact with him the Church of God be defiled by any contagion or accusation.”

After Primian’s opponents informed all the Donatist churches of their decision, Maximian was ordained bishop at Carthage by twelve bishops. Now there were three bishops at Carthage, two Donatists and one Catholic. However, Primian’s group was more numerous than that of Maximian so, by calling a council of the Donatist Church, he wanted to deal with the separatist group of Maximian. On April 24, 394, they met in considerable number in a council at Bagai in Numidia. The council recognized Primian as the lawful bishop at Carthage, and Maximian was excommunicated together with his twelve consecrators.

This was an unfortunate episode for the Donatists, and Augustine would take advantage of this to show their inconsistencies. Since these events started two years after Augustine had become a priest, he had had time to learn his duty as a priest as well, as the history of both churches in his native land. During his education at home and abroad Augustine had not been especially preoccupied with the Catholic faith or with Catholic-Donatist relations and had been, indeed, unaware of the religious situation in his own land. More importantly, because Augustine had learned a consistent image as to what Christianity was all about in Milan, where he converted, he could not imagine God’s Church divided. He certainly had trouble understanding why the Donatists refused to recognize the authority of the Catholic Church, which was spread almost throughout civilized world. Although from the beginning of his activity as a priest

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Augustine, Psalm 36.2.19-21, in WSA 3/16, 118-126; parenthesis is mine.

Augustine opposed the Donatists, his negative attitude and actions toward them developed gradually as peaceful means failed to bring them into the unity of the Church.

Augustine’s assumptions about the Donatists’ unjustified schism and opposition to unity of the Church were, moreover, confirmed by the actions of the State that tried to eradicate the schism through a series of laws.\(^\text{10}\) In July 392, a law was promulgated according to which anyone who ordained people in error to the clergy or anyone in error who assumed clerical office would be fined ten pounds of gold; the law also prohibited meetings of people in error, that is, schismatics, heretics, or pagans.\(^\text{11}\) Early the following year a decree threatened with deportation anyone who disturbed the Catholic faith and people.\(^\text{12}\) In 394, a decree said that “heretics should have neither authority for creating bishops nor lawful confirmations of bishops.”\(^\text{13}\) In the same year, another decree forbids heretical prelates “to commend their faith, which they have not, and to create ministers, because they are not.”\(^\text{14}\) In 395, two months after the death of Theodosius, his sons renewed all penalties that their father had “established against heretics’ stubborn spirit.”\(^\text{15}\) While a decree of the same year banned meetings of those opposed to the Catholic faith and prohibited them from becoming clerics, another one confirmed all previous privileges that favored the Church through imperial decrees.\(^\text{16}\) That same year saw a law that defined what “heretics” meant: “Whoever shall have been discovered to deviate even by a slight token from the Catholic religion’s opinion and path are comprehended by the term of heretics and are bound to

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\(^\text{11}\) Mandate of Valentinian II, Theodosius I, and Arcadius on Heretical Ordination and Worship, 392 (CT 16.5.21), in *CLD*, vol. 2, 445-46.

\(^\text{12}\) Mandate of Valentinian II, Theodosius I, and Arcadius on Disturbances of Religion, 393 (CT 16.4.3), in *CLD*, vol. 2, 446.

\(^\text{13}\) Mandate of Theodosius I, Arcadius, and Honorius on Heretical Consecration of Bishops, 394 (CT 16.5.22), in *CLD*, vol. 2, 452-53.

\(^\text{14}\) Mandate of Theodosius I, Arcadius and Honorius on Heretical Instruction, 394 (CT 16.5.24), in *CLD*, vol. 2, 455.

\(^\text{15}\) Mandate of Arcadius and Honorius on Confirmation of Theodosius I’s Legislation on Heresy, 395 (CT 16.5.15), in *CLD*, vol. 2, 456.

\(^\text{16}\) Mandate of Arcadius and Honorius on Heretical Assemblies, 395 (CT 16.5.26), in *CLD*, vol. 2, 457-58; mandate of Arcadius and Honorius on Confirmation of Ecclesiastical Privileges, 395 (CT 16.2.29), in *CLD*, vol. 2, 457.
submit to the sanctions promulgated against them.” Another law threatened severely those who “deviate from the Catholic religion’s dogma,” by forcing imperial officials to enforce the legislation against them; otherwise, they were subject to all losses and punishments. This legislation certainly gave Augustine confidence that his opinion about the Donatists was right and that the Donatists were wrong.

The Church also tried to find ways to strengthen itself and to weaken the Donatists. The council of Hippo in 393 determined that the sons of Catholic priests should not marry pagans, heretics, or schismatics and that only the Catholics were allowed to receive inheritance from a priest or a bishop. It considered that the Donatist children baptized in infancy and converted to Catholicism should be allowed to be ordained. In addition, the Donatist leaders who never rebaptized and were able to convert their entire communion to Catholicism could remain in holy orders. Although the Catholics were open toward the Donatists, ready to accept them into their unity on easy terms, the Donatists were reticent, indeed, hostile toward accepting the company of the Catholics. After a period of awaiting the decision of Rome as to the conditions they should impose on the Donatists accepted to holy orders, the African Catholic leaders decided by 401 to take this matter into their own hands, as the final response from Rome was indecisive. As a matter of expediency, the Catholics in Africa “decided to allow Donatists to become Catholic clergymen on a case-by-case basis.”

The Donatists’ inconsistencies and divisions within their own body, as well as the Christian Empire’s measures against those who opposed the Catholic faith and Catholic openness to the return of Donatists to the Catholic fold confirmed Augustine’s view on the authority and

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17 Mandate of Arcadius and Honorius on Definition of Heretics, 395 (CT 16.5.28), in CLD, vol. 2, 460.
respectability of the Church, of which he was already convinced by the time of his conversion in Milan. If the Church draws people to herself with authority and in great number, why did the Donatists refuse to unite to the Church? They were viciously stubborn, he believed. However, the recently ordained priest was trying to bring the Donatists to Catholic unity through the power of words, arguments, and reason; force was not an option because it could produce false Christians.

In order to equip himself for the difficult task of priesthood, he asked Valerius, “by the severity of Christ,” for a time for intensive study “in the most salutary counsels of his scriptures,” a time which he hoped to bear fruit for the Church and for the benefits of the brothers and fellow servants. Indeed, Augustine devoted himself seriously to his new job and tried to do his best to serve God and His Church well. Since he had learned how important a role belief in authority plays in one’s conversion, he emphasized it clearly before and after he became priest. In the last work written before Augustine became a priest, *De vera religione*, he asserts that the Christians are “keepers of the whole tradition unimpaired and followers of the right path.” This fact can surely be seen by noticing how multitudes become members of the Church simply through faith. Immediately after his ordination, he wrote *De utilitate credendi*, a book addressed to a Manichaean friend, Honoratus, whom he knew to be in error and mocking the Church because it taught and ordered men to believe before they could behold the truth of faith by reason.

Since the truth cannot be discovered easily, even by continuous seeking, “there is no right way of entering into the true religion without believing things that all who live rightly and become

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22 Augustine, Letter 167.6, in WSA 2/3, 98.
23 Augustine, Letter 93.17, in WSA 2/1, 387.
24 Augustine, Letter 21.6, in WSA 2/1, 57.
worthy of it will understand and see for themselves later on, and without some submission to a certain weight of authority.”²⁹ Certainly, it was this authority that the Church claimed for itself that the Donatists opposed vehemently. However, Augustine was determined to prove them wrong and to demonstrate that the Catholics are the true Church. He approached the problem of disunity from a pastoral point of view, that is, with the firm intention to keep his community united and to prevent the possibility of losing them to the Donatists. This he did not do without being often critical and sarcastic toward his schismatic opponents.

Augustine’s first work against the Donatists, *Psalmus contra partem Donati*, was written at the end of 393, in a popular style, as a song in which verses follow the order of the letters of the alphabet except for the prologue and epilogue.³⁰ The poem was written in order “to familiarize the most lowly people, and especially the ignorant and the uneducated, with the cause of the Donatists and to impress it on their memory.”³¹ In order to be brought to Catholic unity, they needed to know the truth about the schism. Thus, Augustine informed them about the history of the schism, basically the main episodes in which the Donatists either broke the unity of the Church or refused to heal it by not accepting Catholic invitations to peace.³² Also, Augustine states that the Church is a mixed body of saints and sinners, and he repudiates the Donatist view that the validity of baptism depends on the spiritual state of the minister.³³ Throughout the work Augustine repeatedly challenged and urged the Donatists, as people who love peace, to judge about the truth or reality of the schism. In the epilogue of the poem, mother Church calls her children to unity.³⁴ In late 393 or early 394, Augustine wrote his first treatise on Donatism, *Contra epistulam donati haeretici*, a work now lost.³⁵ The work, which is mentioned by

³¹ Augustine, *Retractations* 1.19, p. 86.
Augustine in his *Retractations*, tried to refute the Donatists’ contention that baptism was found only in their community.\(^{36}\)

Augustine’s letters are a very important source of information about Augustine and the theology he developed during his priesthood and episcopate. While the whole corpus of Augustine’s letters covers the period of time from his retreat to Cassiciacum in Italy in 386 up to 423, I will treat only his anti-Donatist letters. The first letter Augustine addressed to a Donatist was Letter 23, sent sometimes between 391 and 395 to Maximinus, the Donatist bishop of Siniti in Numidia. While the letter is mostly about baptism, we also find references to Augustine’s view of the use of force and, of course, to Church unity, as we will see later in this dissertation.\(^{37}\)

The events described in this section, such as the change in the leadership of the Donatist church, the Donatists’ quarrels and division, as well as the State’s laws against schism and heresy, were important matters to which Augustine referred a number of times. He reminded the Donatists about their division, their inconsistency in dealing with the Catholics differently than with their own separatist groups, and about the State’s actions against them, which he portrayed as God’s instrument. In order to unite the divided churches in North Africa, Augustine took time in this period to write two treatises against the Donatists, and a letter. In his letter to Maximinus, Augustine suggests to him that, if he stopped rebaptizing, he could be an example in this regard among the Donatists and also a precedent for Catholic-Donatist unity in North Africa.\(^{38}\)

**B. Augustine the Bishop: From 395 to 405**

During his four years as a priest, all issues against the Donatists that Augustine would deal with as a bishop received treatment from him, but on a reduced scale in comparison to what he would do later. Based on his reading of the Bible, on what he had heard about the schism, on

\(^{36}\) Augustine, *Retractations* 1.20, 90-92.

\(^{37}\) Augustine, Letter 23, in WSA 2/1, 63-68.

\(^{38}\) Augustine, Letter 23.5, in WSA 2/1, 66.
the Church’s status in the Roman Empire and on his personal convictions about the Church, he had definitely been convinced that the Donatists’ claims were wrong and, therefore, they should be convinced to accept the unity of the Church. Valerius, the elderly bishop at Hippo, had enough time during Augustine’s years as a priest to convince himself about his intellectual and pastoral abilities. So he wrote a letter to Aurelius, the bishop of Carthage and the Primate of Africa, in which he expressed his desire to have Augustine consecrated as co-bishop at Hippo with the right to succeed Valerius upon his death. Aurelius concurred with the idea and, thus, Augustine was ordained as co-bishop in 395 despite the provision of the eighth canon of Nicea, which asserted that there may not be two bishops in the city. Augustine later excused himself because at the time of his consecration neither he nor Valerius had been aware of the canonical prohibition. However, Augustine was not a co-bishop for a long time because, one year later, in 396, Valerius died and Augustine became the sole bishop at Hippo.

As when he had begun his career as a priest, Augustine took very seriously his appointment as bishop and considered that it was God’s will. The yoke of Christ pressed down upon him, and, considering his rebellious past against God, he feared refusing to be a bishop. Indeed, Augustine himself asserts, he dedicated his life, that is, his heart, voice, and writings, to God’s servants, who were at the same time his brothers and masters in the Church of Christ, but all this service was done because his most important service was for God, for Christ and for His Church that he had scorned before converting to Christianity. Therefore, as Augustine believed, he was above all a “servus Dei,” a man dedicated to “the full life of a Christian.” By the time he was ordained a bishop he was recognized as being a man dedicated to defending God’s Church against schismatics and heretics. Paulinus, the future bishop of Nola, in a letter to Romanianus,

40 Augustine, Letter 213.4, in WSA 2/4, 34.
41 Gerald Bonner, Augustine of Hippo. Life and Controversies, 120-121.
42 Augustine, Letter 31.4, in WSA 2/1, 104-105.
43 Augustine, Confessions 9.37, 178.
44 Peter Brown, Augustine of Hippo: A Biography, 125.
Augustine’s wealthy patron, stated that God has raised up in Augustine “a man of strength in his [God’s] Church among his elect in order to break the strength of sinners, that is, of the Donatists and the Manichees.”

Between 396 and 397 Augustine wrote three letters to the Donatists. In Letter 33, written in about 396 to Proculeianus, the Donatist bishop of Hippo, we find Augustine’s view on the unity of the Church as well as on coercion and conversion. In Letter 34, written between 396 and 397 to Eusebius, a Roman official in Hippo and a Catholic layman, we find more of his view on baptism and on the use of force in conversion, although his main concern in this letter was for the unity of the Church. In Letter 35, written to the same official shortly after the first letter, Augustine is also concerned about unity but refers to baptism, coercion in conversion, and to the Church as not consisting of saints alone.

In addition to writing letters, Augustine felt the need to expose the evil of disunity and to defend the Church in treatises. *De agone Christiano*, written between 396 and 397, is Augustine’s third treatise after he became a bishop. In it, as in his *Psalmus contra partem Donati*, he intended to provide instruction in a simple manner regarding the Christian rule of faith for poorly instructed people. What resulted was a manual in which Augustine emphasized and refuted the errors of the heretics, including the Donatist errors. Augustine’s emphasis on Christian life as a struggle could be seen in the context of the struggle and confusion caused by the Catholic-Donatist disputes, which added to all other forces that draw people from God’s rules.

Immediately after this work and before the *Confessions*, sometime between 396 and 397, according to Augustine’s *Retractations*, he wrote a work, which is now lost, titled *Contra partem Donati*. In the *Retractations* we find that at the time Augustine wrote *Contra partem Donati*, he

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45 Augustine, Letter 32.2, in WSA 2/1, 109; parenthesis is mine.
46 Augustine, Letter 33, in WSA 2/1, 115-17.
47 Augustine, Letter 34, in WSA 2/1, 118-20.
48 Augustine, Letter 35, in WSA 2/1, 121-23.
51 Joseph Torchia, “*Agone Christiano, De*,” in *AE*, 16.
was displeased that schismatics were violently coerced into communion with the Catholic Church by the force of secular power.\textsuperscript{52}

Augustine clearly intended to heal the schism through persuasion. As when Augustine became a priest, at the time he became a bishop, the Donatists were still more numerous than the Catholics and were likely considered by the majority of the North African population as the Catholic Church of Africa.\textsuperscript{53}

During the last decade of the fourth century, a solid relationship was formed between Gildo, the military commander in Africa, and Optatus, the Donatist bishop of Thamugadi. It was an association that proved to be harmful for the Donatists. Gildo was faithful to the Emperor during the revolt of his brother Firmus (372-373) and thereafter, and Theodosius tried to maintain this good relationship by giving him the position of \textit{magister militiae} and his nephew in marriage to Gildo’s daughter, Salvina. But despite the Emperor’s attempt to keep him loyal, Gildo departed from Theodosius’ policies during the revolt of Arbogast and Eugenius in the West, which took place in 392.\textsuperscript{54} Optatus, who hoped for a social and religious revolution in North Africa, had at his side Gildo, in whom, Augustine said, Optatus had God for his companion.\textsuperscript{55} Although the relationship between these two was strong and was imposing authority and fear in North Africa, Gildo acted cautiously until the open rebellion began in 397, when first the Catholics, the landowners, and the Maximianists felt the effects of this alliance. On that occasion the Donatists who did not dissociate themselves from the schismatic group of Maximian were forced to return to the main Donatist Church of Primian.\textsuperscript{56}

After this began the fall of the above-mentioned alliance, as well as the Donatists’ decadence and final defeat. In 397 Gildo was declared a public enemy by Stilicho and

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{52} Augustine, \textit{Retractations} 2.31, in FC, vol. 60, 129.
\bibitem{53} W. H. C. Frend, \textit{The Donatist Church}, 212-19.
\bibitem{56} W. H. C. Frend, \textit{The Donatist Church}, 222.
\end{thebibliography}
Symmachus at the court of Honorius, and in 398 the army was sent to end the rebellion and defeated Gildo. This end was not favorable at all for the Donatists. Because the leaders of the rebellion were Donatists, they were easily perceived as being enemies of the Roman order, in addition to the fact that they were a schismatic religious group that refused to accept being members of the Church of the Empire. A strong and sudden opposition in the Empire hardened against the Donatists. The new count of Africa decided to choose his friends carefully and to avoid the Donatists. After the defeat of Gildo, the death penalty was prescribed for those involved in the rebellion, and penalties were enacted against those who supported the rebellion. In 399 a law decreed severe penalties on those who violate Church privileges, whereas the Catholic clerics were exempt from tax and public labor.

The Church tried to unite the Donatists with itself. The Council of Carthage held in September 401 had sent people into the Donatist areas to inform them about the history of the schism and about the inconsistencies of their leaders in the light of their schism. The Donatists certainly did not like the Catholic effort to convert them and received the Catholics with hostility; those who had made the mistake of converting to Catholicism were severely punished. Since the Donatists and the Catholics cohabited relatively peacefully during the time of Parmenian and Genethlius and since the Donatists did not want interference in their affairs, Augustine was considered the person who started the quarrel by gradually dispensing propaganda to all levels of society: laymen, leaders of both churches, and imperial officials. The Catholics responded to the
harsh treatment of the Donatists by taking them as hostages in the town and estates where they held a majority.\(^{63}\)

The Council of Carthage took further measures to suppress the schism on August 25, 403. The Council, inspired by Augustine and Aurelius, agreed that the Catholic bishops should dialogue with their Donatist counterparts with the mediation of the local authorities.\(^{64}\) After September 23 the Catholics approached the Proconsul Septimius and told him that the Donatists should be admonished first so that they would seriously consider their errors and that, then they should be required to discuss the matter between them before public courts. While the secular authority agreed with the proposal, the Donatists were reluctant to meet with the authority of the State and, of course, rejected the proposal through a circular sent by Primian to all of his churches. In it Primian explained the reason for refusal: while the Catholics put forward letters from Emperors and exiled the Donatists’ ancestors, the Donatists offered only the Gospels.\(^{65}\) But as the Donatists’ stubbornness was not a solution for the Catholics, they used the opportunity to enhance their case: the Donatists refused to submit to the authority of the State’s officials. Since the Donatists refused peaceful discussions, the Catholics believed more and more that the State’s legislation should oblige the Donatists to join the Church.

In June 404, the Council of Carthage took a further measure against the Donatists, but at this time the appeal was made to Honorius, the Emperor of the Western Empire.\(^{66}\) The envoys to the court, Evodius and Theasius, were instructed to ask for military protection for Catholics, harsh economic measures against the Donatists, and fines against Donatists who did not submit to the decrees that protected the Catholics. By the time the envoys came to Honorius, he had decided in favor of the Catholics. In the meantime, Maximian of Baghai, a former Donatist who had


\(^{64}\) W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church*, 258-59.


become a Catholic and, therefore, had suffered from Circumcellions’ violence, had come earlier to Honorius, before whom he had presented his case against the Donatists. These actions resulted in 405 in a series of edicts intended to bring the Donatists into the unity of the Catholic Church. According to their prescriptions, the Donatists were forbidden to rebaptize, to make or receive donations, and they were for the first time assimilated with heretics for legal purposes. Finally, the schismatics who did not renounce their error were ordered to hand over their churches to Catholics.67

Since the events between his ordination as a bishop and the edicts of unity had been generally favorable to the Catholic cause, Augustine increased his efforts to bring the Donatists to the Church.68 His letters indicate that he acted both firmly and cautiously, according to the means and the events he could use to advance the Church’s cause of unity. He tried to convince both the influential leaders—Donatist and Catholic—and the common people of the Donatists’ error and thus of the need for unity. Augustine was prepared to take advantage of any weakness or fault of the Donatists to make his case for unity—and Gildo’s rebellion was one of weaknesses.

With Church unity in mind, Augustine wrote eight letters between the end of 396 and 400 to certain Donatists. In Letter 43, addressed to a group of Donatist lay leaders between the end of 396 and early 397, Augustine wrote as a mediator of unity, a peacemaker. Unity stands at the center of Augustine’s attention here, and in this letter we find Augustine referring to all the other themes—that is, to baptism, to the use of force in conversion, to the Church as a body which consists of saints and sinners—which were important to him in defending the unity of the Church and will be discussed later in this dissertation. The letter ends with an urging to unity in the


Church that has now spread to the whole world. In Letter 44, written in about 396 or 397 to the same group of Donatists, we also find all the themes Augustine discussed in the previous letter. At the end Augustine emphasized, as always, the need to meet and to discuss with the Donatists and to find ways toward unity. In Letter 49, dated without certainty about 398, Augustine wrote to Honoratus, a Donatist bishop in Numidia, and accepted his plan to discuss the schism by letters, which would avoid the disturbance of the crowds. This is a letter in which we have Augustine discussing mostly the issue of unity. In Letter 70, written between 398 and 400 to Naucelio, a Donatist layman, Augustine and Alypius refer to baptism and to the Donatist’s inconsistencies in baptizing Catholics who joined their Church, whereas they did not baptize people who had been baptized in groups that had splintered off from the main body of Donatists and who later entered into that main body. In Letter 51, written sometime between 399 and 400 to Crispinus, the Donatist bishop of Calama, a town in Numidia, Augustine referred to the issue of baptism, the use of force in conversion, and to the Church as not consisting of the saints alone, although Augustine treated these subjects in order to advance his case for the unity of the Church. Augustine wrote his letter to Crispinus because he had heard that Crispinus wanted to discuss with him the question about what separated the divided churches. At about the same time, Augustine wrote Letter 52 to one of his Donatist relatives, Severinus. Augustine argued that the Church, which cannot be hidden, cannot be that of the Donatists, but must be that of the Catholics, who were known throughout the world. The Donatists, by being a branch separated from the Church, could not bear fruit. Letter 53, written in about 400, is directed to Generosus, a Catholic from Constantine in Numidia, in response to a letter from him. Generosus had received a letter from a Donatist bishop who claimed to be commanded and taught by an angel about the

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69 Augustine, Letter 43, in WSA 2/1, 156-72.
70 Augustine, Letter 44, in WSA 2/1, 173-81.
71 Augustine, Letter 49, in WSA 2/1, 195-96.
73 Augustine, Letter 51.1-5, in WSA 2/1, 198-201.
74 Augustine, Letter 52, in WSA 2/1, 202-03.
true Christianity of his city; therefore, he had tried to convert Generosus to Donatism. In a letter to Generosus, Augustine defends the unity of the Church as well as the toleration of sinners in the Church up to the end of the world.\footnote{Augustine, Letter 53, in WSA 2/1, 204-08.} In Letter 56, written in about 400 to Celer, a wealthy land owner from Hippo, Augustine hoped that, through this instruction, Celer would renounce being a Donatist. Thus, this short letter is about the unity of the Church and about conversion to Church unity.\footnote{Augustine, Letter 56, in WSA 2/1, 237.} Shortly after this letter, Augustine wrote Letter 57 to Celer, which was also about conversion to the unity of the Church. Augustine’s intentions here were not only to convince Celer of the Catholic claims about the true Church but also to convince him to urge conversion to the Catholic Church among his Donatist subjects.\footnote{Augustine, Letter 57, in WSA 2/1, 238.}

In his effort to achieve unity in North Africa, Augustine was always prepared to defend and to support the Church. He had found a letter, now lost, that Parmenian, the former Donatist bishop of Carthage, had written in order to refute Tyconius’ view of the Church. The work in three books that Augustine wrote in about 400 as a response to Parmenian’s letter was titled: \textit{Contra epistulam Parmeniani} (Against the Letter of Parmenian).\footnote{Maureen Tilley, “Epistulam Parmeniani, Contra,” in AE, 312.} Augustine maintained that God’s Church was diffused throughout the world and that the Church could therefore not be limited to the region in North Africa where the Donatists lived.\footnote{Augustine, Contra epistulam Parmeniani 1.1.1, in BA, vol. 28, 209-11.} Augustine asserted that he wanted to clarify an important question that was answered differently by the separated churches: May evil contaminate the good in the unity of the Church? His answer was no. He asserted that this “matter [was] being discussed in the interest of the Church spread over the entire world.”\footnote{Augustine, Retractations 2.43, 154-55.} In the first of the three books Augustine discussed the history of the schism, in the second the attributes of the Church, and in the third he relates the unity of the Church to charity.\footnote{Maureen Tilley, “Epistulam Parmeniani, Contra,” in AE, 312.} Augustine had mentioned in his work against Parmenian’s letter that he would write a book in order to
elucidate the question about baptism, and between 400 and 401 he wrote *De baptismo* (On Baptism).\(^{82}\) In it he argued that baptism can be administered by heretics and schismatics outside of the Church, since it is God’s gift. However, it is not profitable for them, since they are not in the Church.\(^ {83}\)

Between 399 and 400 Augustine had received a part of a letter addressed by Petilian, the Donatist bishop of Constantine, to his presbyters. Augustine was displeased to find that Petilian had written something of weight against the Catholic Church.\(^ {84}\) Since the letter was written against the Catholic Church, Augustine decided immediately to reply to Petilian.\(^ {85}\) The treatise he wrote between 400 and 403 against the letter of Petilian was titled: *Contra litteras Petiliani* and consisted of three books.\(^ {86}\) Since Petilian accused the Catholics of handing over the Scripture, persecuting the Donatists, and having no baptism, in the first book Augustine answered these charges. In the meantime he found and read the entire letter of Petilian. Although he felt that he had answered Petilian’s letter well and completely in his first book, he decided to write the second book of *Contra litteras Petiliani*. In the meantime, since Petilian had replied to Augustine’s first book, Augustine considered it necessary to respond to Petilian’s reply, and he did that in the third book of his work against Petilian.\(^ {87}\) In the second and the third books, Augustine discussed what he believed were inconsistencies in the Donatists’ view of the sacraments.\(^ {88}\) Augustine was still working on his book against Petilian when he wrote *De unitate ecclesiae* in about 401.\(^ {89}\) It is a work about the nature of the true Church, namely unity. Augustine defended this unity by referring to the Old Testament. In this work he also asserted that, since the

\(^{82}\) Maureen Tilley, “*Baptismo, De,*” in *AE*, 91-2.
\(^{83}\) Augustine, *Retractations* 2.44, 156-58.
\(^{84}\) Augustine, *Contra litteras Petiliani* 1.1.1-2, in *BA*, vol. 30, 134-36, 19-21; According to Augustine, the first words of Petilian against the Catholics were about them not having baptism, a statement which Augustine believed was against Petilian’s party.
\(^{86}\) Maureen Tilley, “*Literas Petiliani, Contra,*” in *AE*, 504-05.
\(^{87}\) Augustine, *Retractations* 2. 51, 171-73.
\(^{88}\) Maureen Tilley, “*Literas Petiliani, Contra,*” in *AE*, 504-505.
\(^{89}\) Maureen Tilley, “*Catholicos fraters, Ad; or De unitate ecclesiae,*” in *AE*, 150-51.
Church cannot be perfect in this world, its unity should be more valued than holiness, which is a future fulfillment.\textsuperscript{90}

Augustine’s response to Petilian’s reply to Augustine’s first book provoked the grammarian Cresconius, who wrote a letter to Augustine in which he defended Petilian. The correspondence may have taken place sometime between 401 and 402. However, despite Augustine’s attempt to keep pace with all of his responsibilities as a bishop, he answered Cresconius in about 405, in a book titled: \textit{Contra Cresconium grammaticum partis Donati}.\textsuperscript{91} Again, as in all of his works against the Donatists, Augustine discussed issues specific to the Donatist-Catholic controversy: the issue of baptism, the sin of \textit{tradition} and the holiness of the Church, and the State’s role in the Catholic-Donatist controversy.\textsuperscript{92}

In addition to treatises, his campaign through letters continued vigorously after the defeat of Gildo—and the bad fame associated with his name—provided Augustine the occasion to intensify his effort to bring the Donatists into the unity of the Church. Between 401 and 403 Augustine wrote four letters to certain Donatists. In Letter 58, written in about 401 to Pammachius, a Roman official and wealthy owner of estates in Numidia, Augustine congratulated him because he had been able to convince his subjects to become Catholic. He also urged him to read his letter to other people of his rank so that they might decide to follow Pammachius’ example.\textsuperscript{93} Letter 61, which Augustine addressed at the end of 401 or early 402 to Theodore, a Catholic deacon of Carthage, concerns baptism, as well as the reception of the Donatist clerics into the unity of the Church.\textsuperscript{94} At about the same time, between 400 and 401, Augustine wrote Letter 66 to Crispinus, the Donatist bishop of Calama, in which Augustine discussed the issues of

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\textsuperscript{91} Maureen Tilley, “\textit{Cresconium grammaticum partis Donati, Contra,}” in \textit{AE}, 255-56.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.; Augustine, \textit{Retractations} 2.52, 173-75.
\textsuperscript{93} Augustine, Letter 58, in WSA 2/1, 239-40.
\textsuperscript{94} Augustine, Letter 61, in WSA 2/1, 245-46.
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unity and baptism.\textsuperscript{95} Letter 76, which Augustine wrote in 403 to the Donatists in general, is an exhortation to the unity of the Church, and in it Augustine touches on all the themes treated later in this dissertation, although the emphasis is on the unity of the Church and on showing that the Church does not consist of saints alone.\textsuperscript{96}

C. Augustine the Bishop: From 405 to 418

As the result of the combined and sustained effort of the Church and the State after 398, a series of edicts, designed to suppress the schismatics, were issued from the Imperial Chancery from February 12 to March 5, 405.\textsuperscript{97} The edict issued on February 12 for Manichaeans and Donatists, called the Edict of Unity, prescribed that none should recall the memory of a Donatist, that there should be one Catholic worship, one salvation, and that those who associated themselves with the forbidden practices should be severely punished by the laws previously issued by the Imperial Chancery.\textsuperscript{98} The edict issued on March 5 had prescribed that all persons should know that the one and true Catholic faith must be retained; therefore, the edict also made known the intention of the Imperial Chancery to publish the Edict of Unity through various places.\textsuperscript{99} On December 8, 405, the Emperor agreed that heretics of the Donatist superstition at whatever place, when confessing or convicted, should pay fully the due penalty without delay.\textsuperscript{100}

Between 405 and 411 Augustine wrote six letters that concern the Donatists; in each one, Augustine’s concern for unity of the Church plays an important role. In Letter 86, written sometime between 406 and 409 to Caecilian, the governor of Africa, Augustine urged him to take

\textsuperscript{95} Augustine, Letter 66, in WSA 2/1, 257-58.
\textsuperscript{96} Augustine, Letter 76, in WSA 2/1, 297-300.
\textsuperscript{97} Gerald Bonner, \textit{St Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies}, 265.
\textsuperscript{98} Edict of Arcadius, Honorius, and Theodosius II on Manichaeans and Donatists, 405 (CT 16.5.38), in \textit{CLD}, vol. 2, 496-97.
\textsuperscript{99} Mandate of Arcadius, Honorius, and Theodosius II on Christian Unity, 405 (CT 16.11.2), in \textit{CLD}, vol. 2, 498.
\textsuperscript{100} Letter of Arcadius, Honorius, and Theodosius II on Swift Justice for Donatists, 405 (CT 16.5.39), in \textit{CLD}, vol. 2, 500.
care of the area where the edicts had not yet been implemented.\textsuperscript{101} Thus, we meet in the letter the theme of the use of force in conversion. In Letter 87, written between 405 and 411 to Emeritus, the Donatist bishop of Caesarea, Augustine approached several themes treated in this dissertation: baptism, the use of force in conversion, and the Church as a body which consists of saints and sinners.\textsuperscript{102} In Letter 89, written sometime between 405 and 411 to Festus, a Catholic layman and a Roman official, Augustine referred to themes of baptism and conversion through coercion, while his main interest was to unite the divided churches in North Africa. Even as Augustine told Festus how just and necessary it was to defend the truth of Christian peace and unity, he urged him to help him in dealing with the Donatists around Hippo so that they might be brought into the unity of the Church.\textsuperscript{103} In Letter 105, written in about 406 to the Donatists in general, while Augustine touched on all the themes discussed later in this dissertation.\textsuperscript{104} Letter 88, written between 406 and 410 by the Catholic clerics of Hippo to Januarius, the Donatist bishop of Casae Nigrae and the Donatist primate of Africa, is mainly concerned to bring the Donatists into the unity of the Church.\textsuperscript{105} In Letter 93, written between 407 and 408 to Vincent, the Rogatist bishop of Cartenna, we find all the themes treated in this dissertation.\textsuperscript{106} Letter 249, written sometime during 395 and 411 to Restitutus, a deacon of the Church of Carthage is about the unity of the Church and about how the Church should tolerate evil within its members.\textsuperscript{107}

In about 407 Augustine wrote three treatises that are now lost: \textit{Probationum et testimoniorum contra Donatistas liber unus} (One Book of Proofs and Testimonies against the Donatists), \textit{Contra Donatistam nescio quem liber unus} (One Book against an Unnamed Donatist), and \textit{Admonitio Donatistarum de Maximianistis liber unus} (One Book, of Warning to the Donatists about the Maximianists). While in the first book Augustine defended the unity of

\textsuperscript{101} Augustine, Letter 86, in WSA 2/1, 343.
\textsuperscript{102} Augustine, Letter 87, in WSA 2/1, 344-50.
\textsuperscript{103} Augustine, Letter 89, in WSA 2/1, 359-363.
\textsuperscript{104} Augustine, Letter 105, in WSA 2/2, 54-64.
\textsuperscript{105} Augustine, Letter 88, in WSA 2/1, 35-58.
\textsuperscript{106} Augustine, Letter 93, in WSA 2/1, 376-408.
\textsuperscript{107} Augustine, Letter 249, in WSA 2/4, 182.
the Church through examples from ecclesiastical or public acts, in the second he spoke about the weeds in the Church, that is, bad people in the Church, and in the third he especially referred to the Donatists’ schismatic group, the Maximianists. In about 410, a friend of Augustine received a book on baptism from a Donatist who had stated that it had been written by Petilian, the bishop of Constantine. The book was titled *On One Baptism*. Augustine decided to give his book replying to it a similar title: *De unico baptism contra Petilianum*. The book argued that because in the Church there is one baptism, the Donatists should not rebaptize Catholics.

In 408 two councils were held at Carthage and both demanded that delegates be sent to Honorius with the request to better enforce the laws against the Donatists. The appeal had negative consequences for the Donatists. Those hostile to the Catholic Church, which included pagans, schismatics and heretics, were prohibited from performing governmental services. The Imperial Chancery commanded that the Donatists, together with heretics and Jews, who disturbed the Catholic faith, be justly disciplined. In 408 any illicit assembly was forbidden, and dissenters’ public places were brought under public control.

That same year Stilicho died and Olympius, a Catholic, replaced him as the empire’s supreme military commander. Between 408 and 411 Augustine wrote six letters that concern the Donatists. Letter 97, written in 408 to Olympius, is mainly about the correction of the Donatists and about the laws enacted against them in order to bring them into the Church. In Letter 100, written in 408 to Donatus, the proconsul of Africa, Augustine urged him to put the laws against

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112 Letter of Honorius and Theodosius II on Disturbances of Sacraments, 408 (CT 16.5.44), in CLD, vol. 2, 511.
113 Mandate of Honorius and Theodosius II on Schismatical Assemblies, 408 (CT 16.5.45), in CLD, vol. 2, 512.
114 Augustine, Letter 97, in WSA 2/1, 423-25.
the Donatists into effect, but without killing them.\textsuperscript{115} Letter 106, written in 409 to Macrobius, the Donatist bishop of Hippo, is about baptism.\textsuperscript{116} Soon after this first letter, Augustine addressed another one to Macrobius, Letter 108, in which his main concern was unity, and he touched on all the themes treated later in this dissertation.\textsuperscript{117} In Letter 112, written between 409 and 410 to Donatus, a Catholic landowner: Augustine asked Donatus to bring the Donatists dependent on him into Catholic unity.\textsuperscript{118} In Letter 144, written to the Donatists of Cirta before 411, Augustine asserted that their conversion to the unity of the Church from Donatism was not to be attributed to human action; indeed, it was God’s work.\textsuperscript{119}

Approximately between 409 and 410, a reversal of events took place. Heraclian, the count of Africa, was able to stop the army’s attempt to take Africa from Honorius. Therefore, grateful for the Africans’ loyalty to Heraclian, the Emperor issued an edict that annulled any taxation and granted religious toleration.\textsuperscript{120} However, the edict’s provisions offended the Catholics since it took away the restraints put on the Donatists by the laws enacted against them. Measures had to be taken. A council met at Carthage and a delegation was sent to Honorius to ask for the annulment of the edict and for a conference designed to end the schism and to enforce unity.\textsuperscript{121} The Emperor agreed with the request, and in August 410 he had decreed that “all enemies of the sacred law should know that they must be punished by the penalty both of proscription and of life, if they shall have attempted further to assemble in public.”\textsuperscript{122} In October of the same year, Honorius, by appointing a secular judge to settle the differences between the

\textsuperscript{115} Augustine, Letter 100, in WSA 2/2, 15-6.
\textsuperscript{116} Augustine, Letter 106, in WSA 2/2, 65.
\textsuperscript{117} Augustine, Letter 108, in WSA 2/2, 67-82.
\textsuperscript{118} Augustine, Letter 112, in WSA 2/2, 95-6.
\textsuperscript{119} Augustine, Letter 144, in WSA 2/2, 308-10.
\textsuperscript{120} Augustine, Letter 108.6.18, in WSA 2/2, 80-81; W. H. C. Frend, The Donatist Church, 273; G. G. Willis, \textit{Saint Augustine and the Donatist Controversy}, 63.
\textsuperscript{121} Gerald Bonner, \textit{St Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies}, 267; G.G. Willis, \textit{Saint Augustine and the Donatist Controversy}, 63.
\textsuperscript{122} Mandate of Honorius and Theodosius II on Heretical Assemblies, 410 (\textit{CT} 16.5.51), in \textit{CLD}, vol. 2, 537.
Catholics and the Donatists, showed an interest in suppressing the falsehoods of the Donatists.\textsuperscript{123} Honorius wanted Marcellinus, the chief judge between the divided parties, to abolish the error of the Donatists and maintain the Catholic law, which “either ancient usage formerly has ordained or the religious authority of our ancestors has established or our Serenity has confirmed.”\textsuperscript{124} Marcellinus made known to both parties the rules and regulations of the coming conference, which was planned to begin on June 1, 411.\textsuperscript{125} As these had been made known to both the Catholics and the Donatists, all the Catholic bishops of Africa sent him two letters (nos. 128 and 129 in Augustine’s correspondence). In Letter 128 the Catholics agreed with the rules and regulations of the proceedings; in Letter 129 Marcellinus was told by Catholics that the Donatists should have known that the Church had been prophesied in the Scriptures to exist in all nations and in the whole world.\textsuperscript{126} The Conference of Carthage, which lasted from the first to the eighth of June, ended with the Catholic victory.\textsuperscript{127} Since the Donatists could not prove that their historical claims about the schism were true, the Catholics asked for a judgment, which was given in their favor.\textsuperscript{128} Marcellinus released an edict on June 26, 411, that banned the Donatists. This was posted publicly so that all Donatists would have knowledge of it.\textsuperscript{129} Since the Donatists were not ready to renounce their tradition, a mandate of Honorius of January 30, 412, treated the Donatists severely. They were fined according to their social status, their properties were confiscated if they refused to unite with the Catholics, and their religious leaders were exiled if they continued to remain separated from the Church.\textsuperscript{130} However, although many Donatists saw

\begin{thebibliography}{130}
\bibitem{123} Letter of Honorius and Theodosius II on the Carthaginian Conference between Catholics and Donatists, 410, in \textit{CLD}, vol. 2, 538.
\bibitem{124} Ibid., 359.
\bibitem{125} Edict of Marcellinus on the Carthaginian Conference between Catholics and Donatists, 411, in \textit{CLD}, vol. 2, 541-44.
\bibitem{126} Aurelius, Silvanus, and all the Catholic Bishops, Letter 128.1-2, in WSA 2/2, 175-76; Letter 129.2-3, in WSA 2/2, 178-79.
\bibitem{128} Augustine, \textit{Breviculius Collationis} 3.25.43, in BA, vol. 32, 242-43.
\bibitem{129} Edict of Marcellinus on Donatism, 411, in \textit{CLD}, vol. 2, 551-54.
\bibitem{130} Mandate of Honorius and Theodosius II on Penalties for Donatists, 412 (\textit{CT} 16.5.52), in \textit{CLD}, vol. 2, 554-55.
\end{thebibliography}
themselves obliged to join the Catholic Church because of the imposition of the laws and penalties, many of them refused to join the Church.

In about 413 an unhappy event occurred. Count Heraclian, who had defended North Africa from being usurped, sailed to Italy with the hope of taking the imperial power for himself. His plan did not succeed, and he was defeated. Marcellinus, the judge at the conference of 411, whom Augustine praised for his integrity and ethical values, was believed to have been involved in the rebellion and was executed together with his brother, the Proconsul Apringius, and Heraclian. The Catholics in North Africa did not receive the news happily and were not at ease to see one of their own condemned. However, this event affected the Donatists negatively; since the emperor abhorred disunity and rebellion, he was more determined than before to eliminate schismatics and groups that endangered the unity of the empire. Since the Donatists refused to join the unity of the Church and the empire, in 414 the Donatists were branded with perpetual infamy and segregated from honorable gatherings and from public assembly. In 415 the Donatists were punished by the penalty of death.

Between the end of 411 and 418 Augustine wrote eight letters that deal with the Donatists. Toward the end of 411 Augustine had sent two letters, Letter 133 to Marcellinus, who was his friend, and Letter 134 to Apringius, Augustine asked them both to punish severely the Donatists but to avoid proclaiming the sentence of death. Letter 139, sent to Marcellinus at the end of 411, is also mainly about the correction of the Donatists as they were brought by force into the unity of the Church. Letter 141, written in 412 to the Donatist laity in the name of the fathers of the council held at Constantine in 412, discussed the problems which appeared after

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131 Augustine, Letter 151.7-9, in WSA 2/2, 384-85; Gerald Bonner, *St Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies*, 272.
132 Mandate of Honorius and Theodosius II on Penalties for Donatists and Heretics, 414 (*CT* 16.5.54), in *CLD*, vol. 2, 565-67.
133 Mandate of Honorius and Theodosius II on Heretical Assemblies, 415 (*CT* 16.5.56), in *CLD*, vol. 2, 568-69.
134 Augustine, Letters 133 and 134, in WSA 2/2, 203-07.
135 Augustine, Letter 139, in WSA 2/2, 238-41.
Church unity was proclaimed and enforced after the conference of 411. Since the Donatists believed that the conference was unfair and that Marcellinus was bribed to favor the Catholics, the letter refuted such allegations and urged the Donatists who had not joined the Church yet to return to the unity of the Church. In Letter 142, which Augustine wrote in 412, he expressed his joy to some former Donatists over their return into the unity of the Catholic Church, the Church spread throughout the world. In Letter 173, written between 411 and 414 to Donatus, a Donatist priest who intended to kill himself in order to avoid arrest and submission to the laws of unity, Augustine argued in favor of the use of force to the end of uniting the divided Church and of dragging the Donatists from perishing outside the unity of the Church. In Letter 185 (known also as *De correctione Donatistarum*), written in about 417 to Boniface, the tribune of Africa, Augustine most thoroughly defended the action taken by the Church and civil authorities to enforce the edicts against the Donatists. While in this letter Augustine, for the sake of unity, especially defended the use of force in conversion, all the themes treated later in this dissertation are found here, too. In Letter 204, written in 418 to Dulcitius, an imperial official commissioned to enforce the laws of unity, Augustine also defends, for the sake of unity, the use of force in conversion: the Donatists’ rebelliousness and threat to kill themselves must not hinder his implementation of the laws.

In the same year, Augustine traveled to Caesarea in Mauretania as a papal legate to settle some disputes among the Catholics there. During his stay in that city Augustine met Emeritus, the former Donatist bishop at Caesarea, and invited him to the major church of Caesarea, where Augustine delivered a sermon: *Sermo ad Caesariensis ecclesiae plebem*. After Augustine and

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137 Augustine, Letter 142, in WSA 2/2, 298-300.
139 Augustine, Letter 185, in WSA 2/3, 180-206.
Emeritus entered the Church and introduced themselves, Emeritus made a remark that showed Augustine both his respect and his determination to follow his will and heart in matters of faith: “I cannot refuse what you want, but I can want what I want.”¹⁴³ Two days afterwards they met for a debate. The debate was a monologue and a failure for Augustine because, when Emeritus was invited to speak after Augustine had reviewed the charges against the Donatists and the Carthaginian conference of 411, he refused to speak and to accept Catholic unity.¹⁴⁴ The last work of Augustine against the Donatists was written in 420 against Gaudentius, who succeeded Optatus as the bishop of Thamugadi. Since Dulcitius, the successor of Marcellinus, was in charge of enforcing the laws against the Donatists in North Africa, Gaudentius sent two letters to Dulcitius in which he threatened to set fire to the Church and to the members barricaded inside it if the laws were to be enforced at Thamugadi. Since Dulcitius sent these letters to Augustine, he replied in one book to Gaudentius. After his response, Augustine wrote a second book, thus we have Contra Gaudentium, in which Augustine refuted Gaudentius’ arguments that the Donatists were martyrs persecuted by the Church and the Empire, and he also urged him to join the Catholic Church.¹⁴⁵

This chapter, designed to introduce Augustine’s role in the story of the Donatist-Catholic controversy during his time as a priest and bishop, also provides a necessary background for the discussion in the next chapter. The knowledge of the circumstances in which the Donatist-Catholic controversy took place and the combined effort of both the Church and the State to eliminate the schism provide us with a base for a proper understanding of Augustine’s effort to heal the schism through personal and conciliating discussions, debates, treatises, and letters. Since the next chapter will treat themes that occur in Augustine’s letters, the general and diachronic presentation of the letters shows Augustine’s correspondence in the Catholic-Donatist

¹⁴³ Augustine, Sermo ad Caesariensis ecclesiae plebem, in BA, vol. 32, 416-17, Non possum nolle quod uultis, sed possum uelle quod uolo; W. H. C. Frend, The Donatist Church, 295; G. G. Willis, Saint Augustine and the Donatist Controversy, 81.
¹⁴⁵ Augustine, Retractations 2.85, 251-54; Maureen Tilley, “Gaudentium, Contra,” in AE, 375-76.
controversy as it progressed as well as the intensity of events that led to edicts that eventually prohibited the Donatists.
V. THE CHURCH’S EXTENSION AND UNITY REVEAL ITS UNITY AND AUTHORITY AS THE TRUE CHURCH

A. Preliminary Considerations

1. Themes of Church Unity and Authority in Augustine’s Letters

In the next four chapters I will discuss some themes which Augustine returned to repeatedly in his letters against the Donatists. These themes represent the main subjects discussed and debated during the Donatist-Catholic controversy. Since they were also the main issues Augustine faced during the time he struggled to unite the Donatists with the Church, he saw himself in a position to clarify them. While we will get an idea about the Donatists’ views about the Church indirectly from Augustine’s affirmations, arguments, and refutations, we will find Augustine’s opinions on these themes directly in his works, especially in his letters. These themes are closely related to each other, and all are used by Augustine as arguments in order to support the unity and authority of the Church. The discussions of each theme will take place diachronically by reading his letters in the order they were written; thus, the reader will be able to notice the constancy of Augustine’s thought on the unity and authority of the Church.

In the present chapter, I will show that Augustine asserted, in opposition to the Donatists’ view of the Church as an alternative society, that the true Church is that which is extended throughout the world, not situated in a corner of North Africa. In the sixth chapter, I will discuss Augustine’s view on forced conversion, which he supports by appealing to Scripture and the emperors: since there is no salvation outside the Church, forced conversion has as its final goal the healing and salvation of the Donatist schismatics. While the Church is one and united, it does not consist of saints alone, a theme which we will discuss in the seventh chapter. In the eighth chapter, we will discuss Augustine’s assertion that, because baptism is Christ’s, the Donatists
cannot rebaptize those who come to their Church in accordance with their conviction that baptism is valid only in the Donatist Church.

In trying to achieve Christian unity in North Africa, Augustine used these four themes to show that because the Church is one and spread throughout the earth, the Donatist Church, a local and schismatic group, is not the true Church. These themes—and especially the theme of the Church extending throughout the world according to prophecy—are frequently mentioned by Augustine; therefore, one should not be surprised that, in a diachronic presentation of the letters, these themes will appear constantly and repeatedly. Although Augustine’s repeatedly mentioning of these themes may seem exaggerated, this is the way Augustine thought he had to present his case in order to convey his message effectively. Certainly, Augustine thought that these themes best refute the Donatists’ claim about the issues of unity, holiness, separatism, conversion, and baptism. Since the Donatists were imbued with their point of view about these themes related to the Church, Augustine’s repetitive procedure was a way of refuting the Donatists’ view about them as well as a way of teaching the Donatists a different point of view, while intending to bring the Donatists into the Church. Since Augustine communicated with people of different social and religious standing about various subjects and interests, the use of these themes varies depending on the topic of discussion and Augustine’s interest. Since this dissertation is an exercise in historical theology, I chose to proceed to a diachronic presentation. Such a presentation, which introduces the reader to Augustine’ world and the cases he tried to settle, best presents Augustine and his efforts to eliminate the schism and to unite the divided North African Church. Indeed, Gerald Bonner was right in stating that “as a controversialist Augustine had a tendency to rely on repetition as a device for making his case. As he grew older, the tendency became a habit.”¹ The repetition of the themes Augustine thought necessary to emphasize in order to make his case was

part of Augustine’s “diplomacy in the face of Donatism,” according to Serge Lancel. For Peter Brown, the letters of Augustine were “like the diplomatic notes of one Great Power to another in a Cold War.” Thus, seen as diplomatic correspondence or notes, the letters were not systematic works in which Augustine exposed in an orderly manner his view on the unity and authority of the Church, but small works written as responses to different circumstances and issues he encountered as a leader of the Church. While one or two themes may be found predominately in some of his letters, depending on the particular issues he addressed in each letter, Augustine discussed—or mentioned—the themes treated in my work in almost all of his letters. Since Augustine’s letters had the goal of achieving unity in North Africa, as a leader of the Church he was interested in answering carefully the issues which he faced that were posed by the Donatists or the members of his Church. But he was also preoccupied with making sure that people who wrote him about issues in the Catholic-Donatist controversy would communicate with him until a resolution could be found; Augustine always wanted, in addition to communication through letters, public conferences or discussions, occasions in which people could find the truth about the history of the schism and thus were also able to make decisions in favor of the truth. While the four themes I have mentioned come up in the letters repeatedly, the theme of the unity and extension of the Church throughout the world is stated either explicitly or implicitly in all of them.

This argument—the Church spread in all nations and in communion with all churches has Scriptural warrant and therefore authority—was the one most repeated by Augustine in his polemic against the Donatists, as part of his effort to eliminate the schism and unite the Donatists

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to the Church. Since the Donatists were a local Church and not in communion with the churches throughout the world, they could not be the true Church and could not claim to be the true Church; therefore, Augustine’s “party is the true Church of Africa.”⁵ Thus, according to Augustine, for their salvation, the Donatists had to join the Church which is in communion with the communion of all churches throughout the civilized world.⁶

However, despite this constantly repeated argument in his works against the Donatists, Augustine knew very well that the Church was not spread yet throughout the whole world. In fact, occasionally, he explicitly recognizes that fact, as examples in this chapter and the next chapters will confirm it. Thus, one might ask, was Augustine not telling the truth all the time in this regard? If he did not tell the truth all the time, why did he not do so? If he told the truth even when he said that the Church is spread throughout the world, how is this true? In answering these questions, one should start from the truth that Augustine was a defender of the Church and, as Richard Price asserts, he stressed different aspects of the truth in different contexts: while against the Manicheans and their notion of a degraded physical nature, he asserted its worth, against the Pelagians, who over idealized the natural ability of man, Augustine fought to prove man’s depravity.⁷

In the case of the Donatists, since Augustine fought against their separation in order to achieve Christian unity in North Africa, Augustine emphasized the imperious need for unity, which was his main concern in the Donatist-Catholic controversy and the theme around which are woven all other themes treated in this dissertation. The Scriptures, in which he sought passages to support his efforts for unity, helped him enormously in this regard. In addition to Scripture, the Church, although not spread everywhere throughout the world, was spread quite widely in the civilized world known to the people of Augustine’s time and place. Indeed, Augustine had, both

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⁶ Augustine, Letter 93.2-4, in WSA 2/1, 378-79.
in the biblical arguments about the inheritance of Christ destined to be spread throughout the world and in the concrete extension of the Church, powerful arguments against the Donatists’ localism.

Augustine certainly did not intend not to tell the truth about the spread of the Church. The way he told the truth emphasized what was most obvious about the Church, that is, the fact that the Catholic Church is the Church that penetrated more of the world than did any other church and that it was continuing to extend itself speedily. On the one hand, Augustine spoke of the Church as if it were spread throughout the world because this is what the Donatists were supposed to hear and to acknowledge in order to leave behind their localism. On the other hand, Augustine spoke of the extension of the Church throughout the world as if it were true because the Church, in fact, was spread extensively, and continued to spread. While the prophecy of the Church inheritance throughout the world was present in Scripture, the Church’s extension throughout the world was rapidly becoming more of a reality in Augustine’s own times. Consequently, according to Augustine, the Donatists naturally had to acknowledge what was an obvious truth, although the Church still needed to extend in the far and unknown places of the world. The Donatists, who certainly realized that the Church supported by the State spread widely, did not complain about this truth, although the Donatists knew that Augustine was a dialectician who knew to twist arguments. Augustine, against the Donatists’ localism, had powerful arguments in Biblical passages about the extension of the Church and in the concrete realization of these prophecies in his own times. By comparing the Donatists’ numerical inferiority and geographical localism with the vast extension of the Catholic Church, Augustine intended to tell them that they could not be the true Church and that, therefore, they should join the Catholic Church.

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2. A Clash of Two Traditions

The chronological divisions in this chapter—and of all chapters to follow about themes of Church unity and authority in Augustine’s letters—intend simply to separate the discussion into manageable sections.

Augustine never sympathized with the Donatist tradition in part because he grew up in a town without Donatists. In addition, Augustine had his life-changing encounter with Christianity in Rome and especially in Milan, where he learned from Ambrose, who also baptized him. Augustine certainly knew that the Church in Milan, through its leader Ambrose, had an authority that was able to influence Theodosius and politics in the Empire. At the beginning of his priesthood, Augustine witnessed a policy of Theodosius which, through laws that deprived pagans, schismatics, and heretics of elementary rights, required all of these to become Catholics.

Since Augustine had learned during his stay in Europe that the Church is one and spread throughout the world, he certainly could not accept as normal the divided Church he found when he returned to his native North Africa from Milan. After his arrival in North Africa, Augustine had the chance to read Optatus’ opinion about the Church, which was entirely in accordance with what Augustine believed. Indeed, as Gerald Bonner stated, “Augustine was standing in a Catholic tradition already defended in Africa by Optatus of Mileve.”

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11 R. Markus, “Tempora Christiana’ Revisited,” in Augustine and His Critics, eds. R. Dodaro and G. Lawless (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 201-02; Serge Lancel, St Augustine (London: SCM Press, 2002), 169; see also chapter C.1 of this work.
12 Optatus: Against the Donatists, edited and translated by Mark Edwards (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), xvi-xviii, 77-78. While the “garment” symbolizes the Church undivided, the “strips that hung” and the “branches coming from a single root” symbolize the groups that divide the Church. See Cyprian, Letter 45.1, in FC, vol. 51, 114-15, for the word “root” as the Catholic Church because he inspired later North African writers to use it. Cyprian seems that was influenced by Tertullian in this regard. See about this, Robert Evans, One and Holy: The Church in Latin and Patristic Thought (London: SPCK, 1972), 53-55.
The Donatists believed that Augustine’s church communion with the rest of the church proved nothing except that the rest of the Catholic Church is in communion with the wrong church in Africa. For the Donatists, the “catholic” meant keeping the “whole” or “entire” set of Christian commandments. Since both the Donatists and the Catholics entered into debate and confrontation with different presuppositions and since none of these groups wanted to renounce their own principles, agreement between them was impossible. Indeed, we are dealing here with two different traditions about the place and the role of the Church in the world.

The Donatist tradition stood in sharp contrast to the Catholic. R. Markus well summarizes the Donatist view of the Church:

The African tradition had long laid great weight on the “separateness” of the church from the world and liked to draw a very firm line around the Church. This line enclosed the sphere of purity and holiness in a world of sin and pollution. The church was a society alternative to the “world,” the refuge of saints. Holiness was within; beyond it lay the world ruled by hostile, demonic powers. There could not be overlap: “world” and “church” were mutually exclusive.

The Donatists believed themselves to be the true heirs of the North African tradition, the tradition of Tertullian, Cyprian, and the martyrs. Tertullian believed that the Church was a society tied together by a serious discipline, which was the result of the Holy Spirit working in the Church, which was therefore a spiritual society. For Tertullian the Church was also an alternative society to the world, which was a prison, the place of demonical and hostile forces. When Christians

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17 R. Markus, “Donatus, Donatism,” in *AE*, 286..
died in martyrdom, they were in fact rejecting the idolatrous world.\textsuperscript{20} Tertullian also believed that it was never too late to separate from a church that tended to be worldly.\textsuperscript{21}

While Cyprian’s view of the Church greatly resembles Tertullian’s, in the matter of Church unity he maintained a different opinion than Tertullian did.\textsuperscript{22} Cyprian believed Christians should not stay in communion with an idolater or traitor bishop because it would contaminate the whole community.

\begin{quote}
Separate yourselves, He said, \textit{from the tents of those hardened and evil sinners, and touch nothing of the things that are theirs lest you perish along with them in their sin}. And this is why the faithful who are obedient to the Lord’s commandments and stand in fear of God must separate themselves off from their bishop if he is a sinner; they must have no part in the sacrifices of a priest who is sacrilegious, especially as they have in their own hands the power both to select bishops who are worthy and to reject those who are unworthy.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

This is where the Donatists believed they followed Cyprian when they advocated separation from the Church which, according to them, had betrayed the faith through the act of handing over the Scriptures to the State’s officials. Indeed, M. Tilley states that “the basic reason behind the need for separation was to avoid ritual pollution resulting from associating with those who had committed the sin of apostasy. This sin inhered in the Catholics as descendants and supporters of the \textit{traditores.}”\textsuperscript{24} In accordance with the words of the prophet Isaiah, the Donatists believed that God commanded them to avoid contact with what is unclean and thus contagious: “Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of it, purify yourselves, you who carry the vessels of the Lord.”\textsuperscript{25} In addition, as the Donatists saw themselves persecuted

\begin{footnotes}
\item Robert F. Evans, \textit{One and Holy: The Church in Latin Patristic Thought}, 38, 47-48.
\item Augustine, \textit{Contra epistulam Parmeniani} 3.4.20, in BA, vol. 28, 442-45; Is 52:11.
\end{footnotes}
by the powerful hand of the State, they believed themselves to be the followers of the martyrs, one of whom was Cyprian.26

Since the Donatists believed themselves to be an alternative society to the world, they considered the general and indiscriminate Christianization of society after Constantine to be a threat to their tradition and values. The Donatists believed that, by receiving protection from the State, the Church made common cause with the Roman State and society and, therefore, the Church’s moral standards, which were supposed to separate the Church from the world, disappeared. Indeed, as for Tertullian, for the Donatists, “the world outside the Church was nothing less than the realm of Satan.”27 Since the early Church was persecuted for its faith by a worldly society and State, they saw themselves as successors to the martyrs of the early Church and, therefore, as the true Church.

In contrast to this church stood the Catholic Church, which the Donatists identified with the Church of the traditores, of which Judas was the archetype.28 Thus, the Donatists tried to preserve their identity as an alternative society in a world they considered unclean and in which the Empire, as the leading institution of society, took a tremendously hostile role toward them. S. J. Alexander excellently identified the main themes of the Donatist tradition. These themes are:

a) the devil’s attempt to undermine the Church through false Christians and the latter’s exposure by deeds incompatible with faith, (b) suffering persecution as the mark of the true Christian, inflicting it as the mark of the false, (c) the associated sin of traditio, originally the apostasy of Christians who surrendered the bible to pagan persecutors, now the apostasy of Christians who persecute, and, finally, (d) the justification of separate communion as the sole means of avoiding compromise and contamination. In short, these four themes are integrated to form a coherent and typically Donatist argument.29

It is certainly because of this old tradition that the Donatists tried to preserve that Augustine met a strong resistance in his effort to unite the Church in North Africa: “the Donatist obsession with

27 P. V. Beddoe, “Contagio in the Donatists and St Augustine,” 234.
the ‘pure Church,’ without spot or wrinkle, represents an attitude of mind which had been present in African Christianity from its earliest days—a fact which would explain Augustine’s lack of success in persuading the Donatists to return to the Catholic unity.”

Peter Brown rightly remarked that the Donatists felt their identity constantly threatened: “first by persecution, later, by compromise.”

Being unprepared to understand the Donatist tradition and identity, Augustine tried to show that their ideas about what the Church is and should be were wrong. Augustine, thought that the common sense dictated that the true Church for him could not be other than the Church which was throughout the civilized world recognized and respected and which was prophesied by the Scriptures.

Of course, since he could not convince the Donatists that the Church that was vastly spread in the world and officially endorsed by the state was the true Church, he was led to depict them as perhaps ill-intentioned or too narrow-minded in their view of the Church, and therefore as lacking in common sense because they refused to recognize what most civilized world gradually acknowledged and held as being honorable and worthy of trust.

Since two views about the Church were at stake, one that saw the Church as universal, the other as an alternative society to the world, the question for Augustine in the debate with the Donatists became which and where is the true Church. Is it situated in a small corner of the world or is it spread to all nations? Is it the Church found among the Catholics or that among the Donatists?

Indeed, for Augustine, the Church that was in communion with the apostolic—and all other—churches throughout the world was the true Church. “The Church throughout the world is, in Saint Augustine’s thought, the inheritance of Christ, and whosoever is not in communion

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33 Augustine, The Usefulness of Belief 14.31, in Augustine: Earlier Writings, 316-17.
with this inheritance disinherits himself,” states G. G. Willis.\textsuperscript{35} R. Markus believes that the Church for Augustine was a cosmopolitan and “expanding Church, assured of its mission, confident of conquering a world which had been promised to it by the prophecies of the Old Testament.”\textsuperscript{36} Since, for Augustine, the Catholic Church is the inheritance of Christ and, therefore, the locus of truth, it “is the one dwelling place of truth on earth,” states E. Lamirande.\textsuperscript{37} W. H. C. Frend believes that, in dealing with those that in one way or another opposed him or questioned the Church’s authority, Augustine’s emphasis was on the Church that is Catholic.\textsuperscript{38} Gerald Bonner asserts that, for Augustine, the Church was “the Church spread out through time and rooted in eternity, proclaimed in the prophets, established in the incarnation and teaching of Christ, and today [Augustine’s time] to be seen in the universal Church.”\textsuperscript{39} Peter Brown considers that, for Augustine, the Church was the Catholic Church as it had appeared to him in Milan and Rome.

It was not the old church of Cyprian, it was the new, expanding church of Ambrose, rising above the Roman world like ‘a moon waxing in its brightness,’ it was a confident, international body, established in the respect of Christian Emperors, sought out by noblemen and intellectuals, capable of bringing to the masses of the known civilized world the esoteric truths of Plato, a church set, no longer to defy society, but to master it. \textit{Ecclesia catholica mater christianorum verissima}.\textsuperscript{40}

Because the Church in North Africa was divided, Augustine, as a pastor of his Church, saw himself needing to defend Church unity and authority as well as to protect his flock against the danger of being taken over by the rival Church of the Donatists.\textsuperscript{41} Thus, from his ordination as

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\item E. Lamirande, \textit{Church, State and Toleration: An Intriguing Change of Mind in Augustine} (Villanova: Villanova University Press, 1975), 72.
\item P. Brown, \textit{Augustine of Hippo: A Biography}, 221.
\end{thebibliography}
a priest until the last years of his life, Augustine devoted himself to defending the authority of the
Church.\textsuperscript{42} In order to prepare a solid case against the Donatists, Augustine had to refer to biblical
material that underlined unity and universality.\textsuperscript{43} But he also had to refer to visible signs that
would prove to the Donatists that the schism was a wrong committed by them and an act of pride
on their part, while emphasizing that unity is the result of Christian charity. As S. Grabowski
recognized, in order to prove his thesis of unity and authority, Augustine did not have to focus his
attention on the interior life of the Church; instead, he needed to focus on the visible signs which
show that the Catholic Church is the true Church:

This true church, however, is discernable not through any internal quality, which
is an imponderable and as such beyond demonstrability, but by external, palpable
signs. It is, therefore, under this pressure, that St. Augustine reverts to the truths
contained in Sacred Scripture concerning the external qualities of the true Church
of Christ, finds them in a more primitive form in tradition and gives expression to
them in a form adapted to his time and adversaries.\textsuperscript{44}

The spread of the Church and its authority to all nations was accomplished through divine
providence.

All this has divine providence accomplished through the prediction of the
prophets, through the incarnation and teaching of Christ, through the journey of
the apostles, through the reproaches, crosses, blood and deaths of the martyrs,
through the laudable lives of the saints, and in every case through miracles
worthy of such achievements and virtues, and suitable to the various times.
When, therefore, we see such fruit progressively realized by God’s aid, shall we
hesitate to place ourselves in the bosom of his Church? For it has reached the
highest pinnacle of authority, having brought about the conversion of the human
race by the instrumentality of the Apostolic See and the successions of bishops.
Meantime heretics have barked around it in vain, and have been condemned
partly by the judgment of the common people, partly by the weighty judgment of
councils, partly also by the majesty of miracles. To be unwilling to give it the
first place is assuredly the mark of consummate impiety or of heady
arrogance…How it is possible…to resist an authority so strongly established?\textsuperscript{45}

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\textsuperscript{42} P. Brown, \textit{Augustine of Hippo: A Biography}, 445. \\
\textsuperscript{43} P. Kaufman, \textit{Church, Book, and Bishop: Conflict and Authority in Early Latin Christianity}
(Boulder, CO: WestviewPress, 1996), 90. \\
\textsuperscript{44} S. Grabowski, \textit{The Church: An Introduction to the Theology of St. Augustine} (Saint Louis and
\textsuperscript{45} Augustine, \textit{The Usefulness of Belief} 17.35, in \textit{Augustine: Earlier Writings}, 321-22.
\end{flushright}
In this section we have seen that in the Donatist-Catholic controversy we are dealing with two different traditions regarding the place and the role of the Church in the world. While the Donatist tradition took as its precursor the rigorist North African Christianity expressed especially by Tertullian, and Cyprian, the Catholic tradition represented the development of Christianity that had followed in the line of the Constantinian and Theodosian settlements of Christianity. With two views about the Church at stake, one that saw the Church as universal, the other as an alternative society to the world, Augustine defended with determination and wit the first one.

B. From 391 to 400

In 391 Augustine became a priest in Hippo. This is also the time when, as a leader of the Church, he came in direct contact with the Donatists and with the issue of their separation from the Catholic Church of Africa. Thus, it is proper to begin our treatment of the theme of unity and authority—and all other themes in the chapters to come—with the beginning of Augustine’s priesthood. The years 391-392 were decisive in the history of the two Churches. While until now the Donatists had been able to grow in number, Augustine, in the spirit of the laws that supported the Church and according to his reading of the Scriptures that supported the idea that the Church is spread throughout the civilized world, began a campaign to unite the Donatists to the Church by showing that the true Church—thus, the Church which imposes authority and respect—is the Church spread throughout the world. The chronological divisions of this chapter—and of all chapters to follow about themes of unity in Augustine’s letters—intend simply to separate the discussion into manageable sections.

Augustine’s interest in the unity and authority of the Church already appears in his early works before his ordination as a priest, when he likely did not have any serious knowledge of the

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Catholic-Donatist history and situation. Supported by a venerable tradition and the general consent of people, Augustine, in these early works, already acknowledges that the Church, the guardian of truth, is spread throughout the world and has authority to correct error, schismatics and heretics. In *De vera religione* Augustine affirms that since the schismatics and heretics were minorities numerically, without a sustained and general approval among people, they could not claim to be groups to be trusted. Indeed, Augustine maintains that the true religion was to be found only among those who are called Catholic or orthodox. Since the word of God was daily preached among all nations and multitudes of people entered the Church every day, Augustine also believed that an exceptional time was taking place according to divine providence, which was renewing and restoring the human race by bringing it into a harmonious unity. While in these pre-ordination works Augustine acknowledges that the true Church is the Church spread in all nations and, as a guardian of truth, has right to bring schismatics and heretics into the Church, in his anti-Donatists works the situation changed: dealing directly with schismatics that had to be brought to Church unity, Augustine gradually defended the use of force in order to bring the Donatists into the unity of the Church spread and recognized throughout the world.

At the time Augustine became a priest—and shortly before that—the Church was substantially supported through the emperors’ laws. In his first book after being ordained a priest, *De utilitate credendi*, Augustine stated that true religion cannot be “approached without the weighty command of authority. Things must first be believed of which a man may later achieve understanding if he conducts himself well and proves himself worthy.” In the same book Augustine confessed that he came to believe in Christ—and implicitly in His Church—not through reason but through the authoritative report and opinion widely spread among all nations:

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47 See *Of True Religion* 5.9; 6.10; 3.5; 7.13, in *Early Christian Writings*, 230-31, 231, 228-29, 232.  
48 Robert Markus, “’Tempora Christiana’ Revised,” in *Augustine and His Critics*, 201-02; Serge Lancel, *St Augustine*, 169, 275; see also chapter C.1 of this work for the emperors’ laws.  
I confess I have come to believe in Christ, and to hold that what he said is true, though supported by no reason....I myself did not see Christ as it was his will to be seen by me; for it is declared that he was seen by common eyes like mine. From whom did I derive my faith in him, so that I may come to you duly prepared by faith? I see that I owe my faith to opinion and report widely spread and firmly established among the people and nations of the earth, and that these people everywhere observe the mysteries of the Catholic Church. Why, then, should I not rather ask most diligently of them what Christ thought, seeing that I was brought by their authority to believe that what he thought was profitable…? This I have come to believe on the ground of a report confirmed by its ubiquity, by its antiquity, and by the general consent of mankind. But you [the Manichaeans] are so few in numbers, so confused in thought, so recent in time, that no one could imagine that you could offer anything worthy of being received as authoritative.  

In his first work against the Donatists, *Psalmus contra partem Donati*, Augustine underlined the idea of the Catholicity of the Church according to the prophesied promises. The Donatists’ assertion that they are still with the Church is a false assertion. While the true Church is called “Catholic,” the Donatist Church was known as being the party of Donatus. While the Apostle Paul commanded the Church to pray for the kings of the earth, the Donatists were envious that the kings were Christians. If the Donatists were the Church’s children, why were they envious that the Church’s prayers had been heard? Augustine believed that the Donatists had forgotten the prophets, who foretold that great kings of the earth should send gifts to the Church.  

As Augustine embarked on a diplomatic campaign against the schismatic Donatists through letters, he strongly and constantly emphasized the universal character of the Church. Many of Augustine’s letters were directed to Donatist bishops. He knew that if he could convince the Donatist leaders to think that the Catholic Church is the true Church and to join it, the Donatist laity, influenced by these leaders, would follow them into the communion of the Church.

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Between 391 and 395 Augustine wrote to Maximinus, the Donatist bishop of Siniti in Numidia because he had heard that he had been baptizing Catholics. In his letter, Augustine addressed him with the word “honorable.” But it was not because he honored his episcopacy, which was not in communion with the Catholic Church and the heritage of Christ that stretches out to the end of the earth, but because he has been made in the likeness of God.\textsuperscript{53} If the Donatists were able to divide the clothing of the Lord, which symbolized His body, that is, the Church, they were not able to destroy it.\textsuperscript{54} However, the disunity is a scandalous fact; husband and wife unite “their bodies in fidelity, yet they tear apart the body of Christ by their different communion.”\textsuperscript{55} Augustine urged Maximinus to forget empty objections like the Macarian persecution, which the Donatists saw as an evil act of the Catholics, since the Circumcellions’ acts were no less evil: Augustine knew that the threshing floor of the Lord cannot be free from straw.\textsuperscript{56} In this letter, in order to “avoid the destruction to come for either the weeds or the branches that have been cut off from the vine of the Lord,” Augustine shows his determination to defend publicly the cause of the Church’s unity through peaceful and diplomatic discussions.\textsuperscript{57}

Augustine began the letter that he sent in 396 or a little earlier to Proculeianus, the Donatist bishop of Hippo, with the same type of diplomacy and introduction as he did in his letter to Maximinus. Augustine considered the schism not worthy of honor, yet he called Proculeianus “honorable” because they were bound together by the bond of human society and, most importantly, because Augustine had hoped that Proculeianus would embrace the truth of the

\textit{Augustine} (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), 251-53; Serge Lancel, \textit{St Augustine}, 276.
\textsuperscript{53} Augustine, Letter 23.1, 2, 4, in WSA 2/1, 63-6; Augustine’s reference to Christ’s inheritance in all nations and throughout the world is inspired here by Ps 2:8. The presentation of the letters—and other epistolary literature of Augustine—follows the order and the chronology used by the translators of the WSA.
\textsuperscript{55} Augustine, Letter 23.5, in WSA 2/1, 66.
\textsuperscript{56} Augustine, Letter 23.6, in WSA 2/1, 67.
\textsuperscript{57} Augustine, Letter 23.6-7, in WSA 2/1, 67-68, referring to Mt 13:24-30 and Jn 15:1-8.
Catholic Church.\footnote{Augustine, Letter 33.1, in WSA 2/1, 115.} Indeed, as the result of their discussion, Augustine had hoped that all Donatist poor people, who normally responded well to the authority of bishops, would be brought to the truthful and peaceful paths of Church unity; such an obedient attitude would cause Augustine no trouble at the judgment of God.\footnote{Augustine, Letter 33.6, in WSA 2/1, 117.} Augustine had hoped that, eventually, after peaceful discussions and letters between him and Proculeianus, the people of the divided churches might “at some point say [of themselves], not ‘peoples,’ but ‘one people,’” that is, that they would eventually be able to speak of themselves not as two separate groups but as one family of God.\footnote{Augustine, Letter 33.4, in WSA 2/1, 116.} Schism was a miserable foulness, and as in the letter to Maximinus, Augustine stated that families were divided by their religious allegiance: husbands and wives had peace with each other and had one house of their own, but they did not have peace with Christ and did not have one house of God.\footnote{Augustine, Letter 33.5, in WSA 2/1, 117.}

Augustine believed that if he could convince the Donatist leaders, or the majority of them, of the advantage and reasonableness of Christian unity, his effort to achieve unity in his home land would have a favorable outlook. In a letter he sent at the end of 396 or the beginning of 397 to a group of Donatist leaders, Augustine urged them to “Catholic unity, which is spread throughout the world.” Augustine wrote that he was concerned about the Donatists’ souls, since they were not in the Catholic communion.\footnote{Augustine, Letter 43.1-2, in WSA 2/1, 157.} Therefore, Augustine urged the Donatists to reconsider their view on the origins and reasons for schism. Augustine advised the Donatists to consider more carefully the records about the origin of the schism. The council of the seventy bishops, that is, the Numidien bishops who had the right to consecrate the Primate of Africa and who arrived after Caecilian had already been consecrated by neighboring bishops, condemned Felix of Aptungi because they were jealous and wicked persons, according to Augustine.\footnote{Augustine, Letter 43.2.3, in WSA 2/1, 158; W. H. C. Frend, \textit{The Donatist Church}, 16-19.} The Church, Augustine contended, has different records than those of the Donatists—very likely the
records of the Council of Cirta—that show that among the Donatist leaders who condemned Felix there had been some who were traditores and criminals.\textsuperscript{64} Thus, since there were among them tainted people, their separation from the Catholics, because of some alleged traitors, was not at all justified, Augustine told them.

However, for the Donatists at the Council of Cirta, there was no crime as grave as handing over of the Scriptures and betraying the memory of the martyrs.\textsuperscript{65} By handing over the Scriptures and cooperating with the State, the Catholics were thought by the Donatists to have contacted a contagio and infection from the demonic world that exists outside the Church.\textsuperscript{66} By not giving due respect to martyrs, through whom the power of Christ was displayed, the Catholics, so the Donatists believed, rejected the power that always stood courageously against the pagan gods and the pagan world.\textsuperscript{67}

Since it played a major part in the beginning of the schism, Augustine repeatedly mentioned the perverse council of the seventy Donatists that condemned Caecilian and declared his consecration invalid. S. Lancel asserts that Augustine believed that, the Donatists constructed an image of the Church from a history of the schism that they had falsified.\textsuperscript{68} Augustine constantly mentioned that at the origin of the schism, the Donatists wrongly separated from the Catholic Church. The fact that the members of this council failed to announce to the Church across the sea their decision before condemning Caecilian and electing Majorinus showed, according to Augustine, that they were afraid they could not justify their case and prove Caecilian’s guilt.\textsuperscript{69} However, Augustine did not mention the custom according to which the


\textsuperscript{66} P. V. Beddoe, "Contagio in the Donatists and St. Augustine," 231-36; Augustine, De baptismo 7.38.73, in BA, vol. 29, 485; Contra litteras Petiliani 3.8.17, in BA, vol. 30, 239.


\textsuperscript{68} Serge Lancel, St Augustine, 271.

\textsuperscript{69} Augustine, Letter 43.3.9, in WSA 2/1, 161.
Primate of Africa was to be elected by the Numidians, who had not been consulted in the case of Caecilian. Instead, Caecilian was elected in a hurry before the Numidians arrived. The fact that he asserted that the Donatists had not announced their decision to the churches across the sea shows that it is likely that at this time Augustine was not well-informed about the history of the schism: in fact, the Donatists had done that.\textsuperscript{70}

After Majorinus had been elected bishop in opposition to Caecilian, we are told by Augustine, whose words were perhaps inspired by Optatus, that the Donatists erected altar over against altar and destroyed the unity of the Church by discord.\textsuperscript{71} After the Donatists appealed to Constantine and after the two councils held at Rome and Arles, nothing could be proved against Caecilian and Felix. Therefore, Augustine wrote, “Peace has been granted through the mercy of God by the rulers of the world; we Christians and bishops ought not to destroy the Christian unity that the pagan enemy no longer attacks.”\textsuperscript{72} The Donatists, Augustine asserted, after making the Emperor “the arbiter and judge of a case involving the surrender of the sacred books and schism when they sent petitions to him to whom they later appealed…refused to abide by his judgment.”\textsuperscript{73} Actually, the Donatists did not appeal to the Emperor to have their case judged by him; the fact that Constantine was a Christian had not yet won credence in Africa.\textsuperscript{74} Instead, they asked him to call on Christians from Gaul, where the persecution had been sporadic and insignificant, to judge between them and their opponents.\textsuperscript{75} Miltiades, the bishop of Rome, whom Constantine had named as the mediator of the dispute, did not dare remove from his company colleagues, the sons of peace, against whom nothing had been established by the mob of Donatist

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{70}Ibid. ; W. H. C. Frend, \textit{The Donatist Church}, 21; Optatus: \textit{Against the Donatists} 1. 20, 19.
\item \textsuperscript{71}Augustine, Letter 43.2.4, 3.8, in WSA 2/1, 158. See also Optatus: \textit{Against the Donatists} 1.19, 19.
\item \textsuperscript{72}Augustine, Letter 43.2.4-5, 3.8, 7.20, in WSA 2/1, 158-60.
\item \textsuperscript{73}Augustine, Letter 43.6.17, in WSA 2/1, 165.
\item \textsuperscript{74}A. H. M. Jones, \textit{Constantine and the Conversion of Europe} (Toronto: University of Toronto in association with the Medieval Academy of America, 1978; reprint, 2001.) 92.
\item \textsuperscript{75}Optatus: \textit{Against the Donatists} 1. 22, 22-23; A. H. M. Jones, \textit{Constantine and the Conversion of Europe}, 92.
\end{itemize}
bishops. Augustine also asserted that Majorinus had no legal standing because he had been elected after Caecilian; thus, Miltiades wanted to confirm the one who had been ordained first.

However, because the Donatists considered that the Roman judges were not good judges, there still remained the plenary council of the universal Church, where charges could be brought against the judges that sanctioned Caecilian. Augustine asserted that even if the charges against Caecilian and the Roman judges that condemned the Donatists could be proved, it did not matter because the Donatists were not in communion with the churches throughout the world, while the Catholics were in communion with the whole world: “Let them [the Donatists] prove that they [the judges] did this [judged wrongly or in favor of Caecilian], for we easily prove that they did not from the fact that the whole world is not in communion with them [the Donatists].” Most importantly, even if the Donatists had true objections against the Church—such as the existence of evil people within its unity—those in its communion “endure for the good of the unity what they hate for the good of justice in order that the name of Christ might not suffer the blasphemy of horrible schism.” The Donatists tolerated evil persons within their Church, too. But this is not what displeased Augustine. Instead, he was displeased “on account of their separation from the heritage of Christ spread throughout the world, as it was promised so long ago.” And schism is a much graver sin than that of the idolaters: “those who fashioned an idol were slain by the customary death of the sword, but the leaders of those who chose to cause a schism were swallowed by the earth.” Because the Donatists were not in the unity and the heritage of Christ,

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76 Augustine, Letter 43.5.16, in WSA 2/1, 165.
77 Augustine, Letter 43.5.15-16, in WSA 2/1, 164-65.
78 See chapter A.3.2 of this work about the Roman bishops whom Miltiades named as judges in addition to the Gallic judges asked for by the Donatists.
79 Augustine, Letter 43.7.19-20, in WSA 2/1, 167; Sermon 358.5 (dated 411), in WSA 3/10, 193.
80 Augustine, Letter 43.8.21, in WSA 2/1, 168.
81 Augustine, Letter 43.8.24, in WSA 2/1, 170; referring again to Ps 2:8; see also Sermon 358.2, in WSA 3/10, 190-91 for Augustine’s argument that the Lord does not want divisions in his inheritance, which extends to the very limits of the earth, because he loves unity.
82 Ibid., comparing Ex 32:1-28 (people dead because of their idolatry) withNm 16:1-35, 41-49 (people dead because of their schism).
that is, in the Church, they had been disinherited, despite the fact that they possessed the Bible. Their pride prevented them from seeing that the heritage and the unity of Christ, His Church, rings forth from the books that are common to all Christians. The Church of God was not only “promised the whole world, she has filled the whole world.” Since the word of God about the sin of schism is clear, Augustine urged the Donatists not to be afraid to offend the friendship and the connections that kept them in the Donatist Church, “which are of no help in God’s courtroom,” and to join the unity of the Church.

In about 396 or 397 Augustine wrote to a group of Donatist lay leaders about his discussion with Fortunius, a well-respected Donatist bishop. In recounting his discussion with Fortunius as to whose Church—the Donatists’ or the Catholics’—was the true Church, Augustine hoped to convince them that his arguments had been better that those of Fortunius; he also hoped to convince them to join the Catholic communion. The central question in the discussion was about the true Church: “Which was the Church in which one ought to live, whether that one which, as the holy scriptures foretold so long ago, would spread over the whole earth or that one which a small part of Africa or of the Africans would contain.” Augustine tells us that, since Fortunius could not show letters proving that his community was in communion with churches overseas, by changing the subject, he quoted Scripture: “Beware of false prophets: many will come to you in sheep’s clothing, but within they are ravenous wolves. From their fruits you will know them (Mt 7:15.16).” Augustine replied that those same words could be recited with reference to the Donatists. To the statement of Fortunius that the Donatists suffered persecution, Augustine replied that the persecution they had suffered had to be for a just cause in order for

83 Augustine, Letter 43.9.25, in WSA 2/1, 170.
85 Augustine, Letter 43.9.27, in WSA 2/1, 171-72.
86 Ibid.
87 Augustine, Letter 44.2.3, in WSA 2/1, 174-75; for the Church among all nations foretold in the Scripture, see Sermon 129.5-6 (dated some time before 405), in WSA 3/4, 305-06 and Sermon 229J.5 (dated 417-418), in WSA 3/6, 307.
their suffering under this persecution to be considered just. But, because during the time of
Macarius they had not been found in the unity of the Church, the persecution they had suffered at
that time was not on account of justice, but on account of their unjustified schism. Furthermore,
since the themes of Church unity and universality were Augustine’s tools against the Donatist
separatism, Augustine asked how the schism could be just when they separated from “Christians
who preserve throughout the world the order of succession from the apostles and are established
in the most ancient churches?” A man, Augustine taught in a sermon preached in about 414,
cannot be just and bearing good fruits unless he comes into the Catholic peace where he is
accompanied by patient tolerance. But, since he agreed that the sin of a parent cannot be held
against the child, Augustine proposed that the Donatists act differently than their fathers who had
begun the schism, and he exhorted them to strive with a peaceful mind toward unity, so that the
schism would come to an end.

Augustine began a letter that was likely sent in 398 to Honoratus, a Donatist bishop, in
order to discuss the schism and the unity of the Church, by telling his opponent the reason he
believed the Catholic Church to be the true Church. He supported his argument that the Church is
spread in all nations on the basis of the witness of the Old Testament prophecies, Jesus’ words,
and Paul’s and John’s writings:

Because we see that the Church of God that is called Catholic is spread throughout the world, as it was foretold that it would be, we think that we ought not to doubt about so very evident a fulfillment of the holy prophecy, which the Lord also confirmed in the gospel and the apostles, through whom the same Church was spread, as it was foretold that it would. For in the beginning of the Book of Psalms it is written about the Son of God, The Lord said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I shall give you the nations as your inheritance and the ends of the earth as your possession” (Ps 2:7-8). And the Lord Jesus Christ says that his gospel will be preached among all nations. And before the word of God arrived in Africa, the apostle Paul wrote in the beginning of the Letter to the Romans, Through whom we have received grace

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89 Augustine, Letter 44.2.4, in WSA 2/1, 175; Contra litteras Petiliani 2.39.94, in BA, vol. 30, 354-57.
90 Augustine, Letter 44.3.5, in WSA 2/1, 175.
91 Augustine, Sermon 47.17, in WSA 3/2, 311.
92 Augustine, Letter 44.5.12, 6.13, in WSA 2/1, 180.
and apostleship to bring about obedience to the faith in all nations for the sake of
his name (Rom 1:4). Then he himself preached the gospel from Jerusalem in the
surrounding territory through all of Asia up to Illyricum. He established and
founded churches, not he himself, but the grace of God with him....But how can
anything be seen with greater evidence than when we find the names of regions
and of cities in his letters?...John also writes to seven churches...and we
understand that the universal Church is also indicated in these by the number
seven....And it is evident that we are today in communion with all these
churches, just as it is evident that you are not in communion with these
churches.  

Thus, he asked Honoratus why he thought that Christ had lost his inheritance spread in all the
other nations of the world while it maintained itself only in part of Africa. In vain the Donatists
call the Catholic Church “Macarian” because neither Donatus nor Macarius were known in the
regions from which the gospel flowed. Finally Augustine expressed his hope to discuss by letter
the discrepancy between the small Church of Donatus and the vastly extended Catholic Church
and the possibility of unity.  

In the letter he sent in 399 or 400 to a Donatist relative, Severinus, Augustine pointed out
that though they were “brothers” according to the flesh, they did not live together in the body of
Christ, in one society. Augustine told him that, while the true Church is a city built upon a
mountain and, therefore, cannot be hidden, the Donatist Church is local, not universally spread,
and not widely known. This city upon a mountain is the Catholic Church: the reason it is called
“Catholic” is that it is spread throughout the whole world, Augustine asserted. Indeed, in a
sermon preached in about 420, Augustine contended that “all spiritual people can see that the

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93 Augustine, Letter 49.2, in WSA 2/1, 195-96; for the Church predicted by the prophets, the
apostles, and Jesus to extend throughout the world, see also Sermon 47.17, in WSA 3/2, 310; for the
Church among all nations foretold in the Old and the New Testament, see Sermon 129.5-6, in WSA 3/4,
305-06 and Sermon 229J.5, in WSA 3/6, 307. While is probable that the letter was sent to Honoratus in
398, there is also the possibility that it was sent anytime between 396 and 410.
94 Augustine, Letter 49.2-3, in WSA 2/1, 195-96; see also Contra litteras Petiliani 2.39.94, in BA,
vol. 30, 354-57.
95 Augustine, Letter 49.3, in WSA 2/1, 196.
96 Augustine, Letter 52.1, in WSA 2/1, 202; De baptismo 1.4.5, in BA, vol. 29, 68-71; see Sermon
162A.10 (dated 404), in WSA 3/5, 161-62 for another explanation of the word “Catholic,” which means
“according to the whole.” Thus, according to Augustine, a Catholic keeps “a firm grip on the whole.”
While in the Letter Augustine asserts that the Church is Catholic because it is spread throughout the world,
in the Sermon Augustine asserts that a Catholic holds on the whole, that is, on the Catholic Church.
Church throughout the world is one, true, and catholic. "97 The reason the Donatists cannot see this reality is that they, by severing themselves from the Church, lack love and, thus, the Holy Spirit. 98

Since the sect of Donatus was found only in Africa and did not bear the fruits of peace and love, it was not connected with the churches from which the gospel spread throughout the world and to Africa. If the Donatists’ objections against Caecilian had been true, they would have won their case before the churches across the sea, from whence the authority of the Christian faith came to Africa. But since they had lost their case, Augustine wondered who could fail to see that the Donatists did not have a credible case to present to the authorities who judged them when the schism began. 99 Since reality contradicted the Donatists, Augustine wondered what carnal habit held Severinus with the Donatists. Even though they were relatives, Augustine asserted that no temporal relationships counted if the eternal heritage of Christ and salvation were scorned. 100

In about 400, Augustine sent another letter to Generosus, a Catholic of Constantina in Numidia. Generosus had received a letter from a Donatist priest which represented an attempt to convert Generosus to Donatism. In that letter, the Donatist priest had told Generosus that an angel had told him in a dream to inform Generosus about “the practice of the Christianity of your city.” Generosus sent that letter to Augustine, whose letter back to Generosus is a refutation of the Donatist priest’s statement against the Catholic Church. In refuting the Donatist priest, Augustine used most of the arguments he usually used against the Donatists: the Church is universal, not limited to only a few places; the Donatists refused to obey the Emperor’s command or to listen to...

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97 Augustine, Sermon 4.32 (dated before 420), in WSA 3/1, 202.
99 Augustine, Letter 52.3, in WSA 2/1, 203.
100 Augustine, Letter 52.4, in WSA 2/1, 203.
what Scripture had to say about the inheritance of Christ, that is, the Church; the Donatists had inconsistent doctrines about baptism and evil people within their Church.101

Augustine told Generosus that he could not follow the Donatist priest’s advice because he already held onto “the Christianity, not of your [Generosus’] city, nor only of Africa or of the Africans, but that of the whole world, which has been and is being announced to all nations.”102 This announcement is in the process of fulfillment in the actual expansion of the Church in the world, Augustine said.103 Considering this truth, Augustine asserted, “that angel ought to be anathema, because he tried to cut you off from the whole, shove you into a part, and separate you from the promises of God.”104 Since the Donatist questioned the validity of the succession of bishops of Rome in the Catholic Church, Augustine refers to Peter, who symbolizes the whole Church, and to a list of bishops that followed after him; in this list, Augustine asserted, no Donatist bishop is found.105

Although documents were still available showing how the Donatists had been refuted in the councils gathered in the immediate years after the schism had started, the Catholics relied on Scripture. In it was promised that the inheritance of Christ would extend to the ends of the earth in all nations; therefore, clearly the Donatists’ insistence that they were the Church was false.106 In letter that Augustine sent to Celer, a wealthy landowner of Hippo, between 396 and 400, he told him the same thing, after he gave him a book so that he could be instructed about the schism: “Your Wisdom very easily understands that there is no reason why the sect of Donatus tore itself

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101 Augustine, Letter 53.1-7, in WSA, 2/1, 204-08. Besides the statement quoted above, Augustine does not tell us what the Donatist priest said against the Catholic Church.
102 Augustine, Letter 53.1.1, in WSA 2/1, 204.
103 Augustine, Contra litteras Petilianii 1.13.14, in BA, vol. 30, 158-59. While elsewhere Augustine speaks as if the Church has already spread throughout the world, here he sees the Church in process of fulfilling the prophecy of that spread in, for example, Ps 2: 8, which he often mentioned.
104 Augustine, Letter 53.1.1, in WSA 2/1, 204-05, referring to Gal 1:8.
105 Augustine, Letter 53.1.2, in WSA 2/1, 205.
106 Augustine, Letter 53.2.5, 3.5, in WSA 2/1, 206-07.
from the whole world, throughout which the Catholic Church has spread in accord with the promises of the prophets and of the gospel."\textsuperscript{107}

In this section we have seen that, from the beginning of his priesthood, and even immediate before his ordination, Augustine had a clear view about Church’s unity and authority: the true Church that is possessed of authority is the Church validated by the general consent of people and spread to all nations according to prophecy. While this view is prominent in his anti-Donatist’s works, it also appears in Augustine’s other works. Augustine’s anti-Donatist letters come mainly after his ordination as a bishop in 395, whereas only one of these letters was certainly written during his priesthood.

C. From 400 to 410

While there is no change in Augustine’s view of Church unity in this period, we will deal in this section with different cases in which Augustine argued for the imperious need of unity.

In accordance with whom he addressed and the nature of the discussion, Augustine could be polite and courteous or disrespectful, using insulting epithets, as in the aforementioned letter to Generosus in which Augustine used phrases such as: “hopeless stupidity,” “great blindness and great insanity.”\textsuperscript{108} At the end of 401 or in early 402, Augustine sent a letter to Theodore, a Catholic deacon at Carthage. Telling Theodore how the Donatists should be received in the Church, Augustine’s attitude was open and pleasant. Augustine told Theodore that, although the Donatists did not maintain peace with the people of God who are spread throughout the world, the Catholic Church disapproved only of their dissent but would love to have them back in the

\textsuperscript{107} Augustine, Letter 57.1.2, in WSA 2/1, 238. This is the second letter Augustine sent to Celer. While the first letter is dated between 396 and 400, the second letter was written during this interval of time, shortly after the first letter. I will come back to these letters in the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{108} Augustine, Letter 53.1.1-3.6, in WSA 2/1, 204, 207.
peace of the Church for their salvation. Some Donatist leaders were reticent to become Catholics because they feared that by doing so they would lose the religious ranks they had in the Donatist Church. Therefore, Augustine showed a very open mind toward the Donatists and was ready to deal with them in this matter in accordance with their position and income in the Church.

Unity mattered for both the Catholics and the Donatists. But, knowing how much the Donatists valued and worked for the unity of their church, Augustine was enraged when he saw that, while the Donatists accepted the group that had separated from them, the Maximianists, back into the communion of their church and even appealed to the proconsul to bring them back, they refused to return to the Catholic Church which they had left. After 397 or 400, Augustine wrote a letter to Naucelio, a Donatist lay man and showed him the Donatists inconsistency in this matter: Augustine referred to Felician of Musti who, after having been an ally of Maximian, who had separated from Primian, the Donatist Primate of Carthage, was received back into the main Donatist communion of Primian with the honor he had held before his separation.

As in Psalmus contra partem Donati, in a letter addressed at the end of 403 to the Donatists generally, Augustine wrote to them in the voice of the Church, questioning why they had separated from the unity of the Church spread throughout the world. The Donatists listened to false statements concerning the origin of the schism but did not pay attention and were deaf to the words of God about the inheritance of Christ, the Church. While promises were made to Abraham and his descendant—“In your descendant all the nations will be blessed” (Gn 22: 8)—Abraham’s descendant is Christ: “it does not say: To his descendants, as if to many, but as if to one: To his descendant, that is, to Christ (Gal 3:16).” Augustine asks the Donatists to raise their eyes and to

109 Augustine, Letter 61.1, in WSA 2/1, 245.
110 Augustine, Letter 61.1-2, in WSA 2/1, 245-46.
111 Augustine, Letter 70.1-2, in WSA 2/1, 264-65.
112 Augustine, Letter 76.1, in WSA 2/1, 297.
see how the nations are blessed as the offspring of Abraham, while the Donatists are separated from this blessed offspring.

The Donatists are those who divide the clothes of the Lord (Ps 22:17-19). Since it was promised that “all the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will adore before his eyes, because his is the kingdom and he will be lord over the nations (Ps 22:28-29),” Augustine asked the Donatists, “why do you not want to hold along with the whole world onto that tunic of love woven from the top down”?\footnote{Augustine, Letter 76.1, in WSA 2/1, 297-98; Contra litteras Petiliani 14.33, 16.37, in BA, vol. 30, 256-61, 264-65.} In a sermon that Augustine wrote in 412, we find that for Augustine, following the Donatist hero Cyprian, the tunic symbolized the unity of the Church, and he believed strongly that unity was God’s will:

Our Lord wrote a will, and in his will placed his last words. He foresaw, you see, the future disputes of bad sons, he foresaw people striving to make portions for themselves of someone else’s property….He, though, did not want the tunic to be divided that was woven from the top, with no seam anywhere; it was to be won by lot. That garment was an advertisement for unity, that garment was a declaration of charity, it is charity itself, woven from the top: from the earth comes cupidity; from above, from the top, comes charity.”\footnote{Augustine, Letter 76.1, in WSA 2/1, 297; referring to Mt 27:35; Mk 15:24; Lk 23:34; Jn 19:24; Ps 22:18.}

Further, Augustine urges the Donatists to open their hearts and hear to what the Lord Himself predicted:

\textit{The God of gods, the Lord, has spoken and has called the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting; from Zion has gone forth the perfection of his beauty} (Ps 50:1-2). If you refuse to understand this, listen to the gospel where the Lord now speaks by his own lips and says, \textit{For it was necessary that all the things written about Christ in the law and the prophets be fulfilled and that penance and the forgiveness of sins be preached in his name through all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem} (Lk 24:44.47). The words in the psalm, \textit{He called the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting}, correspond to those in the gospel, \textit{through all the nations.}\footnote{Sermon 265.7 (dated 412), in WSA 3/7, 240; for Augustine on God’s written will that unity should not be broken, see also Sermon 265.7, in WSA 3/7, 240; for Augustine’s view of the Donatist Church as a private flock, whereas the Catholic Church is Christ’s, see Sermon 229O.3 (dated 422), in WSA 3/6, 325.}
In view of this truth, the Donatists’ unwillingness to tolerate the Christians in the communion of the churches throughout the world was simply a stubborn disobedience to what the Scripture says. Augustine was eager to convince educated and influential people of his conviction about the schism and about the unity of the Church. Between 405 and 410 Augustine wrote to Emeritus, the Donatist bishop of Caesarea, who was known as a man with a good mind. He was approached by Augustine because the latter hoped to converse with him about the restoration of unity and truth. In an undated sermon, we find that the truth for Augustine was Christ, and that truth was inseparable from the unity of the Church. But because the Church is the body of Christ, who is also its head, the Church that is spread throughout the world is also the place of truth, the place that proclaims Christ and identifies with Him. Thus, Augustine wondered why Emeritus was “separated from the Church, which is spread throughout the world, as it was foretold by the Holy Spirit.” Since they were not in communion with the Roman world and were also unknown to the churches overseas or those of the barbarian world, the Donatists could not be the true Church that was prophesied.

As in a previous letter to Theodore, Augustine told Emeritus that what he condemned in the Donatists was the crime of schism, which actually progressed into heresy because it wrongly continued. In order to consider the gravity of schism, the Donatists needed to consider carefully what happened to those guilty of schism. Dathan and Abiram, for example, were swallowed by the earth and the rest who were with them were consumed by fire. This punishment was, according to Augustine, set by the Lord as an example in order to prevent people from

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116 Augustine, Letter 87.1, in WSA 2/1, 344.
117 Augustine, Sermon 141.4 (date unknown), in WSA 3/4, 411; Augustine, Sermon 71.37 (dated 417-420), in WSA 3/3, 269.
118 Augustine, Sermon 45.5 (dated 400-405), in WSA 3/2, 254.
119 Augustine, Letter 87.1, in WSA 2/1, 344.
120 Augustine, Letter 87.4, in WSA 2/1, 346; see also Letter 61.1, in WSA 2/1, 245.
committing the crime of schism.\textsuperscript{121} Indeed, in a sermon preached in 397 we find that, for Augustine, the Donatist heretics who blame the Church which they can see were more miserable and guilty than the Jews who denied Christ whom they could not see, and even more than those who killed Him.\textsuperscript{122} The Donatists were inconsistent: what they applied to others, they did not apply to themselves. For example, they were aware of Optatus, whose association with Gildo against the Empire made all of Africa groan, but they never pronounced judgment against Optatus because of the fear that he would become a schismatic and thus drag other people into schism with him. Thus, if they tolerated the evil of a person whom they knew, how could the Donatists condemn Christians all over the world for acts they were not even aware of? The Donatists were right that the Maximianists’ condemnation of the larger Donatist group of Primian had no validity because the Primianists were more numerous than the Maximianists. But then, how did a small Donatist council have “validity against the nations, which are the heritage of Christ, and against the ends of the earth, which are his possession?”\textsuperscript{123} Augustine ended the letter by asking Emeritus to tell him why the Donatists started the schism, because in his opinion that was where the whole case rested. If Emeritus refused to reply, Augustine believed that he would have an easy case before God, because his intention was to restore peace and unity.\textsuperscript{124}

In a letter written after 406 to the Donatists generally, Augustine tried to convince them of the benefits of peace and unity, while he blamed them for a stubborn refusal of unity.\textsuperscript{125} Unity was an issue about which, Augustine asserted, he could not be silent: “we preach the Catholic peace.”\textsuperscript{126} He thought that the Donatists, by believing that the Catholic Church remained in Africa only in the sect of Donatus, in fact refused to believe Christ, whose inheritance spreads

\textsuperscript{121} Augustine, Letter 87.4, in WSA 2/1, 346; Letter 93.13.52, in WSA 2/1, 407; see Nm 16:31-35; Cyprian, Letter 73.8.1, in ACW, vol. 47, 58, asserting that the punishment suffered by Core, Dathan, Abiram, and by their followers awaits those who oppose the Church.

\textsuperscript{122} Augustine, Sermon 218B.2 (dated 397), in WSA 3/6, 192; Sermon 47.19, in WSA 3/2, 313; J. P. Hoskins, “Augustine on Love and Church Unity in 1 John.” 126.

\textsuperscript{123} Augustine, Letter 87.4-6, in WSA 2/1, 346-47.

\textsuperscript{124} Augustine, Letter 87.10, in WSA 2/1, 350.

\textsuperscript{125} Augustine, Letter 105.3.11, in WSA 2/2, 59-60.

\textsuperscript{126} Augustine, Letter 105.1.1, in WSA 2/2, 54-55.
throughout the whole world. According to Augustine, the Donatists’ ideas about the Church may be found in their hearts and in the slanders of their forefathers but they cannot be “read in the law, in a prophet, in a psalm, in an apostle, or in an evangelist...Christ says that we must preach repentance in his name and the forgiveness of sin through all the nations, beginning with Jerusalem (Lk 24:47). You are not in communion with the Church revealed by the lips of Christ.”127 Indeed, Augustine recognized the fact that both Catholics and Donatists have in common the same Scriptures, but the Donatists did not read in them about Christ and the Church in the same way the Catholics did: “In the scriptures we come to know Christ; in the scripture we come to know the Church. We have these scriptures in common. Why do we not in common hold onto both Christ and the Church in them?”128 By quoting extensively from the Scripture passages that foretell Christ’s inheritance in all nations of the world, Augustine tried to convince the Donatists that the Church has the nations as its inheritance and the end of the earth as its possession.129 After reminding the Donatists that they have been defeated constantly during the history of the schism—Constantine’s judgment, the councils held at Rome and Arles, Felix’s declared innocence, and Gratian’s and Theodosius’ legislation against the Donatists—Augustine proposed that they love unity, since the emperors’ judgments were based on Christ’s command: “Let us love and hold onto unity. The emperors command what Christ alone commands, because, when they command something good, Christ alone commands through them.”130

In about 407 or 408 Augustine wrote to Vincent, the Rogatist bishop of Cartenna who had succeeded Rogatus, the Donatist bishop who had separated from the main Donatist church between 363 and 373.131 Augustine wanted to convince Vincent that opposing the testimonies of God, the prophecies in Scripture, which were visibly being fulfilled, was simply ignoring the

127 Augustine, Letter 105.2, in WSA 2/2, 55.
130 Augustine, Letter 105.2.8-10, 3.11, in WSA 2/2, 58-59.
word of God: the Lord Himself (not Donatus, Rogatus, Vincent, Hilary, Ambrose, or Augustine) said: “From the rising of the sun to its setting a clean offering will be made to my name, because my name has been glorified among the nations.”  

Moreover, while all the nations proclaimed Christ’s greatness, Vincent was residing in Cartenna with only the ten Rogatists that remained of his group. To Vincent’s statement that the Catholic Church is still small compared to the world, Augustine replied that he is perhaps not aware how many barbarian nations the Gospel had impacted and that even the enemies of Christ were aware that in a short time the Gospel would be preached throughout the world as a testimony to all the nations.  

To Vincent’s statement that the name “Catholic” comes not from the communion of the whole world, but from the observance of all God’s commandments, Augustine replied that the Church does rely on God’s promises that the Church should be spread throughout the earth. In a sermon dated before 400, Augustine had asserted: “all spiritual people see that the Church throughout the whole world is one, true, and catholic.”

Because the Rogatists were so few, they could not be the only Christians who observed all God’s commands. According to Augustine, they were surely wrong about this, and those who proclaimed the Church apart from the communion of the saints should be anathema. Augustine further stated that “repentance and the forgiveness of sins” were to “be preached in [Christ’s] name through all nations, beginning from Jerusalem (Lk 24:47). Augustine added that Christians ought to maintain with unshaken faith what Paul wrote: Let anyone who proclaims to you another gospel than what you have received be anathema (Gal 1:9)”  

While the Donatists, according to Augustine, could not bring testimonies from Scripture in favor of their Church, the testimonies

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133 Augustine, Letter 93.7.22, in WSA 2/1, 390; for the Donatists as enemies of the Church, see Letter 93.2, in WSA 2/1, 378 and for the heretics as enemies, see Letter 55.31, in WSA 2/1, 232-33.  
134 Augustine, Sermon 4.32, in WSA 3/1, 202; Letter 93.23, in WSA 2/1, 391; for Augustine’s explanation of the word “Catholic,” see Sermon 162A.10, in WSA 3/5, 161-62; for the traditional African idea of the Church as a place where dwells the Holy Spirit, which could not be found in people and places cut off from the Church, see Sermon 268.2, in WSA 3/7, 278-79.  
135 Augustine, Letter 93.7.23, in WSA 2/1, 391.
about the Catholic Church abounded; therefore, the Donatists were not to be listened to,
Augustine would assert in a sermon preached in 410. Augustine believed that no one could
justly separate from the communion of churches throughout the world, because each Christian
should seek the Church not in human righteousness but in the testimonies of the divine Scriptures,
which foretold that the Church would spread throughout the world. If the Donatists could not
recognize their Church in the testimonies of the Scripture, they could not miss the true Church
because it is not veiled or hidden (Mt 5:14) but "a mountain prepared on the height of the
mountains to which all the nations will come (Is 2:2)." Augustine thought that this mountain is
certainly the Church which had grown and filled the whole world. Thus, the Donatists should
have been pasturing not in paths where there are many shepherds, but in "the tent of the shepherd,
where there is one flock and one shepherd," who is Peter.

Since the Donatists claimed the authority of Saint Cyprian, Augustine told them that "he
[Cyprian] preserved by love and defended by argument the unity of the whole world and of all the
nations." The idea of the unity of the Church, which is widely extended and at the same time
one and united, Cyprian ideally expressed in a passage in which he adapted for ecclesiological
purposes the images which Tertullian had applied to the Trinity in order to emphasize its unity:
"the sun and its rays; the root of the tree and its branches; the source and the spring":

The Church is one which with increasing fecundity extends far and wide into the
multitude, just as the rays of the sun are many but the light is one, and the
branches of the tree are many but the strength is one found in its tenacious root,
and, when many streams flow from one source, although a multiplicity of waters
seems to have been diffused from the abundance of the overflowing supply,
nevertheless unity is preserved in their origin. Take away a ray of light from the

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136 Augustine, Sermon 8.18 (dated 410), in WSA 3/1, 252.
137 Augustine, Letter 93.9.25-28, in WSA 2/1, 392-94. Augustine tells us that, according to
Vincent, the Christians are "more righteous to the extent that they are fewer." Since the Donatists were
fewer than the Church, they believed that they were more righteous that the Catholics.
138 Augustine, Letter 93.9.29, in WSA 2/1, 394-95.
139 Augustine, Sermon 45.7, in WSA 3/2, 256.
140 Augustine, Letter 93.9.29, in WSA 2/1, 394-95; Sermon 76.4 (dated 410-412), in WSA 2/1, 313.
141 Augustine, Letter 93.10.36, in WSA 2/1, 398.
142 Gerald Bonner, "‘Christus Sacerdos’: The Roots of Anti-Donatist Polemic," in Signum Pietatis,
328-29.
body of the sun, its unity does not take on any division of its light; break a branch from a tree, the branch thus broken will not be able to bud; cut off a stream from its source, the stream thus cut off dries up. Thus too the Church bathed in the light of the Lord projects its rays over the whole world, yet there is one light which is diffused everywhere, and the unity of the body is not separated. She extends her branches over the whole earth in fruitful abundance; she extends her richly flowing streams far and wide; yet her head is one, and her source is one, and she is the one mother copious in the results of her fruitfulness. By her womb we are born; by her milk we are nourished; by her spirit we are animated.  

Furthermore, Augustine advised Vincent—and, implicitly, the Donatists—to read the letter that Cyprian had sent to Iubaianus and thus to convince himself how inexcusable Cyprian considered a person who chose to break away “from the unity of the Church, which God promised and has brought to fulfillment in all the nations.” Augustine quoted a passage from Cyprian that showed how bishops in Africa, who did not agree to offer reconciliation to fornicators, did not severe themselves from the unity of the Church but maintained the bond of peace. Moreover, Tyconius, a Donatist, had shown clearly that the Donatists themselves valued unity and that at the council held in 335 the Donatists had valued unity more than purity. Why, then, Augustine asked, did the Donatists avoid Catholic unity?  

Regarding a passage from the Song of Solomon—“where do you pasture your flocks, where do you make them lie down in the South (Sg 1:6)”—which the Donatists used to foster exclusivity and separatism, Augustine told Vincent it stood against them. If the true Church is in the south and if the south means Africa only, as the Donatists contended, that means, Augustine asserted, that the Maximianists, another Donatist group separated from the main Donatist church, were the true Church of Africa, not that of Rogatus, because the Maximianists were further south than the Rogatists were. However, for Augustine, this passage had to be  

\[^{143}\text{Cyprian, } \text{The Unity of the Church} \text{ 5, in FC, vol. 36, 99-100; Augustine, Letter 108.3.11, in WSA 2/2, 75.}
\[^{144}\text{Augustine, Letter 93.10.36, 41, in WSA 2/1, 398-401; Cyprian, Letter 73.1.1-26.1, in ACW, vol. 47, 54-69.}
\[^{145}\text{Augustine, Letter 93.10.41, in WSA 2/1, 400-01; Cyprian, Letter 55.21.1, in ACW, vol. 46, 45-46, see also n. 93 on p. 196 of this volume.}
\[^{146}\text{Augustine, Letter 93.10.43, in WSA 2/1, 401-02; W. H. C. Frend, } \text{The Donatist Church, 167-68.}
\[^{147}\text{Augustine, Letter 93.8.24, in WSA 2/1, 391-92; for a discussion of the passage, see Maureen Tilley, } \text{The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World, 148-49.}
interpreted allegorically; therefore, the Donatists’ interpretation of this verse did not settle anything: “But apart from great impudence who tries to interpret something expressed in an allegory in his own favor, unless he also has perfectly clear testimonies that cast light on the obscure passages?”¹⁴⁸ In a sermon preached in 410, commenting against the Donatists who claimed to be the true Church, Augustine would see in the lady of the Song of Songs 1:6-7 the Church prophesied to be spread throughout the world.

The Church is not covered; A city, after all, that is set on a hill cannot be hidden (Mt 5:14). And by losing the way stumble not on your flock, but on the flocks of your companions. It’s in fact the heretics who are being called companions. They went out from us (1Jn 2:19). Before they went out, they had access with us to one table. So what reply is she given? Unless you know yourself. It’s the bridegroom saying it, answering her question. Unless you know yourself, O beautiful among women (Sg 1:7). O truthful among heresies, unless you know yourself. Because such great things were foretold about you; in your seed shall all the nations be blessed (Gn 22:18); the God of gods, the Lord, has spoken and summoned the earth, from the rising of the sun to its setting (Ps 50:1); request of me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance, and for your possessions the limits of the earth (Ps 2:8); their sound has gone forth to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the wide world (Ps 19:4); it’s of you that these testimonies were foretold.¹⁴⁹

As in a previous letter, Augustine told Vincent that what makes the Donatists “heretics” was not the sacraments and the creed, which were the same with them as in the Catholic Church, but their schism, the fact that they were not with the Church “in the spirit of unity and in the bond of peace, finally, in the Catholic Church herself.”¹⁵⁰ D. E. Doyle rightly states that the words “schism” and “heresy” “were used interchangeably in the canons of the North African Councils,” and Augustine, at this time, did not really differentiate between them in the strict sense of their meanings today.¹⁵¹

Finally, Augustine tells us that, since Vincent recognized that Augustine was a member of the Catholic Church, he implicitly recognized that, apart from the Donatists or Rogatists, the

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¹⁴⁹ Augustine, Sermon 295.5 (dated 410), in WSA 3/8, 200.
¹⁵⁰ Augustine, Letter 93.11.46, in WSA 2/1, 402-03.
Christian faith exists in the Catholic Church “spread through all the nations…according to the testimony of God in the offspring of Abraham.” In other words, Vincent did not frankly deny the Catholic Church of which Augustine was a member and a leader.

In this section, we have seen that all the letters he addressed to different people were concerned with the unity of the Church. In particular, Augustine urged the Donatists to seek unity in the Catholic Church. He did that by pointing to Scripture, to Cyprian, the Donatists’ hero, and also to the Donatist inconsistencies as to unity: While they accepted the group that separated from the main Donatist church, they refused to join the Church from which they had separated long ago.

D. From 410 to 418

While we will deal in this section with different cases in which Augustine argued for the need of unity, this period extends from the time immediately before the Conference of Carthage up to 418, when Augustine wrote his last letter against the Donatists.

After 410—and especially after the Conference of 411—the references in Augustine’s letters and other works to the Church spread through the entire world are not as abundant as before this time. On the one hand, Augustine’s letters to the Donatists were fewer after 411, a time when his project of uniting the Donatists to the Church was partially fulfilled through the enforcement of laws that condemned the Donatists. The Conference, in particular, was a point in the history of the schism when it officially ended since the Donatists were proscribed. However, the effort to end the schism was a project only partially fulfilled because the laws were not able to eradicate the Donatists completely. Augustine realized this. Therefore, he continued his efforts by urging civil leaders to implement the laws against the Donatists effectively and

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thoroughly. On the other hand, Augustine was less concerned to argue with his rivals about the true Church and the necessity of unity. Instead, from now on his concern was to justify the imposition of unity through laws and coercion. However, despite this main concern, Augustine did not cease to refer to the Church spread in all nations as the true Church which the Donatists should join for their salvation since the Scripture had prophesied that it would be spread all over the world.

In 412 Augustine drafted a letter in the name of the Fathers of the Catholic Church gathered at Cirta and sent it to the Donatist laity in order to inform them about the proceedings of the Conference of 411 at Carthage, where the Donatists believed that Marcellinus had been bribed. According to Augustine, the Donatists had stated that, because of the numerous testimonies of Scripture, they had nothing against the Church spread throughout the world. The Catholics responded by saying that “whoever, then, separates himself from this Catholic Church, no matter how praiseworthy he believes his life to be, will not have life because of this sin alone of being separated from the unity of Christ.”154 Instead of spreading the lie that Marcellinus was bribed, the Donatists were to remember that their case against the Catholics was without value since their claim of being the true Church had been repeatedly defeated by the judgments of Constantine and his successors and then by Marcellinus, too. Augustine urged the Donatists to believe the Catholics’ story about the schism and then to join the “Catholic peace, where love covers a multitude of sins.”155

In the same year, Augustine wrote to some formerly Donatist clerics and laypersons who had come over to the Catholic Church, and he told them to be joyful because the Church they had just joined not only was spread throughout the world but had as its head the Savior Himself. Because of Him the Church’s glory could be seen all over the earth, as it sang a new song to the

154 Augustine, Letter 141.5, in WSA 2/2, 292; Sermon 210.8 (date uncertain), in WSA 3/6, 122.
155 Augustine, Letter 141.12-13, in WSA 2/2, 297, referring to 1 Pt 4:8.
Augustine remarked again that the Church was not built in one corner of the world but throughout the world, and he quoted psalms that showed the extension of the Church as well as how all the families of the world sang to the Lord. At about the same time, another letter of Augustine told the Donatists of Cirta who had accepted the unity of the Church that the argument maintaining unity of the Church spread throughout the world is a solid argument against the Donatists’ view of the Church as an alternative society. He drew from Scriptural verses which state, for example, that in Abraham’s offspring, that is, in Christ, “all the nations will be blessed.” While “it was believed when it was promised, and it is now denied [by Donatists] when it is seen to be fulfilled,” the Donatists who had not yet joined the Church were to ponder more upon this argument and then join the Church.

In approximately 417 Augustine sent a letter—which in the Retractations 2.74 is named De correctione Donatistarum—to Boniface, the tribune of Africa charged with implementing the laws against the Donatists, and defended in it the actions taken against the Donatists by the united forces of the Church and State in the effort to implement the Imperial edicts. Augustine plainly recognized that, unlike the Catholic-Arian controversy, the quarrel with the Donatists was only about Church unity. While the Donatists had the same Scripture as the Catholics and came to know Christ in it, they did not recognize in the Scripture the Church that the Catholics recognized: while “the Donatists come to know Christ only in the scriptures, with an amazing blindness they do not recognize his Church through the authority of the divine writings but design their own church through the vanity of human lies.” Although they divided the Church, they were not able to destroy the tunic of Christ, which symbolized the unity of the Church, a unity which can be recognized in the following passage: “All the ends of the earth will remember and

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156 Augustine, Letter 142.1, in WSA 2/2, 298, referring to Ps 96:1.
157 Augustine, Letter 142.2, in WSA 2/2, 299, referring to Ps 57:12; Ps 96:1; Ps 96:2-3; Ps 97:7.
158 Augustine, Letter 144.3, in WSA 2/2, 309.
159 Augustine, Retractations 2.74, 226-28.
161 Augustine, Letter 185.2, in WSA 2/3, 181; for heretics who deny the Church on earth and believe in the Christ in heaven, see Sermon 47.19, in WSA 2/2, 313.
turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will adore in his sight, for kingship belongs to the Lord, and he will have dominion over the nations (Ps 22:28-29).” Since the argument of the Church’s extent and unity formed a very important part of his campaign for unity, Augustine continued quoting verses that implicitly affirmed that the Church could be found not in Africa alone, but throughout the world.163

Referring to the origin of the schism, on which, Augustine believed, Catholic-Donatist relations rested, Augustine contended that even if Caecilian, with whom the schism had begun, had been found guilty of traditio, for this reason alone Christ’s prophesied heritage could not have been lost in the world and exist only in a small part of Africa.164 While Augustine knew only from enemies of the Church that Caecilian had been ordained by clerics who had surrendered God’s books, Augustine asserted that he was not told in “the law of God, in the preaching of the prophets, in the holiness of the psalms, in the apostle of Christ, or in the words of Christ” about the Church of Donatus; “but testimonies from the whole of the scriptures proclaim with one voice the Church spread through the whole world, with which the sect of Donatus is not in communion.”165 While it is said that Christ’s name will be “glorified among the nations (Mal 1:11),” it is also said that “He will have dominion from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth (Ps 72:8).” Therefore, one was to count and consider seriously the testimonies of the Scripture and put away the weight of human testimony directed against the Church, for those who

162 Augustine, Letter 185.1-2, in WSA 2/3, 180-81; for the biblical reference to the tunic of Jesus Christ, see Ps 22:17-19 and Mt 27:35; Mk 15:24; Lk 23:34; Jn 19:24; for the tunic as symbol of unity, see Sermon 265.7, in WSA 3/7, 240, in which Augustine asserts that Christ, before His death, left His last will and testament, which was about the unity of the Church that He exemplified in the tunic which the soldiers could not divide; see also, Sermon 218.9 (dated before 420), in WSA 3/6, 185.
163 Augustine, Letter 185.3, in WSA 2/3, 181, referring to Ps 2:7-8; Lk 24:46-47; Jn 1:1,14.
164 Augustine, Letter 185.4, in WSA 2/3, 181; for Augustine’s judgment that an alleged guilt of Caecilian and the Catholics would not mean that the Church spread throughout the world is not the true Church, see Letter 43.7.19-20, in WSA 2/1, 167; for the statement about “the origin of the schism where the whole case rests,” see Letter 87.10, in WSA 2/1, 350.
165 Augustine, Letter 185.5, in WSA 2/3, 182; for testimonies from prophets, apostles, the Gospel, the Lord, magistrates, and the Emperor about the Church spread throughout the world, see also Sermon 162A.12, in WSA 3/5, 163-64.
did not follow God’s testimony had lost the validity of their own human testimony.\textsuperscript{166} Moreover, in a sermon preached in 411, Augustine asserted that Jesus had not come to ratify division, but to establish unity.\textsuperscript{167}

Because the Donatist Church saw itself as an alternative to society, a minority group in North Africa, Augustine used extensively the argument that the Catholic Church is spread in all nations, in fulfillment of what was prophesied in the Scriptures. This argument undermined severely the Donatist claim to be the true Church: how can a small church be the true Church and not that which spreads over the whole earth?\textsuperscript{168} Augustine’s argument in this context had a certain goal, that is, to show that the Catholic Church, which was superior numerically, was the true Church, whereas the Donatist Church, inferior numerically, was not the true Church. Augustine hoped to use this argument to convince the Donatists to join the true Church, that is, the Catholic Church. By this strategy Augustine pursued his main concern in the controversy: to unite the Church in North Africa. In other words, as I already mentioned, because Augustine’s main interest in the Catholic-Donatist controversy was unity, all his other arguments were woven around the argument for unity.

In reality, Augustine knew that the prophecies about the Church spread to all nations were not yet fulfilled, but were only in the process of being fulfilled. At the end of 419 or the beginning of 420, Augustine sent a letter to Hesychius, the Catholic bishop of Salona, whom he did not have to convince about the true Church but about the time of the coming of Christ. On this occasion, Augustine told Hesychius that not even in Africa were these prophecies yet fulfilled: “For there are among us, that is, in Africa, countless barbarian nations where the gospel has not yet been preached.”\textsuperscript{169} While Augustine was ready to say against the Donatists that “the Church of God, established in all nations, is praised by words of God,” that is, by Scripture, Augustine

\textsuperscript{166} Augustine, Letter 185.5, in WSA 2/3, 182.
\textsuperscript{167} Augustine, Sermon 340A.11 (dated 411), in WSA 3/9, 305.
\textsuperscript{168} Augustine, Letter 44.2.3, in WSA 2/1, 174-75.
\textsuperscript{169} Augustine, Letter 199.46, in WSA 2/3, 350.
recognized in writing to a Catholic that the Church still had room to increase before it was to become what was foretold about it by Solomon’s prediction about Christ: “He will have dominion from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth (Ps 72:8).”¹⁷⁰ Yet to Vincent, among many others, Augustine had affirmed that even the enemies of Christ could not doubt that in a short time Matthew 24:14 would be fulfilled in history: “And this gospel will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.”¹⁷¹ While Augustine’s assertion that the Church was spread throughout the nations seems to contradict that fact that the Church was still spreading, Augustine meant that the prophecy of the Church’s inheritance throughout the world was present in Scripture and therefore true, whereas the Church’s extension throughout the world was rapidly being fulfilled in Augustine’s own times. These truths allowed him to speak of the Church as already spread in all nations, although the Church was in a speedy process of spreading to the end of the known world.

I will illustrate by analogy Augustine’s meaning in his making of statements that the Church is spread throughout the world, even while he recognized that it was still spreading in all nations. To do this, I will refer to a case in which the same tension appears. Augustine was able to speak of the Church, which consists of saints and sinners, as if it were the city of God, which consists of God’s elect. However, Augustine realized the tension in this manner of speaking; the Church cannot be perfectly identified with the city of God. Since Augustine realized that there is no perfect identity between the Church and the city of God, Augustine believed that the Church is the city of God in the condition of the Church.

We must understand the kingdom of heaven in one sense as a kingdom in which both are included, the man who breaks what he teaches, and the man who practices it, though one is the least and the other is great in the kingdom, while in another sense it is a kingdom into which enters only the man who practices what he teaches. Thus where both are to be found we have the Church as it is now; but where only the one kind will be found, there is the Church as it will be, when no

¹⁷¹ Augustine, Letter 93.22, in WSA 2/1, 390; Letter 208.6, in WSA 2/3, 391.
evil person will be included. It follows that the Church even now is the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of heaven. 172

As Augustine could speak of the Church as both a present and future entity at the same time, he could certainly speak at the same time of both the Church as spread throughout the world, since the Scripture said that, and of the Church as still spreading throughout the world, a reality in a process of rapid fulfillment. Just as the present kingdom with sinners differs from the future kingdom without them as yes differs from no and now differs from later, so does the present Church not spread throughout the world differ from the future fulfillment of prophecy that will be spread throughout the world as yes differs from no and now differs from later. However, in each pair there is a link between the now and the later. The link is that the now is on its way to becoming the later.

Unity was the main issue for Augustine in the Catholic-Donatist controversy. Since the Donatists were a Christian group small in numbers and restricted geographically, the argument of Church unity and extension is very important in Augustine’s arguments against the Donatist schism, and we will find it in all of Augustine’s discussions against the Donatists. Thus, the argument will appear constantly in the following chapters of this work as a leitmotif of his arguments against the Donatists.

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VI. CONVERSION THROUGH COERCION TO ACHIEVE UNITY

This chapter will show that Augustine’s urgings to conversion and his advocacy of the use of force in conversion had as their main goal the unity of the Church. After preliminary considerations, I will treat diachronically the letters in several sections. As I already mentioned in the previous chapter, the chronological divisions of this chapter intends to separate the discussion into manageable sections, not to emphasize especially the chronological distinctiveness of each period from the others, although the particulars of each period will be emphasized.

Coercion and conversion are treated together because, for the sake of unity, Augustine saw coercion as a mode of conversion or at least as a huge step toward conversion and thus toward Church unity and salvation of those united in the Church. Indeed, Augustine repeatedly emphasized that coercion or the use of force in achieving the unity of the Church was needed for the sake of the Donatists’ salvation: “Were [the Donatists who knew the Catholic Church to be the true one but who were too apathetic to come over to it] not to be disturbed for their salvation by the penalty of temporal chastisement in order that they might emerge, as it were, from their sluggish sleepiness and wake up in the salvation of the Church’s unity?”¹ However, although Augustine emphasized to the Donatists the need for them to be in the Catholic Church for their salvation, he knew that simply being in the Church did not assure them a ticket to heaven; while the Church was an indispensable place for salvation, it did not guarantee salvation. Indeed, for Augustine, as John Rist asserts, the Church as a mixed community of the saved and reprobate “becomes a necessary but not a sufficient instrument of salvation.”² Thus, Augustine’s emphasis on the use of force as a way toward conversion and salvation should be seen in the context of his most important goal, that is, to heal the schism and to unite the divided in North Africa. Indeed,

¹ Augustine, Letter 93.2 (dated 407 or 408), in WSA 2/1, 378. This letter Augustine wrote to Vincent, the Donatist bishop of Cartenna in Mauretania.
as Carol Harrison asserts, the Donatist-Catholic controversy and implicitly the issue of the unity of the Church raised a number of practical and theological issues for Augustine, which were to shape his understanding of the nature of the Church.\(^3\) The issues that the Donatist-Catholic controversy raised for Augustine had at their core the unity of the Church. With this leitmotif as a guiding principle should be understood Augustine’s attitude toward conversion and coercion.

### A. Preliminary Considerations

Augustine’s attitude to coercion and conversion should also be seen in the larger context of Christian history and theology after the Emperor Constantine as well as in Augustine’s immediate context and background. If the early Roman Empire did not tolerate sects considered dangerous to its well being, and this was the case for Christianity during its first centuries of existence, intolerance toward divisive and disturbing groups was the Empire’s policy after Constantine ascended to the imperial throne. Constantine’s initial religious policy in the Edict of Milan appeared to be neutral, since Constantine and Licinius wished “to grant both to the Christians and to all others [other religious groups] full authority to follow whatever worship each man has desired…no man whatever should be refused complete toleration.”\(^4\) However, this was not practically true. Since religion was an affair of the State and since Constantine inherited an absolutist tradition of rule, he did not envision a policy of complete toleration of any kind of religious manifestation. Instead, Constantine decided to diplomatically support Christianity to the detriment of pagan religion and other sects. The fact is that his policy was not neutral or tolerant is clearly seen in the grants and immunities Constantine offered to the Catholic clergy in North Africa, to the exclusion of the Donatists. As S. L. Greenslade asserts, “neutrality might have been


\(^4\) “The ‘Edict of Milan,’ 313,” in *NE*, 284.
preserved by allowing the immunities to both sets of clergy.”⁵ Indeed, Constantine openly favored the Catholics and opposed heretics, schismatics, and pagans.⁶ Carol Harrison asserts, “It is in the coercion of heretics that we find one of the most cogent effects of the Constantinian settlement. The Church was now part of the State, the State became its protector and defender, and the question of the Church’s attitude to, and role in, the persecution of heretics became a pressing one.”⁷

For Augustine, Constantine’s support and favor of the Christian Church was an important and decisive moment in the history of Christianity. He counted the good emperors from Constantine down to the Christians emperors of his time. Constantine was the prototype of a good emperor whose judgment was followed by all emperors of that period, except Julian. He started a policy that favored the Church and opposed those cultivating other forms of devotion, and Augustine told the Donatists that it was a good policy and should be followed:

Then Constantine first issued a very severe law against the sect of Donatus. His sons [Constantine and Constans] who imitated him issued similar orders. Julian, the apostate and enemy of Christ, succeeded them… He permitted to the sect of Donatus a freedom leading to its own perdition. Finally, he restored the basilicas to the heretics at the same time as he restored the temples to the demons, supposing that in that way the Christian name would perish from the earth, if he showed hatred for the unity of the Church…. This man was succeeded by Jovian who issued no orders about such matters since he died soon. Then came Gratian and Theodosius; when you want to, you may read what they determined concerning you. Why, then, are you surprised about the sons of Theodosius [Honorius and Arcadius], as if they ought to have followed another course in this matter than the judgment of Constantine that was most firmly preserved by so many Christian emperors.⁸

Then, when the Theodosian settlement went into effect, Christianity became the official religion of the Empire, and substantial legislation was issued to suppress any religious activity other than

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⁸ Augustine, Letter 105.9, in WSA 2/2, 59.
Christian, Augustine now had immense support to justify unity through force. The edict issued in the name of Gratian, Valentinian II, and Theodosius I declared:

> It is Our Will that all people who are ruled by the administration of Our Clemency shall practice that religion which the divine Peter the Apostle transmitted to the Romans, as the religion which he introduced makes clear even unto this day. It is evident that this is the religion that is followed by the Pontiff Damasus and by Peter, bishop of Alexandria….We command that those persons who follow this rule shall embrace the name of Catholic Christians. The rest, however, whom We adjudge demented and insane, shall sustain the infamy of heretical dogmas, their meeting places shall not receive the name of churches, and they shall be smitten first by divine vengeance and secondly by the retribution of Our own initiative.

Augustine had also learned from his family and formal education that many good things in his life were required for him against his will, because he was obliged to do good things which he opposed and did not like. Thus, his own education also accounts in part for his view about coercion for the sake of conversion. To all the aforementioned contextual elements, should be added the gravity of the schism itself: “Faced with the violence of the Circumcellions, who were not above theft, arson, assault or murder, and the Donatists’ deep-rooted, defiant hostility which his [Augustine’s] own efforts had done little to counter, he [Augustine] seem to have become increasingly supportive of state intervention.” Indeed, it was as the result of the Donatists’ determined resistance against the Church’s efforts to unite them with itself and particularly the Circumcellions’ violent reaction against Catholics Augustine became increasingly supportive of state intervention.

Augustine’s view on conversion was also influenced by an early Christian conception of conversion, especially by the idea of conversion as it emerged after Constantine’s and

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10 “An Edict on the Profession of the Catholic Faith, 380,” in *CCC*, 150.


Theodosius’ settlement of Christianity. In his classic and eminent study on conversion, A. D. Nock, differentiating Christian conversions from pagan adhesions, defines early Christians’ conversions as “the reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right.”

Although he does not deny the effect of Christian preaching in gaining converts from paganism, he contends that “the one Christian type known to the populace [of early Christians] was that of the martyr…to die rather than break the law was the ideal way of hallowing God’s name.”

Nock’s assertion is based on Tertullian’s statement that the pagans, profoundly impressed by Christian martyrdom, were ready to follow the Christian way: “the blood of Christians is seed.”

Like Nock, Ramsay MacMullen considers martyrdom as a reason for conversion along with miracles. He also defines conversion in the early Church as “that change of belief by which a person accepted the reality and supreme power of god and determined to obey Him.”

He further comments: “Whether actual, entire, and doctrinally centrist obedience resulted would depend on cases. It would depend on cases whether the change lay half on the surface and in the conduct, or produced an exclusive loyalty, or was warmly or little felt….However, the church itself interpreted the initial process very loosely, without, of course, abandoning the duty to perfect it thereafter. Moreover…our definition—a device only of convenience, after all—becomes…inconvenient in any discussion of the post Constantinian world.”

Jack Sander contends that while martyrdom and miracles were not the only motives for conversion in the early

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14 Ibid., 193.
17 Ibid., 5.
Church, the tradition of martyrdom was well-respected.\(^\text{18}\) Indeed, Rodney Stark, the reputed scholar in sociology and comparative religion, asserts that “martyrs are the most credible exponents of the values of religion, and this is especially true if there is a voluntary aspect to their martyrdom.”\(^\text{19}\) His assertion is based on the fact that the martyrs, by accepting death and denying any merely this-worldly values, set the highest value upon religion and communicated that value to others.

If conversion to Christianity before Constantine was socially and materially disadvantageous and detrimental, after Constantine there was a propitious atmosphere that encouraged conversion.\(^\text{20}\) On the one hand, Constantine urged his subjects to be obedient to his new deity, to renounce their pagan rites, and to despise the temples; and he had Christian leaders who were entrusted with carrying out his instructions.\(^\text{21}\) On the other hand, the advantage of being a Christian for political, military, or socio-economic reasons could not be denied; the Church was generously endowed with lands, gifts from which one could not benefit unless he was a Christian.\(^\text{22}\) Since Constantine emphasized religious unity and welcomed new converts to Christianity, he disliked obstinate dissenters who, by viewing the State as the Devil’s instrument and through their interest in martyrdom, potentially endangered the desired political and religious unity.\(^\text{23}\) The policy of Constantine—and of all emperors after him except Julian—was religious unity in a united Empire. Constantine wrote to Athanasius, who refused to allow the Christian Arians to enter the Church: “Now you know my will: to all those who desire to enter the Church do you provide a free entry. For if I hear that you have hindered any who share in the faith of the


\(^\text{21}\) Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, 49-50.


Church or that you have barred such from entering in, I will immediately send one who at my order shall depose and shall drive you into exile.”

Through the measures he took against pagan worship, Constantine showed his desire to bring pagans to Christianity. And to an extent that cannot be underestimated, Constantine’s favors to the Christian Church and growing resentment toward pagans, heretics, and schismatics had a powerful and irreversible effect on the subsequent history of the Church. Indeed, according to Carol Harrison, the coercion of heretics was one of the most evident characteristics of the Constantinian settlement. And H. A. Drake states that Constantine’s impact on the future of Christianity was so substantial that, “during the thirty years of his reign, more change took place in the status, structure, and beliefs of the Christian Church than during any previous period of its history….When he died in 337, Christian leaders had assumed the rank, dress, and, increasingly, the duties of the old civic elite.” Constantine’s son, Constantius, continued his father’s policy and, through generous gifts to Christians and through an even stronger policy than his father against pagans and heretics, tried to bring his subjects under Christian unity, which he wanted to achieve from an Arian theological perspective. Constantius agreed with a group of Arians that Christ is “like” the Father, not of the same essence as the Father, and this opinion was confirmed by a general council at Constantinople in the following year. This formula seemed, for Constantius, “politically expedient for the welfare of the empire.”

Since religious unity was a serious concern in the empire, people adhered to Christianity to a great extent because it was advantageous and required, whereas it was very improbably that

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they would all change their way of life. Ramsay MacMullen asserts that “in the first period up to 312/3, the church could boast of a high level of commitment among its members. Though some were Christians only in name…nevertheless there were many extraordinary demonstrations of belief. In the fourth century, and indeed sometimes a generation or two earlier, Christians looked back on their predecessors with wonder and pride. As worldly advantages accrued to the Church, however, people joined for nonreligious or mixed reasons.” Alan Kreider shares about the same idea regarding Christian conversion during the time of Augustine: “Augustine recognized that those converted in appearance were more numerous that those truly converted (In Psalm. 40.10).” And Norbert Brox believes that “pseudo-conversions and semi-conversions were fatal to the church; the reasons for these lay in a lack of earnestness or knowledge, in weakness and a lack of understanding, and from the fourth century also in calculation of political advantage.”

Augustine, a man who learned about Christianity in a period when a series of edicts were issued against pagans and heretics and when people filled the churches in great numbers, thought that it was a time in history when people were called by God to be Christians through the laws of the emperors. In interpreting Christianity, Augustine relied significantly on the historical realities of his own time, and after a period of rejecting conversion by the use of force, Augustine considered the Donatists coming into the unity of the Church, even by force, as conversion or at least as the first step—and a very important one—toward conversion. And, as Carol Harrison asserts, Augustine came to believe that “even if coercion did not result in repentance, and the Donatists, like so many pagans, merely feigned conversion in order to avoid penalties, he was aware that God’s grace was unfathomable and might well work in electing and bringing to faith an, at first, feigned conversion.”

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28 Ramsay MacMullen, Christianizing the Roman Empire, 1.
29 Ibid., 118.
32 Carol Harrison, Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity, 153.
In a letter to Alypius, Augustine told him how Dioscorus, a chief physician at the court at Milan, suffered physically because his conversion was incomplete until he had done no more than memorize the creed. When Dioscorus’ daughter had become gravely ill, he vowed to become a Christian if his daughter recovered. Although she recovered, Dioscorus was blinded because he did not fulfill his vow. He realized what the cause of his blindness was and, therefore, vowed again. Since for a second time he did not completely fulfill his vow after he had been healed of his blindness, he was paralyzed. Then, Dioscorus dreamt that his suffering was because, in converting to Christianity, he did not recite the creed from memory, but read it. After all the trials Dioscorus suffered, he finally learned the creed and held it in his memory, Augustine told Alypius.  

Narrating the story about how Theodosius defeated the usurper Eugenius, Augustine praised Theodosius’ attitude toward the pagans of Eugenius’ army, who became Christians through the merciful attitude of the Emperor: “The sons of the enemies had been carried off, not by his order, but in the tumult of war; and, though they were not Christians, they took refuge in the Church. Theodosius wished them to become Christians, since the occasion thus offered; and he loved them with Christian charity. He did not deprive them of their property; in fact he heaped honors on them.”

In addition to the broad context of Augustine’s attitude about coercion in conversion and unity of the Church, the gravity of Donatist-Catholic controversy was a determining factor that obliged him to take an attitude that would end the schism. Because at first he advocated that a conversion should be the result of free and reasonable decision, naturally Augustine would not have justified coercion if the Catholic-Donatist relation were not getting worse and requiring a solution. Thus, Augustine’s attitude toward persecution of non-Catholics should be seen in both

33 Augustine, Letter 227, in WSA 2/4, 103-04.
35 Emilien Lamirande, Church, State and Toleration: An Intriguing Change of Mind in Augustine
the larger and more immediate context. However, because of the immediate context and due to the particularity of the Donatist-Catholic controversy, Augustine’s attitude toward coercion for the sake of seeing the Church in North Africa united, as Peter Brown asserts, was unique in the early Church: “Augustine, in replying to his persistent critics, wrote the only full justification, in the history of the Early Church, of the right of the state to suppress non-Catholics.” Emilien Lamirande rightly asserts that Augustine’s justification of persecution, although unique, was not a dogmatic one—that is, a binding statement that had to be taken by the Church as a model for the following centuries when it would deal with schismatics or heretics—but one conditioned by the particularity and the evolution of the Catholic-Donatist controversy. Thus, while Augustine’s intellectual formation and background should be seriously considered, the particular context of the Catholic-Donatist controversy requires special attention in evaluating Augustine’s attitude to coercion, which he adopted for the sake of uniting the divided Church in North Africa.

G. G. Willis, in emphasizing the role of circumstances that led to Augustine’s justification of persecution, is perhaps neglecting Augustine’s intellectual background according to which a mistake should be corrected by disciplinary methods, which could include corporal punishment: “Thus by the pressure of circumstances Augustine had been led to his final view on the suppression of schism by state authority.” Opposed to this view is Peter Brown who claims that Augustine’s attitude to coercion is typical of the general quality of his thought, which was never in a state of rest: “it is marked by a painful protracted attempt to embrace and resolve tension.” Moreover, Brown contends, “we may be dealing less with a volte-face provoked by external circumstances, than with a phenomenon common to many aspects of the thought of

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37 Emilien Lamirande, *Church, State and Toleration: An Intriguing Change of Mind in Augustine*, 70-71.
Augustine—that is a sudden precipitation, under external pressures, of ideas which, previously, had evolved slowly and imperceptibly over a long time.”

Brown rightly emphasizes Augustine’s intellectual formation and background as factors in his attitude toward coercion, and he correctly notes that the circumstances alone are an insufficient reason for Augustine’s justification of the use of force in conversion, since both Augustine’s intellectual formation and the particular context of the schism played a role in his justification of the use of force. However, by deemphasizing the role of circumstances and the gravity of the situation, Peter Brown seems to consider Augustine’s attitude to coercion to be mainly the result of his intellectual formation and of his mind, which was ready to endorse the use of force; according to this view, the tension-filled circumstances offered Augustine a proper occasion to endorse the use of force. This view is hard to endorse because Augustine, as already mentioned, had earlier thought that coercion was not the proper way of conversion, and he did his best to try to convert the Donatists diplomatically—through preaching, discussions, and even threatening allusions—to realize unity. During the effort of converting the Donatists peacefully, Augustine, of course, as he studied Scripture, found passages that, he thought, justified the use of force. But Augustine saw the use of force as the last solution, an alternative one, when nothing else worked to heal the schism. He endorsed the use of force when the external circumstances—the gravity of the schism and the State’s total support of the Catholics through a legislation that proscribed the Donatists—seemed both to require and to support the use of force. Once he started to support the use of force, Augustine did not see a way back from this position.

But, Augustine did all these things in order that the Donatists would sincerely and freely unite with the Church. As Markus asserts, the phenomenon of semi-Christians who entered the Church by the social pressures of law constituted a serious problem for Augustine. Consequently, he would not have justified coercion if he had not had strong reasons, such as the

40 Ibid., 264.
gravity of the schism and the help of the State, which encouraged him, in addition to his intellectual formation. Indeed, as W. H. C. Frend asserts, by challenging the Donatists to unite with the Church, Augustine started the quarrel with the Donatists.\footnote{W. H. C. Frend, \textit{The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 240.} And it is true that the quarrel became a very serious one. Augustine’s determination to heal the schism, and the way in which he provoked the Donatists was not a happy fact for the Donatists, who proved to be serious adversaries for a very determined fighter for the unity of the Church. This provocation, which the Donatists disliked, was delivered through preaching openly the need of unity.

However, as Markus states, “Augustine’s ‘theory’ of coercion, was from beginning to end, part of a pastoral strategy.”\footnote{R. A. Markus, \textit{Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine}, 140.} Indeed, through this pastoral perspective should be seen Augustine’s justification of conversion through coercion. Lamirande sees Augustine’s attitude toward coercion as rooted in his concern for truth: “since the Catholic Church is the one dwelling place of truth on earth, actual membership is necessary for salvation.”\footnote{Emilien Lamirande, \textit{Church, State and Toleration: An Intriguing Change of Mind in Augustine}, 72.} While this is a very important argument in Augustine’s justification of conversion through coercion, it is an argument which he developed during the Catholic-Donatist controversy and an argument for unity against the Donatists.\footnote{Carol Harrison, \textit{Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity}, 157.} Carol Harrison sees Augustine’s view of coercion as the result of Augustine’s view of the fall and the impotence of the human will, and the role of God’s grace which, through discipline, correction and coercion, is able to break the chains of sinful habits. However, while this is an important argument in Augustine’s justification of coercion, it is both an insufficient explanation of coercion and an argument that, too, developed during the Donatist controversy, although Augustine devoted more attention to it during the Pelagian controversy.\footnote{Carol Harrison, \textit{Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity}, 157.} Carol Harrison asserts that Augustine, in defending the use of force in conversion in order to achieve unity, believed that the Church should act as parents do in correcting their children:
Just as parents discipline, correct, and punish their children through love, so the Church should act to bring back those who had erred from it, ‘the truth is, that always both the bad have persecuted the good, and the good have persecuted the bad; the former doing harm by their unrighteousness, the latter seeking to do good by the administration of discipline; the former with cruelty, the latter with moderation; the former impelled by lust, the latter under the constraint of love’ (ep. 93.5-10).  

According to Peter Brown, Augustine, after beginning to defend the use of force in achieving unity, came to believe “that God’s grace was able to bring about a change of heart in men who had been forced into the Catholic Church. He would, therefore, leave the problem of feigned conversion to God; to object to the Catholic policy because it provoked such feigned conversions became, in his opinion, tantamount to denying the ‘Power of God.’”  

Augustine’s view of conversion to the visible Church went beyond the conception of individual conversion; Augustine’s Church was not a closed community. As the Church was the body of Christ, a society redeemed by and through Him, the Church was intrinsically united in Christ and, therefore, a community open to all who accepted the invitation to become members; otherwise, the Church could be described with the Donatists’ or any other perfectionist ideas about the Church.  

As I already mentioned, by the time Augustine became a priest, he had a strong opinion as to the importance of authority in guiding people toward the right things in life. Since the Church had guided him toward the truth that he had sought continuously from the time he left Thagaste for further studies, he considered it to be the place of truth and that, therefore, it had great authority to correct, even by physical punishment if necessary, and even to move them toward the path of truth by the use of force. Augustine believed that God, who is indissolubly connected with His people through and in the Church, by inspiring fear in Augustine, moved him toward accepting the role to be one of His servants in the Church. Speaking retrospectively,

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Augustine asserts in his Confessions: “By fear of you, you repressed my pride and by your yoke you made my neck submissive; now I carry that yoke, and it is gentle, exactly as you promised and as you made it (Matt. 11:30). In truth it was gentle already, but I did not realize it at that time when I was afraid to submit to it.”

Although this passage does not say anything about the Church as the place of truth, Augustine believed that the true religion existed only among Catholic or orthodox Christians, who were guardians of truth and followers of right. Augustine also believed that the Church gives to all people within itself the possibility to participate in the grace of God, which confirms that God relates to His people through the Church.

At the time of his ordination as a priest, Augustine believed that, by accepting his role to be a servant of God, he suffered great violence from God, who wanted to correct him and reprimand his past critique against the servants of the Church.

Since the leaders of the Church and the emperor are God’s servants, they have the right to correct or punish those who seem to be His enemies, either by their heresy, schism, or by refusing to convert to the Church from their pagan ways. In addition, Augustine believed that the circumstances showed that he was living in real Christian times when multitudes of people, through the laws of the emperors, were becoming Christians. The Donatists could not be an exception from this Christianization of the Empire, of which Augustine gives us a glimpse in his De vera religione, a work written right before his ordination as a priest, in 390:

> From one particular region of the earth in which alone the one God was worshiped and where alone such a man could be born, chosen men were sent throughout the entire world, and by their virtues and words have kindled the fires of the divine love. Their sound teaching has been confirmed and they have left to posterity a world illuminated…. After all the Christian bloodshed, after all the burnings and crucifixions of the martyrs, fertilized by these things churches have sprung up as far as among barbarian nations….All over the inhabited world the Christian rites are entrusted to men who are willing to make profession and to

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51 Augustine, True Religion 5.9-6.10, in WSA 1/8, 36.
52 Augustine, Letter 21.1-2, in WSA 2/1, 55.
53 R. A. Markus, Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine, 35, referring to Augustine, Sermon 22.4 (dated 400), in WSA 3/2, 44.
undertake the obligations required. Every day the precepts of Christianity are read in the churches and expounded by the priests. Those who try to fulfill them beat their breasts in contrition. Multitudes enter upon this way of life from every race, forsaking the riches and honors of the present world, desirous of dedicating their whole life to the one most high God. Islands once deserted and many lands formerly left in solitude are filled with monks. In cities and towns, castles and villages, country places and private estates, there is openly preached and practiced such renunciation of earthly things and conversion to the one true God that daily throughout the entire world with almost one voice the human race makes response: Lift up your hearts to the Lord.  

Encouraged by such circumstances, Augustine believed that the Catholic Church, the guardian of truth and the right religion, had the right to correct and guide pagans, heretics, and schismatics to the true religion: “this Catholic Church, strongly and widely spread throughout the world, makes use of all who err, to correct them if they are willing to be aroused, and to assist its own progress. It makes use of the nations as material for its operations, of heretics to try its own doctrine, of schismatics to prove its stability, of the Jews as a foil to its own beauty.”  

At the time he wrote On True Religion, he intended to censure those who, through wicked opinions or some other cause of dissension, deviated from the Rule of Faith and from the communion of the Catholic Church.  

Summarizing the thought of On True Religion in his Retractations in about 427, he mentioned that the Lord Jesus Christ “did nothing by force, but everything by persuasion and admonition.”  

Augustine’s attitude regarding the authority of the Church and its right to correct those who did not belong to the true religion can be noticed at the time of his ordination as a priest, and then it developed gradually in accordance with the evolution of the schism and the duty of his office.  

As I already mentioned, before accepting a policy of coercion against the Donatists, the

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57 Augustine, Retractations 1.12, 54.  
58 R. A. Markus, Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine, 140-41.
problem of feigned conversions caused him to be reticent about the use of force, a reticence which he overcame.\textsuperscript{59}

\section*{B. From 391 to 405}

From the beginning of his career as a priest, Augustine was actively trying to convert the Donatists to the Church. He believed that through education and discussion he would be able to convert the Donatists. At that time, he believed that conversion should be the result of a proper understanding, arrived at after instruction intended to prepare the newly converted for the life of the Church. However, he also believed that threatening with the word of God and instilling fear in those not in the Catholic Church were methods which had to be used to convert people to the Church. At the end of the period treated in this section, in about 405, Augustine changed his opinion about the use of force in conversion.

Through a Catholic brother, Augustine sent some of his writings to Gaius, a Catholic layman of Africa, whom he may have converted. Augustine’s writings tried to help Gaius cling to the truth he had received when he joined the Church. In the letter sent to Gaius in 390 or 391, Augustine told him that the brother would not force upon him his (Augustine’s) thoughts against his will.\textsuperscript{60} Augustine believed that fear had to be instilled in the hearts of those not in the Church and that they would come to that fear by reading the words of Scripture. In the letter written in about 390 or 391 to Antonius, a Catholic layman whose wife was not a Catholic, Augustine, after showing willingness to help in converting her, counseled him “to implant or to nourish a reasonable fear of God in your spouse by reading the words of God and by serious conversation”; this is a fear which presupposed a psychological torment.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{60} Augustine, Letter 19.1, in WSA 2/1, 52.
\textsuperscript{61} Augustine, Letter 20.3, in WSA 2/1, 54; Peter Brown, \textit{Augustine of Hippo: A Biography}, 191.
Valerius, the bishop of Hippo, Augustine stated his belief that he himself suffered this kind of violence and correction from the hand of God when he was ordained a priest:

I suffered violence because of the merits of my sins...but I think that my Lord wanted to correct me because I dared, as if I were more learned and better, to reprimand the mistakes of many sailors [members of the Church] before I had experienced what is involved in their work. And so, after I was launched into the middle of the sea, I began to feel the rashness of my reprimands, though even earlier I judged this ministry to be filled with perils. And this was the reason for those tears that some of the brothers noticed that I shed in the city at the time of my ordination.62

Augustine believed that God’s violence and severity had the goal not to condemn him but to show him His mercy; therefore, Augustine tells us that he decided “to examine carefully all the remedies of his scriptures and, by praying and reading, work that he may grant my soul health suited for such dangerous tasks” of being a priest.63 However, at the beginning of his career as a priest, even if God used violence with him, Augustine did not think necessary the use of compulsion by people in converting the Donatists, and he did his best to convert them through a campaign of discussions, letters, conferences, and treatises, which, of course, did not lack threats.

The toughness of Augustine’s position and the responsibility involved is also underlined in the letter which he wrote sometime between 391 and 395 to Maximinus, the Donatist bishop of Siniti, who was, according to Augustine, not abstaining from baptizing Catholics who left the Catholic Church and became Donatists. Since he would have to give an account to the prince of all pastors, that is, to Christ, about the sheep entrusted to him, Augustine told him that he could not be silent about such an act.64 Augustine suggested that Maximinus discuss with him and, then, that they write letters to each other, which were to be read publicly. Augustine promised not to read them publicly when the army was present because he did not want to give people a reason to say that he wanted the Donatists to be persecuted by the State. Augustine also stated that he did not want people forced into the Catholic communion against their own will. However, it is quite

64 Augustine, Letter 23.6, in WSA 2/1, 67.
clear that some harsh measures against the Donatists had been already taken as the result of the Church’s and State’s effort to ensure unity: “Terror from temporal authorities will cease on our side…Let us deal with the facts; let us deal with reason; let us deal with the authorities of the divine scriptures.”

After he became a bishop, sometime between 395 and 396, he wrote to the Donatist bishop of Hippo, Proculeianus. In the letter Augustine recognized the fact that many people have not considered his effort to convert the Donatists to the Church as sincere or inspired with the fear of Christian humility. However, neglecting people’s opinion, Augustine believed that the schism had become so grave that the Church had even forgotten to call a physician to apply remedies: “Because these wounds have become gangrenous, we have lost the pain on account of which one usually calls in a physician.” In response to those who questioned Augustine’s sincerity and humility, Augustine replied that he and Proculeianus should hold discussions about the unity of the Church so that the people under his and Proculeianus’ pastoral care, respectively, may not cause these two bishops “trouble at the judgment of God,” a theme which Augustine used often to threaten those not in communion with the Church or not pleasing God through their improper behavior.

In the letter written between 396 and 397 to Eusebius, a Catholic layman and Roman official in Hippo, about a case which he thought he had to make publicly known (a boy had bitten his mother and then went over to the Donatists). This letter was the result of Augustine’s failure to convince Eusebius to intervene in the case through several messages he had sent Eusebius through some good and honest brothers. Augustine hoped to convince Eusebius to involve himself in the case by telling Proculeianus, the Donatist bishop in Hippo, not to ignore the case.

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65 Augustine, Letter 23.7, in WSA 2/1, 67.
66 Augustine, Letter 33.1, in WSA 2/1, 115.
67 Augustine, Letter 33.6, in WSA 2/1, 117.
68 Augustine, Letter 33.6, in WSA 2/1, 115-17; Letter 104.9, in WSA 2/2, 48; Peter Brown Augustine of Hippo: A Biography, 190-92.
69 Augustine, Letter 34.5, in WSA 2/1, 120.
and to take disciplinary measures against the rebel boy, who had become a member of Proculeianus’ community.\textsuperscript{70} The case of the dissenter boy received by the Donatists in their communion was for Augustine a good occasion to spread propaganda about the kind of people the Donatists unscrupulously received in their community and an occasion to win them over to the Catholic Church: “We peacefully deal with this whole question of our division, in order that the error, which is already evident, may become more evidently known.”\textsuperscript{71} Augustine asserted that despite his desire for peace, he had to reveal the plain truth to all who have been in error, because he, through the words of the Apostle Paul, was commanded by God Himself to defend the faith and to refute the error.\textsuperscript{72}

However, Augustine’s first letter to Eusebius had failed to obtain help from Eusebius; thus, shortly after his first letter, Augustine sent a second letter to him.\textsuperscript{73} It was obvious that Eusebius, who very likely had a good relation with the Donatist bishop, was not willing to be a judge or mediator between Augustine and Proculeianus, a sign which indicates that the Donatists were not in the Roman eyes as bad an enemy as Augustine tried to present them.\textsuperscript{74} Further, as Serge Lancel asserts, not all Catholics who were government officials or landowners were good Catholics willing to get rid of the Donatists.\textsuperscript{75} In addition to the case of the boy who had bitten his mother, in the second letter Augustine mentioned two other cases that also aggravated him. One case was about a former Catholic priest who, because he had been removed from the ranks of the clergy for inappropriate behavior, had become a Donatist together with two Catholic nuns.\textsuperscript{76} The other case was about a young woman, a daughter of a tenant farmer of the Church and a catechumen in the Catholic Church, who was won over to the Donatists and rebaptized. Since the

\begin{footnotes}
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\item[70] Augustine, Letter 34, in WSA 2/1, 118-20.
\item[71] Augustine, Letter 34.5, in WSA 2/1, 120.
\item[72] Augustine, Letter 34.4, in WSA 2/1, 119, referring to 1 Tm 1:11.
\item[73] Augustine, Letter 35.1-5, in WSA 2/1, 121-23.
\item[74] Augustine, Letter 35.1, in WSA 2/1, 121; Serge Lancel, \textit{St Augustine} (London: SCM Press, 2002), 188-89.
\item[75] Serge Lancel, \textit{St Augustine}, 276.
\item[76] Augustine, Letter 35.2, in WSA 2/1, 122.
\end{footnotes}
father of the young woman wanted to win her over to the Catholic Church through fatherly severity, Augustine “had refused that the woman, whose mind had been corrupted, should be taken back unless she were willing and desired by free choice what is better.” It is quite evident that at this stage in the Catholic-Donatist controversy, sometime between 396 and 397, Augustine was against the use of force against the Donatists. As in the previous letter, Augustine believed that making the cases public was what the Lord’s and the apostles’ teaching persuaded him to do.

In a letter written to a group of Donatists in 396 or 397, Augustine’s main concern is the unity of the Church and thus the conversion of the Donatists to the Catholic Church. Courteously, Augustine tells them that he does not write to them as heretics since they, different than their parents, who were seduced and fell into error, were concerned about the truth and ready to be corrected. However, the schismatics who stubbornly refuse to join the Church are potential heretics and, therefore, should be corrected in any way possible: “We should avoid the heretic swollen with odious pride and insane..., so we do not deny that we should correct him in whatever ways we can. This is the reason why we have written even to some of the Donatists, not letters of communion that they no longer accept on account of their having turned away from the Catholic unity, which is spread throughout the world, but such private letters as we are permitted to send even to pagans.” After recounting the history of the schism, during which the Donatists had been invariably condemned, and after mentioning that peace has been granted through God’s mercy and the rulers of the world, which the Christians and the bishops should seek to preserve,

77 Augustine, Letter 35.4, in WSA 2/1, 123.
78 Augustine, Letter 35.3, in WSA 2/1, 122-23; see 1Tm 1:11, 2Tm 4:3.
79 Augustine, Letter 43.1, in WSA 2/1, 157; for Donatists as heretics, see Letter 88.7, in WSA 2/1, 355 and Contra Cresconium 46.50-47.51, in BA, vol. 31, 370-79. The Donatists were named “heretics” simply because they formed a schismatic church. Indeed, Augustine stated clearly that they maintained orthodox doctrine and that what he had against them was the fact of being schismatics and thus not in the unity of the Church. For Augustine’s statement that the only quarrel with them is about unity, see Letter 185.1, in WSA 2/3, 180. In about 400, in the first book against Petilian, Augustine called the Donatists “heretics”; see Contra litteras Petiliani 1.1.1, in BA, vol. 30, 133.
Augustine expressed surprised that the Donatists did not want to accept correction.\textsuperscript{80} While nothing forced the Donatists to remain in schism, Augustine asserted, as in many other letters, that the letter he sent to them “will be a witness for my defense in the judgment of God, who knows with what intention I acted and who said, Blessed are the peacemakers because they will be called the children of God (Mt 5:9).”\textsuperscript{81}

In another letter addressed to the Donatists he had already addressed in the previous letter, Augustine recounts his encounter and discussion with Fortunius, the Donatist bishop of Thiave, about the way unity could be achieved in North Africa. While two groups had been gathered to attend the debate, one that supported Augustine and one that supported Fortunius, Augustine tells us that only a few had paid a religious and undivided attention to the discussion, whereas the rest had assembled for the spectacle of quarrel. Therefore, the discussion was not as efficient as he had expected.\textsuperscript{82} However, responding to Fortunius’ affirmation that the Donatists had been persecuted by Macarius, the Imperial commissioner sent in 347 to Africa to unite the divided churches, Augustine responded that they had not suffered persecution on account of justice because they had separated from the unity of the Church:

Those who want to see whether they suffered persecution on account of justice should consider whether they rightly cut themselves off from the unity of the world. If they were found to have done so unjustly, it would be evident that they suffered persecution on account of injustice rather than on account of justice and, for that reason, cannot be added to the number of the blessed, of whom it was said, Blessed are those who suffer persecution on account of justice.\textsuperscript{83}

To Fortunius’ question about who would be a just person—“the one who persecutes or the one who suffers persecution”—Augustine replied that he did not pose the question correctly, since it is possible that both are unjust and it is also possible that the more just person persecutes the more unjust. Augustine also argued that Maximian—as well as his group—who separated from the main Donatist Church and, therefore, was persecuted by them because of his schism, should be

\textsuperscript{80} Augustine, Letter 43.21, in WSA, 2/1, 167-68.
\textsuperscript{81} Augustine, Letter 43.2, in WSA 2/1, 157-58.
\textsuperscript{82} Augustine, Letter 44.1, in WSA 2/2, 173-74.
\textsuperscript{83} Augustine, Letter 44.4, in WSA 2/2, 175; see also Mt 5:10 and 1Pt 4:14.
more just than the entire whole, according to Fortunius’ judgment. Of course, by refusing to recognize Maximian as more just than the rest of the Donatists, Fortunius had been silenced.\(^84\)

Fortunius asserted that the interim administrator, who had been appointed to take care of the See of Carthage after Caecilian’s ordination had been unrecognized by the seventy Numidian bishops and Secundus, and before Majorinus became the Donatist bishop at Carthage, this interim administrator had been killed in his church by Caecilian’s allies. To Fortunius’ allegation, Augustine replied that his assertion had not been confirmed as true.\(^85\) Augustine recognized that any Catholics who had killed Donatists even in the name of Christ were not a good people. However, Augustine brought to Fortunius’ attention that Elijah, who Fortunius could not deny was just, killed many false prophets by his own hand; “here he really saw,” Augustine stated, “that such actions were permitted to the just. For they did such acts with their prophetic spirit and by the authority of God who undoubtedly knows for whom it is good even to be killed.”\(^86\) To Fortunius’ assertion that such cases could be seen in the New Testament, Augustine stated that no just person in the New Testament had killed anyone, but he also asserted that Jesus tolerated criminals: “He did not conceal from them [apostles] that there was a great criminal [Jude] among them.”\(^87\) Since Fortunius expressed his fear of again being persecuted by the Catholics trying to enforce unity, Augustine asserted: “God sees our hearts, which they [the Donatists] could not see, and that they are too ready to fear these events which, if they do come about, come from evil persons, though they themselves have worse ones than these. Nor ought we, nonetheless, to separate ourselves from the Catholic communion if anything should perhaps happen when we were unwilling or even opposed to it, if we were able, since we learned peaceful toleration from the lips of the apostle.”\(^88\) This statement shows that at this time, in about 396-397 Augustine

\(^{84}\) Augustine, Letter 44.7, in WSA 2/1, 177; see also Augustine, Confessions 9.7.15, 164.

\(^{85}\) Augustine, Letter 44.8, in WSA 2/1, 177; W. H. C. Frend, The Donatist Church, 19.

\(^{86}\) Augustine, Letter 44.8-9, in WSA 2/1, 178; for Elijah and the killing of false prophets, see I Kgs 18:40.

\(^{87}\) Augustine, Letter 44.10, in WSA 2/1, 178; see also Mt 26:14-28; Jn 4:1-2.

\(^{88}\) Augustine, Letter 44.11, in WSA 2/1, 179.
opposed an open persecution of the Donatists. Since the discussion he had with Fortunius was disturbed by crowds, in the end he proposed that Fortunius meet with him at a neutral place, where neither Catholics nor the Donatists had a church, and finish the discussion in the pursuit of Christian unity.\textsuperscript{89}

Augustine had heard rumors that Crispinus, the Donatist bishop of Calama in Numidia, had wanted to speak with him about the schism. In the letter Augustine sent to Crispinus in about 399 or 400, Augustine told him that, regardless of the way the Catholics had acted in the past, those things should now be past so that they do not impede what had remained to be done about the schism and the end of it. Augustine insisted that they should communicate through letters so that the facts recounted and their arguments would not be forgotten by them or by others interested to know about their discussion. Since Augustine believed that some false statements had been made by the Donatists about the past events of the schism, he wanted to discuss them in light of the present reality.\textsuperscript{90} Although Augustine referred to the false statements of the past, he does not recount in this letter the whole history of the schism, which Augustine believed was not as the Donatists believed it to be. Instead, he here rehearses only more recent events that had taken place in the Donatist Church and which Augustine believed showed the Donatists inconsistencies as to the way they related themselves to their own problems and to the issues they debated with the Catholics. Augustine exemplified to Crispinus the gravity of schism by references to the Scripture:

\begin{quote}
You are surely aware that in the time of the people of the old testament the sacrilege of idolatry was committed and a contemptuous king burned the book of a prophet. The sin of schism would not be punished more harshly than each of these crimes unless it were considered more serious. For you, of course, recall how the earth opened up and swallowed alive the authors of schism and how fire poured down from heaven and consumed those who had sided with it. Neither the construction and worship of an idol nor the burning of a sacred book deserved to be punished in such a way.\textsuperscript{91}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{89} Augustine, Letter 44.14, in WSA 2/1, 180-81.  
\textsuperscript{90} Augustine, Letter 51.1, in WSA 2/2, 198.  
\textsuperscript{91} Augustine, Letter 51.1, in WSA 2/2, 198-99; for the sin of idolatry, see Ex 32:1-35; for the burning of a scroll, see Jer 36:23-32; for the sin of schism, see Nm 16:31-35.
Although Augustine had already exemplified to Honoratus the gravity of schism through the cases mentioned in the aforementioned quotation, and since the Donatists often objected to the Catholics that they had persecuted the Donatists by earthly powers, he asserted: “On this point I do not want to discuss either what you deserve for the terribleness of so great a sacrilege or how much Christian kindness restrains us [the Catholics].”92 It is very likely that in the quoted passage Augustine did not feel comfortable stating clearly what he had already implied the Donatists deserved according to the examples he had given to support his view on the gravity of the schism. Although he did not state what Christian kindness restrained the Church from doing, Augustine and his colleague bishops did not endorse yet an open action of the State to force the Donatists into the unity of the Catholic Church. Since the Donatists stated that the Catholics were persecuting them by earthly powers, Augustine implied in his statement that Christian kindness restrained the Church from endorsing an open persecution, which they, in fact, deserved. Moreover, Augustine implied that, since the Donatists persecuted their schismatic Maximianists and asked the State’s officials to bring them back to the mother Church, there is no reason the Donatists should judge the Catholics for endorsing violent correction of their schismatics.

Among the wealthy landowners in North Africa, many were Donatists.93 In the letter Augustine sent between 396 and 410 to Celer, a wealthy Donatist of Hippo, Augustine, very courteously, told Celer that he wanted to lead him to salvation through the materials he sent to him through the priest Optatus. Of course, since Celer was a rich landowner, Augustine’s intention was to convert him to Catholicism and through him his tenants. The material he sent to him very likely was about the history of the schism, since Augustine asserted that he wanted Celer “to see clearly the unshakable foundations of the proofs that refute the error.”94 However, Augustine realized that it was hard to break the chain of sinfulness, that is, the chain of schism,

92 Augustine, Letter 51.3, WSA 2/1, 199-200.
93 Serge Lancel, St Augustine, 276.
94 Augustine, Letter 56.1-2, in WSA 2/1, 237.
which had become a habit and something like a friend. In a second letter to the same Celer, which he wrote soon after the previous one, Augustine said he believed, very likely based on the material he had sent to him previously, that Celer did not have any doubt that the Donatists had had no reasons to break from the unity of the whole world. Therefore, Augustine was trying to persuade Celer that through men in his service, Paternus and Maurisius, he should act in the cause of unity in the region of Hippo. Augustine also asked Celler to allow him to confer with a Donatist who was a subject of Celer and who was afraid to confer with him on account of certain violent men of his party. Although Augustine appreciated the constancy in the Donatist with whom he wanted to confer, he hated his stubbornness. While Augustine loved constancy because it did not allow one to become worse, he thought that stubbornness should be corrected by the use of force.

As always when he wrote to men of high social status, Augustine, very courteously, addressed Pammachius, a Roman senator, in 401 and thanked him for having brought his tenants in Numidia into the unity of the Church:

Unless you were rooted in his [Jesus] love, the Catholic unity would not be so dear to you. You would neither have admonished with such a language your African tenant-farmers…nor would you have roused them with such fervor of spirit that they chose with such prompt devotion to follow the course that they believed so fine and great a man as you would only follow because he knew the truth. And in that way, though separated from you so far in terms of special distance, they came under the same head and were counted for eternity along with you among the members of him [Jesus] by whose commandment they serve you.

Since these Donatists accepted Catholicism because their master had told them to do so, their conversion should not be seen as a freely chosen religious act but as one conditioned by a society

95 Augustine, Letter 56.2, in WSA 2/1, 237
96 Augustine, Letter 57.1, in WSA 2/2, 238.
97 Augustine, Letter 57.2, in WSA 2/2, 238; Serge Lancel, St Augustine, 276.
98 Augustine, Letter 58.1, WSA 2/1, 239.
in which the subjects, on account of their economic dependence, had to follow their masters. The fact that the landowners were masters of their subjects is clearly seen in the letter in which Augustine reprimands Crispinus, who rebaptized about eighty Catholic tenants of an estate which he had bought. Excited because of Pammachius’ act, Augustine urged him to read his letters to other senators like him in order to encourage them to follow his example:

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…Hence, it seemed to me to suffice that you read this letter to those men you can on the basis of their being Christian, with confidence in their friendship. For in that way 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.

From the beginning of his career as a priest, Augustine actively tried to convert the Donatists to the Church. Initially, Augustine believed that through education and discussion he would be able to convert the Donatists. He also believed that conversion should be the result of a proper understanding, arrived at after instruction intended to prepare the newly converted for the life of the Church. However, he also believed that threatening with the word of God and instilling fear in those not in the Catholic Church were methods which had to be used to convert people to the Church. Augustine’s appeal to Catholic imperial officials, Donatist leaders, and landowners was also an important method of uniting the Donatists with the Church through the influence these exercised on the Donatists. However, in about 405, after a period in which he tried to bring the Donatists peacefully to the Church, Augustine changed his opinion about the use of force in conversion.

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99 Serge Lancel, *St Augustine*, 275-77; in Letter 66.2, in WSA 2/1, 258, which Augustine sent to Crispinus, the Donatist bishop of Calama and a landowner in Numidia, Augustine implicitly recognized that many Donatists became Catholics because they were coerced by their masters.
100 Augustine, Letter 66.1-2, in WSA 2/1, 257-58.
101 Augustine, Letter 58.3, in WSA 2/1, 240.
C. From 405 to 408

The legislation which accompanied the Edict of Unity of 405 incited Donatists to social unrest and rebellion, since they saw themselves obliged either to accept Catholicism or to be deprived of civic and social rights. The letter which Augustine and his clerics of Hippo sent between 406 and 411 to Januarius, the Donatist bishop of Caesae Nigrae in Numidia, was the result of their discontent on account of the Donatists’ rebelliousness, especially the Circumcellions’ violence, which followed the Edict of Unity of 405. Augustine recounted the main events in which the Emperor Constantine judged against the Donatists’ claim to be the true Church of Africa and the most recent efforts of the Church—about two years before the laws of 405—to unite the Donatists to the Church. Because the Donatists violently opposed the Church and had refused to accept the unity of the Church, Augustine tells us that a council of Catholic bishops sent a delegation to the Imperial court in 404; this was the first official step toward a formal appeal to the State in order to advance the Catholic cause for unity against the Donatists’ stubbornness and rebelliousness. This action, plus the scars that the Catholic bishop of Bagai, a convert from Donatism, because he was beaten by the Donatists, had moved the Emperor to issue a hard legislation against which the Donatists complained and reacted violently. On this occasion the Donatists were required to hand over their churches to Catholics and, for legal purposes, were for the first time classified with heretics.

According to scholars, 405—and the events that preceded it—was a turning-point in Augustine’s attitude toward the Donatists, since he and his colleagues had openly asked the State

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102 W. H. C. Frend, The Donatist Church, 261-274.
103 Augustine, Letter 88.1, in WSA 2/1, 351. Although there is no doubt that the Circumcellions activities endangered and stressed the Catholics, Peter Brown is right that their violent actions seemed to be erratic and aimless compared to the determined effort of the Church to convert the Donatists and the harsh measures taken against them by the State, which were instigated by the Church; see Peter Brown, Augustine of Hippo: A Biography, 225, 237-38.
104 Augustine, Letter 88.6-7, in WSA 2/1, 354-56; for the events which preceded the Edict of Unity, see Chapter C.1.i of this work; W. H. C. Frend, The Donatist Church, 261-74; G. G. Willis, Saint Augustine and the Donatist Controversy (London: SCKP, 1950), 50-51; Gerald Bonner, G. St. Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies, 262-65.
to help them against the Donatists, an action which generated other actions that finally secured in 411 the official condemnation of Donatists.\textsuperscript{105} Since the legislation could not be evenly and thoroughly applied, it exacerbated the conflict, which lasted with slight interruptions up to and after the Conference of 411.\textsuperscript{106} Although the action taken by the Church in 400-405 against the Donatists was decisive for Augustine’s later view on the use of force against the Donatists, before the edict and its implementation, Augustine was reticent regarding the use of force in conversion. Indeed, Augustine tells us that at that time

\begin{quote}
yielded…to these examples, which my colleagues proposed to me. For my opinion originally was that no one should be forced to the unity of Christ, but that we should act with words, fight with arguments, and conquer by reason. Otherwise, we might have false Catholics those whom we had known to be obvious heretics. But this opinion of mine was defeated, not by the words of its opponents, but by examples of these who offered proof. For the first argument against me was my own city. Though it was entirely in the Donatist sect, it was converted to the Catholic unity out of fear of the imperial laws.\textsuperscript{107}
\end{quote}

Although an open persecution was decided at the council which sent delegates to the emperor, Augustine was against it and thought that through economic and civic measures against the Donatists would be more appropriate.\textsuperscript{108} Indeed, as Augustine himself stated in the aforementioned passage, his endorsement of the use of force came as the result of the persecution which had begun in 405, when he saw that many Donatists became Catholics; thus, the persecution was justified by its results.

In a letter sent between 406 and 409 to Caecilian, the governor of Africa, Augustine courteously praised him for the measures taken against the Donatists in some parts of Africa.

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{107} Augustine, Letter 93.17, in WSA 2/1, 387.
\bibitem{108} W.H. C. Frend, \textit{The Donatist Church}, 262-66; Peter Brown, Augustine of Hippo: \textit{A Biography}, 299-230.
\end{thebibliography}
However, since in his city and its surroundings the edict did not have effective results, Augustine urged him to implement the anti-Donatist legislation in Hippo and the surrounding cities:

For to the extent that we rejoice that you have shown concern for the Catholic unity through the other parts of Africa with a wonderful effectiveness, to that extent we are saddened that the region of Hippo Regius and the areas near it bordering on Numidia have not yet merited to be helped by the force of your official decree, my excellent lord and son, who are truly and rightly honorable and to be embraced in the love of Christ.  

Augustine, as a bishop and pastor of his Church, considered that it was his duty to signal to Caecilian the fact that the legislation in the region of Hippo had not yet been rightly implemented:

For fear that this may be ascribed to the negligence of myself, who have the burden of bishop in Hippo, I thought that I should not keep silent before your Magnificence. If you would deign to listen to how presumptuous the audacity of heretics [Donatists] has been in the area of Hippo either from my brothers and colleagues who could tell Your Highness of these things or from the priest whom I sent to you with a letter, you would undoubtedly with the help of the Lord our God make provision that the tumor of sacrilegious vanity may be healed by instilling fear rather than cut away by taking vengeance.

It is clear that Augustine wanted to unite the divided churches by instilling fear in the Donatists and opposed vengeance that could eliminate them as a community.

In the letter sent between 405 and 411 to Emeritus, the Donatist bishop of Caesarea, Augustine told him that it is a great perversity to bring accusations against the severity of the state, for “when earthly authorities persecute the schismatics, they defend themselves by that rule which the apostle states in Romans 13:2-4.

Now the question was whether the schism was evil and therefore punishable. Since Augustine repeatedly stated that schism is a crime, he believed that the Donatist schism was unjust on account of their separation from the unity of the whole world. Thus, the Donatists’ objections to being persecuted are perverse since the authorities were established precisely to

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110 Augustine, Letter 86, in WSA 2/1, 343.
111 Augustine, Letter 87.7, in WSA 2/1, 348.
112 Ibid.; for the Donatists’ separation from the whole world, see, for example, Sermon 162A.10 (dated 404), in WSA 3/5, 161-62.
correct the unjust. Augustine asserted that the Roman Emperors persecuted the Donatists because they dared to tear apart by their schism the Church of which they were members. The Church sought help from the State in order to defend itself against the violence of the Circumcellions. In doing this, the Church did what Paul had done when he sought help from the State’s authority because the Jews were conspiring to kill him. However, Augustine stated that he was displeased because some people on the Catholic side punished the Donatists without moderation.\footnote{Augustine, Letter 87.8, in WSA 2/1, 348-49; for Paul seeking help from the Roman authorities, see Acts 23:12-24.}

Since Emeritus asked why the Catholics wanted to be united with the Donatists if they were criminals, Augustine answered that it was because they were still alive and could be corrected, although they did not have life from the root: “For, when you are united with us, that is, to the Church of Christ, the heritage of Christ, whose possession is the ends of the earth, you are corrected so that you have life from the root. For the apostle speaks in this way of the branches that were broken off, \textit{God, after all, is able to reinsert them} (Rom 11:23).”\footnote{Augustine, Letter 87.9, in WSA 2/1, 349; for schismatics as branches and on the possibility of being grafted in, see Sermon 162A.12, in WSA 3/5, 163-64; for schismatics as lacking life, see Sermon 268.2 (dated 405), in WSA 3/7, 279-79; for schism as a crime, see Letter 76.1-4, in WSA 2/1, 297-300; Letter 87.4, in WSA 2/1, 346.} Further, since Emeritus claimed that it was not permitted for Christians to persecute even bad people, Augustine granted that it should not be allowed. However, Augustine asked Emeritus if it was permissible to neglect the commands of the civil authorities that, according to Augustine, were established to maintain order and to be obeyed. Since Emeritus asserted that the Roman emperors were stirred up against the Donatists, Augustine replied that they stirred them up against themselves, “for you have dared to tear apart with your schism the Church of which they are members, as was foretold so long before. For it was said of Christ, \textit{“And the kings of the earth will adore him}} (Ps 72:11).”\footnote{Augustine, Letter 87.8, in WSA 2/1, 348.} \footnote{Augustine, Letter 87.8, in WSA 2/1, 348-49; for Paul seeking help from the Roman authorities, see Acts 23:12-24.}

To Festus, a Roman official and Catholic layman in Africa, Augustine stated in a letter sent to him between 405-411 that, before the insuperable strength of the Donatists’ opposition to
unity, constant and vigorous work must be done, not only for the defense of those who are
Catholics, but also to bring into the unity of the Church those Donatists who are not yet
Catholics. ¹¹⁶ Because of the measures taken against them after 405, the Donatists complained
about being persecuted, a fact which Augustine fully resented. In trying to refute the Donatists’
claim of being persecuted unjustly, Augustine considered that the Donatists were mercifully
disciplined and compared them with bad children corrected by their father.

"But what is more unhappy and more perverse in the conduct of the Donatists,
who boast that they suffered persecution, than not merely failing to be ashamed
over the coercion of their wickedness, but also their wanting to be praised for
it?...But what should I say against these whose pernicious perversity is either
repressed by a fear of fines or is taught by exile how the Church is spread
everywhere, as it was predicted that she should be, the Church that they prefer to
attack rather than recognize? And if those things that they suffer through a most
merciful discipline are compared to those deeds that they commit out of a
mindless fury, who would not see which of us should rather be called the
persecutors? After all, by the very fact that bad children live wicked lives, even if
they do not lay their hands on their parents in violence, they persecute more
grievously their loving parents then when a father or a mother compels them all
the more to lead a good life without any pretense to the extent that they love them
more." ¹¹⁷

Indeed, because the Donatists had been part of the Church, Augustine believed that the Catholic
Church, especially its shepherds, had the obligation to remind the Donatists, even by the force of
the State, that they should return to the Church from which they had separated. ¹¹⁸ Since the
Donatists could not prove before Constantine the charges they had against Catholics, “if they
suffer anything in return for their wickedness, they call it persecution,” Augustine said. ¹¹⁹

By their wild raging or by being lazy, the Donatists refused to respond obediently to all
authorities; therefore, Augustine asserted, the Church intervened with its medicine “to chastise
[by corporal punishment] the maniac and to stimulate the lethargic….Both are offended, but both

¹¹⁶ Augustine, Letter 89.1, in WSA 2/1, 359.
¹¹⁷ Augustine, Letter 89.2, in WSA 2/1, 359-60; J. S. Alexander, “A Quotation from Terence in the
¹¹⁸ Augustine, Letter 105.13, in WSA 2/2, 60-61; Peter Brown, “St Augustine’s Attitude to
Religious Coercion,” in Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine, 278.
¹¹⁹ Augustine, Letter 89.3, in WSA 2/1, 360.
are loved; both are bothered.”\textsuperscript{120} Of course, the corporal punishment was applied by the power of the State instigated and supported by the Church. Since the Donatists prided themselves that they were received in the Catholic Church as they were, Augustine replied: “we do not receive them such as they were, because they do not begin to be Catholics unless they have ceased to be heretics.”\textsuperscript{121} However, in case the Donatists pretended to become Catholics, Augustine asserted:

But if when they cross over they are pretending, this is not now a matter for our judgment, but for God’s. And yet, though some are thought to be pretending because they crossed over to us out of fear of authority, they are later in some temptations shown to be that sort of persons who are better than certain others who were Catholics at an earlier date. It is not true that nothing is accomplished when it is accomplished with violence.\textsuperscript{122}

Indeed, although Augustine knew that many Donatists who were afraid for their property had became Catholics, he believed that no matter what their motives were for converting, the Donatists should be accepted into the Church.\textsuperscript{123} When some of his brothers were not willing to accept a Donatist in the Church because they believed he was pretending to become a good member of the Church in order to avoid losing his property,\textsuperscript{124} Augustine opposed them and thought that, by admitting the Donatists into the penance, he could encourage them to be sorry for the things they had done.

You’re afraid that since they were found to be faithless, they may trample on that which is holy. But look, even here your fears are taken care of; they are admitted to penance; they will be in penance as long as they wish, with nobody forcing them, nobody terrifying them to be reconciled. Because a penitent Catholic is no longer subject to the threats of the laws; he begins to desire to be fully reconciled, with nobody now terrifying him; then, at least, trust his sincerity. Let’s grant, he was forced to be a Catholic; he will become a penitent.\textsuperscript{125}

Augustine believed that, once in the Church, the Donatists’ attitude regarding the schism and the Catholic Church could change. Instead of rejecting the Catholic Church and its insistence on uniting them with the Church, the Donatists could see positively the Catholic insistence on

\textsuperscript{120} Augustine, Letter 89.6, in WSA 2/1, 362.
\textsuperscript{121} Augustine, Letter 89.7, in WSA 2/1, 362.
\textsuperscript{122} Augustine, Letter 89.7, in WSA 2/1, 362-63.
\textsuperscript{123} Augustine, Sermon 296.14 (dated 411), in WSA 3/8, 212.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 211-12.
\textsuperscript{125} Augustine, Sermon 296.15, in WSA 3/8, 213.
unity and regret the years spent in schism. With this attitude regarding conversion and unity, Augustine asked Festus for his cooperation in dealing with the Donatists around Hippo. He asked Festus to send one of his subordinates who, after discussing with Augustine and his colleagues a plan without the Donatists knowing about this, should do “what seems necessary to do” about Church unity around Hippo. Augustine sent this letter to Festus so that he would have a piece of his writing against anybody who would try to persuade him not to act against the Donatists: “I wanted you to have a piece of our writing by which you yourself not only might know the reason for my concern, but also might have something to reply to anyone who dissuades you from working vigorously for the correction of your people and who slanders us because we want such things.” By telling Festus to do “what seems necessary to do” and to work “vigorously for the correction” of the Donatists, Augustine certainly implied that corporal punishment was allowed. In previous passages of this letter, which we already mentioned, he stated that the Donatists continued to be chastised, that is, punished corporeally, with suffering, and terror. Moreover, since the Donatists did not accept joining the Church freely, it is clear that Augustine agreed with physical punishment and that the Donatists saw themselves obliged to join the Church in order to avoid suffering. Further, Augustine’s often mentioning of Donatists’ conversions due to fear implies that the measures against them were both fearful and brutal. While Augustine recognized that brutal measures were taken against the Donatists, as we have already seen, and opposed excessive violence and death, he did not oppose the corporal punishment that forced the Donatists into the Church.

In a letter Augustine sent to a group of Donatists after 406, Augustine tells them that they are persecuted because of their actions, since they never permitted the Catholics to preach the truth about the schism and the true Church. Moreover, Augustine asserted, God made the

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126 Augustine, Letter 89.7-8, in WSA 2/1, 362-63.
127 Augustine, Letter 89.8, in WSA 2/1, 363.
128 Augustine, Letter 105.3, in WSA 2/2, 55. Indeed, Augustine knew that in order to be convincing in his preaching that the Catholics hold the truth whereas the Donatists have their opinion about
authorities who persecuted them subject to Christ according to prophecy, for if the emperors were
in error they would have issued laws against God, as Nebuchadnezzar had ordered that a gold
statue should be adored. But since the emperors held the truth and gave orders that support
Christianity, their orders were to be obeyed: “whoever disregards these orders brings punishment
upon himself. For among human beings he pays the penalty, and before God he cannot hold up
his head, for he refused to do what the truth itself ordered him to do through the heart of the
king.” Augustine argues that “the emperors command what Christ also commands.” The fact
that Christ speaks through the emperors is seen in the fact that the judgment of Constantine
against the Donatists was preserved as valid by the emperors who followed him, except Julian.
In addition, Augustine told the Donatists that, since he fears God, he cannot allow them to go
astray:

> If you hate us more deeply because we do not allow you to go astray and to be
lost, tell this to God whom we fear, when he threatens bad shepherds and says,
you have not called back what has gone astray, and you have not sought what
was lost (Ez 34:4). God himself does this to you through us by begging, by
threatening or by rebuking, by fines or by penalties, through his hidden warning
and chastisements or through the laws of temporal authorities.

As already mentioned, Augustine is saying here that neither he nor his colleagues are those who
punish the Donatists; it is rather God who does that through them and the temporal authorities.

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130 Augustine, Letter 105.11, in WSA 2/2, 59.
131 Augustine, Letter 105.13, in WSA 2/2, 60-61; in Sermon 46.14, in WSA 3/2, 272 Augustine
tells the Donatists that, because he fears God, he is not afraid of them. He also mentions his determination
to call the Donatists back to the Church: “Am I to be more afraid of you than of him? We all have to
present ourselves before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10). I am not afraid of you. After all, you
can’t overturn the judgment seat of Christ and set up the judgment seat of Donatus. I will call back the
straying sheep, I will seek the lost one. Whether you like it or whether you don’t that’s what I’m going to
do. Even if the briars of the woods tear at me at as seek, I will all the same squeeze myself through all the
thickets, I will search out all enclosures; according to the strength my terrifying Lord gives me, I will roam
everywhere in my search.”
In the letter Augustine wrote to Vincent, the Rogatist bishop of Cartena, between 407 and 408, Augustine rejoiced because the Donatists were held in check and corrected by authorities established by God. He contended that, given the force of habit, the Donatists would not have accepted the unity of the Church if they had not been struck by the fear caused by temporal authorities, which caused them to consider accepting the unity of the Church. Because not all the Donatists could be forced to accept unity, Augustine contended that the Church should not give up trying to convert them by inspiring fear and by punishing them. Since many Donatists became good Catholics as the result of harsh measures and treatment, Augustine asked: “Ought I to have begrudged salvation to these people and called my colleagues back from such fatherly care.” While the leaders of the Church did not punish the Donatists, they asked the State to intervene for the Church and they supported its efforts to bring the Donatists, through laws and coercive measures, into the unity of the Church. As good parents punish their bad children, the Church punishes its bad members through its leaders and authorities established by God.

Not everyone who is merciful is a friend and not everyone who scourges is an enemy; thus, Augustine believes that it is better to love with severity than to deceive with leniency. Indeed, Augustine believed that God punished good and bad people and also forced them into righteousness: “He [God] afflicts the rebellious people with more severe punishments. Though he was asked three times, he does not remove from the apostle the thorn in his flesh, in order that he may make virtue perfect in weakness.” Moreover, Augustine asserted that “Paul was forced to come to know the truth and to hold onto the truth by the great violence of Christ who compelled

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132 Augustine, Letter 93.1, in WSA 2/1, 377; for the role of fear in conversion, see also Sermon 113B.3 (dated 399), in WSA 3/4, 185-86, in which Augustine asserts that “nobody can change for the better without fear, without anguish, without dread.”

133 Augustine, Letter 93.3, in WSA 2/1, 379

134 Augustine, Letter 93.1, in WSA 2/1, 378.

135 Augustine, Letter 93.4, in WSA 2/1, 379; see 2 Cor 12:7-9.
him.” As Sarah persecuted Hagar for her pride, through which, in fact, she was persecuting Sarah, and as Ishmael, a carnal person, persecuted Isaac, a spiritual person, the Catholic Church suffers persecution from the pride and wickedness of the carnal Donatists, “whom it tries to correct by temporal troubles and fear.” While Moses punished with hard chastisements the people for their idolatry, Elijah killed the false prophets. Paul also handed over to Satan a “man for the destruction of the flesh in order that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord Jesus (1Cor 5:5).”

Augustine recognized that neither in the Gospels nor in the letters of the apostles is there found a case in which the kings were asked to defend the Church. However, Augustine asserted that this is so because the prophecy about the kings of the earth was not yet fulfilled: “And now, kings, have understanding; you who judge the earth, be warned; serve the Lord in fear (Ps 2:10-11).” While past actions in the books of the prophets symbolized events which were to come, Nebuchadnezzar symbolized both times: the Church of the apostles and the Church after Constantine. The period in which Nebuchadnezzar persecuted the people of God signifies the period of the apostles up to Constantine, whereas the period in which he decreed that whoever would dare to blaspheme God would be punished signifies the period from Constantine forward, “the times of the later kings, who were now believers under whom the non-believers suffered instead of the Christians.”

The fact that the Rogatists did not agree with the Circumcellions’ actions and separated from the Donatists did not mean that they were tame: “you certainly seem to us less fierce, since

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136 Augustine, Letter 93.5, in WSA 2/1, 380; Acts 9:3-7; for Paul forced by Christ to become a Christian, see also Sermon 279.10 (dated 401), in WSA 3/8, 66; for Paul destroyed as a persecutor and built up as a preacher, see Sermon 312.3 (dated 417), in WSA 3/9, 82.
137 Augustine, Letter 93.6, in WSA 2/1, 380; 185.9-11, in WSA 2/3, 184-85; Sermon 46.17-18, in WSA 3/2, 273-75; for Isaac as a spiritual person and for Ishmael as a wicked person, see also Sermon 71.32 (dated 417-420), in WSA 3/3, 266; for Sarah and Hagar, see Sermon 2.7 (dated 391), in WSA 3/1, 180; see also Gal 4:21-31.
138 Augustine, Letter 93.6, in WSA 2/1, 380-81; for Moses punishing idolaters, see Ex 32: 15-35; for Elijah killing false prophets, see 1Kgs 18:4-40.
139 Augustine, Letter 93.7, in WSA 2/1, 381.
140 Augustine, Letter 93.9, in WSA 2/1, 382.
141 Augustine, Letter 93.8-9, in WSA 2/1, 382.
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.”¹⁴² Augustine contended that even if they would like to act rebelliously, they could not because they were very few in number. To Rogatus’ assertion that no one should be forced into the unity of the Church and no one should repay evil with evil, Augustine implied that the Donatists would have favored such policies had they won their case before Constantine, and Augustine asserted that Constantine’s judgment still had force against the Donatists. Since the Donatists did not want to recognize this, measures would have to be taken.¹⁴³ Augustine asserted “that by fearing what he [a Donatist] does not want to suffer, he abandons the stubbornness that holds him back or is compelled to recognize the truth he had not known. Thus out of fear he either rejects the error for which he was fighting or seeks the truth that he did not know, and he now willingly holds what he did not want to hold.”¹⁴⁴ He justified his statement by saying that many Donatists in cities became Catholics out of fear of Imperial laws, of which one was his own city, Hippo. Although already mentioned, it is here in this context where Augustine mentioned that initially he opposed the use of force and that his opinioned changed due to the conversion of his city, which was converted out of fear of the imperial laws. According to Augustine, he originally believed that no one should be forced to the unity of Christ, but that the Church should act with words, fight with arguments, and conquer by reason.

After a period in which Augustine opposed the use of force in conversion, we find in a letter sent to Vincent, the Rogatist bishop of Cartenna, that he changed his mind on this matter. Augustine originally believed that, in order to avoid making false Catholics out of them, no one should force the Donatists into the unity of the Church. However, under the influence of his colleagues and of the example of his own city, Thagaste, which was converted to the Catholic unity out of fear of the imperial laws, Augustine changed his mind.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Augustine, Letter 93.11, in WSA 2/1, 383.
¹⁴³ Augustine, Letter 93.14, in WSA 2/1, 385.
¹⁴⁴ Augustine, Letter 93.16, in WSA 2/1, 387.
¹⁴⁵ Augustine, Letter 93.17, in WSA 2/1, 387.
Augustine is the first to use the Lukan *compelle intrare*—that is, “compel them to enter”—to support the use of force. The phrase *compelle intrare*, according to some scholars, played a decisive role in the development of Augustine’s opinion on the use of force.\(^{146}\) In fact, this is not true. In his letters, Augustine referred only three times to Luke 14:23, the only Biblical passage where we find the phrase “compel people to come in.”\(^{147}\) In Letter 173 Augustine used *compelle intrare* to show that, before the Emperor Constantine’s reign, people were not compelled to join the Church; the phrase could be applied only after the Church received power to coerce, that is, after Constantine.\(^{148}\) But, apparently, Augustine was not limited to the precise phrase *compelle intrare* since he also used *cogite intrare*.\(^{149}\)

As far as we know, in the Catholic-Donatist controversy, the first time Augustine uses Luke 14:23 to defend the use of force is in his Letter 93 to Vincent, in which he also acknowledges that he has changed his opinion as to the use of force in conversion.

...Vincent and his fellow Rogatists were a peaceful Donatist group, against the use of force in religious matters. Against the Rogatists’ view, about which Augustine informs us in the aforementioned passage, *neminem debere cogi ad iustitiam*—that is, no one ought to be forced to...

\(^{146}\) Émilien Lamirande, *Church, State, and Toleration: An Intriguing Change of Mind in Augustine*, 52-53.

\(^{147}\) In the original text of Luke, the word used is *αναγκασον*, a strong word meaning to require (to make necessary) or to force.


\(^{149}\) Letter 93.5, in CSEL 34, 449; 185.24, in CSEL 57, 23.

\(^{150}\) Augustine, Letter 93.2.5., in CSEL 34, 449. “You think that no one ought to be forced into righteousness, though you read that the head of the household said to his servants, *Whomever you find, force them to come in* (Lk 14:23), though you read that he who was first Saul and afterwards Paul was forced to come to know and to hold onto the truth by the great violence of Christ who compelled him, unless you perhaps think that money or any possession is dearer to human beings than this light that we perceive by these eyes. Laid low by the voice from heaven, he did not recover this light that he lost suddenly, except when he was incorporated into the holy Church.” I use here the translation found in the WSA II/1, 380.
justic—Augustine appeals to Luke 14:23. Augustine argued that Paul knew the truth and held
onto it by *magna violentia Christi*, that is, by the great violence, fury, or savagery of Christ.
Augustine uses imperative forms of both *compello* and *cogo* to justify the use of force in
conversion. In origin the verb *compello* (from *pello*) means “to force” someone to do something.
The verb *cogo* (from *ago*), a less forceful synonym for *compello*, can mean the same except that it
has the additional sense of assembling, collecting or urging. Since *cogite* is an imperative, the
phrase *cogite intrare* would mean “force” or “urge” someone to enter. *Cogi* is a passive infinitive
of *cogo* and in our text means “to be forced” or “urged.” So *cogentis*, the present participle of
*cogo* in the genitive case modifying Christ, shows how Paul was compelled (*compulsum*) by an
urging (*cogentis*) Christ to join the Church. Although it is impossible to read Augustine’s mind,
as already mentioned, it is likely that in this passage—and in the other mentioned passages—he
deliberately used *cogentis* instead of *compellentis* in his quotation of Luke 14:23. Of the forty-
five citations of Luke 14:23 in the Vetus Latina, the imperative forms of *compello* (*compelle* and
*compellite*) occur twenty-two times as compared with the imperative forms of *cogo* (*coge* and
*cogite*), which appear only ten times. Thirteen citations use forms of neither *compello* nor *cogo*
and are incomplete verses or rough paraphrases.  

Although both *compello* and *cogo* are roughly synonymous, both suggesting that those brought into the Church do not have the choice of
avoiding it, *cogo*, in addition to being milder than *compello*, has richer meanings and
connotations. While *compello* means in this verse to drive people into the Church, *cogo* has the
additional pastoral meaning of gathering together, or assembling the lost sheep of the Church.
Since Christ is the Shepherd of the flock, *Pastor Bonus*, and since in this passage it is Christ who
is gathering together the lost sheep, he is gathering them together in the Church by disciplinary
means but for their own salvation. In this passage, Augustine also mentions that “a shepherd at

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times calls wandering cattle back to the herd with a whip.’” The fact that a Christ who is cogens has Paul compelled (compulsum) shows that these two verbs mean about the same thing for Augustine. Christ’s active role in the event of Paul being converted is expressed by the use of the present active participle cogentis with Christ. Paul was forced (compulsum) by the great violence (magna uiolentia) of Christi cogentis. The cogentis suggests that Christ’s active role in the “forced” (magna uiolentia) conversion is that of one who is gathering or assembling his flock.

Augustine asserted that, whoever persecutes the Donatists as the result of the opportunity provided by the Imperial laws, not out of a desire to correct them, that person does not have the Catholics approval. However, he thought that the Donatists should not remain Donatists simply because their parents were. The Donatists also should not be embarrassed to correct themselves, since there is a shame that leads to sin and there is a shame that leads to glory. Being embarrassed to change a wrong opinion for fear of being thought unstable by someone else leads to death: “Datan, Abiram, and Korah, who were swallowed when the earth opened up, prefigured these people far in advance.” Augustine ended the letter to Vincent by telling him that it is a huge error to speak ill of the Church, which treats those who abandoned her in one way and those who are coming into her peace in another way: “She humbles the former more to a greater degree, while she welcomes the latter more gently, loving both, working to heal both with her maternal love.”

As we have seen, 405 was a turning-point in Augustine’s attitude toward the Donatists, because he and his colleagues had openly asked the State to help them against the Donatists. Before 405 Augustine was reticent regarding the use of force against the Donatists for fear of having false Catholics. However, we are told by Augustine that it was immediately after 405

152 Augustine, Letter 93.2.5, in WSA II/1, 380.
153 Augustine, Letter 93.50, in WSA 2/1, 406.
154 Augustine, Letter 93.2, in WSA 2/1, 378; for the Donatists holding on to their tradition, see also Exposition of Psalm 54.20, in WSA 3/17, 73.
155 Augustine, Letter 93.52, in WSA 2/1, 407; see Nm 16:31-33; Ps 55:16.
156 Augustine, Letter 93.53, in WSA 2/1, 407; for the Church as our mother, of whom Christians are born to eternal life, see, for example, Sermon 57.2 (dated 410-412), in WSA 3/3, 110.
when he changed his mind regarding the coercion of the Donatists. His change of mind was the result of measures taken by the State against the Donatists, when his own town, Hippo, was converted to Catholicism through the fear instilled in the Donatists by the laws of the emperor. However, since the laws could not be applied thoroughly and since not all the Donatists were ready to join the Church as the result of the State’s pressure, Augustine appealed to imperial officials and landowners to implement the laws in their own areas of administration. Augustine believed that since God made the authorities who persecuted the Donatists subject to Christ, the Donatists were punished because they did not obey what the emperors commanded.

D. From 408 to 418

Despite the hard work of the alliance between Church and State after the Edict of Unity, the Donatists could not evenly and thoroughly be forced to accept the unity of the Church. For this reason, at the end of 408 Augustine sent a letter to Master of the Offices Olympius in Ravenna and urged him to make sure that the Donatists knew that the laws against idols and heretics had been issued by the Emperor Honorius, not by his military commander Stilicho, and that they were still valid: “They [the Donatists] deceitfully boast or rather choose to think that these laws were established without his knowledge or against his will.”

Although Augustine told him that he was very pleased that many Donatists had converted to the Catholic peace at the occasion of the Emperor’s laws, he suggested, begged, pleaded, and demanded him to urge the implementation of Imperial laws; a delegation sent to him in the same year had the mission to convince the Emperor about the urgency of implementing the laws. Augustine also told Olympius that he and his colleagues feared very much for the weakness of the Donatists who had

already became Catholics and who, because of the weak implementation of laws, might not remain in the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{159}

However, the measures against the Donatists were so severe that some of them were even killed. In the letter Augustine sent toward the end of 408 to Donatus, the proconsul of Africa and a Catholic layman with large properties in Hippo and Siniti, Augustine, diplomatically and courteously told him that he was raised to the office of proconsul in order to hold back the enemies of the Church. However, since some measures against the Donatists were drastic, Augustine begged him to act against them not in accord with the immensity of their rebelliousness but in accord with Christian gentleness: “we desire that, by making use of judges and laws that cause fear, they be corrected, not killed….We do not want discipline to be neglected in their regard or the punishment they deserve to be applied. Repress their sins, therefore, in such a way that those who repent having sinned may still exist.”\textsuperscript{160} Augustine also told Donatus that, in the event he hears cases regarding the Church, he should not forget that no one except men of the Church ought to bring before him cases involving the Church; that way the Donatists would not be killed, but only corrected. Since the Donatists believed that they were enduring sufferings for truth and justice, Augustine tried to make sure they were repressed through the power of laws but not killed and violently treated. Moreover, in addition to reminding them that the laws against them are valid and enacted, Augustine asked that they be taught about the schism and convinced to renounce it and to unite the Church.\textsuperscript{161} While Augustine argued in letters against the Donatists that severe punishment, even killing, was justified when people acted against God, he did not hold to that when he addressed imperial officials, as we have just seen in this letter. Indeed, Augustine was concerned that the Donatists, by being punished, would be corrected, not disabled or killed.

\textsuperscript{159} Augustine, Letter 97.4, in WSA 2/1, 425.
\textsuperscript{160} Augustine, Letter 100.1, in WSA 2/2, 15.
\textsuperscript{161} Augustine, Letter 100.2, in WSA 2/2, 16.
A year later, Augustine sent another letter to Donatus in which he told him that his true worth rested not in the reputation he received among people, but in the action of restoring Church unity: “Even if these actions displeased the crowd, they are precious because of their own brilliance and importance, not because of the approval of the uneducated.” Augustine also urged him to bring all his dependents into the communion of the Church.

Between 409 and 410, since the Africans had shown their support of the emperor against the usurper Attalus, whose subaltern had taken an army to conquer Africa but had been defeated by Heraclian, the military commander of Africa, the emperor eased his policy against the Donatists and heretics. Thus, in a letter sent to Macrobius, the Donatist bishop of Hippo and the successor of Proculeianus, Augustine told him that “unity is banished so that the audacity of farmhands [people whose lives depended on their work for landowners] rises up against their bosses, and in opposition to the teaching of the apostle fugitive servants not only abandon their masters but even threaten their masters.” Since this situation precipitated the Catholics’ efforts to bring the Donatists into the unity of the Church, they dispatched a delegation to Honorius and asked the withdrawal of any legislation that favored toleration and also that the Donatists should be brought to a conference of unity, a request which materialized in the Conference of 411, which outlawed the Donatists.

Before the Conference of 411, a group of Catholic leaders, among whom was Augustine, wrote a letter to Marcellinus, the imperial commissioner sent by the emperor to preside over the conference. They proposed that if they could prove to the Donatists that Caecilian had been proven innocent, and that the Church of Christ occupying territories not only in Africa but also in the whole world was not destroyed by the sins of those within it, then the Donatists should

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162 Augustine, Letter 112.2, in WSA 2/2, 95.
163 Augustine, Letter 112.3, in WSA 2/2, 96.
164 Serge Lancel, St Augustine, 294-95; W. H. C. Frend, The Donatist Church, 273; G. G. Willis, Saint Augustine and the Donatist Controversy, 62-63.
165 Augustine, Letter 108.18, in WSA 2/2, 80-8, referring to Ti 2:9.
166 W. H. C. Frend, The Donatist Church, 273-74; G. G. Willis, Saint Augustine and the Donatist Controversy, 63.
embrace unity. In a following letter to the same Marcellinus, telling him how Constantine judged against the Donatists and how since then the Church had spread to all nations, the leaders of the Church implied that they believed that the true Church was the Church in which the kings would serve Christ and establish laws against heretics and schismatics: “we believe that they [the Donatists] finally realized that they should not blame that issue over which they are often very angry with us, namely, that the kings of the earth, of whom it was predicted so long before that they would serve Christ, establish laws against heretics and schismatics on behalf of the Catholic peace.”

After the Conference of 411, Augustine personally wrote to Marcellinus, since he was concerned that the Donatists would be killed. Since Augustine believed that Marcellinus was sent to Africa for the benefit of the Church, he urged him that, “alive and with no part of the body mutilated,” the Donatists should be restrained and forced into unity by the severity of laws. We see the same concern in the letter Augustine sent toward end of 411 to Apringius, the proconsul and brother of Marcellinus. Augustine worried that the Donatists might be too harshly persecuted; therefore, he begged Apringius to receive his advice and to follow it, since the “judges will stand to render an account of the judgments they render” before the tribunal of God. Augustine feared that some Donatists would be condemned to death because of their unwillingness to comply with the requirements of laws. Therefore, Augustine told him that although he carried the sword, although he was a minister of God to punish those who do evil, and although he should govern with severity, the Church should show her forbearance by showing mercy. And although he was a lofty magistrate, he should not forget that he was also a son of Christian piety.

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167 Aurelius, Silvanus, and all the Catholic Bishops, Letter 128.2, in WSA 2/2, 175-76; while Aurelius was the Primate of Africa, Silvanus was the Primate of Numidia.
168 Aurelius, Silvanus, and all the Catholic Bishops, Letter 129.4, in WSA 2/2, 180.
169 Augustine, Letter 133.1, in WSA 2/2, 203.
170 Augustine, Letter 134.1, in WSA 2/2, 205.
171 Augustine, Letter 134.2, in WSA 2/2, 206.
statement by which Augustine implied that he should listen to him.\textsuperscript{172} Indeed, Augustine told Apringius that, if milder punishment could not be imposed on them, he would prefer that the Donatists be released rather than suffer the shedding of their blood.\textsuperscript{173}

Although the Conference of Carthage proscribed the Donatists, they were still opposing the authorities and the efforts to force them into the unity of the Church. In a letter Augustine sent at the end of 411 or the beginning of 412 to Marcellinus, he asked him to send him the proceedings of the Conference of Carthage and to make public the Donatists’ confession that they recognized their wickedness “not because the fear of God compelled them to repent but because the diligence of the courts revealed the hardness of their most cruel hearts.”\textsuperscript{174} Augustine also mentioned some Donatists’ assertion that they would not withdraw from the Donatists even if the Donatists’ perversity had been proven to them, a fact which shows that some of the Donatists detested the Empire, and through it the Catholic Church as the result of its cooperation with the State.\textsuperscript{175} However, as in other letters, Augustine urged Marcellinus that the punishment of the Donatists should not involve the death penalty.\textsuperscript{176}

Between 411 and 414, Augustine wrote to Donatus, a Donatist priest, since he had attempted to kill himself in order to avoid being arrested and forced to accept the Catholic Church. According to Augustine, Donatus stated that no one should be forced into unity without his consenting will. Augustine replied that many people, against their will, are forced to accept a good work, as, for example, people who are forced to accept episcopacy against their will, although they who desire episcopacy desire a good work. Then, how much more should those who have a bad will, as the Donatists have, be forced toward good?\textsuperscript{177}

\textsuperscript{172} Augustine, Letter 134.3, in WSA 2/2, 206.  
\textsuperscript{173} Augustine, Letter 134.4, in WSA 2/2, 206.  
\textsuperscript{174} Augustine, Letter 139.1, in WSA 2/2, 238.  
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{176} Augustine, Letter 139.2, in WSA 2/2, 238-39.  
\textsuperscript{177} Augustine, Letter 173.1-2, in WSA 2/2, 120; for the desire of episcopacy, see 1Tm 3:1: it is very likely that Augustine, referring to people who are forced to accept the episcopacy, referred to himself,
The Israelites, for example, were kept from evil by severe scourges and were forced toward the land of the promise. Paul also was not allowed to use his wicked will against the Church but was punished with blindness, “blinded so that he was changed, changed so that he was sent, and sent so that he suffered on behalf of the truth the sort of evils he was committing in error.”\(^ {178}\) Certainly a bad will should not be left freed, since in the Scriptures a father is not only warned to rebuke a disobeying child but to beat his back, so that, being disciplined, he may take a good direction in life: “You indeed strike him with a rod, but you set his soul free from death (Prv 23:14). If a bad will should always be left to its way, why are the negligent shepherds rebuked, and why is it said to them, You have not called back the wandering sheep; you have not searched for the one that was lost (Ez 34:4)? And you are Christ’s sheep….Do not, then, say what I constantly hear you say, ‘So I want to wander off; so I want to be lost.’ For it is better that, as far we are able, we do not permit this at all.”\(^ {179}\) To Donatus’ statement that the seventy disciples who abandoned the Lord were left to the choice of their will, Augustine replied that Donatus did not notice that, while the Lord intended in the beginning to teach humility, the Church, as it achieves its territorial expansion and greatness, uses its power not only to invite people but to compel them to become members of the true Church of Christ:

the Church was then first beginning to grow with new seedlings and that there had not yet been fulfilled in it the prophecy, And all the kings of the earth will adore him; all nations will serve him (Ps 72:11). And to the extent that it is fulfilled the more, the Church uses greater power not only to invite but even to compel people to what is good. At that time the Lord wanted to indicate this, for, though he had a great power, yet he first chose to teach humility. He also showed this quite clearly in that parable of the banquet where he sent word to those who were invited and they refused to come.\(^ {180}\)


\(^ {179}\) Augustine, Letter 173.3, in WSA 2/2, 125; Sir 30:1-2, 12; J. S. Alexander, “A Quotation from Terence in the De correctione Donatistarum of St Augustine,” 223.

\(^ {180}\) Augustine, Letter 173.10, in WSA 2/2, 128; see also Letter 185.19-20, in WSA 2/3, 190-91.
After quoting Luke 14:21-24, Augustine told Donatus that Jesus indicated in the Gospel of Luke that the Church was growing to the point that it may also have the strength to compel:

See now how it was said of those who came earlier, Bring them here; it was not said, Compel them. In that way he [Jesus] indicated the beginnings of the Church that was growing to the point that it might also have the strength to compel. Then, after its strength and greatness were already built up, since it was necessary that human beings be compelled to enter the banquet of eternal salvation, after it was said, What you commanded has been done, and there is still room, he said, Go out into the roads and pathways and compel them to enter. Hence…we find you in the pathways and compel you to enter.  

Despite the fact that one is forced to go where he does not want to go, Augustine told Donatus that “after he has entered he eats willingly. Hold in check your wicked and wild heart, then, in order that you may find in the true Church of Christ the banquet of salvation.”

The letter Augustine sent in about 417 to Boniface, the tribune of Africa, is a defense of the use of force against the Donatists, who had refused to be corrected by the Imperial laws. After telling Boniface that the difference between the Catholics and the Donatists is not doctrinal but only having to do with Church unity, Augustine told him that: “it was predicted, after all, that there would be heresies and scandals so that we might develop our minds in the midst of our enemies and that in that way our faith and love might be more tested—our faith, of course, in order that they may not deceive us, but our love in order that we may also work for their correction as much as we can.”

Since the Donatists sought to condemn Caecilian before the Emperor Constantine, the laws by which the Donatists wanted to destroy Caecilian turned against them, as had happened to the accusers of Daniel, Augustine asserted. Augustine implies here that the Donatists first

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181 Ibid., 128-29; Augustine quotation of Lk 14:21-23: “Go out into the squares and streets of the city, and bring here the poor, the weak, the blind, and the lame. And the servant said to his master, it has been done as you commanded, and there is still room. And the master said to his servant, Go out into roads and pathways, and compel them to enter in order that my house may be full.”

182 Augustine, Letter 173.10, in WSA 2/2, 129.

183 Augustine, Retractationes 2.48, in BA, vol. 12, 532

184 Augustine, Letter 185.2, in WSA 2/3, 180; for biblical references to disputes, divisions, schism, schism and heresy, see 2 Pt 2:1-2; Ti 3:9-10; 1Cor 1:10; 11:18-19; Jn 7:43.
appealed to the Emperor to have their case heard. Since Constantine considered Caecilian innocent, the laws that followed his decision were aimed to unite the divided Christian parties in North Africa. In fact, the Donatists did not appeal to Constantine to have their case judged by him. Indeed, the Donatists asked Constantine to send bishops from Gaul to hear the case since they believed they would be impartial in their judgments because Gaul was spared from a thorough and severe persecution. Because the Donatists could not demonstrate that they were the true Church of Africa, either by the words of the Catholic preachers or by the laws of the Catholic emperors, the Donatists should be called to salvation. In the time of the prophets the kings who did not forbid practices contrary to God’s commandments were blamed. Although first having persecuted the people of God, Nebuchadnezzar issued, as soon as he was corrected by God, a law according to which no one in his kingdom was supposed to speak blasphemously against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. If any individuals opposed his law, which was intended to keep his people united, they suffered persecution, even if they believed that they suffered it unjustly. As the law of Nebuchadnezzar served the true God and was therefore just, the same had to be said for the laws of the emperors against the Donatists, who were suffering persecution on account of their injustice. While many people may suffer persecution, only those who suffer for a just cause are true martyrs. The Donatists, Augustine asserted, were wrong in believing that the true Church is necessarily the Church which suffers persecution. Caecilian, for example, belonged to the true Church not because he suffered persecution but because he suffered on account of justice. While the Church tries to correct the error and to restore and maintain unity, the Donatists do the opposite; therefore, measures had to be taken by the Church against

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187 Augustine, Letter 185.8-9, in WSA 2/3, 184-85; 93.6-7, in WSA 2/1, 380-81. For instances in which Augustine believed God’s people suffered persecution on account of justice, see Gn 16:6; 1Sm 8:8-11; Mt 23:38; Mk 15:27; Lk 22:33.
them. Augustine believed that Psalm 18:37 spoke of the Church persecuting its enemies, just as Sarah had persecuted Hagar:

Whose words do they [the Donatists] think are found in the psalm where we read, *I shall persecute my enemies and seize them, and I shall not turn back until they collapse*. The Church persecutes by loving; they persecute by raging. The Church persecutes in order to correct; they persecute in order to destroy. The Church persecutes in order to call back from error; they persecute in order to cast down into error. The Church, finally, persecutes and lays hold of enemies until they collapse in their vanity so that they may grow in truth.\(^{188}\)

Thus, Augustine asserted, the laws by which the Donatists were persecuted had the goal of setting them free of the madness of opposing the truth and the unity of the Church.\(^{189}\) Augustine believed that the Donatists who were first brought to the Catholic Church against their own will, as well as those who would follow them, would heal in the Catholic Church, since most of them were good people in comparison with those who opposed the Catholics by accepting even to die for their cause.\(^{190}\) However, Augustine also leads us to understand that the schism had economic and social aspects. He tells us that unity could not be thoroughly and uniformly enforced because the low social strata, which consisted substantially of Donatists, opposed their masters, many of whom were Catholics and insisted that their subjects join the Catholic Church: “What master was not forced to fear his slave...?...What banker was able to demand what they [the Donatists] were unwilling to pay?”\(^{191}\) According to Augustine, the Catholic preaching of unity as well as actions directed to correcting the Donatists and to forcing them into the Church inflamed them with anger: “hardly any churches of our communion were able to be secure against their plots, acts of violence, and brazen robberies, and hardly any road was safe for those to travel who preached the Catholic peace.”\(^{192}\) Since the Church had asked for help from the Empire, Augustine defended the actions that forced the Donatists into the Church by saying that the Church had had no good

\(^{188}\) Augustine, Letter 185.11, in WSA 2/3, 185-86.
\(^{189}\) Augustine, Letter 185.12, in WSA 2/3, 186.
\(^{190}\) Augustine, Letter 185.13-14, in WSA 2/3, 187.
\(^{191}\) Augustine, Letter 185.15, in WSA 2/3, 188.
\(^{192}\) Augustine, Letter 185.18, in WSA 2/3, 189.
reason to endure the Donatists’ resistance and violence. Although it is better to bring people to God through instruction than by fear, this fact does not mean that the second option should not be used if the first does not work. According to Augustine, when the Bible says that a man is not corrected by words, it does not say he should be abandoned; rather it implicitly says that he should be corrected by temporal scourges.

To the Donatists’ contention that no one should be forced into the Church and that Christ did not use force, Augustine shows that Paul was forced by Christ; “The Church, then,” according to Augustine, “imitates its Lord in forcing the Donatists.” By quoting the Parable of the Great Banquet in Luke 14:16-23, and especially verse 23, Augustine wanted to convince the Donatists that the Church before Constantine waited without forcing anyone into its unity until the message of the prophets was fulfilled concerning the faith of kings and of the nations.

From this we can without any absurdity understand the statement of the apostle where blessed Paul says, We are prepared to punish every disobedience once your earlier obedience is carried out (2 Cor 10: 6). For this reason the Lord Himself orders that guests first be invited [v.16] to his great banquet and afterward forced. For, when his servants answered him, Lord, we have done what you ordered, and there is still room, [v.21] he said, Go out into the roads and pathways and force whomever you find to come in (Lk 14: 16, 21, 23).

According to Augustine, the phrase “your earlier obedience is carried out,” which resembles 2 Corinthians 10:6, refers to Jews before the apostles and to Christians before Constantine. In those who were gently invited to accept God and His Church before Jesus and Constantine the earlier obedience is carried out, and this reality is obvious, according to Augustine, in Luke 14:16-23. When those—Jews before the apostles and Christians before Constantine—were gently invited to accept God and His Church, they carried out the “earlier obedience.” Afterwards, that is, after Constantine, people should be forced into the unity of the Church since the prophecy that the kings of the earth will adore God and that all the nations will

193 Ibid.
194 Augustine, Letter 185.21, in WSA 2/3, 191-92; See also the passages Augustine refers to: Prv 29:19; Prv 23:14; Prv 13:24; Ps 42:3.
serve him (Ps 72:11) is true of the Church spread in all nations. According to Augustine, Luke 14:23, in which people are compelled to join, refers to post-Constantinian times. From the apostolic times and up to the time of Constantine, both Jews and Gentiles were gently invited to the Church through awe-inspiring miracles. Hence, since people in the early Church were invited to the Lord’s Banquet, those who were forced to the Great Banquet, which is the Church, were those after the kings began to serve God. According to Augustine, through the faith of rulers, the Church received power to force into the Church those found on the roads and pathways, that is, those in heresy and schism.

In a letter sent in the summer of 418 to Dulcitius, an imperial commissioner in charge of implementing the imperial edicts against the Donatists, Augustine praised him for his gentleness, which kept those in the Catholic Church, who had been empowered by emperor to be in charge of correcting the Donatists, from acting too harshly against the Donatists “either by injecting terror or by imposing penalties.” In this letter Augustine told Dulcitius, who had said, perhaps unintentionally, that the Donatists deserved death for their rebellious insubordination to the state’s laws, that he had not received the power of life and death over the Donatists. As we have seen, this section from 408 to 418 is about the events that preceded the Conference of Carthage in 411 and also the events after it up to Augustine’s last letter against the Donatists. Although Augustine advocated the use of force against the Donatists, he opposed excessive measures that would have injured for life or killed the Donatists. This is also a reason to believe that Augustine would not have advocated coercion if the circumstances had not required forced measures to stop the Donatists’ aggression and the schism.

In this chapter, we showed Augustine’s attitude regarding conversion and the use of force in conversion. Augustine’s statements regarding the use of force were not dogmatic propositions, that is, binding statements that had to be taken by the Church as a model for the following

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197 Ps 2:10-11.
198 Augustine, Letter 93.9, in WSA 2/1, 382.
199 Augustine, Letter 204.3, in WSA 2/3, 373.
centuries whenever it would have to deal with schismatics or heretics. His statements on this subject were rather circumstantial ones, that is, statements meant to apply to the particularities and the evolution of the Catholic-Donatist controversy, which conditioned these statements. As a pastor of his congregation, Augustine saw himself responsible to keep his flock united in a majority Donatist environment in which the members of his church were often tempted to join the Donatist church. Indeed, Augustine’s justification of the use of force in conversion should not be seen outside of the context of the Catholic-Donatist debate. Augustine would never have emphasized Church unity as much as he did if that unity had not already been wounded by the Catholic-Donatist split. While the Donatists responded reticently and often violently to the Catholics’ efforts to convert them to the Church, Augustine also realized that the implementation of the laws against them was not as effective as expected. Furthermore, the relation between the Catholics and the Donatists became tense, as the latter responded violently to any action of the Church toward unity. While Augustine learned that the Donatists could not be brought into the Church by peaceful means, he also realized that coercion could bring them into the unity of the Church, as he experienced in the case of his own city. Thus, Augustine began to endorse the use of force in achieving unity. Was Augustine wrong in justifying the use of force? Yes and no.

Insofar as Augustine advocated coercion to stop the Donatists’ violence against the Catholics, Augustine rightly justified the use of force. While Augustine and his colleague priests and bishops supported and helped the State to enforce unity, it was the State’s duty to stop, by force if necessary, the Donatists’ violence and to provide peace, stability, and unity in local communities and in the Empire as a whole. Thus, by directing the attention of the State toward the Donatists’ schism and violence against the Catholics, Augustine pointed out an issue that was the State’s duty to fix. Further, in order to have a proper opinion about the Catholic-Donatist controversy, one should keep always in mind this distinction between two different traditions. Since Augustine failed to recognize the Donatists as a church, he did that based on his view, founded on his reading of Scripture, that the true Church is the Church recognized throughout the world. In doing
this he neglected biblical passages in which people, especially the prophets, criticized organized religion and society for not worshiping God adequately. Of course, the Donatists neglected and paid little attention to biblical passages about the spread of the Church in all nations, which Augustine used plainly. The Donatists, as exponents of a biblical tradition extending from the early Church throughout its later history, used such passages to support their claim that any familiar association with the secular world impedes an adequate worship of God. Thus, this sort of relation between the Church and the state could not be seen as other than evil by the Donatists. However, although he never identified the Church with the secular world, Augustine taught us a lesson that was true not only of the Church in his own time but is true of the Church of our time: the Donatists neglected the fact that the Church is part of society, not separated from it.

Judging Augustine for his advocacy of the use of force against the Donatists without considering the context of his own time and the gravity of the schism would seem to be an inadequate judgment, since a proper judgment would consider carefully his own time and the nature of events. Since Augustine lived in a totalitarian society and since he wanted to defend his church against a dissenting and sometimes violent religious group that opposed the secular world and its rule, Augustine’s advocacy of the use of force against the Donatists would hardly have appeared exaggerated to most of his own contemporaries, except the Donatists and their sympathizers. Advocating the use of force in conversion, Augustine lived with the problem of evil Christians in the Church throughout his episcopate. As Pamela Bright asserts, Augustine was not comfortable knowing that the united and holy Church contained sinners. Therefore, as the

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201 For a detailed account about the Catholic and the Donatist interpretation of Scripture, see Maureen Tilley, The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World, 151-62.
result of his realization that the Church contains both good and evil persons, Augustine arrived at the conclusion that the Church does not consist only of saints. The Church as a community that consists of both saints and sinners is the subject of the next chapter.
VII. The Church Does Not Consist Only of Saints

This chapter is about the tension between good and evil in the Church in Augustine’s letters against the Donatists. The nature of the Donatist controversy put Augustine in the position, as a bishop of the Church, to defend the presence of bad as well as good in the true Church with strength never before seen in the history of the Church. Indeed, no theologian until Augustine defended so determinedly the existence of the good and bad in the Church. In comparison with the Donatist tradition at Carthage regarding the nature of the Church, which was seen as a society entirely separated from the secular world, Augustine’s view was attuned to the new conditions of the Church in the empire after Constantine and Theodosius.¹ This chapter will present Augustine in various circumstances in which he dealt with the Donatists concerning Church unity and holiness, in order to show that, inclined to toleration of human shortcomings, he believed that unity is what should prevail in Christian community even if the united Church contains both good and evil people. The Church that is one is the body of Christ, the home of the Holy Spirit, the place in which sins are forgiven and, therefore, the place of salvation:

Thus too sins, which are not forgiven apart from the Church, must be forgiven in that Spirit by which the Church is gathered together in a unity. And then, suppose someone outside the Church does repent of his sins, and has an unrepentant heart about the particular great sin of being estranged from the Church of God, what use will that repentance be to him, seeing that by this one sin of being estranged from the Church he

says a word against the Holy Spirit? Why? Because the Church has received this gift, of sins being forgiven in her in the Holy Spirit.\(^2\)

According to this passage, it is through the Holy Spirit that the Church is united and sins forgiven. Repentance outside the Church is in vain: by being severed from the unity of the Church even people repentant for some of their sins are still in opposition to the Holy Spirit, who works for the ecclesial unity of Christians. United with the Church, people receive forgiveness of their sins in the Holy Spirit, which is a gift received by the Church. Thus, according to Augustine, both good and bad people have their chance to be saved in the Church of God.

### A. Preliminary Considerations

Ancient Christians, like Jews, saw themselves as God’s people who are called from the world because they were a chosen race (Dt 7:6 and 10:15), a royal priesthood (Ex 19:6), a peculiar people (Dt 4:20; 7:6; 14:2), God’s own people, and a holy nation set apart from the rest of the world for God’s special purpose (Ex 19:6; Dt 4:20).\(^3\) In the New Testament, we find the Christians gathered together in the name of Jesus or the God of Jesus Christ.\(^4\) Jesus’ message was mainly about God’s kingdom, and entrance into the Kingdom involved a radical transformation and obedience to God’s rule.\(^5\) According to

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\(^2\) Augustine, Sermon 71.28-38, in WSA 3/3, 263-70. For salvation in the name of Jesus, see Sermon 56.1, in WSA 3/3, 95. For the Church as the body of Christ, see Sermon 213.8, in WSA 3/6, 212-13.


the Gospel of John, Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world.\textsuperscript{6} Since their master is not of this world, Jesus’ followers, too, are not of this world.\textsuperscript{7} Consequently, the world hates and rejects them, as it hated and rejected Jesus.\textsuperscript{9} However, the Kingdom was both a present and future reality\textsuperscript{9}: While Jesus taught his disciples to pray: “Your kingdom come,”\textsuperscript{10} he also told them that, “if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom has come to you.”\textsuperscript{11} The requirements of the Kingdom, as Jesus revealed them in the Beatitudes, are composed of the unlimited ethical and moral demands of God, which indeed surpassed the demands of the Law.\textsuperscript{12} In addition, the Beatitudes also show that the Kingdom is of the meek, the humble, the poor, etc.\textsuperscript{13} Jesus and the early Christians advocated an ethical radicalism, that is, a total and radical change of moral values, as an imperative condition needed for entering the Kingdom.\textsuperscript{14} Indeed, as Wayne Meeks asserts, God’s will for the early Christians seems to have been spelled out “by all the means of moral instruction that were at the disposal of their leaders.”\textsuperscript{15}

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\textsuperscript{6} Jn 18:36.
\textsuperscript{7} Jn 15:19; Phil 3:20.
\textsuperscript{10} Mt 6:10.
\textsuperscript{11} Lk 11:20.
\textsuperscript{12} Mt 5:17-48; see also Étienne Trocmé, \textit{The Childhood of Christianity} (London: SCM Press, 1997), 10.
\textsuperscript{13} Mt 5:1-12.
\textsuperscript{15} Wayne Meeks, \textit{The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries}, 85.
The Church has, however, a terrestrial dimension and a human nature that is not always capable of the high moral demands of the gospel. While 1 John tells us that “those who have been born of God do not sin,” Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians that the Christians in Corinth “are still of flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among” them, they were “of flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations.”

While Paul urges separation from uncleanness and lawlessness, he also urges his congregations to stay united, bearing with one another in love. Thus, although the Church held up a high ideal for the comportment of its members, it had to lower its expectations in order cope with the weaker ones. The tension between theory and practice in regard to the question about the way Christians should live in the world led naturally, as Maurice Wiles asserts, “to the development of a double standard in ethical demands, a ‘pass’ standard for those who were content with the basic requirements of Christian discipleship and an ‘honours’ standard for those who aspire for perfection.”

The tension or ambiguity found in Scripture concerning Christian moral practice and, consequently, in the relationship between Christians and society, continued throughout the first centuries of the Church. On the one hand, Christian patterns of behavior and attitude towards society—such as the refusal to engage in some public activities, and criticism of the worldly values of power, such as pleasure and opulence—inevitably created a negative public reaction. This, in turn, caused a defensive Christian

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16 Acts 9:31; 1Cor 1:2; Gal 1:2.
17 1John 3:9; 1Cor 3:3.
18 2Cor 6:17.
19 Eph 4:1-7; 1Cor 1:10.
reaction. On the other hand, from the middle of the second century onwards, Christians began to realize more and more that the destiny of the Church is somehow bound up with that of worldly society. As long as the State did not seek to oppose the Church’s rightful status and goals, it could be seen as God’s providential establishment for men and therefore the proper object of obedience.

The tension between the Church and society, characteristic of the early Church and, indeed, of all Christian history, is eloquently expressed by the author of the Epistle to Diogenetus, who shows that, while the Christians live as ordinary people, they also show an extraordinary loyalty to their own commonwealth, which is otherworldly.

While [Christians] live in both Greek and barbarian cities, as each one’s lot was cast, and follow the local custom in dress and food and other aspects of life, at the same time they demonstrate the remarkable and admittedly unusual character of their own citizenship. They live in their own countries, but only as aliens; they participate in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners….They marry like everyone else, and have children, but they do not expose their offspring. They share their food but not their wives. They are “in the flesh,” but they do not live “according to the flesh.” The live on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws; indeed in their private lives they transcend the laws. They love everyone, and by everyone they are persecuted. They are unknown, yet they are condemned; they are put to death, yet they are brought to life….They are cursed, yet they bless; they are insulted, yet they offer respect. When they do good, they are punished as evildoers; when they are punished, they rejoice as though brought to life….In a word, what the soul is to the body, Christians are to the world…and though Christians are detained in the world as if in prison, they in fact hold the world together.

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25 The Epistle to Diognetus 5-6, in *ECW*, 144-45.
According to the author of this passage, the early Christians saw themselves as a morally distinct community, separated from society around them, although sharing with their fellow citizens the basic aspects of life. Since the early Christians were different from the society in which they lived, they were persecuted as evildoers. As Wayne Meeks asserts, this passage shows the tension between the Christians’ realization of both their sharing in the culture around them, on the one hand, and their opposing it, on the other. This tension between the Church and society continued after the Church became the protégée of the emperors. There was, however, one difference. During the first three centuries, the Church considered itself a society, sect, or religious group set apart from society because its members were marginalized and often persecuted. Therefore, the Christians thought of the Church and society as of two different worlds: while one was righteous and sometimes persecuted, the other was unrighteous and sometimes persecuting. The Church before Constantine dealt with the sinners in the Church by developing a rigorous ecclesiastical discipline of penitential excommunication and reintegration into the community.27

After the Church became the favored religion of the empire and after the empire came to identify itself more and more with Christianity, the division was not between the righteous Church and the secular world, but between the good and evil members of the Church itself. As one of the main marks of the Church is its holiness, the presence of the

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bad as well as the good in the Church was a problem that had to be solved satisfactorily if the Church was to maintain its mark of holiness.

This issue surfaced preeminently during the Catholic-Donatist controversy, which revolved around the nature of the Church as a society and the Church’s relation with the secular world. Augustine knew well that Scripture speaks of the Church as containing both good and evil members. But he also knew that Scripture speaks of the Church as holy, without spot or wrinkle. How could this latter point be said about the Church of which Augustine was a member, since he knew well that the Church included many unworthy members among its number? The Catholic-Donatist controversy challenged Augustine, as a pastor in the Catholic Church, to offer an opinion that recognized the Church as a holy body that contains both good and evil members. Indeed, the Donatists’ view of the Church, already old-fashioned, which looked “back to the age of Cyprian and beyond,” gave occasion to Augustine to counter their ecclesiology with a conception of the Church that fit the actual state of the Church in the world of his time.

Donatist ecclesiology combined ideas from both Tertullian and Cyprian. Like Tertullian, the Donatists considered separation from unworthy Christians justified, whereas they saw suffering persecution at the hand of the State as a distinctive sign of the righteous. The Donatists followed Cyprian regarding separation from those unworthy of the Church. Cyprian,

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34 Robert Evans, *One and Holy: The Church in Latin Patristic Thought*, 70.
urging separation from the fallen bishops, stated a principle that would be taken seriously by the Donatist rigorist tradition in North Africa:

> Separate yourselves, [the Lord] said, from the tents of those hardened and evil sinners, and touch nothing of the things that are theirs lest you perish along with them in their sin….The faithful…must separate themselves off from their bishop if he is a sinner; they must have no part in the sacrifices of a priest who is sacrilegious, especially as they have in their own hands the power both to select bishops who are worthy and to reject those who are unworthy.\(^{35}\)

To a group of fallen people that had been reconciled and had written to him “in the name of the Church,” Cyprian replied that it is inadmissible that “a band of the lapsed should be called ‘the Church.’ For it is written: ‘God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.’”\(^{36}\) Furthermore, Cyprian saw in the Song of Songs that the Church was an enclosed garden totally separated from the secular world and those outside the Church:

> “An enclosed garden is my sister, my bride…a fountain sealed…a well of living water. But if the garden enclosed is the spouse of Christ, which is the Church, a thing enclosed cannot lie open to outsiders and profane men. And if the fountain is sealed, there is no access to the fountain to anyone placed outside either to drink or to be sealed therewith.”\(^{37}\)

Similarly, some of the martyrs during the Diocletian persecution, which was the root of the Donatist schism, firmly declared separation from traitors.

> If anyone communicates with the traitors, that person will not have a share with us in the heavenly kingdom….Each one of the martyrs signed the judgment with their own blood….Therefore, these things being so, would anyone who is strong in the knowledge of divine law, endowed with faith, outstanding in devotion and most holy in religion, who realizes that God the judge discerns truth from error, distinguishes, faith from faithless…would that person think that the church of the martyrs and the

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35 Cyprian, Letter 67.3.2, in ACW, vol.47, 23 (see Nm 16:26 for Cyprian’s quotation).
37 Cyprian, Letter 69.2, in FC, vol. 51, 245; Sg 4:12, 15; 6:8.
convicente of traitors is [sic] one and the same thing? Of course, no one does…. “Because of this, go out from their midst and separate.”

Here the Donatist Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs provides insight into the critical period that led to the formal split between Donatists and Catholics. The traitors in the passage are the Catholics’ forefathers, Christians who, according to the Donatists, handed over Scripture to the State during the Diocletian persecution.

Augustine chose to fight against these ideas, which were drawn from the situation of the Church when it was a sect that considered itself wholly different than the world. As Serge Lancel asserts, “The difficulty he [Augustine] encountered [in his effort to reject the Donatists’ view of the Church] was that this vocabulary of interiority and exteriority, inclusion and exclusion, had already been used a century and a half earlier—it is true, in the quite different context of a persecuted and cruelly assailed Church—by the great African martyr, Cyprian.”

The situation of the Catholic Church of Augustine’s time was entirely different: the Church was no longer a righteous and small sect in the secular world; the Church, though considered holy, was identified with the ends of the world since most of the civilized society, that is, most of the Roman Empire during the time of Augustine was Christian. While Cyprian advocated separation of Christians from those gravely stained by sin, especially from sinful leaders, for him the Church was also a sealed garden, that is, a community separated from the sinful world. For Augustine, those who separated themselves from the Church would have suffered the loss of the chance of salvation.

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39 For details about the North African rigorist tradition, see part A of this dissertation.
40 Serge Lancel, St Augustine, 281-82.
Indeed, Augustine tells us that he wanted the Donatists to be united with the Church because he was seriously concerned for their salvation. However, Church members were too numerous for the spiritual and moral maturity of all members to be verified. Since the Church was no longer a sect in the world but rather now a socially and legally sanctioned body that began to assimilate the world, Augustine had to find a solution to the issue posed by a holy Church that, perplexingly, contains both good and bad people. Serge Lancel rightly asserts that, “listening to the Donatists, Augustine’s idea was to counter their ecclesiology with a different conception of the Church.”

For Augustine, the separation between the holy Church members and the unknown or incorrigible sinners among them should take place not now but at the end of the world. Furthermore, Augustine believes that the good people are not contaminated by consorting with sinners. Therefore, according to Augustine, both the good and the bad should live peacefully together in the Church. While to the Church belongs all the faithful people, the Church is not at present holy insofar as, according to the Lord’s prayer, Christians should ask for forgiveness of their sins. Consequently, the Church is not holy by virtue of the holiness of its members. Against the Donatist ideas that the Church is a community of saints on earth as in heaven, a tiny remnant separated from the unworthy people, Augustine argues that the Church contains good and bad fish and that they are not to be separated until the final judgment.

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43 Serge Lancel, *St Augustine*, 281-85.
44 Augustine, Letter 76.2, in WSA 2/1, 298-99; 93.28-30, in WSA 2/1, 393-95.
45 Augustine, Sermon 4.14, in WSA 3/1, 193.
46 Augustine, Letter 93.33-34, in WSA 2/1, 397-98.
47 Augustine, Sermon 4.11, in WSA 3/1, 191.
48 Augustine, *Contra epistulam Parmeniani* 2.10.20, in BA, vol. 28, 312-17.
50 Augustine, Letter 76.2, in WSA 2/1, 298; *Contra litteras Petiliani* 3.2.3, in BA, vol. 30, 586-91.
Since the Church is the body of Christ and, consequently, belongs to Christ,\textsuperscript{51} the Donatists cannot alienate God from his Church if an inordinate behavior or ritual infiltrated, or took place within, the Church.\textsuperscript{52} According to Robert Dodaro, Augustine’s view of Christ as Mediator, as well as head and body of the Church formed and developed during his campaign against the Donatists:

“Augustine introduces into…discussion of Christ’s mediation the concept of the ‘whole Christ, head and body’ (\textit{totus Christus caput et corpus}), which, adapting Paul, he identifies as the church (Col 1:18, 24). He develops this image…in order to stress Christ’s unity with the church against the Donatists, for whom the church exists only where it can be found ‘without stain or wrinkle’ (Eph 5:27)... Augustine’s frequent reference to \textit{Christus totus} during this campaign leads him to a deeper appreciation of the image’s capacity to depict a series of complex interrelationships between Christ and the members of his church.”\textsuperscript{53}

According to this passage, the Donatists cannot be in the Church except they are in communion with the whole body of Christ, which is the Catholic Church in communion with churches throughout the world. Since the Church is Christ’s, the Donatists should depend on Christ, not on their merit, when confronted with failures in some members of the Church. Indeed, Peter Brown asserts that Augustine comes to believe that God’s grace was able to bring about a change of heart in nominal Christians: to object to the Catholic policy because it allowed such Christians to be part of the Church is, in his opinion, denying the power of God to change people’s lives.\textsuperscript{54} According to Mary Kreidler, Augustine’s Church was not a closed community, as that of the Donatists, but one open to all who accept becoming members of Christ’s body and inheritance, for this is, in fact, the Church.\textsuperscript{55} Unlike Augustine, the Donatists believed that they should not be in communion with traitors and persecutors.

\textsuperscript{51} Augustine, Sermon 45.5, in WSA 3/2, 254-55.
\textsuperscript{52} Augustine, \textit{Contra epistulam Parmeniani} 2.7.12, in BA, vol. 28, 294-95.
\textsuperscript{54} Peter Brown, \textit{Augustine of Hippo: A Biography}, 231.
of Christians. In the next section, I intend to show how Augustine treated, in his letters—and other writings—the issue of good and evil in the Church.

B. From 391 to 400

The solution to the Donatist-Catholic controversy demanded agreement concerning the nature of the Church. According to Augustine, while the Donatists did not know what the Church was, it was the Church that received the nations as its heritage. I have shown that Church unity was the main issue in the Catholic-Donatist controversy. Therefore, Augustine’s main intention in the controversy was to show the Donatists that the true Church is the Church in communion with the churches throughout the world and that, therefore, the Donatists, as a separatist group within Christianity, should join the Church, or even be forced into its unity. However, as I already mentioned several times, Augustine’s constant reminder to the Donatists that the Catholic Church is the true Church was part of his work toward the unity of the divided churches in North Africa. The sections of this chapter will show that Augustine clearly supports unity against the Donatists’ idea that the good Christians should separate from apostate sinners. Since Augustine’s works against the Donatists were responses to Donatist statements and arguments, these works present no systematic treatment of the presence of good and evil members in the Church. Although Augustine responded brilliantly to the Donatists and, in doing so, significantly influenced Western Christianity, and although the Donatists

were forced to join the Church, his works against them were not entirely successful because the Donatists could not be entirely convinced by Augustine’s ideas about the Church and because unity in North African Christianity was never completely established.\footnote{S. Lancel, \textit{St Augustine}, 281.}

Since both the Catholics and the Donatists approached the subject of Church unity from very different presuppositions, it was impossible for them to come to a common consensus.\footnote{R.B. Eno, “Some Nuances in the Ecclesiology of the Donatists,” \textit{Studia Patristica} 16 (1976): 417.} While the Donatists valued unity as much as the Catholics, they believed that the Christian should separate from what is openly revealed as sinful. However, the Donatists did not claim to be a church uncontaminated by the presence of sinners, known or unknown, as Augustine constantly implies in his letters.\footnote{See, for example, Augustine, Letter 87.1-3, in WSA 2/1, 344-45.} Indeed, as R. Eno asserts, the honorable Donatists claimed that they, unlike the Catholics, made a real effort to clean their church of sinners.\footnote{R.B. Eno, “Some Nuances in the Ecclesiology of the Donatists,” 420.} Such an effort was perhaps easier in the small Donatist community; however, it was an impossible goal in a Church that, as Peter Brown asserts, considered its historic mission to be the absorption of the world.\footnote{P. Brown, \textit{Augustine of Hippo: A Biography}, 209, 221, referring to Ps 2:7-8.} While the Donatists believed that all known sinners should be expelled from the Church, Augustine recognized that authority could do nothing in respect to some sinners and thus that some of the wicked must be tolerated.\footnote{Augustine, Sermon 164.8 (dated 411), in WSA 3/5, 192; ACC 3.90-95, 1202-03; R.B. Eno, “Some Nuances in the Ecclesiology of the Donatists,” \textit{Studia Patristica}, 402-21.}

As in previous chapters on the themes of Church unity and authority, the chronological divisions of this chapter are intended to separate my treatment of this matter into manageable units, although the particulars of each period will be emphasized.
In what follows, I will show Augustine’s dealings with the Donatists in regard to the issue of the good and the bad in the Church. In addition to his letters, I will also refer to Augustine’s other works, especially those of an epistolary nature, in which he touches on the issue of good and bad in the Church.

In a letter which he wrote to Aurelius, the bishop of Carthage, between 391 and 393, Augustine suggests that the practices of feasting and drinking in the cemeteries at the martyrs’ tombs should be banished, since in most of the lands of Western Christianity these practices had been eliminated by “holy bishops.”

Augustine quoted the passage in Romans 13:13-14, which contributed a great deal to his final decision to convert to Christianity. From the three vices mentioned in it—“Not in feasting and drunkenness, not in fornication and impurity, not in strife and jealousy”—fornication and impurity were severely punished, according to Augustine, whereas feasting and drunkenness were considered as licit and permissible in the Church. Augustine recognizes that, according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:11, one should not take bread with the kind of people Paul mentions in this verse: “But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard or robber. Do not even eat with such one.” However, Augustine is ready to make a compromise: these things may be tolerated privately but should not take place publicly in the Church.

What do we do with that passage in which, after the same apostle [Paul] listed many vices among which he mentioned drunkenness, he ended by saying that one should not take bread with such people. But let us tolerate...
these practices in matters of sex and domestic corruption and even in those banquets that are held within private homes, and let us receive the body of Christ with those people with whom we are forbidden to eat bread. At least let this great disgrace be kept from the tombs of the bodies of the saints...from houses of prayer.⁶⁹

In regard to the vices of strife and jealousy, Augustine feels that he should not say anything since they are so common and impossible to eradicate: “For these vices are more serious, not in the people, but in our own number [that is, in the members of the episcopate]. The mother of these vices is pride and the eagerness for human praise, which also often leads to hypocrisy. One does not resist this unless the fear and love of God is inculcated by frequent testimonies from the books of God.”⁷⁰ Indeed, Augustine believes that, preaching from the Scriptures fear of future punishment will occasion positive change, first in spiritual people, then in the multitudes of “deplorable” Christians: “By threatening from the scriptures punishment in the future...the spiritual people or those close to spiritual people will be first moved, and by their authority the remaining multitude will be subdued by even the gentlest, but most insistent admonitions.”⁷¹ At the end of his letter, Augustine tells Aurelius that there are many things concerning Christians’ lives and conduct over which he should shed tears. Due to their gravity, Augustine tells Aurelius, they should not arrive to him by letter.⁷² Although Augustine was concerned about ungodly private acts, he was mainly concerned with public morality, especially with the drinking at the tombs of martyrs, which he believed should be completely eradicated. Augustine believed that the fear that some passages from the

⁶⁹ Augustine, Letter 22.3, in WSA 2/1, 59, referring to 1 Cor 5:11; for Augustine’s inclination toward toleration, see Mary Jane Kreidler, “Conversion in the Church as Found in the Letters of St. Augustine,” in Augustine Presbyter Factus Sum, 418-25.
⁷⁰ Augustine, Letter 22.7, in WSA 2/1, 61; for pride as the beginning of all sins, see Sermon123.1, in WSA 3/4, 244.
⁷¹ Augustine, Letter 22.5, in WSA 2/1, 60; for fear of the eternal death as a motive to live better lives, see Sermon 399.13, in WSA 3/10, 466-67.
⁷² Augustine, Letter 22.9, in WSA 2/1, 62.
Scriptures could instill in evil-behaving people could change them from an erroneous way of life to a godly one.

The discussion about feasting and drunkenness Augustine approached again, this time more determined to eliminate their public practice in the Church, in a letter that he sent to Alypius, bishop of Thagaste, in 395. In it Augustine tells Alypius about the sermon he preached to his congregation with the goal of eliminating the feast of Leontius of Hippo, the first martyr bishop of the town. The feast was called *laetitia*, that is, joy. 73 According to Augustine, “in calling it [the feast] ‘joy,’ they [the people of Hippo, Catholics and Donatists alike] try in vain to hide the term ‘drunkenness.’” 74 Referring to 1Corinthians 11:20-22, Augustine reproved Christians’ common habits of drinking and relaxed morals:

> I stressed with greater care that no dinners, not even decent and sober ones, ought to be held in the church, since the apostle [Paul in the aforementioned verses] did not say, ‘do you not have homes for becoming drunk?’ as if it were only forbidden to become drunk in church. Rather, he said, *for eating and drinking*, which can be done decently, but outside the church, by those who have homes where they can be refreshed by needed nourishment. And yet, we have come to these difficulties of corrupt times and relaxed morals so that we do not now desire decent dinners, but the reign of drunkenness within our homes. 75

Augustine used Psalm 89:31-34—“if these children abandon my law and do not walk in my commandments, if they profane my ordinances, I shall visit their crimes with the rod and their sins with scourges, but I shall not take away my mercy”—to tell his congregation that, if they scorned all these words, the Lord would approach them with rod and scourge. Augustine’s message had such an effect that not only was his

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74 Augustine, Letter 29.2, in WSA 2/1, 95.
75 Augustine, Letter 29.5, in WSA 2/1, 97.
congregation weeping, but he himself was also caught up in their weeping.\textsuperscript{76} Augustine reports that the people of his congregation saw how wicked it is to do, in the name of religion and within the walls of the church, something devoted to the filth of carnal pleasures.\textsuperscript{77} However, the next day there were Christians who complained about the suppression of the feast. Augustine responded by quoting a passage from Ezekiel through which Augustine, as one entrusted by God with his flock, could absolve himself from the danger of not communicating to his congregation the danger of sinning: “I was, nonetheless, planning, if they thought that they should persist, to read the passage from the prophet Ezekiel, \textit{The lookout is acquitted if he reported the danger, even if those to whom it is reported refuse to beware} (Ez 33:9), to shake the dust from my clothes, and to leave.”\textsuperscript{78} Although Augustine saw himself as responsible to God for his church and although he preached to instill in his congregation the fear of God, it seems that not all Christians were ready to renounce their tradition of celebrating at the tombs of martyrs.

Augustine exploited every opportunity to show the Donatist failures.\textsuperscript{79} He believed that by repeatedly mentioning their mistakes, they would believe that what he said was true. In a letter he sent to Eusebius, a Roman official in Hippo and a Catholic layman, Augustine asked him to appeal to Proculeianus, the Donatist bishop of Hippo, who seemed to enjoy good relations with the Roman official, about the case of the young teenager who, after beating his mother, joined the Donatist church of Hippo. Of course, Augustine wished to make sure that people of his congregation would not join the Donatists and so reduce the numbers of his own church. Unfortunately, Eusebius refused

\textsuperscript{76} Augustine, Letter 29.7, in WSA 2/1, 97-98.
\textsuperscript{77} Augustine, Letter 29.2, in WSA 2/1, 95.
\textsuperscript{78} Augustine, Letter 29.8, in WSA 2/1, 98; for the bishop as a lookout or watchman, see also Sermon 339.2, in WSA 3/9, 280.
\textsuperscript{79} S. Lancel, \textit{St Augustine}, 277.
to interfere in the cases brought to his attention. In addition to this case, Augustine referred in this letter to other two disciplinary cases. In the first case, Augustine refused to bring back to the Church, against her will, a daughter of a tenant farmer of the Church who joined the Donatists and whom her father wished to beat in order to bring her back to the Church. The second case concerned a Catholic subdeacon, Primus, who was not allowed access to nuns, since it was contrary to good discipline. On account of his contempt for sound rules, disobedience and depraved conduct, he was removed from his clerical rank. Therefore, he went over to the Donatists with two nuns and enjoyed the privilege of being a member in good standing. Since Augustine wished to unite the divided churches, Augustine was concerned about losing members of his church; however, he tells us that a member under penalties in his church cannot be received in a different communion as a full member but must be received as a penitent. At the end of his letter, since Proculeianus refused to communicate with Augustine through letters, Augustine asked Eusebius to inform Proculeianus about these events and to communicate to him Proculeianus’ reply to him. While the Church was not free of people behaving in an ungodly manner, Augustine fought not to lose members of the Church who went over to the Donatists. In order to avoid this, Augustine, through his correspondence and by appealing to official persons in the community, openly criticized the Donatists who had

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80 For the first letter Augustine sent to Eusebius, see Letter 34.1-6, in WSA 2/1, 118-20; Letter 35.1, in WSA 2/1, 121-22; see also S. Lancel, St Augustine, 188-89.
81 Augustine, Letter 35.4, in WSA 2/1, 123. D. Doyle, The Bishop as Disciplinarian in the Letters of Saint Augustine (New York and Washington, D.C.: Peter Lang, 2002), 311-313.It is quite evident that at this stage in the Catholic-Donatists controversy, sometime between 396 and 397, Augustine opposed the use of force against the Donatists.
82 Augustine, Letter 35.2, in WSA 2/1, 122; see also D. Doyle, The Bishop as Disciplinarian in the Letters of Saint Augustine, 313-315 and Van Der Meer, Augustine the Bishop: The Life and Work of a Father of the Church, 228.
83 Augustine, Letter 35.5, in WSA 2/1, 123.
received in their community persons who, due to their improper behavior, needed to pass through a period of penitential discipline.

Between late 396 and early 397, Augustine wrote a letter to a group of Donatist leaders urging them to accept correction and to be unified with the Church. Augustine told the Donatists that though the Catholics are in communion with bad people, they are in communion not with their actions, but with the altar of Christ. Indeed, although the good people are displeased with the actions of bad people, they cannot correct all since they would risk uprooting the wheat, that is, the good people, before the time of the harvest. After all, the good people in the Church cannot separate from the bad since they do not want the name of Christ to suffer the blasphemy of horrible schism, the ultimate sin of heretics.

Further, Augustine refers to Scripture to show how the early Church and the people of Israel tolerated sinners in their midst. Referring to Revelation 2:1-3, Augustine showed that the Church in Ephesus, although it did not tolerate sinners, had patience with them: “I know your works and your labor and patience and that you cannot tolerate evil persons, and you have tested those who say that they are apostles and are not, and you have found them to be liars. And you have patience, and you have put up with them on account of my name, and you have not failed.” Referring to Revelation 4:5 Augustine implied that the Donatists abandoned their first love, which, according to Augustine meant failing to tolerate sinners in their midst: “But I hold against you that you have abandoned your first love. Recall, then from where you have fallen, and do penance, and do the works you did first….He, therefore, says, ‘first love,’ because the church endured

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84 Augustine, Letter 43.21, in WSA 2/1, 168, referring to Mt 13:29.
85 Augustine, Letter 43.18, in WSA 2/1, 166; D. Doyle, The Bishop as Disciplinarian in the Letters of Saint Augustine, 275.
the false apostles on account of the name of Christ, and he commands that she seek again that love and do her earlier works.\textsuperscript{86} After these two examples in Revelation, Augustine uses an example from the Old Testament that shows how sinners were tolerated by communities and their leaders.

Aaron tolerates the many people who demand, build, and worship an idol. Moses tolerates so many thousands who murmur against God and sin against his name so many times. David tolerates Saul who persecutes him, who abandons the things of heaven with his wicked conduct and seeks the things below by the arts of magic; he avenges him when he is slain, and even calls him the anointed of the Lord on account of the mystery of his holy anointing. Samuel tolerates the wicked sons of Eli and his own evil sons….Samuel, finally, tolerates the people who are proud and contemptuous of God. Isaiah tolerates those whom he accuses of many true crimes. Jeremiah tolerates those from whom he suffers so much. Zechariah tolerates the Pharisees and scribes who scripture testifies existed at that time.

Augustine acknowledged that he passed over many other examples from the Old Testament. However, he asserted that those who want to read the heavenly words regarding this matter will find that all the servants and friends of God always had sinful people whom they had to tolerate in their midst. Most importantly, none of those who tolerated sinners in their midst were defiled by their sins, rather they were preserving “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3)”.\textsuperscript{87} The New Testament also has its own examples of toleration:

The Lord himself tolerated Judas, a devil, a thief, and a man who betrays him for money; he allows him to receive along with the innocent disciples what the faithful know is our ransom. The apostles tolerated the false apostles, and among those who seek what is their own, not what pertains

\textsuperscript{86} Augustine, Letter 43.22, in WSA 2/1, 168.
\textsuperscript{87} Augustine, Letter 43.22-23, in WSA 2/1, 168-69; for Aaron tolerating sinful people, see, Ex 32:6; for Moses tolerating sinful people, see Ex 14:11: 15:24; 16:2, 8; 17:2-3; Nm 14:2; 16:41; for David tolerating Saul, see 1Sm 28:7-20; for Samuel’s toleration of Eli’s sons, see 1Sm 2:27-29; 3:21; 8:1-5.
to Jesus Christ (Phil 2:21), Paul, not seeking what is his own, but what pertains to Jesus Christ, lives a life of most glorious tolerance.\textsuperscript{88}

Although the Donatists separated from the Church on account of some alleged traitors, Augustine asserts that no sinner wipes out from the earth the Church of God. God promised the whole world to the Church and the Church has fulfilled this promise by filling the whole world. And if the Church contains both evil and good on earth, in heaven it admits only the good. This letter, according to Augustine, served as a source of correction for the Donatists in view of Church unity.\textsuperscript{89}

Between 396 and 397 Augustine wrote to a group of Donatists about his discussion with Fortunius, the Donatist bishop of Thiave. In this discussion he had striven to reconcile the Donatists with the Church.\textsuperscript{90} To the Donatist reproach that the interim man appointed after the death of Mensurius was killed by Caecilian’s people, Augustine responded that Elijah killed any false prophets and that such actions were permitted to the just.\textsuperscript{91} However, on a different occasion, when the Donatists pointed out the atrocities of the Catholics during the time of Macarius, Augustine asserted: “Let us remove from the center stage those empty objections that are often hurled at one another by ignorant parties. You should not raise as an objection the era of Macarius….The threshing floor of the Lord has not yet been winnowed; it cannot be free from straw.”\textsuperscript{92} Indeed, Augustine tells the Donatists to look at the Lord, who tolerated a betrayer; thus Augustine suggests that the Donatists should tolerate the alleged \textit{traditores} of the sacred books.\textsuperscript{93} Those who produced the schism, that is, the Donatists, did not have the toleration and peace of which

\begin{footnotes}
\item Augustine, Letter 43.23, in WSA 2/1, 169; for the Lord tolerating a betrayer, see Letter 44.10, in WSA 2/1, 178; for Paul tolerating false apostles, see 1Cor 11:13.
\item Augustine, Letter 43.27, in WSA 2/1, 171-72.
\item Van Der Meer, \textit{Augustine the Bishop: The Life and Work of a Father of the Church}, 110.
\item Augustine, Letter 44.9-10, in WSA 2/1, 177-78.
\item Augustine, Letter 23.6, in WSA 2/1, 67.
\item Augustine, Letter 44.10, in WSA 2/1, 178.
\end{footnotes}
Paul spoke in Eph 4:2-3; “*Bear with one another in love; strive to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*” Indeed, Augustine condemned the Donatists because, while they did not tolerate Catholics, they tolerated evil persons in their community in order to avoid disunity. According to Augustine, Scripture speaks clearly of the importance of unity and toleration: “In the time of the Old Testament the peace of unity and toleration was not preached with such a strong commendation as by the example of the Lord and the love of the New Testament, and yet those prophets and holy men often charged the people with crimes when they tried to remove themselves from the unity of that people and from the communion.”⁹⁴ Indeed, in a letter he sent to Crispinus, the Donatist bishop of Calama, between 399 and 400, Augustine expressed the belief that the sacrilege of schism would not be punished more drastically than the sins of idolatry and killing unless it were considered more serious than these crimes.⁹⁵

During this period of time, from the time of his ordination as a priest until 400, an important topic in Augustine’s dealings with the Donatists and his own congregation was the issue of good and bad members in the Church. While he recognized the existence of bad people in the Church, he criticized and pressured them through his sermons to renounce their wicked way. On the other hand, Augustine prepared with Scriptural passages, argued against the Donatists that the Church consists of both good and bad people and that the good people should not separate from the bad ones; instead, they should tolerate weak Christians.

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⁹⁴ Augustine, Letter 44.11, in WSA 2/1, 179.
⁹⁵ Augustine, Letter 51.1, in WSA 2/1, 198-99; for the sin of idolatry, see Ex 32:1-35; for the sin of killing, see Jer 36:23; for the sin of schism, see Nm 16:31-35.
C. From 400 to 409

In years 400-409 Augustine’s position on the subject of good and evil members in the Church does not change notably from what we have just outlined in the previous section. Between late 401 and early 402 Augustine wrote a letter to Xantippus, the primate of Numidia, about a priest, Abundantius, in a small town under Augustine’s care. Augustine mentioned in his letter that, since Abundantius was not living a life worthy of a servant of God, “he had begun a reputation that was not good.” Indeed, Augustine wrote that Abundantius had embezzled a certain peasant’s money that was entrusted to him for religious purposes and that he could not provide a credible account of it. Moreover, on a day of fasting before Christmas, Abundantius had eaten supper and dinner at the house of an ill-reputed woman and stayed the night at the same house with no clerical companion. Augustine tells us that another cleric from Hippo had stayed at the inn of this woman, and he had been removed from his position for this reason.\(^{96}\) While Abundantius had one year to appeal his case to a council, Augustine’s attitude was firm in thinking that this man should be removed from the office of the priesthood.\(^{97}\) Augustine believed that a community that was particularly exposed to the Donatists’ criticism should not be entrusted to such a man: “I feared to entrust a church to him, especially one situated amid the rabidity of the heretics who go about barking.”\(^{98}\) Although the case of Abundantius was delayed by the decision of an episcopal court if he appealed his case, Augustine’s attitude was firm: Abundantius should not be entrusted

\(^{96}\) Augustine, Letter 65.1, in WSA 2/1, 255, see also Van Der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop: The Life and Work of a Father of the Church*, 229; S. Lancel, *St Augustine*, 250; D. Doyle, *The Bishop as Disciplinarian in the Letters of Saint Augustine*, 315-316.

\(^{97}\) Augustine, Letter 65.2, in WSA 2/1, 256.

\(^{98}\) Augustine, Letter 65.1, in WSA 2/1, 255.
with a church. As we noticed, Augustine’s determined attitude was in part due to the fact that he wanted to avoid the Donatists’ criticism.

At the end of 403, Augustine addresses to the Donatists in the name of the Catholic Church a letter that is an exhortation to unity. God promised that the ends of the earth would turn to the Lord, and all the families of the earth would adore Him, because He is the Lord over the nations. Consequently, the Donatists cannot claim that the true Church resides only in Africa or imagine that they have escaped the weeds, that is, having bad people in their midst. Indeed, Augustine asserts that the Donatists are nothing but weeds, “for if you were grain, you would tolerate the weeds that are mixed in and would not split yourselves from the crop of Christ.” While of the weeds it was said, “Because injustice will abound, the faith of many will grow cold,” of the wheat it was said, “The one who persevere to the end will be saved” (Mt 24:12-13).” And Augustine continues saying that, by accusing good Christians, they prove themselves to be evil Christians, and by separating from good Christians, they contradict Christ who states that both the good and the evil should grow together up to the time of the harvest.

Why do you believe that the weeds have increased and filled the world, but the wheat has decreased and remains only in Africa? You say that you are Christians, and you contradict Christ. He said, Allow them both to grow until the harvest (Mt 13:30); he did not say, “Let the weeds increase, and let the grain decrease.” 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.” He said, The harvesters are the angels; he did not say, “The harvesters are leaders of the Circumcellions.” And because you accuse the wheat in defense of the weeds, you have proved that you are weeds, and what is worse, you have separated yourselves from the wheat ahead of time.99

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99 Augustine Letter 76.1, in WSA 2/1, 297, referring to Ps 22:27-29.
To show the Donatists’ inconsistencies about good and evil members in the Church, Augustine also mentioned that the Donatists were in communion with evil persons such as Optatus, the Donatist bishop of Thamugadi from 388 to 398, not with those who tolerated the weeds in the Lord’s field up to the harvest, that is the members of the Catholic Church. Since, for Augustine, the schism is an awful evil, he urges the Donatists to remove themselves from the crime of schism if they hate evil persons.\textsuperscript{101}

In a sermon that Augustine preached sometime between 405 and 410, he argues that the schism of the Donatists is an awful evil, a crime, and that the Donatists, as schismatics, are not Christians although they are called such.\textsuperscript{102} Further, Augustine mentions, in a sermon preached in about 417, that schismatics like the Donatists confess Christ in words only while denying Him in deeds.\textsuperscript{103} Indeed, in the letter quoted above, Augustine asked the Donatists why, if they fear to mingle with evil people, they did not separate from Optatus, whom they call a martyr. Here Augustine refers to the case of Felician of Musti who, after being separated from the main church of Primian and after being accused in the court of the proconsul, was received back with honor.\textsuperscript{104} As always when he could, Augustine pointed out cases in the Donatist church in which the Donatists not only did not exclude bad persons from their midst but they also received back in the church people who were once separated from them. Of course, these actions of the Donatists were contrary to the way they acted toward the Catholics.

\textsuperscript{101} Augustine, Letter 76.3, in WSA 2/1, 299.
\textsuperscript{102} Augustine, Sermon 5.1, in WSA 3/1, 216; for schism as a crime, see Letter 76.4, in WSA 2/1, 299.
\textsuperscript{103} Augustine, Sermon 183.10, in WSA 3/5, 340.
\textsuperscript{104} Augustine, Letter 76.3, in WSA 2/1, 299; for Optatus of Thamugadi, see W.H.C. Frend, \textit{The Donatist Church; A Movement of Protest in North Africa} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952; reprint, 1985), 201-25.
In a letter written sometime between 408 and 418 to Felix and Hilarinus, two Catholic laymen of Hippo, Augustine advises them not to be disturbed by the publicly known scandal caused by the priest Boniface and the monk Spes. Augustine begins the letter by telling them that Satan disturbs the hearts of the faithful whenever unpleasant situations arise about the servants of God. But since Scripture speaks of scandals, these are tests for the faithful, who must persevere in love up to the end: “For he says, *Because injustice will abound, the love of many will grow cold,* but he immediately adds, *but whoever perseveres up to the end will be saved* (Mt 24:12).” Augustine continues by acknowledging that the servants of the Church are susceptible to criticism whenever the occasion arises: “Why, then, is it surprising that human beings speak evil of the servants of God, and since they cannot ruin their life, they try to destroy their reputation…”105 Since Augustine did not have any concrete evidence against Boniface, he tells Felix and Hilarinus that he could not remove Boniface from the priesthood. Thus, Augustine points to Matthew 7:2: “In the judgment by which you have judged you will be judged,” and tells them that, since the case awaits God’s judgment, which he cannot anticipate, he cannot remove Boniface from the priesthood.106 Despite the public scandal caused by the priest and the monk, Augustine, due to the fact that he did not have concrete evidence against Boniface, could not remove Boniface from the priesthood. Furthermore, Augustine seems here inclined to leave the case in God’s judgment.

In the same period of time as that to which the previous letter is dated, Augustine wrote a letter to his monks, clergy, and the faithful of Hippo. He starts this letter as he

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106 Augustine, Letter 77.2, in WSA 2/1, 301-02.
started the previous one, by saying that Scripture mentions the evil with which this world is going to abound, but he now refers to Romans 15:5 in order to instruct the servants of his church that they must have patience since the evil events serve as instruction for the faithful: “For whatever was written before was written for our instruction in order that through patience and the consolation of the scriptures we might have hope in God.”

Augustine, although worried because others were disturbed about the priest Boniface, was more worried about those who rejoiced over such things: “Two men from our house have such a case that one of them is considered to be undoubtedly wicked, and the reputation of the other is bad among certain people and doubtful among others.” While this case tormented Augustine, he was inclined to believe that the priest, although he did not find a way to prove one of the two guilty. According to Augustine, the monk insisted that he be raised to the clerical state either by Augustine in Hippo or elsewhere by someone else. Augustine refused to ordain a man whom he suspected of sin. Spes responded by saying that if he was not raised to the clerical state, Boniface, the priest, should not be allowed to continue in his office. In order to avoid more trouble, Augustine decided to send them both to the shrine of Felix of Nola, where people miraculously confessed their sins. While Augustine did not dare to remove the name of the priest from the number of his colleagues for fear that he might do injury to the authority of God under whose scrutiny the case was pending, he referred to 1 Corinthians 4:5 for the support of his argument: “Do not judge anything ahead of time before the Lord comes.

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107 Augustine, Letter 78.1, in WSA 2/1, 303.
108 Augustine, Letter 78.2, in WSA 2/1, 304.
109 Augustine, Letter 78.3, in WSA 2/1, 304-05; for Felix of Nola, see Michael McHugh, “Felix of Nola,” in EEC, 426.
and illuminates what is hidden in darkness, and he will reveal the thoughts of the heart, and then each one will have praise from God.”

Then Augustine told those he addressed that he tried to keep the matter as quiet as possible because he did not want the strong Christians to be “uselessly tormented” and the weak Christians “dangerously disturbed.” He feared that “the weak [Christians] could fail and perish” amid their detractors, that is, pagans and false brethren, who certainly were the Donatists. Indeed, Augustine reproved some of his clerics that boasted, on the occasion of the apostasy of two Donatists deacons who joined the Catholic Church, that “nothing of the sort had come about in the clerics from our school,” that is, from the Catholic Church. Since he who boasts should boast in the Lord, Augustine said that whoever said this about the Donatist deacons did not act correctly: “You should raise as objections to the heretics only that they are not Catholics. Otherwise, you will be like those [the Donatists] who, since they do not have any defense in the issue of their separation, try only to gather up the crimes of human beings and spread about more of them in lies.” Further, while Augustine said that Christ is he who makes his faithful secure from ministers who commit their own sins, he writes: “Practice what they [the ministers] say, but do not do what they do. For they preach, but they do not practice (Mt 23:3).” Augustine asked the people he addressed to pray for him since he feared that he might “perhaps be found to be rejected after preaching to others.” After all, Augustine asserted, his monastery was not a better place than some Biblical places where human sin and frailty, both good and bad people, and rejected and chosen people were found.

Nor that I dare to claim for myself that my monastery is better than the ark of Noah where among eight persons one was found to be rejected or better

110 Augustine, Letter 78.5, in WSA 2/1, 306.
111 Augustine, Letter 78.7, in WSA 2/1, 307.
than the house of Abraham where it was said, Cast out the handmaid and her son (Gn 12:10) or better than the house of Isaac of whose twins it was said, I have loved Jacob, but I hated Esau (Mal 1:2). Nor is my monastery better than the house of Jacob himself where a son defiled with incest the bed of his father, not better than the house of David whose son slept with his sister and whose other son rebelled against the holy gentleness of his father, not better than the dwelling of the apostle Paul. For, if he dwelled only among the good, he would not have said, Fights on the outside, fears on the inside (2Cor 7:5), nor would he have said when he was speaking of the holiness and faith of Timothy, I have no one who is genuinely concerned about you. Everyone is seeking his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ (Phil 2:20-21). Nor is my monastery better than the dwelling of the very Lord Christ in which eleven good men put up with the disloyal and thieving Judas, nor better finally than heaven from which the angels fell.\footnote{Augustine, Letter 78.8, in WSA 2/1, 308, for boasting in the Lord, see 1Cor 1:31; for being rejected after preaching to others, see 1Cor 9:27; for Noah’s ark, see Gn 7:13; 9:22-27; for the house of Jacob, see Gn 49:4; for David’s son who slept with his sister, see 2Sm 13:14; for David’s son, Absalom, who rebelled against his father, see 2Sm 15:12.}

Augustine realizes here the fragility of human nature. While he blamed some of his clerics for boasting about their strength to overcome temptation, Augustine asserted that what they should object to about the Donatists is their schism, not their mistakes and failure to act rightly. Indeed, Augustine here doubts even his action, which may be not as good as expected by God, although he preaches to others.

Sometime between 405 and 408 Augustine wrote to Paul, the Catholic bishop of Cataqua in Numidia, reprimanding his manner of living. Augustine was constantly conscious of his duty to rebuke sin.\footnote{Augustine, Letter 85.1, in WSA 2/1, 341; for the danger of not criticizing the evil members in the Church, see 1Cor 9:27; see also D. Doyle, The Bishop as Disciplinarian in the Letters of St. Augustine, 144.} In addition to his responsibility to God, Augustine could not endure people’s complains as to Paul’s behavior.\footnote{Augustine, Letter 85.2, in WSA 2/1, 342.} Moreover, since Paul was brought to the Gospel by Augustine, Augustine considered himself even more responsible for his behavior.\footnote{Augustine, Letter 85.1, in WSA 2/1, 341.} Although Augustine did not mention in this letter the sin committed
by Paul, we can find the issue at stake in another letter he sent to Olympius in about 408 to ask him about the remission of taxes left by Paul in his parish at his death. We find that Paul, due to an enormous debt, had to renounce all his possessions. However, since he had contrived to retain some money, he bought some fields, as if for the Church, in the name of a very rich and respectable family, but this was merely a treachery intended to avoid taxes. The new bishop, Boniface, had asked Olympius for the remission of the taxes owed by Paul. Paul’s actions significantly affected Augustine’s community. Augustine had written him earlier: “For you have so wounded the church in Hippo that, unless the Lord delivers you from all your worldly concerns and burdens and calls you back to a genuine episcopal manner of life, such a wound cannot be healed.” Because his comportment had been inexcusable and gave opportunity to his detractors to blaspheme against the Church, Augustine broke off all connection with. As in a previous letter, Augustine was deeply disturbed by ungodly actions in his own community. While he was concerned about the mark Paul left on his church in Hippo, he was also concerned about the detractors’ blasphemy, that is, the Donatists’ critical comments, against the Church.

In the letter Augustine wrote to Emeritus, the Donatist bishop of Caesarea, sometime between 405 and 411, Augustine told him that the unknown sinners of the Church could not defile those in communion with them, since that would mean that the Donatists’ unknown sinners would render their whole church impure. Augustine wished to convince the Donatists that the presumed Catholic traitors in the beginning of the

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117 Augustine, Letter 85.1, in WSA 2/1, 341.
118 Augustine, Letter 85.2, in WSA 2/1, 342.
schism, whom they could not prove clearly guilty before the imperial officials, did not render the Church contaminated by their sins. However, the Donatists believed that the unknown sinners in the Church did not contaminate the rest of the Church.\textsuperscript{119} The Donatists believed that sin was transmitted through sacramental communion. It was in baptism (or ordination) that the infection was passed on; therefore, the Donatists believed, as Cyprian, that Christians should not stay in communion with polluted leaders, the dispensers of the sacraments.\textsuperscript{120} As I already mentioned, unlike the Catholics, the Donatists believed that they ought to carefully purge those in the Church who were visibly ungodly; the unknown sinners in their midst would be, indeed, separated from the good people at the end of the world.\textsuperscript{121} However, they believed, as Cyprian believed, that they should distance themselves from visible sinners and corrupted leaders.\textsuperscript{122} Thinking of the prophets of Israel, who clearly stated that disobedience and sin led God to close his ears to the needs of His people, the Donatists believed that they should avoid the company of ungodly people.\textsuperscript{123} Augustine reminded Emeritus that godly men did not separate from sinners even when they were many in the one people of God, which implies that, even if there are many known sinners in the Church, this is not a reason to separate from the Church of God:

\begin{quote}
It is evident that a person does not become the same as a bad person with whom he approaches the altar of Christ, even if the bad person is not unknown, provided one does not approve of that person and separates
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{120} Augustine, \textit{De baptismo} 6.37.72, in BA, vol. 29, 482-85; P. Beddoe, “Contagion in the Donatists and St. Augustine,” 235; Peter Brown, Augustine of Hippo: A Biography, 208-09.

\textsuperscript{121} ACC 3.90-95, 1202-03; R.B. Eno, “Some Nuances in the Ecclesiology of the Donatists,” 420.


\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Contra epistulam Parmeniani} 2, in BA, vol. 28, 276-81.
himself from him by a good conscience by disapproving of him. It is evident, then, that to be an accomplice of a thief is nothing other than to steal with him or to accept his theft with a consenting heart.\textsuperscript{124}

The same topic comes up in a letter that Augustine sent to the Donatists sometime after 406. Those who cannot be corrected must remain part of community, but the good persons in community must not partake in their sins. The sinners should be tolerated like weeds among the grain, or like straw among the wheat, or like bad fishes caught with good fishes within the net. As the weeds are not gathered in order to avoid uprooting the wheat so the bad are left in the Church of the Lord in order to avoid uprooting the good on their account. In regard to bad leaders, Augustine asserts that God said to “\textit{do what they say, but not to do what they do. For they speak, but do not act (Mt 23:3).}”\textsuperscript{125} We have seen that, while the Donatists, like Cyprian, advocated separation from corrupted leaders, Augustine advocated tolerance, since the bad people in the Church do not contaminate the good ones. While the good and bad could cohabit together in the Church, Augustine urged the good people not to imitate the bad people’s actions.

\section*{D. Letter 93}

Since I want to separate the discussion in manageable sections and since in the letter 93 the subject of good and evil in the Church appears more frequently than in the other ones, I treat this letter separately. The letter Augustine sent probably in 407 or 408 to Vincent, the Rogatist bishop of Cartenna, had the goal of uniting to the Catholic Church this Donatist group, which had separated from the main Donatist church, and of

\textsuperscript{124} Augustine, Letter 87.3, in WSA 2/1, 345-46; for a multitude of false brethren, see Gal 2:4 and 2Cor 11:26.  
\textsuperscript{125} Augustine, Letter 105.16, in WSA 2/2, 63.
showing Vincent the Donatists’ inconsistencies in their view of the Church and its holiness. Augustine asserted that the Donatists did not judge the Catholics with the same principles with which they judged their own actions.\textsuperscript{126} In this letter we find from Augustine that he originally was opposed to forced conversion because the Church could have thus “false Catholics” but he changed his opinion because of the many Donatists brought in the Church out of fear of the imperial laws.\textsuperscript{127} Since Augustine sincerely fought throughout his episcopate against false Catholics, it is obvious that Augustine, for practical reasons, came to the conclusion that it was better to have a united Church of good and bad people than a Church divided on account of disparate views about holiness. Indeed, as Pamela Bright says, although Augustine favored the unity of good and bad in the Church against the Church of the saints only, “Augustine lived with the pastoral and doctrinal question of holiness throughout his episcopate.”\textsuperscript{128}

Speaking of the origins of the schism, Augustine, asserting that Caecilian was either innocent or could not be proved guilty, questioned why the Donatists separated from good Christians whom God ordered to grow amid the weeds until the harvest. Even if the alleged traitors would have been proven and known, such actions were to be endured on account of fellowship with the innocent. And Augustine again appeals to Scripture to make his case by way of examples: “The prophets tolerated those against whom they said so much….In this way the Lord himself tolerated the guilty….In the same way the apostles tolerated those who preached Christ out of hatred, which is a vice

\textsuperscript{126} Augustine, Letter 93.11-15, in WSA 2/1, 376-408.
\textsuperscript{127} Augustine, Letter 93.17, in WSA 2/1, 387.
of the devil himself. In the same way Cyprian tolerated the greed of his colleagues, which he called idolatry in accord with the apostle.”

Augustine asserted that no one could have justly separated from the Church because Christians should seek the Church not in their righteousness, but in the divine Scripture. In the examples that follow, I will depict Augustine’s differentiation between two churches (or two levels or two societies) of the same Church or, as Roger Haight put it, between an inner church of the elect or the saints, which is within the empirical Church, and the external, visible church. While the empirical or visible Church is a mixed community and contains both good and evil people, the elect and the wicked, the inner church, which exists within the empirical Church, is the church of the elect or the saints, the church of those who live by charity and love. Since Augustine knew very well that he rubbed shoulders in the Church with the most notorious money-grubbers and ungodly people, he believed that he must differentiate between the good people and the evil ones in the Church. Thus, the Donatists could learn that the earthly Church is a mixed society of good and evil, not a pure one, which they could learn from one of their own, Tyconius, to whom Augustine was indebted in regard to his view of good and evil in the Church.

Indeed, as Yves Congar asserts, with his distinction of the two churches,
Augustine stressed the need for purity even more than the Donatists: while the Donatists were concerned only with ecclesiological purity, that is, with a church from which lapsed, traitors, and persecutors were excluded, Augustine was concerned with theological purity. Augustine distinguished between an external adherence to the Church and a spiritual one. According to the first state, the Christians are those who are part of the Church and take part in its sacraments, without being spiritually part of the Church, whereas the spiritual people in the Church are faithful and united one another in love.

According to Augustine, the Church is as the Scriptures refer to it: “Like a lily in the midst of thorns, so is my beloved in the midst of daughters (Sg 2:2).” The daughters, that is, the thorns, represent people with evil conduct in the Church, whereas the “lily” represents the church of those who live a good and charitable life. The “lily,” the church of good people, is represented as one entity in the midst of thorns, the bad people in the Church. In addition to the daughters, there are also heretics, by which Augustine means schismatics. Of the Church dealing with sinners, Augustine says: “She [the Church], after all, is the one who says, from the ends of the earth I have cried out to you [God] when my heart is troubled (Ps 61:3)….Weariness grips me because of sinners who abandon your law (Ps 119:158).”

Of the church of the schismatics, Augustine implies that, according to Scripture, it is worthy of the punishment inflicted upon the authors of evil schism such as Dathan and Abiram. After referring to Luke 18:8—“When the Son of Man comes, do you suppose

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bipartite body of saints and sinners, Augustine believed that the Church is a mixed body of saints and sinners.

133 Yves Congar, “Théologie Augustinienne,” in BA, vol. 28, 123.
134 Serge Lancel, St. Augustine, 284.
135 Augustine, Letter 93.28, in WSA 2/1, 393-94; for Dathan and Abiram, see Nm 1:7; see also Ps 55: 14-16.
he will find faith on earth?—a question that troubles the Church. Augustine asserts that:

She [the church of those who live good and charitable lives], therefore, is the Church which swims along with bad fishes within the Lord’s net, from whom she is always separated in heart and morals and from whom she departs in order to be presented to her husband as glorious, having neither spot nor wrinkle (Eph 5:27). But she awaits bodily separation on the seashore, that is, at the end of the world, correcting those whom she can, tolerating those whom she cannot correct; she does not, nonetheless, abandon unity on account of the sinfulness of those whom she does not correct.”

The “Lord’s net” is the Catholic Church, and “she” is the church of good people who swim along with bad fishes, that is, evil members of the Catholic Church. Of “the Church which swims along with bad fishes” Augustine says that it is separated in heart—that is, being truly repentant—and morals—that is, leading a good life morally—from the bad fishes “from whom she departs in order that she may be presented to her husband [God] as glorious, having neither spot nor wrinkle (Eph 5:27)” at the end of the world. The passage quite clearly indicates that Augustine speaks of the Church as consisting of two groups, churches, or entities; while one consists of good people, the other consists of bad people.

Of the church of good people, Augustine says, “She it is of whose few numbers scripture says in comparison with the many evil persons, Straight and narrow is the way that leads to salvation, and few are they who walk on it (Mt 7:14).” And Augustine continues by making a distinction between the good people in the Church, who are few, and the bad people, who are a multitude. While the Church should be as numerous as

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136 Augustine, Letter 93.33, in WSA 2/1, 397.
137 Augustine, Letter 93.34, in WSA 2/1, 397-98.
the stars of the sky and like the sand of the sea (Gn 22:17 and Dan 3:36)...holy and good believers are, of course, few in comparison with the evil and are many by themselves...She it is who is at times obscured and as if clouded over because of a multitude of scandals, when sinners bend their bows to shoot in the dark moon those who are upright of heart (Ps 11:3). But even then she stands out in her strongest members. And if some distinction is to be made in these words of God, perhaps there was a point in saying of the offspring of Abraham that they will be like the stars of the sky and like the sand at the shore of the sea (Gn 22:17), namely, that we understand by the stars of the sky the fewer, stronger, and more brilliant, but in the sand on the seashore the great multitude of the weak and carnal, who at times seem at rest and free because of the tranquility of the weather, but at other times are overwhelmed and churned up by the waves of tribulations and temptations.138

Referring to the disagreement between Paul and Peter in Galatians 4:19, Augustine shows Vincent that they did not arrogantly separate from each other. Indeed, the Church gathers together its scattered members and does not scatter those gathered together. According to Augustine, although the Church is growing in all nations, the Church is found in the good seeds, not in the weeds: “The Church is found in the good seed, which the Son of Man sowed and which he foretold would grow among the weeds up to the harvest. But the field is the world, and the harvest is the end of the world.”139 Here we have to understand the tension in Augustine’s words. As already mentioned in a different chapter, Augustine could speak of the Church, which consists of saints and sinners, as if it were the City of God, which consists of God’s elect. Since Augustine realized that there is not perfect

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138 Augustine, Letter 93.30, in WSA 2/1, 395; for the net as the Church, see Letter 108.7, in WSA 2/2, 72-73; Sermon 248.2 (dated before 417), in WSA 3/7, 113; Sermon 249.2 (dated before 405), in WSA 3/7, 117; Sermon 250.2 (dated 416), in WSA 3/7121-22; for the saints in the Church, who are few in comparison with a multitude of ungodly people, see also De baptismo 7.51.99, in BA, vol. 29, 562-66; Sermon 250.2-3, in WSA 3/7, 121; Sermon 252.4 (dated 396), in WSA 3/7, 134-35 Sermon 270.7 (dated 416), in WSA 3/7, 294-95; for sinners within the Church who are much worse than those outside, see Sermon 354.3 (dated 403), in WSA 3.10, 157.
identity between the Church and the City of God, Augustine believed that the Church is the City of God in the condition of the Church.\textsuperscript{140}

Yves Congar differentiates in Augustine between the Church as a community of sacraments and the Church as a community of saints.\textsuperscript{141} While the community of sacraments is a mixed community, which consists of both good and bad people, of wheat and weeds, the community of saints consists of the good people in the Church, those destined for God’s glory. According to Congar, Augustine’s community of the sacraments consists even of the evil and utterly perverse members of the Church, but like the chaff they will not be removed from the threshing floor of the Lord until the last winnowing, that is, the end of the world.\textsuperscript{142} In a sermon written between 417 and 421 Augustine asserts that bad Christians cannot be said to be in the Church.\textsuperscript{143} Again, we have here the tension which I explained in the previous passage by the analogy between the City of God and the Church. However, Augustine makes clear to Vincent that “these [the bad people] do not choke the Lord’s wheat [good people in the Church], which is meager in comparison with them, but great in itself. They do not choke off the wheat plants of the Lord, which in comparison with them are few, but are many by themselves. They do not choke off the elect of God who will be gathered at the end of the world.”\textsuperscript{144} However, the community of the saints is the communion of those who live by charity and love; the ungodly man, whether in the Church, or openly outside, chokes himself off from

\textsuperscript{142} Augustine, Letter 93.33, in \textit{WSA} 2/1, 397.
\textsuperscript{143} Augustine, Sermon 71.32 (dated 417-420), in \textit{WSA} 3/3, 265-66.
\textsuperscript{144} Augustine, Letter 93.33, in \textit{WSA} 2/1, 397; for the chaff removed at the last winnowing, see Mt 3: 12 and 13:30; for the communion of the sacraments, see Augustine, Sermon 214.11 (dated 391), in \textit{WSA} 3/6, 157, Sermon 15.2 (dated 418), in \textit{WSA} 3/1, 321.
the congregation of the saints.\footnote{Augustine, \textit{De baptismo} 1.17.26, in BA, vol. 29, 112-14; for sinners in the Church not inheriting the kingdom of God, see \textit{De baptismo} 4.17.15.} In the \textit{City of God}, Augustine distinguishes between the city of Abel—the city of a righteous man and so, a city above—and the city of Cain. While “the City of the saints is above, it produced citizens here on earth,” and, according to Augustine, “in their persons the City is on pilgrimage.”\footnote{Augustine, \textit{City of God} 15.1, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 596.}

To show the Donatists that one of their teachers valued unity and hated schism, Augustine referred to Cyprian who, desiring unity, judged as most arrogant those who wanted to separate themselves from the Church.\footnote{Augustine, Letter 93.36, in WSA 2/1, 398, referring to Cyprian, Letter 73, in FC, vol. 51, 268-85; for Cyprian’s view of separation, see the first part of this section and the chapter on Cyprian.} However, since Augustine wanted to emphasize Caecilian’s efforts for maintaining the unity of the Church, Augustine did not say anything about the cases in which Caecilian urged separation from unworthy or lapsed bishops.\footnote{Augustine, Letter 93.36, in WSA 2/1, 398.} Then Augustine pointed to Tyconius who said that the Church is not limited to Africa and that the sins of some stain no one else but them in the community. Augustine also mentioned the Donatist council of 355 at which for the sake of unity in Africa, Donatus, who presided over the council, allowed communion with people previously separated from him.\footnote{Augustine, Letter 93.43-44, in WSA 2/1, 401-02; for details on the council, see W.H.C. Frend, \textit{The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in North Africa}, 167-68.} Finally, although Vincent boasts that he has already separated the sheep (the good people) from the goats (the bad people), Augustine says he would be surprised if the vice of drinking, which was very common, had not penetrated Vincent’s church.\footnote{Augustine, Letter 93.49, in WSA 2/1, 405.}

As we have seen, between 400 and 410, Augustine wrote letters to both Catholics and Donatists. When he wrote to Catholics, Augustine was faced with disciplinary issues
and so he spoke about distinguishing and disciplining evildoers whenever it was possible. However, in the letters to the Donatists Augustine wanted to show the Donatists, who maintained the idea of pure Church, that the Church is a mixed society which consists of both a group of good and a group of evil persons.

**E. From 410 to 423**

In this section, I will continue the discussion about Augustine’s view of the good and evil in the Church. While Augustine’s interest in the Catholic-Donatist controversy was unity, I will continue to present his letters in which he, during the aforementioned time, discussed the issue of good and bad members in the Church. In about 410, Augustine wrote a letter to Generosus, a Catholic of Constantina in Numidia, whom a Donatist had tried to convert to his church because, according to the latter, the Catholic Church was not the true Church. Since the Donatists had claimed that they separated from traitors, Augustine asserted first that the Church is the inheritance of Christ and is destined to extend to the end of the earth in all nations. Then Augustine asserted that the straw in the Lord’s harvest is mixed with the wheat and must be tolerated up to the end when the whole threshing floor will be winnowed at the last judgment. Hence, according to Augustine, the charges against the traitors, “whether true or false, do not pertain to the Lord’s grain, which must continue to grow through the whole field, that is, the whole world, up to the end of the world, as the Lord says in the gospel.” Moreover, Augustine

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151 Augustine, Letter 53.1-7, in WSA 2/1, 204-08. That the Catholic Church is not the true Church is implied in the Donatist intention to convert Generosus. According to the Donatist, since Generosus was not in the true Church, he must join the Donatist church, which he considered as the true one.

152 Augustine, Letter 53.6, in WSA 2/1, 207.
reminded the Donatists that they had received back in their community people whom they had once condemned, as was the case with Felician of Musti. After having broken with the Church of Primian, Felician of Musti had sided with the Maximianists, a group which had separated from the Church of Primian. Finally, after a period of time spent with the Maximianists, Felician had been received with honor in the mother church of Primian. Consequently, Augustine asserted,

if they [the Donatists] are not defiled by those whom they condemned with their own lips as criminal and sacrilegious and whom they compared to those first schismatics whom the earth swallowed alive…let them at long last wake up. Let them realize the great blindness and great insanity with which they say that the world was defiled by the crimes of Africans, which it did not know, and that the inheritance of Christ, which was shown to have been promised to exist in all nations, had been wiped out by the sins of Africans through the infection of communion with them, though they do not want to be wiped out and defiled when they are in communion with those whose crimes they knew and condemned.  

In the end of the letter Augustine asserts that if an angel appeared in the Donatists’ dream in order to separate Generosus from the Church, it was an angel of Satan transformed into an angel of light, as Paul says is possible.  

The issue of bad bishops in the Church was a problem for Augustine since the Donatists, according to Augustine, claimed that they had separated themselves from the Church because of this issue. In a sermon for the ordination of a bishop, possibly the ordination of Antonius, the bishop of Fussala, in about 411, Augustine states that bad bishops in the Church caused the Donatists to separate from the Church: “pay attention to the reason why our brothers [the Donatists] separated themselves from us. Let them tell

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153 Augustine, Letter 53.6, in WSA 2/1, 207; for Augustine’s discussion of the case of Felician of Musti, see Letter 70.1-2, in WSA 2/1, 264-65.
154 Augustine, Letter 53.7, in WSA 2/1, 207-08.
us why. ‘There were bad bishops.’” Indeed, in this sermon in which he discusses the proper nature of a servant of the Church, Augustine speaks of the possibility of bad bishops in the Church: “But if we are bad bishops (which God forbid), and have sought our dignity and honor for our own sakes, and neglected God’s commandments, and have never cared tuppence for your salvation, greater punishment awaits us than the rewards which have been promised.” According to Augustine, who refers to 1 Timothy 3:1,

\[ \text{Whoever desires the office of bishop, is setting his heart on a good work.} \]
Desiring the office of bishop is not desiring the office of bishop; it is setting your heart on a good work. But does not he want to be a bishop, the one who does not do a good work, but his own work? This man does not desire the office of bishop. It is what I was saying a moment ago; he is seeking the name, not the real thing. Are you seeking the name, or the real thing If it is the real thing you are seeking, you are setting your heart on a good work. If it is the name you are seeking, you can have it even with a bad work, but with a worse punishment.

According to this passage of Augustine, it is possible that someone could set his heart on obtaining the office of bishop for its name and reputation and for his own works, that is, for bad and worldly works, has it for his own punishment.

However, though Augustine recognizes the problem of bad bishops, he counters the Donatist argument by urging the people that, if they find themselves beset by a bad bishop, their hope should rest on “the Lord, the bishop of bishops,” and not in the least should their hope rest in man. Indeed, even Peter, who was so sure of himself that he

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156 Augustine, Sermon 340A.8, in WSA 3/9, 301.

157 Augustine, Sermon 340A.6, in WSA 3/9, 299-300; for the power of bishops as a form of local power in late Roman society, see These references to three pages in Peter Brown’s works are not what one would expect here. One would expect that you would refer to whole articles on this topic, if not to whole books on it. Here you need to replace these references to Brown with reference to one or more of these articles or books. P. Brown, Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire (Hanover, NH, and London: University Press of New England, 2002), 1-2 and Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 4.
made the promise that he would go with Jesus to the death, failed.\textsuperscript{158} According to Augustine, even if the bishops are bad, Christians should do “what the Lord commanded: \textit{Do what they say, but do not do what they do} (Mt 23:3).”\textsuperscript{159} Thus, according to Augustine, the existence of bad bishops in the Church is not a reason to separate from it. Indeed, Augustine asserts that the Lord, who had no wish to ratify division, who had come to establish unity, said: “\textit{I have other sheep who are not of this fold; I must bring them along too, so that there may be one flock and one shepherd} (Jn 10:16).” Also, in the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:13-15 in which a brother wanted to have the inheritance divided between him and his brother, the Lord refused to be a judge or arbiter: “\textit{Tell me, man, who set me up as a divider of the inheritance between you? What I say to you is, beware of every kind of greed} (Lk 12:13-14).” He had no wish to be a divider of the inheritance; he had come to gather Unity [that is, the Church] together, to give us one inheritance throughout all countries.\textsuperscript{160} While Augustine believed that bishops with bad reputation had the office as their punishment, since they had to have their hearts set on good works, Augustine advises here that Christians should do what they say and preach. Furthermore, the presence of bad bishops in the Church is not a reason for separation.

In 411, at the Conference of Carthage, the Donatists were officially banned by a severe edict promulgated by Theodosius and Honorius. Therefore, Augustine was more interested from this period on in defending his view on the use of force than in convincing the Donatists that the Church is not a community formed of holy people.

\textsuperscript{158} Augustine, Sermon 340A.8, in WSA 3/9, 301-02.
\textsuperscript{159} Augustine, Sermon 340A.11, in WSA 3/9, 304.
\textsuperscript{160} Augustine, Sermon 340A.11, in WSA 3/9, 305.
only. However, Augustine could not avoid the subject of good and bad in the Church since it was interwoven in his other arguments against the Donatists.

In about 410 Augustine wrote a letter to Macrobius, the Donatist bishop of Hippo, who had succeeded Proculeianus. Since Macrobius, according to Augustine, judged the whole Catholic world, as if it were not the true Church, this kind of attitude must be stopped. According to Augustine, the case of Maximian was a mirror for the Donatists’ correction since he, after having been separated from the church of Primian, had been received back together with those he had baptized during their estrangement from the Church and none of them had been rebaptized. Augustine recognized that the motive for the Donatists’ separation from the Catholics might appear reasonable. However, this was a case in which Scripture had not been understood correctly. Augustine argued that while Scripture says, “do not share in the sins of others (1 Tm 5:22),” such sharing happens when one consents to evil actions, not when a good believer shares Church’s sacraments with an evil Church member. Further, Augustine asserted that one does not become contaminated by bodily contact but by consent of the will: “For scripture says, Depart from there, and touch nothing unclean (Is 52:11), and, One who touches something impure is impure (Lv 22:4.6), but one who touches by consent of the will, by which the first man was deceived, not by bodily contact, by which Judas kissed Christ.” Then, Augustine asserts that, although separated in morals, the good members of the Church mingle with the bad until the end of the world. Moreover, Augustine recalls

161 For the edict against the Donatists, see Mandate of Honorius and Theodosius II on Penalties for Donatists, 412 (CT 16.5.52), in CLD, vol. 2, 154-55.
162 Augustine, Letter 108.4, in WSA 2/2, 70.
163 Augustine, Letter 108.6, in WSA 2/2, 71.
164 Augustine, Letter 108.7, in WSA 2/2, 72; for Adam being deceived, see Gn 3:1-6; for Judas kissing Jesus, see Mt 26:49 and Mk 14:45.
165 Augustine, Letter 108.7, in WSA 2/2, 73.
Biblical examples in which good men accepted evil people in their midst without separating from Israel: Ezekiel, Daniel, the three young men in the fiery furnace, all the prophets, the apostles, and Paul in particular.\footnote{Augustine, Letter 108.7-8, in WSA 2/2, 73; for Daniel and the three men in the furnace, see Dn 9:5-16 and 3:28-31; for Judas, see Mt 27:4; for Judas as a thief, see Jn 12:6; for Paul, see 2Cor 11:26.}

As in the previous letter, Augustine refers to Cyprian too. But on this occasion Augustine makes reference to Cyprian’s The Fallen (De lapsis) in order to show that, despite Cyprian’s belief that the persecution was caused by Christians’ bad morals and that covetousness, robbery, and fraud were common in his community, he did not consider himself defiled by them and did not separate from them.\footnote{Cyprian, The Fallen 4-6, in On the Church: Select Treatises, trans. Allen Brent (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2006), 103-07; Augustine, Letter 108.10, in WSA 2/2, 74.} Indeed, Augustine mentioned a passage of Cyprian in which Cyprian, although he realized the existence of tares in the Church, Cyprian advised his readers that neither the faith nor love should be hindered on this account, nor should they separate from the Church.\footnote{Augustine, Letter 108.10, in WSA 2/2, 74, referring to Cyprian, Letter 54.3, in FC, vol. 51, 132.} Augustine urged the Donatists to unity and to toleration of the chaff on the threshing-floor of the Lord by reminding them about the Maximianists who, after having separated from the main Donatist church and condemned its leaders, had been received back into the main fold.\footnote{Augustine, Letter 108.16-17, in WSA 2/2, 79-80.} Augustine ended the letter by referring to Noah’s ark, which prefigured the Church. He noted that the clean animals, which represent pure people in the Church, did not separate from the unclean animals, which represent the impure people in the Church.\footnote{Augustine, Letter 108.20, in WSA 2/2, 82; Sermon 264.5 (dated 417), in WSA 3/7, 231.} However, while the Donatists also considered the ark as a type of the Church, they were concerned
to preserve it, inside and out, from defilement, a view of the ark which, of course, defended their view of the Church.\textsuperscript{171}

Deogratias, probably a Carthaginian priest, told Augustine about the trouble Restitutus, a deacon, probably in the church of Carthage, had in his heart regarding the disorders and sins in the Church. In a letter which Augustine wrote in about 411 to Restitutus, Augustine told him to read Tyconius, but to avoid parts of Tyconius’ thought. Though Augustine did not explicitly say what was to be avoided in Tyconius, we can infer that from Augustine’s letter. Here, as in his letter to Vincent, Augustine was displeased with Tyconius because, despite his view that the Church spreads in all nations, he had not joined the Catholic Church. Augustine asserted in his letter to Deogratias that, while the bond of unity should be preserved, sinners and disorders in the Church should be tolerated if these cannot be corrected. Again, as in the letter to Vincent, Augustine referred to the small numbers of true Christians in the midst of many false Christians, among whom the peaceful and true ones must live peacefully: “We [peaceful Christians] ought be at peace with those who hate peace until our long sojourn away from home passes with our groans and until, in the strength of Jerusalem, our eternal mother, we enjoy in her towers a most secure peace and an abundance of true brothers and sisters, whose small number we now bemoan amid many who are false.” Indeed, Augustine came to the realization that the strength of the earthly city is God, “in whom alone peace may be obtained both for individual human beings…and for all together.” Although

\textsuperscript{171} Augustine, \textit{Epistula ad Catholicos} 5.9, in BA, vol. 29, 524-27; Serge Lancel, \textit{St Augustine}, 281. A more detailed account on the ark will be given in the next chapter on baptism.
people are bound together by ties of loyal friendship, they are not united in their agreement of heart.\footnote{172}

In a letter written in about 412 to some Donatist clerics and laypersons who, after the conference of Carthage, had joined the Church, Augustine told the Donatists that, while those who behave in an ungodly way in the Church condemn themselves, they must be tolerated on the threshing-floor of the Lord up to the winnowing.\footnote{173}

The letter written in about 417 to Boniface, the tribune of Africa, known also as \textit{The Correction of the Donatists}, deals mainly with the question of the enforcement, by the Church and civil authorities, of the edicts issued against the Donatists.\footnote{174} In the course of the letter, Augustine asserted that the heresies and scandals in the Church should not be a surprise, since Scripture predicted that they would take place in order to test the faith.\footnote{175} However, sin in the Church should not be a reason for separation from it. Even if the charges against Caecilian were true, the Church should not be abandoned.\footnote{176} The Donatists’ objection to Catholic unity, namely the danger of being contaminated by some sins, was not reasonable since they accepted in their midst people who had once been condemned and separated from the main Donatist church.\footnote{177} Only God is righteous, and the Donatists are mistaken, Augustine asserted, if they believed themselves to be righteous in this life. Indeed, according to Augustine, the verse in Ephesians 5:27 about the Church without spot or wrinkle would be true for those Church members who died and for the whole Church only at the end of the world, “when we will be able to say,
where, o death, is your victory? Where, o death, is your sting? For the sting of death is sin (1Cor 15:55-56).”

According to Augustine, if one says that he is without sin, he is deceiving himself. Most importantly, although Christians received individually a measure of faith, the individual faith functions properly and efficiently only in the Church, that is, in the body of Christ, where the many Christians become one: “no one can be righteous as long as he is separated from the unity of this body. For, just as if a member is cut off from the body of a living man it cannot retain the spirit of life, so a man who is cut off from the body of the righteous Christ can by no means retain the spirit of righteousness, even if he retains the shape of the member that he received in the body. Let the Donatists, then, enter into the frame of this body, and let them have the fruits of their labors.”

As in most of his letters in which he deals with the good and bad members of the Church, the presence of sinners in the Church should not be a reason for separation from the Church because it will be without spot and wrinkle only at the end of the world. Furthermore, the Donatists, who claim to be the true Church, cannot be righteous outside the Church where the spirit of righteousness abides.

In about 423 Augustine sent a letter to Felicia in order to answer the concerns of this consecrated virgin and former Donatist forced into the unity of the Church and now scandalized about the actions of certain bad pastors. Scripture predicted scandals and trouble in the Church, and the bad pastors in the Church, who sought the chairs of shepherds for temporal honors and worldly advantage and not for the interests of Jesus.

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180 Augustine, Letter 185.42, in WSA 2/3, 202, referring to Rom 12:3-5.
Christ, are a glimpse of the scandals and troubles Scripture predicted.\textsuperscript{181} According to Augustine this situation must continue because, even though the flock was entrusted to the shepherds, the separation between good and bad shepherds and between good and bad Christians in the flock is made by the eschatological Christ alone.\textsuperscript{182} Augustine advises Felicia to put her hope not in the shepherds of the Church, but in Christ. Since the Church of Christ had spread in all nations, there were in it good and bad people who lived together. However, separation from the bad Christians must be avoided because a person cannot live a good life separated from the Church: “But people separated from her [Church] cannot be good as long as their thoughts are opposed to her. For, though a seemingly praiseworthy manner of life is thought to prove that some of them are good, their very division makes them bad.”\textsuperscript{183} Indeed, according to Augustine, Felicia’s separation from the Church, to which she had been brought by force by the bad pastors whom she blamed, would ruin her salvation. A separation from the body of Christ would also render the preservation of her bodily chastity worthless. Therefore, Augustine advised her:

[although you] owe a most sincere love to his [God’s] servants by whose ministry you were forced to come in, you ought nonetheless to put your hope in him [God] who prepared the banquet, about which you too are concerned out of a desire for eternal life and happiness. Entrusting to him [Christ] your heart, your plan of life, your holy virginity, your faith, hope, and charity, you will not be upset by the scandals that will abound until the end, but you will be safe with solid strength and will be glorious in the Lord through persevering in his unity until the end.\textsuperscript{184}

\textsuperscript{181} Augustine, Letter 208.2, in WSA 2/3, 389, referring to Phil 2:21; see also Van Der Meer, \textit{Augustine the Bishop: The Life and Work of a Father of the Church}, 231-32.
\textsuperscript{182} Augustine, Letter 208.3, in WSA 2/3, 390, referring to Mt 25:32.
\textsuperscript{183} Augustine, Letter 208.6, in WSA 2/3, 391, referring to Mt 12:30.
\textsuperscript{184} Augustine, Letter 208.7, in WSA 2/3, 392, referring to Lk 14: 18, 23.
As in a previous letter, we see here that Augustine urged Felicia to put her trust in Christ, although he also recommended loving the leaders of the Church. Only in this way she would be able to ignore the troubles in the Church and secure her salvation in the Church to which she was brought by force. Since troubles in the holy Church were numerous and since no one was without sin, Augustine came to a final solution, that is, Christ, the Mediator between God and man.

The Donatist-Catholic controversy, and in particular the issue of good and evil Christians in the Church, shaped Augustine’s understanding of the nature of the Church. Indeed, the issue of holiness in the Church was a problem that deeply preoccupied him all his life. Augustine was insistent that the application of discipline was necessary to address publicly known faithlessness in the Church. Exception would be made when, for some reason, evil people could not be corrected; in that case, these should be allowed to be in the Church until the eschatological winnowing when the Lord himself would separate the sheep from the goats. In regard to Donatists’ view of Church holiness, Augustine showed in Biblical examples that evil members of God’s people were tolerated by godly members and that, in fact, the reality of the Church without spot and wrinkle would not be fully realized until after the death in individuals and at the end of the world for the Church as a whole. According to Augustine, no one could be righteous outside the Church, the body of Christ. Indeed, Augustine’s solution to the issue of evil in the Church is Christ and the Church. Since Christ is righteous, so is its

187 D. Doyle, The Bishop as Disciplinarian in the Letters of Saint Augustine, 144.
188 Augustine, Letter 208.3, in WSA 2/3, 390.
body, the Church. Therefore, since no one could be righteous outside the body of Christ, the Donatists, though claiming to be without spot or wrinkle, could not be righteous because they are not in the unity of the Church. However, since the body of Christ contains both good and evil members, they will also be separated by the eschatological Christ, who is the head of the Church. Moreover, unlike the Donatists who put great value in the righteousness of Church leaders as ministers of God, Augustine asserted that the mediator between man and God is Christ. 189 As already mentioned, although the Donatists consider Christ as the Mediator between God and man, they believed that sinful priests could contaminate the faithful through administering the sacraments. As we will see in the next chapter, according to Augustine, Christ is the true priest, and the ministers are His agents through whom he works. 190 Having realized that it is practically impossible to have a united and extensive (numerically and territorially) Church without sinners, Augustine came to believe that God was able to change the heart of sinful members of the Church. 191 The Church could then be a community open to all who accepted to become its members. 192 However, according to Augustine, not all members of the empirical Church, which consists of multitudes of people, will be saved, because it contains both saints and sinners. Since the sinners did not live by charity and love, they will not be saved as those who lived by charity and love, whom Augustine identified as

189 Augustine, Letter 166.5, in WSA 2/3, 82; Letter 187.34, in WSA 2/3, 246-47; Letter 190.5, in WSA 2/3, 265-66; Confessions 43.68, 219.


191 Augustine, Letter 89.7, in WSA 2/1, 72; Peter Brown, Augustine of Hippo: A Biography, 231.

192 Mary Jane Kreidler, “Conversion in the Church as Found in the Letters of St. Augustine,” in Augustine Presbyter Factus Sum, 425.
being part of an inner and spiritual church within the Church. Thus, while unity of the Church was an imperious necessity because people received within it the chance of being saved, Augustine also believed that those who lived ungodly lives cannot be part of the heavenly city of God.

A consequence of Augustine’s view of holiness is his view on baptism. While the Donatists believed that a polluted priest or bishop could not baptize, Augustine, as we shall see in the next chapter, opposed this view of baptism.
VIII. THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

This chapter will show that Augustine’s arguments about baptism that are found in the letters he wrote in his dealings with the Donatists have as their main goal to unite the Donatists with the Church so as to bring unity to the separated churches in North Africa. Since Augustine did not treat the subject of baptism in his letters systematically, this chapter will not be a systematic presentation of Augustine’s view of the subject. Instead, I will show in this chapter how he developed his view in accordance with the context of each letter and the main issue Augustine wanted to tackle in it.

A. Background to the Donatist Baptismal Controversy

The subject of baptism—its specific meaning, the way it should be performed, the question of infant and mature baptism, the officiator at baptism, and his worthiness to perform the rite—has divided the Church and the scholars over the centuries. This

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section about baptism introduces the reader to the background of the Donatist-Catholic controversy regarding baptism.

The Donatist-Catholic controversy started over the issue of Church holiness. More precisely, the Donatists asked: If the Church is a holy Church, how should a Christian relate to the secular and evil world? Since some of Christians were imprisoned and martyred for the faith, the answer was that there is not any relation between the Church and those who compromised the faith by handing over the Bible to the State authorities and opposing the martyrs. This position generated a practical question: Can fallen or compromised ministers validly perform the sacraments? The Donatist answered that, “no, they could not.” And thus appeared the practice of rebaptism, upon which, according to Bonner, “the whole argument between Donatists and Catholics ultimately turned.” Bonner also sees the Donatist tradition, especially its emphasis on the “pure Church,” as both plausible and popular, but deeply mistaken “in that it seeks to provide an ethnic and anthropological explanation for what is essentially a theological question.” By this, Bonner says that the Donatists’ emphasis on the pure Church represents an attitude of mind present in African Christianity from its earliest days, an attitude which had a particular appeal for the African temperament.

However, as Robert Markus believes, the question about the relation between the Church and the world is related with an established ecclesiology in North Africa. The aforementioned

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197 Ibid., 327-28.
scholar asserts that the problem is one of the survival…of an ancient…tradition of Christianity
with…[a] distinctive ecclesiology within a universal empire allied, after Constantine, with a
universal Christian orthodoxy. In North Africa the Donatists had a strong claim to represent the
ancient Christian tradition of the province.” Thus, it was a distinctive ecclesiology that the
Donatists wanted to preserve, not just an ethnic and anthropological tradition. The same scholar
asserts that “the issue between Augustine and the Donatists concerned, at bottom, the nature of
the church and of the relation between it and the world.” Maureen Tilley arrives at the same
conclusion: “The issue was how to survive as a pure and spotless Church in a world filled with
sinful Christians…the answer was separation from sinners…the new hallmark of the true Church
was separatism.”

Thus, Bonner’s opinion cannot be wholly true. The practice of baptism—and
Augustine’s view of it—cannot be seen as the subject on which the whole controversy
rested or as the key to the whole Donatist controversy. Seeing baptism as the only
theological question in the controversy underestimates other themes to which Augustine
referred constantly. Indeed, while the question of baptism appears in Augustine related to
his desire to unite the divided churches in North Africa, it is also related to the question
of Church holiness, which was perceived differently by Donatists and Augustine.

The question over the practice of baptism appeared in a context in which the main
question was about the relation between the Church and the world and about the attitude the
Church should take toward it in case of a persecution. Indeed, in trying to unite the divided
churches in North Africa, Augustine invariably referred to the history of the schism. He did that
in order to show that the Donatists could not prove the story about Catholic traitors to be true and
that, therefore, the schism was groundless.

The events at the origin of the schism, which divided Christians in North Africa regarding the relation between the Church, a holy community separated from the world, and the secular world, whose goals are different those of the Church, were determinative in the Donatists’ separation from the Catholic Church and in the controversy over the practice of baptism. Since the Donatists believed that the sons of traitors, those who had handed the Scriptures over to the persecutors of the Church, could not be of the true Church, they baptized those who came to them from the Catholics. In his effort to unite the Donatists to the Church, Augustine argued that, since the Donatists could not prove that the story about traitors is true, the Donatists’ rebaptism was unjustified.

Further, the controverted issues—unity, holiness, the relation between the Church and the world, the use of force, and baptism—are related with one another. Thus, while the question of baptism is indeed a very important one, baptism does not have priority over the other issues that Augustine discusses in his works against the Donatists. Indeed, the question of baptism was the logical consequence of the question concerning the Church’s holiness and relation with the world. Since the Donatists thought that the Church of traidores could not be the true Church, they maintained that those from among the Catholics joining their Church should be baptized. In adopting this approach, the Donatists appealed to African tradition for authority, in particular to Cyprian.200

Thus, it is proper to see the controversy over baptism in the light of two traditions, that is, a Donatist tradition that reaches back to Tertullian, who claimed to be practicing baptism according to an ancient, unwritten tradition which was received by the Church, and a Catholic tradition, which was also ancient and apostolic.201 Indeed, according to Tertullian in his De baptismo, schismatics and heretics have neither Christ nor baptism. Since heretics and

schismatics do not have baptism fully, they do not have it at all.\textsuperscript{202} According to Tertullian in his
\textit{De corona}, the Christians in North Africa practiced baptism according to an unwritten Christian
tradition which had been received by the common Church and of which Scripture did not
speak.\textsuperscript{203} Even though Tertullian does not speak in \textit{De corona} concretely about schismatic
baptism, it is likely that his view about schismatic baptism belongs to the same unwritten tradition
of which he speaks in this last-mentioned work.\textsuperscript{204} Indeed, both \textit{De baptismo} and \textit{De corona} came
approximately from the same period of time.\textsuperscript{205} However, in refusing to give the schismatics and
heretics the credit of having baptism, Tertullian refers to the Lord’s gospel and Paul: “We have
one baptism, and one only, on the evidence both of our Lord’s gospel and of the apostle’s letter,
where he says that there is one God and one baptism, and one Church.”\textsuperscript{206} This last statement of
Tertullian from Scripture implies that, since the schismatics and heretics do not have the
Church—the “we” who have baptism—they also cannot have baptism.

Cyprian followed the established North African tradition of Tertullian, which required
that schismatics and heretics should be initiated fully when they come into the true Church.\textsuperscript{207}
However, the practice of rebaptizing those already baptized into schismatic groups was a
particular conviction among rigorist Christians. Novatian, the Roman presbyter who separated


\textsuperscript{206} Tertullian, \textit{De baptismo} 15, in \textit{Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism}, 33, referring to Mt 28:18; Jn 13:10; Eph 4:4-5.

from Cornelius, the bishop of Rome, rebaptized those Christians who came to his church from the communion of Cornelius.\textsuperscript{208} According to Cyprian, Novatian’s followers—who were found in Africa in the separatist group of Novatus during Cyprian’s episcopate—re baptized those whom “they entice away from us” as though Novatian’s group represented the true Church.\textsuperscript{209} The baptismal controversy between Cyprian and Stephen, the bishop of Rome after the death of Cornelius, had in the background Novatian’s view on the pure Church.\textsuperscript{210} When Novatianist schismatics sought readmittance to the Church, the question was how they should be readmitted into the Church. Cyprian maintained that, since baptism is not common to the true Church and to schismatics, “they who come to the Church from heresy ought to be baptized.”\textsuperscript{211}

Unlike Cyprian, Stephen of Rome maintained that schismatics’ baptism was valid and therefore it should not be repeated: “Let nothing be done contrary to what has been handed down, namely that hands should be imposed upon them in penance since the heretics themselves properly do not baptize those who come to them from each other but only receive them in communion.”\textsuperscript{212} Against Stephen’s argument from tradition, Cyprian asserts that baptism is a witness to the truth. Since the forgiveness of sins is not given except in the Church, schismatics cannot have baptism because they are not in the Church. According to Cyprian, those who accept schismatics’ baptism claim that schismatics have the Church.\textsuperscript{213} Further, Cyprian asserted: “Let not anyone say: ‘We follow the apostles,’ since the apostles handed down nothing if not one Church and one baptism, which is not established except in the same Church. And we find that no one, when he had been baptized among heretics, was admitted in the same baptism and

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{211} Cyprian, Letter 73.21, in FC, vol. 51, 282.
\bibitem{212} Cyprian, Letter 74.1, in FC, vol. 51, 285-86.
\bibitem{213} Cyprian, Letter 70.2, in FC, vol. 51, 260.
\end{thebibliography}
communicated by the apostles lest the apostles seem to have approved the baptism of heretics."\textsuperscript{214} Firmilian, the bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia who defended Cyprian against Stephen, believed that Stephen’s defense of heretical baptism, was an exaggeration of his authority, which is reflected in his break of peace with Cyprian and in his cutting himself off from the Church of Africa: “For what quarrels and dissensions you have provoked through the churches of the whole world! How great a sin, certainly, you have heaped up for yourself when you cut yourself off from so many flocks.”\textsuperscript{215} Further, while Firmilian defended the truth against the custom, he also said that the practice of not recognizing the schismatic and heretical baptism had always been the custom in Africa: “But we join custom to truth and we oppose to the custom of the Romans the custom of truth, holding this from the beginning which was handed down by Christ and by the apostles. Nor do we remember that this began to be observed among us at any time, since it has always been observed here that we recognized no other but the one Church of God and we counted no baptism holy except that of the Holy Church.”\textsuperscript{216} This last statement fits with Tertullian’s statement about the practice of baptism according to an unwritten Christian tradition. Since Stephen, on the one hand, and Tertullian, Cyprian, and Firmilian, on the other hand, claimed to practice baptism according to an old custom, it is pertinent to believe that we have two traditions in regard to heretical baptism. Which tradition is older is not known. However, Augustine later in his conflict with the Donatists sided with Stephen and believed that the Catholic Church’s custom of not rebaptizing schismatics was according to an ancient custom and, although without Scriptural warrant, had its origin in apostolic tradition.\textsuperscript{217}

The Roman Church—and the churches in communion with it—continued in the tradition of baptism maintained by Stephen against Cyprian. In North Africa the tradition of rebaptizing

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{214} Cyprian, Letter 73.13, in FC, vol. 51, 276
\item \textsuperscript{215} Firmilian, Letter 75.24, in FC, vol. 51, 311; 75.6, 299.
\item \textsuperscript{217} Augustine, \textit{De baptismo} 5.23.31, in BA, vol. 29, 382-85.
\end{itemize}
heretics and schismatics also continued until the Diocletian persecution struck in North Africa and many leaders and lay Christians lapsed. The question was asked how lapsed ministers could validly perform baptism. While the rigorist tradition in North Africa, the forefathers of the Donatists, maintained that they could not, the Church of Rome—and the churches in communion with it—maintained that it could. Consequently, after the separation from the Catholic Church, the Donatists claimed that Catholics—who the Donatists believed to be traditores and baptized by lapsed ministers—who wished to join the Donatists should be rebaptized, or baptized authentically since they had never truly been baptized. The Donatist tradition of rebaptism was officially condemned in 314 at the Council of Arles.\footnote{Optatus: Against the Donatists, app. 4, ed. and trans. Mark Edwards Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), 185-86; A. H. M. Jones, Constantine and the Conversion of Europe, 97-98.} However, since the Donatists did not stop rebaptizing Catholics who joined their communion, the issue regarding schismatic baptism continued until Augustine, who, in his efforts for unity, tried to eliminate it. By reading his letter for his view on baptism, the reader would see Augustine actively defending the unity of the Church, but would also see his arguments in different contexts and situations. The reader would also see that, regardless of the issue he encountered or discussed, all of Augustine’s arguments have at their center his interest in the unity of the Church.

**B. Augustine’s View on Baptism**

Since in the letters against the Donatists Augustine was interested in defending the unity of the Church, the letters do not present a coherent view of Augustine’s view of baptism. Therefore, before proceeding to the letters, I will briefly introduce Augustine’s view on baptism.\footnote{For a detailed treatment of Augustine’s view of baptism, see E. Ferguson, Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries, 776-816.}
The Donatists’ view on baptism, as it was presented by Augustine, and Augustine’s view on baptism could be found in his *De Baptismo* and *Against the Letters of Petilian*. Indeed, as Patout Burns suggests, *De baptismo* is not as much on the subject of baptism as it is against the Donatists.\(^\text{220}\) In *Against the Letters of Petilian*, Augustine replied to Petilian’s view on baptism by quoting short statements from him and answering them.\(^\text{221}\) Augustine’s view on baptism is much indebted to Optatus, who argued that Christ is the source of sacramental grace and not the human agent.\(^\text{222}\) Indeed, Gerald Bonner asserts that, regarding baptism, “Augustine was standing in a Catholic tradition already defended in Africa by Optatus.”\(^\text{223}\) The idea of Christ as the true minister of the sacrament goes back at least to the third century. Speaking of the Eucharist, Cyprian argued that Christ is the High Priest.\(^\text{224}\) Since Cyprian believed that schismatics have neither Church nor Christ, and therefore, not sacraments, he excluded the possibility of sacraments among schismatics. While Augustine also considered Christ as the High Priest, he believed that the sacraments in the name of Christ were valid among schismatics.

Augustine was disturbed by the repetition of baptism. According to Augustine, it was forbidden to repeat baptism that has been conferred once.\(^\text{225}\) According to the Donatists, the Catholics, because of their compromise with the State and the world, were


\(^{225}\) Augustine, Letter 204.4, in WSA 2/3, 374.
not the true Church. Consequently, the Catholics did not have baptism. Petilian, the Donatist bishop of Constantine/Cirta asserted that, since the Catholics performed a false baptism, the Donatists did not celebrate baptism a second time after the Catholic rituals.  

Augustine, who believed that the Donatists, as a small church in a corner of Africa, were not the true Church, asserted that the baptism commanded by Christ cleanses the Church and, therefore, no second baptism is required. According to Augustine, who referred to Romans 10:4, since Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes, no one baptized should be receiving a second baptism. According to Augustine, baptism could not be lost by people who had received it and then had placed themselves outside the Church.  

According to Augustine, baptism performed in the name of the Trinity conferred an indelible character, regardless of the person who administered it. In order to show this, Augustine uses the analogy of military mark. Augustine used here the analogy of the tattoos which soldiers in the imperial armies had branded on their hands in order to be identified if they deserted. In the same way, Christ and the Church, through the Christian emperor, had a right to call back those who had received the mark of baptism if they were in a state of desertion from the true—and imperial—Church. The mark, according to Augustine, could be retained by deserters and received by those who are not in the army, but it was not good to receive or retain it outside the ranks. The mark was not changed or renewed.

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227 Augustine, Letter 76.2, in WSA 2/1, 298; Letter 129.6, in WSA 2/2. 181.
228 Augustine, *De baptismo* 5.9.11, in BA, vol. 29, 342-44.
229 Augustine, *De baptismo* 1.5.7, in BA, vol. 29, 74-76; 4.4.6, in BA, vol. 29, 244-46.
when a man enlisted or was brought back to his service. Augustine identified baptism with the mark, that is, the emblem of the emperor, the soldiers received on their arms as a sign of being enlisted in the emperor’s army. Thus, according to Augustine, those who have received Christ’s baptism, even received outside the Church, have a valid baptism. However, since it was not good for baptism to be retained outside the Church, Christ through his Church has the right to call back to the Church its deserters.

The Catholics did not baptize those who came to the Church from schism. Indeed, baptism’s authenticity did not depend on the character of the minister who performed it because, no matter who performed it or in which church, baptism was Christ’s and therefore holy. According to Augustine, baptism in the name of the Trinity has Christ for its authority, not any man, whoever he may be.

According to Augustine who cites Petilian, the Donatists believed that those baptized by one who is dead, that is, a sinful minister, are not in fact washed of their sins and their baptism does not profit them. While from a corrupt tree come corrupted fruits, only from a good tree come good fruits. In addition, while from a good heart come good deeds, from an evil heart come bad deeds. According to Augustine, in these arguments the Donatists wanted to show that the man who is baptized partakes of the character of the minister who baptized him. Augustine asserted that baptism by a sinful minister did not make a baptism unrighteous. Furthermore, according to Augustine,
making baptism dependent on the minister who performs baptism would render the act of baptism uncertain, since no one can be certain of the merits and conscience of the minister who performs the act of baptism.\textsuperscript{239} Those who receive baptism should rather trust the Lord then man.\textsuperscript{240}

Augustine asserted that, by receiving the Donatists back into the Church without rebaptizing them, the Catholics did not recognize schismatic baptism; they recognized baptism among them because it was of God or Christ and of the Church. In addition to the mark of baptism, the water of baptism was sanctified even if the words spoken by the priest had errors. If the prayer of baptism was somehow faulty, it was countered by the fixed words of the Gospel, that is, baptism in the name of the Trinity.\textsuperscript{241} According to Augustine, there was no baptism of Christ if the words of the Gospel were not used.\textsuperscript{242}

Despite the indelible mark of baptism and the right words used in it, according to Augustine, baptism did not avail for those outside the Church. It was effective and able to forgive sin only in the unity of the Church.\textsuperscript{243} Moreover, whatever the Donatists possessed from the unity of the Church was of no efficacy to their salvation, unless they returned to the unity of the Church. While the water in the Church is full of faith, salvation, and holiness, it avails only to those who know how to use it rightly, who can be found only in the Church.\textsuperscript{244} According to Augustine, the efficacy of baptism depended on consecration in the words of the Gospel and in the unity of the Church, the only place of charity. Of course, some measure of faith was necessary. However, the faith and the

\textsuperscript{239} Augustine, \textit{Contra litteras Petiliani} 1.4.5, in BA, vol. 30, 140-42.  
\textsuperscript{242} Augustine, \textit{De baptismo} 6.25.47, in BA, vol. 29, 456-61; for Mt 28:19 as the fixed words of the Gospel in baptism, see E. Ferguson, \textit{Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries}, 799.  
\textsuperscript{244} Augustine, \textit{De baptismo} 4.2.2, in BA, vol. 29, 236-37.
correct procedure in receiving baptism would not avail any one if they were without charity, that is, not in the unity of the Church, by which they might be grafted onto the Catholic Church. While both Augustine and Cyprian agree that there is no salvation outside the Church, they differ from each other about the validity of baptism.

C. From 391 to 400

As in the case of the other themes treated in this dissertation, the subject of baptism appears in Augustine’s letters against the Donatists as an argument for unity. Thus, we find in Augustine’s anti-Donatist letters no systematic treatment of baptism. The information about baptism appears in Augustine’s letters as he saw fit to use it in his arguments for unity. As in previous chapter-length treatments of themes in this dissertation, the chronological divisions of this chapter intend simply to separate the discussion into manageable sections.

In the letter written between 391 and 395 to Maximinus, the Donatist bishop of Siniti in Numidia, Augustine’s concern was both to know whether Maximinus rebaptized a Catholic deacon in Mutugenna, a town in Numidia, and to eliminate the Donatist practice of rebaptism. At the core of the matter was Church unity, which could be achieved only by eliminating rebaptism, an inveterate custom in the Donatist camp that separated the Donatists from the Catholics. Since Augustine often urged the Donatists to renounce the tradition of their fathers, Augustine believed that during over a century of

\[245\] Augustine, *De baptismo* 7.53.102, in BA, vol. 29, 570-72; for the unity of the Church as the only place of charity, see Sermon 265.11, in WSA 3/7, 242; Sermon 32.5, in WSA 3/2, 139; Sermon 46.18, in WSA 3/2, 274-75.

\[246\] Augustine, Letter 23.6-7, in WSA 2/1, 67-68.
schism and practice of rebaptism, this practice became an entrenched custom which the Donatists stubbornly were not willing to renounce. Augustine reported that he deplored the Donatists’ custom of rebaptizing and their boasting in doing so. Augustine writes that he had received a report according to which Maximinus had rebaptized the Catholic deacon in Mutugenna. Since Augustine had heard good things about Maximinus, which he did not believe at first but then came to accept, he hoped that this report was not true. Therefore, Augustine wrote that he personally visited Mutugenna to convince himself about the truth. After he arrived there, he was told by the deacon’s parents—since he could not see him—that the former Catholic deacon in Mutugenna had become a Donatist deacon there. However, Augustine wrote that he thought so well of Maximinus’ disposition of the heart that he would tell Maximinus of the gravity of rebaptizing: “to rebaptize…a heretical person who has already received these signs of holiness that the Christian discipline has handed down is a sin without a doubt. To rebaptize a Catholic is, however, a most grievous sin.”

While Augustine wanted to convince Maximinus not to rebaptize anymore, he also wanted to get him on the side of the Catholic Church. Augustine asked Maximinus to reply to him whether he rebaptized or not. If his Donatist colleagues asked him to rebaptize, he should not fear them but seize the freedom of Christ since the honor of this world is passing. If he did not repeat baptism and believed in the baptism of the Catholic Church, Augustine urged him to put on the confidence of Christ so as to put aside the timid servitude that tied him to the Donatist church. Augustine stated that baptism in the name of the Trinity was valid and could not be nullified by separating

247 Augustine, Letter 23.2, in WSA 2/1, 64.
248 Augustine, Letter 23.3, in WSA 2/1, 64-65.
from the Church. A person cannot be for a second time subject to exsufflation, that is, subject to the baptismal rite by which the devil is blown out from the baptized person by the priest who performs the act of baptism. Since a baptized person had the devil blown out from him when he was first baptized, a repetition of this act meant that the first baptism was invalid. By performing exsufflation the Donatists did not recognize the grace received in the first baptism. Since circumcision, which was a sign of righteousness made in the flesh, was a necessary sign that could not be repeated, baptism, since it is the circumcision of the heart and purity of conscience, certainly cannot be repeated: “But in the flesh of a circumcised man I would not find a place to repeat the circumcision because that member is only one, much less is a place found in one heart where the baptism of Christ might be repeated.”

Augustine thought Maximinus should assert: “I know of only one baptism consecrated and sealed by the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Where I find this form, I must approve. I do not destroy what I recognize as the Lord’s; I do not spit at the standard of my king.” Indeed, in De baptismo Augustine asserted that baptism could not be rendered void by any human perversity, whether in receiving or administering it.

Those who divided the clothing of the Lord did not destroy it. Since the clothing of the Lord signifies the unity of the Church, one could believe that Christ’s last will and testament was about the unity of the Church, which must not be broken. Since baptism is efficient only in the unity of the Church, it is also, according to Augustine,

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250 Augustine, Letter 23.4, in WSA 2/1, 65; for baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, see De baptismo 4.15.22, in BA, vol. 29, 286-89.
251 Augustine, De baptismo 6.1.1, in BA, vol. 29, 402-03.
indissolubly related to the unity of the Church.\textsuperscript{254} Thus, Augustine asked, if the persecutors did not destroy the unity of the Church and its sacraments when Christ was on the earth, why are the Donatists doing this now when He is seated in heaven: “If his clothing was not torn by his persecutors when he was hanging on the cross, why is his sacrament destroyed by Christians when he is seated in heaven.”\textsuperscript{255}

Indeed, if Maximinus chose not to rebaptize, Augustine believed that his example could be easily imitated by those who scandalously rebaptize. Thus, those divided in North Africa would not continue to tear apart the body of Christ by their different comunions.\textsuperscript{256} On the other hand, Augustine believed that if he remained silent about the error of rebaptism, the Christians in North Africa would believe that there was nothing wrong with it and thus more people would be rebaptized by the Donatists. Since Augustine decided to write a letter about the issue of rebaptism to be read publicly, he decided to read it after the army—which was present there—had left so that the congregation would not believe that he wanted to force people against their will into the unity of the Church.\textsuperscript{257}

We have seen in Augustine’s letter to Maximinus his firm determination to oppose the Donatists’ view on baptism as well as his efforts to defend the unity of the Church. Augustine thought that if he could change Maximinus’ view on baptism, other Donatists could follow Maximinus’ example. Indeed, in addition to his firm opposition to rebaptism, Augustine thought that if he could convert Maximinus to the Catholic Church,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[254] For baptism that belongs to Christ, see Augustine, De baptismo 4.12.18, in BA, vol. 29, 280-81; for baptism of profit only in the Church, see De baptismo 1.2.3-3.4, in BA, vol. 29, 62-65.
\item[255] Augustine, Letter 23.4, in WSA 2/1, 65.
\item[256] Augustine, Letter 23.5, in WSA 2/1, 66.
\item[257] Augustine, Letter 23.7, in WSA 2/1, 67.
\end{footnotes}
he could discredit the Donatists’ position about baptism and separatism and thus they could be more willing to join the Church.

Between 396 and 397 Augustine wrote to Eusebius, a Roman official in Hippo and a Catholic layman, to inform him about the case of a young Catholic boy who, after he had beaten his mother and then left the Church, had been baptized by the Donatists. Augustine asked Eusebius to inquire whether or not Proculeianus, the Donatist bishop of Hippo, had made the case public. According to Augustine, since the Church had given birth to the ungrateful child through baptism, rebaptism was forbidden. Augustine wrote that since the Church did not condone the ungrateful child’s abuse of his mother, the boy thought to make the members of the Church suffer by leaving the Church to join the Donatists, who knew how to destroy the grace received first in baptism: “I shall go to those who know how to drive out the grace in which I was born in her and to destroy the form that I received in her womb.” Since the Donatists held that the effect of the sacrament depended on the minister’s worthiness or holiness, Augustine called here the Donatist ministers “sanctifiers.” Augustine believed that, while the minister performed the act of baptism, however sinful he might be, the gift of baptism was the gift of almighty God. Since Augustine wanted more support from Eusebius, he appealed to him in another letter.

Shortly after first letter, Augustine sent Eusebius another letter in which he asked him to pose several questions to Proculeianus about some cases of Catholics who Augustine thought had

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258 Augustine, Letter 34.3, 2-3, in WSA 2/1, 118-19; Augustine is again referring to the rite of exsufflation through which the Donatist blew out the devil as though the first baptism was invalid; for the baptized being born again, see Sermon 228.1 (date uncertain), in WSA 3/6, 257-58; for baptism as one time sacrament, see Sermon 179A.6 (dated before 410), in WSA 3/5, 311; F. Van Der Meer, Augustine the Bishop: The Life and Work of a Father of the Church, trans. Brian Battershaw (London and New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), 109.
joined the Donatists inappropriately. We are informed here about the case of a Catholic subdeacon, Primus, who, after having been disciplined by the Church for improper conduct, had left the Church and then joined the Donatists, where he was rebaptized. Two nuns went with him over to the Donatists, and they, too, were rebaptized. In addition, we are informed about a case of a young girl, a catechumen in the Church, who had left the Church to join the Donatists and was given a second baptism by them. Indeed, the Donatists customarily rebaptized the Catholics whenever they had the chance. Thus, for Augustine, the Donatists were sending the message that, since the Catholic Church was not the true Church, they were without the proper rite of initiation. In this regard, the Donatists followed Cyprian who, in his dispute about Novatian’s baptism, had asserted, “Being outside the Church, [Novatian] has power to do nothing and…baptism—and there is only the one—is with us [Cyprian’s Church].”

Augustine mentions that, in response to his challenge to discuss the issues that separate the divided churches in North Africa, the Donatists responded: “We do not to argue, but we want to rebaptize.” This was a painful reality for Augustine, who asserted that he could not bear to see the Donatists persuade those former Catholics who came to them to have a second baptism. Augustine believed that the Lord would not fail to protect his Church, that is, the Church in communion with the communion of churches throughout the world.

In the letters sent to Eusebius, we have learned that Augustine, in order to succeed in his efforts to unite the Donatists with the Church, appealed to an official of the State. While he did not receive the support he expected, Augustine firmly opposed the rebaptising of Catholics who joined the Donatists. Since the Donatists did not stop rebaptizing members of his Church,

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261 Augustine, Letter 35.4, in WSA 2/1, 123.
262 Cyprian, Letter 72.2.2, in ACW, vol. 47, 55.
263 Augustine, Letter 35.4, in WSA 2/1, 123.
264 Augustine, Letter 35.3, in WSA 2/1, 122-23.
Augustine understood that they did not recognize the Catholic Church and its baptism; this was a painful reality for Augustine.

At the end of 396 or early 397, Augustine wrote a letter to a group of Donatist leaders on the subject of Church unity. Augustine asserted that, although the Donatists’ practice of rebaptism had been condemned by the bishops at the Council of Arles in 314, they still baptized outside the Church. Since the Donatists did not believe that the Catholics were the true Church, Augustine asserted that the Donatists would rebaptize the Church itself if they could. Through their act of rebaptism, which annulled the first baptism through the rite of exsufflation, as though the baptized was never baptized, the Donatists have torn the unity of Christ and blasphemed Christ’s heritage. According to Cyprian, since the unity of the Church is indissolubly connected with the divine sacraments which are dispensed in the true Church and by the true bishop, one cannot break this unity except if “he is a stranger; he is profane; he is an enemy. He cannot have God as a father who does not have the Church as a mother.” While both the Catholics and the Donatists agreed with this view about the indissoluble connection between Church unity and the sacraments, the Catholics emphasized less than the Donatists the role of bishop. According to Augustine, when baptism is given with the formula from the Gospel, no matter how great is the perversity of the minister through which the baptism is given, or of him to whom it is given, the sacrament itself is “holy even in wicked persons:” The Donatists separated from the Catholics because they believed that such wicked persons were not the true Church. But, as the Catholics wanted to bring the Donatists into the unity of the Church, so the Donatists wanted to bring back into their unity those who were severed from them. Augustine makes clear to the Donatists in this letter that what the Catholics object about the Donatists is “the madness of schism, the insanity of

265 Augustine, Letter 43, in WSA 2/1, 156-172.
266 Augustine, Letter 43.21, in WSA 2/1, 167.
rebaptizing, and the wicked separation from the heritage of Christ, which is spread throughout all nations.\textsuperscript{269}

In the previous letter Augustine addressed a group of Donatists leaders through whose influence he hoped to affect the Donatists as a whole. While he argued that the practice of rebaptism has been condemned at the Council of Arles, he also told them that, no matter how perverse a leader could be, baptism in the name of the Trinity is valid. He also appealed to Cyprian to show the Donatists that, despite his dealing with sinners in the Church, he asserted that the unity of the Church should not be broken.

In 396 or 397 Augustine wrote to a group of Donatist laymen about his encounter with Fortunius, the Donatist bishop of Thiave, and the discussion he had had about Church unity. Since Jesus baptized through His disciples more than John baptized, the Donatists believed that Jesus’ disciples gave in baptism what they had received from him, that is, the disciples cleansed the baptized through the power they received from Jesus. While Augustine believed that the Donatists give nothing in baptism, he asserted that baptism in the name of Christ cleanses the baptized person and it should not be repeated: “\textit{One who was once bathed does not need to be washed again, but is entirely clean} (Jn 13:10)…. For the perfect cleansing is…in the name of the Lord, if the one who receives it presents himself as worthy of it. But if he is unworthy, the sacraments still remain in him, not for salvation, but for his destruction.”\textsuperscript{270} Unlike the Donatist’s view that the bishop bestows grace upon the person who is baptized, Augustine asserted that baptism in the name of Christ cleanses the person who is baptized, whereas the baptizer does not give anything in baptism.

\textsuperscript{269} Augustine, Letter 43.21, in WSA 2/1, 168.
\textsuperscript{270} Augustine, Letter 44.10, in WSA 2/1, 178-79, referring to Jn 4:1-2; for baptism received for destruction, see \textit{De baptismo} 4.10.16, in BA, vol. 29, 270-72; for baptism as Christ’s, even if it was given by a good man or an apostate, see \textit{De baptismo} 5.13.15, in BA, vol. 29, 351-53.
Between 399 and 400 Augustine wrote a letter to Crispinus, the Donatist bishop of Calama, in order to discuss with him the Donatist-Catholic schism. Since the Donatists claimed that the Catholics did not have the baptism of Christ and that this baptism exists nowhere outside of their communion, Augustine referred to the Donatist group, the Maximianists, which had separated from the main Donatist church of Primian. While they were separated from the main Donatist church, the Maximianists baptized many people. When the Donatists received the Maximianists back in their church, they did not rebaptize them, as if baptism outside the Donatist church had been of benefit to the Maximianists, even though, according to the Donatists, they had lost the power of baptizing by separating from the church. Augustine continues by saying that he deplores “the fact that the baptism of the Maximianists is accepted and that the baptism of the whole world is subject to exsufflation,” through which the Donatists showed total disdain toward the baptism received in the Catholic Church. By not recognizing the authenticity of the Catholic baptism, the Donatists showed, Augustine thought, that they did not consider the Catholic Church as the true Church. According to Augustine, baptism belonged neither to Catholics nor to Donatists, but to Him who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, that is, to Christ. Thus, Augustine tried to show his neutrality or unbiased view as to baptism. Indeed, since baptism is as valid at the hands of a contemptible man as it is at the hands of an apostle, it is recognized to be the act neither of the one nor the other, but of Christ, asserted Augustine. In this letter Augustine revealed the Donatists’ inconsistencies as to the way they treat the Catholics. While the Donatists did not rebaptize the people who separated from them and then were received back in the Church, they rebaptized the Catholics who joined the Donatists. Through this attitude, Augustine learned once more that the Donatists did not see the Catholic Church as the true Church, since they acted toward their people in schism as the Catholics acted toward the Donatists.

Augustine, Letter 51.1-5, in WSA 2/1, 198-201.
Augustine, Letter 51.4, in WSA 2/1, 200; Letter 70.2, in WSA 2/1, 264-65.
Augustine, Letter 51.5, in WSA 2/1, 200-201; see Jn 1:33.
We have seen in this section, in the six letters in which we found discussions related to baptism, that baptism is always connected with the issue of unity. Since the Donatists’ rejected the Catholic baptism, Augustine responded brilliantly that baptism is Christ’s action, no matter where it is administered or by whom it is administered. In order to show that baptism should not be repeated, Augustine showed the Donatists their inconsistencies: since the Donatists did not rebaptize the groups that came back to their church from division, they believed that baptism even outside the true Church should not be repeated, which was the belief in the Catholic Church.

While De baptismo, for example, is a detailed treatment of baptism, the letters are less detailed than this work, but they show the intensity of Augustine’s effort to unite the divided Church of North Africa. In the light of this truth, the letters show much more than any other Donatist works Augustine’s interest in Church unity, which is the essence of his letters against the Donatists. Most importantly, the letters show that his arguments against rebaptism have as their goal the unity of the Church.

**D. From 400 to 410**

In this section I will continue discussing the letters of this period in which Augustine talks about baptism. At the end of 401 or the beginning of 402 Augustine wrote to Theodore, a Catholic deacon of Carthage, to explain how the Donatists should be received in the Church. Augustine asserted that, while the Church disapproved of their dissent only, they were to be received in the Church in the name of God in whose name they received baptism. Since baptism outside the Church was destructive, Augustine was concerned to have the Donatists in the peace of the Church, where their baptism could benefit them.275 Indeed, Augustine asserted that, while the Catholic Church recognized the gift of God, that is, the sacrament of baptism, among the Donatists that gift was not efficient without love, which is found in the unity of the Church:

And we embrace our brothers [the Donatists], standing with them, as the apostle says, *in oneness of the Spirit, in the bond of peace* (Eph 4:3), and acknowledging in them the gifts of God, whether holy baptism, the blessing of ordination, the profession of continence, the vow of virginity, the faith in the Trinity, or any other gift. Even if all of these were present, they, nonetheless, did no good if love was not there. But who truly claims to have the love of Christ when he does not embrace his unity? And so, when they come to the Catholic Church, they do not receive here what they had [baptism, among other divine gifts], but they receive here what they did not have [love in the unity of the Church] in order that what they have may begin to benefit them. For here they receive the root of love in the bond of peace and in a society [the Church] that is one in order that all the sacraments of the truth, which they have, may not contribute to their damnation, but to their deliverance.\(^{276}\)

After all, according to Augustine, the Donatists, as branches, cannot have life without being grafted back onto the Church.\(^{277}\) According to this letter, the Donatists have baptism for their damnation, not for salvation. Thus, Augustine implies that, in order to be saved, the Donatists should join the unity of the Church.

Sometime after 400, Augustine wrote another letter to Crispinus, the Donatist bishop of Calama in Numidia. Since Augustine was quite troubled by Crispinus, the letter lacks salutation and starts by telling Crispinus that he should fear God for rebaptizing the tenants on an estate that he had recently bought. Augustine asked Crispinus as if he were the Lord: “Was the death [I suffered] to buy the love of all the nations a low price? Was what you counted out of your purse for rebaptizing your tenant farmers more effective than what flowed from my side for baptizing my people?”\(^{278}\) Augustine implied here that Crispinus paid his tenants to accept being rebaptized and that his money was more effective than the price the Lord paid on the cross.

After 400, Augustine and Alypius wrote to Naucelio, a Donatist layman, about the case of Felician of Musti, whom the Donatists had condemned, because he had separated from the main Donatist church and because he had been baptized outside of their church. However, he was received back in the Donatist church with those whom he had baptized without rebaptism for any of them, even though the Donatists rebaptized those Catholics who came to join them. Thus,

\(^{276}\) Augustine, Letter 61.1-2, in WSA 2/1, 245-46, referring to 1Cor 13:3.
\(^{277}\) Augustine, Letter 61.2, in WSA 2/1, 246, referring to Rom 11:18.
\(^{278}\) Augustine, Letter 66.1, in WSA 2/1, 257.
Augustine asserted that, since the baptism outside the Donatist church was valid in the case of Felician, the baptism of the Church throughout the world must surely be valid. In this letter Augustine challenged the Donatists by saying that, if Felician who was in communion with Maximian administered a true baptism, they should not complain about the baptism given throughout the world. If Felician administered a false baptism when he was in communion with Maximian, then those whom Felician baptized in the schism of Maximian were not supposed to be received back in the church without being rebaptized.

Between 405 and 411 Augustine wrote a letter to Emeritus, the Donatist bishop of Caesarea in Mauretania Caesariensis, in which he abundantly treats the subjects of coercion and of tolerating sinners in the Church. In this letter Augustine mentions that the Donatists asked him: “Why do you want us to be united with you if we are criminals?” Augustine answered that the Church wants them in the unity of the Church because they were alive and because they could be corrected and thus saved in the Church unity. But in a sermon preached in about 397, Augustine stated that the Donatists asked a question which is even more proper for our subject: “If we are not of the faith, not believers, why do you not give us baptism?” Augustine answered that the Donatists were not rebaptized because the Church recognized that the baptism among them is holy and not changeable. If the Catholics were to rebaptize the Donatists, they would injure sacrilegiously the mysteries of Christ among them.

The sacraments that you have are holy, since they are the same in all. Hence, we want you to change from your misguided ways, that is, so that your cut-off branches may be again attached to the root. For the sacraments, which you have are not changed, are approved by us as you have them…For even Saul had not spoiled the anointing he had received, the anointing to which King David, the devout servant of God, showed such great respect. For this reason we, who want to restore you to the root, do not rebaptize you; we, nonetheless, accept as valid the form of the branch that has been cut off….Though the branch is whole, it still can in no way bear fruit without the root. One question concerns the persecutions that you say you suffered…; another question concerns baptism since we do not ask where it exists, but it is beneficial. For wherever it is, it is the same, but the

279 Augustine, Letter 70.1-2, in WSA 2/1, 264-65; Letter 76.3-4, in WSA 2/1, 299-300.
280 Augustine, Letter 87.9, in WSA 2/1, 349.
281 Augustine, Sermon 260A.2, in WSA 3/7, 188.
one who receives it is not always the same wherever he is….We reverence the baptism of Christ everywhere. For, if deserters carry off with them the standards of the emperor, once they have either been punished by condemnation, or corrected b pardon, the standards are received back intact.\(^\text{282}\)

Referring to the indelible character of baptism, Peter Brown well describes how the sacraments functioned in Augustine’s view: “the sacraments of baptism and ordination administered in schism by the Donatists, linked the remaining Christians in Africa to their true owner, the Catholic Church. For these sacraments were like the tattoos which soldiers in the Imperial armies had branded on the back of their hands, so as to identify deserters: in the same way, Christ the Emperor of the Catholic Church was entitled to recall to the ranks of His Church, those who had received His brand.”\(^\text{283}\) In this letter Augustine states again that Christ’s baptism is revered everywhere and, therefore, the Donatists are not baptized when they are received back in the Church. Further, Augustine asserted that, by rebaptizing the Donatists, the Catholics would injure the mysteries of Christ among them.

Before 405, Augustine wrote a letter to Festus, a Roman official and Catholic layman, in which he explains to him the reasonableness of Catholics and the stubborn and unreasonable attitude of the Donatists.\(^\text{284}\) Since the Donatists said that baptism is the true baptism of Christ only when it is administered by a righteous person, Augustine brought Scripture as a witness that the one who baptizes is Christ. Only in this way, Augustine argues, is the Church secure in its hope of salvation. Augustine asserted that the Donatists believed that, in the case when a good person baptizes, then he who baptizes sanctifies the baptized; when a bad person whose actions are hidden baptizes, then, the Donatists say, it is not he, but God who sanctifies. If this is the case, Augustine argued, those who are baptized should hope to be baptized by a bad person, “for God sanctifies much better than any righteous human being.” Since it is absurd to want to be baptized

\(^{282}\) Augustine, Letter 87.9, in WSA 2/1, 349-50, referring to 2Sam 1:1-16; for the mark of baptism, see Sermon 260A.2, in WSA 2/1, 188-89; Sermon 293A.16, in WSA 3/11, 261; *De baptismo* 6.1.1, in BA, vol. 29, 404-05.


\(^{284}\) Augustine, Letter 89.1-8, in WSA 2/1, 359-363.
by a bad person rather than by a good person, “baptism is valid because he upon whom the dove descended is the one who baptizes.” Indeed, Augustine asserted, baptism is common to all who baptize because it is not human, but divine, that is. Since baptism is Christ’s, those who baptize do not affect in any way the character and essence of baptism.

In the letter Augustine sent in 407 or 408 to Vincent, the Rogatist bishop of Cartenna, we find intermingled all the themes treated in this dissertation. Augustine asserted that because they refused to renounce their schism and their rebaptizing, the Donatists’ wickedness, surpassed idolatry, that is, the pagans’ wickedness. This is true, according to Augustine, since the Donatists “know the truth and out of passion for their error fight against the truth.” The Donatists, according to Augustine, go astray under the name of Christ, that is, “not knowing the righteousness of God and wanting to establish their own, they were not subject to the righteousness of God” (Rom 10:2-3).” According to Augustine, since the Donatists did not stop rebaptizing, they wanted to establish their own righteousness and to ignore the righteousness offered by Christ in baptism. By this Augustine implies that the Donatists, by considering invalid the baptism performed by an unworthy priest, do not rely entirely on Christ’s grace and righteousness that he offers in baptism.

The Donatists claimed to follow Cyprian’s authority in regard to the issue of baptism. Augustine asserted that Cyprian’s writings should not be regarded as Scripture, as we already noted in the chapter on the Church and Scripture: “Cyprian, however, is found to have held other ideas concerning baptism than is contained in the norm and practice of the Church, not in canonical writings, but in his own and in those of a council. He is not, however, found to have

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285 Augustine, Letter 89.6, in WSA 2/1, 361-62; for the Donatist’s differentiation between a good man who administers baptism and an evil person who administers baptism, see also Letter 105.12, in WSA 2/2, 60; for Christ who baptizes, see Jn 1:33.
286 Augustine, Letter 89.7, in WSA 2/1, 362.
287 Augustine, Letter 93.10, in WSA 2/1, 383.
corrected this view.” Since the Donatists believed that, by admitting sinners to the sacraments, the Church perished, Augustine asserted that Cyprian’s view in this regard was different than theirs. “For in the writings of Cyprian we see that sinners participated in the sacraments when people were admitted to the Church who according to your opinion and, as you claim, according to Cyprian’s did not have baptism, and yet the Church did not perish.” While it is true that in Cyprian’s church both saints and sinners participated in the sacraments of the true Church, Augustine is misleading the reader here since Cyprian, as already seen, firmly required that people baptized in a heresy or schism should be rebaptized when they were accepted in the Church. As already mentioned, Augustine believed that if Cyprian did not change his view about baptism, he could be wrong because his opinion was not as valid as that of the Catholic Church as a whole. However, Augustine believed that Cyprian’s love for the unity of the Church covered for his inadequate view on baptism. Furthermore, as already mentioned, Augustine presented his arguments according to his purpose, which, in the case of the Donatists, was to bring them to the unity of the Church. In the Donatist church, too, both saints and sinners participated in the sacraments, but the Donatists considered themselves as the true Church. While Augustine mentioned this, he emphasized that the Donatists, by underlining the importance of the bishop in baptism, do not rely entirely on the righteousness of Christ in baptism. Since both the Catholics and the Donatists saw themselves as the only true Church, reconciliation was impossible.

The Donatists asked Augustine why he was seeking to bring them into the unity of the Church, if they were, as Augustine called them, “heretics.” Furthermore, since the Donatists were called “heretics,” why were they not baptized? Augustine answered that it was not their baptism that made them heretics, but their schism. Further, Augustine asserted that he would have

288 Augustine, Letter 93.38, in WSA 2/1, 399; for Augustine’s opinion that Cyprian either did not hold such a view on baptism or he did correct it according to the Rule of Faith, see also 93.40, in WSA 2/1, 400; Cyprian, Letter 73, in FC, vol. 51,268-85.
289 Augustine, Letter 93.37, in WSA 2/1, 399.
290 Augustine, Letter 93.39, in WSA 2/1, 400.
baptized them if they were not baptized or if they were baptized in the name of Donatus. Since they were baptized in the name of Christ, baptism was not longer necessary for them.\textsuperscript{291}

According to Augustine, between the baptism of Christ conferred by an apostle and the baptism of Christ administered by a drunkard there is no difference.\textsuperscript{292} Indeed, according to Augustine, although a drunkard administrates baptism, the gift of baptism is Christ’s.\textsuperscript{293} This opinion of Augustine shows that he, unlike the Donatists, relied entirely on the authority of Christ in baptism. However, according to Augustine, although the Donatists had Christ’s baptism, it was not a benefit to them because they were not in the unity of the Church: “You are, however, with us in baptism, in the creed, in the other sacraments of the Lord. But in the spirit of unity and in the bond of peace, finally, in the Catholic Church herself, you are not with us. If you accept these, what you have [that is, the sacraments and the creed] will not only then be present, but they will then benefit you.”\textsuperscript{294}

Augustine ended his treatment of the subject of baptism in the letter to Vincent with an ironic tone, as if in the Donatist church of Rogatus there were not drunkards and as if they held the Catholic faith: “I was mistaken when I wanted to convince you about the drunkard who baptizes; it slipped my mind that I was dealing with a Rogatist, not with just any sort of Donatists. 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 the Catholic faith, not because you are in communion with the whole world, but because you observe all the commandments and all the sacraments.”\textsuperscript{295}

According to Augustine in this letter, by refusing to stop rebaptizing and by refusing to join the Church, the Donatists’ sin is more serious than the sin of idolatry. The Donatists’ appeal to Cyprian as to baptism was superfluous since he loved unity and opposed schism. Furthermore,
since baptism is Christ’s, the Donatists’ emphasis on the worthiness of bishops in giving baptism is also superfluous.

In the letter Augustine wrote in 409 to Macrobius, the Donatist bishop of Hippo who had succeeded Proculeianus, Augustine pleaded with him not to rebaptize a Catholic deacon who had joined the Donatists. After giving his reasons for this request, Augustine mentioned, to make his case more credible, the Donatists who did not baptize those who, having been baptized after being separated from the Donatist church, were later received back into the church.

Felician of Musti condemned Primian of Carthage, and the former was in turn also condemned by the latter. For a long time Felician was in the sacrilegious schism of Maximian; in it he baptized many in his churches. Now he is your bishop along with Primian, but he does not baptize anyone after they have been baptized by Primian. With what right, then, do you think that you should still rebaptize someone after he has been baptized by us? Answer this question, and rebaptize me. But if you cannot resolve this question, spare the soul of another, spare your own soul.”

Augustine ended this letter by expressing his desire that Macrobius—and all the Donatists, of course—be in peace with the Catholic Church, that is, in the unity of the Church. In this letter Augustine relates, perhaps better than in other letters, the case of Felician of Musty. Also, Augustine emphasized the need of unity.

Augustine sent Maximus and Theodore, two laymen of Hippo to deliver the letter just mentioned to Macrobius. Maximus and Theodore informed Augustine by a letter about how his letter to Macrobius had been received by the Donatist bishop. They mentioned that, while at first Macrobius was reticent about receiving Augustine’s letter, he eventually accepted it and allowed the commissioners to read it before him. Then, after the letter had been read to him, Macrobius said: “I cannot but receive those [the Catholics] who come to me and give them the faith they have asked for [that is, baptism].”

Augustine sent another letter to Macrobius based on the information he received in the letter from Maximus and Theodore. Augustine began his letter with Macrobius’ words mentioned

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296 Augustine, Letter 106.1, in WSA 2/2, 65.
above: “I cannot but receive those who come to me and give them the faith they have asked for.”

Augustine answered Macrobius’ affirmation by saying that he—and the Donatists generally—did not act toward the groups that separated from them and then returned as he acted toward the Catholics: “If someone baptized in your communion, who was long separated from you, comes to you and through ignorance thinks that he has to be baptized again and asks for it, after you investigate and learn where he was baptized, you receive the person who comes to you, but you do not, nonetheless, give him the faith he asks for.”

Augustine continued by asking how the person who asked for baptism from Macrobius did not have what he already received by being baptized by Augustine or in the Catholic Church. Since, according to Maximus and Theodore, Macrobius said that he abided by what he received from his predecessors regarding baptism, Augustine asked him why “do we not rather remain in the Church that we have received from Christ the Lord through the apostles as beginning from Jerusalem and bearing fruit and growing throughout the nations? And why are we now judged concerning the actions of some fathers of ours that are said to have been committed almost one hundred years ago?”

Augustine asserted that, according to Isaiah 66:5, the Catholics are brothers to the Donatists, though the later hate the Catholics: “‘Say, You are our brothers,’ to those who hate you and despise you in order that the name of the Lord may receive honor and may be seen by them in joy, while they are put to shame (Is 66:5 LXX.’” Further, since Christ said “I give you my peace (Jn 14:27,’” Christ should not “be divided in his members by those who say ‘I belong to Paul,’” or ‘I belong to Apollos,’ or ‘I belong to Cephas’ (1Cor 1:12) and who are torn asunder by the names of human beings….Would Christ of whom it was said, This is the one who baptizes (Jn 1:33), be subject to

298 Augustine, Letter 108.1, in WSA 2/2, 68; see also the previous note; see also D. Doyle, The Bishop as Disciplinarian in the Letters of Saint Augustine (New York and Washington, D.C.: Peter Lang, 2002), 242.

299 Augustine, Letter 108.1, in WSA 2/2, 68.


exsufflation in his own baptism.” Augustine appreciates Primian who, in receiving those whom Felician had baptized while he was separated from Primian, did not rebaptize them and thus did not destroy the sacrament of God through the rite of exsufflation. However, Augustine was displeased because Primian—and the Donatists generally—did not act toward the Catholics as he did toward those coming to his church from non-Catholic churches.

Augustine tells us that the Donatists took one of their objections against the Catholics from the Book of Sirach: “If one is baptized by someone dead, what good does his bath do? (Sir 34:30).” Augustine answered by saying that the statement did not say that baptism was not baptism, but that is was not a good baptism. Indeed, this interpretation of Augustine fits perfectly with his view that baptism is valid wherever it was administrated, but it does not benefit the person who is not in the unity of the Church. And again Augustine mentioned the case of Felician and the fact that the Donatists did not rebaptize him and those baptized by him while they were separated from the main Donatist church.

Augustine mentions that Donatists supported with the Psalms another objection against the Catholics: “Let not the oil of a sinner anoint my head.” In order to understand the passage correctly, Augustine asserted, one needed to read it in its entirety: “The righteous person will correct me and rebuke me with mercy, but the oil of the sinner will not anoint my head” (Ps 141:5). Thus, according to Augustine, the psalmist said that he preferred to be worn down by a truthful severity of someone merciful to being exalted by someone’s deceptive praise. Augustine continued by writing that, however the passage is interpreted, the Donatists should consider the case of Felician who was received in the church after being separated from it for a while. By receiving him—and those whom he baptized while he was separated from the main Donatist

304 Augustine, Letter 108.6, in WSA 2/2, 71-72.
church—back in the church, the Donatists either considered the oil of sinners valid, or they recognized that it was the oil of Christ that was conferred even by sinful ministers.\(^{305}\)

While the Donatists had to reconsider the interpretation of passages as those aforementioned, Augustine told Macrobius that the baptism of Christ, which was given to the Church in order that Christians might partake of eternal salvation, was not to be judged as foreign to the Church when it was conferred outside the Church and was not to be regarded as belonging to schismatics and heretics because they practiced it. Augustine went on, “In those outside the Church and separated from the Church it contributes to their destruction, but in those who belong to her and are her own it produces salvation. In the former, when they are converted to the peace of the Church, their error is corrected, but the sacrament is not destroyed when the error is punished,” that is, when the Donatists were brought by force into the unity of the Church.\(^{306}\) In this letter we have cases of biblical passages which, according to Augustine, were not interpreted appropriately. Since the Donatists baptized Catholics as if these had no faith and baptism, Augustine told Macrobius that baptism was given to the Church for the salvation of its members, while the Donatists have it for their destruction. By forcing the Donatists into the unity of the Church, they were enabled to partake of eternal salvation.

We have seen in the eleven letters discussed in this section that Augustine treated the subject of baptism according to issues raised by his challengers. In particular, Augustine emphasized that baptism is Christ’s, no matter who administered it, and that it is effective only in the unity of the Church, although it should be recognized wherever it is practiced. By asserting that baptism is Christ’s and valid in the unity of the Church only, Augustine intended to bring the Donatists in the unity of the Catholic Church. Since the Donatists were not in the unity of the Church, according to Augustine, they could not be saved because they did not rely on Christ’s baptism, which the Church has received in order that Christians might be saved. By repeating this

\(^{305}\) Augustine, Letter 108.6, in WSA 2/2, 72.

\(^{306}\) Augustine, Letter 108.16, in WSA 2/2, 79.
argument to the Donatists, Augustine believed that he could convince them that their salvation was endangered outside the Church unity and they, therefore, should join the unity of the Church. While the cases he debated differed from each other, his arguments about baptism repeat throughout his letters. The underlining motif in these letters is Church unity.

E. From 410 to 418

This section extends approximately from the Conference of Carthage of 411 to the year in which Augustine wrote his last letter against the Donatists. Since the Donatists were severely condemned in 411 and were henceforth being forced into the Church, Augustine was concerned in this period to justify the use of force against them; therefore, the theme of baptism appears in his letters less often after 411 than before this date.

In the letter Augustine sent between 411 and 414, he told Donatus, a priest of the Donatists who had attempted to kill himself, that the Donatists were brought back to the unity of the Church—and Donatus was not allowed to kill himself—by the use of force because they, as Christ’s sheep, bear the Lord’s mark, that is, the sacrament of baptism. By making this statement, Augustine was asserting that the Catholic Church was not allowing the Donatists to wander off from Christ the shepherd and to perish, although Augustine mentions that the Donatists often say that is what they want.307 While Augustine exaggerates, the Donatists did say that they preferred to be let alone, that is, not to be forced into the unity of the Church by force. Since, for Augustine, the unity of the Church was the surest place of salvation, Augustine stated with some exaggeration that the Donatists refused to be saved. Augustine, as in many letters already referred to, mentioned the case of Primian, who, by not baptizing the Donatists whom he received back into the Church and who were baptized outside the Donatist church, recognized that baptism outside the Church is valid. Furthermore, “he [Primian] annulled the whole statement that you

[the Donatists] are accustomed to make, although you misunderstand it: “One who is baptized by someone dead, what does his bath profit him?” (Sir 34:30). Since the Donatists bore the mark of the Lord, that is, baptism, the Church was supposed to bring the Donatists into the Church, where they belonged. By bringing them into the Church, the Donatists would be restored to the Church, where their baptism was efficient and by their being restored they would be on the path of salvation.

In the letter which Augustine sent in 417 to Boniface, the tribune of Africa, he especially defended the use of force against those Donatists who did not want to be forced into the unity of the Church “in accordance with the imperial laws.”

Augustine writes that the Maximianists’ separation from the Donatists and their reconciliation with them provided him and the Catholic Church with strong arguments against them. The point that Augustine made is the same as in the letters we have already seen: “The Donatists did not dare to rebaptize any whom the condemned bishops had baptized outside of their communion….They did not dare to declare invalid the baptism that the condemned bishops…conferred outside their church.” This reality was, for Augustine, a strong argument against the Donatists, who acted toward their schismatic groups entirely opposite from the way they acted toward the Catholics.

Since the Donatists protested their being coerced into the Church, Augustine answered that the Church imitates its Lord in forcing the Donatists, and gave Paul as one of the most important examples of an apostle forced by Christ into the Church. Furthermore, the Donatists bore the mark of the Lord, that is, His baptism. This mark represented a motive for which they were to be brought back into the original fold of the Church before they multiplied excessively.

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310 Augustine, Letter 185.17, in WSA 2/3, 189.
Does he [the Lord] not have to call them back, even by the fear and pain of beating, if they want to resist? He ought especially to do so if the sheep have multiplied through fertility among runaway slaves and thieves, because it is more just that the Lord’s brand should be recognized on them which is not violated in those whom we receive back but still do not rebaptize. For in that way the error of the sheep is to be corrected without destroying on it the mark of the redeemer. For suppose someone receives the mark [baptism] of the king [Christ] from a deserter [a schismatic] who bears the mark, and suppose they both receive pardon and the deserter returns to the army [the Church], and the other begins to be in the army, where he had not been before. The mark on neither of them is canceled. Is it not rather recognized in both of them and treated with due honor, since it is the mark of the king?

As the Donatists were received into the unity of the Church, they were not to be rebaptized in order not to harm the mark of the emperor, that is, the baptism of Christ, Augustine asserted.

According to Augustine, the Donatists claimed for themselves righteousness so great that they made righteous the people whom they baptized. Since the Donatists emphasized the importance of the minister in baptism, Augustine exaggerates by asserting that their leaders made righteous the people they baptize. Thus, Augustine asserted, there remained for the Donatists to say that the person who is baptized by them should believe in the person who baptized them. However, as he always argued against the Donatists, Augustine replied that only God is righteous and makes people righteous. Augustine continues by saying that in baptism all sins are forgiven in the Church; however, while it is in vain for the person who receives it outside the Church, it benefits the person who returns into the unity of the Church. Thus, while baptism outside the Church is a simple sign, in the Church this valid sign receives real meaning, that is, is effective. Since only God is righteous, only through Him could people be made righteous and since the Church is His body, only in the Church could people be made righteous.

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313 Augustine, Letter 185.37, in WSA 2/3, 199-200; for Christ as the principal agent in baptism, see, Sermon 129.7 (dated some time before 405), in WSA 3/4, 306-07; for God as the only who gives grace in baptism, see Contra litteras Petiliani 2.6.13, in BA, vol. 30, 229-231.
315 Augustine, Letter 185.40, in WSA 2/3, 201.
Augustine asserted that the Donatists could not sincerely and biblically claim to be righteous and to confer righteousness because the Lord taught Christians to pray for forgiveness of their debts, which implies that the Church is not sinless on earth.\textsuperscript{316} By arguing that the Church is not without sinners, Augustine told the Donatists that they could not be the Church of the saints and be separated from the rest of the Christian world.

In this letter Augustine told us that the Donatists’ inconsistency in baptizing Catholics and Donatists was a strong argument against them. Since the Donatists received back in the church those who separated from them, Augustine asserted that the Church, like the Donatists, tries to bring them back into the Church, since the mark of the Lord belongs to the Church. In addition, since baptism is void outside the Church, the Donatists must join the Church, where their baptism is effective.

In 418 Augustine wrote his last letter dealing with the Donatists to Dulcitius, the imperial commissioner in charge of implementing the laws against the Donatists.\textsuperscript{317} Augustine tells us in his \textit{Retractations} 2.85 that Dulcitius had written to Gaudentius, the Donatist bishop of Thamugadi, “urging him to Catholic unity and dissuading him from that conflagration by which he was threatening to burn himself and his followers, as well as the very church in which he was.”\textsuperscript{318} As the aforementioned passage indicates, Gaudentius threatened to set fire to the church and to the members barricaded inside it if the laws were to be enforced at Thamugadi. Augustine instructed Dulcitius how to refute Gaudentius. Since the Donatist bishop threatened to kill himself together with the people of his Church if they were forced into the unity of the Church, Augustine asserted in this letter that “it is not forbidden to correct hearts that have fallen into error because it is forbidden to repeat sacraments that have been conferred once.”\textsuperscript{319} Thus, according to Augustine, an improper view on baptism justified the use of force in order to correct it according

\textsuperscript{316} Augustine, Letter 185.39, in WSA 2/3, 200.
\textsuperscript{317} Augustine, Letter 204.1-9, in WSA 2/3, 372-76.
\textsuperscript{318} Augustine, \textit{Retractations} 2.85, in FC, vol. 60, 251-54.
\textsuperscript{319} Augustine, Letter 204.4, in WSA 2/3, 374.
to the general custom of the Church. While we could learn that the Donatists’ resistance against
the Church was strong seven years after the Conference of Carthage, we could also see that while
Augustine defended the use of force against the Donatists, he firmly opposed the practice of
rebaptism.

The subject of baptism was a very important topic in the Catholic-Donatist controversy. While it is closely related to the holiness of the Church, it is also related to Church unity, which
was Augustine’s main concern in the controversy and the subject around which the theme of
baptism—and all other themes discussed in this dissertation—revolved. The Catholic-Donatist
controversy started over the issue of Church holiness: Is it possible for a traitor—that is, one who
handed Scripture over to the State—to administer baptism? In order to unite the churches of
North Africa divided over this issue, Augustine argued that the Church does not consist of saints
alone. Consequently, he claimed that the Donatists were not a pure church and that baptism
administered by a sinner was no different than baptism offered by a saint because it was Christ’s
action. He added that baptism was effective in the unity of the Church only. Since the Church is
the place of the Holy Spirit, in which sins are forgiven, the Donatists, who were outside the
Church, lack the Holy Spirit and thus the possibility of being saved.

Although this chapter was about Augustine’s discussion of baptism in his anti-
Donatist letters, the goal of this chapter was not a presentation of Augustine’s view of
baptism. Instead, this chapter showed that, though discussing baptism, Augustine’s
intention was to unite the divided churches of North Africa. Though I hope this chapter
offered an overview on Augustine’s view on baptism, I hope we could note that the
underlining motif is Church unity. Indeed, as already mentioned, Augustine developed
his view on holiness of the Church and on baptism during his debates with the Donatists.
During the Donatist-Catholic controversy, Augustine came to the conclusion that
baptism, even though it was valid in the name of Christ regardless of the place where it
was received, was not effective outside the Church. Therefore, according to Augustine, the Donatists had to join the Church in order to have baptism effectively and to set themselves on the surest path of salvation.

In the letters in which he touched on the issue of baptism—and in all of his anti-Donatist letters—Augustine concluded that Church unity was the solution as to the issue of baptism. As we have already seen, separation from the secular world, a godly and pious life, and baptism in the name of Christ were not sufficient conditions to be saved. However, according to Augustine, pious people and baptized in the name of Christ outside the Church find meaning in the unity of the Church. Therefore, in order to put the Donatists on the path of salvation, Augustine insisted that the Donatists should be brought into the unity of the Church by force. All his arguments against the Donatists, and his arguments for the use of force in conversion, show that Augustine valued unity more than any other Christian value. Therefore, unity of the Church is Augustine’s most important theological characteristic against the Donatists. According to John Rist, Augustine, “by restricting the channels of grace to this mixed body, the Church,” he “is now unnecessarily restricting the workings of the divine omnipotence itself.”

Indeed, as we noticed and John Rist acknowledged, the Church and the unity of the Church were the center of Augustine’s interest in discussing baptism, which availed for the forgiveness of sins and salvation only in the unity of the Church, although it was valid among all people who offered it in the name of Christ.

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CONCLUSION

The subject of this dissertation has been the Church’s unity and authority in Augustine’s anti-Donatist letters. The purpose of this dissertation has been to assess the views on Church unity and authority Augustine developed in the period in which he devoted his special attention to eliminating the schism in North Africa. This dissertation has shown that Augustine’s letters that concern the Donatist-Catholic controversy demonstrate that the unity of the Church was in this period the center of his interest, indeed the supreme goal for which he fought with great determination. Augustine’s determination to defend the unity of the Church came from a combination of his background, his duty as a bishop, the social, political and religious context, and particularly the evolution of the schism. In order to achieve the goal of unity, Augustine argued—by appealing to the obvious unity of the Church in the Empire, the Scriptures and Christian tradition—that the Church had authority to realize Christian unity by using the authoritative power of the State, which was Christian and therefore supportive of the cause of the Church.

Before discussing Augustine’s views on Church’s unity and authority, I presented a general introduction into ideas on these subjects from the period of the New Testament up to Augustine, with particular emphasis on North African Christianity. We saw that, while Augustine’s views on unity and authority were founded in part upon the Christian tradition before him, he built on it in accordance with the issues raised by the Donatist-Catholic controversy. In particular, Augustine’s views about Church unity, which was his
main concern throughout the Donatist-Catholic controversy, developed according to the development and the gravity of schism.

After the background to Augustine’s view on Church’s unity and authority, I discussed the influence of Augustine’s formative years on his views on authority. Augustine claimed during his mature years that the Church could rightfully use coercion to bring the Donatists into unity with Catholics because Scripture gave the Church authority. During his childhood and elementary education, Augustine learned that authority had a major role in his spiritual and professional life. Since much of what he learned against his will during his childhood at the hands of people in positions of authority proved to be beneficial later in his life, he could recognize that the Church, a respectable and widely spread institution, had received the authority to discipline, even to use force, in order to correct mistakes and to lead people, particularly the Donatists, to salvation.

After the chapter regarding Augustine’s formative years regarding his view on authority, I discussed Augustine’s view on the relation between Church and Scripture. Augustine believed in the reciprocal authority of Scripture and the Church. Augustine then referred to the authority of both Scripture and the Church to justify the imperious need to act for Church unity and against the evil of schism. In fact, according to Augustine, while the Church referred to Scripture as an authority in support of Christian unity, the Bible was best interpreted by the Church according to the Rule of Faith, which interpreted the Scriptures according to the authority of the Church. Thus, because there was an indissoluble connection between Church and Scripture, the Donatists, as
schismatics outside the Church, were not to claim that their interpretation of Scripture regarding the unity of the Church could be true.

After the chapter on the relation between the Church and Scripture, I devoted a chapter to the main events and issues Augustine encountered during the Donatist-Catholic controversy. In addition, I introduced in chronological order his literary works against the Donatists, works that later chapters of the dissertation would treat thematically. This chapter showed how the circumstances of the Donatist-Catholic controversy during his time as a priest and bishop prepared and helped him to firmly advocate for the unity of the Church. While Augustine despised schism and referred to the unity of the Church even before becoming a priest, after being entrusted with a community of believers, he exploited any chance—the Donatists’ inconsistencies, flaws within their ranks, and political events that undermined the Donatists’ position as a separatist group within the Church of the empire—to unite the divided churches in North Africa. Augustine exploited these occasions through discussing with the Donatists the issue of Church unity, by appealing to official and religious dignitaries to help him to solve it, and by writing treatises and letters that challenged the Donatists as a divisive and separatist Christian group.

My presentation of certain themes related to Church unity and authority in Augustine’s letters has shown that his treatment of these themes had as its main goal the defense of the unity of the Church. Augustine’s letters, which are the main source of my dissertation, are more pertinent, or less biased, because they are less polemical than Augustine’s other works against the Donatists. In addition to this, and unlike any single one of his polemical treatises, Augustine’s letters expose the reader to the whole of his
theology as it developed over time because, as already mentioned, the anti-Donatist letters spread from 391 to 418. The theme of the use of force in conversion relates well to the theme of the Church of both saints and sinners, since this mixed Church receives even those who are not truly repentant. The theme of the Church composed of sinners and saints also relates to the theme of baptism, since baptism in the name of Christ had made both the saint and the sinner in the Church part of the universal body of Christ and had validity even for those involved in the sin of schism because they were baptized among the Donatists. I have shown that, while the four themes come up in the letters repeatedly, the theme of unity and extension of the Church throughout the world is present either explicitly or implicitly in all of the themes.

Augustine used the first theme treated in this dissertation—that the Church’s extension and unity reveal its authority as the true Church—as a refrain of all his arguments against the Donatists. Indeed, this theme was the one most repeated by Augustine in his polemic against the Donatists. I have shown that, according to Augustine, the Donatists could not claim to be the true Church, since they were merely a local church not in communion with the churches throughout the world. I also have shown that, unlike the local and numerically small Donatist church, the true Church, for Augustine, is the Church spread in all nations. Indeed, Augustine argued that the true Church is the Church extended throughout the world according to scriptural prophecies. However, despite this constantly repeated argument in his work against the Donatists, Augustine knew very well that the Church was not spread throughout the world, although the Church enjoyed a wide recognition and respect. Since Augustine could speak of the Church as both a present and future entity at the same time, he could certainly speak at
the same time of both the Church as spread throughout the world, since the Scripture referred to that still-future reality, and of the Church as still spreading throughout the world in the present time, in a rapid process of fulfilling the promised future.

In the second chapter on themes about Church unity—Conversion through Coercion to Achieve Unity—I have shown that Augustine’s urgings to conversion and his advocacy of the use of force in conversion had as their main goal the unity of the Church. Augustine’s rationale for the use of force in order to unite the Donatists to the Church was grounded in his concern for the Donatists’ salvation. Since the Church is the home of the Holy Spirit, through which sins are forgiven, the Donatists lacked the Holy Spirit and their sins were not forgiven. Thus, to benefit from baptism received outside the Church and to put themselves on the path of salvation, the Donatists had to join the Church.

Thus, Augustine argued that the Donatists, who believed that they were persecuted by the Church allied with the State, should not object to this temporal chastisement since the measures against them were intended to bring them into the unity of the Church for their salvation. Although Augustine, in advocating the use of force in view of Church unity, could be judged as morally wrong, he defended his arguments with Scripture, in which he found examples, including Paul’s forced conversion by Jesus, which supported his goal of unity. Since the Donatists were theologically orthodox, as Augustine himself confessed, and since the Donatists’ moral behavior was not at a level not acceptable to Catholics, Augustine exaggerated the importance of unity and the use of force in order to achieve it. Indeed, since Augustine used the Bible in a biased way in order eliminate through the use of force the Donatists as a community, and since he ignored the Donatist tradition, Augustine could be judged as morally wrong. However, since the society in
which Augustine lived was a totalitarian society, in which unity and order were very important factors for the society’s well-being, Augustine’s advocacy of the use of force against the Donatists would hardly have appeared exaggerated to most of his contemporaries, except the Donatists and their sympathizers. Augustine, perhaps blinded by the Church’s wide extension and recognition throughout the Roman Empire, was not willing to recognize that the Donatists had a scriptural tradition and orthodoxy such as that existing in the Church. Since the Donatists were forced indiscriminately to join the Church, thus occasioning the likelihood of faked conversions to God, Augustine’s main goal in the Catholic-Donatist controversy was the unity of the Church. According to Augustine, neither a pious life nor baptism in Christ’s name outside the Church put one on the path of salvation. Thus, Augustine emphasized the unity of the Church, in which alone both a pious life and baptism in Christ’s name have meaning, that is, are effective and lead to salvation.

The next chapter, on Augustine’s view that the Church does not consist only of saints, has shown that Augustine believed that maintaining Church unity mattered more than the effort to keep the Church free of sinners at the cost of losing unity with the Catholic Church and its mixture of saints and sinners. Since no one could be righteous outside the body of Christ, the Donatists, according to Augustine, though claiming to be without spot or wrinkle, could not be righteous because they were not in the unity of the Church. Since Augustine knew very well that good people in the Church rub shoulders with notorious sinners, he came to the opinion that those in the Church who did not live by charity were not going to be saved as part of the eternal city of God, although they lived physically in the Church. Thus, in order to do justice to those good Christians in the
Church who lived by charity and were going to be part of the eternal city of God, he came to speak of them as a spiritual church within the empirical Church of the empire. However, since the Church was the body of Christ the home of the Holy Spirit in which sins are forgiven, Augustine advocated conversion to the Church and unity because it was the most certain place of salvation. In addition, in spite of the mixture of the good and bad in the Church, its unity should be maintained because the separation between the good and bad in the Church was reserved for the final judgment.

In the chapter on the sacrament of baptism, I have shown that Augustine’s arguments about baptism against the Donatists had again as their main goal the unity of the divided churches in North Africa. Since the unity of the Church had been broken over the issue of holiness, the administration of baptism had become a problem in the Catholic-Donatist controversy because the Donatists believed, in agreement with Cyprian, that sinful leaders should not administer baptism because, through their sin, they rendered it invalid. In order to unite the divided churches of North Africa, Augustine argued that the Donatists, especially the leaders charged with administering the sacrament of baptism, were not saints and, therefore, not free of sin. Urging the Donatists to join the Church, Augustine asserted that baptism was valid regardless of the place where it was received if it was administered in the name of Christ. However, since the Church is the place of the Holy Spirit, who keeps the Church united and mediates forgiveness of sins, Augustine asserted that baptism was not effective unto salvation outside the Church. Thus, in order to be saved, the Donatists had to join the unity of the Church, in which their baptism was valid and their Christian life meaningful.
I hope that this dissertation will help the reader to understand and to appreciate two Christian traditions, one of the Catholic Church, the other of the Donatists, each one with its own understanding of itself. I have shown that, according to Augustine, Church unity mattered most in the Donatist-Catholic controversy. The true church was the Church which was united and spread throughout the world. Conversion through the use of force was justified because there was no salvation outside the unity of the Church. Although only spiritual people of the Church would be saved, the Church was one and should be united until the final judgment, when the good and bad in the Church would be separated from each other. Although baptism in the name of Christ was valid wherever it was administered, it was not effective for salvation outside the unity of the Church. Thus, we can confidently say that unity of the Church is the dogmatic principle that guided Augustine during his conflict with the Donatists.

While some scholars have acknowledged summarily Augustine’s interest in Church unity, this dissertation, which focused on Augustine’s works of an epistolary nature, treated it in an unprecedented manner. Indeed, this dissertation showed that Augustine’s primary emphasis on the unity of the Church came from a combination of his personal background; Christian tradition; the social, political and religious context; his position as a bishop; and the evolution of the schism. These factors contributed strongly to Augustine’s view on Church unity, in which were anchored all his other theological positions in the Catholic-Donatist controversy that were treated in this dissertation.
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