**UNDERSTANDING AUGUSTINE’S CHANGING JUSTIFICATION FOR STATE-SPONSORED RELIGIOUS COERCION AND ITS CONTEXT WITHIN DONATIST NORTH AFRICA**

It is perhaps only a coincidence of history that, Augustine of Hippo, one of the greatest and most influential personages in the history of late antique/early European society and in the history of the Christian religion lived and worked in an era that saw the requirements and job-description of bishop change from that of clandestine community organizer to that of the local overlord for non-Christian majorities as well as that of being a quasi-delegate of the secular regime in an era of civil unrest. But what is certain is that this transition bore considerable consequences on the life and ministrations of Augustine because of his operation within a place and time where Roman Catholic Christians were often a minority at the beginning of his public career in North Africa. In Augustine’s North Africa, society and religion was deeply and often violently divided because of the powerful cross-currents of the indigenous Donatist movement.

It is this context, in which the Catholic Augustine would have to actively engage majority populations of rival Donatists, that the bishop of Hippo developed and refined his method of asserting the truth of his Christianity as well as upholding the legitimate function and authority of the state. That Augustine found his flexi-methodology in these circumstances as opposed to others on the other periphery of the Mediterranean partly explains the rationale, and sometimes lack thereof, with which he sought to institutionalize, without formal opposition, the Catholic Church’s unique status as the counter, albeit complimentary, reality to the Roman secular regime in North Africa.

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1 To this end, Augustine himself noted in his *Sermo* 302.19, that the ability of the bishop to perform pastoral duties was being burned by secular concerns. G. WILLS, *Saint Augustine and the Donatist Controversy* (London, 1950), 133: “The great churchman was often a leader of society in temporal as well as spiritual matters.” But this phenomenon cannot be said to be indicative of North Africa exclusively. Commenting on Augustine’s transition for seeing conversion as an ongoing process through sacramental signs between a person and God to the legitimate use of the state in prompting conversion, F. RUSSELL notes: “We can see how far Augustine has come from *Confessions* 13 to *Letter* 185 (10.46; 11.50), from the working of the Holy Spirit in the world to the Holy Spirit of discipline within the church. How his social and cultural horizons have narrowed! Now signs were not merely coercive speech acts, but the church itself was close to becoming a coercive sign. Intellectually, the burden has shifted imperceptibly from discovering the truth to disseminating the truth. Correspondingly, bishops have institutionally become coercive stewards (dispensatores) of the truth. The church, now a church of bishops, is endowed with its own rationale, not that of the Roman Empire, for disciplining its often stubborn members into the mystical body of Christ. Bishops have become agents of a lofty and paternalistic church. With this we are truly at the limits of ancient Christianity”, in “Persuading the Donatists: Augustine’s Coercion by Words”, *The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R.A. Markus*, ed. W.E. KLINKSHRN and M. VESSEY (Ann Arbor, MI, 1999), 129-130. But this is not to say that bishops in this period became total autocrats such as in later European history either. In Augustine’s *Sermo* 302.7, he reveals “the limits of Christianization in an African at the beginning of the fifth century, or more exactly, the limits of a bishop’s actual power on the face of a completely ‘lay’ administration, in the sense we give the word, whose representatives, even when they themselves were Christians, were jealous of the their autonomy relative to another hierarchy”, S. LANCEL, *Saint Augustine*, trans. A. NEVILL (London, 2002), 261.

In protecting the spiritual domain of the Church, Augustine began by bypassing state involvement, but as his willingness for coercion increased over time, he would often require the intervention of the secular domain, resulting often enough in their mutual benefit. It is this seeming innovation that draws forth the attention of this article. In these pages, we will assess and re-state the peculiar circumstances and how those impacted the development of the bishop of Hippo’s schema for religious coercion and ask whether this explanation suffices to clarify this enigmatic part of the life of Augustine.

I. Donatism and Religious Upheaval up to Augustine

What has been described as Augustine’s “attitude” or thoughts about religious coercion has been compared in light of the accredited general trademark of his thought: never appearing as a “‘doctrine’ in a state of rest…[and] marked by a painful and protracted attempt to embrace and resolve tensions.”

Peter Brown’s assessment seems to speak to the very heart of the matter with which Augustine and other Christian leaders of his milieu had to approach the Donatist movement in North Africa. The Donatist Church itself showed a remarkable propensity for organic-like adaptation to an ever changing provincial existence, it is then no wonder that the bishop of Hippo is claimed to have strategized and agonized against the Donatists “day and night” for a significant part of his life as a cleric. The tensions Augustine would experience in crafting his view of coercion reflect the reality of the restless character of Donatist Christianity, both historically and ideologically speaking. In this section, I will provide a portrait of the history of the Donatist Church in summary form. Only then will Augustine’s interpretations and responses be given their proper context.

A. Donatist Foundations

The Donatist saga finds its distant causal point centuries before the time of Augustine with the arrival of the Phoenicians from the east and later the Romans from the north. The two colonizing powers left behind a network of liminal cities along the southern Mediterranean which were not only loci for imperial wealth but were also brooding points for the indigenous North African Berbers. North Africa never became a colony the likes of Spain, Gaul, or Britain. Instead, the ancestors to the Donatists maintained their own culture and tongue, which led W.H.C. Frend to conclude that “…in many other aspects of African life Roman civilization was little more than a façade.” North African culture assumed a new flavor with the arrival of...
Christianity sometime in the late second/early third century. Two characters were elemental in their contributions to a unique Christianity in Africa: Tertullian and Cyprian.

Tertullian (160-225) was the first to articulate many of the views and attitudes that Donatists would later adopt for themselves. Among the theological innovations of the ‘grandfather of Donatism’ were (1) the centrality of purity as the mark of the real city of God (the Church); (2) the diametric opposition between the world (as personified by the Roman Empire) and the true Church; and (3) the legitimate, even preferential recourse to violence in establishing or witnessing to the Kingdom of God. Within that framework he defined quintessential positions on the specificity of baptism, rebaptism, and the advantage of martyrdom as constitutive for the life of the Church.

Cyprian (202-258) had a singular role in defining North African Christianity through his work as the bishop of Carthage. Under the influence of Cyprian, the notions of purity and the rigor of the Church (through the practice of baptism), the stark contrast between the Christian and secular worlds, and the primordial role of martyrdom (especially the example of Cyprian) achieved the rank of being nearly infallible North African theological tenants. Specifically, the bishop made unmistakable contributions with his treatment of lapsi (or those who buckled under the pressure of the imperial authorities to offer sacrifice to the state pantheon), the fundamental role of the bishop in a given church, and added bold new insight into North African biblical interpretation. As Frend also pointed out, although Cyprian was and is considered wholly orthodox through his writings and legacy he is justly considered as a founding-father of Donatism and that Donatus is far more to be considered Cyprian’s successor than Caecilian (who we are to meet in the next chapter). This is due to the fact that Cyprian not only assumed and retransmitted the North African Christian tradition from Tertullian, but also because he successfully installed the role of the martyrs, the puritanical mark of the Church as evidence of being the brotherhood of the righteous and rigorous (a Noah’s Ark), combined with a new awe of the episcopacy as “official policy” in North Africa.

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9 There is still quite a bit of uncertainty as to the exact beginnings of Christianity in Roman Africa. Frend points out that the Christian Church had not prospered “before the second half of the second century A.D” (Frend, DC, 87). There were some signs of Christian activity early on, Ep. 71.4; 73.3; P. Monceaux, Histoire Littéraire de l’Afrique Chrétienne Depuis les Origines Jusqu’à l’Invasion Arabe. Tome Deuxième. Saint Cyprien et Son Temps (Paris, 1902), II. 27-28. Even before that, in 180, a group of Christians in the unidentifiable village of Scilli were condemned by the Roman Proconsul Vigeilias Saturinus for refusing to offer a sacrifice to the state gods; see Acta Scillitanorum, ed. R. Harris, Texts and Studies (Cambridge, 1891), I. II, 106, and P. Monceaux, Hist. Litt. I. 63.

10 Tertullian, De Baptismo 5. 15.

11 Tertullian, Apologeticum 50. The practice was endorsed emphatically by the Carthaginian Archbishop Agrippinus at a regional synod assembled regarding the issue in 220; Cyprian, Epistula 71.4. Augustine later attempted to nullify this action; De Baptismo contra Donatistas II.9.14.

12 Tertullian is purported to have been the Latin editor of the Passio Perpetuae (Frend, DC, 118; Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, s.v. “Tertullian”). The literature would become a clear influence on North African Christianity, especially when it would become mirrored in the Donatist text Acta Saturini (Frend, DC, 115-117); Tertullian, De Scorpicio IX.1 ff: T. Barnes, Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study (Oxford, 1971), 164-186; Tertullian, De Pudicitia 21, “Exhube nunc apostolicae, prophetica exempla, ut agnosco divinitatem et vindicea tibi delictorum eiuscemiad remittendorum potestatem.”

13 Cyprian likened the Church to Noah’s Ark, with the elect few saved within it, in contrast to the drowning multitudes outside of its safe confines, Ep. 74.15.

14 Frend, DC, 140.
B. Fourth Century Africa

By the time of the Diocletian persecutions (303-305) the Cypriano-Tertullian (African) tradition had ripened to the degree that tensions were unavoidable between those who felt they faithfully interpreted Tertullian and Cyprian and their spirit of “flight from the world, sale [of] goods to the poor, and estrangement from one’s earthly city...[as] an alternative road to perfection [to martyrdom]”\(^{15}\) and those who had hoped for a Christian religion compatible with the *civitas saeculi*, that would offer “order, stability, and peace in the world.”\(^{16}\) This tension would mark the decades before Augustine’s birth in 354\(^{17}\) as well as the dialog during his life and career. Why this is so essential to understanding the thinking of Augustine is because he was faced with an African Christian world view much older than himself that was inherently bi-polar and for which there was no middle ground concerning the civil and spiritual realms.

Prior research shows that this bi-polar orientation of Donatist Christians is defined by an idiosyncratic political theology which is in essence an eschatological ecclesiology whereby these Christians were denizens of the *civitas Dei* pitted staunchly opposed to the *civitas diaboli*: “sacred and secular were two separate spheres, each contained within its own sociological milieu: the Church of the pure face to face with a hostile, persecuting world, consisting of secular society and the Roman government, and an apostate church which had come to terms with them. The ‘secular’ was irretrievably ‘profane.’”\(^{18}\) Added to this, was the fact that Catholics stood guilty (in the view of Donatists) of being compromised by the world into being an *ecclesia traditorum*, a worldly ally of the *civitas diaboli*. This body obviously stood in stark contrast to the *ecclesia martyrorum* (the *collecta* of Israel).\(^{19}\) For Augustine then the struggle became a matter of arranging a strategy that could effectively address such a demographic that vehemently rejected not only the Roman Empire (as the secular/ worldly power) but also the Catholic Church because of its collaboration with imperial governance.

Fortunately for Augustine and his contemporary Catholic colleagues, the Donatist leadership routinely espoused an inherently flawed behavior historically that regularly derailed the church’s success as the majority religion in Roman North Africa.\(^{20}\) This problematic behavior was the propensity for Donatist leaders to betray the long-standing African tradition of passive (or even sometimes antagonistic) resistance to secular powers by resorting to the Roman Emperor of one his delegates for their *recognition* as the authentic church in North African Proconsularis, Numidia, and Mauretania.\(^{21}\)


\(^{16}\) FREND, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 464.


\(^{19}\) This biblical typology is treated extensively in M. TILLEY, *The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World.* (Minneapolis, MN, 1997).


Donatist history is replete with examples of such reversals. However, the prime moments when Donatist leaders betrayed their own political theology are as follows: (1) shortly after the conversion of Emperor Constantine;22 (2) in 346 when Donatus the Great appealed to Emperor Constans for recognition as the authoritative Carthagian bishop (which resulted in the Marcarian persecutions);23 (3) the triumvirate of Gildo, Optatus of Timгад, and Primian in the 390s;24 and (4) the legal battles in 404-405 (that resulted with the Imperial Edict of Unity) and 411 (at the Council of Carthage which led to the generalized state-sponsored suppression, eradication of Donatist assets and congregations.25

In each case the outcome was virtually similar: by trying to attain the beneficial sanctioning of the state empire, the Donatist leadership found themselves time-after-time responded to with persecution instead of open arms. The final example provides the crux of the framework within which Augustine’s attitude towards religious coercion developed. As such, we will further investigate the events in this particular period and Augustine’s reactions and methods throughout. By the end of this segment it should be clearer as to the nature and influences of Augustine’s thought on the matter.

II. Augustine’s experiences

Augustine returned from Italy in 388 and by 391 had been ordained a presbyter in Hippo. It is with his becoming a presbyter that his entanglement with Donatism officially began and would continue as it became the foremost and most prolonged issue throughout his ministerial life.26 Augustine had little time to prepare his reaction to Donatism after entering ministry. Hippo itself was then still a Donatist stronghold with entrenched support from the citizenry.27 The

Circumcelliones were also a local reality in the areas surrounding Hippo; clearly Augustine’s new home was unfriendly territory for Catholic clergy.

The overwhelming odds in which the new presbyter found himself did not deter him from engaging his opponents. By 393 Augustine had penned his first anti-Donatist work, Psalmus contra partem Donati, which attacked the Donatist notion of the holiness of the earthly Church and the tendency to judge people before Judgment Day. The influence of Optatus of Milevis was clear in Augustine’s initial efforts, especially his summary of the history of the Donatist movement, his call to bring forth ecclesial unity in Africa, and to shun the scandal of Circumcellion aggression.

Augustine followed-up the same year with his first treatise against the Donatist Church Contra Epistulam Donati haeretici (which has been lost) in which he delivered a scathing critique of the practice of rebaptism. More striking though was the method he developed early on of not only attacking central premises of the Donatists and feverish pace, but also his direct attempt at communicating with his adversaries and his simultaneous effort to rally his own congregants against the Donatist Christians. By 395, when Augustine was made bishop, he had already laid out the basic strategy with which he would attack the weaknesses of Donatist political theology: question the historicity of that church, make the case for unity and universality, review the notion of sacraments, condemn the Circumcelliones, reject the separation of good and evil people, and reject the notion of separation from the world.

1. Augustine as Bishop

Upon being consecrated as Bishop of Hippo in 395, Augustine combined his preoccupation of converting the Donatists “day and night” through his theological efforts with a multi-tiered pastoral and legal method that sought to bolster the strength and gravitas of the Catholic Church in Africa and directed fire at the Donatist Church’s area of greatest weakness: the complication within its political theology that arose from certain retrograde actions in the 390s (such as the rejection of Parmenian’s inclusive theology and the upswing in the use of secular strong-arming by Gildo and Optatus of Timigad).

Augustine’s effort at better organizing his church to overcome the influence of the Donatists was no easy task as he faced serious problems personally and among his community.

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28 The relation between Donatists and Circumcelliones is a topic of historical debate. They were a movement of rebellious farmers mainly from Numidia and beyond, with a fanatic devotion for the martyr cult, that would attack Catholic clergy and Donatists that returned to the Catholic Church among other things.

29 AUGUSTINE, Psalmus Contra Partem Donati vv 84, 137-55; Contra Epistulam Parmeniani I, XI, 17-18; Contra Litteras Petiliani. I, XXIV, 26; POSSIDIUS, Vita Aug. 10.


31 Ps. cont. part. Donati, vv. 15-129.

32 Ps. cont. part. Donati, vv. 131-257.

33 Ep. 23.

34 AUGUSTINE, Enarrationes in Psalmos 35. 14; Enarr. in Ps. 54. 26.

35 POSSIDIUS, Vita Aug. 9.

36 Parmenian served as Bishop of Carthage from 355 to 391. He only assumed his jurisdiction in 361 when the Donatist episcopate returned to Africa under Julian; OPTATUS, De Schismate, II.7; P. MONCEAUX, Hist. Litt. V.5.
Augustine, having spent considerable time away from North Africa, had the liability of not being able to easily communicate in the cultural paradigm of his fellow Africans and had an appalling ignorance of the African context.\textsuperscript{37} With such defects aside, Augustine was able to overcome his deficiencies by channeling his focus on enhancing clerical and ecclesiastical discipline and by procuring the placement of collegial-mind ed bishops, i.e., his closest friends, in neighboring dioceses. Reigning in on clerical indiscipline was a pivotal move as Augustine’s Donatist critics had a history of opposing, deploring, and even removing scandalous and despotic clergy. The presence of greed,\textsuperscript{38} certain bishops’ frivolous spending of church funds,\textsuperscript{39} and recalcitrant presbyters defying their bishops\textsuperscript{40} were systematically dealt with in annual councils in Carthage at the initiative of Augustine and his colleague Aurelius of Carthage.\textsuperscript{41}

Even more pivotal in the Catholic counter-offensive was the placement of Augustine’s peers into North African Catholic dioceses for by doing so guaranteed a pool of bishops that would be team-players with Augustine in attacking the Donatists and also counter-balance the Donatist episcopate bishop for bishop especially in strategic places. In 394, Augustine’s close friend Alypius\textsuperscript{42} was installed as Bishop of Thagaste.\textsuperscript{43} In 397 another of his friends, Severus,\textsuperscript{44} was elevated to the bishopric of Milevis\textsuperscript{45} simultaneously with his other friend Profuturus, who was elected as the bishop of Constantine.\textsuperscript{46} In 400, Profuturus\textsuperscript{47} was replaced by another friend Fortunatus.\textsuperscript{48} Finally, the same year, Augustine’s future biographer, Possidius, was installed at Calama.\textsuperscript{49} The consequences of these improvements were far reaching. In the final decade of the fourth century, Augustine and his colleagues had successfully implemented a reform plan that brought about greater stability and efficacy to the Catholic Church in North Africa. As the “church began to raise her head once more”,\textsuperscript{50} it was only a matter of waiting for the most advantageous time to expose the inner weaknesses of Donatist political theology.

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\textsuperscript{37} Not only did Augustine not know Punic but also did not know Libyan; FREND, DC, 233. This fact would surface itself in Augustine’s disputation with Petilian of Constantine later (the target of his Contra Litteras Petilianit), see FREND, DC, 255. Examples of Augustine’s lack of familiarity are his statements about Numidia, such as not knowing where the dominant Auras Mountains were or that olives were not a major export (when it was the largest exporter in the Mediterranean), Sermo 46.39. This also seems to indicate that his area of travel and pastoral work were in the precincts of the Romanized areas along the coast and in Proconsularia. These rather minor details would have been highly symbolic to the Numidians and Mauretanians who would have identified Augustine’s ignorance with the condescension that they had come to expect from Roman elites. This perhaps explains Augustine’s naïveté in dealing with Donatist cultural sensitivities such as his notion that he could somehow “wake-up a bit” this Donatists with only some mild persecution, Cont. Cresc. II.20.25; Ep. 93.2 and 5.

\textsuperscript{38} Breviarium Hipponense [Breviary of the Council of Hippo], in Concilia Africanae A.345-A.525, CCSL. CXLIX, ed. C. MUNIER (Turnhout, 1974), can. 27; see FREND, DC, 245.

\textsuperscript{39} Breviarium Hipponense, can. 31.

\textsuperscript{40} Breviarium Hipponense, 171, 175, can.7 of the Council of 390; AUGUSTINE, Ep. 164.4.

\textsuperscript{41} Councils would end up being convened in 397, 398, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 407, 408, 410, 411; AUGUSTINE, Ep. 22.2.7; 23.5.

\textsuperscript{42} B. 354-d. 427/28; MANDOUZE, Prosopographie de l’Afrique Chrétienne, s.v. “Alypius”, 53-56.

\textsuperscript{43} Ep. 24; see also FREND, DC, 246-247.

\textsuperscript{44} R. 395-426; MANDOUZE, Prosopographie de l’Afrique Chrétienne, s.v. “Severus I”, 1070-1074.

\textsuperscript{45} Ep. 31.9.

\textsuperscript{46} Ep. 32.1.

\textsuperscript{47} R. 394/95-397/401; MANDOUZE, Prosopographie de l’Afrique Chrétienne, s.v. “Profuturus”, 928-930.

\textsuperscript{48} AUGUSTINE, De Unico Baptismo 16.29.


\textsuperscript{50} POSSIDIUS, Vita Aug. 7.
Augustine reacted to Donatism with several other core writings as bishop: *Contra Epistulam Parmeniani* (400), *De Baptismo* (400-401), *De Unitate Ecclesiae* (401), *Contra Cresconium* (405), and *Contra Gaudentium* (420). The three central lines of argumentation in these writings also appear in Augustine’s *sermones*. (1) Augustine explains to the Donatists that it is impossible for them to represent the true Church. The Church is by definition universal and unified. Donatists on the contrary do not live in *communio* with the churches outside Africa and have themselves disrupted unity by their schism.\(^{51}\) (2) Holiness is central for Donatists. All that is sinful must be removed from the Church; all sinners have to be expelled. Augustine does not agree, and underlines that the Church is a *corpus mixtum*, containing good people as well as sinners. Only Christ is allowed to distinguish between the good and the bad.\(^{52}\) Replying to the central thesis of Donatism that the Catholic Church is contaminated since she tolerates ‘unworthy’ ministers, Augustine states that the capacity to baptize did not disappear when the minister sinned. He also relativized the role of the minister, by indicating the minister as an instrument and not as source of grace.\(^{53}\) (3) Augustine rejects the Donatist plea that they are the true Church, because they are persecuted. Donatists cannot be considered as martyrs, because they do not suffer on behalf of a rightful cause but inflict themselves with such suffering.\(^{54}\)

To complement Augustine’s reactions to the Donatists in the *sermones*, another source must be consulted, namely his letters. Augustine wrote letters about coping with the Donatist controversy to colleague bishops and imperial officials who were in charge of implementing the legislation concerning Donatism.

### 2. The Imperial Edict of Unity (405)

In the first years of the fifth century the fall-out from the demise of Gildo and Optatus had a significant ripple-effect throughout North Africa.\(^{55}\) Augustine and his Catholic confreres had greater latitude in directing attacks against the Donatist community as the church found itself unable to safeguard its existence through temporal measures alone, it needed to win over hearts

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51 Donatists break the unity within the Church and are also divided themselves: *Sermo* 4; 10. 4-5; 33. 3; 88. 21; 90; 107. 3; 138; 147A; 159B. 17-18; 162A. 7-12; 202. 3; 266; 269; 271; 313E. 2-7; 340A. 11; 358. 2; 400. 7-12. Moreover, sacraments cannot be really received outside the unity of the Church (*Sermo* 132A. 2).

52 *Sermo* 4; 14, 16, 18, 20, 31-35: the Church has, just as Isaac, two sons: a bad and a good one. Otherwise put, the Church is a ‘mixed’ community. Sinners should not be rejected. Only Christ had the authority to separate the chaff from the wheat. Regarding this, the Donatists are wrong, they follow the *carnaliter* thinking of Esau. The topic of the ‘mixed’ nature of the Church, that *mali* should be tolerated inside the Church, frequently features in Augustine’s sermons, although not always explicitly anti-Donatist: *Sermo* 15; 90; 99; 164. See also the serial *sermones* 248-249-250-251-252-252A on the two miraculous drafts of fish, in which Augustine emphasizes that the first one was a ‘mixed’ catch, good and bad together, while in the second one only the good remained.


54 Not the fact of *poena*, but the just *causa* constitutes martyrdom. Augustine holds this against the Donatists (*Sermo* 275. 1; 313E. 2-7; 327. 1-2; 359B. 16-17). Augustine repeats this often at occasion of martyr feasts without explicitly referring to Donatists (e.g., *Sermo* 94A; 274; 285; 335; 335C).

55 Frend, *DC*, 249.
and minds. Conversely, Augustine, Aurelius, and their allies would now be better disposed to imperial resort as they now engaged the Donatist leaders on a more level battleground.\footnote{An important factor in the catholic ascendency was the imperial ratification of Catholic privileges and the \textit{condemnatio} of catholic opposition groups; \textit{Cont. Ep. Parm.} I.12.19. At the same time, Catholics were at the winning end of a string of high profile property lawsuits; \textit{Cont. Ep. Parm.} I.12.19.} At the same time Primian and the freshly minted Petilian of Constantine\footnote{B. 354-d. 419/22; \textit{Mandoûze, Prosopographie de l’Afrique Chrétienne}, s.v. Petilianus”, 855-868.} assumed the banner of Donatism. In these opening years of the new century, they found themselves engaged in a highly intense back and forth with Augustine and the Catholic party. Primian and Petilian were drawn into the debate under the pressure of their own membership fleeing for the Catholic Church\footnote{\textit{Cont. Litt. Pet.} II.98.225; \textit{Sermo} 252.4-5; \textit{Ep.} 93.1.3; \textit{Ad Catholicos Epistulae de Secta Donatistarum} 25.74.} and the looming threat of the dust being blown-off the covers of previously established anti-heretical legislation.\footnote{\textit{Gest. Coll. Carth.} I.139 (SC. 195).} Additionally in this period, particularly at the Council of 401, the Catholic party had gained enough of a standing to openly combat the Donatist Church with missionaries who were disbursed throughout Africa, with Augustine himself serving as an example proselytizer.\footnote{\textit{Cont. Cresc.} III.60.66.}

The combination of renewed Catholic evangelization initiative and the looming threat of imperial interdiction on the behalf of the Catholics in Africa sent the leadership into a scurry in order to defend their church’s position as the true church in Roman Africa. Petilian of Constantine participated in the Donatist reaction. In his \textit{Epistola ad Presbyteros},\footnote{Letter preserved in P. \textit{Monceaux, Histoire Littéraire de l’Afrique Chrétienne Depuis les Origines Jusqu’a l’Invasion Arabe. Tome Cinquième: Saint Optat et les Premiers Écrivains Donatistes} (Paris, 1920), V. 311-238.} Petilian chastised the efforts of Catholics to legitimize their church since in the Donatist viewpoint the Catholics constituted the \textit{ecclesia traditorum}. He used familiar Donatist arguments to get his perspective across: the validity of baptism is incumbent upon the worthiness of the minister\footnote{\textit{Cont. Litt. Pet.} II.2-5.} for the Holy Spirit cannot dwell in an unsanctified place. The genuine Church is the one that has retained the purity of the sacraments so that even ordination in a fallen church or by a fallen minister would only transmit impurity.\footnote{\textit{Cont. Litt. Pet.} II.8.17.} It is simply impossible for the Catholics to have purity in their church for they were the heirs of the idolater Caecilian, therefore their church is even worse in their deeds than Judas for the Caecilianists (another Donatist term for Catholics) had received and betrayed the Word of God and not just Christ in his bodily form as Judas had.\footnote{\textit{Cont. Litt. Pet.} II.8.17.} Also, the appellation of “catholic” used by the Caecilianists referring to geographical dispersion was inferior to “catholic” as meaning whole or pure by the Donatists.\footnote{\textit{Cont. Litt. Pet.} II.38.90.}

The inflation of tensions between the two parties spurred by Petilian’s works erupted among the ordinary followers of each church as the Donatists perceived the prolific writings of the Constantine bishop as “a new gospel.”\footnote{\textit{Ad Cath. Ep.} I.1.1.} The Donatist segment found recourse in their time-
tested approach of separation from the outside world as the rural-based Circumcelliones found themselves motivated after Gildo’s collapse and the chance to safeguard the Donatist-Numidian identity. The Circumcelliones reacted harshly against the Catholic missionaries in their lands as well as Catholic clergy and their Roman Imperial counterparts in general.\(^67\) Rioting soon occurred in places in North Africa.\(^68\)

By 403 the Catholic party had responded in kind by making the first recourse to secular authority in its recent history.\(^69\) When Donatist representatives rejected the demand to present themselves at the Carthage Council of 403, at the behest of Augustine and Aurelius, the Catholic leaders referred the matter to the cooperative Proconsul Septimus who compelled the Donatist to comply.\(^70\) Primian entered the fray as he adapted traditional Donatist political theology to the conflict, straight-away rejecting the mandate to meet with those “who had exiled our fathers”, the sons of *traditores* that had offered the letters of the emperors as opposed to the Gospels offered by the sons of martyrs.\(^71\)

The matter intensified further as Augustine’s colleague Possidius was ambushed and nearly killed by Circumcelliones under the command of a Donatist presbyter.\(^72\) The affair was afterwards submitted to be rectified by the secular legal system and on a second attempt, as all of Africa awaited the outcome,\(^73\) it was decided by the Proconsul Septimus that the presbyter’s bishop (Crispinus\(^74\)) was responsible for the presbyters wrongful actions,\(^75\) and under the laws established by Emperor Theodosius in 392, also found guilty of being a heretic and forced to pay the penalty of 10 lbs. of gold.\(^76\)

The ruling was a groundbreaking event in Donatist history as it was the first occurrence in which the church was declared to be heretical and enemy of the state under the Theodosian

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\(^67\) *Ad Cath. Ep.* 19.50 and 20.54; *Cont. Cresc.* III.42.46.


\(^69\) In the 390s, the Catholics were largely unsuccessful in bringing forth litigation in the Roman court system, E. TENGSTROM, *Donatisten und Katholiken*, 102-104. The first time the Catholic advocates attempted to use the Theodosian Law of 392 was in 395, which set the precedent for nearly a decade in which it was found that the 392 anti-heresy law was incredibly difficult to apply concretely; *Cont. Litt. Pet.* 2.83.184; see also E. HERMANOWICZ, *Possidius of Calama*, 96-155.

\(^70\) Before 404, the Catholic’s only grounds were the 981 anti-Manichean laws and the 392 Theodosian canon (16.5.21). The challenge was, therefore, to convince the Roman administrators that Donatists were heretical: “The gap between the intent of the law and how (and against whom) the Catholics wanted that law applied necessitated intense rhetorical persuasion, a legal swimming against the current”, E. HERMANOWICZ, *Possidius of Calama*, 102.


\(^72\) AUGUSTINE, *Cont. Cresc.* III.46.50.

\(^73\) POSSIDIUS, *Vita Aug.* 12, “et per totam Africam expectante.”


\(^75\) AUGUSTINE, *Cont. Cresc.* III.47.51.

\(^76\) The 392 law instituted by Emperor Theodosius was rarely utilized at first, especially in North Africa; R. M. ERRINGTON, *Roman Imperial Policy from Julian to Theodosius* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006); P. BROWN, “Religious Coercion in the Later Roman Empire: 283-305”, *History* XLVIII (1963): 83-101, reprinted in P. BROWN, *Religion and Society in the Age of Augustine* (London, 1972), 283-305. And when the law was actually applied, it was only applicable towards clergy and landowners; *Cont. Ep. Parm.* 1.12.19.
anti-heresy legislation. Augustine and Possidius by then had come to understand the political theology of their opponents and knew that if Crispinus was forced by the Empire to pay the fine, then it would be seen by the North Africans as persecution and the Donatists and especially the Circumcelliones would be revived again. The two realized that the penalty needed to be struck-down, but before they could achieve this goal Crispinus set out to appeal the court ruling before the Emperor in Ravenna, only to have the penalty doubled. Augustine and Possidius, understanding that the Donatist Church would become resurgent and emboldened by the Emperor’s penalty had the sentence commuted and prevented the Donatists from gaining ammunition for martyrdom.

A. No killing, no torture

Official state repression of Donatists was a well established fact by Augustine’s time. Several measures, ordered by Constantine and his successors, varied from the restriction of civil rights to execution. Augustine however never allows capital penalty or physical torture. He writes this explicitly in Epistula 100 to proconsul Donatus, who was sent to North-Africa to ‘solve’ the Donatist problem. Augustine feared that the proconsul, impressed by the committed crimes, would opt for severe and harsh action. Inspired by love, Augustine advises, we should not opt to kill Donatists, but to pray for them. Augustine’s Epistula 133, addressed to tribune Marcellinus who had to judge Circumcelliones who murdered a catholic priest, begs not to apply the law of equal retribution. Augustine proposes: no capital punishment, no mutilation, but a kind of useful hard labor. Killing heretics moreover is not efficient and even counter-productive, because it implies the killing of haeretici before they have had the chance to convert. And this is exactly the only purpose of coercive measures: bringing the erring people back on the right track. The killing of the non-converted would render them to hell. This cannot be the aim of somebody acting out of neighborly love. Augustine also does not tolerate the execution of pagans that try to restore the pagan religion and commit acts of violence against Catholics.

B. In the beginning: against all form of coercive measures

During the first years of Augustine’s episcopacy, he used only the instrument of friendly persuasion. He tried to dialogue in personal contacts, public discussions and letters. His correspondence preserved several examples of this. He writes Maximinus that he attempts a peaceful exchange of thoughts and that he, for this reason, wants to postpone the discussion until no armed force is present anymore. Augustine’s dislike of violence is illustrated in his letter to Eusebius: “God, who sees the secrets of the human heart, knows that, as much as I desire peace among Christians, I am troubled by the sacrilegious actions of those who persevere in its disruption in an unworthy and impious fashion. God knows that this attitude of my mind is...
directed toward peace and that I am not trying to force anyone involuntarily into the Catholic communion, but to reveal the plain truth to all who are in error. Then, once our ministry has made it evident with God’s help, the very truth may be enough to persuade to embrace and follow her.”

Augustine writes a father who wanted to force his Donatist daughter to come back to the Catholic Church, that he should not do this. His daughter has to do this from her own will and longing. Augustine was even, in the beginning, not in favor of applying the imperial legislation against heresy. In a letter to Januarius, he explains he tried to not apply the existing legislation in the name of love for one’s neighbor and mildness. The same letter states that Augustine wants to demand a fine only in the case of proven violence against Catholics, while the legislation of Theodosius stipulates that all *haeretici* have to pay that fine.

To avoid inauthentic conversions, Augustine opposed forced conversions. Summarizing, he recalls in *Retractiones* 2. 5 that he confessed the Donatists (in the lost *Contra Partem Donati*): “In the first of these books, I said: “I am displeased that schismatics are violently coerced to communion by the force of any secular power.” And truly, at this time, such coercion displeased me because I had not yet learned either how much evil their impunity would dare or to what extent the application of discipline could bring about their improvement.”

But in 404, general civil unrest began to spread throughout North Africa with the Circumcelliones at the forefront. The Catholic bishops convened a council in Carthage to direct efforts and containing the uprising by forced coercion. By then the Catholics had learned to avoid utilizing general persecutions because of the way in which the Donatists benefited from them as in the case of Marcarian or Count Romanus. Instead the bishops opted to impose the Theodosian penalty (10 lbs. of gold) on base villages and outpost of Circumcellion operation and stripped the Donatists of property and inheritance rights.

In the following spring, Emperor Honorius issued an edict mandating the unity of the churches in Africa as well specifically declaring the Donatists heretics for the purpose of safeguarding North Africa as a place of last resort for the battered and shrinking Roman Empire. Honorius’ decree initiated the penultimate persecution of the Donatist Church. Starting in the year 405 Donatist churches and properties were confiscated, some clergy were exiled, property rights were suppressed, rebaptism was proscribed, and Donatist leaders like Primian and Petilian fled Proconsularia and Numidia. The atmosphere of Donatist persecution and

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85 Ep. 35. 4.
86 Ep. 88. 7.
88 AUGUSTINE, *Cont. Cresc*. III.46.50; Ep. 3.1; 88.6.
89 Ep. 88.7; *Breviarium Hippomense*, 93.
91 C.Th. XVI.5.37-38; XVI.6.4-5; XVI.2.2.
92 C. Th. XVI.6.4.
93 Ep. 88.10.
Catholic ascendancy was sustained in the subsequent years even though the former group would end up retaining group cohesion in the long term.  

By 410, the Donatists, assisted by their Circumcellion militants, were beginning to gain ground with a sense of being the *ecclesia martyrorum* stronger than ever as they had become the obvious target of persecution.  

As Alaric was in the process of entering Rome, Honorius pulled out all of the stops in smothering Donatist Christianity by means of “blood and proscription.” There was then no greater matter of importance than stabilizing Africa. To insure that Africa would remain a reliable place of refuge in scenario of complete surrender to the invading barbarian armies, Honorius dispatched an Imperial chancellor and friend of Augustine, Count Marcellinus, to Africa for the express purpose of bringing about a final solution to the Donatist Controversy. Marcellinus’ task was to see to the unreserved enforcement of anti-heretical legislation and to direct “the removal of the seditious superstition [Donatism].” With the entrance of Count Marcellinus into the controversy, the final episode in the development of the Donatist political theology would be begun as they would mistakenly attempt once more to engage the Catholics on the same playing field via the conduit of the Roman Empire.

3. COUNCIL OF CARTHAGE (411)  

The unambiguously Catholic Marcellinus, upon arriving in Africa, set June 1st as the start date in Carthage for a North African general council which would be the apparatus used to fulfill Emperor Honorius’ demand for the suppression of the Donatist Church. To lure the Donatist bishops into attending the council, Marcellinus restored confiscated basilicas to the Donatists to the surprise and dismay of Catholics who sensed that the time of their justification was near.

For Primian and other Donatist leaders, the consensus was that the best chance they had to abrogate the Unity Edict of 405 and hence preserve the status of their church was a forceful presentation of their case and to receive a favorable ruling at such a council. In total, two hundred eighty four Donatist bishops made their way to Carthage to defend their faith. On May 18, the bishops began a triumphant procession through the gates and into the African capital.

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95 *Ep.* 3.1; *De Unico Baptismo* 12.20.  
96 *C. Th.* XVI.5.51.  
97 *C. Th.* XVI.11.3.  
99 M. TILLEY, “Dilatory Donatists or Procrastinating Catholics,” 7-19; also see *Actes de la Conférence de Carthage en 411* (SC. 194).  
100 Count Marcellinus appears to have been a theologian of sorts and a disciple of Augustine. He was the object of many literary dedications by Augustine, including ‘De Pecatorum Meritis’ (*Retractiones*, II.33) and *De Civitate Dei*, prologue. Augustine, with whom Marcellinus would continuously confer with through the council and afterwards, often referred to the Count as a most faithful son of the Catholic Church, *Ep.* 128, 151.8.  
102 To the Catholic observers, the common thought on the return of properties to the Donatists was “Why return to heresy what would soon be shared in unity?” *Gest. Coll. Carth.* I.5 (SC. 224); *Ep.* 128.4.  
for what was to be their last public show of strength. Shortly, they were to re-present the fortunes and mistakes of their predecessors in the 310s and 347.

As soon as the council opened difficulties arose for the Donatist bishops. It was certainly within their tradition to welcome the rebuke of the Empire as a sign of their persecuted authenticity, but any hopes of advancing their own agenda were dashed by Marcellinus. He declared forthrightly that the council had been called by the emperor to “confirm the Catholic faith.” The Donatists, who had “discolored Africa with vain error and superfluous dissension,” were to be given the opportunity to embrace the truth or leave and be condemned in absentia.

The following days proved even more difficult for the Donatists. For the format of the council they had in mind past councils such as Cyprian’s in 256 or Secundus’ in 312 wherein every bishop could offer their perspective individually. Marcellinus, however, had selected an Imperial lawsuit-type format to allow an expeditious ruling consisting of nine representatives on each side. The Catholics opposed the chance for the Donatists to stage a mob-scene, but Marcellinus relented. As such, bishops of both sides filled-in the council chambers and stated whether or not they recognized a rival bishop in their see which frequently resulted in jabs and tension for both sides. As history had shown and predictably, the bishops from Proconsularia and Byzacenia were predominately Catholic while those from Numidia and Mauretania were overwhelmingly Donatist. In all, this show of numerical superiority resulted in two hundred sixty six Catholic and two hundred seventy nine Donatist bishops.

The Donatist defense strategy during the short council appears on the surface to have been quite fluid, at times they were given to tactics of obfuscation. Gradually, in the attempt to prove the authenticity of the Donatist Church, Petilian led the debate by accusing Augustine and some of his colleagues of being closet Manicheans. Eventually, such tactics proved faulty as Marcellinus steered the debate over which church in Africa was legitimately to be titled the “catholic” one. Augustine led the charge to investigate the historicity of Donatism and in doing so exploited a fatal error for the Donatists: a lack of written records. The Donatists, with their extensive access to oral tradition, were nearly completely unable to prove (at least from the

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105 Ad Donat. post Coll. 25.43, “Cum tante speciosi agminis pompa”.
109 FRENDE, DC, 280.
110 The Donatist Emeritus of Caesarea made light of the set-up, arguing that a council should be modeled on that of the Scriptures; Gest. Coll. Carth. I.31 (SC. 195).
112 Both Catholics and Donatists traded accusation of having no rivals or of intimidation by their rival in several heated moments; Gest. Coll. Carth. I.139 (SC. 195); Gest. Coll. Carth. I.120, I.121 (SC. 195).
113 Gest. Coll. Carth. I.121 (SC. 195); I. 134; I. 165.
114 For the purpose of broadcasting strength through numbers both sides desperately attempted to add absent or ill bishops which eventually propped up the totals to 286 Catholics and 284 Donatists; Gest. Coll. Carth. I.213-214 (SC. 195) ; Gest. Coll. Carth. I. 215-216 (SC. 195).
117 Gest. Coll. Carth. III. 176-79 (SC. 224) ; AUGUSTINE, Ad Don. post Coll. 25.44.
surviving record) their arguments on the beginning of their church. They could not prove Caecilian had ever been condemned outside of the Donatist Council of 312, while the Catholics were able to provide records of Constantine’s vindication of Caecilian in 314 through the Arles decision and in 316. Nor could the Donatist defense even exonerate Donatus himself from having been condemned in 313.

The argumentation period went so badly for the Donatists, that even their ecclesiological notion of being separate from the world was vetoed by Marcellinus. For the president of the council, the parable of the wheat and the tares that the Donatists had referred to throughout their history was about the Church and not the world. The final death blow against the Donatists occurred when Marcellinus sought any evidence from Donatists that the cause of the initial schism, the alleged traditio of Caecilian and Felix of Aptungi, was verifiable. The Donatist has no evidence with which to corroborate their claims. With that, the council was called to a close. The same night Marcellinus summoned the two parties, and as expected, ruled in favor of the Catholics to the outrage of the Donatists. Almost as quickly and chaotically as it had began, the Council of Carthage has come to an end.

Without wasting any time after the ruling, Marcellinus had his decision communicated and enforced throughout Roman Africa to village seniores, ordines of the Roman cities and towns, and to the administrators of the agricultural estates and other Imperial assets. The Donatist bishops having not learned from the experience of the consequences of contradicting their political theology at the council sought immediate recourse to Honorius in Ravenna. This action resulted in an even steeper penalty for the appellants. Furthermore, in 412 Honorius commanded Selecus, the Praefectus Praetorio, to exile the Donatist clergy to the farthest outposts of the Empire, all Donatist property was to be confiscated post haste, and heavy fines in gold and silver placed on non-conformists. And as Augustine had learned about the Donatist political theology earlier, the death penalty was by-passed so as to deny the Donatists another opportunity to revive themselves through martyrdom.

4. THE IMPERIAL ENFORCEMENT OF REUNIFICATION AND THE SURVIVAL OF DONATISM (411 AND AFTER)

The 411 Council of Carthage dealt the Donatist Church a serious blow to its organizational abilities as a result of, yet again, trying to use the Imperial authorities as a means

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118 And when the Donatist delegates did attempt to use their materials, they often did so in non-thorough ways which provided the Catholics with even more ammunition. One example of this comes from the attempt to show that Caecilian had been condemned by Constantine via OPTATUS, Against the Donatists, I.26. The Catholics indicated to the embarrassed Donatists that if they had read just a bit further down the line that it says Caecilian was exonerated; Brev. Coll. III.20.38.
120 Brev. Coll. III.20.38.
122 Gest. Coll. Carth. III.584 (SC. 224).
123 Gest. Coll. Carth. III.587 (SC. 195). The Donatists accused Marcellinus thereafter of physically restraining them during the pronouncement; Ad Don. post Coll. 12.16; 35.58.
124 PL. XI, col. 1418.
125 Ad Don. post Coll. 12.16; POSSIDIUS, Vita Aug. 13.
126 C. Th. XVI.5.52.
of legitimization. Some bishops fled their see cities, such as Petilian in Constantine, and the Hippo bishop. 127 Many properties were confiscated and many congregations were unified or integrated into the Catholic communities. 128

However, it seems that the Donatist remnant in this period underwent a ressourcement of sorts in which they returned to a more familiar mode of life as a persecuted minority at odds with the world as the mass conversions that were expected after the council never did occur. In an atmosphere of persecution, Donatist North Africans continued to have ordination, disseminate their message and propaganda, and even remained in control of key Numidian settlements such as Caesarea and Thamugadi. 129 In the Numidian countryside (the Donatist heartland), the Circumcelliones again regrouped and protected a network of churches on the large farm estates. 130 Even in historically less-extreme Mauretania, where Bishop Emeritus of Caesarea 131 had taken refuge, Augustine himself was unsuccessful at changing the hearts and minds of the locals after a direct plea and exchange with Emeritus. After preaching and imploring the Mauretanians in their own basilica, the people stood behind their still-defiant Emeritus. 132

Between 417 and 420 the situation seems to have gotten even worse for the Catholic attempt to conform the Donatists as there were ever strengthening “pockets” and “regions” 133 of resistance throughout North Africa which were also enhancing their tenacity. 134 By 428, as the cities and towns of North Africa came under the onslaught of “hordes of African barbarians plundering and destroying without resistance,” 135 the villages of Numidia and Mauretania remained relatively undisturbed as the Roman Age was coming to an end and Augustine was about to breathe his last. In these rural, mutually protected communities the flame of the Donatist faith continued on through the collapse of the old order of the ancient world.

By being humiliatingly vanquished at Carthage in 411, the Donatists returned to familiar roles as a clandestine and highly animated group in the African hinterlands. In a time of transition as the Catholic churches in the cities eroded in their structural integrity, the Donatist political theology offered a bunker with which to protect their way of life. They had withstood the Roman Empire’s repeated attempts to persecute them and surely were to withstand the new Vandal regimes. It is no wonder then, that in Augustine’s final days, as in his first as a presbyter, he noted reluctantly the increasing amount of conversions to Donatism 136 and that church’s strengthening influence over the African peoples. 137

127 Ep. 139.2. 144; Ep. 142.
128 Ep. 141; In Ioan. Evang. Tract. VI.25; Ep. 185.9.36-37.
129 Contra Gaudentium Thamugadensen episcopum Donatistarum 1.33.43.
130 Ep. 139.2.
132 AUGUSTINE, Gesta cum Emerito Donatistarum Episcope 1, 10, 11, cols. 704-706.
133 In 418, Augustine mentioned in writing to Count Boniface of only a few minor “pockets” of Donatist presence, Ep. 185.7.30. By 420, in attempting to arbitrate the surrender of Gaudentius and the Thamugadi basilica, Augustine mentions there were now “regions” of resistance, Cont. Gaud. 1.23.26.
135 Ep. 220.7.
136 In Ioan. Evang. Tract. 10.5.
137 Ep. 185.7.30.
III. Summary observations and proposals for Augustine's change of mind

Before 400, Augustine was pro absolute religious freedom and dialogue. After 400, a change of mind can be observed. From that moment on he justifies the use of some coercive measures. Augustine himself regards this change as a shift in his thinking. What could explain this change in attitude?

With this change, Augustine joined the opinion of the majority of the African bishops. They considered legally allowed violence as a justifiable defense against the terrorist excesses of Donatists. Donatists, despite the question whether they are connected to the Circumcelliones or not, used violence against Catholic priests and churches. They liked to destroy pagan altars, idols and temples. Moreover, the bishops of North Africa were convinced that coercion can result in real conversions and restore ecclesial unity.

Conversion of pagans, Manicheans and Jews do, according to Augustine, not belong to the tasks of the Church, since they were never a part of the Church. For this reason, Augustine rejected the legal suppression of pagans, Manicheans and Jews. However desirable their conversion is, this should not happen with violence. They should be treated in a Christian way. Donatists however are fundamentally different. Donatists are: ‘bad brothers, but still brothers’, ‘bad, lost sons’. Christians do not want to fight the Donatists, but on the contrary want the best profit for them, namely that they re-enter the unity and share with the other Christians the heritage of God. Donatists remain connected with the Church, still belonging to the Church. That is why the responsibility of the Church concerning Donatists is much larger than concerning non-Christians. The Church, as Locus Veritatis, has the duty to protect her members against error. Coercion can be a means to help erring members to recognize the truth. In the period of the Carthage Conference with the Donatists, Augustine preached (ca. 411) that people who refuse to be defeated by truth, actually are defeated by error. He exhorts Donatists to tear down the wall of error, so they could become brothers again. Only truth overcomes and this truth is caritas. It is very clear that Augustine situates this veritas and caritas within the Catholic Church, built on Christ as rock.

A. Coercion, but moderated

Augustine changes his mind around 400. From 405 it is clear that he favors coercive measures in religious conflicts, although he always opposes torture and execution. In 411

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138 Ep. 93; 185.
139 Enarr. in Ps. 65. 5; 149. 13; Sermo 90. 10; In Epistulam Iohannis 10. 7; Ep. 91; De Haeresibus 46. 15-17.
140 Enarr. in Ps. 46. 31.
141 Cont. Ep. Parm. 3. 1.
142 Sermo 359. 4.
143 Ep. 93. 16.
144 Sermo 358. 1. 4-5.
however, he asks his community in a homily not to act as the Donatists – who hate peace – but to treat them gently, to pray for their healing.  

A terminological excursion gives us some clues. Augustine uses the words *correptio* and *correctio* and not the negative and legalistic sounding *cohercitio*. Augustine does not aim at punishing, but at correcting. Augustine formulates this in a pedagogical and medical vocabulary. *Epistula* 185 states that Donatists should be treated by Church and state as patients by their doctor, reprimanded as disobedient sons by their father, corrected as women by their husband. Christians do not persecute profaners for their own pleasure, but for the salvation and spiritual progress of those unfaithful.

As a correcting measure Augustine accepts the abolishment of some civil rights of the Donatists. Augustine allows the prohibition of certain religious acts – worship in general and the praxis of rebaptizing, specifically – as a instrument of repression. Augustine advocates two kinds of punishment. Strokes with a stick, as was common in schools and episcopal courts, are a possible punishment, however only during a juridical investigation and to discover the guilty as quickly as possible. A fine is another possibility. This should be a moderated fine, which leaves the guilty enough to live from. Augustine also approves that the emperor declares the last wills of Donatists to be invalid. Augustine advises officials to act as gently as possible and to be quite forgiving when the good intentions of the guilty become noticeable. This however does not imply that Augustine neglected committed crimes and stimulated a kind of impunity. His purpose is not to punish, but to save. Moreover, being merciful is an imitation of God, who calls to love the enemy. It is crucial that nobody is forced to convert unwillingly. Inner consent is always necessary. External pressure however can promote this. When force is the only way out, that force should be joined by instruction aimed at inner conversion.

**B. Six ways to argue in favor of coercion**

Augustine built the application of legal coercion upon six arguments. A first motive is the legal defense of the catholic community against Donatist violence. Augustine’s second...
argument is somewhat polemical. The state intervention and repression is justified because Donatists accepted that too, and were actually the first to appeal to the civil authority. Augustine reminds them of the fact that Donatists collaborated during the persecutions by Julian the Apostate. Donatists supported imperial repression of paganism. Donatists moreover persecuted, very violently, the Maximianists, an inner Donatist schism. Augustine, thirdly, refutes the Donatist claim that they are the true Church, because real Christians are to be recognized from the fact they are persecuted (Mt. 5: 10). Augustine replies that martyrdom is not (solely) constituted by suffering, but by the just cause. Only the good cause makes a martyr: Christ. Martyrs do not strive to suffer; their suffering is only an unintended consequence of their witness of Christ. The suffering of Donatists is nothing more than a punishment. Moreover, the martyr’s palm only can be attained within the true Church, from which Donatists have dissociated themselves. And again the fact that they themselves persecute the Maximianists, renders this Donatist argument invalid. The repression of Donatists by Catholics does not harm the Donatists, but is a medicine for their healing. It is actually the Church that is suffering, not the Donatists, because of their violence and mainly because of the rupture of unity caused by them. Since the Donatists remain ontologically connected with the Church, the Church grieves and is harmed, like a father because of his run-away sons. The Donatists admit that the food of unity is good, but still they refuse to eat it. By a forced return, they are given Christ as bread and as peace. That food has to be given to them by force, because not giving that food would be far worse. The Church, as mother, has namely that parental task: nourishing and taking care of the sick.

Fourthly, Augustine thinks that coercion can be ‘useful’. External force can lead to inner consent. Afterwards, one is happy to be forced to accept what one previously did not want to accept. The Bible supplies Augustine with a fifth argument. The Old Testament contains examples of just men persecuting and killing others. Elias killed false prophets, Sara persecuted Hagar, and Moses punished the rebellious Israelites. Donatists however reject the Old Testament. Augustine replies with the doctrine of duas voces. The old law of force and coercion is not perfect, and now of lesser importance than in the period of Moses. The remaining usefulness of the old law, despite its incompleteness, cannot be denied. For this reason the situation in which Israel was forced to obey to certain laws is equal to the ecclesial situation of North Africa in the fifth century. The Jewish law and the imperial legislation against heretics are both essentially pedagogic. Augustine is aware of the shift between the Old and New Testament.

160 Ep. 93. 12.
163 Sermo 89. 2; 108. 14; 204. 4; 325. 2; Ep. 88. 8; 89. 2; 93. 6; 105. 5; 185. 9; Cf. Cont. Gaud. 1. 6. 22.
164 Ep. 185. 10.
165 Sermo 359. 7-8: the medicus does not combat the patient (the Donatist as a person) but rather the illness (the heresy).
166 Enarr. in Ps. 145. 16; Ep. ad Cath. 20. 56; Cf. Cont. Gaud. 1. 25; Cont. Litt. Pet. 1. 102.
167 Sermo 360C. 5-6.
168 Ep. 93. 1. This is an issue that F. RUSSELL develops in depth in his ground-breaking article.
169 Ep. 44. 9 ; 93. 6. Cf. Contra Faustum 22. 20.
170 Sermo 62. 8.
Testaments: the abolishment of capital punishment.\textsuperscript{171} This evolution however did not imply a complete absence of punishment or violence in the New Testament. Christ himself used violence casting out demons and chasing the moneychangers out of the temple in Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{172} Paul was converted by force.\textsuperscript{173} Another biblical motif is the parable of the banquet in Luke 14: 23. The parable tells that the master orders his servants to force all unwilling guests to enter (\textit{compelle intrare}). The banquet symbolizes the unity of the Church, the unwilling guests \textit{schismatici} and \textit{haeretici}.\textsuperscript{174}

Augustine’s last argument is that civil authority has the duty to intervene in religious matters. The state has to take care of its subjects. Christian state authorities have to defend the highest good: faith and unity in faith.\textsuperscript{175} This reasoning is based on the interpretation of schism and heresy as a \textit{crimen} falling, like all other crimes, within the juridical power of public officials and thus punishable under the Theodosian codices.

\textit{C. Donatists: Augustine’s thinking on religious coercion}

Tempered by a context that was wholly influenced by Donatist Christianity, Augustine seems at first sight to be intolerant in religious matters, since he endorses a certain degree of coercion and repression. This attitude however is not caused by a radical aversion to everything that is heterodox. Love and truth are Augustine’s main concerns. Love for truth and love for the other urges him to bring the erring other in a loving way back to truth. That truth is love, the love of community and of the one Church.

Augustine rejects execution and torture. He argues through six different ways in favor of the application of corrective measures on Donatists. In the end he respects human freedom. Faith cannot be forced upon somebody. Salvation implies free acceptance of grace. When a Donatist comes back to the Church, this is God’s work.\textsuperscript{176} Only God can realize an inner acceptance. Coercion and punishment sometimes can be useful, since it forces people to reflect and can help them understand that they are erring. Augustine’s interpretation of men as weak and sinful makes him emphasize the responsibility of everybody in power, especially in the Church.

It has also to be pointed out that Augustine in his sermons, after the change of mentality in 400, actually remains silent about coercive measures, but is always pleading for a peaceful dialogue aimed at reconciliation, to give a good example, to not act like Donatists are acting themselves. Speaking about religious coercion happens almost exclusively in letters to (ecclesial and imperial) officials, responsible for implementing the imperial legislation regarding Donatists. This legislation provided a large scope of coercive measures, while Augustine requests to opt only for the most moderate and rehabilitative forms.

\textsuperscript{171} Ep. 44. 10.
\textsuperscript{172} Mk. 1: 34 ; Mt. 9: 32 ; Lk. 4: 35. Mk. 11: 15 ; Mt. 21: 12 ; Lk. 19: 45.
\textsuperscript{173} Ep. 24; 62; 93. 5; 173. 3. Cf. \textit{Retractationes} 1. 12. 6.
\textsuperscript{174} Sermo 112. 1-8; Ep. 173; Cf. \textit{Cont. Gaud.} 1. 28-29.
\textsuperscript{175} Ep. 185. 25.
\textsuperscript{176} Sermo 360. 1.
IV. Conclusion

That Augustine modifies his “attitude” or approach to religious coercion during the course of his episcopate is certain. Thus we concur with the general assessment among scholars, especially as elaborated by Brown, Russell, and Hermanowicz. However, in the course of our research on this subject, we could not help but identify nuances to this general assessment. For one thing, the entire context within which Augustine formulated his thinking towards handling dissidents was colored by Donatist Christianity. Understanding Augustine in this regard is simply for naught without taking this into consideration.

Because of Augustine’s situatedness within the Donatist context, it is also important to identify the myriad complexities with which it took to effect state-sponsored reaction against the majority Donatist Church. We identified that the Donatist leadership’s negligent implementation of their faith’s political theology exposed its vulnerable side. So while the Catholic leaders failed at first to successfully lobby for favorable imperial legislation, by going against their own political theology tradition the Donatists provided the Catholics a golden opportunity. A stinging series of anti-Donatist, pro-Catholic legal decrees issued forth from Ravenna and Rome thusly, including the Edict of Unity and the mandate for the 411 Council of Carthage. These legal mandates rattled the Donatist Church’s structural bearing to its core and sent it reeling for survival.

At the same time as the Catholics found success at suppressing their Donatist rivals, vis-à-vis imperial authority, Augustine and his colleagues generally tempered their agreeableness by excluding torture and capital punishment. At heart, Augustine saw the need for the conversion or curing of Donatists and other dissidents that way a doctor cures an illness, via *senatio in radice*. For Augustine, the state too has a role in safeguarding its people’s wellbeing, which is done by insuring the integrity of the Christian faith. All in all, it is a matter of preserving the integrity of the truth and making room for love through unity and reconciliation.

But as significant as these observations are, there are still other questions which need to be address in the future such as how does Augustine appropriate the possibility of religious coercion differently in the Pelagian crisis than in the Donatist controversies? Along those lines: how will Augustine’s intermediate attitudes towards coercion, developed in the later 390s and early 400s, stand in framework of his mature systems seen in *De Civitate Dei*? A last question might be about addressing the historicity of this approach to coercion within the North African tradition or whether it could be considered as pure innovation when comparing the thought of Tertullian and Cyprian? Those possible research questions aside, the evidence clearly shows that Augustine’s approach to state-sponsored religious coercion is as multi-faceted and dynamic as his reputation suggests.
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