



## Augustine and the Donatist Schism

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The African Church was split into halves throughout most of the fourth century by [the Donatist] schism of the early Church. At the beginning of Augustine's career the great majority of the Christians of Africa belonged to the schismatical, or Donatist, faction. Even at the close of the century it is questionable if the Donatists were not still in the majority. But as soon as Augustine became a power in the Church, the success of the Donatists began to wane. He devoted himself with intense ardour to the extinction of the schism, and the first twenty years of his episcopate are largely absorbed in the controversy. In order to understand this aspect of his work, we must glance at the history of the schism. M. de Pressense and other philosophic historians assure us that it was a natural expression of the growing democratic protest against the advance of hierarchic pretensions. The fatal objection to the theory is that the Donatists had a hierarchy no less ambitious and authoritative than that of the Catholics; and there was at that time no question whatever in Africa of anything like allegiance to Rome. The real origin of the Donatist schism is far more prosaic, and offers little ground for large political theories.

After the close of the last persecution of the Christian Church, its adherents began to emerge into the light of day and repair the breaches in their organisation. The stress of the persecution had lain heavily on north-west Africa, and it was a small and obscure body that formed its Church in the early years of the fourth century. So much is familiar history. The unfamiliar circumstance, which the chronicles of the fourth century abundantly establish, is that this obscure and struggling body was undermined by corruption. One naturally assumes that the Christian clergy who survived the last of the great trials of the Church must have been exceptionally chastened. No assumption could be farther from the truth. It is in an ecclesiastical soil of exceptional grossness that the Donatist schism took root.

The actual outbreak of the schism dates from the year 311. In that year the bishops of the Proconsular (or Carthaginian) province met at Carthage for the ordination of a bishop to that important see. Mensurius, the preceding bishop, had been summoned to court to answer for a contumacious subordinate. Having a presentiment that he would not return alive, he buried the gold and silver vessels of his church and intrusted the secret to two of his senior clergy, Botrus and Celestius. He had, apparently, a shrewd, if unflattering, appreciation of his clergy, and so he gave a list of the buried treasures into the charge of a pious old dame in his congregation. Mensurius did not return, and clergy and laity met for the purpose of electing a successor. Botrus and Celestius had been so much impressed with the wealth of their church that they exerted themselves to secure the election of one or the other to the see. However, a certain Cascilian, who had been a popular archdeacon under the late bishop, secured the majority of votes, and was ordained Bishop of Carthage by the assembled bishops. When, moreover, the old dame came forward with the secret list of the treasures, and Botrus and Celestius were compelled to hand over the full wealth of the Church to their more favoured colleague, they were reduced to an extreme stage of disaffection.

“Ambition and avarice” were thus two of the three great roots of the schism, says Optatus;

the third was “the anger of a humbled woman.” Cascilian had had the misfortune to quarrel with an influential lady of the congregation during his archidiaconate. Lucilla, a wealthy matron of Carthage, had a habit of kissing the lips of an alleged martyr, whose body was preserved in the church, before presenting herself to receive the sacrament. There was, it appears, a great lack of discrimination in the matter of reverencing people as martyrs in that violent age, and Cascilian had endeavoured to check the general laxity. He had forbidden the Christians to flock to the jails with stores of food and drink for the sustenance of all kinds of criminals under the pretence that they were martyrs of the Christian Church. He now scolded Lucilla publicly for “preferring a dead man’s lips” (Optatus has grave doubts about the martyrdom) to the sacred chalice, and the angry woman deeply resented his action. When Caecilian was elected bishop, Lucilla joined forces with the disappointed elders, and they determined to elect a rival bishop. That was the origin of the schism. All the subsequent pretexts and allegations are an afterthought; and all talk of a democratic reaction is quite out of place.

But to explain how the conspirators succeeded in causing a schism, we must glance back once more into earlier years. In the year 305 a small group of ten or a dozen bishops met at Cirta for the ordination of a bishop of that town. The persecution had just ended, and the senex, or Primate of the Numidian province, Secundus, Bishop of Tigisis, proposed to begin by an inquiry into the conduct, during the persecution, of the assembled bishops. One by one he accused his colleagues of having saved their lives during the persecution by delivering to the pagan authorities the Scriptures and other sacred possessions. One by one his colleagues admitted the crime, until he came to a half-savage prelate of the name of Purpurius. “You are accused of murdering your nephews,” said Secundus to him. “Yes, I did kill them,” answered the prelate, “and I’ll kill anybody who attempts to upset me.” He added that if Secundus tried to bully him as he had done the others, he would inform the meeting of the way in which the primate had saved his own life in the persecution. Secundus took to reflection at that, and finally decided to “leave the whole matter to God.” They then proceeded to ordain the new Bishop of Cirta. The clergy and the better part of the laity were opposed to the candidate (Silvanus) who was presented for the see, saying that he was a notorious traditor; but the lower orders, who favoured Silvanus, had shut them up somewhere during the election, and thus secured a happy unanimity for their candidate. The Numidian bishops were induced, by the gift of a respectable sum, to overlook the irregularity of the election, and they ordained Silvanus; the new bishop’s first act being to confer the priesthood on the man who had furnished the bribe for Secundus and his colleagues.

It was to these men that the thoughts of the conspirators turned. They were invited to Carthage, and were received at the house of Lucilla. Various reasons were then discovered for questioning the validity of Caecilian’s ordination. Secundus maintained that a primate (the Bishop of Carthage being Primate of the Proconsular province) should be ordained by a primate. But the chief allegation was that the bishop who had laid hands on Qecilian, Felix of Aptunga, was a traditor. This was a serious point to raise, since it was then easy to spread the idea that an ordination might be invalid if performed by an unworthy minister. Cascilian entered into communication with the Numidian bishops, offering to come before them for a discussion of the situation, and asking that at least they would ordain him themselves, if they held his ordination to be invalid, since he had been unanimously elected by the people and clergy. Purpurius alone saw an advantage in this offer; “let him be invited here,” he said in barbarous Latin, “as if we were going to ordain him, and we’ll smash his head in for his trouble.” The other bishops had a rudimentary moral feeling, it appears, and they preferred to ignore Cascilian; moreover, the people, hearing of the threat, refused to let Qecilian go to their council. Pocketing a heavy bribe from Lucilla, the seventy bishops

proceeded to set up a second bishop at Carthage, selecting a certain Majorinus, a reader of the Church, and one who shared with the dead “martyr” the affection of Lucilla. They then gave Majorinus the usual letters of communication with all the churches of the Roman world, and the Donatist schism was launched.

Such is the undisputed story of the origin of the Donatist schism. In view of the misleading theory of M. de Pressense and other Christian Presbyterians, I have thought it necessary to describe the sordid episode at some length. Nor can it be said that we may trace a democratic reaction in the remarkable growth of the schism. In the course of time, as will be seen, the Donatist ranks were swelled by thousands of fugitive slaves and labourers; and we find many democratic pleasantries, such as forcing the wealthy Catholic to pull the chariot in which his slave was seated, or to take the place of the miller’s ass. But this is a purely accidental circumstance. There was precisely the same hierarchic claim on the Donatist side as on the Catholic. There was no question whatever of Rome’s pretensions, or of reaction against them. It is true that after a few years Constantine had the quarrel adjudicated upon at Rome, but the Roman bishop then acted only as an important and impartial neighbour who was called in to arbitrate; and that not by the Africans, but by the Emperor. It will be seen that throughout the whole century of the struggle neither Catholics nor Donatists recognised the mild pretension of the Bishop of Rome to a kind of vague supremacy. The truth is, that even the notion of a federation of churches was only dimly conceived at the beginning of the schism. It was elaborated by the Catholics, or Caecilianists, in the course of the struggle when they found the “churches beyond the seas” to favour the case of Cascilian; just as, on the other hand, the Donatists only elaborated, as the schism advanced, their central position of the invalidity of sacraments (whether baptism or ordination), conferred by sinners. The dogma of a central authority to which submission was required would have been a point of the first importance in the arguments of the Caecilianists. They do not even whisper it. It was “a concern of the Africans,” as both sides agreed at the great Council of 411, and “the churches beyond the seas” were to stand aside and communicate with the winner, after they had fought it out.

I will touch very briefly the development of the schism down to the time of Augustine. Rome had a traditional horror of the reiteration of sacraments, just as Carthage had a traditional laxity in that regard. Rome, therefore, could not hesitate to communicate with Cascilian, and that meant the support of the newly converted Emperor for the Cascilianists. The Donatists, seeing that the imperial gifts were going exclusively to their rivals, appealed to the Emperor for a decision. The case was, of course, decided against them at Rome, Aries, and Carthage, after a series of inquiries; and, finally, by Constantine himself in 316. At first Constantine persecuted the schismatics, though he is said to have told the Africans eventually to settle the matter themselves. His successor took little more notice of them, and under Julian their churches were restored to them and their bishops recalled. Valentinian and Gratian passed a number of violent decrees, confiscating their churches, etc.; but none of these were enforced very rigorously until 398, the date when we find Augustine facing the schism. In 395 Theodosius, the able and zealous ruler of the East, passed a severe law against all heretics who exercised priestly functions. He died in the same year, and Gildo, an African prince, usurped authority over the whole of that diocese. Gildo was very friendly with an active Donatist bishop, Optatus of Thamugade, and during his brief authority the Donatists spread over the provinces with the wildest license. They had by this time associated with their cause a vast and remarkable army who went by the name of the *Circumcellions*. It seems hardly just to compare this army with the Covenanters, or any other historical body, as is done sometimes. In addition to the genuine religious fanatics who flourished their “Israelites” (heavy clubs) over the heads of the Cascilianists, there were undoubtedly thousands whose only attraction lay in pillage and violence.

Fugitive slaves and vagabond monks flocked to the standard. Augustine tells many a story of Catholic delinquents evading the discipline of the Church by joining the Donatists, and of women who thus escaped from marital control; in one letter (No. 35) he tells of a deacon, suspended for improper behaviour at a certain nunnery, immediately passing over to the Circumcellions with two of the nuns. At a word from one of their bishops these wild hordes would spread into a district, and fill it with revolting outrages. They would pour vinegar and salt-water down the throats of the Catholic clergy, put lime in their eyes, and sometimes cudgel them to death. They would seize their churches, wash and scrape the walls and floors, burn the wooden altars, sell the sacred vessels in the open market, — to be bought generally by *sordidæ mulieres*, says Optatus, — and cast the consecrated elements to the dogs. They would force the laity to receive Donatist baptism, and see that they were faithful to their new profession. They would harness wealthy Cascilianists to their own chariots, turn respectable *patresfamilias* into millers' asses, put rush tunics on priests and daub them with mud, burn and plunder houses, destroy debtors' tablets, and commit a thousand outrages. During the short usurpation of Gildo this pandemonium was at its height. At the beginning of 398, however, Gildo was defeated by the imperial forces, and the Church would have been more than human if it had not retaliated. Before the end of the year Honorius reaffirmed the decree of Theodosius, and awarded the penalty of death to all who violated the churches or assaulted the clergy of the Orthodox party. But we have now arrived at the date of Augustine's struggle with the schism, and must review its further progress in the light of his actions.

Augustine was well acquainted with "the fury of their drunken Circumcellions "from the beginning of his episcopate. When he came to Hippo he found that the Donatist baker would not bake for the Cascilianists. He found his people often violently forced into the Donatist communion, and his clergy assaulted. He himself only escaped an ambush they set for him on one occasion by providentially losing his way. Yet it need hardly be said that his attitude was at first one of gentleness and forbearance. We have to follow his development step by step until he became what Barbeyrac has called "the patriarch of Christian persecutors."

Augustine's first Donatist document is a letter to a bishop of the sect named Maximinus, written in the year 392. It is a courteous, if not friendly letter, greeting Maximinus as "most beloved and honour- able brother." In the following year he wrote his popular ballad against the sect, and his work *Contra Epistolam Donati*. In the same year a provincial synod, which met at Hippo, dealt gently and temperately with the question, and decided to allow Donatist priests to retain their functions after conversion if they had not rebaptised, and if they brought their congregations with them. In 397 a Council of Carthage discussed the question of admitting to the service of the altar converts who had received Donatist baptism in their infancy. Legates were sent to ask the opinion of the bishops of Rome and Milan (the two being put on a quite equal footing); and when these prelates opposed the idea, the Africans quietly disregarded their opinions (though they sent further legates to convince them) and adopted the practice. The fact that some of their churches had "not even an unlettered deacon "to serve them moderated their dogmatic feeling. In the same year Augustine had another public debate. He had endeavoured to arrange one with the Donatist Bishop of Hippo, but without success; though he had urged the civil magistrate to put pressure on his rival, and had spoken with some warmth of the excesses of the Donatists. However, in 397 he was passing through a small town on his way to Cirta, and he heard that the Donatist bishop was at home. He at once went to the house and engaged the bishop, a quiet and tolerant old man of little ability, in a debate. Augustine stipulated for the presence of notaries as usual, but they seem to have been Donatists, and they refused to work. His own clerics then commenced to take down the debate, but a great crowd of idlers pressed in, and made so much noise with their comments and applause, that the debate has

unfortunately lost the reward of immortality. Augustine afterwards wrote his version of the proceedings to his rival's congregation, and complained that Fortunius had falsified copies of some of the works they referred to.

In 398 Gildo was defeated, as I said, and the golden age of Donatism came to an end. By this time the Cæcilianists were reduced to a pitiful condition in the country. But this was the year of the turn of the tide. Honorius at once renewed the law of Theodosius, which imposed a heavy fine on every heretic exercising sacerdotal functions, and curbed the violence of the Circumcellions. Augustine still looked with disfavour on the interference of the civil authorities in the controversy. It was about this time that he wrote his two books *Contra Partem Donati* (which we no longer have), in which he declared that he 'Miked not to see the schismatics violently forced into communion by the exercise of secular authority.' We have a private letter in which he shows that he is even averse to parental pressure being put on children of mature years; he desires no converts who do not come to him with perfect spontaneity. But his attitude rapidly changes in the following years. We can trace the growth of his opinion in his letters until we find in 401 open indications of a change. One of the ablest of the Donatists was an ex-advocate, Petilian, now Bishop of Cirta. He was the Augustine of the Donatist party, the successor of their great Donatus of Carthage. Augustine secured a copy of his writing against the Caecilianists, and began his work *Against Petilian's Letter*. In the second book of this work he not only defends the use of force by the example of Christ in the temple, but he sets an example of intemperance and arrogance of speech which the Donatists quickly follow. Petilian's temper was not improved by remarks about his "diabolical pride" and "most inept loquacity," and he repaid in the same coinage. In the third book Augustine has entirely lost the idea of moderation. He is sadly domineering and abusive: "Let him go now," he says at one stage, "and denounce me as a dialectician with his puffing lungs and turgid throat," and there is much talk about his "stupid cursing" and "blasphemous mouth." In the end he modestly contrasts their respective writings as "the inflated and the solid, the bloated and the sound, the storm and the calm, divine utterance and human presumption." In the meantime he had an adventure with another able Donatist bishop, Crispinus of Calama. His disciple Possidius, now Catholic bishop of that town, was attacked by the Donatists in an neighbouring village. They set fire to the house he took refuge in, thrashed the men of his party, and stole all their horses. Possidius, obviously acting on Augustine's advice, appealed to the law — not the civil law, which would punish his assailants, but the new law of Honorius against heretics, which he claimed to apply to Crispinus. The Donatist was convicted, and it was only the intercession of Augustine and Possidius that saved him from a heavy fine. But the important point is that Augustine has appealed to the law against heretics. There are other indications that his feelings are hardening. In all that he writes from the beginning of the fifth century he betrays a pitifully narrow and sectarian judgment of his fellows. Thus in his *De Bono Conjugali* (written in 401) he finds that "the dinners of the just are more meritorious than the fasts of the infidels, the marriage of the faithful more meritorious than the virginity of the heretic"; in fact, the heretic's fast is "a service of demons," the Donatist virginity "no better than fornication."

Of the many works he wrote against the Donatists at this period little need be said. They have no literary value, and little human interest of an agreeable kind. They repeat incessantly the familiar arguments on the familiar points — whether Felix of Aptunga was a traditor, whether the sacraments given by an unworthy minister are invalid, and so forth. Between 400 and 410 he wrote his *De Baptismo* (seven books), *Contra Epistolam Parmeniani* (three books), *De Unico Baptismo* (an answer to a work of Petilian's which is "inflated only with sounding words," but which he answers for the sake of "slower minds"), and the four books *Contra Cresconium*. The last-named work (written in 409) is a

temperate reply to a Donatist grammarian who had taken up Augustine's reply to Petilian, and asked (evidently in reference to Augustine's abusive language) whether he thought of "finishing by his intolerable arrogance" a controversy that had proceeded so many years. In his letters Augustine expresses his feeling about persecution with perfect candour. In 406 he writes to a venerable Donatist bishop (Ep. 88) in defence of the recent severe law against the schismatics. They appealed first to the Court, he says; it is a case of the guilty taking Daniel's place in the lions' den. He still, however, lays great stress on the outrages of the Donatists (admitting to some extent that the Circumcellions generally get a *quid pro quo* from the Catholic laity) in extenuation of the law. A little later (Ep. 89) he writes a candid and direct defence of the laws. Their coercion is "a most merciful discipline," the "medicine of the Church"; "madmen" must be bound and "lethargies" must be stirred up for the sake of their health; even the devil would be less bold, he thinks, if some coercion were imposed. He is clearly passing from his apologetic attitude to the view that religious coercion is an admirable institution. And two years afterwards, in a letter to the Rogatian bishop, Vincentius, he shows himself "the complete persecutor." Vincent seems to have written to chide him — notice the perversity of human judgment! — on his degeneration since their school-days at Carthage, when Augustine was a "quiet and respectable youth." Augustine replies (Ep. 93) with a long and unwavering defence of coercion. "The important point is not whether a man is compelled," he says, "but to what he is compelled." The fruits of the imperial laws are their justification. He knows even Circumcellions who are now grateful that the pressure of the laws had led them to study the Caecilian position more carefully. In a word, persecution has at length appeared to him in the light of a providential and highly philanthropic institution; it is a use of force which he can only compare to the coercion with which we prevent a fever-patient from flinging himself out of the window. He adds the *tu quoque* argument and the usual appeal to the outrages of the Donatists; but the dominant idea of the letter is an appreciation of religious coercion in and of itself.

The laws to which Augustine refers in these letters are those which Honorius was induced to pass in 405. Two years previously the Caecilianist bishops, in council at Carthage, had sent a temperate and earnest challenge to the Donatists to meet them in a public conference. The Donatists scornfully rejected the invitation, and Augustine thereupon wrote a letter to the laymen of the sect, in which he pointed out the moral of the refusal of their clergy. This greatly incensed the Donatists, so that the only immediate result was a renewal of the activity of the Circumcellions. But with Augustine's gradual conversion to the policy of coercion a change of tactics was inevitable. He had hitherto been the chief obstacle to a change of policy, constantly appealing to his colleagues to rely exclusively on moral force in matters of religion. His moral force had not achieved the success he had anticipated. His works found able critics, and his challenges to debate were rarely accepted, and still more rarely effective. In the year 404, when the African bishops met at Carthage on the 26th of June, he gave his fatal sanction to the policy of recourse to the "secular arm." Two bishops were sent to ask Honorius to enforce the law of Theodosius and make it explicitly applicable to the Donatists; they asked also that he would renew the law which made invalid all legacies to heretics — except in the event of conversion. Honorius replied in February of the following year with a severe law. He declared the Donatists to be heretics, confiscated the meeting-houses and goods of all who repeated baptism, excluded them from testamentary benefits, and imposed heavy fines on aggressive controversialists. It was now open to the Catholic bishop to drag his rival — as we have seen Possidius drag the Bishop of Calama — before the civic tribunal, and have him not only heavily fined, but also branded with the odious appellation of "heretic." Carthage was almost immediately purged of the schismatics. When the bishops met again in the month of August, they sent two of their number to thank the Emperor for his welcome legislation, and issued a letter

to all the African judges, acquainting them with the tenor of the new law.

The next three years were marked by a dreary and repellent struggle with the angry schismatics. Homeless and proscribed, the Donatists had no weapon but their dreaded club, and they used it with vigour. The fifth century was not of a temper to meet violence with meekness, and Africa was soon devastated by a kind of civil war. 1 On the 23rd of August, 408, the virtual ruler of the Western Empire, Stilicho, came to an ignominious end. Schismatics and pagans at once asserted that the coercive laws passed during his regency died with him, and began to seize their churches and temples once more. Stilicho's successor, Olympus, was a Christian, and Augustine wrote, at the first rumour of his promotion, to secure his interest on behalf of the Church. In the meantime (in October) the African bishops met again at Carthage, and sent two of their number to the Emperor at Ravenna, asking him to reaffirm the validity of the laws passed in the time of Stilicho. Augustine was not present, but he wrote a second letter (No. 97) to Olympus, and urged him to secure the enforcement of the law without waiting for the deputation from Carthage. When Augustine's letter arrived we do not know. He speaks of writing "in the middle of winter," but we need not take that too literally; on the other hand, he obviously believes his letter will arrive before the Carthaginian bishops. Probably both reached Ravenna about the end of November or beginning of December; and with them came a crowd of maimed and half-blinded clerics, who had fled to court with lively proof of the outrages of the Donatists. In December the Emperor sent the desired decree to Donatus, the Proconsul of Africa, and the work of making converts by fiscal machinery recommenced. Augustine wrote to Donatus (Ep. 100), urging him to apply the decree at once, but to spare the lives of the Donatists and avoid all appearance of vindictiveness.

Then there occurred a development of the situation which somewhat perplexes the ordinary ecclesiastical writer. In the summer of 409 the African bishops were once more thrown into grave anxiety by the appearance of a new decree from Ravenna, in which Honorius suddenly attains a commanding height of humanity and toleration. He directs that in future "no one shall embrace the worship of the Christian religion except by his own free will," and rescinds his oppressive decrees against the Donatists.

The writer of the article on "Donatism" in the *Dictionary of Christian Biography* notes that political considerations influenced the decision, but claims that it was dictated "partly by the kindness of heart" of the Emperor. Once more the spirit of the Donatists revived in Africa, and the hateful struggle was renewed about the altars of the Prince of Peace. In June, 410, the bishops met at Carthage, and sent four delegates to Ravenna to renew their complaints. The answer came swift and sharp. The "kindliness" of Honorius has had a brief reign. In September he sends the following decree to Heraclian, now supreme in Africa: "The decree which the followers of heretical superstition had obtained to protect their rites is entirely rescinded, and we direct that they suffer the penalty of proscription and death if they again venture to meet in public in their criminal audacity." A few weeks afterwards a new decree was issued, ordering a public conference to be held at Carthage within six months, in which the Catholic and Donatist bishops should defend their respective positions before a civil judge.

...For the moment, before describing the great conference at Carthage, I will only say that we have no need whatever to make a microscopic research into the character of Honorius. Since the death of Stilicho in 408, the Court at Ravenna had lived in hourly dread of Alaric and his Goths. In 409 Alaric set up a rival emperor at Rome, and the possession of Africa became of supreme importance to him and his puppet. The practised army of the Circumcellions would have been a formidable auxiliary to an invading force, and it was well known they would not hesitate to join the Arian Goths. Hence the momentary "kindliness." The small force sent by Attalus into Africa was cut up by Heraclian in 410.

Honorius was informed that the loyal count had detained all the cornships, and was prepared to resist invasion. Hence the decree of September. But it was important that this religious schism, which had now revealed its grave menace to political unity, should cease as promptly and with as little violence as possible. Honorius therefore adopted the idea of a conference, which both Donatists and Catholics had urged more than once. On the 14th of October (six weeks after the fall of Rome) a decree was issued in the name of “the pious, prosperous, victorious, and triumphant emperors,” appointing the tribune Marcellinus to convoke and preside at such a conference at Carthage.

And towards the end of May, 411, Carthage began to stir with an unusual excitement. The Donatists had sent the summons of Marcellinus into every village of Africa, and the aged and infirm were implored to spend their last strength in an effort to reach the conference; some of them died on the way. A long procession of two hundred and seventy-nine bishops, with thousands of their supporters, marched proudly into Carthage towards the end of May. All the chroniclers are Catholics, and we are assured that the Cascilianists gathered two hundred and eighty-six bishops without straining their resources. The question of numbers was admitted to be of importance on both sides, and it would be interesting to know the date of the ordination of many of these bishops. It was at least made clear at the conference that the Catholics had in places two or three bishops within the limits of one Donatist par&cia. A further interesting circumstance seems to be suggested by the records. On the day the conference opened the Donatists were jubilant at finding they were in the majority, only two hundred and sixty-six Catholic bishops having signed the response, but they were greatly distressed to see twenty new bishops appear on the Catholic side when the roll was called. It looks very much as if the twenty were kept in hiding so as to give the Donatists a false security. Augustine also tells that he and a few others were discussing the situation a few days before the conference, and they doubted if more than one or two of their colleagues would express a willingness to resign if the verdict were given to the Donatists. To his surprise, all expressed such a willingness when a meeting was held to discuss the point. Thus the Catholics were able to make the magnanimous offer of resigning their sees if the Donatists proved their point, and sharing their ministry with their rivals if they themselves secured the verdict. Probably the only impression this generous offer made on the Donatists was the opposite to what Augustine intended. Those who lived with Augustine would feel no less than we do to-day that he would have thought it a sacrilege seriously to entertain the idea of losing his case and resigning his charge. It is difficult to see where the Donatists found a source of hope. Marcellinus was a zealous Catholic, and was much influenced by Augustine; and of the imperial inclination there could be no doubt. It is true that Marcellinus offered to retire if the Donatists desired another judge; but the tone of their reply, declining his offer, shows that they had no hope of securing an impartial judge. The debate was a farce, and the verdict a foregone conclusion.

On the first of June the conference opened at the Gargilian baths in the centre of the city. The Catholics had proposed that only seven speakers and seven consulters for each party, with four bishops to control the *notarii*, should take part in the conference. This was rejected by the Donatists, who attended in full force, and insisted on the attendance of all their rivals when the list of two hundred and eighty-six names was produced. Marcellinus took the chair, and was supported by the chief civic officials. When he saw the great throng of Donatist bishops, some of them weak with age and infirmity, he bade them seat themselves. The fanatical group refused to sit under the same roof as the *traditores*, and Marcellinus and his officials politely relinquished their own seats. The president then read the conditions of the conference, and gave an assurance that the losers would suffer no violence for their zeal.

It would be of little interest to follow the course of the conference in detail. The official



notaries were supplemented by four representing each party, and controlled by four bishops, so that we have a verbatim report of the proceedings, each speech being signed by the speaker. The first day was wasted in a quarrel about names and numbers, each side being now eager to prove how many bishops it had left at home. The second day was equally unprofitable. On the third day the tactics of the Donatists were cleverly met by Augustine and Marcellinus, and a long debate ensued. Petilian, the ex-lawyer, was the leader of the schismatics, and the “conference” was little more than a warm encounter between him and Augustine. He first claimed that the period assigned in the Emperor’s decree had elapsed before the date of the conference, but Marcellinus rejected his difficulty. Then he claimed that, the Catholics having demanded the conference, the Donatists, as defendants, had a legal right to discuss the character of the plaintiffs. This was met by the production of a petition for a conference which the Donatists had presented in 406. However, Petilian was eager to discredit his great rival by reviving the old calumny of the philtre. After a nervous duel with Augustine — Marcellinus interfering in such a way that a distinguished prelate said, rather profanely: “You take good care to defend them, by God !” — he hissed out the question that burned on his lips : “ Who ordained you ?” Another bishop added, amidst great uproar (little Alypius meanwhile demanding that the noise be put on the records), the Pauline depreciation of mere learning: “Though ye have ten thousand pedagogues, yet not many fathers.” Augustine shirked the question at first; but as it was repeated from all sides, he at length boldly stated that it was Megalius, and challenged them to discuss it. However, Marcellinus ruled the personal discussion out of order, and at last dragged the bishops to the question at issue. The Catholics tried to introduce the fact of their communion with the “churches beyond the sea” (again laying no particular stress on the judgment of the Bishop of Rome), but the Donatists at once protested, and the point was abandoned without difficulty. “ It was not a question of the whole world, but an African question,” said the Donatists ; “the churches beyond the seas must wait and communicate with the victors.” Then the formal issue was discussed in the light of Scripture and history. The conference had begun in the early morning, and it was growing dusk when Marcellinus closed the discussion and cleared the room for the writing of the verdict. The Donatists had quickly abandoned the complimentary way in which they addressed him on the first day, and they were probably under no illusion when they were recalled to hear his sentence. The Catholics had proved their case to his satisfaction; the Donatists were to hand over their churches to the Catholics, and they were forbidden to hold further meetings.

In the following year Honorius renewed his law against the Donatists, and in 414 (the death of Marcellinus reviving their hopes) he passed a fierce and brutal law, doubling the fines imposed on them, excluding them from the testamentary advantages and from courts of law, branding them with “ perpetual infamy, “and banishing their obstinate clergy. The schism now entered upon its last and most bloody stage. The outlaws became fiercely indifferent to life. They flung themselves down precipices — it was “a daily game” of theirs, pleasantly says Augustine (Ep. 185). They assailed armed groups of pagans and Catholics, and fought them to the death. They met travellers on the country roads, and threatened to kill them if they did not inflict martyrdom on their strange accosters. One of Augustine’s priests was murdered by them. When these suicides were pointed out to Augustine, he coldly replied (Ep. 204) that they did not move him; it was better, he said, that these few whom God had predestined to hell should perish than that all should be damned for want of coercion. Yet even he shuddered sometimes at sight of the spectre he had raised. We often find him pleading with the officials to refrain from violent retaliation, and especially from capital punishment.

The Donatists struggled for many years under the heel of the law. In 418 we find Augustine attempting to draw Emeritus, the former Donatist bishop of Cassarea, into a

debate in what had once been his own church. The embittered old man would not deign to speak. In the same year we hear of a meeting of some thirty Donatist bishops, under the resolute Petilian, to discover new ways of evading the laws. Two years afterwards Augustine writes to remonstrate with a Donatist bishop who has shut himself in his church with his flock, and threatened to set fire to it, when the officials come to apply the law. The Vandals found the sect still struggling when they invaded Africa and laid the proud structure of its rivals in ruins. There was a brief and limited revival at the end of the sixth century, but the remarkable sect only perished finally in the universal devastation of the Mohammedan invasion.

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Joseph McCabe. *St. Augustine and His Age*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1903.

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