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The Donatist Schism

Controversy and Contexts

edited by
RICHARD MILES

Liverpool
University
Press

First published 2016
Liverpool University Press
4 Cambridge Street
Liverpool, L69 7ZU

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A British Library CIP Record is available.

ISBN 978 1 78138 281 3

Typeset by Carnegie Book Production, Lancaster
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

For Brent Shaw

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This volume is the result of a two-day Colloquium held at Trinity Hall, Cambridge, on 25 and 26 March 2014 under the auspices of the Ancient North Africa Research Network, University of Sydney.

A great debt of gratitude is owed to the Translated Texts for Historians Contexts General Editors Mary Whitby, Gillian Clark and Mark Humphries, and Helen Gannon and Alison Welsby, the Commissioning Editors of Liverpool University Press, for their enthusiastic support for this project.

Thanks are owed to Ralf Bockmann, Gillian Clark, Sander Evers and Robin Whelan for their lively and acute contributions at the colloquium.

I would also like to thank Daniel Irwin and Michael Hanaghan for their assistance in the editing of this volume. Lastly, all the contributors to this volume would like to acknowledge the very considerable contribution made to the study of the Donatist Controversy by Professor Maureen Tilley who sadly passed away whilst this volume was in preparation.

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able not only to see their spokesmen hold their own against the vaunted powers of their opponents; they were also able to enjoy a sense of their own collective identity, to feel the strength of their numbers and to see the designated representative of the Roman state respond to that strength. Even the less successful passages of argument, towards the close of the first day, would have had some utility (now that the collective self-confidence of the Donatists had been consolidated); the aggressive malice of the Catholic advocates in turn would have diminished faith in the promise held out at the outset (and one which must have held considerable attractions for many on the Donatist side) of harmonious power-sharing.

It bears repeating that, for most of the bishops, the first day *was* the conference. Not only was the decisive third session reserved for the designated speakers, but the transcript of the complex arguments of that session was not published until long after Marcellinus' abrupt decision at the end of the day, by which time partisan narratives would already have gained traction; and very few readers, as Augustine complained, had the stomach to face the text itself.¹⁴³ Those who read the *Gesta* through Donatist spectacles, moreover, would not necessarily have found there a straightforward vindication of Catholic claims.¹⁴⁴ Seven years after the conference, Emeritus of Caesarea would maintain that the *Gesta* showed the Donatists 'crushed by power' rather than 'defeated by truth'.¹⁴⁵

*

It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore developments during the decade after 411. The evidence is limited; and here, too, historians easily succumb to inherited assumptions, many of them derived from Augustine. But, once again, careful reading of Augustine can suggest conclusions very different from the conventional ones.¹⁴⁶ And, if the arguments of this paper are accepted, we should no longer read into our narrative of these subsequent events the triple theme of systematic state enforcement of the verdict of 411, concerted Catholic enthusiasm for its terms and Donatist demoralisation in its wake.

143 See above, n. 2.

144 There is a good discussion of the arguments in Hogrefe 2009.

145 *Gesta cum Emerito* 3.

146 For the case of Antoninus of Fussala, see McLynn 2010.

TEXTUAL COMMUNITIES AND THE DONATIST CONTROVERSY¹

Richard Miles

Introduction: Showdown in Calama

Sometime around 400 CE a North African bishop wrote a letter to a neighbouring bishop and major local landowner:

Now, unless I'm mistaken, there is, by the Lord's help, nothing to prevent us: we are both in Numidia, and located not far from one other. I've been told that you are still willing to examine, in debate with me, the question that divides us from communion with one other. Look how swiftly all confusion can be dispersed: please reply to this letter, and perhaps that will suffice for us two and those who want to listen to us. If not, let us exchange letters until discussion is exhausted. What greater benefit could come to us by the relative proximity of the cities where we live? I have decided to debate with you just by letters so that nothing that is said will be forgotten, and to ensure that all who are interested in this question, but unable to be present at a debate, may not miss out on further understanding.²

The cordial tone of this letter masked the bitter schism that divided these two prominent men and their respective ecclesiastical factions. Behind the

- 1 I would like to thank Jennifer Ebbeler for very useful and insightful comments on this paper. This paper was also greatly improved by the observations and comments of all those who attended the Colloquium. Needless to say, however, all errors remain my own.
- 2 'Nunc excusatio, nisi fallor, nulla est adiuvante Domino; ambo in Numidia sumus, et nobis loco terrarum invicem propinquamus. Rumor ad me detulit, adhuc te velle mecum disputando experiri de quaestione, quae nostram dirimit communionem. Vide quam breviter omnes auferantur ambages, ad hanc epistulam responde, si placet, et fortasse sufficet, non solum nobis, sed et eis qui nos audire desiderant; aut si non sufficet scripta atque rescripta, donec sufficiant, repetentur. Quid enim nobis commodius poterit exhibere urbium, quas incolimus, tanta vicinitas? Ego enim statui nihil de hac re agere vobiscum, nisi per litteras, vel ne cui nostrum de memoria quod dicitur elabatur, vel ne fraudentur talium studiosi, qui forte interesse non possunt' (Augustine, *Ep.* 51.1).

collegial veneer, the letter's author was completely aware of the extreme pressure that it placed on its addressee, Crispinus, the Donatist bishop of Calama.

Augustine and his protégé Possidius, the Catholic bishop of Calama, had been trying to pin down the Donatist bishop to a public discussion on the longstanding ecclesiastical disagreement between their respective churches for some time. A few years previously Augustine and Crispinus had communicated on the possibility of setting up a public meeting between themselves in Carthage. However, Augustine was clearly now of the opinion that Crispinus was stalling. This letter, like his others, was probably widely copied and disseminated; its challenge to the Donatist bishop was thus very public.³

Making little headway through letters, Augustine subsequently resorted to exerting pressure through legal and governmental channels. In 403, after intense Catholic lobbying, Crispinus was called before the magistrates of Calama to answer a letter of summons issued by the Proconsul, Septiminus. Crispinus, however, delayed the proceedings by requesting that he be able to confer with his episcopal colleagues. A number of weeks later, after attending a meeting with his fellow Donatists, Crispinus appeared in front of the magistrates and submitted a formal response to the Catholic request for a debate. The surviving account of Crispinus' appearance in front of his fellow grandees and citizens of Calama leaves a strong impression of the humiliation that was heaped on the shoulders of the embattled bishop. His blustering and increasingly disjointed 'see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil' defence of his refusal to engage with his opponents was mercilessly pulled apart by an increasingly confident Possidius.⁴ Crispinus had been caught in a trap. If he responded to his opponent's jibes then his words would undoubtedly have been carefully copied down by either the city stenographers or his Catholic opponents, thereby breaking the preferred Donatist tactic of non-engagement with an enemy growing in intellectual vigour and confidence now that the tide of imperial support was slowly but irrevocably turning their way. Silence, however, laid open the very real possibility of ridicule and the perception of weakness. In the previous century the Donatist church had known both good times and bad. Now that the halcyon decades of imperial tolerance

3 On the copying of Augustine's letters and the sending out of multiple copies to put pressure on recipients see Ebbeler 2012; Miles 2008.
4 Augustine, *C. Cresc.* 3.46.

that had followed the emperor Julian's decision to reverse prejudicial legislation against them were drawing to a close, the Donatists had clearly decided to hunker down and wait for better days. Refusing to be drawn into potentially incriminating public debates with their Catholic opponents was part of that strategy. In the end, Crispinus suffered in silence. A few weeks later the Donatists responded. Buoyed by their success, Possidius and his entourage set out on an expedition into the Numidian countryside on a preaching campaign against the Donatists. There they were waylaid by an armed posse, mustered by one of Crispinus' deacons, who nearly succeeded in killing him.⁵

Crispinus was one of a number of Donatist bishops who did all that they could to avoid entering into any kind of dialogue with Augustine. By the early years of the fifth century CE Augustine had already built up a fearsome reputation as a theologian and disputant. The Donatists' reticence to engage in rhetorical debate was not prompted merely by fear of a humiliating defeat in front of an audience numbering at most a few hundred. Rather, it was Augustine's dogged insistence on stenographers being present to record every utterance of the disputing parties – utterances which would then be faithfully copied and widely distributed across North Africa – that prompted the Donatists' avoidance of public debate. There were no 'off the record' discussions with Augustine. Crispinus' attempt to follow the code of religious *omerta*, therefore, was always doomed to failure. His unconvincing and disjointed attempts to bat away Possidius' demands and insinuations were carefully copied down and later used as ammunition in Augustine's three-volume demolition of the Donatist laymen Cresconius. It is hardly surprising that Crispinus' associates considered violence to be their only recourse.

The next year, during his own trial for heresy directly brought on by the assault on Possidius, Crispinus, at the insistence of Augustine, was forced into another public debate with his Catholic opposite number in front of the Proconsul.⁶ On this occasion he was condemned as a heretic. Possidius, however, successfully intervened with the judges so that Crispinus was excused from paying the large fine which formed his punishment.⁷ Augustine and the Catholics could afford to be merciful

5 Augustine, *C. Cresc.* 3.46; Hermanowicz 2008, 113.
6 Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 12.7. Hermanowicz 2008, 115–6. The *defensor ecclesiae* who had not shown himself to be sufficiently partisan had been replaced.
7 Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 12.7.

now that they had emerged victorious and the details of their triumph transcribed into the court records. Indeed, such public magnanimity helped to assuage any unwelcome associations with persecution.

This episode stands as a striking testament not only to the air of menace that often swirled around the Donatist Controversy but also to how this seemingly most intractable of schisms was articulated and contested through texts. Augustine and Possidius' public challenge to Crispinus marked an important watershed moment for the Catholic strategy against the Donatists. That change of strategy and its important consequences for the North African church are the focus of this work.

This chapter explores the Donatist Controversy through the lens of the production of new texts, particularly those that were supposed to be transcribed versions of the spoken word. Prior to Augustine much of the energy expended on this sectarian conflict, particularly with regards to the production of new texts, was used to maintain rather than to challenge the status quo. First the emergence of the Donatist church will be examined as an increasingly strong and coherent textual community in the decades that followed the onset of the schism. Then this chapter will explore how Augustine of Hippo consistently sought to challenge its validity. It will be argued that, in line with his vision of a universal Catholic church, Augustine sought to breach the clearly defined sectarian boundaries that existed between the Catholics and Donatists as *textual communities* and, in the process, redefined the Donatists from the hermetically sealed pure Church of God and the Martyrs to mere schismatics and heretics.

However, any discussion about the significance of textual communities in the context of the Donatist Controversy comes with an important caveat. There was no room for ambivalence in the copious polemical writings of Augustine or any of the other ecclesiastical writers who provide most of the surviving reportage of the Donatist Controversy. Yet religious ambivalence certainly existed in late antique North Africa. As with the later controversy between the Nicene and Homoian churches during the Vandal period, much of the stridency in the writings of its leading protagonists was aimed at creating clear-cut choices for congregations for whom these distinctions meant far less. Across Africa, Catholic and Donatist congregations continued to fraternise with one another in a way that stood at odds with the stark sectarianism found in the letters, treatises, histories, sermons and council records of their clergy and bishops.⁸

8 I thank Neil McLynn and Robin Whelan for reminding me of this important point.

However, the ambivalence of the silent majority does not mean that the textual communities that were created by both Donatist and Catholic communities did not matter. They had real consequences as both sides increasingly sought to bring down the iron fist of imperial law upon the heads of their opponents – consequences that would have a profound effect on the committed and the ambivalent alike.

Persecution Complex: (Re)Constructing the Donatist Textual Community

It is, of course, difficult to reconstruct the Donatist church from the suffocating weight of Augustinian invective. However, recent scholarship has started to reveal a self-confident and coherent textual community whose distinctive identity was constructed, defined and performed through a range of religious and non-religious texts.⁹ The textual bedrock of the pre-Constantinian church in Africa had been the Scriptures (both Old and New Testaments), increasingly supported by a raft of exegetical, ecclesiological and eschatological literature predominately authored by major local figures such as Cyprian and Tertullian. This literature was in the form of treatises, sermons and letters. Of the non-canonical works, the acts and passions of North African martyrs (who had died at the hands of the Roman imperial persecutors) were also very influential. This textual legacy is almost exclusively North African in flavour and places a strong emphasis on the church as an island of pureness in a sinful world.¹⁰

The ecclesiological positions taken by the Donatist church were generally far more in step with the traditions of the North African church than those of their Catholic rivals. The strongly held Donatist belief on the purity of the church clearly fitted well with those held by their revered predecessors, as did its tendency to celebrate the particularity of the North

9 Maureen Tilley (Tilley 1991; 1997a; 1997b) has been at the forefront of this work. In my use of the term 'textual community' I am clearly indebted to the work of Brian Stock (1983). Textual communities can be defined as groups whose collective identity and internal coherency were policed and reaffirmed through texts. Such textual communities are not limited to the literate but merely require islands of literacy within the community to disseminate them. Respect for the authority of texts, rather than literacy itself, therefore, is the key qualification for membership of such textual communities.

10 Beddoe 1993, 234.

African church.¹¹ Likewise, the Donatist tenet that Christians should not remain in communion with *traditores* because it would contaminate the whole ecclesiastical community was wholly aligned to the views held by no less a figure than the universally accepted colossus of the North African church, Cyprian of Carthage.¹²

Donatist distrust of Roman imperial power, although often opportunistic and pragmatic, as evident in their numerous appeals to the emperor, essentially mirrored that of the pre-Constantinian church. The Constantinian revolution, which had brought the Christian church into the bosom of Roman Empire, had offered Christian intellectuals new options for articulating their relationship with Roman imperial power. For the Catholics, Constantine's support in 313 allowed their spokesmen to claim imperial legitimacy and the advent of an age of peace and unity. For the Donatists, Constantine's rejection of their position provided the opportunity to further strengthen their self-proclaimed credentials as the True Church, kept pure by the rod of imperial sanction.¹³

People of the Bible

Many of those Donatist heroes were found in the Bible. The age of self-sacrifice might have passed, but, increasingly, the church of martyrs found its bearings in the Bible as the holy assembly of Israel in the midst of its unclean enemies.¹⁴ By the late fourth century, however, the Donatists, when confronted by the sustained assault of Augustine and the imperial authorities, had retreated to their former position as a Church of the Martyrs.¹⁵ Around 400 CE, the leading Donatist bishop Petilian produced a work that sifted through the Scriptures for the biblical ancestry of the Donatist church. He found them amongst the great biblical martyrs: the Maccabees, Daniel, the Three Hebrew Youths and Jesus himself.¹⁶ Petilian

11 E.g. Tertullian, *Ad Martyras* 1–2; *De Paenitentia* 1.

12 E.g. Cyprian, *Ep.* 67.3. See Brent 2010, 250–327 for Cyprian's attitudes towards traditors and rebaptism. For the Donatist view see Augustine, *C. Ep. Parm.* 3.4.20. For the claims to the authority of Cyprian by both Donatists and Catholics see Partout Burns 2002, 166–74.

13 Dearn 2007, 128.

14 Tilley 1997a; Tilley 1997b.

15 Gaumer 2008.

16 Augustine, *C. Litt. Petil.* 2.92.202. See also *C. Gaud.* 2.13. Dearn 2007, 129.

also produced an impressively long list of monarchs from the Scriptures who had been hostile to the Christians. This list extended to the persecutions that the Donatists had suffered under recent emperors.¹⁷ For the emperors after the tetrarchs, the Donatist bishop diplomatically ascribed any outrage against his church to imperial officials who had themselves been tricked by the false prophets, the Catholics.¹⁸ Although the work has not survived, Augustine's close critique reveals Petilian's extensive mining of the Bible to support his points. The church, like the world, was split between the people of Christ and the people of the Devil, descendants of Cain and Abel, who were locked in perpetual conflict. Catholic mendacity was illustrated by Matthew 7.15–6 (false prophets) and 2 Corinthians 11: 14–5 (the devil disguising himself as the angel of light).¹⁹ These Scripture-proven claims to purity and the sacred inheritance of the glorious martyrs not only reified the difference between the Donatists and their enemies but also acted as powerful agents of internal cohesion within the Donatist community.

More generally, the Donatist textual community put strong emphasis on the scriptures as the key to understanding the world and church. The celebrated Donatist layman scholar Tyconius, in his only extant work, the 'Book of Rules', made the case for the centrality of the Bible to human existence particularly eloquently. In his work Tyconius established a hugely influential system of typological exegeses designed to examine the relevancy of biblical prophecy for the Christian church in North Africa.²⁰ The Bible, for Tyconius, was an 'immense forest of prophecy' which his seven rules would help the reader to walk through so that they could live by the precepts of the Book.²¹

Intensive mining of biblical themes is also found in surviving Donatist pastoral works. *De singularitate clericorum*, a letter written around 350 by the Donatist bishop of Rome, Macrobius, warned clergy against spiritual marriage, an arrangement whereby male and female celibates shared the same household. Liberal slabs of the Old and New Testament, particularly the Book of Proverbs and Paul's Letters to the Corinthians, bolstered Macrobius's advice. As Tilley has observed 'for even the most

17 Augustine, *C. Litt. Petil.* 2.92.202.

18 Augustine, *C. Litt. Petil.* 2. 16.36; 2.18.40. Dearn 2007, 129–30.

19 Augustine, *C. Litt. Petil.* 2.92.202. Similar use of the Bible is made in the Donatist Sermon 39 from the so-called Escorial collection in order to urge total separation from the Catholic persecutors (*PLS* 708–10).

20 Gennadius, *De Viris Inlust.* 18.

21 Bright 1988, 8–9; Tilley 1997b, 112–28.

sophisticated Donatist, there was no more powerful warrant for any action than the command of Scripture, and no other one necessary'.²²

The *Liber Genealogus*

The self-identification of the Donatists as the people of the Bible fated to suffer persecution at the hands of the godless was also transmitted through a range of other literary genres. The *Liber genealogus*, an anonymous multi-authored Donatist interpretation of biblical and early Christian history in the form of a list of biblical genealogies, presents what one commentator has described as 'a vision of history as consisting in constant strife between the people of God and God's enemies'.²³ Thought to have been first written some time after 405, with additions in the years 427, 438, 455, 463 and possibly 470, the short entries of the *Liber* detailed people and events in chronological order from Adam and Eve to contemporary events.

With the persecution of the people of God as its organising theme, the work's Donatist flavour is easy to discern. The lineage of persecutors and persecuted was traced back to Cain and Abel respectively. The accusation of *traditio* was levelled against prominent African ecclesiastical figures during the Great Persecution, including Mensurius of Carthage and his successor Caecilian, whilst the emperor Honorius' severe legislation against the 'Christians' in 405 was also mentioned.²⁴ In this work, the catastrophic invasion of North Africa by the Vandals was treated as just another episode in the battle between the true Christians and their enemies in which the Vandal king was characterised as the Antichrist. The authors of the *Liber genealogus* were clearly well versed in a wide range of religious and chronological works that included the *Chronicle* of Hippolytus, a recension of Victorinus' *Commentary on Revelation* and the *Chronology* of Julius Quintus Hilarianus, but this knowledge always played a supporting role to biblical truth.

22 Tilley 1997b, 82–6. Quote = Tilley 1997b, 85. One finds a similar single-minded insistence on the Bible as the sole guide for everyday life in another anonymous Donatist homily, *Sermo in Natali Sanctorum Innocentium*, which has been dated to roughly the same period (Tilley 1997b, 86–9).

23 *Liber genealogus* 154–96. For recent discussion of the text see Dearn 2007, 130–4. Inglebert 1996, 599–602. For the classic study of the work see Monceaux 1901–23, 6, 249–58. I have followed Inglebert's dating sequence.

24 *Liber genealogus* 626–7.

Preaching and Singing

An important recent study by Lesley Dossey has highlighted the strength of Christian textual communities and the sheer range of clerical communication through episcopal letters, sermons and letters in late antique rural North Africa.²⁵ Like their Catholic counterparts, the Donatist bishops used letters to exhort their congregations on ecclesiastical matters such as their relations with their bishops and clergy.²⁶ Preaching was also an activity in which rural bishops were heavily involved, often concentrating on developing a clear, simple style replete with agricultural metaphors.²⁷ Homilies were clearly a powerful medium for reinforcing the sectarian divide in communities where Donatists and Catholics lived cheek by jowl. In order to demonise the Catholics as liars and persecutors, preachers used simple biblical exegeses. The sermon on the Passion of Saints Donatus and Advocatus, dating from the period of the first period of persecution of the Donatists, made it clear that it was often those closest to home that offered the most potent threat: 'Instruction is especially needed when there is no hostility professed on an issue because it is easy for a hostile society to mislead those that are closest. "And one's enemies," it (the Bible) says, "will be members of one's own household"' (Matt 10.36).²⁸

The reach of these works may be usefully compared to the works produced by the rival Catholic community. Augustine certainly appears to have encouraged the recycling of his own sermons:

25 Dossey 2010, 147–72.

26 E.g. the letter of the Donatist bishop of Limata, to the clergy of Cirta on their relationship with their own bishop which was collected in the *Gesta apud Zenophilum* or Macrobius, Donatist bishop of Rome, to one of his clergy on the question of celibacy in *De singularitate clericorum* 1.

27 Dossey 2010, 154–5. Augustine's own anti-Donatist sermons were written in a far more pastoral than theological vein. He worked hard to combat his congregations' fear of losing salvation and their contamination by the sins of others – two ideas that were at the forefront of Donatist preaching. Augustine also continually emphasised two important points: firstly the universality of the church and the sin of undermining ecclesiastical unity, and secondly the reality of a temporal church where the righteous and the sinners live side by side. Augustine made very little attempt, in only five of around 40 sermons, to challenge the Donatist theology of martyrdom (see Tholen 2010).

28 'Magis enim necessaria instructio illic est, ubi professa hostilitas non est, quia hostilis societas ad decipiendum facilis et proxima est et inimici, inquit, homini domestici eius.' (Sermon on the Passion of Saints Donatus and Advocatus 1.

there are people who are good speakers but are not able to compose a sermon. If they use ideas of others that are written intelligently and eloquently, commit them to memory and deliver them to the people, they are doing nothing criminal. In this way for example many persons – and that is very useful – learn to be preachers of the truth.²⁹

The recent identification of a dossier of texts as a package of preaching aids for Donatist bishops and clergy has shed some light on such activity and how ideas were spread amongst Donatist congregations. The dossier appears to have been first collected together sometime after 365, before being revised in the late fourth century and completed sometime around 427, roughly concurrent with the *Liber genealogus*. It contains a wide variety of reference texts that would have been of great use to those preparing homilies. One of the earliest additions was a copy of the *Liber generationis*, an earlier work translated from Greek; a bible study handbook that contained a biblical chronology and geographical information; and lists of Israelite judges, kings of Persia, Samaria and Alexandria, the Roman emperors and the bishops of Rome. The dossier also contained stichometric lists of the books of the Old and New Testaments, which were perhaps produced as a reference to check the completeness of the Scriptures used by different Donatist communities. There was also a stichometry of Cyprian's works that highlighted the martyred bishop's important reputation within the Donatist community. In its later manifestation the dossier also included a wide variety of biblical aids, including an anthology of prophecies from the Old and New Testament, a list of miracles from Elijah and Elisha, an inventory of people of the same name who appear in the Old and New Testaments and five lists of interpretations of Hebrew names. This probable 'exegete's tool kit' suggests a well-organised community with a strong sense of its own textual integrity, and one that was willing to invest significantly in safeguarding that integrity.³⁰

Both Donatists and Catholic bishops were also involved in the writing of partisan psalms to galvanise their congregations.³¹ An anonymous

29 'Sunt sane quidam qui bene pronuntiare possunt, quid autem pronuntient excogitare non possunt. Quod si ab aliis sumant eloquenter sapienterque conscriptum memoriaeque commendat atque id ad populum proferant; si eam personam gerunt, non improbe faciunt. Etiam sic enim, quod profecto utile est, multi praedicatores veritatis fiunt ...' (Augustine, *De Doc. Christ.* 4.29.62); Dossey 2010, 170–1.

30 Rouse & McNelis 2000, 207–26.

31 Augustine mocked the Donatists for singing psalms which referred to the whole world praising God when their own actions contradicted such sentiments. (*En. in Ps.*

Catholic tract claimed that the Donatist leader Parmenian 'wrote treatises against us and composed new psalms, with which he went round all of Africa'.³² As Shaw has observed, 'The hymns song in church, the psalms that were chanted or sung as a regular part of the liturgy, were an important part of this engagement. The songs were one of the main repetitive actions that large numbers of ordinary parishioners had in common with their clergy.' This singing and chanting not only promoted group solidarity but also acted as effective vehicles for the vilification of one's enemies.³³

The Testimony of the Martyrs

However, the most powerful and emotive textual emblems of the Donatist community were the Acts and Passions of the Martyrs. Older martyr stories that were revered by both communities often appear to have been subtly adapted to give them a Donatist identity. Thus, in the Passion of Cyprian, after the judge's pronouncement, Cyprian exclaimed *Deo Laudes* in the Donatist account, whereas in all other accounts it was *Deo Gratias*.³⁴ The *Passion of Maxima and Donatilla*, the tale of two sisters martyred after refusing to sacrifice during the Great Persecution, appears to have been merged with another story of a twelve-year-old girl, Secunda, from a wealthy family who was said to have leapt from her window to join the sisters in martyrdom. Scholars have been unsure of whether this was a Donatist tale that had been doctored by the Catholics or a Catholic one changed by a Donatist. Although it would be dangerous to identify a Donatist suicidal trait, it is clear that these stories were added to and embellished.³⁵ The possibility of martyr texts being amended to serve the interests of either community was expressly recognised at the

95.11). See also Augustine *Ep.* 55.18. For Augustine's own *Ps. contra Part. Donat.* see Shaw 2011, 475–89.

32 'Parmenianos a Parmeniano, qui per totam Africam libros contra nos conficiens et novos psalmos faciens circumibat, contra quem noster scripsit Optatus'. Arnobius *Iunior-Praedestinatus*, 1.44.

33 Shaw 2011, 441–89. On Augustine's psalm also see Hunink 2011.

34 Tilley 1996, 2. Dearn, this volume, 75–6, however, is sceptical of this analysis. On the slogan *Deo Laudes* and the Donatists Shaw 2011, 469–71, although see Dearn, who argues that it was not an exclusively Donatist term.

35 Tilley 1996, 14; Dearn 2006, 29–30.

end of *The Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs*, another martyr text of which several versions exist, with the addition of the curse quote taken from the Book of Revelation:³⁶ 'Whoever adds the smallest part of a letter or a letter to this book, the Lord will add to that person innumerable plagues; and whoever deletes, the Lord will delete that person's share from the book of life.'³⁷

These texts were more than merely an exercise in raking over past grievances. The use of sanction and violence against the Donatists by imperial authorities during the renewed persecution that broke out in 347 created a religiously charged atmosphere in which new Donatist martyrs could be created and promoted. Like the old martyr stories, new texts aimed to galvanise the Donatist community.³⁸ William Frend was surely right when he argued "'The days of Macarius", the *tempora Macariana*, left as deep a mark on the mind of the Donatist Numidians as did the Great Persecution'.³⁹

Accounts of recent unequivocally Donatist martyrs such as the *Passion of Maximian and Isaac* and the *Martyrdom of Marculus* were clearly going to arouse strongly partisan emotions amongst the Donatist community, emotions that could be further fuelled by the physical setting of the texts' public reading.⁴⁰ Early Christian churches often contained writings, both inscriptions and graffiti, that were important markers of the community which worshipped in them. At the Numidian rural settlement of Aïn Ghorab, on the plains south-west of Tebessa, the architectural remains of a number of churches littered the site when first discovered by French colonial-era excavators. Many of these architectural pieces were covered in writing, including a lintel commemorating the *memoriae* of the blessed martyr and 'lawyer of God' Emeritus, one of the martyrs of Abitina

36 The work is generally known in Latin as *Passio Datiui, Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum*. See Tilley 1996, 26–7 on the different versions of *The Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs*, although it is perhaps more difficult to identify 'Catholic' and 'Donatist' renderings of the story than Tilley suggests.

37 'et hanc sententiam suam sancti Spiritus auctoritate conscriptam tali comparatione firmabant. Scriptum est, inquiunt, in Apocalypsi: Quicumque adiecerit ad librum istum apicem unum aut litteram unam, adiiciat illi Deus innumerabiles plagas; ut quicumque deleverit, deleat partem ejus Dominis de libro vitae' (*Passio Datiui, Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum*, 18).

38 Shaw 2011, 162–94; Tilley 1997b, 69–76; Frend 1952, 177–87.

39 Frend 1952, 185. Shaw (2011, 162) actually refers to it as 'the Great Persecution'.

40 For evidence of passions being read out *Passio Marculi* 1.

martyred in Carthage in 304 and held dear by the Donatists; a building inscription put up by a priest Optatus; a building dedication to a Saint Casta; a later fifth-century dedicatory inscription to the apostles carved onto the actual keystones for the arches that held up the roof.⁴¹ The initial excavators also found graffiti or rough inscriptions carrying the celebrated Donatist exhortation of *Deo Laudes*.⁴² Although it is impossible to know at present whether Aïn Ghorab was the site of a Donatist church or churches, what these inscribed pieces of masonry do show is that these buildings were an important part of local Christian textual communities.

The most striking example of the collaboration between these martyr texts and their physical staging can be found at a basilica at Vegesela in southern Numidia.⁴³ Located in the south-eastern extremity of the church was an intricately decorated installation one side of which would have been open to the congregation. An inscription on a decorative plaque identified the installation as MEMORIA DOMNI MARCHULI.⁴⁴ Although it cannot be conclusively proved, the weight of evidence strongly suggests that this was a memorial to Marculus, a leading Donatist bishop who was arrested and tortured with nine episcopal colleagues by an imperial envoy in 348 at Vegesela.⁴⁵ The church's excavators also uncovered evidence of a further nine burials which might have housed the remains of the other

41 Leschi 1936, 31–5. The inscriptions:

Dedicatory Inscription = Y. Duval 1982, 1, 146–8; Leschi.

Optatus = Leschi 1936, 31–2.

Emeritus = (cross)H(i)c domus D(e)i nos[tri Christi, h]ic avitatio Sp(iritu)s

S(an)c(t)I P[aracletii??]

(cross) H(i)c memoria beati martiris Dei consui [E]mer[iti]

(cross) H(i)c exaudietur omnis q(u)i invocat nomen D(omi)ne D(e)i
omnipot[entis]

cur homo miraris? D(e)o iubante meliora videvis A...XL (or I)

(Y. Duval 1982, 1, 151–4)

Casta = Duval, 1982, 149–50.

42 Leschi 1936, 34–5.

43 Y. Duval 1982, 1, 158–60.

44 Cayrel 1934; Courcelle 1936.

45 For Marculus see Shaw 2011, 178–83. There has been much debate over whether the Marculus mentioned in the inscription is the Donatist martyr of the *Passio Marculi*. It is certainly the case that there is no conclusive evidence that they are the same Marculus (Y. Duval 1982, 1, 160; Michel 2005, 102–4). However, the weight of evidence does, in my opinion, strongly suggest that the memoria in the Ksar-el-Kelb basilica was that of the Donatist martyr. For further discussion see Anna Leone's chapter in this volume (333–6).

nine Donatist bishops who were detained with Marculus.⁴⁶ The basilica appears to have been built in the late fourth century with the memoria being subsequently added, perhaps specifically for the deposition of the relics of this high-profile recent Donatist martyr.⁴⁷ What the excavation reports of Cayrel and subsequently Courcelle make clear is how this text was skilfully utilised not only to enhance the dramatic impact of the basilica for those who entered it but also to reinforce the sense of a specific religious communal identity. An inscription on the vault over the apse of the church proclaimed DEO LAUDES H[IC] OMNE DICAMU(S), a slogan heavily (if not exclusively) associated with the Donatist cause. As Shaw has pointed out: ‘The additional words unusually appended to the core cry of “Praise to the Lord” have emphatic meaning. *Here* we shall all say “Praise to the Lord,” where the “here” and the “all of us” distinguish the congregation from “others” who are not “us” and are not “in this place”.’⁴⁸

Another inscription quoted Psalm 131:18 DE DONO/[DEI] INIMICIS/[CONF]USIONEM/[FE]CIT. These slogans skilfully conjured up the self-reinforcing image of a group secure in the knowledge that they were God’s chosen people and that their self-sacrifice would throw their enemies into disarray. Other writing inscribed on the stone of the building appealed to other, less dramatic but equally powerful bonds that tied together the religious community which gathered in the church. Finely inscribed on the stone beam of a door decorated with a large Constantinian monogram, which Cayral tentatively placed between the small pillars that delineated the entrance to the choir, were DOMUS DEI (at the top) and AULA PACIS (at the bottom).⁴⁹ *Domus dei*, although used to denote churches across Christian North Africa, has been most commonly found on inscriptions in the area of south-eastern Numidia around Vegesela.⁵⁰ Similarly, the use of *aula*, most commonly found in Christian poetic verse

46 Courcelle 1936, 183 n. 1. For burials Courcelle 1936, 174, 167 fig. 1.

47 Cayrel 1934, 140. Dalvit (2013, 70ff) has argued that the memorial room might have been created after the Catholics had taken over the church in order to marginalise the shrine.

48 Shaw 2011, 183.

49 Cayrel 1934, 124, 129.

50 Particularly in the region around Khenchela and Aïn Beïda, see Cayrel 1934, 129–30.

but very rarely in North African ecclesiastical inscriptions, is also limited to the immediate area around Vegesela.⁵¹

Diverse Textual Communities?

Despite the unifying themes and emphases in Donatist texts, there were also marked differences in approach and style. Augustine presented the Donatist church as a hotbed of factionalism riven by its own schisms, but in a more positive sense it is also clear that this was a textual community that contained diverse viewpoints and a tradition of vigorous internal discussion.⁵² In particular, the 370s and 380s, a period of renewed confidence and growth for the Donatist church under a more tolerant imperial regime, prompted the theologians Tyconius and Parmenian to challenge established Donatist ecclesiology by emphasising inclusion and rebaptism. This picture of a textual community made up of diverse elements is further evidenced by Parmenian’s vigorous and public disagreement with some of Tyconius’ views.⁵³

In terms of style, Donatist writers also appear to have covered a broad spectrum and catered for a wide variety of different audiences. For example, the letter of the Donatist grammarian, Cresconius, that sought to defend Parmenian, the bishop of Carthage, from Augustine’s attack, with its use of biblical, historical and dialectic argument and eloquent style (a fact even recognised by Augustine himself), appears to have been aimed at a highly educated lay audience. Augustine’s vitriolic and lengthy response probably attests to the success of Cresconius’ letter.⁵⁴

Going Through the Records

Both Donatist and Catholic textual communities were not solely made up of religious tracts; legal texts, in particular, also played a key role in the

51 See Bigeard 1907, 19 for the church dedication from Henchir Oumkif near Khenchela where the expression AULA SANCTIS is used.

52 For an account of the Maximianist schism see Frend 1952, 213–24.

53 On Tyconius and Parmenian see Tilley 1997b, 93–129.

54 Monceaux 1922, 106; Finnaert and De Veer 1968, 24–7 and 43–8. Augustine on Cresconius’ eloquence – *C. Cresc.* 2.3.

controversy. The fog of forensic litigation around the Donatist Controversy was a result of the practice of Christian disputes being initially the preserve of municipal governments and local town courts. Recourse to the legal apparatus of the Roman Empire understandably led to both Donatists and Catholics readily turning to the courts to resolve their differences. Because the initial dispute at the beginning of the schism had involved judicial proceedings, the Donatist controversy had a particularly forensic hue from the start, with each side often using professional advocates to plead their cases. The legal cases that Donatists and Catholics pursued against one another added to the ever-growing dossiers of 'evidence', made up of verbatim extracts from court proceedings, conciliar *acta* and imperial correspondence, that each claimed proved the rectitude of their respective claims. Both Donatists and Catholics extracted what they considered to be key supporting evidence such as the *Gesta apud Zenophilum*, the minutes of a hearing before an imperial official, Zenophilus, at Carthage in 320. The inquiry had taken place in order to establish whether Silvanus, the Donatist bishop of Cirta, had been a *traditor* who had handed over the scriptures and other church property to Roman officials, and also if he had wrongly appropriated church funds. Silvanus was one of the godfathers of the Donatist schism by dint of having consecrated Majorinus, one of its original protagonists and Caecilian's rival, for the see of Carthage.⁵⁵ The dossier included the court transcript minus the actual verdict and five letters from various North African bishops produced as evidence against Silvanus. The text also incorporated an earlier transcript dated from 303, the *Acta* of Munatius Felix from Cirta in Numidia, setting out official confiscations of goods and literature from a church in Cirta.⁵⁶

Many of the leading Donatist and Catholic bishops were skilled lawyers and rhetoricians with considerable forensic experience and expertise.⁵⁷ At the Conference of Carthage both sides had seasoned and skilled advocates on their front bench teams.⁵⁸ In particular, the interventions of Augustine and Petilian, who had been a lawyer, often involved the complex forensic scrutiny of a wide range of documents.⁵⁹

55 See Y. Duval 2000, 13–209; Tilley 1997b, 78–82.

56 *Gesta apud Zenophilum* 2–4; Edwards 1997, 154.

57 Humfress 2007, 187. More generally on the importance of Classical *eloquentia* and rhetoric amongst the late Roman Christian elite see Kaster 1988; Brown 1992.

58 Humfress 2007, 188–9.

59 Humfress 2007, 264–7.

The Donatists had themselves used the courts to attempt to pressure breakaway members of their own community. The transcript of the Council of Bagaï held in 394, in which the dissident deacon Maximian and his closest supporters were excommunicated, was used by Donatist lawyers in conjunction with specific imperial laws against heretics to lobby municipal councils and proconsular officials to find against the Maximianists.⁶⁰ Similarly, from 404, when it seemed that they had unequivocally won imperial support for their position, the Catholics devoted their efforts to appealing to a variety of provincial and imperial courts and negotiating with administrators to have legislation imposed but the punishments often lessened or waived.⁶¹

Constant engagement and recourse to secular authority by both Donatists and Catholics had other consequences. Both sides quickly learned to appropriate the legalistic language of government and the courts to lend themselves an air of legitimacy. Nor was it just the educated urban-based ecclesiastical elites who claimed this legalistic mantle. As Dossey has recently observed, the forensic habit had spread far into the North African countryside; even Axido and Fasir, the supposedly thuggish leaders of the *agonistici*, held quasi-judicial proceedings and recorded their commands by the creation of documents.⁶²

Effective communication and lobbying had a major impact on the warring parties' ability to mobilise support effectively from the imperial and provincial authorities, churches and influential theologians outside of North Africa, and to bolster the cohesiveness and resistance of their own communities. The success of the Catholics in claiming the mantle of Catholicism for themselves and ensuring that the Donatist label stuck on their opponents was partly due to the effectiveness of their lobbying and propaganda campaign.⁶³ As Brent Shaw has recently shown, the

60 Augustine (*C. Litt. Petil.* 2.58.132 and *Enarr. in Ps.* 57.15) states that the proceedings of the Council of Bagaï were inserted into municipal and proconsular *acta*, showing that the Donatists did present their case to local and then provincial officials. When asked for evidence, the Donatists produced the transcript of the Conference of Bagaï and read out the decree of the bishops condemning Maximian. (Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps.* 36.2.19–20). See Hermanowicz 2008, 126–9 for an account of the Donatists' legal manoeuvres against the Maximianists.

61 Hermanowicz 2008, 132–55.

62 Optatus *De Schism. Donat.* 3.4; Dossey 2010, 179.

63 For the imposition of the Donatist moniker see Shaw 1995. Pelttari 2009 suggests that the Donatists often defined themselves as the Church of the truth.

painstaking collection of sworn affidavits by Augustine, Possidius and their Catholic colleagues which documented alleged cases of Donatist violence and lawlessness, and their collation into a dossier that could be taken to the imperial court at Ravenna, played a decisive role in alarming the authorities sufficiently to goad them into action.⁶⁴ In 407 Augustine also produced a volume, *Probatium et testimoniorum contra Donatistas*, a collection of what he considered 'necessary proofs' from the ecclesiastical and public records as well as the Scriptures, which he then offered to send to Donatists.⁶⁵

Such was each side's encyclopaedic knowledge of the legal twists and turns connected with the schism that even those who had been sent by the emperor to adjudicate the matter could find themselves being corrected in court. At the 411 conference the judge Marcellinus made the claim that both sides had requested that the meeting take place. The Donatists spokesman's reply, however, was emphatic:

It is this that we wanted here declared before the tribunal, if they (the Catholics) insinuated to the emperor that we presented ourselves voluntarily before the praetorian prefect or more so that we asked for a debate. If this is in fact what you said, I am able to refute you before the tribunal on the basis of the text of the Gesta (of 406CE which recorded a meeting between a Donatist embassy and the Praetorian Prefect).⁶⁶

Augustine and the Assault on the Donatist Textual Community

It is difficult to overestimate the galvanising impact that Augustine of Hippo had on the Donatist Controversy. The situation that existed when Augustine first entered the priesthood and subsequently became bishop of Hippo Regius was one of sectarian deadlock. By the time of his death in 430, the Donatist church had in effect been broken as a major ecclesiastical force for over a decade.

64 Shaw 2011, 520–43.

65 *Retract.* 2. 53.

66 'Hoc est quod volebamus in iudicio prodi, utrum imperialibus auribus intimarint nos in iudicio praefecturae vel voluntarios adstittisse, vel quaesisse conflictum. Si enim ista dixisses, possem te digestorum fide in iudicio confutare. Si autem non dixisses, intellegatis qui cognitor datus est de omnibus se imperatoriae notioni referre oportere' (*Gesta Coll. Carth.* 3, 129).

The Catholics' emphatic victory was largely down to Augustine's success in snatching the agenda away from the Donatists. Critically, Augustine redefined Donatism as a body of ideas in as negative a way as possible. This strategy was aimed at ensuring the full support of the imperial and provincial authorities in the suppression of the church. Although Catholics had been accusing Donatists of associating with heretics as a speculative form of abuse since almost the start of the schism, it was Augustine and his colleagues who first managed to get the cap of heresy to fit by carefully compiling a dossier of 'Donatist' violence against law abiding 'Catholic' citizens for the imperial court.⁶⁷ Central tenets of Donatist group identity were presented in a sinister light. Augustine's consistent presentation of Donatist martyrdom as a symptom of lawlessness carried out by a group who wantonly sought out voluntary martyrdom or suicide was an important step in creating a distinctive and negative Donatist identity.⁶⁸ On 12 February 405 Honorius passed an edict using Augustine's arguments that legally defined Donatism as a heresy for the first time.⁶⁹ Shaw has wryly observed, regarding the success of the Ravenna dossier: 'in drafting legislation that sought to regulate the behavior of undesirable religious groups, the court was dependent on the Catholic church to define and to name them'.⁷⁰ Even the label 'Donatist' is evidence of Catholic determination to prevent their rivals from defining themselves on their own terms.⁷¹

67 Shaw 2011, 323–6. For Donatist accusations that Catholics were heretics see Optatus, *De Schism. Donat.* 1.10.4–11.2.

68 Augustine, *C. Gaud.* 1, 22. 25; 1.28.32. For the metaphorical imagery of the Donatists as wild, dangerous animals see Shaw 2011, 332–9. Optatus also strongly associated the Donatist cause with the Circumcillions whose *modus operandi* often revolved around violence inflicted on others or suicide (Optatus, *De Schism. Donat.* 3.4).

69 *CTh* 16.6.4. For Augustine's arguments that the Donatists were heretics see *C. Litt. Petil.* 2.94.217; *C. Cresc.* 2.7.9.

70 Quote = Shaw 2011, 277. On the campaign by Augustine, Possidius and other Catholic bishops to have the Donatists condemned as heretics see Hermanowicz 2008, 97–132; Shaw 2011, 276–9.

71 E.g. Augustine, *Ps. contra Part. Donat.* 275–80.

Breaking the Sectarian Deadlock

Sectarianism is essentially a conservative, passive aggressive, highly ritualised code of community behaviour.⁷² The situation in North Africa in the 390s certainly conformed to that model. When Augustine first arrived in Hippo Regius in the early 390s he found that the local Donatist bishop had banned Donatist bakers in the town from selling bread to Catholics.⁷³ Interaction between the ecclesiastical leadership of the two factions at both local and provincial levels had become increasingly entrenched and formulaic and aimed far more towards appeasing the home team rather than attempting to break the deadlock.

Forensic, legal and ecclesiological argument was bundled together with biblical quotations. When charges of heresy were laid against Crispinus of Calama, charges that would eventually lay the precedent for all Donatists being subject to the stringent imperial laws on heresy, Augustine proclaimed that the Donatists were facing judgement under both the prophetic truth of the Scriptures and Roman imperial law.⁷⁴

The decades of grinding litigation and debate, claim and counter-claim had made both Catholics and Donatists as familiar with each other's dossiers of evidence as they were with their own. In a letter to Emeritus, a leading Mauretanian Donatist bishop, Augustine issued the following challenge: 'Whether what you say is true is another question, while we show your 'facts' to be false through far more authoritative documents and we say that it is proven even better by your own documents, with regards to the charges that you level against us.'⁷⁵

These legal documents and dossiers were far more than mere bodies of evidence with which to win a case. As the Donatist Controversy dragged on and increasingly became an argument about the African church's recent history, these texts took on an increasingly ritualised and quasi-canonical

72 For a pertinent comparative perspective on Christian sectarianism in early modern Ireland see Ford 2005; Downey 2005.

73 Augustine, *C. Litt. Petil.* 2.184.

74 'Neque enim aliter innotesceret, quid adiutorio Christi Ecclesia catholica in suos inimicos posset et nollet, non secundum haereticam praesumptionem privato furore Circumcellionibus saevientibus, sed secundum propheticam veritatem iugo Domini Dei subditis regibus' (*C. Cresc.* 3.47).

75 'Alia enim quaestio est, utrum illa vera dicatis, quae quidem nos multo probabilioribus documentis falsa esse convincimus, et in vestris magis ea ipsa quae obicitis, tunc probata declaramus' (Augustine *Ep.* 87.2). See also *Ep.* 51.2.

quality on both sides of the debate. One gets a strong whiff of this sectarian complacency in a text written either by Augustine or by one of his protégées after hearing that a Donatist bishop had been preaching in Hippo on the topic of Noah's Ark. The preacher had in particular focused on how the vessel had been caulked with pitch on the inside and the outside to seal it from within and without, an obvious metaphor for the Donatist belief that baptism could not be given or recognised from the outside. The wry but insightful observation from the Catholic commentator was that: 'One would suspect that when he (the preacher) said this, there was a lot of applause from those who loved hearing it without reflecting very well on what they had come to understand.'⁷⁶

On a local level a tradition of some communication between Catholic and Donatist bishops seems to have been continued. However, Donatist bishops around Hippo Regius seem to have quickly learnt to avoid the young Catholic bishop. It was not just Augustine's fierce forensic intelligence but also his insistence on having any public meetings copied down by stenographers that marked him out.⁷⁷

In his collected correspondence there are numerous instances of Augustine attempting to pressure Donatist bishops into public debates that were taken down by scribes. In one letter Augustine described a meeting he had with the Donatist bishop of Tubursicum. Although a good crowd had gathered, Augustine's primary concern was to have a true transcript of the meeting prepared. Eventually the reluctant Donatists agreed, but their stenographers still refused to copy down the whole proceedings. Some of Augustine's companions attempted to keep a record, but were eventually thwarted by interruptions and the speed of some of the argument.⁷⁸

Donatist bishops appear to have been much more concerned about the creation of these new public texts that might be added as damaging evidence to their opponents' dossiers than the risk of humiliation at the public debates. One potential cause for alarm was the possibility of incriminating oneself and one's church at a time when the Donatist could not rely on a sympathetic hearing from the imperial authorities. Donatist reticence around public transcription must also have been connected to fears about losing control over the debate and its transmission, and more generally their own textual community.

76 Augustine, *Ep. ad Cath.* 5.9.

77 Augustine had his own copyists on his staff (*Ep.* 20. 5).

78 Augustine, *Ep.* 44. 2.

Augustine was also extremely anxious to gain possession of as many Donatist documents as possible. For instance, Augustine accessed the transcripts of the rival Maximianist and Donatist councils of Cebarsussa and Bagaï, which he then used extensively to expose Donatist hypocrisy on the questions of state persecution and rebaptism.⁷⁹ At the public meeting at Tubursicum in 397 Fortunius, the aged Donatist bishop of the town, had attempted to show that the Donatists were in communion with the worldwide church by presenting a document from the council of Sardica showing that the bishops assembled there had sent a copy of their synodal letter to Donatus. However, Augustine soon realised that this document would be useful for his own case, as it was an Arian council. Augustine asked to take the book away with him and when this was refused asked to take notes, a request that was also turned down.⁸⁰

Writing and the Control of the Spoken Word

The use of texts to try to control dialectic debate in the early Christian community has been widely recognised by scholars. In the production and reinterpretation of an ever-increasing number of texts, Christian leaders sought to emphasise not only the central tenets of their faith but also the terms of membership of the Christian community. Such attitudes meant that the Christian church placed a special premium on the written word – ‘that religious texts mattered’.⁸¹ The growth of authoritarian patterns of social relationship in the late third century and the political concerns of the first Christian emperor, Constantine, corresponded with an increase in reliance on textual authority in debates at the expense of open public debate.⁸² New ecclesiastical elites, trained in the rhetorical schools and the bureaucratic militias of the empire, brought with them an acute sense of how consensus relied on the careful repackaging and dissemination of information. The written word could be used to mediate and even control the spoken.⁸³

The blurred boundary between the spoken and written word was a key feature of early Christian textual communities. Augustine’s sermons

79 *C. Cresc.* 4.5.

80 Augustine, *Ep.* 44. 7.

81 Cameron 1991, 110.

82 Lim 1995, 24–30; Cameron 1991, 169–70.

83 Lim 1995, 29.

were written down and circulated on an *ad hoc* basis.⁸⁴ Some scholars, struck by the untypical baldness of his prose, have argued that Augustine’s words must have been reduced to their bare bones by their stenographers.⁸⁵ However, Augustine’s popular sermons used a much plainer style of Latin, *sermo humilis*, with shorter sentences and less complex syntax, word order and vocabulary. Stylistically they contained many characteristics of speech, such as repetition and improvisation.⁸⁶ Moreover, comments can be found in the text referring to the congregation cheering when Augustine quoted particular passages from the Scriptures or when he encouraged those listening to pay close attention.⁸⁷ It has been argued that this is good evidence of Augustine’s preaching containing a fair amount of ‘off-the-cuff’ material that the stenographers copied down verbatim.⁸⁸ However, it also points to a sophisticated understanding and manipulation of the malleable boundary between oral and written communication. This is particularly apparent in sermons where Augustine created the appearance of an actual spoken dialogue with his Donatist opponents:

You say to me ‘You’re a traitor!’ I say to you: ‘You’re a liar!’ You’ll never ever prove that I am a traitor. But right here, right now, I’ll show that you’re lying from your own words! You said that we sharpened our swords? I read out the records of your own Circumcellions ... ‘We only preach the gospel,’ you say. I quote the many judicial decisions you’ve used to persecute your dissidents. I read aloud your appeals to that apostate emperor.⁸⁹

Augustine’s understanding of the power of text to control and give authority to the spoken was also in evidence in the creation of an ‘official’ transcript of the church service when he handed over to his chosen successor as bishop of Hippo Regius, Eraclius. The stenographers recorded

84 Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 7. For a clear synopsis of Augustine’s preparation of, and the publication of his sermons see Dupont 2013, 12–19.

85 Van De Meer 1961, 412.

86 Hunink 2011.

87 Augustine, *Serm.* 252.5.5.

88 Deferrari 1922.

89 ‘Tu mihi dicis: Traditor es. Ego tibi dico: Mendax es. Sed tu traditionem meam nusquam et nunquam probas: ego mendacium tuum hic in istis ipsis verbis tuis modo probo. Certe ibi dixisti, quia nos acuimus gladios nostros: recito gesta tuorum Circumcellionum ... Certe ibi dixisti: Nos sola offerimus Evangelia: recito tot iussiones iudicum, quibus a te divisos persecutus es: recito Preces ad Apostatam imperatorem, cui dixisti, quia sola iustitia apud eum habet locum’. Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps.* 36.17–18. Translation: Shaw 2011, 424.

the long series of loud acclamations by the congregation that emphasised the unanimity of the decision. In ordering the preparation of such a document Augustine was perhaps hoping to avoid the controversy that had met his own irregular consecration.⁹⁰

Letters and Control of the Textual Community

Equally significant was Augustine's use of letters as a way of communicating ideas to a much larger audience than just the addressee through presenting them as dialogues.⁹¹ Jennifer Ebbeler has shown how, once Augustine had realised that his letters were going to elicit little response from their Donatist addressees, he began to see them merely as documentary evidence for use in the law courts.⁹² Augustine was also increasingly willing to break the boundaries of time to engage in textual dialogue with his opponents by responding to the letters, even if, as in the case of Parmenian, they were dead.⁹³

Augustine also attempted to circumvent the silence that met his letters to Donatist leaders by concocting replies out of any information that he could acquire. Macrobius, Augustine's counterpart at Hippo Regius, rebaptised one of Augustine's deacons and refused to answer Augustine's letter of protest. In lieu of a proper reply Augustine manufactured a response from Macrobius made up of the Donatist bishop's utterances when the letter was being read out to him which were witnessed by Augustine's own letter-bearers.⁹⁴

Augustine also used letters as a means to expose the parochialism of the Donatist textual community. The Donatists, according to Augustine, could not claim to be the Catholic church in North Africa because they were not in communion with the wider church:⁹⁵

90 Augustine, *Ep.* 213. For an account of the ceremony and acclamation Shaw 2011, 453–5.

91 For Augustine's use of letters to correct correspondents through the exchange of letters see Ebbeler 2012, 63–99, 151–89.

92 Ebbeler 2012, 181–4.

93 Ebbeler 2012, 177–8.

94 Augustine, *Epp.* 106, 107 and 108.

95 On Augustine's broad vision of the universal Church see Markus 1970, 113; Brown 2000, 221.

The sect of the Donatists, restricted to Africa alone, is an object of scorn to the rest of the world. It does not recognise that by its sterility, which refuses to nurture the fruits of peace and charity, it has been cut off from the root of the eastern churches from which the Gospel came into Africa.⁹⁶

For Augustine, texts – in this case letters – were the physical manifestation of that communion. At one public debate he challenged his Donatist opponent to prove his claim that his church was worldwide.

I asked him whether he could produce letters of authentication, which we call 'formatae', anywhere he wished, and I asserted that the question could easily be settled by that proof, which was evident to all. I was ready, if he agreed, for the test of sending such letters from our churches to those which, as we read, were founded by apostolic authority in apostolic time.⁹⁷

The mud stuck. This assertion was later accepted by Marcellinus, the imperial judge at the Council of Carthage in 411, who ruled that the faction which was in communion with churches overseas should be recognised as Catholic.⁹⁸

96 'pars autem Donati in solis Afris calumniatur orbi terrarum, et non considerat ea sterilitate, qua fructus pacis et caritatis afferre noluit, ab illa radice Orientalium Ecclesiarum se esse praecisam unde Evangelium in Africam venit' (Augustine, *Ep.* 52. 2). For similar arguments used by Augustine against the Donatists see *Epp.* 66. 1, 87. 5–7 and 93. 21–5.

97 Quarebam utrum epistolas communicatorias, quas formatas dicimus, posset quo vellem dare, et affirmabam, quod manifestum erat omnibus, hoc modo facillime illam terminari posse quaestionem. Parabam autem, ut si consentiret, ad illas ecclesias a nobis tales litterae mitterentur, quas in apostolicis auctoritatibus pariter legeremus illo iam tempore fuisse fundatas (Augustine, *Ep.* 44. 3). In fact, the Donatists were not against communication with the other Churches of the Christian world. For them, Augustine's broad boast that the Catholicity of the Catholics was sealed by their being in communion with the rest of the Church proved nothing except that the Catholic Church was in communion with the wrong group in North Africa, a state of affairs which would be rectified once the validity of their own position became clear (Tilley 1991, 17; Eno 1972, 46–50).

98 *Gesta Coll. Carth.* 3.92–103.

The 411 Conference and the Creation of a Catholic Textual Community

The 411 conference has to be viewed within the context of the verdict being a foregone conclusion. Both the Donatists and the Catholic bishops who attended knew that the judge, Marcellinus, would rule that the latter party was the true Catholic church of Africa. It was the inevitable end of a process that had started over six years previously.⁹⁹ The calculation in the Donatist camp, which had long experience of the capriciousness of imperial religious policy, appears to have been that, although a major reverse, the conference did not mark the end of their struggle. Many of the Donatist responses were clearly designed with a view to re-examination and renewed legal action at a later date.¹⁰⁰ For instance, they vehemently denied Marcellinus' statement that both sides had requested the conference.¹⁰¹ They were also insistent that they should be able to see the mandate which the Catholics had sent to Honorius with the justification that they wanted no one to be able to accuse them later of remaining silent in the face of lies.¹⁰²

The Donatist's grudging acceptance of Marcellinus' publication plans did not prevent them using pithy, quote-worthy statements that were designed for maximum effect in the conference proceedings.¹⁰³ As Thomas Graumann has argued, 'Repeatedly they (the Donatists) appear to be making statements for the record, envisaging the publication of the *gesta* and addressing through them a wider North-African audience – and potentially a future more benevolent administration – rather than expecting much immediate effect with their opponents or the chairman of the meeting.'¹⁰⁴ On the synodal letter presented on the third day of the conference the Donatists represented themselves as 'of the Catholic faith which does not commit but suffers persecution'.¹⁰⁵ The effectiveness of this

99 Graumann 2011, 332–3.

100 Hermanowicz, 2008, 216.

101 *Gesta Coll. Carth.* 3.129.

102 *Gesta Coll. Carth.* 3.138; 375.

103 For the Marcellinus' publication plan and the Donatist's grudging acceptance of it see *Gesta Coll. Carth.* 1.10.61; *Gesta Coll. Carth.* 3.135.

104 Graumann 2011, 332 argues that the Donatist refusal of Marcellinus' offer that they should sit was a cleverly managed refutation of the whole proceedings.

105 *Gesta Coll. Carth.* 3.258.

strategy can be gauged by Augustine's later insistence on challenging the statement in his abridged account of the proceedings.¹⁰⁶

Petilian was also careful to switch his signature from *Recognaui* to *Petilianus episcopus recognaui*.¹⁰⁷ He also objected when it came to light that some Catholic bishops had been signed down as *episcopus ecclesiae catholicae*, whereas some of his comrades had been signed down merely as bishop or even as part of the Donatist party.¹⁰⁸

The importance of the final transcript to all parties was reflected in the elaborate system of recording and transcription which had been established to create confidence in the record. Four Donatist and four Catholic bishops were to monitor the stenographers. The speakers themselves were required to check their transcribed words and publically acknowledge their accuracy by placing their signatures after each of their entries.¹⁰⁹ This attention to detail failed to prevent much of the second day of the proceedings being halted after Donatist objections to the continuation of the debate when the transcripts from the first session were not ready in fair, readable copies.¹¹⁰

Whereas for the Donatists the conference proceedings offered opportunities to generate unanswered queries that could be exploited in later legal battles, for the Catholics it meant a document that was final and complete in every sense, a point emphasised by Augustine on the third day of the conference:

if we have lobbied for this conference, it is not to examine the charge of 'tradition' with which they reproach Caecilian and his colleagues and to put an end to it once more, but to demonstrate that it ended a long time ago, to teach

106 Augustine, *Ad Donat. post Coll.* 16.20.

107 *Gesta Coll. Carth.* 1.7, 1.9.

108 *Gesta Coll. Carth.* 3.22; 30–5; 91–5.

109 Tengström 1962; Teitler 1985, 6–13.

110 *Gesta Coll. Carth.* 1.10. Their protests are often ascribed to dilatoriness, but they were simply arguing for the proper observance of Marcellinus' second edict, which declared that each day of discussion would be followed by a day wholly dedicated to transcribing the record, which would then be examined and signed by the participants. The stenographers had not finished transcribing the events of 1 June by the morning of 3 June. They clearly wanted to carefully check it. Shorthand writers wrote down the speeches which were copied out, checked and validated before being copied into the final proceedings which were kept in the offices of the proconsul of Africa. For the arrangements for the transcription of the 411 conference see Lancel 1972–91, 346–53. Tengström 1962, 20–34 suspected that the text had been amended.

the people who are ignorant of it and shaken by the accusations, so that they know in which church they will find the way to Christian salvation.¹¹¹

Augustine was also determined that documents from earlier historic legal cases where the Donatists had lost or had been proved wrong, such as the trial proceedings of Felix of Abthungi, should be included in the main body of the text rather than as appendices. Augustine even went to the length of having the documents read out so that they would be included in the transcript.¹¹² For Augustine this document was to be a comprehensive forensic refutation of the Donatists as a discrete textual community.

The Catholic assault on the Donatist textual community started on the first day of the conference. The Donatists, understandably, wanted to explore the terms of engagement, particularly with regard to who were the plaintiffs and dependents, and access to the documents that the Catholics had presented.¹¹³ Despite the fact that Marcellinus had judged it be a case of civil law, the Donatists in particular were unhappy about dealing with a religious case in a civil court. Petilian argued: 'Now, yet, again, I am demanding that they set forth which they choose, whether they are going to deal with me in a legal case or whether they will make their argument according to divine law.'¹¹⁴

The crux of the argument centred on the admissibility of evidence. Addressing Marcellinus, Petilian outlined the issue in the clearest possible terms: 'Therefore, Noble Judge, if the course of this case has conformed to the initial dispositions, either they (the Catholics) should jettison these official papers and commence the discussion according to (divine law), or if they want to resort to these documents, they should abandon divine law.'¹¹⁵

111 'Unde nunc collationem istam poposcimus, non ut illam causam traditionis quam Caeciliano et eius collegis obiiciebant, suscipiamus denuo finiendam, sed demonstremus olim esse finitam, ut hoc cognoscentes populi qui nesciunt, et istorum adhuc criminationibus commoventur, tandem aliquando cognoscant in qua Ecclesia christianae salutis viam requirant' (*Gesta Coll. Carth.* 3.187).

112 *Gesta Coll. Carth.* 3.215. Mac Gaw 2013, 55.

113 Monceaux 1901–23, 4, 413; Markus 2003, 325; Frend 1952, 279; Lancel 1972–91, 74; Lancel 2002, 296–300 view this as timewasting on the part of the Donatists.

114 'Et nunc etiam atque etiam flagito ut promant quid eligant, utrum forensi actione mecum agant, an legali concertatione disceptent' (*Gesta Coll. Carth.* 3.149). See also Tilley 1991, 13–14.

115 'Igitur, vir nobilis, si tenor se ita habet causae sicut ab initio videtur esse formatus, aut iacturam cartularum istarum publicarum faciant, et ad legalem disceptationem veniant; aut si his rebus uti desiderant, faciant legis divinae iacturam' (*Gesta Coll. Carth.* 3.153).

Augustine, in his response, crafted a very careful distinction between the *Causa ecclesiae* and *Causa Caeciliani*: the basis for the former was the holy texts, for the latter legal documents.¹¹⁶ Augustine explained that the Catholics would be happy to have a debate according to scripture as long as the cases of individuals such as Caecilian were raised. Recent scholarship has rightly observed that, behind this exchange, lay the opposing views that the two parties held as to the nature of the church, with the Donatists regarding it a bastion of purity and the Catholics as representative of the world and therefore comprising of both sinners and saved.¹¹⁷ Maureen Tilley has also argued convincingly that the Donatists wished to place Caecilian at the centre of the debate to underline how their opponents had singularly failed to deal with sinful behaviour within their own ranks that, in turn, meant they could not be the true church.¹¹⁸

Hermanowicz has emphasised the differing attitudes towards the legal texts, with the Donatists viewing this material in terms of actual procedure, whereas the Catholics considered it as 'a matter of historical consequence'.¹¹⁹ There was, however, another very significant undercurrent, one that had important implications for Donatism as a textual community. In establishing a clear alternative between legal documents and Scriptures Augustine was firmly taking control of the terms of textual engagement. Augustine's position, which was confirmed by Marcellinus, also directly questioned the legitimacy of Donatism as a textual community made up of an interconnected web of scriptural, other religious, and legal material.¹²⁰

The conference of 411 represented the finale of a sustained assault on the part of Augustine on the Donatist textual community. Augustine understood that the *de facto* textual apartheid that had existed between the Catholics and Donatists could be construed as an unspoken recognition of the former as a legitimate and discrete community – in other words, a church. Augustine's campaign to force Donatist bishops to engage in dialogue with himself and his insistence on these encounters being transcribed was about creating new texts that reflected his vision of a broad Catholic church whose purity would be guaranteed only on the

116 *Gesta Coll. Carth.* 3.55.

117 Mac Gaw 2013, 51–4.

118 Tilley 1991.

119 Hermanowicz 2008, 204. More generally on Donatist legal strategy at the conference see Hermanowicz 2008, 204–12.

120 *Gesta Coll. Carth.* 3.156.

Day of Judgement. The Donatists would not be afforded the dignity of separation but would merely join the baleful ranks of transgressors who required correction. These new transcripts and the official record of the 411 conference, therefore, were designed as a conclusive rejection of the intellectual and legal underpinnings of Donatist sectarianism.

The importance of the 411 transcript to the Catholics can be gauged by the effort that Augustine expended on its distribution and publication. As soon as Augustine had returned to Hippo Regius from the conference, he started badgering Marcellinus for a copy of the *Gesta* so that he could exploit its propagandic value.¹²¹ In sermons and letters, and at public meetings, Augustine turned back to the conference proceedings (*ut nuper in collatione nostra quod etiam in Gestis ipsis legere potestis*) to condemn the Donatists.¹²² He recommended that the minutes be read out annually in church during Lent.¹²³

Augustine appears to have sincerely believed that even the most ardent Donatist when they read the *Gesta* could not fail to see that the Donatists had been comprehensively defeated. In 416, in a letter to Donatus, a Donatist priest of Mutugenna in the diocese of Hippo who had been brought forcibly into a Catholic church and had then attempted to commit suicide by throwing himself down a well, Augustine wrote:

For this reason the mercy of God provided your bishops and us with the opportunity to meet at Carthage in such a well-attended, even crowded, conference, and of taking part in a discussion in a very orderly manner about this disagreement between us. The record of it has been written up; our signatures are in evidence. Read it or have it read to you, and then choose which side you prefer ... But read the rest of the record, read the rest of it ... Read them or have them read to you. Consider them all, examine them carefully, and choose which side you follow.¹²⁴

121 Augustine, *Ep.* 139.1. Augustine would pin his anti-Donatist works up on the walls of Donatist churches (*Retract.* 2. 53).

122 Augustine, *Serm.* 99.8.

123 Augustine, *Ep.* 28.2.

124 'Ideo praestitit misericordia Dei ut et nos et episcopi vestri tam frequenti numeroque conventu Carthaginem veniremus, atque inter nos de ipsa dissensione ordinatissime conferremus. Gesta conscripta sunt, nostrae etiam subscriptiones tenentur; lege, vel patere ut tibi legantur, et tunc elige quod volueris. ... Lege ista, vel legantur tibi. Considera omnia, retracta diligenter, et elige quid sequaris' (Augustine, *Ep.* 173.7–9 abridged). For further evidence of Augustine's promotion of the work see *Ep.* 134.4 to Apringius the proconsul of Africa and the brother of Marcellinus.

Augustine wrote his *Brevicarium* – an abridged version of the *Gesta Conlationis Carthagenensis* – as part of his campaign to publicise the 411 conference. In one letter he encouraged a rural bishop to read this summary out in churches that had recently been taken over from the Donatists. Seemingly, not just content with recommending the work, Augustine also carefully set out the optimum environment for its redaction. After the reading-out of the *Gesta* of the conference, the shorter account should then be read out – not, however, from the usual reader's position, but in a less formal setting with the congregation allowed to sit.¹²⁵

Although in his *Retractions* Augustine justified writing the *Brevicarium* on the grounds of the length of the unabridged proceedings, the work was anything but a mere shortened, simplified version of the *Gesta*.¹²⁶ Clarification of the text quickly slipped into interpretation. At important junctures the legitimate complaints of the Donatists and the pedantic interventions of the Catholics were glossed over.¹²⁷ Augustine also had no qualms about strengthening the Catholic arguments used against the Donatists at the conference,¹²⁸ and was uninhibited about including in his shortened version of the *Gesta* information that he might have discovered after the meeting of 411.¹²⁹

Ultimately, the Donatists were outmanoeuvred as a result of the Catholic determination to turn the proceedings of the 411 conference into the definitive record of the schism, one that could be used without recourse to the other myriad of documents and dossiers that were symbols of the intractable textual sectarianism that had typified the controversy.

In the years following the Conference of Carthage, Augustine and the victorious Catholic Church systematically set about the difficult task of dismantling the Donatist church. To achieve that aim a range of tough tactics was used against the Donatists, including physical coercion.¹³⁰ As part of that wider strategy, Augustine continued to try to stage public

125 Augustine, *Ep.* 28.2–3.

126 Augustine, *Retract.* 2.29.46.

127 Augustine, *Brev. Coll.* 9; *Gesta Coll. Carth.* 1.38–55 dismissing the Donatist question whether dispute should be sorted out under secular public justice or under divine law.

128 *Brev. Coll.* 3.8.10–14.

129 *Brev. Coll.* 3.17.32 on the date of the Council of Circa; *Brev. Coll.* 3.7.9. rebutting the insinuations around his own ordinations.

130 For a justification of imperial coercion see Augustine, *Ep.* 93; *C. Gaud.* 1.25.28. Russell 1999; Brown 1964.

'debates' with the dispossessed and harried Donatist leadership, producing transcripts of their defeats that could then be distributed amongst their old congregations. This initiative reached its apogee with Augustine's account of his 'debate' with the Donatist bishop Emeritus of Caesarea in the latter's old church. Augustine presented his encounter with Emeritus, brutally portrayed as a cowed and beaten old man, as a quasi-legal transcript.¹³¹ Faced with an impossible situation Emeritus had, after a short period, reverted to the only form of defiance open to him, silence. However, it made little difference. In the text Augustine merely continued the 'dialogue' by presenting what he *thought* Emeritus would have said.¹³²

'Resistance' and the Survival of the Donatist Textual Community

Paradoxically, some Donatist literature found a home in the post-411 Catholic textual community even in the work of their great destroyer. Augustine adopted and advanced some of Tyconius' ideas in his own work, including his famous seven rules of biblical interpretation in the later books of *De Doctrina Cristiana*.¹³³ Pre-Constantinian martyr tales that had been much favoured by the Donatists, such as the Passion of the Abitinian martyrs, were also appropriated.¹³⁴ In the later fifth century Catholic writers made additions to the *Liber genealogus* as the text now resonated for them under the persecution of the Arian Vandals. Sermons by ex-Donatist bishops concerning their conversion to Catholicism also found their way into the collections of those who had once opposed them, such as Maximianus of Castellum Siniti, whose sermon is in the corpus of Augustine.¹³⁵

A dossier of sermons dating between 411 and 429, was probably written by an ex-Donatist who had joined the Catholic fold. There are signs within the collection of their author adapting to the new set of circumstances in which he found himself. In these sermons there is a careful avoidance

131 See, for instance, Augustine's account of his 'debate' with the Donatist bishop Emeritus of Caesarea, which was clearly written to resemble an official legal document (Augustine, *Gesta cum Emerito*, preface). Shaw 2011, 508–12.

132 Augustine, *Gesta cum Emerito*, 2–3.

133 Tyconius, *Liber Regularum*, 72–5. Augustine, *De Doc. Christ.* 3; *De. Civ. Dei*, 18, 49. For Tyconius' influence on Augustine, van Oort 1991, 254–74.

134 Augustine, *Brev. Coll.* 3.17.32.

135 Pseudo-Augustine, *Sermones Dubii*, S.360; Dossey 2010, 154.

of allusions to the outside world or contemporary events.¹³⁶ There is also a sense of trying to find common ground through the condemnation of mutual enemies such as pagans and Pelagians.¹³⁷

However, isolated instances of subtle resistance still remained. One sermon, in particular, from the collection stands out with the gospels heavily used to expound a range of Donatist positions: false Christians did the devil's work but were exposed by their deeds (Matthew 7, 15–6); the good tree could not produce bad fruit nor the bad tree good fruit (Matthew 7, 18); wickedness naturally tries to hide itself but when it is exposed one needs to be wary of it (Matthew 7, 20); suffering persecution as the mark of the true Christian and taking part in persecution as the sign of false Christians (Matthew 5, 11). Isaiah 52, 11 and 2 Corinthians 6, 14 were also used to make the case for complete separation from sinners.¹³⁸ It has been suggested that its Catholic convert author had left this sermon in his collection as a reminder of old loyalties.¹³⁹

An intriguing suggestion has also been made about the Donatist *Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs*: that it was in fact written as a defiant response to the 411 conference, rather than in the early fourth century CE.¹⁴⁰ This text recounted the arrest, imprisonment and martyrdom of a group of Christians at Abitina and notoriously accused Caecilian and his bishop of using security guards to prevent their fellow Christians bringing the prisoners any food. Even Emeritus' seeming humiliation might also be read as a clever piece of recalcitrance. One might suspect that Augustine's partisan account airbrushed out Emeritus' accusatory eyeballing of his now Catholic ex-congregation assembled shamefacedly in front of him. However, Emeritus' repetitive response of 'fac' – 'do what you wish' – might in fact have been a cunning display of defiance on the part of an old bishop who well understood that Augustine would make his words immortal. These were the very words that no less a figure than Africa's most revered bishop and martyr, Cyprian of Carthage, had uttered to the persecuting Roman governor, Galerius Maximus, at his own triumphant trial.¹⁴¹

136 Alexander 2001, 6–7.

137 Leroy 1994, 140; 1997, 256.

138 Sermon 39 (Leroy 1997, 259–62) = Escorial 18 PLS 4, 707–10). Leroy 1997, 250–8 & Alexander, 2001, 5–6 for analysis of the features that identify this sermon as Donatist.

139 Leroy 1997, 250–2.

140 Dearn 2004 *contra* Tilley 1996, 25–50.

141 Shaw 2011, 12 n. 8.

Conclusion

During nearly a century of religious stasis both the Donatist and Catholic factions had marshalled ever-growing corpora of religious and legal textual 'evidence' in order to prove the rectitude of their respective positions. This literature also provided the building blocks for the creation of powerful, self-sustaining Donatist and Catholic textual communities that further consolidated the sectarian landscape of Christian North Africa in the fourth and early fifth centuries CE.

This deadlock was broken by the decisive intervention of Augustine of Hippo, who set out to dismantle the Donatist textual community. In letters, sermons, council documents, court papers and recorded debates, Augustine and his allies relentlessly attempted to delegitimise or appropriate the religious texts and secular documents around which Donatism had been carefully constructed. In characterising the Donatists merely as obstinate and misguided dissidents in need of correction within a broad Christian church, Augustine delivered a powerful refutation of the Donatist's carefully constructed self-image as the Church of the Pure attempting to insulate itself from a sinful world.

The Augustinian vision of a universal church inhabited by both saints and sinners was shored up by the creation of new texts that challenged the old certainties created by decades of religious sectarianism. Faced by opponents who were afraid of the legal consequences and anxious to maintain their self-image as a community that rejected the sinful world and refused to engage in dialogue, Augustine used any opportunity that presented itself to initiate contact with Donatist bishops and clergy in order to produce new texts from the transcripts of their 'conversations'.

Although it did not mark a conclusive end to the Donatist Controversy, the official records of the 411 Conference of Carthage and the abbreviated versions that followed it reflected the relentless nature of the Catholic campaign against the textual foundations of Donatism. The proceedings themselves underlined the importance that both sides ascribed to the production and dissemination of an official account of the conference. However, their respective strategies highlighted the gulf in their ambitions. Understanding a judicial judgement against them was a foregone conclusion, the Donatist leadership, merely hoped that their often perceptive and effective interventions would prepare the ground for a future appeal to an imperial government that was less implacably opposed to their cause. In contrast, the aim of Augustine and his fellow Catholics was nothing less

than to create a definitive 'universal' document that would not only conclusively settle this long-running and destructive dispute but also stand as an emphatic rejection of the idea of a discrete Donatist textual community.

Finally, it is worth reflecting on the relative failure of the Donatist strategy of *omerta*. When his approaches to Donatist bishops and clergy were met with silence, Augustine simply invented responses in order to keep the 'dialogue' going. This short-sighted tactic had another unforeseen but even more serious consequence, achieving paradoxically what even the 411 conference and subsequent imperial persecution failed to bring about: the eventual silencing of Donatism in North Africa.

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