Responses to Conflict in Early Christianity

Romani Principes Adversum Nos Provocantur: Augustine of Hippo's *Epistula* 87 to Emeritus of Caesarea

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Abstract

Prior to the 411 colloquy at Carthage, Augustine had written to Emeritus, the Donatist bishop of Cherchell, urging him to abandon his adherence to Donatism. A complaint of the Donatists against the Caecilianists was that they urged the state to persecute Donatists. Augustine put words into Emeritus' mouth: "... you stir up the Roman emperors against us." (Ep. 87.8) Augustine told Emeritus that one can only be persecuted if one's cause is right; if evil then it is legitimate punishment. In Augustine's view the Donatists have brought imperial punishment (not persecution) upon themselves because of their schism. This paper will show how Augustine sidesteps a dilemma using Paul's letter to the Romans: while it is true that Christians should not judge each other (Rom 14:4), it is the responsibility of the state to punish wrongdoers (Rom 13:2-4), while it is the responsibility of Christians to rehabilitate them (Rom 11:23).

Keywords

Augustine of Hippo – Donatism – religious coercion – religious violence

1 Introduction

At its heart Donatism, which dominated North African Christianity for a century from early in the fourth century, was a seemingly irreconcilable clash between views about purity and unity within the church.¹ Both sides in the dispute created caricatures of themselves and their opponents in order to score debating points. One side, which we may label using the traditional designation of Donatist,² saw themselves as pure and untainted by worldly compromise, prepared for martyrdom, and defined church membership in such a rigorous way as to exclude those who were deemed to have sinned through

- 1 For a convenient outline of the history of Donatism see W.H.C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa*, Oxford, 1985, 3rd edn; *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa*, trans. M.A. Tilley (TTH, 24), Liverpool, 1996, pp. xi–xvii; M.A. Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World*, Minneapolis, 1997; W.H.C. Frend, “Donatism,” in: *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. E. Ferguson, New York–London, 1997, 2nd edn, pp. 343–347; R.A. Markus, “Donatism,” in: *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. A.D. Fitzgerald, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1999, pp. 284–287; P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, Berkeley–Los Angeles, 2000, rev. edn, pp. 207–221; S. Lancel, *St Augustine*, trans. A. Nevill, London, 2002, Eng. edn, pp. 162–173; J. Hoover, “The Contours of Donatism: Theological and Ideological Diversity in Fourth Century North Africa,” MA diss., Baylor, 2008; L. Dossey, *Peasant and Empire in Christian North Africa* (TCH, 470), Berkeley–Los Angeles, 2010, pp. 19–21; J.P. Burns and R.M. Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa: The Development of its Practices and Beliefs*, Grand Rapids, Mich., 2014, pp. 47–57; and *The Donatist Schism: Controversy and Contexts*, ed. by R. Miles (TTHC, 2), Liverpool, 2016. B. van Egmond, “Perseverance until the End in Augustine’s Anti-Donatist Polemic,” in: *Studia Patristica*, 70, ed. M. Vinzent, papers presented at the sixteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies, Oxford 2011, Leuven, 2013, pp. 433–438, at p. 433, claims that the question of which community persevered in the truth during the persecution of Diocletian is at the heart of the controversy.
- 2 We know that ‘Donatist’ was the epithet given to them by their opponents. Traditional scholarship simply named their opponents as ‘Catholics’, a term the Donatists would not have conceded to them, seeing that as a term they would use of themselves. Both sides wanted to see themselves as Catholic, for to be Catholic was to be orthodox. To be fair, if we are going to use the label ‘Donatist’ imposed by the opposition on one group, we should equally use the label imposed by that opposition on the first group. In that case we should describe the first group as *traditores*. The fact that the first group would reject vehemently being described as traitors, gives us some clue as to how much the other group would have rejected being called the church of Donatus. In my own work I am prepared to call one group Donatists, since that has been a long-standing convention, and prefer to call the other group Caecilianists rather than Catholics, in order to emphasise the extent to which identity was formed by adherence to a leader. On some of these theoretical issues see M.A. Tilley, “Redefining Donatism: Moving Forward,” *AugSt*, 42 (2011), pp. 21–32.

lapse of fidelity to their faith, and viewed the validity of the sacraments as depending upon the holiness of the minister.³ The other side, whom we may label Caecilianists, saw themselves as more open to the world around them and defined church membership in such a way as to include those who had sinned but had been reconciled through repentance in order to preserve church unity, and viewed the validity of the sacraments as depending upon the activity of the Spirit. Assessing the importance of the Donatist controversy in the history of Christianity, we may turn to the words of Peter Brown when he writes,

It is not surprising, therefore, that Africa, which had always been the home of articulate and extreme views on the nature of the Church as a group in society, once again, in the age of Augustine, became the ‘cockpit of Europe’, for this, the last great debate, whose outcome would determine the form taken by the Catholic domination of the Latin world until the Reformation.⁴

Donatism is most often regarded as a schism rather than a heresy, with Patout Burns and Robin Jensen going as far as to say that “[t]he Donatist schism is one founded not so much on belief as on religious practice.”⁵ Yet, as the late Maureen Tilley pointed out in her 2006 presidential address to the North American Patristics Society, it is often hard to distinguish doctrinal heresy from organisational schism.⁶ Although Donatists and Caecilianists differed in essential practices those practices were based upon divergent and unacceptable views of purity and unity.

There was much variety in the responses to this conflict over the century that it existed, ranging from discussion and debate to violence. While the presence of violence has received extensive treatment recently in the work of Brent Shaw, other, less forceful, means of dealing with the conflict also need to be

3 On Donatist ecclesiology see M.A. Gaumer, “The Evolution of Donatist Theology as Response to a Changing Late Antique Milieu,” *Augustiniana*, 58 (2008), pp. 201-233.

4 Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, pp. 209-210.

5 Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, p. 47.

6 M.A. Tilley, “When Schism Becomes Heresy in Late Antiquity: Developing Doctrinal Deviance in the Wounded Body of Christ,” *J ECS*, 15 (2007), pp. 1-21. She named the two groups as Majorinists and Mensurianists, which captures the same sense of the two groups as I see them, although using the less familiar names of the actual original protagonist bishops. On the lack of clear distinction on these two terms in Tertullian and Cyprian see G.D. Dunn, “Heresy and Schism According to Cyprian of Carthage,” *JTS*, n.s. 55 (2004), pp. 551-574.

reassessed.⁷ The approach of Augustine, bishop of Annaba (ancient Hippo Regius in the Roman province of Numidia), was to engage his Donatist episcopal colleagues in an exchange of correspondence in order to offer rational argument to reinforce his own claim to legitimacy and to disprove the claims of his opponents. As part of the rhetorical tactics employed by each side in trying to win their arguments, there was nothing more satisfying than finding inconsistency in the opponent's primary values. Thus, the Caecilianists delighted in finding examples of Donatists failing to exclude those among them who failed, and the Donatists were equally ecstatic and jubilant to uncover instances where the Caecilianists excluded individuals from church membership. Each side was particularly sensitive to criticisms of this kind and went to inordinate lengths to discredit and undermine the arguments used against them.

In this paper I wish to consider how Augustine responded in *Epistula* 87 to the censure from Emeritus, bishop of Cherchell (ancient Caesarea in the Roman province of Mauretania Caesariensis),⁸ in particular to the latter's claim that by appealing to the Roman authorities the Caecilianists were undermining the unity of the church, which they espoused most fervently, by engaging in a persecution designed to drive them from Christian ranks.⁹ This, as Augustine speculated, was the charge the Donatists would throw against him and his church: "But, you will say, 'you stir up the Roman emperors against us.'" ¹⁰ He was acutely aware that to be seen to persecute (or to turn to the state to do it on their behalf) those they regarded as deviant or separatist Christians was the most damaging attack on their (the Caecilianists') claim to be the church of unity and tolerance. In this letter Augustine had to deal with the fact that not only did he engage in intellectual debate with his opponents but he had involved the machinery of government to do the dirty work for him and his side, and this needed to be justified.

7 B.D. Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine*, Cambridge, 2011.

8 On Emeritus see J.-L. Maier, *L'épiscopat de l'Afrique romaine, vandale et byzantine* (Bibliotheca Helvetica Romana, 11), Rome, 1973, p. 302; and A. Mandouze, *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire* [= PCBE], vol. 1: *Prosopographie de l'Afrique chrétienne (303-533)*, Paris, 1982, pp. 340-349 (Emeritus 2). On the church of Caesarea Mauretania see Maier, *L'épiscopat de l'Afrique romaine*, p. 120.

9 Augustine, *Ep. 87*; S. Aureli Augustini Hipponiensis episcopi *Epistulae*, pars 2: *Ep. 31-123*, ed. A. Goldbacher (CSEL, 34/2), Vienna, 1898, pp. 397-406 [= NBA, 21/2, Rome, 1969, pp. 736-750]. English translation in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, part II, vol. 1: *Letters 1-99*, trans. R. Teske, Hyde Park, NY, 2001.

10 Augustine, *Ep. 87.8*; NBA, 21/2.744: "Sed a uobis, inquires, Romani principes aduersum nos prouocantur."

While both blocs would try to enlist Cyprian, the mid-third century Carthaginian bishop, to their side, at the heart of Augustine's defence of the Caecilianists is the support he could garner from the Scriptures.¹¹ Thus, in agreement with Maureen Tilley, I disagree with Robert Eno's assessment that biblical passages for the Donatists were a "minor consideration".¹² The fact that Augustine appealed to Scripture as much as to historical events or logical argument in this letter as elsewhere is clear proof that the Scripture was of major importance for both sides in the long-running dispute.

As a bishop from Maurentania Caesariensis, Emeritus might have been something of a small-time player in a much larger drama. Indeed, Brown never mentions him at all in his biography of Augustine. Yet, as we shall see, his was a metropolitan church, and eventually, anywhere up to a decade after this letter, Augustine would visit Cherchell in 418 in person and meet Emeritus, so his interaction with him is not without significance.¹³ Further, the issues explored

11 See R.A. Markus, "Christianity and Dissent in Roman North Africa: Changing Perspectives in Recent Work," in: *Schism, Heresy and Religious Protest: Papers Read at the Tenth Summer Meeting and the Eleventh Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. D. Baker (Studies in Church History, 9), Cambridge, 1972, pp. 21-36; and B.D. Shaw, "African Christianity: Disputes, Definitions and 'Donatists,'" in: *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Religious Movements: Discipline and Dissent. Essays in Honour of M. James Penton on His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. M.R. Greenshields and T.A. Robinson (Centre for the Study of American Religion, 2), Lewiston-Lampeter, 1992, pp. 5-34 [= B.D. Shaw, *Rulers, Nomads, and Christians in Roman North Africa* (Collected Studies Series), Aldershoot and Brookfield, Vt, 1995, ch. 11]. On Cyprian see J.P. Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop* (Routledge Early Church Monographs), London-New York, 2002; G.D. Dunn, *Cyprian and the Bishops of Rome: Questions of Papal Primacy in the Early Church* (ECS, 11), Strathfield, NSW, 2007; A. Brent, *Cyprian and Roman Carthage*, Cambridge, 2010; and *Cyprian of Carthage: Studies in His Life, Language, and Thought*, ed. H. Bakker, P. van Geest, and H. van Loon (LAHR, 3), Leuven, 2010. On Augustine's appeals to Cyprian see ; M.A. Gaumer, "Dealing with the Donatist Church: Augustine of Hippo's Nuanced Claim to the Authority of Cyprian of Carthage," in: *Cyprian of Carthage*, ed. van Geest, van Loon, and Bakker, pp. 181-202; M.A. Gaumer, *Augustine's Appeal to Cyprian in the Donatist and Pelagian Controversies: A Study of the Legitimacy of the Use of Authority in Two Controversies in Roman North Africa*, Leuven, 2012; and M.A. Gaumer, *Augustine's Cyprian: Authority in Roman Africa* (Brill's Series in Church History and Religious Culture, 73), Leiden-Boston, 2016.

12 R.B. Eno, "Doctrinal Authority in Saint Augustine," *AugSt*, 12 (1981), pp. 133-172, at p. 161. See Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, p. 12.

13 See Augustine, *Sermo ad Caesariensis ecclesiae plebem; Sancti Aureli Augustini scripta contra Donatistas*, pars 3, ed. M. Petschenig (CSEL, 53), Vienna, 1910, pp. 167-178 [= NBA 16/2, Rome, 2000, pp. 336-356]; and *Gesta cum Emerito*; CSEL, 53.181-196 [= NBA 16/2.378-406]. On the voyage there see O. Perler and J.-L. Maier, *Les voyages de saint Augustin*, Paris, 1969, pp. 72, and 466-467.

in the letter are some of the central ones in the whole Donatist schism. We may begin by considering the historical background to this letter before analysing its contents and assessing its contribution to how Augustine responded to conflict in early Christianity. The argument is that Augustine was not interested in compromise and negotiation over religious difference but in achieving a winner-take-all victory over his opponents. He was prepared to enlist the long arm of the state in enacting and enforcing laws against them, but was very sensitive to accusations that this amounted to persecution. He sought to defend himself from the charge that it was not right for Christians to involve the state and that he was being inconsistent in insisting both upon church unity and the punishment of recalcitrant schismatics by appealing to external coercion and punishment.

2 Historical Context

Cherchell is a seaside town with a fine harbour on the Mediterranean coast of Libya, some one hundred kilometres west of Algiers. It was the second most important port in Africa after Carthage, and possibly contained a population of about 20,000.¹⁴ Originally a Phoenician settlement named Iol, it was established at the start of the fifth century BC and it became part of Jugurtha's kingdom of Numidia before being inherited by his father-in-law and betrayer, Bocchus I, king of Mauretania,¹⁵ and then was controlled by his son, Bocchus II. When Augustus became emperor much of the territory was given to Juba II, Jugurtha's great-great nephew, as a client kingdom, who renamed Iol as Iol Caesarea Mauretaniae and made it his capital.¹⁶ The town was endowed with the standard features of Roman architecture: baths, forum, temples, theatre, amphitheatre, circus, stadium, library, aqueducts, walls, as well as a splendid lighthouse.¹⁷ When Claudius made Mauretania into two Roman provinces in

¹⁴ Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, p. 14.

¹⁵ See Sallust, *Bellum Iugurthinum* 97.2; cf. 103.1; and Plutarch, *Sulla* 3. Plutarch, *Marius* 10, calls Bocchus Jugurtha's son-in-law.

¹⁶ Eutropius, *Breu.* 7.10.3. See S. Raven, *Rome in Africa*, London–New York, 1993, 3rd edn, pp. 12, 55–56, 70–71, and 100–101; T. Potter, *Towns in Antiquity: Iol Caesarea and its Context*, Oxford, 1995; T. Potter, "Recent Work in North Africa: The Cherchel Excavations," in: *North Africa from Antiquity to Islam*, ed. M. Horton and T. Wiedemann (Centre for Mediterranean Studies, Occasional Papers, 13), Bristol, 1996, pp. 34–38; and D.W. Roller, *The World of Juba II and Kleopatra Selene*, London–New York, 2003.

¹⁷ See T. Potter and N. Benseddik, *Fouilles au Forum de Cherchel, 1977–1981* (Supplement to BAA, 6), 2 vols, Algiers, 1993; and G. Sears, *The Cities of Roman Africa*, Stroud, 2011, pp. 41–43.

44 the town was made a colony and renamed as Colonia Claudia Caesarea of Mauretania Caesariensis.¹⁸ Under the reforms of Diocletian it remained the capital of a smaller province of the same name in the civil diocese of Africa. There is mosaic evidence that suggests it was a fertile area, growing grapes, vines, and corn,¹⁹ although it was a more mountainous and harsh terrain than Africa Proconsularis.

Theodosius, father of the future emperor, Theodosius I, discovered Caesarea burnt in 373 by the African rebel, Firmus, son of Nubel, king of Mauretania, and himself *dux Mauretaniae*, who had risen up against the corruption of Romanus, the local governor, or his failure to deal with corruption.²⁰ Firmus was the brother of Gildo, a *comes et magister militum utriusque militiae per Africam*, who would also rebel against the empire.²¹ The ancient sources mention it as having been a splendid city and it would take years for it to be restored fully, as the letter of 380 from Symmachus to his brother, Celsinus Titianus, *ui-carius Africae*, indicates.²² Interestingly and somewhat surprisingly, Symmachus highlighted favourably the efforts of the bishop of Caesarea, Clemens, in helping restore the town.

As Paul-Albert Février and Jane Merdinger point out, there is evidence of Christianity in Mauretania from the time of Tertullian and Christian bishops in Mauretania Caesariensis from the time of Cyprian in the middle of the third century, with the first attested bishop in Chervell being Fortunatus, who

18 Pliny the Elder, *Nat. hist.* 5.2.

19 Raven, *Rome in Africa*, p. 92.

20 Ammianus Marcellinus 29.5.18; Zosimus, *Hist. nou.* 4.16.3; Zosime, *Histoire nouvelle*, t. 2/2: *Livre 4*, ed. F. Paschoud (Collection des Universités de France), Paris, 1979, 277; and Orosius, *Hist. adu. pag.* 7.33.5-7; *Pauli Orosii Historiarum aduersum paganos libri VII accedit eiusdem Liber apologeticus*, ed. K. Zangemeister (CSEL, 5), Vienna, 1882, pp. 516-517. On Theodosius see A.H.M. Jones, J.R. Martindale, and J. Morris, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* [= *PLRE*], vol. 1: A.D. 260-395, Cambridge, 1971, pp. 902-904 (Theodosius 2). On Firmus see *PLRE* 1.340 (Firmus 3); and *PCBE* 1.457 (Firmus 1). On Romanus see *PLRE* 1.768 (Romanus 3); and *PCBE* 1.997-998 (Romanus 1). See S. Williams and G. Friell, *Theodosius: The Empire at Bay*, London, 1994, pp. 23 and 42; Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, pp. 38-46; and H. Börm, "Born to Be Emperor: The Principle of Succession and the Roman Monarchy," in: *Contested Monarchy: Integrating the Roman Empire in the Fourth Century AD*, ed. J. Wienand (OSLA), Oxford, 2015, pp. 239-264, at p. 257.

21 Claudian, *Gild.* On Gildo see *PLRE* 1.395-396; *PCBE* 1.539 (Gildo 1); and A. Cameron, *Claudian: Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius*, Oxford, 1970, pp. 93-123.

22 Symmachus, *Ep.* 1.64; *Q. Aurelii Symmachi quae supersunt*, ed. by O. Seeck (MGHAA, 6/1), Berlin, 1883, p. 29. See M.R. Salzman and M. Roberts, *The Letters Of Symmachus: Book 1* (WGRW, 30), Atlanta, 2011, pp. 132-134. On Symmachus see *PLRE* 1.865-871 (Symmachus 4). On Titianus see *PLRE* 1.917-918 (Titianus 5); and *PCBE* 1.1115 (Titianus 1).

attended the 314 synod in Arles.²³ Merdinger even suggests that a number of bishops in Mauretania disagreed with the views of Tertullian and Cyprian about the need to baptize heretics because heretical baptism was invalid.²⁴ We cannot be sure when Donatism reached Chervill, although it was certainly before the Donatist synod of Carthage in 336, at which Mauretanian Donatist bishops were present and in which they argued against the Donatist practice of baptizing heretics who wanted to enter their church.²⁵ Nor do we know when Emeritus became the Donatist bishop there. Augustine regards him as well educated and thoughtful man.²⁶

We do know that Emeritus was bishop in 394 because, as we are told later in *Gesta cum Emerito*, it was Emeritus who delivered the sentence passed at the synod of Ksar-Baghāi (ancient Bagai in the province of Numidia) on behalf of Primianus as legitimate (Donatist) bishop of Carthage against Maximian, which represented a significant schism within Donatism itself.²⁷ We also know

- 23 Tertullian, *Ad Scap.* 4.8; *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani Opera*, pars 2: *Opera Montanistica*, ed. E. Dekkers et al. (CCL, 2) Turnhout, 1954, p. 1131. Cf. J. Rives, *Religion and Authority in Roman Carthage from Augustus to Constantine*, Oxford, 1995, 224. P.-A. Février, "Aux origènes du christianisme en Maurétanie Césarienne," *MEFRA*, 98 (1986), pp. 767-804; and J. Merdinger, "Roman North Africa," in: *Early Christianity in Contexts: An Exploration across Culture and Continents*, ed. W. Tabbernee, Grand Rapids, Mich., 2014, pp. 223-260, at pp. 251-254. See also Y. Duval, "Densité et repartition des évêchés dans les provinces africaines au temps de Cyprien," *MEFRA*, 96 (1984), 493-521, at 519. On Fortunatus see *PCBE* 1.489 (Fortunatus 1); and Synod of Arles (314), *Ep. ad Siluestrum; Conciliae Galliae a. 314 – a. 506*, ed. C. Munier (CCL, 148), Turnhout, 1963, p. 4; and Synod of Arles (314), *Can. Ad Siluestrum*; CCL 148.15, 17, 19, 20, and 22. On the synod of Arles see K.J. Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church from the Original Documents*, vol. 1: *To the Close of the Council of Nicaea, A.D. 325*, trans. W.R. Clark, Edinburgh, 1894, pp. 180-199; I. Mazzini, "La lettera del concilio di Arles (314) a papa Silvestro tradita dal codex Parisinus Latinus 1711. Dubbi intorno alla sua autenticità," *VC*, 27 (1973), pp. 282-300; Maier, *L'épiscopat de l'Afrique romaine*, pp. 27-28; J.-L. Maier, *Le dossier du Donatisme*, t. 1: *Des origines à la mort de Constante II (303 – 361)* (TU, 134), Berlin, 1987, pp. 160-167; B. Kriegbaum, "Zwischen den Synoden von Rom und Arles: Die donatistische Supplik bei Optatus," *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae*, 28 (1990), pp. 23-61; C.M. Odahl, "Constantine's Epistle to the Bishops at the Council of Arles: A Defence of Imperial Authorship," *JRH*, 17 (1993), pp. 274-289; and J.L. Boojamra, "Constantine and the Council of Arles: The Foundations of Church and State in the Christian East," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 43 (1998), pp. 129-141.
- 24 J.E. Merdinger, "Before Augustine's Encounter with Emeritus: Early Mauretanian Donatism," in: *Studia Patristica*, 70, ed. Vinzent, pp. 371-379, at pp. 375-376.
- 25 Augustine, *Ep.* 93.10.43; NBA 21/2.862. See Maier, *L'épiscopat de l'Afrique*, pp. 28-29.
- 26 Augustine, *Ep.* 87.1; NBA 21/2.736: "... bono ingenio praeditum, doctrinisque liberalibus eruditum..."
- 27 Augustine, *Gesta cum Emer.* 10; NBA 16/2.400. On the sentence passed at Baghai see

that Augustine had written to Emeritus prior to *Epistula* 87.²⁸ Merdinger speculates as to whether Augustine mentioned that Emeritus was part of a Mauretanian tradition that, like the Caecilianists, did not favour the baptism of heretics or schismatics joining their respective communities.²⁹

Augustine's *Epistula* 87, which we are considering in this paper, is usually dated to between 405 and 411, i.e. before the 411 colloquy in Carthage and after Honorius' Edict of Union of 405.³⁰ We may turn now to consider its contents.

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- Augustine, *C. ep. Parm.* 2.3-7; *Sancti Aureli Augustini scripta contra Donatistas*, pars 1, ed. M. Petschenig (CSEL, 51), Vienna, 1908, pp. 51-52 [=NBA 15/1.110-112]; Augustine, *C. litt. Petil.* 1.10.11; *Sancti Aureli Augustini scripta contra Donatistas*, pars 2, ed. M. Petschenig (CSEL, 52), Vienna, 1909, p. 10-11 [=NBA 15/2.38-40]; 1.19.21; NBA 15/2.48-50; 2.7.16; NBA 15/2.70; Augustine, *C. Cresc.* 3.21.24; CSEL, 52.431 [= NBA 16/1.216]; 3.53.59; NBA 16/1.270-272; 4.2.2; NBA 16/1.322-324; and 4.16.18-19; NBA 16/1.350-354. See Maier, *L'épiscopat de l'Afrique*, pp. 36-37 and 84-91; and Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, pp. 125-131. On Primianus see *PCBE* 1.905-913 (Primianus 1); M.A. Tilley, "From Separatist Sect to Majority Church: The Ecclesiologies of Parmenian and Tyconius," in: *Studia Patristica*, 33 (1997), ed. E.A. Livingstone, papers presented at the twelfth International Conference on Patristic Studies, Oxford 1995, Leuven, 1997, 260-265; D.E. Wilhite, "True Church or True Basilica? The Song of Songs and Parmenian's Ecclesiology Revisited," *J ECS*, 22 (2014), pp. 399-436; and G.D. Dunn, "Optatus and Parmenian on the Authority of Cyprian," in: *The Uniquely African Controversy: Studies on Donatist Christianity*, ed. A. Dupont, M.A. Gaumer, and M. Lamberigts (LAHR, 9), Leuven, 2015, pp. 179-196. On Maximian see *PCBE* 1.719-722 (Maximianus 3); see J.-L. Maier, *Le dossier du Donatisme*, t. 2: *De Julien l'Apostat à Saint Jean Damascène (361-750)* (TU, 135), Berlin, 1989, pp. 91-92; and B. Gronewoller, "Felicianus, Maximianism, and Augustine's Anti-Donatist Polemic," in: *Studia Patristica*, 70, ed. Vinzent, pp. 409-417. On the synod of Baghai see Maier, *Le dossier du Donatisme*, 2.84-91; and B. Kriegbaum, "Die Donatistischen Konzilien von Cebarsussa (393) und Bagai (394)," *ZKT*, 124 (2002), pp. 167-277.
- 28 Augustine, *Ep.* 87.6; NBA 21/2.742.
- 29 Merdinger, "Before Augustine's Encounter with Emeritus," p. 373.
- 30 For the date see Teske, *The Works of Saint Augustine*, 2/1, p. 344; R.B. Eno, "Epistulae," in: *Augustine through the Ages*, ed. Fitzgerald, pp. 298-310, at p. 300; Merdinger, "Before Augustine's Encounter," p. 373; and C. Buenacasa Pérez, "The Letters *Ad Donatistas* of Augustine and their Relevance in the Anti-Donatist Controversy," in: *Studia Patristica*, 70, ed. Vinzent, pp. 439-447, at p. 442. However, E. Smither, "Augustine, Missionary to Heretics: An Appraisal of Augustine's Missional Engagement with the Donatists," in: *The Uniquely African Controversy*, ed. Dupont, Gaumer, and Lamberigts, pp. 71-84, at p. 275, wants to date the letter prior to 405. On the edict of 405 see *Cod. Theod.* 16.5.38; *Codex Theodosianus*, vol. 1: *Theodosiani Libri xvi cum constitutionibus Sirmondinis*, part 2: *Textus cum apparatu*, ed. Th. Mommsen and P. Krüger, Berlin, 1990, p. 867; and Maier, *Le dossier du Donatisme*, 2.134-136. On extensions to the areas in which this edict was to apply see *Cod. Theod.* 16.5.39; ed. Mommsen and Krüger, p. 867; and 16.5.43; ed. Mommsen and Krüger, p. 869. See P. Marone, "Some Observations on the Anti-Donatist Legislation," in:

3 Contents of the Letter

After his opening piece of flattery in praising Emeritus' learning, Augustine was able to use that opening to make his first point about why his community was to be regarded as representing the real church and Emeritus' was not: the rest of the church spread throughout the world, whether Roman or barbarian, did not know the Donatists while the Caecilianists are united in communion with them.³¹ It was no doubt on the basis of this similarity of faith shared with the universal church that Augustine asserted the tag of Catholic for his church. Augustine wanted to debate the origins of the schism, for it would seem that the whole validity of one's ecclesial status rested on that point.

Augustine made his second point, honing in on the Donatist inconsistency in being the pure church they claimed to be, by turning their logic back on themselves. Augustine stated that the Donatists could not condemn the rest of the universal church the way they did with the Caecilianists in Africa. This argument only works if the Donatists did so condemn the rest of the church, for Augustine then added his reverse application: if the Donatists were going to condemn the rest of the church along with the Caecilianists in Africa, even though the former seemed not to have done anything wrong, then among themselves the Donatists ought to condemn those who did wrong, even though it remained undetected, which, obviously they did not. Augustine could draw two conclusions from this: the Donatists ought not to condemn the rest of the church for undetected crimes and if the undetected crimes within their own Donatist communities did not contaminate their community while they remained undetected, then even after they were detected they could not contaminate them.³² He turns to Ezekiel 9:4-6; Philippians 2:21; and Nehemiah 9:26 to demonstrate that even those who sin should be tolerated, even while the good grieve.³³ Yet, Augustine hinted, even while Christians ought to tolerate sinners within their midst, this did not mean that there was not an authority that could remove them. What is required of Christians is that they disapprove of sinful person even while willing to approach the altar with them.³⁴ Not to be like that would be like Optatus, bishop of Timgad (ancient

The Uniquely African Controversy, ed. Dupont, Gaumer, and Lamberigts, pp. 71-84, at pp. 75-77.

31 Augustine, *Ep.* 87.1; NBA 21/1.736.

32 Ibid., 87.1-2; NBA 21/2.736-738.

33 Ibid., 87.2-3; NBA 21/2.738.

34 Ibid., 87.3; NBA 21/2738: "... manifestum est non hoc effici hominem, quod est malus quisquam, cum quo ad altare Christi acceditur, etiamsi non sit incognitus, si tantum non approbetur, et a bona conscientia displicendo separetur."

Thamugadi in the province of Numidia), a notoriously bad Donatist bishop whom the other Donatist bishops did not expel from their communion. That Optatus, in Augustine's estimation, did not condemn evil but promoted it. But more to the point, while Augustine could praise the Donatists for not having split their own community by expelling even a great sinner like Optatus, he chastised Emeritus for remaining within a community that was founded by the splitting of the church. The schism of splitting is made into a heresy by persisting in it.³⁵

While Optatus was not to be defended, Augustine conceded that it was fair enough not to condemn him if, as Emeritus would no doubt argue, he did not know enough about him to condemn him. In like manner, the universal church – built on the apostles Augustine added, just to emphasise their superiority over Donatist communities – could not and should not be blamed (as the Donatists did) for not condemning anyone during the time of Diocletian, as they did not know enough about what was happening. Again, Augustine turned to the Scriptures to demonstrate that it was not the responsibility of a Christian to judge another: Galatians 6:5 and Romans 14:4. Thus, the Donatists should not try and rebaptize Christians from the universal church.³⁶

Augustine then returned to a variation on his opening argument about the universal church. Just as the Donatists condemned and would take no heed of their own splinter group, the Maximianists, because they were a much smaller group (and, of course, Augustine was not going to mention the fact that there were quite a number of reasons the Maximianists were condemned, as that would detract from his case), they ought to be the ones condemned by the universal church rather than doing the condemning.³⁷ Actually, the Maximianist schism within Donatism could have been a strong debating point for the Donatists, showing that indeed they maintained purity and expelled the sinful. By Augustine equating the size of the Maximianists negatively with the size of the Donatists he was attempting to thwart this possible Donatist tactic. As an aside, Buenacasa Pérez points out that in letters Augustine wrote after 405 it is common to see reference to the Maximianist schism within Donatism.³⁸

From this point Augustine turned more defensive, responding to the criticisms hurled against the Caecilianists by the Donatists. He investigated the question of state involvement in the Donatist controversy, for this must have been the most telling of the attacks against them: for the group that urged

35 Ibid., 87.4; NBA 21/2.740.

36 Ibid., 87.5; NBA 21/2, 740–742.

37 Ibid., 87.6; NBA 21/2.742.

38 Buenacasa Pérez, "The Letters *Ad Donatistas*," p. 442.

tolerance and inclusiveness, the Caecilianists were perceived to have a weakness in that they involved the state in rooting out Donatists.³⁹ Taking inspiration from Romans 13:2-4, Augustine asked why the Donatists would have had anything to fear from imperial authorities if they had not done wrong.⁴⁰ If their act of schism were justified then the persecution they suffer from the state is on account of their justice and they are blessed (Matt 5:10), but if it were not then, the inference is, whatever they suffered was on account of their crime and they were not blessed. But enough of defence for the moment, Augustine repeated the attack he outlined earlier to prove that their schism was of the latter kind: they condemned the rest of the church for something they themselves were guilty of and used as an excuse, viz., not knowing of or even tolerating the evil within their midst.⁴¹

While it is true that Christians ought not persecute each other, it was a different matter with the state, for as Romans 13 had established, this was the function of the state. The Donatists could not argue that Christians could not work with the state, because the Donatists themselves had colluded with Virius Nicomachus Flavianus, *uicarius Africae* in 377, whom Augustine accused of being a Donatist, although he was famously a non-Christian.⁴² It is here that Augustine inserted his imagined claim from Emeritus against him, that the Caecilianists stir up the emperors against the Donatists. His response is to state that they had brought it upon themselves by starting a schism and rebaptizing, something the emperors had long forbidden.⁴³ The Caecilianists were only seeking to protect themselves against Donatist aggression and violence, from

39 On Donatist anti-imperial sentiment see A.L. Bass, "*Justus sibi illex est*: The Donatist Interpretation of the Law in Romans 2:14," in: *Sacred Scripture and Secular Struggles*, ed. D.V. Meconi (The Bible in Ancient Christianity, 9), Leiden–Boston, 2015, pp. 162–178.

40 Augustine, *Ep.*, 87.7; NBA 21/2.744.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid., 87.8; NBA 21/2.744. See *Cod. Theod.* 16.6.2 (although it appears to be addressed to Florianus, *uicarius Asiae*); ed. Mommsen and Krüger, pp. 880–881; CIL 6.1782 and 1783 for the later career of Nicomachus Flavianus and R.M. Errington, "The Praetorian Prefectures of Virius Nicomachus Flavianus," *Historia*, 41 (1992), pp. 437–461; J.F. Matthews, "*Codex Theodosianus* 9.40.13 and Nicomachus Flavianus," *Historia*, 46 (1997), pp. 196–213; and M. Kulikowski, "The *Notitia Dignitatum* as a Historical Source," *Historia*, 49 (2000), pp. 358–377, at pp. 366–367, for problems with conflicting evidence; *PLRE* 1.347–349 (Flavianus 15); and A. Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*, Oxford, 2011, pp. 155–156, and 627–690. Cf. G.A. Cecconi, "Alan Cameron's Virius Nicomachus Flavianus," in: *The Strange Death of Pagan Rome*, ed. R. Lizzi Testa (Giornale Italiano di Filologia), Turnhout, 2013, pp. 151–164.

43 *Cod. Theod.* 16.6.1–5; ed. Mommsen and Krüger, pp. 880–883; and 16.7.4; ed. Mommsen and Krüger, p. 885, for the laws until 405. See P. Marone, "Some Observations on the Anti-Donatist Legislation," pp. 71–84, at p. 75, for the imperial obsession with rebaptism.

which Augustine was quick to dissociate Emeritus in a moment of flattery and outreach. This is why Paul appealed to the state against the Jews (Acts 23: 12-24). Even though Lancel notes that here Augustine sought to justify appeal to the state as an act of defence, it is not the only justification Augustine offered in the letter.⁴⁴ Scripture shows also the state to be the divinely established authority for punishing wrongdoers (Rom 13:4; and Matt 3:12). Even if some Caecilianists did direct state authorities to take action against the Donatists, their aim was to cleanse the church before the chaff is separated from the wheat on the last day (Matt 3:12).⁴⁵ The point, though, again turning back to attack and away from defence, was that the Caecilianists did not force any premature separation as had the Donatists.⁴⁶

Correction (*corrigo*) not expulsion was the aim as far as Augustine was concerned. Augustine offered a scriptural organic image: the Donatists were branches detached from the roots, who could be reattached, just as Paul stated (Rom 11:23). Since Donatist sacraments were valid, the Caecilianists did not rebaptize. Even so, the detached branch could be corrupted, and even if it were not, it still remained fruitless unless reattached to the roots. They could be corrupted by acts of violence against their fellow Christians, in comparison with which the 'persecutions' (*persecutiones*) the Donatists said they suffered were reckoned as gentle and mild (*mansuetudo et lenitas*). The use of *nostri* seems to be some belated acknowledgement that the Caecilianists were involved in rousing the state to take action. So long as the Donatists kept their faith intact they could be received back into communion intact after punishment or correction (*uel damnatione punitisi, uel indulgentia correctis*).⁴⁷

Augustine concludes by restating his belief not only that the Donatists started it, but that Emeritus was intelligent enough to figure out that Augustine was right. What happened since the schism started was of less importance. Indeed, Augustine ends with a point made at the start of this paper: to worry too much about what has happened in the previous century would be simply to end up engaged in name calling (the moderate Rogatists called the rest of the Donatists Firmians; while the Donatists called Augustine's community Macarians).⁴⁸

44 Lancel, *St Augustine*, p. 293.

45 On the use of this and the related Matt 13:24-43 see G.D. Dunn, "Ecclesiology in Early North African Christianity: The Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds," *Aug*, (forthcoming).

46 Augustine, *Ep.* 87.8; NBA 21/2.746.

47 Ibid., 87.9; NBA 21/2.746-748.

48 Rogatus, bishop of Ténès (ancient Cartenna in the province of Mauritania Caesariensis) broke away from the Donatists over their support of the Circumcellions. See *PCBE* 1.990-991 (Rogatus 5). On Macarius, the imperial commissioner of 347, see *PLRE* 1.524-525 (Macarius 1). On the Circumcellions see B.D. Shaw, "Who Were the Circumcellions?," in:

Dredging up the past, except for the origins of the schism, is seen as being in conflict with the love of peace and the reason of truth (*amor pacis et ratio ueritatis*) that was the only way to overcome this lingering error.⁴⁹ Augustine expressed the hope that if Emeritus did not write back it was because he had had the desired change of heart and that if he did write back, he would be having the desired change of heart.

Although Carles Buenacasa Pérez recently has written that in the letters written after the Edict of Union of 405 Augustine was no longer interested “to persuade anyone, more only to justify the condemnation”, it is clear from the end of the letter, as it is from its start, that, while it is true that he does want to condemn Donatist bishops like Emeritus for their persistence in schism (now heresy), even more than that he still wanted Emeritus to abandon his Donatist allegiance.⁵⁰

4 Analysis of the Letter

The letter is one of a number Augustine wrote in a strategy of correspondence to bishops, aristocrats, and Donatist laity to deal with the long-running Donatist controversy. He would complain, in a rather exaggerated fashion according to Buenacasa Pérez, that he was getting little response.⁵¹

What we notice from reading *Epistula* 87 is that the central charge the Donatists laid against the Caecilianists was that they cajoled the state into doing their dirty work for them, and that they were not as tolerant of sinners within their communion as they appeared to be. Augustine agreed that this was an important criticism of the Caecilianists, but his response was fairly perfunctory and superficial. He stated simply and quickly that it was the God-given responsibility of the state to punish wrongdoers and that his community was interested only in protecting themselves from violence and in bringing about the correction and reintegration of the Donatists.⁵² That he did not belabour the point could be a sign that he wanted his opponent to believe that he was

Vandals, Romans and Berbers: New Perspectives on Late Antique North Africa, ed. A.H. Merrills, Aldershot–Burlington, Vt, 2004, pp. 227–258; B.D. Shaw, “Bad Boys: Circumcellions and Fictive Violence,” in: *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Realities*, ed. H.A. Drake, Aldershot–Burlington, Vt, 2006, pp. 179–196; and Dossey, *Peasant and Empire*, pp. 173–194.

49 Augustine, *Ep.* 87.10; NBA 21/2.748–750.

50 Buenacasa Pérez, “The Letters *Ad Donatistas*,” p. 442.

51 Ibid., p. 446.

52 P.I. Kaufman, “Donatism Revisited: Moderates and Militants in Late Antiquity,” *JLA*, 2

dithering in providing a retort; a short, sharp answer might have been intended to show Augustine's confidence that, important though it were, the issue was clear-cut and did not need him to waffle on *ad nauseam* to explain himself. In comparison with some of his later letters, like *Epistula* 185 to Boniface, military tribune, there is little explanation about the nature of correction as opposed to persecution.⁵³

Of course, within Augustine's own thinking we are able to distinguish varying levels of state involvement in dealing with the Donatists and hence, a variety of vocabulary in describing that involvement.⁵⁴ The word that Augustine puts on the lips of Emeritus – persecution (*persecutio*) – suggests simply punitive action and condemnation. Augustine's brief reference to the Caecilianists appealing to imperial authority to secure defence against Donatist aggression also suggests punishment and protection as a motive. We are in the world of legitimised religious violence.⁵⁵ Yet, when Augustine speaks of cleansing (*purgo*) before the day of judgement and correcting (*corrigo*) he moves into the realm of salvific healing. In this letter, Augustine refers to such correction as something to be embraced by the Donatists themselves. But what if they do not embrace it? When does correction give way to coercion (*coercitio*) and force? One must bear in mind that such a distinction between correction and coercion may be more a modern one than a late antique one.⁵⁶ Certainly imperial legislation, with its threats of punishment for non-compliance, were coercive measures, yet Augustine, in this letter at least, only wanted to refer to that reality to the minimal extent possible. In introducing the organic Pauline metaphor of branches and roots, Augustine wanted the emphaise the Donatists' free choice in embracing correction rather than any external pressure to do so.

We know from his *Epistula* 93 to Vincent, the Rogatist bishop of Ténès, in 407 or 408, that Augustine had changed his mind at some point about how to correct the Donatists: argument and logic was insufficient, and there needed to

(2009), pp. 131-142, points out how Augustine often exaggerated the degree of Donatist violence.

53 On this letter see G.D. Dunn, "Discipline, Coercion, and Correction: Augustine against the Violence of the Donatists in *Epistula* 185," *Scr*, 13 (2017), pp. 114-130.

54 The same is true of dealing with non-Christians. See D. Riggs, "Christianizing the Rural Communities of Late Roman Africa: A Process of Coercion or Persuasion?", in: *Violence in Late Antiquity*, ed. Drake, pp. 297-308.

55 See T. Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion), Philadelphia, 2009.

56 P. Brown, "Religious Coercion in the Later Roman Empire: The Case of North Africa," *History*, 48 (1963), pp. 283-305; and P. Brown, "St. Augustine's Attitude to Religious Coercion," *JRS*, 54 (1964), pp. 107-116, at pp. 111-114.

be imperial legislation to bring them to their senses.⁵⁷ As others have pointed out, this has had a dramatic impact on the possibility of church-sanctioned state violence in later centuries.⁵⁸ Of course this does not help date our letter since Augustine's change of mind had happened some time before he wrote *Epistula* 93, and our letter, *Epistula* 87, does acknowledge that imperial legislation exists. Yet, *Epistula* 87 stands in some contrast with *Epistulae* 93 and 185,⁵⁹ in that the notion of coercion, while present, is not highlighted. Indeed, *Epistula* 87 does not rate a mention in some scholarly considerations of the other two letters. Paul van Geest is someone who has considered it, and he is to be thanked for having developed a chronology of Augustine's changing thoughts on coercion. While he characterises *Epistula* 87 as "still harsh" (an assessment I find a little too harsh!), he does note that Augustine was turning more "from a judge to an inviting teacher..."⁶⁰ Elsewhere, van Geest has considered Augustine's attitude towards coercion as medicinal.⁶¹ Of course, we must bear in mind Brown's warning that we should not find in Augustine a sudden change

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- 57 Augustine, *Ep.* 93.5.17; NBA 21/2.828-830. See Brown, "St. Augustine's Attitude to Religious Coercion," pp. 107-116, although I would disagree with Brown to the extent that Augustine did not see coercion at all in punitive terms; and M. Gaumer and A. Dupont, "Understanding Augustine's Changing Justification for State-sponsored Religious Coercion and its Context within Donatist North Africa," *Augustinus*, 55 (2009), pp. 345-371. They offer six arguments employed by Augustine to justify his position.
- 58 See L. Goble, *Worshipping Politics: Problems and Practices for a Public Faith*, Eugene, Or., 2017, p. 89.
- 59 See F.H. Russell, "Persuading the Donatists: Augustine's Coercion by Words," in: *The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R.A. Markus*, ed. W.E. Klingshirm and M. Vessey (Recentiores: Later Latin Texts and Contexts), Ann Arbor, 1999, pp. 115-130, at pp. 122-124; M. Gaddis, *There Is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire* (TCH, 39), Berkeley-Los Angeles, 2005, pp. 131-150; M. Kahlos, *Forbearance and Compulsion: The Rhetoric of Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in Late Antiquity*, London, 2009, pp. 111-133; and R. Roukema, "Reception and Interpretation of Jesus' Teaching of Love for Enemies in Ancient Christianity," in: *Violence in Ancient Christianity: Victims and Perpetrators*, ed. A.C. Geljon and R. Roukema (SuppVC, 125), Leiden-Boston, 2014, pp. 198-214, at pp. 210-211.
- 60 P. van Geest, "Quid dicam de vindicando vel non vindicando? (*Ep.* 95, 3). Augustine's Legitimation of Coercion in the Light of His Roles of Mediator, Teacher and Mystagogue," in: *Violence in Ancient Christianity*, ed. Geljon and Roukema, pp. 151-184, at 171. A similar had been expressed earlier by R.A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 115-119.
- 61 P. van Geest, "Timor est servus caritatis (s. 156,13-14: Augustine's Vision on Coercion in the Process of Returning Heretics to the Catholic Church and his Underlying Principles," in: *The Uniquely African Controversy*, ed. Dupont, Gaumer, and Lamberigts, pp. 289-309, at pp. 302-304.

in thinking but only the sudden expression of a slowly developing thought.⁶² When one considers the details into which Augustine would go in later years to justify unity through forced conversions, as outlined by Maijastina Kahlos, among others, it would suggest that we ought to locate *Epistula* 87 sooner after 405 rather than later. One has the sense in our letter of a moderate Augustine, truly believing that tempered words might have a positive effect on Emeritus.

That the question of coercion and punishment was a troubling one for Augustine may be seen in *Epistula* 95 he wrote to Paulinus of Nola. There he could consider the contradictions seemingly contained in the Scriptures and discuss his doubts and confusions with someone with whom he feels comfortable, something he could not do with a Donatist rival in Cherchell.⁶³

The Donatist controversy was, in the words of Paola Marone, "... one of the earliest instances of the secular powers becoming engaged in religious disputes between Christians over a sustained period of time."⁶⁴ She has outlined various measures taken by the imperial government with regard to the controversy from the Donatist appeal to Constantine I in 312, which led to synods in Rome and Arles in 313 and 314, to the penalties imposed on the Donatists in the years immediately their negative adjudication at the colloquy of Carthage in 411 under Honorius.⁶⁵ The conclusion she draws is that although successive emperors enacted laws against the Donatists that became increasingly harsh, there was much local apathy in enforcing those laws. Nonetheless, in Augustine's mind such laws were important for a number of reasons. For one, they restrained many Donatists from engaging in acts of physical aggression. For another, they might have raised questions in the minds of Donatist members as to just how legitimate their church was if the emperors were against it (although they had been for nearly a century). For a third, when such laws were enforced the purpose was to correct and reconcile the Donatists with the mainstream church.

5 Conclusion

Epistula 87 from Augustine to Emeritus of Cherchell is one of a number of letters in which Augustine considered the extent to which coercion was a legitimate tactic to use against Donatists. Throughout his works he insisted that

62 Brown, "St. Augustine's Attitude," p. 109.

63 Augustine, *Ep.* 95.3; NBA 21/2.892-894.

64 Marone, "Some Observations on the Anti-Donatist Legislation," p. 71.

65 On the synod of Rome in 313 see Maier, *L'Épiscopat de l'Afrique*, pp. 26-27.

punishment was corrective rather than punitive and reconciliatory rather than vindictive. An examination of this letter reveals that the argument used by the Donatists that the Caecilianists promoted state-sponsored measures to exclude Donatists from the free practice of their faith was a particularly telling one against a group who prided themselves on virtues of unity, tolerance, and inclusiveness. In this letter Augustine sought to respond to those accusations. Yet, his method was not to deal with the topic at any great length. Perhaps the more attention he gave to the issue the more he was admitting that there was something in the Donatist accusations. Instead of threats (which are, admittedly toned down rather than eliminated altogether) Augustine reached out to Emeritus with some degree of respect, while still pointing to the weakness in his opponent's situation while all the while minimising any weakness in his own. It is a letter that turns more to positive possibilities of reconciliation than to negative nuances of conflict.