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Themes in St. Augustine's understanding of the Church developed
within the context of the North African Schism

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in

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ABSTRACT

Themes in St. Augustine's understanding of the Church developed
within the context of the North African Schism

Domenic Ruso

This study takes a close look at Saint Augustine's understanding of the church as it developed during the North African Schism. Although Augustine grew in many ways, the emphasis in this work is concerned with themes that surfaced through his interactions with Donatism.

The first section seeks to explore significant events and ideas that proceeded Augustine's direct involvement in the schism. This section, consisting of chapters 1-3, accentuates important contextual information for understanding Augustine's ecclesial development within its proper context. Section two focuses primarily on Augustine at the height of his role within the schism. It examines important ecclesial themes such as the church as people on pilgrimage and Jesus the healing physician and his church as the wounded yet healing community. These were central in the developing ecclesiastical debate.

In the course of responding to the Donatists' claims, the thesis argues that through his direct involvement with the Donatist schism, in his own spiritual journey and in his role as bishop of the church of Hippo, Augustine's response to specific issues raised during the debate, made him the leading voice of authority for the Catholic community at an important time of transition within the local African church as well as the Roman empire.

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Themes in St. Augustine's understanding of the Church developed within the context of the North African Schism

Introduction

To revisit the already immense literary commentaries on Saint Augustine may seem some what redundant. Some still wonder what an individual who lived over 1500 years ago could have to say to today's reader. These are all valid points, if uttered by one who has never encountered Augustine, but for those who have peered into the pages of ecclesial history might soon observe, a fresh perspective might be exactly what is needed, today. It is a call for a reconsideration of a vibrant source in the patristic tradition which transcends today's ecumenical dialogues, in order to seek the wisdom of our past in order that we may celebrate in a more united future. As Robert Webber so poignantly explains, "The way into the future, is not an innovative new start for the church; rather, the road to the future runs through the past."¹

On a more personal level, this thesis is connected in part to my own journey within the structures of the Western church. While my initial conversion experience led to diverse paradigm shifts, none were as disturbing as the one connected to my ecclesiology. As I slowly grew in my passion to love the Lord with all my heart, soul and mind, I encountered an ecclesial reality that stifled rather than encouraged a deep historical passion for the Church. This is a harsh reality that I shared with so many of my own generation. While some voted with their feet, and walked out the doors of the church with no sign of turning back, I opted for another alternative, a choice that would give me an opportunity to one day make a difference.

¹ Webber, *Ancient-Future Time; Forming Spirituality through the Christian Year*, 11.

The change that I opted for began with a change in me. A change that initiated a passion for the church that to this day continues to propel me into a dual ecclesial journey, at once pastoral and academic. The frustration with this apparent dichotomy led me to an individual who saw pastoral responsibilities and intellectual integrity as joint pieces for foundational ecclesial leadership. This individual is the father of western ecclesiology, one of the great fathers of the church, Saint Augustine of Hippo.

While my initial research on Augustine led me to encounter the convoluted historical environment of the fourth century a deeper look at Augustine sheds light on, what I regard as the modern churches', lack of attention to questions concerning the nature and role of the church.

Although diverse Christian communities continue to focus on areas of tension toward other Christian traditions, Augustine's voice cuts through the divide and reminds us of our historical commonality. The significance of Augustine's works shed light on the common bond that is shared by all Christian traditions; Jesus is the head of the church and we represent his body. This is an ecclesiology rooted in, and refined during, some of the most difficult segments of Church history which reminds us that there is always hope with Christ as the head of the Church.

This historical approach, seeks to encourage and initiate a new fervor for an ancient orthodox ecclesiology. This thesis seeks to encourage a new curiosity for the wisdom of the Patristic tradition as it highlights a church tradition that wrestled through foundational challenges during formative years, yet continued to progress under the leadership of exceptional spiritual leaders. With this in mind, it is the goal of this dissertation to give a glimpse of Augustine as primarily a bishop, who is passionate about the church during

both its times of strength, but especially in times of weakness. Augustine models a leadership style that takes all noteworthy issues into consideration, and gives us a glimpse of his successes as well as his failures.

An important underpinning of this thesis is the reality that the catholic Christian Church has from its inception gone through difficult times, yet struggled with how to remain faithful to her divine nature while revealing an honest transparency in times of weakness. This is extremely significant for those ministering at the dawn of the twenty-first century. During this time of immense transition and concern, the Church will once again have the opportunity to demonstrate her divine nature, by inclusively expressing the love of Christ to a new generation who seeks to be part of a community that is transparently wounded yet divinely strengthened.

This work also sheds light on the luminous scholarship already present in the discipline of Patristic studies. It seeks to understand the Augustinian tradition as it pertains to the specific area of ecclesiology. In light of this I have intentionally focused on Augustine's works and thoughts dealing with the North African Schism. My thesis moves through different phases of Augustine's own Christian development which allowed him to formulate an ecclesiology that was progressive in nature yet constantly rooted in the teaching of those who preceded him. For this reason, in chapter two, I examine how Augustine expresses a profound respect for the North African father Cyprian. Due to the Donatist schism, Augustine was forced not only to examine the history of the schism, but also to study the Donatist's most esteemed teachers.

In addition to Cyprian, Augustine became aware of the dialogues that ensued out of the schism that played an important part in his responses to Donatists' claims. For this

reason, chapter three examines two foundational dialogues that once again give glimpse of Augustine's ecclesiological efforts. These two dialogues allow the reader to become acquainted with diverse characters who became intertwined in the historic schism. They consist of Optatus of Milevis, Parmenian, the new Donatist bishop of Carthage and lastly, Tyconius, a leading thinker that greatly influenced Augustine's thoughts on ecclesiology.

This third chapter focuses on the strength present within the Donatist community as they presented a case for a strict 'purist' church. As Brown remarks, "Augustine came to the problem of the Donatist from the outside."² For this reason the first three chapters help the reader see Augustine's exceptional abilities during a period of familiarization within the particular dynamics of the schism.

Section 2, consisting of chapters four and five, specifically focuses on three foundational themes that emerged to demonstrate a developing Augustinian ecclesiology. The first theme consists of 'The people on pilgrimage'. This theme sheds light on Augustine's own spiritual journey as well as a decisive hermeneutical conversion which led to a re-examining of the scriptures in light of his encounter with the risen Christ.

The last two themes, as expounded in chapter five, consist of 'Jesus as Physician and his healing community of grace' and 'the Church as a mixed community'. I argue that these two themes emerge specifically as foundational aspects of Augustinian ecclesiology which surface primarily due to Augustine's involvement with the Donatist schism. It is the complexities of Donatism that allow us to be enlightened by Augustine's brilliance in pursuing the essence of what he believed the church to be. Though many continue to debate and add to the conversation, I believe that this thesis, points to significant ideas and perspectives within the study of present ecclesiology.

² Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 211.

Much of what I suggest, I believe, can and should be considered as formative in shaping ecclesial principles for the 21st century. In a time with continual strife and confusion over the nature and role of the church due to the competing voices clamoring for our attention, Augustine still has considerable advice. Augustine reminds us that the true voice, which emanates from the Spirit of God, continually calls us to unity and love and that without such goals in mind we face the possibility of becoming like those “talking high-nonsense, carnal worldly men...[whose] hearts are empty of true meaning.”³

³ Augustine, *Confessions*, 3.6.10

Section 1

The Historical and Theological Context

Chapter 1

Historical Encounters

Introduction

To adequately address Augustine's historical encounters, this chapter will begin by explaining the origins of the Donatist schism. During the schism (313-411) Augustine encountered a group known as the Donatists whose ecclesial paradigm was formulated by key narratives which emerged from the persecution under Diocletian. As part of an overview of these events, I will comment on two major Donatist positions, namely, their disdain for the Church that associated itself with Roman imperial rule, and a developing hermeneutic with focus on a martyrdom theology which brought strength to the Donatist community during persecution. Although Augustine would address additional ecclesiological issues pertaining to the schism, it was these two concerns that would lead to his decision to use force against the schismatics. Finally, I will argue that Augustine's involvement in the schism began with his own toiling, in relation to his personal calling and sense of responsibilities. While his rise to the episcopate was unintended on his part, this platform gave him opportunity to come to terms with his own giftedness and pastoral role in intelligently leading the Catholic Church through the schism. I will argue that Augustine's struggle with the Donatists and his own calling played a significant role in the development of his ecclesiology.

Origins of the Schism

What Augustine encountered on his return to North Africa (388) was something that had been brewing for many years. W.H.C. Frend points to the significances of the outbreak of the persecution. “On 23 February 303 there was posted an edict in Nicomedia ordering all copies of the Scriptures to be surrendered and burnt, all churches to be dismantled, and no meetings for Christian worship to be held.”⁴

Although some argue for a more precise time for the origins of the schism, (i.e. the Abitinian prisoners⁵ and Caecilian’s actions toward them), I think it is safe to hold to what both Frend and Chadwick propose as the origins of this schism.

Diocletian’s great persecution (303-305) brought about many complexities for the church. Chadwick writes,

In North Africa the party led by Donatus of Black Huts (*Casae Nigrae*), later dissenting bishop of Carthage, a well-educated man according to Augustine (*Tr. In Joh.* 6. 20), originated in protest against compromise with Diocletian’s government ordering the surrender of Bibles and sacred vessels and forbidding Christian assemblies for worship.⁶

The Christian communities in North Africa were still dealing with how to respond to the issues that ensued out of this persecution when Augustine returned to Africa eighty years later. As Dodaro remarks,

As bishop of Hippo Regius, Augustine inherited a series of complex institutional relationships with the imperial and provincial officials who encompassed both political and military fields of responsibility (176).⁷

⁴ Frend. *The Early Church*, 129.

⁵ Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*. 70.

⁶ Chadwick, Henry. *The Church in Ancient Society*. 382.

⁷ Dodaro, Robert. “Church and State.” *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, 176- 184. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999.

While Augustine was aware of the Donatists' presence in Hippo, he did not immerse himself within the schism on his return to Hippo.⁸ Instead, his writings clearly show how he studied the documents of the dispute before developing a systematic response.⁹

The effects of Diocletian's persecution rippled throughout the Christian world leaving a path of devastation. The demands made on those specifically involved in leadership (e.g. bishop) as part of the persecution was a significant factor in the evolution of the North African schism. Diocletian's request for scriptures to be handed over and burned as a sign of allegiance to the Emperor essentially meant renouncing one's faith in Christ and disintegration of one's congregation. In her study on 'the Council of Cirta',¹⁰ Tilley writes about the severity of the events that occurred during the persecution stating, "no crime, not even the one being addressed at this Council¹¹ which had to do with murder within the family, seemed to cause as much consternation as handing over the Scriptures" (51). Due to these events, the term *traditores*¹² would soon become the most disliked title in the empire. Chadwick reported that "those involved in handing over these sacred objects were seen as no longer qualified to be involved in the work of the church therefore making their calling as bishops and leaders obsolete."¹³ So in addition to being called *traditores*, those who had relinquished sacred texts and objects were seen as having lost the divine authority that was understood to be embedded within the sacrament

⁸ At the time when Augustine arrived at Hippo, a savage war had just broken out between two factions. On June 24, 393, a synod of one hundred bishops at Cabarsussi condemned Primianus, the successor of Parmenianus, See Eugene, Portalie. *A Guide to the Thoughts of Saint Augustine*. 1960. (p25)

⁹ See Augustine. *On Baptism against the Donatist*. Book II.

¹⁰ Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*. Also see Augustine, *Contr. Cresc.* 3.27.30 (CSEL 52. 435-37).

¹¹ See Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*. Fortress Press. 1997. (p51)

¹² Those who had succumbed to the orders of the emperor and who would later be seen as apostates.

¹³ Chadwick, Henry. *The Church in Ancient Society*, 382.

of ordination. Therefore, anyone connected to these acts of apostasy could no longer consecrate future priests as a fulfilling duty.

With Diocletian's health dwindling and the persecution slowly diminishing the new Emperor Constantine inherited the schismatic situation. Constantine realized that he would have to find a way to mend this schism if the empire was going to prosper under his rule. Bright explains,

The victory of Constantine at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge on 28 October had an immediate impact on the African Church....The Constantinian letters, swiftly sent to the provinces to halt the persecution of the Christian communities, were followed up by new appointments to Africa to replace Maxentius's officials."¹⁴

Constantine's halt of the persecution caused a sense of relief for Christians but did not change the tensions regarding the schism. As we will see, it only made it worse.

In Carthage, the incidents under Caecilian's ordination became the principal narrative that fueled the schism for years to come. Chadwick explains,

The bishops of Numidia expected to be well represented at the ordination of a bishop of Carthage; they sympathized with the zealots and believed a rumour that Caecilian's principal consecrator Felix bishop of Apthugni had surrendered the scriptures to the authorities. In short, if so, Caecilian had been made bishop by polluted hands guilty of apostasy.¹⁵

Caecilian's ordination was strongly opposed by Donatus of Casae Nigrae who was from southern Numidia. His ability to rally those around him and take these matters concerning Caecilian's ordination into his own hands led to naming the schismatics after himself. In addition to Donatus' role in the schism, Bright explains, "The vitality and versatility of the leadership exercised by the Donatist bishops with their far-flung dioceses are

¹⁴ Bright, Pamela. "Church, North African, 312 to 430." *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, 185- 190. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 186.

¹⁵ Chadwick, Henry. *The Church in Ancient Society*, 184.

reflected in the range of documentation that has survived; martyr acts, homilies, council documentation, and theological treatises.”¹⁶

Constantine’s rise to power brought about quick changes that led to new questions concerning the relationship between the empire and the Church. The primary issue initiated by Constantine was the calling of the Council of Nicea that would bring about questions such as, ‘What could a Christian emperor mean to a disabled and fragmented church? Could this be God’s hand at work?’ Constantine’s role and relationship within the North African ecclesial communities created further tension since he would not side with the Donatists. While the Catholic community embraced the rise of the emperor’s support, the Donatists did not consider assimilation an option. Tilley writes, “In a land where many other Christians accepted the political and moral status quo this separatist church found new ways to resist assimilation to the larger worldly society.”¹⁷ The Donatist community remained extremely skeptic of what adjustment and support of the Emperor might mean. None the less, this did not stop the Donatists from appealing to the new emperor concerning their frustrations over Caecilian’s ordination. “The Carthaginian group hostile to Caecilian....appealed to Constantine, especially when they were not included in substantial funding from the imperial treasury.”¹⁸ In addition to the funding, their frustrations included the emperor’s support of Caecilian’s ordination. The first synod to consider this issue angered the Donatist resulting in Constantine nominating a more neutral synod that met at Arles on August 1st, 314. At this second hearing, what was initially decided was upheld, therefore allowing Caecilian’s ordination to stand as valid.

¹⁶Tilley, Maureen A. “Donatistas post conlationem, Contra” *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, 281. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999.

¹⁷ Tilley, Maureen.. *The Bible in Christian North Africa*. 16.

¹⁸ Chadwick, Henry. *The Church in Ancient Society*, 184.

Chadwick remarks how, “eventually Constantine left the Donatists ‘to the judgment of God’, a decision which a century later Augustine was to describe as most ignominious.”¹⁹

While Constantine’s approach to resolving the complexities would never amount to the persecution seen under Diocletian, Constantine would soon find the Donatists to be a ‘thorn in the flesh’. In response to their stubbornness he would also opt for means of persecution which only reinforced and renewed a developing Donatist belief that the imperial authority of Rome could not be associated with the Church. “Donatus himself was heard to ask, ‘What has the emperor to do with the Church?’”²⁰

Under Constantine’s leadership the church moved from a period of persecution to a time of prosperity. This did concern the Donatists since their views and concerns were not upheld by the new emperor. They instead began developing a new hermeneutic to fit their new surroundings. Tilley writes, “As the pattern of persecution changed, so did the use of the Bible. The shifts in the use of the Bible signal profound changes in self-perception within the Donatist communities of North Africa.”²¹

Once the Donatists realized that their views would not be supported by the so called ‘Christian emperor’ they would begin to formulate two theological positions opposing any form of ecclesiology that united forces with the empire. The Donatists were determined not to trust an Emperor who followed in the lineage of some of the most horrible Christian killers and who now sided with the *traditores*.

¹⁹ Ibid, 184.

²⁰ Ibid. 187.

²¹ Tilley. *The Bible in Christian North Africa*. 53.

The Donatists' Disdain for Rome

To this point I have reviewed the historical accounts of the origins of the schism that led to the long lasting tension. This is important to help the reader view Augustine's return to North Africa in its proper context.

As the Emperors changed, so did the Donatists' attitudes toward the authority of Rome. After Constantine's decision concerning Caecilian, "Donatus and his fellow bishops returned to Africa in 315, defiant of the emperor's orders to hand over their churches to Caecilian."²² This practice of handing over churches was a common occurrence as Emperors sided with different groups. While the Donatists were forced to adhere to the emperor's orders, their violent revolt against future proclamation would become a dangerous area of contention.

During his time away from North Africa, Augustine had been baptized as a 'Catholic Christian' by the bishop of Milan, Ambrose. On his return to North Africa, Frend explains, "Augustine came into contact with an entirely different interpretation of Christianity which he would have to battle with for the next quarter of a century." ²³ He soon encountered the Donatists' disdain for the 'Catholic' empire which consumed his early years as the bishop of Hippo. He was also quickly introduced to their attempts at upheaval. Bright writes,

The early years of Augustine's episcopacy coincided with the revolt against the Western emperor Honorius, who succeeded Theodosius. It was led by Gildo, a younger brother of Firmus....At the outbreak of the revolt many of the Donatist bishops rallied to Gildo's side....²⁴

²² Bright, Pamela. "Church, North African, 312 to 430." *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, 185- 190. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 186.

²³ Frend. *The Donatist Church*. 214.

²⁴ Bright, Pamela. "Church, North African, 312 to 430." *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, 185- 190. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 190.

The Donatists found ways to re-interpret central biblical passages in light of their new and ever changing surroundings. Tilley writes,

[The] period of persecution under a 'Christian' emperor had forced them to rethink their self-perception as Christian Church against pagan state. Through their use of the Bible we can see them opting for a new identity to support themselves in the long-term struggle against a state that was in league with "nominal" Christians.²⁵

The Donatist had years of practice in defending their positions which made them more than able to respond to Augustine's accusations. Augustine quickly became aware of "the strength and originality of another form of Christianity: the religion of Donatus, who asked 'what has the Emperor to do with the Church?'" ²⁶ This disdain toward the Imperial rule continued to grow and led to provocative actions on the part of the Donatists. "Throughout most of the fourth century a small Donatist community established in Rome appointed bishops to the see of Peter." ²⁷ The Donatist's ambitious attempt to usurp the Catholic authority in Rome was an example of their extreme stubbornness. Augustine encountered this same obduracy time and time again. The Donatists' disdain for the Christian imperial rule would remain a central point of division between both Catholic and Donatist communities.

Developing Hermeneutic: A Martyrdom Theology

Along with the Donatists' disdain for the Empire they placed a strong emphasis on martyrdom. As the persecution under Diocletian ravaged the empire, those living in

²⁵ Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*. 69.

²⁶ Brown, Peter. *Religion and Society in the Age of St. Augustine*. 246.

²⁷ Bright, Pamela. "Church, North African, 312 to 430." *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, 185- 190. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 186.

North Africa experienced a more intense form of persecution leading to major influx of martyrs. Chadwick writes,

In Africa the persecution was sharp, and forty-nine Christians who had gathered to celebrate the Eucharist at Carthage were all executed under the judgment of the proconsul. Ladies of wealth and refinement were not exempted from the death penalty as the laity came to be included in the imperial bloodbath (180).²⁸

While the persecution under Diocletian encouraged the development of a martyrdom theology, it was their persecution under Constantine that reinforced the Donatists' theological position. From the Donatists' perspective, the persecution was understood to be a biblical sign for those following in the lineage of Christ. As a result, the Donatists saw themselves as the true church that remained holy and in doing so, formulated an understanding that the Catholic Church could not be seen as true since she had assimilated herself to the empire. For the Donatists,

The contemporary challenge was fidelity to God and God's Law in the face of persistent temptation to defection from true Christianity to a Christianity compromised by its association with the world that is, to Catholicism (Tilley 78).

Though numerous martyr stories are available²⁹, a central narrative referred to during Diocletian's persecution is known as '*Acts of the Abitinian Martyr*'.³⁰ This narrative speaks of a group of imprisoned confessors during Diocletian's persecution in 304 who were refused food by guards who were stationed under the authority to Caecilian. This account, which has undergone considerable examination for authentication and dating, is considered by the Donatists a prime reference when defending their position against that

²⁸ Chadwick. *The Church in Ancient Society*. 180.

²⁹ See Tilley. p57. *Passio Ss. Dativi, Saturnini presbyteri et aliorum* (also known as the Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs), the *Passio Ss. Maxmiae, Donatillae et Secundae*, and the *Sermo de passione Ss. Donati et Advocati*.

³⁰ As referenced by Tilley. *Acta Martyrum Saturnini Presbyteri, Felicis, Dativi, Ampelii et aliorum*, hereafter *Acts of the Albitinian Martyrs* (MPL 8.688-713).

of the Catholics. This narrative was so central to the schism that it was still being recounted at the Conference of 411. Tilley writes,

The Donatist bishops introduced this account [the Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs] of martyrdom into the Conference records and relied on it for a number of their biblical citation during the debate.³¹

It is clear that this idea of martyrdom played an important part of the Donatist ecclesial understanding in relation to the Catholic Church. So much so, that at times the Donatist would actually refer to themselves as ‘The Church of the Martyrs’. This perspective would only be strengthened during Constantine’s reign as the persecution came from those who claimed to be Christian. Tilley writes, “...a new kind of martyr story, in which Christians were persecuted by a Christian state, developed in response to changes in the religious and political environment.”³² While the Catholic community viewed themselves as fighting for unity and orthodoxy against the schismatic and heretics of their day, they failed to understand that their attempts at silencing the Donatists through violence only fueled the Donatist’s ecclesiological perspectives.

The martyrdom theology that emerged out of their experience of persecution remains deeply entrenched within Donatist ecclesiology. It eventually led to the development of a group of fanatics known as the ‘Circumcellions’³³. Augustine encountered this group on his return to North Africa.³⁴ It was the “prevalence of the Donatist martyrs [that] led

³¹ Tilley notes that this happened on numerous occasions during the conference. *The Bible in Christian North Africa*. 155.

³² Ibid, 55.

³³ A group within the Donatist church that was its “extreme and violent wing”who committed suicide as a form of martyrdom. *Augustine through the Ages*, 193. A type of bandits who traveled around making trouble for those who were Catholic.

³⁴ Augustine would later address this issues, on numerous occasions, in *The Letters of Petilian*, the Donatist. Bk II.

Augustine to distinguish true from false martyrdom.”³⁵ For Augustine, martyrdom could be defined as authentic only when there was ‘love for life’. Although Augustine’s initial and lengthy approach toward the schismatics was loving, it was these violent bandits who eventually provoked him to call on the use of imperial force against the Donatist.³⁶ It is important to note that use of force against one’s brother was not part of Augustine’s ecclesial paradigm, even in the last phases of the schism. Chadwick remarks,

Augustine made a striking move, offering the Donatists that if they would share Eucharistic communion, the Catholics would invite their opposite number to share with them in pastoral care. His own supporters were deeply apprehensive that the Donatists might accept the invitation; but there was no chance of that.³⁷

While Augustine forcefully responded to the Donatists claims, he applied a more balanced view of martyrdom. Straw writes,

Martyrdom had a central place in Augustine’s pastoral theology that rejected any pathological fascination with death and torture. His views would be followed by later Western writers such as Gregory the Great and become normative in the West through the Counter-Reformation.³⁸

In light of the Donatists’ tensions with the Emperor and the formulating martyrdom theology, Augustine formulated a more balanced ecclesiology that allowed room for dialogue and, most of all, a possibility for unity. This became a major concern of Augustine’s ecclesial paradigm that would later be borrowed by the Western world.

³⁵ Straw, Carole. “Martyrdom.” *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, 538-542. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 541.

³⁶ The history of Augustine’s struggles against the Donatist is contemporaneous with a change in his mental attitude regarding the use of harshness in dealing with heretics. Because Augustine was the soul of its councils, this change was mirrored in the Church of Africa. Portatie, Eugene. *A Guide to the Thoughts of Saint Augustine*. Greenwood Press, 1975.25.

³⁷ Chadwick, Henry. *The Church in Ancient Society*, 391.

³⁸ Straw, Carole. “Martyrdom.” *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, 538-542. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 541.

Augustine's Conversion

It is foundational to this study to understand Augustine's personal encounter as revealed through his conversion and rise to Church leadership. Due to the specific concerns pertaining to Augustine's ecclesiology, I will elaborate on two key facets as they played part in Augustine's historical encounters. For a more extensive explanation of Augustine travels and experiences see O'Meara and Brown.³⁹

Augustine's personal encounter with God begins with his own spiritual journey that led him to the voice of Ambrose of Milan. Augustine, in his '*Confessions*', explains his feelings as they relate to Ambrose. He writes.

And so I came to Milan to Ambrose the bishop, known throughout the world as among the best men, devout in your worship...I was led to him by you, unaware that through him, in full awareness, I might be led to you. That 'man of God' (2 Kgs. 1:9) received me like a father...I began to like him, at first indeed not as a teacher of the truth, for I had absolutely no confidence in your Church...(Confessions. 5.23).

As this encounter unfolded Augustine slowly became aware of what God was intending to say to him through Ambrose. He writes,

Nevertheless together with the words which I was enjoying, the subject matter, in which I was unconcerned, come to make an entry into my mind. I could not separate them. While I opened my heart in noting the eloquence with which he spoke, there also entered no less the truth which he affirmed, though only gradually. (Confessions. 5.24).

This encounter with Ambrose would reach its climax as Augustine was to shape and formulate an anthropomorphic understanding of God. Augustine writes,

³⁹ See O'Meara, John J. *The Young Augustine*. and Peter Brown. *Augustine of Hippo*.

Above all, I heard first one, then another, then many difficult passages in the Old Testament scriptures figuratively interpreted, where I, by taking them literally had found them to kill (2 Cor. 3:6) (*Conf.* 5.24).⁴⁰

As Augustine wrestled with these ideas,⁴¹ he remained open minded as to the possibility of an intelligent approach to the Christian religion. His continual episodes with Ambrose's teaching eventually led to his conversion encounter. Chadwick writes,

Ambrose's sermons taught him that the catholic faith of the universal Church was other than he had supposed... Without having close personal contact with Ambrose he was inexorably drawn to conversion, spurred on by the tedium of calling on powerful senators in hope of gaining their support for his ambition, and made the decision under extreme stress in a friend's garden at Milan in July or August 386.⁴² ⁴³

Augustine's conversion was a time of deep wrestling and questioning. He came face to face with the status of his heart and his need of God. Although difficult, he eventually surrendered his desires and passions to Christ. Reminiscing about his time away from the reality of God, he writes,

Late have I loved you, beauty so old and no new; late have I loved you. And see, you were within and I was in the external world and sought you there, and in my unlovely state I plunged into those lovely create things which you made. You were with me, and I was not with you... You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness... (*Confessions*. 10.38).

⁴⁰ See Carl W. Griffin and David L. Paulsen. *Augustine and the Corporeality of God*. Brigham Young University. Harvard Theological Review. 95:1 (2002) 97-118. They conclude that the evidence shows that young Augustine was himself a corporealist and knew Christians who believed God to be anthropomorphic, and that this latter belief was a critical impediment to his acceptance of Christianity.(98)

⁴¹ Here I am referring to his traveling experiences and most of all his fascination with Manicheism. Manicheism was mainly inspired by Eastern religions such as Buddhism and Zoroastrianism... including some form of Christian ideas. See J Kevin Coyle. *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, O.S.A. 1999. (520-25).

⁴² "It may come as a surprise to many admirers of Augustine to learn that a large number of important scholars have maintained that Augustine in 386 as converted not to Christianity but rather to Neo-Platonist philosophy. This view has in recent years been greatly weakened, so that the comparative silence of writers in English on the matter has saved their readers much rather useless controversy." O'Meara. John J. *The Young Augustine*. p125.

⁴³ Chadwick. *The Early Church*. 474.

Augustine's passion for God continued to grow as he prepared for his journey toward baptism. In the meanwhile, Augustine developed his writing and thoughts by spending time in Cassiciacum. "Augustine left his teaching post in Milan, both because of lung problems (*Conf.* 9.4) and because of his conversion (8. 14-30), and retired to the rural villa of the Milanese grammarian Verecundus (8.13.)."⁴⁴ His time at Cassiciacum brought about much dialogue and writing as he grew in spiritual community with those he loved. This would be very different from the chaotic turn of events he would soon experience in his rise to the episcopate.

Augustine: Bishop of Hippo

After returning to Africa in 388 Augustine settled back in his home town Thagaste and when visiting the seaport of Hippo, north of Thagaste, early in 391, "Augustine found himself mobbed by the plebs, and forced to accept ordination at Valerius' hands."⁴⁵ While Augustine's giftedness made this inevitable, he quickly made a request for a short time away to prepare himself for his new role as Bishop. This sheds light on how important this responsibility was for him⁴⁶. Despite his preparation, he would later lament "no one who has not been a bishop would believe what we are expected to do."⁴⁷

Augustine's encounter with his inadequacies and fears were eventually subdued as he became the leading force against the heretics and schismatics of his day.

⁴⁴ Berardino, Angelo. "Cassiciacum" *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, 135. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 135.

⁴⁵ Chadwick. *The Early Church*, 475. In Africa this was a common procedure which admittedly led to some unsuitable ordinations....

⁴⁶ Chadwick, "At first Valerius had allowed Augustine as presbyter time to study the Bible and to acquire a better knowledge of Christian doctrine. Scripture had played no part whatever in his education. *The Church in Ancient Society*. (p477).

⁴⁷ As quoted by Chadwick. Chadwick, Henry. *The Church in Ancient Society*. Oxford Press. 2001. p477.

When Augustine became bishop of Hippo, the schism in Africa was eighty-five years old, and the two opposed communities had become resigned to living side by side, with a mutual dislike maintained by occasional outrages, but in the main without intolerable discomfort. Augustine felt that it was impossible passively to accept such a situation of deadlock.⁴⁸

His encounter with the ecclesial passivity that disrupted unity was not going to be left unattended. As his pastoral responsibilities took shape and surfaced he saw restoring unity as a central part of his role as bishop. While “the Bishop of Hippo preferred to re-establish unity through discussion and friendly conversation”⁴⁹ ultimately, this would not work as a solution. Augustine found himself working through historical documents of the schism that helped him get acquainted with the historical underpinnings of Donatist ecclesiology. This inevitably led him to the works of Cyprian who, though respected by North African Catholics, played a special role in the formulating of North African Donatist ecclesiology. What did it mean to be the church, and how had the North African tradition shaped it? Understanding these questions would occupy much of Augustine time. Markus writes,

It is widely accepted that in the broadest terms, the problem [was] one of survival and the autonomy of an ancient, provincial (in this instance North African) tradition of Christianity with its distinctive ecclesiology within a universal empire allied, after Constantine, with a universal Christian orthodoxy.⁵⁰

Augustine developed an understanding of the North African tradition by going through Cyprian, as the saint to whom the Donatists constantly referred. This became Augustine’s primary concern if he was ever to address the North African schismatics intelligently and truthfully. Therefore, it must now become our task.

⁴⁸ Chadwick, Henry. *The Early Church*. 222

⁴⁹ Portatie, Eugene. *A Guide to the Thoughts of Saint Augustine*. Greenwood Press. 1975.(p25).

⁵⁰ Markus, R.A. “Donatism.” *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, 284-287. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 286.

Chapter Two

Caecilius Cyprianus: Developing North African Ecclesial Tradition

Introduction

The primary intent of this chapter is to demonstrate an understanding of the Cyprianic influence in the construct of North African ecclesiology. As part of this presentation I will explain a major Cyprianic idea that became part of the North African tradition and which latter caused continuous strife during the Donatist schism. As well, I will show how the Donatists borrowed certain aspects of Cyprian's ecclesiology while also misconstruing other key aspects of it, thus ignoring the full context of Cyprian's thought. This sentiment will also be evidenced in Augustine's defense of Cyprian as he establishes his own authority in the schism.

Cyprian's Socio-Historical Context

Before examining the influence of Cyprian on both the Donatist and Catholic ecclesiology, it would be wise to briefly comment on Cyprian's influence on North African ecclesiology. According to Tilley "Thascius Caecilius Cyprianus was the most important bishop in the history of North Africa besides Augustine."⁵¹ Chadwick also recognizes Cyprian's influence within the North African communities. On commenting in his edition of Augustine's *'Confessions'* He writes, "Cyprian, bishop of Carthage martyred in 258, was for the African Churches their outstanding hero the vigil of whose feast day (14 September) was marked by all-night dancing."⁵² His influential role was manifest during his time as bishop of Carthage. While his Episcopal leadership created a

⁵¹ Tilley, Maureen. "Cyprian of Carthage." *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, 262-264. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 262.

⁵² See Bibliography. Chadwick's translation of Augustine's *Confessions* was of great help through out this thesis. p82.

venue for him to shine, his choice in career was not specifically intended. His upbringing seemed to point him toward a life of administration despite the fact that he toppled into his role as bishop (248/49-258). None the less, his ministerial position was inaugurated with a change in emperor. “The new emperor Decius ... initiated formal anti-Christian action, no doubt in hope of allaying the god’s wrath, perhaps because he shared some of Cyprian’s diagnosis of the ills of society and looked to the cult of the gods to bring reform and foster loyalty.”⁵³

The persecution under Decius (249-51) was a significant factor that shaped Cyprian’s influence within the North African community. The outcome of his persecution brought about complicated scenarios concerning church unity and purity. For example, the Emperor proclaimed an edict “in 249 instructing provincial governors that everyone in the empire must offer sacrifice to the gods, and everyone was to have a signed and officially countersigned certificate (*libellus*) attesting the act.”⁵⁴ Some submitted to the pressure following the imperial orders and therefore recanted their allegiance to Christ. These persons became known as the ‘lapsed’. In addition to those who renounced their faith, there were those who used bribery as a method of following the edict imposed by Decius. They bribed soldiers who, in return, provided them with a certificate claiming the right sacrifice was made when it was not. According to Chadwick, “Cyprian deeply disapproved of any bribery, above all if used to produce a paper attesting falsely that the possessor had compromised with demonic powers.”⁵⁵

When the persecution ceased, the Christian community was left to deal with one more alteration to the already complicated situation. Those who had remained true to the

⁵³ Chadwick, *The Early Church*. 148.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 149.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 149.

Christian faith despite the ensuing persecution became known as ‘confessors’. These were those, who Chadwick referred to as “endowed with the Holy Spirit and thereby had charismatic authority to hand out tickets of readmission.”⁵⁶ The confessors, who were seen as having a special standing before God for their dealings with suffering, began handing out tickets of re-admittance to those who had lapsed. Chadwick writes, “Some confessors injured their own dignity by being careless in handing out certificates of readmission, giving blank certificates which the applicant could fill in (*ep* 15.4) accepting bribes too.”⁵⁷

Cyprian’s response concerning proper reconciliation for those involved in the bribes as well as those who apostatized provided the context for Cyprian to establish his place in the North African ecclesial tradition which in return would later make him a hero within the Donatists’ community.

The primary challenge for the church (universal) was to develop a coherent and unifying response to effectively deal with those who had lapsed. What occurred is that Rome’s ecclesial authorities did not see eye to eye with Cyprian. In addition, “[Cyprian’s] enthusiasm for harmony with Rome when he needed support in the problem of reconciling the lapsed was quite gone when he discovered Rome to be recognizing the validity of schismatic or heretical baptisms.”⁵⁸ Cyprian and Rome’s ecclesial authority wrestled over the process by which reconciliation should take place for those who apostatized. Their differing views caused the rift between Rome and North Africa to

⁵⁶ Ibid, 150.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 150.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 155.

widen. Chadwick explains, “The theological debate so far as the West was concerned could not be resolved for a further half-century....”⁵⁹

Though this debate would continue to plague the ecclesial world of the West, Cyprian would soon find himself dealing with another imperial persecution. Chadwick recounts, “In 257 the emperor Valerian (253-60) with his son Gallienus abandoned an initially friendly attitude to the Christians...and initiated a persecution in which capital punishment was a penalty to come to Cyprian....”⁶⁰ This persecution would also become a key component in shaping Cyprian’s influence within Donatist circles. Tilley remarks, “In his modeling of appropriate behavior for later Christians, he provides the words that ring across the decades of Roman persecution: ‘I am a Christian...I know no other gods but the one true God who made heaven and earth and all that is in them’.”⁶¹

Cyprian’s Writings

Cyprian’s influence in North African ecclesiology was made clear by the penning of two important works; *The Lapsed* and *The Unity of the Catholic Church*.⁶² These works will serve as primary references for this study. Both works present Cyprian’s views on church unity and his concern regarding orthopraxy in dealing with the reconciliation process of the lapsed.

Cyprian’s writings played a dominant role in the developing North African ecclesiology. As Tilley indicates, “His writings and those attributed to him functioned in a place one step below Scripture from his own times to the eclipse of Christianity in the

⁵⁹ Ibid, 158.

⁶⁰ Ibid 159.

⁶¹ Tilley’s extensive work in *The Bible in Christian North Africa* is invaluable. Her research in primary sources was of great value here. Deut. 4:35, Exodus. 20:11 in *Acta Proconsularia* 1.1 (CSEL 3/3.cx). p 45.

⁶² *The Lapsed: The Unity of the Catholic Church*, translated and annotated by M. Bevenot, ACW 25 Westminster, Md.: Newman 1957).

seventh century.”⁶³ In these works, we see how Cyprian articulated an understanding of the role of the ‘confessors’, a stance on re-admittance for the ‘lapsed’ and an over all premise for the unity of the Church. While both works have a slightly different reason for being written, they both are none the less concerned with responses to the ecclesiological issues that ensued out of the persecution. *De Lapsed* is “a treatise of pastoral denunciation, combined with exhortation and encouragement to those who keenly felt the disgrace of their fall, or who shrank from the rigors of the Church’s penance.”⁶⁴ His other treatise, *The Unity of the Catholic Church*, although primarily concerned with ecclesial unity, can only be properly understood when read within Cyprian’s context.

Although Cyprian’s passion in penning this work is admirable, Bevenot writes,

He [Cyprian] had not the long experience of life in the Church which alone would have enabled him to write of the Church not merely in a way adequate to its present needs, but also with that accuracy of touch which would stand the test of time. In his treatise he was meeting the situation as he saw it; we must not expect in it a complete theological treatise on the Church.⁶⁵

In effect, *The Unity of the Catholic Church* has traditionally been seen as a response to Novatian, a Roman priest, whose teachings led to the founding of the sect known as Novatianism. Cyprian’s work, which was initially instigated by the rebuttals of Novatian, would remain central until the time of Augustine. What makes Cyprian’s treatise foundational is his strong defense for the role of the bishop as the sole authority and unity figure of the Church. While many wrestled with how to reconcile the apostates back into community, Cyprian’s work attempted to shed light on his own perspective and approach. Tilley remarks, “Presbyters and confessors had no consistent policy for readmission, and

⁶³Tilley, Maureen. “Cyprian of Carthage.” *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, 262-264. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 263.

⁶⁴ See Introduction to *The Lapsed: The Unity of the Catholic Church*, translated and annotated by M. Bevenot, ACW 25 Westminster, Md.: Newman 1957). p5.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

their procedures challenged Cyprian's Episcopal authority.”⁶⁶ This caused major concern as to the proper process one needed to follow for reconciliation and communal acceptance.

During this early phase of Christian history believers struggled with how to define and understand the role and nature of the Church concerning those who needed remittance into the church. For this reason “Cyprian worked toward a consistent policy on readmission.”⁶⁷

The Influences of Cyprian's Ecclesiology

The influence of Cyprian's ecclesiology, as it pertains to this study, is that it would become the hallmark of the Donatists' rebuttals against the Catholic Church (especially against Augustine). Though Cyprian's interaction with Rome demonstrates Cyprian's concern for the Church it none the less reveals his inexperience in developing a consistent ecclesiology which could be applied in differing circumstances.

The primary ecclesial issue for Cyprian, as discussed above, was that the Church was called to be 'one' united; in agreement. As the church wrestled as to what to do with the apostates emerging out of the persecution, Cyprian proposed that the lapsed not assume an easy entrance back into the communal fold. This was the defining issues for which the church should be united on. This process, as Cyprian saw it, should not be lenient as to diminish its outcome of true penance. For Cyprian, orthopraxy was directly linked to the purification process. Cyprian writes,

⁶⁶ Tilley, Maureen. “Cyprian of Carthage.” *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, 262-264. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 262.

⁶⁷ Tilley. *The Bible in Christian North Africa*. 23.

With utter neglect and contempt for all this, without making any expiation for their sins or any open acknowledgment of their guilt, before their conscience has been purified by the imposition of hands, before the menacing anger of their offended Lord has been appeased...their hands and mouth sin more grievously now against their Lord than when with their lips they denied Him.⁶⁸

The above excerpt expresses Cyprian's concern in the fact that the process was not sternly adhered to, therefore making the outcome ineffective which in return grieved God. Cyprian saw this as a serious issue to restoring the Church's unity. He was aware that some; (i.e. confessors) were using their status inappropriately. Chadwick remarks, "Some confessors injured their own dignity by being careless in handing out certificates of readmission, giving blank certificates which the applicant could fill in (*ep.* 15.4), accepting bribes too."⁶⁹

To demonstrate the seriousness of these issues Cyprian writes, "This is a new sort of persecution, a new sort of temptation, by which the crafty Enemy still attacks the lapsed, and ranges about wrecking unsuspected devastation..." (*De lapsis* 16). In order to address this, Cyprian raised the awareness of the role of the bishop as a symbol for unity that could bring stability in the chaos. If the decision process could be minimized to specific leaders, this for Cyprian made the most sense. In light of this disorder, Brent explains, "Thus Cyprian's claim that the bishop alone could absolve an apostate, through a ceremony involving the imposition of hands quite distinct from the Eucharist, was an innovation designed to increase Episcopal power at the expense of the presbyterate."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Cyprian, *De Lapsis*. 16.

⁶⁹ Chadwick. *The Early Church*. 150.

⁷⁰ See Allen Brent, *Cyprian's Reconstruction of the Martyr Tradition*. *Jnl of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 53, No.2, April 2002. Cambridge University Press. (241-268). 248. This article is an interesting perspective for Cyprian's formulations. Brent highlights an important aspect concerning Cyprian's position for authority.

At this time, Rome had also come under scrutiny. “There the learned presbyter Novatian was advocate of the traditional view that to those guilty of murder, adultery and apostasy the Church had no power to Last Judgment.”⁷¹ Cyprian came to the defense of the Roman See by defending Cornelius’ view that the bishop could remit even grave sins. By doing so, Cyprian would reinforce his thesis that stated that the rule of the Bishop symbolized unity for all to abide to. Cyprian writes,

The authority of the bishops forms a unity, of which each holds his part in its totality. And the Church forms a unity, however far she spreads and multiples by the progeny of her fecundity; just as the sun’s rays are many, yet the light is one, and a tree’s branches are many, yet *the strength deriving from its sturdy root is one*”-my emphasis.⁷²

Chadwick emphasizes Cyprian’s points in stating, “Splits result from opposition to the one bishop who is the bond of unity in his church.”⁷³ Cyprian expounds this idea by writing, “He, [the Enemy] invented heresies and schisms so as to undermine the faith, corrupt the truth, to sunder our unity.”⁷⁴

As Cyprian’s thesis was adhered to, Novatian quickly became seen as being ‘outside’ of the unity of the church since his views did not coincide with that of the Roman bishop Cornelius. This disagreement would make Novatianism an example for all those who would think of causing ecclesial disunity by opposing the symbol of unity; the bishop. Even “Augustine refers to Cyprian’s experience with the Novatians insofar as it touched on the unity of the church (c. *Gaud.* 2.9.10) or on rebaptism (*bapt.* 3.11.16).”⁷⁵

⁷¹ Chadwick. *The Early Church*. 119.

⁷² Cyprian, *De Unitate*. 5.

⁷³ Ibid, 154.

⁷⁴ Cyprian, *De Unitate*. 3.

⁷⁵ Fitzgerald, Allan D. “Novatian, Novatianism” *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, 591-592. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 592.

Some Novatianists quickly made their way back to the Catholic fold for readmission. Since they were seen as outsiders, those who had been baptized under Novatian's leadership would have to undergo a rebaptism that found its validity only within the true church- the Catholic Church. "Cyprian held that baptism given outside the sphere of the Spirit-filled community was no baptism, and that the schismatics could not be recognized at all...."⁷⁶

This defense of a strict policy for those outside of the catholic fold would be borrowed by the Donatists as a reason for rebaptism when returning into their community. They would appeal to Cyprian as their defender who established this method against those who attempted to live outside the rule of the Church. What the Donatists failed to understand was that Cyprian maintained this position in order that unity might be preserved. Tilley explains "...Cyprian wrote *De Unitate*, defending the authority of the bishop (in this case, at Rome) and rejecting Novatian's faction."⁷⁷

Cyprian's ecclesial slant as it pertained to the authority of the bishop was soon to take a turn in favor of the later Donatist position. After Cornelius, the new bishop Stephen held views that did not coincide with his predecessor Cornelius. "The new bishop Stephen (254-6), held that by tradition baptism in water in the name of the Trinity was valid wherever given, and that those baptized outside the Church should not be rebaptized but reconciled, like penitents within the Church, by laying on of hands."⁷⁸ This would be a time of intense testing for Cyprian as he would now have a bishop who did not side with his views. Cyprian's disagreements with Stephen brought about a new tension

⁷⁶ Chadwick, *The Early Church*. 119.

⁷⁷ Tilley, Maureen. "Cyprian of Carthage." *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, 262-264. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 263.

⁷⁸ Chadwick, *The Early Church*. 120.

bringing Cyprian's case for unity to a halt. Both parties would have to agree to disagree since this issue would not be resolved. Cyprian's response to such disagreement revealed Cyprian's true love for Church unity. Frend explains, in *De Lapsis* [Cyprian] maintains that for the sake of unity and peace some unworthy prelates had to be tolerated and left for divine censure (133). While Cyprian "denied the validity of Novatianist baptism because they had been excommunicated,"⁷⁹ he did not let his differing views lead to disunity. The Donatists, on the other hand, would later hold: the validity of rebaptism and the invalidity of the baptism of those outside the true Church to the point of bringing total disunity between them and the Catholic community.

"According to Stephen the sacrament is not the church's but Christ's, and depends upon the correctness not of the minister but of the form."⁸⁰ This issue would be underscored by the Donatists who believed that Cyprian was right and that his view of rebaptism was the true understanding of the sacraments. Cyprian's inconsistency in approaching Rome's authority gave opportunity for the Donatist to use his views for their own arguments as they saw fit.

On other occasions as well, Cyprian's teachings were easily amalgamated into a Donatist ecclesiology. Tilley explains that "Cyprian's most important legacy to the Donatists is his combination of the literal and typological interpretations...."⁸¹ Cyprian's biblical approach helped develop an evolving biblical hermeneutic that would allow the Donatists to defend their ecclesiastical beliefs with biblical support. Tilley explains that "Cyprian's use of the Bible to warrant separation would be a strong influence on the Donatists" (29). Cyprian's ecclesiology contributed to the Donatist practice of seeing

⁷⁹ Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*. 29.

⁸⁰ Chadwick, *The Early Church*. 120.

⁸¹ Tilley. *The Bible in Christian North Africa*. 38.

their community in light of primarily Old Testament narrative accounts. This helped both Cyprian and the Donatist to add meaning to their situations by expressing them through biblical passages and metaphors. This would be extremely important for the Donatists when they would eventually come into conflict with a Christian emperor who persecuted them.

Although the Donatists had reason to lean on certain views propagated by Cyprian they did fail to adhere to some of his other teachings that clearly supported the Catholic ecclesial position. A key area is the issue of ‘a universal church’ versus ‘a localized church’. Cyprian paints the picture of the true church by referring to it as a fruitful and expanding one. He writes,

She spreads her branches in generous growth over all the earth, she extends her abundant streams ever further; yet one is the head-spring, one the source, and the mother who is prolific in her offspring, generation after generation:....⁸²

In emphasizing this idea, Cyprian actually dismantles the later Donatist ecclesial position that attempted to confine the church to a particular geographical region (i.e. North Africa). As will be seen later, Optatus, as well as others, continued to illuminate this fact to the schismatics.

From disagreements with Roman rule, and a developing biblical hermeneutic that fitted their changing surroundings, the Donatists were able to use key aspects of Cyprian’s ecclesiology to defend their position. Because of this, Augustine would have to formulate a response, maintaining respect for Cyprian yet defending the Catholic ecclesial position.

⁸² Cyprian. *De Unitate*. 5.

Augustine's approach to Cyprian

Augustine's concerns with the Donatists quickly led him to Cyprian's ecclesiology. His approach did not only consist of rebuttals, but of a reexamination of Cyprian's thoughts on Church unity. Augustine was able to respect Cyprian's authority, as perceived by the Donatists, as well as demonstrate his knowledge of his contextual ecclesial position. In Augustine's foundational treaty against the Donatist he writes,

In this treatise we have undertaken, with the help of God, not only to refute the objections which the Donatists have been wont to urge against us in this matter, but also to advance what God may enable us to say in respect in the authority of the blessed martyr Cyprian, which they endeavor to use as a prop, to prevent their perversity from falling before the attack of truth (*On Baptism*, 1.1).

Here Augustine explains that the Donatists were hiding behind Cyprian as a method of defending their views. Augustine's respect for the Cyprianic tradition is easily seen in his reference to Cyprian's ideas about church unity. Augustine writes,

...deserving of expressions of great praise, that Cyprian and his colleagues had such love for unity that they continued in unity with those whom they considered to be traitors to the truth, without any apprehension of being polluted by them (*On Baptism* 7.3).

Even though Augustine applauded Cyprian's work as it pertained to unity, he believed that Cyprian was misled in his approach to rebaptism. He writes,

“And I take it, that the reason why the Lord did not reveal the error in this to a man of such eminence was, that his pious humility and charity in guarding the peace and health of the Church might be made manifest...(On Baptism 1. 28).

Augustine's view demonstrates his respect for Cyprian while some of his contemporaries would not be so lenient. “Some of Cyprian's later letters show that probably because of

the tension with Rome Cyprian had to reply to critics in Africa, discontented both with him and with his sacramental theology.”⁸³

In book II of *On Baptism Against the Donatists* Augustine begins an extensive explanation regarding Cyprian’s role in maintaining unity in the midst of disagreements. Augustine was able to appeal to the Donatist to truly follow Cyprian’s example while still making reference to a need of correction. For example, Augustine makes reference to Peter’s scuffle with Paul therefore comparing Cyprian to Peter. He writes,

For neither did Peter, whom the Lord choose first, and on whom He built His Church, when Paul afterwards disputed with him about circumcision, claim or assume anything insolently and arrogantly to himself, so as to say that he held the primacy, and should rather be obeyed of those who were late and newly come. Nor did he despise Paul because he had before been a persecutor of the Church, but he admitted the counsel of truth, and readily assented to the legitimate grounds which Paul maintained...(On Baptism 2.1).

Augustine’s use of this narrative, sheds light on the fact that even the most respected figures, including Peter himself, can err. What is important is that Augustine makes a parallel between Cyprian and Peter demonstrating that error can also be found in the noblest characters. Augustine nonetheless concludes by saying, “For Cyprian, in urging his view of the question, was still anxious to remain in the unity of peace even with those who differed from him on this point, as is shown by his own opening address at the beginning of the very Council which is quoted by the Donatists” (*On Baptism*. 2.2). This excerpt is an appeal to the Donatist to consider Cyprian in his proper perspective who demonstrated a primary concern for Church unity.

Augustine’s allusion to this sheds light on his devotion to tackling these issues in the context of their historicity. In doing so, he demonstrates to the Donatists that he is aware of the historical underpinning of their birth. He writes,

⁸³ Chadwick, *The Early Church*. 157.

In accordance with this principle, the Church of Africa has recognized the Donatists from the very beginning, obeying herein the decree of the bishops who gave sentence in the Church at Rome between Caecilianus and the party of Donatus; and having condemned one bishop named Donatus, who was proved to have been the author of the schism.... (*The Correction of the Donatists* 10.47).

Augustine makes this awareness abundantly clear when he referenced Cyprian's words at the council of 411.⁸⁴ He writes,

It remains that we severally declare our opinion on this subject, judging no one, nor depriving any one of the right of communion if he differs from us.... But we must all await the judgment of our Lord Jesus Christ, who alone has the power both of setting us in the government of his Church, and of judging of our acts therein. (*On Baptism* 2.2)

Augustine's leadership in the schism quickly takes shape as he questions the Donatists' use of Cyprian in their defense. Tilley adds, "Augustine was forced to admit that Cyprian had indeed rejected the baptism of those outside his own church, but Augustine rejected the Donatist claim that they were imitating Cyprian."⁸⁵ He makes it clear that he is concerned with unity and peace and that Cyprian was as well. It is almost in a taunting manner that he insists "You are wont, indeed, to bring up against us the letters of Cyprian, his opinion, his Council; why do ye claim the authority of Cyprian for your schism, and reject his example when it makes for peace for the Church?" (*On Baptism* 2.3.)

Augustine addresses an important dichotomy that I believe is central to unearthing many of the inconsistencies of the schism. First, he highlights the way Cyprian acted towards those who disagreed with him. He emphasized how Cyprian's aggressive

⁸⁴ Augustine. *On Baptism Against the Donatists*. Tran. J.R. King, Oxford 1870. The Council of Carthage, A.D. 256, in which eighty-seven African bishops declared in favor of rebaptizing heretics. The opinions of the bishops are quoted and answered by Augustine, one by one, in Books vi. and vii.

⁸⁵ Tilley, Maureen. "Cyprian of Carthage." *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, 262-264. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 263.

response to the schismatics of his day without devaluing the importance of ecclesial unity could not be overlooked. By doing so, Augustine essentially positions himself as the new Cyprian who would show patience to those who disagreed with his positions, yet continue to stand for the unity of the church.

Conclusion

North African ecclesiology would always be remembered for its legacy of great thinkers who wrestled with developing a biblical ecclesiology in light of surrounding complexities. Cyprian's role would be added to that legacy when "[on] the evening of 14 September Cyprian became the first bishop-martyr of Africa."⁸⁶ His death added credibility to the Donatists who highly esteemed martyrdom.

Historical studies report a rich ecclesial legacy left by Cyprian as he struggled to formulate his understanding of communal ecclesial unity. It is as Tilley wrote, "Cyprian was the prime influence on North African Christianity from the period of his episcopate until the time of Augustine." With this in mind, this study will now move toward elaborating on formulated Donatist ecclesiologies and the dialogues they instigated.

⁸⁶ Frend. *The Donatist Church*. 139.

Chapter 3

Donatist Ecclesiologies

Introduction

It is evident thus far that the very different perspectives on the nature of the church that evolved between both Donatists and Catholic communities became central to establishing superiority in the fierce ecclesial debate. While scholars realize the scarcity of Donatists texts available we are fortunate to be able to reconstruct certain dialogues. With this in mind, this chapter will examine two specific dialogues that were central to Augustine's emerging ecclesiology. The first dialogue will examine the debate between bishop Optatus of Milevis and the successor of Donatus, new bishop of Carthage, Parmenian. This dialogue will show the originality and brilliance of the Donatist leadership in defending their position and how Parmenian's skillfulness had brought the North African Catholic community to a small minority. It will also examine how the shift in the authority of the Empire, as a new emperor emerged, led to new developments within the Donatists community. This dialogue becomes specifically important as Augustine would later use it as reference for responding to Parmenian in '*Contra epistulam Parmenian*'. (c.a. 400 C.E.) What is important is that Parmenian had already passed on when Augustine found the time to counter to his views. This reinforced Augustine's leadership role, since he was willing to tackle the most well educated and respected leaders of the Donatist community whether they were present or not.

The second dialogue concerns Augustine's literary conversation with the fellow Donatist Tyconius. While the two never met, Augustine quickly demonstrated his appreciation for Tyconius' ideas by giving him ample space in his work *De Doctrina*

Christiana'. This dialogue will not only demonstrate Augustine's perception concerning the relationship he believed Donatist and Catholics could have, but it also shows how Augustine's intense immersion in the conflict, caused him to misunderstand Tyconius' ideas in his work *The Book of Rules*⁸⁷. Augustine borrowed from Tyconius to reinforce his own ecclesial position. Augustine's reference of Tyconius will demonstrate Augustine's brilliance to use everything at his disposal to construct an argument that could stand against the attacks of the Donatist ecclesiology.

These two dialogues are intricately connected as Tyconius' theological position caused Parmenian, Optatus' opponent, to excommunicate him. These two dialogues are, to date, the key sources available that shed light on Augustine's developing ecclesiology.

Context of Optatus' and Parmenian's dialogue

Optatus of Milevis

Optatus of Milevis was bishop of a Catholic community in the province of Numidia at a time when the Donatists outnumbered Catholics in the surrounding dioceses. While working from a disadvantaged position, he none the less demonstrated his faithfulness to the Catholic ecclesial position by responding to the Donatists' most astute leader. The deficiency of the Catholic community of his time would remain until Augustine's influence would turn the tide. Robert Eno explains, "...before the time of Augustine he [Optatus] was the only Catholic apologist in the field against the Donatists."⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Tyconius, *The Book of Rules*, W.S. Babcock, trans. Texts and translations, 39. Atlanta, 1989.

⁸⁸ Eno, Robert. "Optatus of Milevis" *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, 596-597. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 596.

Eno reinforces the fact that this was a difficult time for the Catholic community in North Africa. Their previous reliance on the Empire was not enough to discredit the fact that the Donatists were better advocates of their position and thus were able to secure a strong majority in Roman North Africa. As is often seen in antiquity, theological positions were transferred and reinforced by the writing of specific treatise. This is the exact case with Optatus and Parmenian.

Optatus unique role in the schism cannot be overlooked. Tilley writes, “Optatus was born in the wake of the first major anti- Donatist campaign (ca.320). He came from a non-Christian family of indeterminate social status...By the 360’s he had become the bishop of Milevis, his birth place.”⁸⁹ As it pertains to the dialogue and its context, it is important to keep in mind that Optatus’ work is the only one available.⁹⁰ In addition to this limitation, an increased difficulty emerges in the fact that very little has been unearthed concerning our author Optatus. With this in mind, Edwards remarks, “It is chiefly on the researches of Optatus, even now, that any attempt to explain the outbreak of the schism must rely.”⁹¹

Parmenian: Bishop of Carthage

As for Parmenian, Frend writes,

With the death of Donatus the leadership passed to two men, Bishop Pontius, Donatus’ companion in exile, and Macrobius, Bishop of Rome. Parmenian, who was consecrated Donatus’ successor by the exiled bishops, was a stranger to Africa, possibly even a Spaniard or Gaul by birth, and played little part at this stage.⁹²

⁸⁹ Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*. 97.

⁹⁰ The best resource available has been translated and edited by Mark Edwards. *Optatus: Against the Donatist*. Liverpool University Press. 1997.

⁹¹ Edwards, Mark. *Optatus: Against the Donatist*. XVI.

⁹² Frend. *The Donatist Church*. 185.

Frend's note of Parmenian's early stages of church leadership shouldn't cause one to view Parmenian in a light manner. Although Parmenian stepped into his position at a rare time of imperial support, he none the less was introduced to a Donatist movement with major internal problems. This would quickly challenge and reveal the depth of his leadership. In addition, Augustine's work *Against Parmenian* revealed the need to address Parmenian's ideas head on even though Parmenian had passed. His ecclesial ideas had become pillars that rooted the Donatist movement of his time. So much so that, Tilley reminds, "at Parmenian's death ca. 391, Donatism still held the allegiance of many Christians even in the area of Carthage."⁹³ These brief details concerning Parmenian help to affirm his unique and masterful role as the leader of the Donatist community during this period.

Julian the Apostate c.a. 332-363 C.E.

Another key component in assessing the context of this dialogue was the emergence of the new emperor, Julian the Apostate (Flavius Claudius Julianus)⁹⁴. As it pertains to this study, Julian became a leading force in undoing what his predecessor had done. This is of primary concern at a time when ecclesiologies were being formed. As it pertained to both Parmenian and Tyconius, Tilley remarks,

Both formulated their ecclesiologies at a time when Donatists had respite from persecution and enjoyed government support. During the period when persecution had ceased and the emperor was on their side, Donatists began to develop an ecclesiology, or rather a variety of ecclesiologies, to suit their new situation (96).⁹⁵

⁹³ Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*. 96.

⁹⁴ Bunson, Matthew. *A Dictionary of the Roman Empire*. Oxford University Press. 1991. (p219-220)

⁹⁵ Tilley. *The Bible in Christian North Africa*. 96.

As previous Emperors embraced the Catholic community Julian saw his role as the opposite.

He began his reign by throwing off his Christian background, thus earning himself the historical title of “Apostate.”...The aim of Julian was to resurrect the traditional Roman paganism, if necessary, at the expense of Christianity. He thus dismissed Christian teachers, put an end to state subsidies and organized pagan worship in all of the provinces.⁹⁶

Bunson demonstrates that Julian’s actions reveal his desire to see an Empire completely different than his predecessors.

Since the Donatist community was seen as being outside the orthodox Catholic tradition, Julian’s edicts also swung the balance in favor of the Donatists. Julian, having full reign of the empire, made a national decision to bring all exiles back from hiding. In addition to allowing certain Donatists to return to Africa, Optatus writes, “...the basilica and other property seized by the Catholics in 347 were to be restored to [the Donatists].”

⁹⁷ These immense changes turned the tide toward the Donatist community therefore allowing their ecclesiological perspective to prosper. In addition, Optatus mentions that exiles came “frenzied in anger, tearing asunder the limbs of the Church, subtle in deceit, horrible in slaughterings.”⁹⁸

While historically, not much has been found concerning both individuals, the time in which Optatus and Parmenian dialogued was a time of interesting changes within the Empire. As it pertains to this study, Julian’s reign should not be overlooked. His influence would have possibly stirred emotions connected to the other persecutions during the patristic period. Frend writes,

⁹⁶ Bunson. *A Dictionary of the Roman Empire*. 220.

⁹⁷ Frend. *The Donatist Church*. 188.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 188.

In this respect the events of 347-8 resemble the persecution of 303-5. Both took their victims by surprise, in both there were apostasies and mass flights, and in both the cowardice of the majority was redeemed in the eyes of later generations by a few resolute individuals. . . .⁹⁹

Another key facet to Julian's reign lay in the fact that it altered the way the Donatist viewed their identity. In relation to this study, the underpinning of this fact would eventually lead to new and emerging ecclesiological ideas within their ranks.

Tilley writes,

...the Donatist use of the Bible reveals their tactics for coping with a change in status from a persecuted minority, to a solid separatist movement, to an internally divided community¹⁰⁰, during the time from the reign of Julian to the 390s. This situation of radical change called for a response to bridge the gap between an ecclesiology that valorized purity and promoted separation to one that could deal with evil within the Church and foster integration.¹⁰¹

Tilley's remarks shed light on the fact that though the Donatist had grown to a majority group in North Africa that in no way implied unanimity among their ranks. It actually saw the beginning of different rifts which would eventually be used ammunition by their Catholic accusers.

Optatus' Work '*Against Parmenian the Donatist*'

As previously mentioned, "Optatus' only surviving work, an unnamed treatise, provides the only contemporary view of the work of Parmenian, bishop of Carthage."¹⁰²

While Tilley provides the context for the difficulty evident in reconstructing this dialogue, it is important to note that diverse scholars continue to study the complexities that come with this dialogue. Robert Eno writes, "In 366 or 367 he [Optatus] authored the first six books of a work variously titled by scholars *Against Parmenian the Donatist* or

⁹⁹ Ibid. 180.

¹⁰⁰ Tilley's work is exceptional at providing historical information of the factions that emerged from within the Donatist community. Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*. Fortress Press. 1997

¹⁰¹ Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*. 94.

¹⁰² Ibid, 98.

On the Schism of the Donatists¹⁰³.”¹⁰⁴ The inability to correctly name this treatise reveals an increased concern to remain aware of the lack of data for this section. Because this dialogue must be completely reconstructed from that of Optatus’, some would add that Optatus’ work cannot be trusted in fully divulging the depth of the Donatist position. While this study is aware of such complexities, Tilley, who is a strong advocate of understanding the Donatist through their own works¹⁰⁵ writes,

Although not all of Optatus’ testimony can be accounted accurate, when compared with what is already known of Donatism and in view of the situation of Donatism after 360, Optatus’ work does provide some valuable evidence about what Donatists did indeed believe, what Parmenian most probably wrote, and how the Donatist movement adjusted to its majority position.¹⁰⁶

Optatus’ attempt to diminish Parmenian’s argument and to highlight the contradictions in his argument demonstrates his understanding of the historical narratives of the schism.¹⁰⁷

The context for understanding this dialogue demonstrates the importance of treading wisely as one attempts to understand what Augustine would have eventually read and borrowed to shape his own ecclesial position. Eno reminds, “The work of Optatus was of fundamental importance for Augustine’s anti-Donatist writings. He placed Optatus on the same level as earlier great African authors like Cyprian and Lactantius (*dos. Chr.* 2.40.61).”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Scholars mention a seventh book that was possibly added later by another source. As to the different titles used for Optatus’ work, I will use the latter for the remainder of this study.

¹⁰⁴ Eno, Robert. “Optatus of Milevis” *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, 596-597. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 597.

¹⁰⁵ Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*. 99.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 100.

¹⁰⁷ Tilley mentions “Optatus’ reply to Parmenian show that he was primarily a historian rather than a theologian.” (p98). I disagree with Tilley’s view here. Just because Optatus’ uses a historical approach to strengthen his theological stance does not suffice to see him as a historian rather than a theologian. Instead I would argue that he was both depending on the need of his community.

¹⁰⁸ Eno, Robert. “Optatus of Milevis” *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, 596-597. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 597.

Response to Parmenian

On reading Optatus' response it is quickly evident that both Parmenian and Optatus were well immersed in the issues of the conflict and both were deeply interested in the unity of the Church. It is important to note how Optatus understood his relationship toward his fellow bishop Parmenian. Chapman remarks, "He calls Parmenian 'brother', and wishes to treat the Donatists as brethren, since they were not heretics...."¹⁰⁹ In this light, Optatus' response to Parmenian gains its proper context. What is central to this treatise is the identification of essential properties that were the foundational identifiers of the true Church. In book II Optatus identifies five gifts; ¹¹⁰ 1. The Chair of Peter, 2. The Angel, 3. The Holy Spirit, 4. The Fountain, and lastly, 5. The Seal. The interconnectedness of these identifiers of the true church and their role within the Catholic community is well articulated by Optatus and extremely important to understanding his rebuttal against Parmenian. For Optatus, his argument is forcefully confirmed in claiming that these signposts, which distinguished the true church, could not be claimed solely by the Donatist, but were affirmed by the universality of the Christian church as revealed throughout the empire.

Before Optatus responds to Parmenian he diverts shortly to make a distinctly historical and factual argument that immediately shifts momentum on to the side of the Catholic community. Optatus states,

But I see that you do not yet know that the Schism at Carthage was begun by your fathers. Search out the beginning of these affairs, and you will find that in associating heretics with schismatics, you have pronounced judgment against yourselves. (On the Schism Bk. 1. p20)

¹⁰⁹ Chapman. John. Trans. Anthony A. Killeen. *Donatists*. The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume V <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05121a.htm>. Online Edition Copyright. by K. Knight. 2003.

¹¹⁰ The Donatists added one more gift known as the "umbilicus" in reference to the altar which Optatus sees as inseparable from the gifts he mentions.

It is interesting that Optatus puts the onus on Parmenian to search the facts out as well, but continues in his argument by providing the historical dialogue needed to strengthen his point. Beginning with Caecilian's situation, Optatus continues in his response by clearly stating,

Since then there can be no possible doubt that these things have thus happened, and that you are the heirs of Betrayers and schismatics, I am, my brother Parmenian, sufficiently surprised—seeing that you are yourself a schismatic—that you should have thought it advisable to join schismatics to heretics.¹¹¹

What will be central to Augustine's argument is Optatus' continual reference to Parmenian as his brother. In the above excerpt he calls Parmenian a schismatic as well as a brother within the same periscope, as to a prompt him to rethink his position and the loving inclusiveness that is found in community with Catholic believers.

Optatus helps his readers by solidifying his position concerning all of Parmenian's claims. Although he addresses each 'gift' of the church separately, he clearly adds For it has been proved that we are in the Holy Catholic Church, who have too the Creed of the Trinity; and it has been shown that, through the Chair of Peter which is ours – through it—the other Endowments also belong to us."¹¹² He goes on to add, "We have also shown in our first Book that we cannot justly be reproached with the crime of Betrayal, and that this crime has been condemned not only by you, but by us also."¹¹³ This thought provoking claim states the Catholic position all along. That not only were they not the betrayers of unity, but they continued to stand against those who were the true betrayers, which were the Donatists themselves.

¹¹¹ O. Vassall-Phillips, *The Work of St. Optatus, Bishop of Milevis against the Donatists*. Book 1, 21.

¹¹² *Ibid.* 86.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 88.

Optatus closes this discourse with beautiful imagery concerning the church as paradise inclusive to all and strongly holding on to the universal unity commanded through the forefathers. He reminds Parmenian,

Whatever you have been able to say in praise of the Church, we, before you, have said the same. We too, with you condemn the Betrayers—those men whom, if you remember, we have shown up in our first Book.¹¹⁴

Optatus' claims seem to constantly return his readers to his initial claim he makes in the first book. He has proven that historically the Catholic community had no part in the divisive schemes that were being uttered by the Donatist. Rev. O.R. Vassal –Phillips, in commenting writes, "Optatus complains that Parmenian was content with contrasting the rival churches in Africa, ignoring in his argument the rest of the Catholic world, as though the controversy could be settled by reference to what had happened in Africa."¹¹⁵ Phillips makes this case in explaining Optatus' words stating,

You for some time past have thought well to provide two churches, as if Africa alone had Christian people—that Africa in which through fault, two parties have been made! And you—not remembering Christ, who says that His Spouse is One—have said, not that there are two parties in Africa, but two Churches. Without doubt that Church is One....¹¹⁶

Optatus claims that Parmenian is looking out only to his own interest rather than the interest of the Universal body of Christ.

Conclusion

Optatus' role in defending the catholic position and in influencing Augustine's ecclesiological developments is central to understanding the schism in its proper context. In addition to his work against Parmenian, Optatus makes the crucial connection between

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 98.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 92. (See Footnote)

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 92.

the North African Church and her continuity with the Roman See. As Chadwick remarks, “Optatus is the first western writer to assert that ‘Peter was superior to the other apostles and alone received the keys of the kingdom, which were distributed by him to the rest (7.3).”¹¹⁷ This underpinning to Optatus’ argument continues in linking the catholic position to the forefather Cyprian. Eno affirms, “The related discussion concerning the chair of Peter or of Cyprian and its current rightful possessor shows that Optatus’ ecclesiology remains significantly in line with that of Cyprian.”¹¹⁸ Eno’s remark explains how Augustine was again able to use Optatus as well as previous Cyprianic claims in developing a consistent argument against the Donatists. Although specific correlations between their ecclesial thoughts are not found in their discourses, readers can extract closely linked ideas that would have transpired during the present schism. What is also essential to Augustine understanding of Optatus is his position and authority within the North African context. What in hindsight seems like a classic argument won by Optatus its historical context probably found its audience less excited and trust worthy of the Bishop from Milevis. As Frend notes, “With the Catholics discredited as ‘Macariani’, his proof that the Donatists were really the schismatics might have sounded odd to a Numidian audience.”¹¹⁹ None the less, the Catholic bishop fought for unity and paved a way for his fellow colleague Augustine to continue in the defense of the Church. Chadwick writes, “Substantial elements of Augustine’s argument against the Donatists

¹¹⁷ Chadwick. *East and West The Making of a Rift in the Church*. 31.

¹¹⁸ Eno, Robert. “Optatus of Milevis” *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, 596-597. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 597.

¹¹⁹ Frend. *The Donatist Church*. 196.

were already set out by Optatus bishop of Mileu about 370 in reply to Parmenian, Donatist bishop of Carthage....”¹²⁰

Augustine’s ability to respond effectively to Donatist claims finds root in the exceptional work of Optatus. In doing so, Augustine would pave his way to the forefront of the debate providing his own response to Parmenian’s claims. Augustine’s response would not only be revealed in his academic style through his particular treatise, but also within his sermons. Chadwick writes,

Parmenian, Donatist bishop of Carthage, even claimed that the bishop in the true (Donatist) succession stands as the authorized mediator between God and the laity—language which Augustine regarded as ‘intolerable to Christian ears’ indeed ‘the voice of Antichrist’. For Augustine, the voice of Christ is heard whenever the preacher proclaims the truth (*sermo* 17.1).¹²¹

This reinforces the fact that this battle was not only one of political influence, but as Augustine demonstrates, a fight for the minds of his parishioners and their own formulating ecclesiologies which the bishop, as the shepherd, was responsible to guide and protect.

Second Dialogue, Tyconius in Context

It is unfortunate how an individual so foundational to ancient Christianity and Augustinian ecclesiology has gone for so long without being examined with academic integrity. It wasn’t until the exceptional research of Pamela Bright¹²² that Tyconius remained hidden by the many other writing of the Patristic Era. In addition, Bright explains, “Tyconius has been most commonly studied within the ambiance of

¹²⁰ Chadwick. *East and West The Making of a Rift in the Church*. 31.

¹²¹ Ibid, 31.

¹²² Bright Pamela, *The Book of Rules of Tyconius, Its Purpose and Inner Logic*. Notre Dame: Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 1988.

Augustinian studies.”¹²³ While Tyconius’ role in Augustine’s ecclesial development is essential one must first see Tyconius within his own context which would have been years prior to Augustine’s full fledged involvement in the schism. What Bright provides is an understanding of Tyconius that emerges out of his own writings rather than through the lenses of Augustinian interpretation.¹²⁴

Tyconius’ book, *The Book of Rules* is the only source available for this study. Through this book Tyconius criticized the theology of his community- but did not leave it. He was later excommunicated by Parmenian due to their differing views.

Babcock in his translation of Tyconius’ book writes,

Tyconius lived and wrote in North Africa in the second half of the fourth century. Of his writings only the Book of Rules survives intact or nearly intact...In relation to the Donatist controversy, which was certainly the dominant feature on the landscape of North African Christianity in the fourth and early fifth centuries, Tyconius occupied an ambiguous and enigmatic position (xi).

Babcock’s reference to Tyconius enigmatic position lay in the fact he did not see eye to eye with Parmenian, the bishop of Carthage, nor did he end up siding with the Catholics. What also adds to the ambiguity is how little we really know about him.

“Tyconius lived from ca. 330 to ca. 390.”¹²⁵ He grew to adulthood during the second period of Donatist repression; the time of the Macarian persecution...He was about thirty-two when Parmenian became bishop of Carthage.”¹²⁶

It is with the little information that one must attempt to understand his perspective and his paramount role in the developing ecclesiology of his time and his influence on

¹²³ Bright, *The Book of Rules of Tyconius*, 24.

¹²⁴ Tyconius, *The Book of Rules*, W.S. Babcock, trans. Texts and translations, 39. Atlanta, 1989.

¹²⁵ As explained by Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*. 203. Augustine and the biographer Gennadius of Marseilles (fl.470) provide the only surviving details of his life. See Gennadius, *Liber de viris illustribus* 18, ed. Ernest Cushing Richardson, T&U 14/2 (Leipzig: J.C.Hinrichs’sch, 1896), 68. Augustine make his most illuminating remarks on Tyconius in Contr. Ep. Parm. 1.1.1. (CSEL 51.19-20)....

¹²⁶ Tilley, 113.

Augustine. Frend remarks, “Of the Donatist themselves, Tyconius is the only writer of note whose work has survived in this period, but Tyconius sheds little light on the history of the movement, except what may be gathered by inference.”¹²⁷

Although little is available, Tyconius’ ecclesial position is central for this study. As one will see, this second dialogue is central in demonstrating Augustine’s own ecclesiological developments.

Tyconius’ Ecclesiology

Tyconius’ work is structured in a way that clearly leads his reader to the important rules he thought were central to early Christian hermeneutics. Tyconius’ methodology sets forth seven specific rules. i. the Lord and His Body, ii. The Lord’s Bipartite Body, iii. The Promises of the Law, iv. The Particular and the General, v. Times, vi. Recapitulation, vii. The Devil and His Body. As it pertains to Augustine and this study, it is Tyconius’ second rule that plays significant part in this present work. In rule number 2 Tyconius explains the central component of his ecclesiology. In this section he explains that the church’s nature consists of a ‘*Bipartite Body*’. For Tyconius, this idea was a formulation of numerous scriptural references¹²⁸ which revealed goodness and evil existing together.

This point is elaborated in what Tyconius entitled *Rule II- Of the Bipartite Body*. The hermeneutical approach revealed in Tyconius’ ecclesial development sheds light on the fact that Tyconius’ strongly disagreed with the Donatist ecclesial stance, that good and evil could be separated by the present church. This mystery that the church is made up of

¹²⁷ Frend. *The Donatist Church*. 169.

¹²⁸ Bright’s demonstrates Tyconius’ use of passages such as, Gen 19:5-17, Rev 15:1, 2 Thess. 2:7, and especially Isa. 24:13 (p 50-51).

both the 'left and right' reveals a defining turn in North African ecclesiology which led to enormous repercussions for the historical schism including Augustine's ecclesiology.

Influence on Augustine

Augustine's interest in Tyconius comes at a time in which Donatism continued to propagate an ecclesiology that required purity within the fold. While Tyconius' work allowed Augustine to defend his catholic ecclesial approach, it must remain clear that both were not altogether in agreement. Bright explains, "for Tyconius the Church was a mysterious duality of good and evil in one body; for Augustine, the evil ones only *seem* [Bright's emphasis] to belong to the Church."¹²⁹ This slight nuance demonstrates another important dynamic of Augustine's ecclesiology. For Augustine, though the nature of the church consists of both sinners and saved while on earth, her nature was solely pure and good which was due to the fact that Christ was the head.

While Augustine would continue in formulating his ecclesial position, Tyconius' influence is undeniable evident. Bright remarks, "While Tyconius' exegetical theory may have been misrepresented by Augustine, the fact that the Book of Rules itself survived was no doubt due to Augustine's summary in the *De Doctrina Christiana*."¹³⁰

What is central to understanding the reaction against Tyconius in Donatist circles is the author's insistence on the mystery of evil within the church. This was in direct opposition to the Donatist 'purist' ecclesiology. This idea would also be of considerable interest to Augustine, as he developed his own formulation of 'purity' and the church which was very different from that of the Donatist.

¹²⁹ Bright, *Tyconius book of Rules.*, 29.

¹³⁰ Bright, Pamela. *The Book of Rules of Tyconius Its Purpose and Inner Logic.* 23.

Due to Tyconius' influence, Augustine's on going struggle with developing an ecclesiology that was consistent and coherent would often find glimpses of ideas propagated by his fellow Donatist Tyconius. This reality is best seen in Augustine's idea of the church as mixed society '*permixta ecclesia*'. This concept exemplified that the church would have to struggle with those who were not truly part of the community, yet for the time being, remained within the local community. Hall explains,

In [this] Augustinian model, it is only in the future that God will separate true Christians from their false counter-parts. Any attempt to do so in the present time, whether to be the schism of the Novatianists in the third century or that of the Donatists in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, will ultimately prove futile, largely because only God knows those who are genuinely his.¹³¹

This concept shows the influence of Tyconius on Augustine. Though Augustine would elaborate on Tyconius idea, it none the less demonstrates the importance of Tyconius in Augustine's developing ecclesiology.

Conclusion

Since the exceptional work of Pamela Bright in *The Book of Rules of Tyconius. It's inner purpose and logic*, Tyconius has yet to be fully appreciated by many immersed in Patristic studies. Bright wonderfully explains the importance of Tyconius' role within Western ecclesiology, early church hermeneutics and especially Augustinian studies. Bright explains how Tyconius' approach was rather complicated, "On the one side he defended his fellow Donatists as the victims of persecution; on the other he insisted that the Church, the Body of Christ, as to be found throughout the world-certainly beyond the confines of Africa."¹³²

¹³¹ Hall, Christopher A. *Learning Theology with the Church Father*. 245.

¹³² Bright, *The Book of Rules*, 20.

Tyconius' status as an outcast within Donatism and not willing to side with the Catholic community also caused Augustine to be puzzled. The revealed complexities did not hinder Augustine from seeing fit to discuss Tyconius' hermeneutical principles in his work *De Doctrina Christiana*¹³³ thus making Tyconius a key player in his developing ecclesiology.

¹³³ Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* (the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers NPNF), First Series 3, ed. P. Schaff, trans. J.F. Shaw; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956).

Section 2

Ecclesial Themes Developed

Chapter 4

People on Pilgrimage

Introduction:

Anyone remotely aware of Augustine's journey toward his conversion knows that he understood himself to be on a pilgrimage. In essence, we all are. As it pertains to his ecclesiology, Augustine understood 'pilgrimage' to be a central and on going aspect of one's spiritual journey that continued even after one became a part of the church community. This section will shed light on Augustine's own pilgrimage. In reference to his own journey, this chapter will elaborate on one of Augustine's foundational ecclesial idea, that the nature of the Church is made of people on pilgrimage. This issue of pilgrimage is intricately intertwined with Augustine's idea of the church's nature consisting of both the sinner and saved. Understanding this tension takes the reader to Augustine's writings on the Psalms. Augustine's insight on this tension gives readers a glimpse of his relevance for all who are on the pilgrimage.

Since the pilgrim involves being in motion, so is one's position as one becomes part of the Christian community. This was one of the central themes that Augustine presented in his case against the Donatist. Augustine presented an ecclesiology that allowed for patience toward the other, openness to God's timing and judgment and lastly, the beauty of the pilgrimage as experienced by him.

Augustine's Pilgrimage

Of all Augustine's writings, it is his exceptional work in his *Confessions* that elaborates on his own pilgrimage. Because of this work (especially books 1 to 9) scholarship has continuously focused on Augustine's journey toward conversion and

stopped there. This chapter will take over where many voices leave off. For the importance of Augustine ecclesiology, it is paramount to understand that Augustine's pilgrimage toward Christ did not end with his conversion, but continued on in his episcopal years. As it pertains to his ecclesiology, Augustine's journey toward his role as bishop and the development within the daily responsibilities of his congregation revealed an Augustine constantly on pilgrimage. There is no doubt that his initial involvement at Hippo and the immense duties quickly led him on his knees wondering how he gotten himself in this predicament. None the less, his brilliance and passion for the Church soon surfaced as a new type season in his own pilgrimage began to take shape. This pilgrimage was no longer about following the ideas of others; instead it brought Augustine to the forefront where he began to pave new steps in the sand for others to now follow. Brown remarks,

Augustine stepped into a position where certain things were expected of him. One of the most important and elusive aspects of his life in Hippo, is the extent to which Augustine lived up to the traditional expectations of the average townsman, and the degree to which he flouted and transformed them....Notwithstanding his unchanging pastoral routine, Augustine lived through a generation of rapid changes, many of which were provoked by his own initiative, and by that of his Catholic colleagues.¹³⁴

While the destination of his pilgrimage had not changed, the path that he was now on led him to the front of the pack bringing about increasing influence. As Augustine had experienced earlier,¹³⁵ he quickly learned that those you journey with affect the destination of the journey. What makes Augustine the individual 'par excellence' was his ability to understand the diversity and complexities of individual pilgrims. His own journey, pre and post clergyman, had led Augustine to wrestle with diverse issues that he

¹³⁴ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*. 188.

¹³⁵ His experience as a Manichee is key example of this.

was able to harness and use to his own advantage. In explaining Augustine's importance to today's contemporary quandary C. W. McPherson writes,

Augustine wrote for agnostics and nihilists, for thoughtful classical conservatives demanding a return to pagan values and pagan gods, for disciples of any of the bewildering variety of philosophical schools and sects that flourished in the late empire, for rival religionists, as well as for practicing Christians. This gives his work a philosophical integrity lacking in many subsequent theologians, who wrote within a strictly Christian context for a specifically Christian readership.¹³⁶

The people we journey with are just as important as the pilgrimage itself. This was part of Augustine's own pilgrimage experience as he now finds himself trying to lead others in the journey. While Augustine's position as the leader¹³⁷ brought about new situations that sometimes caused him to walk alone and experience loneliness, he continuously worked at adapting a very communal understanding of one's individual pilgrimage. Brown writes,

In choosing his company as he did, Augustine arranged that he would never be alone. He needed company. Even his most intimate experience of contemplation, he had in the presence of his mother; and now he ensured that in his bishop's palace at Hippo, he would always be the centre of a tight group of like-minded friends.¹³⁸

This developing idea of community that played a central role in Augustine's ecclesiology allowed Augustine's influence to deepen and therefore be a part of those whom he journeyed with. In this light, he became a real bishop who was in tune with the news of his community and most of all the reality that the church was made up of those who were saved by grace, but still wrestling with sin.

¹³⁶ McPherson, C.W. *Augustine our Contemporary*. Cross Currents. Spring-Summer 2000. Web, http://www.findarticles.com/cf_0/m2096/2000_Spring-Summer/63300904/print.jhtml. 2.

¹³⁷ Brown remarks how Augustine found himself at the head of a 'family' the Christian community of his town, which he speaks of often as the *familia Dei*. p189. (eg.Ep. 177, i: *familia Christi*.).

¹³⁸ Brown. *Augustine of Hippo*. 194.

People on Pilgrimage

Augustine's experience with 'people on pilgrimage' finds its culmination during his time as bishop of Hippo. Here Augustine's primary role was to teach and journey with those put under his care. Augustine did not take this role lightly. More than anything else, Augustine's passion for the church stemmed from his love for his flock. This love evolved as Augustine became immersed in the life of the community. At the time of Augustine episcopacy the role of the bishop had elaborated into a complex operation. Carol Harrison writes,

Not only did he baptize, preach, and celebrate (the latter two often daily) but he also assumed the burden and demanding duties of administrator and legal arbitrator. The Church was now a legally recognized institution, able to receive donations, gifts, and bequests. It fell to the bishop to administer these goods, which often included land, estates, and buildings for the benefit of the Church and for the needy to whom it had traditionally ministered—the widows, foundlings, orphans and homeless who had figured on the Church's 'list', and benefited from its care, since the time of the apostles.¹³⁹

The Episcopal duties of Augustine's day allowed him to be immersed in the lives of his local community. For this reason, Augustine became aware of the humanness and the weakened will of those who professed Christ as Lord. Perhaps, on particular occasions Augustine saw his own journey in the lives of those he was now called to strengthen. The reminder of God's faithfulness, grace, and love remained at the center of ecclesiological developments. For his parishioners, who better to journey with than one who has experienced the love of the Father at so many junctures in life?

Augustine's ecclesiology was very much shaped by the anthropological observations of his community as well as the deep inner examination of his own journey. By this I mean that Augustine slowly became aware that purity and holiness, as explained by the

¹³⁹ Harrison. Carol. *Augustine Christian truth and Fractured Humanity*. 122-23.

Donatists, though important to the nature of the Church, were not something that developed instantaneously. For this very reason, the community of believers, the church, came to be understood as those on pilgrimage toward wholeness. As noted earlier, for Augustine, the nature of the church must be rooted in the idea of communal pilgrimage. Tarsicius J. van Bavel explains how for Augustine,

The church is primarily the active gathering of a new humankind into communion with Christ. God did not wish the only Son to remain alone; in order to give him all human beings as brothers and sisters, he adopted us as his children (ep Jo. 8.14). From the moment the people follow Jesus in faith, hope, and love, communion with Christ comes into existence.¹⁴⁰

While communion with Christ is experienced by those who committed themselves to following the word incarnate, his commands require that his love be extended to all, including those downtrodden by the rest of society. For Augustine, the church's nature revealed itself in its social dynamic toward the community at large. It is in this light that the exclusivity exhibited by the Donatists ecclesiology came into direct opposition with Augustine's. Van Bavel reinforces this by stating,

To share in Jesus' life means to pray to the Father as he did, to be at the service of others like he was, to go to the outcast from society and religion with the same faith, to love friend and enemy with love. By this communion the body of Christ is constituted, a notion that is at the heart of Augustine's doctrine of the church, and the very foundation of her salvific character.¹⁴¹

It is here that this idea of pilgrimage finds its strongest argument. Augustine's understanding of 'pilgrimage', as it related to the church, concerns those who have made the decision to follow Christ and those who yet have not. In being concerned about those who had yet to decide to follow Christ, the Church, as those on pilgrimage, invite those

¹⁴⁰ Bavel, Tarsicius J. van. "Church" *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, 169-176. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 171.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 171.

people who are moving away from the Father to consider their destinations. Augustine's own journey reveals how a loving God draws all to Himself. He writes,

He who is making confession to you is not instructing you of that which is happening within him. The closed heart does not shut out your eye and your hand is not kept away by the hardness of humanity, but you melt that when you wish, either in mercy or in punishment, and there is 'none who can hide from your heat' (Ps 18:7).¹⁴²

Augustine's own pilgrimage led him to understand that different individuals of his community would be at different places in the journey. There were possibly those who reminded him of himself, those who shunned God and wanted nothing to do with changing direction in the journey. Despite the fact, Augustine's ecclesiology allowed room for inclusive love toward the other which could one day help the stubborn turn toward the father just as he had eventually done. While Augustine includes an aspect of individual responsibility that is extended to 'the other', he also demonstrates an important tension that would slowly surface during his interaction with Pelagius (c.a. 350-425).¹⁴³ The tension consists of the fact that, for Augustine, the human will has been rendered ineffective and distorted. Due to this evident reality, the people on pilgrimage must rely on the work of God, who calls out to them in the midst of their selfish ambitions. Harrison comments, "thus we find that Augustine's characteristic picture of a Christian is of someone in exile, on a pilgrimage, journeying towards the object of his love, meanwhile yearning and longing, uttering sighs and groans, his journey moved forward by love and delight in God's revelation. . . ." ¹⁴⁴ Harrison's insight reiterates that one's movement forward needs to be steered by love. This is an act of God's mysterious

¹⁴² Augustine. *Confessions*. v.i.

¹⁴³ TeSelle, Eugene. "Pelagius, Pelagianism." *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, 633-640. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999.

¹⁴⁴ Harrison, *Augustine Christian truth and Fractured Humanity*. 97.

activity that required patience and openness toward others thus allowing for the so called 'sinner' to be in the midst of the church.

Pilgrimage and the Donatists

This major theme of 'people on pilgrimage' in Augustine's formulating ecclesiology did in fact oppose the view held by the Donatists. This central issue, as it pertained to the Donatist, did not coincide with their idea that the church is an exclusive community for a select few (i.e. those in North Africa). The main issue is how the two communities differed on their understanding of sin (*peccatum*) and their relationship to the world. While the complexities of Augustine's understanding of sin cannot be elaborated on here, it is on this issue that the two communities strongly disagreed. As people on pilgrimage the idea rests on the fact that there is constant need of growth as one moves toward the right direction which is God. This was Augustine's experience and thus a key component of his ecclesiology. On the other hand, the Donatist saw conversion as an instantaneous event which flowed out of the baptismal sacrament and thus was to be protected against impurity which came primarily by association with those who were pagans and especially the *traditores*. This stressed the Donatist emphasis on the perfect ritual for the validity of baptism. Markus writes,

The African Christian tradition had long laid great weight on the "separateness" of the church from the world and liked to draw a very firm line around the church. This line enclosed the sphere of purity and holiness in a world of sin and pollution. The church was a society alternative to the "world," the refuge of the saints.... There could be no overlap; "world" and "church" were mutually exclusive.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Markus, R.A. "Donatism." *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, 284-287. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 286.

With this long standing history, Augustine's more inclusive approach to the world confirmed the Donatist view that the Catholics were not the true church as they were. For Augustine the idea of pilgrimage was something that grew out of his own journey and thus was foundational to his understanding of the church. He also tried, on diverse occasions, to demonstrate that this idea of 'people on pilgrimage' was the more realistic way in which people approach their commitment to Christ. The Donatists were not impressed. As it has been understood, "The issues between Augustine and the Donatists concerned, at bottom the nature of the church and of the relation between it and the world."¹⁴⁶

This idea of sin was a developing one in the mind of Augustine. Early on in his life, Augustine strongly adapted an understanding of the human will that left room for one to decide between good and evil within the realm of one's own conscious effort. His own intellectual conversion propelled Augustine into a new realm within his own pilgrimage. Markus writes,

As a young man he had already undergone an earlier conversion: the intellectual restlessness of a brilliant student was then directed by a reading of Cicero's lost work, *Hortensius*, toward the quest of wisdom. Augustine was now launched on the ardent pursuit of a pilgrimage toward an unknown destination.¹⁴⁷

Markus clearly shows how Augustine's own journey led to diverse 'conversions' as he calls them. He clearly shows that Augustine is a developing individual who wrestles with reality and shapes his theological perspective accordingly. As he understood his own spiritual pilgrimage, Augustine's more mature writing, as seen in the *Confessions*, gives one a glimpse that sin had a deeper effect on humans, including himself, than he once thought. Markus explains,

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 286.

¹⁴⁷ Markus, R.A. *Sacred and Secular. Conversion and disenchantment in Augustine's spiritual career.* 6.

In writing his *Confessions*, Augustine had come to accept himself as ultimately problematic; “I have become a question to myself”. In this acceptance lies the clue to some of the central theological insights he would uphold later in his career. It is hard to doubt, for instance, that this is what committed him to the unrelenting struggle against the Donatism.¹⁴⁸

This idea is at the heart of Augustine ecclesiology, since it would later cause him to lose patience with the Donatist and see imperial force as a viable option to be used against them.¹⁴⁹

The Psalms & the Ascending Pilgrimage

Although Augustine’s works on the Psalms has not been addressed thus far, recent writings on Augustine’s pilgrimage make light of the fact the Psalms played a central role in Augustine’s personal journey as well as his pastoral journey as it surfaced within his own parish. Thomas Martin, on reference to Augustine’s *Psalms of Ascent* writes, “This preaching series unfolds at the height of Augustine’s anti-Donatist campaign, a theme that unmistakably runs throughout all 15 sermons.”¹⁵⁰ As Martin remarks, Augustine’s work on the Psalms played an interesting role in his dealing toward the Donatist campaign and therefore incorporates additional insight into his Episcopal work and his concern and understanding of the nature of the church. Augustine’s diverse reforms¹⁵¹ revealed his paradigm for what the Christian community of the 4th century should encompass. As it pertains to the Psalms, Martin wonderfully explains,

Donatist piety, if Augustine is not exaggerating too much, clearly seems to have tended towards the dramatic and spectacular – thrones, canopies, processions, and chanting – suggesting once again that the catholic piety Augustine campaigned

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 10. Also see *Confessions*, X.33.40 as referred by Markus.

¹⁴⁹ Though this was one of the factors, The continuing violence of the Donatist was also a major factor.

¹⁵⁰ Martin, Thomas. *Relocating practice: Augustine on Pilgrimages for the Heart*. Villanova University 2003. Web resource. <http://divinity.library.vanderbilt.edu/burns/chroma/practices/pilgrimartin.htm>, p4.

¹⁵¹ For example his approach to a more balanced martyrdom theology.

for was marked by restraint and dispassion: *sobrie psallimus*. His early Letter 22 to Aurelius regarding efforts to curb cemetery celebrations among the catholic community of Hippo Regius signals what will be a life-time campaign to “raise the level” of Catholic piety, away from emphasis on material practice towards interior practice, the “relocation” of holiness within.¹⁵²

Once again Augustine wanted the Catholic community to have an understanding of ecclesiology that stemmed from the internal struggles of the heart and the conversations that ensue. Augustine’s reflections on the Psalms reveal a leader who demonstrated that the pilgrimage lived out daily stems for the heart and soul. An inauthentic life was not compatible with one’s pilgrimage toward the father. Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, expresses that for Augustine as seen through *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, “The Psalm is a meaningful narrative structure, a history of the soul. And souls only have a history in conversation with God.”¹⁵³

One should become increasingly aware that ‘the people on pilgrimage’ as a key theme in Augustine’s ecclesiology was a deep internal journey that slowly was made manifest outwardly. This internal journey caused each individual to wrestle with short comings and to become aware of the voice of grace and forgiveness that flowed out of the Fathers love. Augustine would rather have one be honest to personal inadequacies than to pretend to follow Christ while allowing for deep separation in one’s soul. Augustine clarifies it best when he writes,

Lest you understand a bodily pilgrimage, he says that it is the soul on pilgrimage (*animan dixit peregrinari*). The body journeys by way of places, the soul by the way of affections (*affectibus*). If you are a lover of the earth, you journey away from God; if you are a lover of God, you ascend to God. We are exercised by love of God and neighbor, so that we may return to love (*exerceamur, ut redeamus ad*

¹⁵² Martin, Thomas. *Relocating practice*. p.3. Also see footnote 9.

¹⁵³ Williams, Rowan. “Augustine and the Psalms”. *Interpretation*; 20.

charitatem). If someone ascends in the heart, there is no ascent by heart steps unless it is the soul that journeys. . . .(119.8)¹⁵⁴

As seen in his works on the Psalms, Augustine developed an important idea that would play an integral part of his ecclesiology. For Augustine his work on the Psalms (*Enarrationes in Psalmos*) reveal the deep mysteries of the journey. Due to the timing of this work (ca 392-418), it holds specific importance to Augustine's discussions with the Donatist and his developing ecclesiology. Cameron wonderfully explains,

...Augustine channeled all the Psalms into a richly variegated figurative sense by holding them to the light of the paschal mystery, kaleidoscopically turning their words and phrases to reflect myriad exquisite nuances of the love between Christ and the church.¹⁵⁵

Augustine's interpretation of the Psalms demonstrated his brilliance as an expositor. He constantly worked at teaching his listeners about the deep mysteries exposed in the scriptures. For Augustine these mysteries always consisted in the revelation of God's love and our pilgrimage toward Him. In this light, his hermeneutical approach to this work became immensely Christological in nature. ...Augustine the expositor figuratively cast himself in the role of the one removing the roof of Scripture's outer meaning "because I know Christ is hidden underneath (36.3.3; cf. Mark 2:4)."¹⁵⁶

This idea of 'forward motion' as it pertains to Augustine's ecclesiology and his dealing with the Donatists is central. For Augustine the church, as will be elaborated in chapter 5, is made up of those struggling in the journey. Therefore, their motion toward the good, the holy, the Father is not always visible to others. In this light, Augustine saw patience

¹⁵⁴ As quoted by Thomas Martin.

¹⁵⁵ Carmen, Michael. "Enarrationes in Psalmos" *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, 290-296. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 290.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 292.

and love as demonstrated through Christ as a key component to his understanding of the Church. Rowan Williams writes,

The incarnational embrace of the prose of human existence means that the least spectacular act of authentic faith and obedience is validated by God....And the principle is applied also—with a clear aim at the Donatists—to living with the visible imperfections of the church: we have absolutely no way of knowing whose faith will prove victoriously secure at any given moment, thus we have no way of deciding that a person needs no help from us or we from them. And if that is so, we take a considerable risk in trying to separate ourselves from the supposedly wicked (Ennarrat. Ps. 99.9-11).¹⁵⁷

Conclusion

At the height of the Donatist campaign Augustine's voice became the leading proponent of the Catholic community in North Africa. His involvement with the schismatics propelled Augustine to a new level in his own pilgrimage thus allowing him to assist his own local church; the people on pilgrimage.

This central theme of pilgrimage as revealed through reflection of the inner self and movement toward the Father would remain foundational to all other aspects of the developing Augustinian ecclesiology. These were not ideas Augustine theorized about, they instead remained part of his own pilgrimage as he matured as the bishop of Hippo. Williams writes,

...our examination of the self as Christian believers is meant to bring us to the recognition that the inner life, instead of being a sanctuary of stability, is both profoundly mysterious to us (the dark *profundum* of the *Enarrationes*, the "caverns" of Conf. 10.8.13) and the locus of our deepest awareness of frustration.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Williams, Rowan. "Augustine and the Psalms". *Interpretation*; 22.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. 25.

Fortunately this frustration is not the end; instead, it is the *raison d'être* which leads to the incarnation and the role of Christ as the head and healer of the Church. This is the next key theme that stood at the center of Augustine's ecclesiology. As Martin affirms, "Christ and grace are what this sacred journey is all about, a Christology and soteriology addressing both Catholic and anti-Donatist concerns."¹⁵⁹ With this in mind, Augustine's emphasis on Christ as the Head of Church now becomes our emphasis.

¹⁵⁹ Martin, *Relocating Practice*, 10.

Chapter 5

Jesus as the Physician and his healing community of grace

Introduction:

During Augustine's influential years as Bishop of Hippo the church of North Africa was still deeply affected with scars pertaining to the historical schism. The reconciliation needed struck at the core of Augustine's pastoral responsibilities. His passion for ecclesial unity and catholic reconciliation caused Augustine to leave a legacy that was one of the most characteristic of his developing ecclesiology: Jesus as the Physician and the church as his healing and healed community of grace. Augustine's thoughts and experience throughout the Donatist conflict led to this central underpinning of his ecclesiology. As it pertains to ecclesiology and specifically to this chapter, Augustine makes his strongest argument for an inclusive ecclesiology of inclusive grace as the initial event toward encountering the community's physician who brings holistic healing.

This chapter will seek to bring closure to Augustine's ecclesial development with specific focus on Augustine's understanding of Jesus as the center of his ecclesial perspective as well as Jesus' role in giving meaning and purpose to the church as the Body of Christ. This, in effect, will illustrate how Jesus is the culmination and all encompassing reality through out Augustine's ecclesiology. The mysterious unity between Jesus and his church will be clarified by briefly explaining Augustine's idea of *Totus Christus* (the Whole Christ).

As his passion to counter the Donatists claims yielded to diminishing patience Augustine's exegesis of 'the parable of the weeds' (Matthew 13: 24-30) brings one face to

face with the central scripture reference as Augustine's deepest defense for an inclusive ecclesiology that would slowly permeate the Western world.

Jesus the Physician

While Augustine's Christological development evolved during differing phases of his journey, it is clear that, as it pertains to the church, Augustine saw Christ as the focus of the church's essence. The church as 'incarnational' community, an extension of Jesus' work and presence was a commonality with those living in antiquity. Robert Webber explains,

In the classical period the chief understanding of the church was that it was a visible continuation of the presence of Jesus in the world...The incarnational view of the church saw Jesus present in the assembled people, in the ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon, in word and song, and at the table.¹⁶⁰

Webber's idea allows one to appreciate Augustine within his context. Augustine's developing Christology was a deep process that evolved over the years. From his time as a hearer within the ranks of the Manicheans, Augustine wrestled with the meaning of Jesus Christ as fully man, fully God.¹⁶¹ It was his conversion under the leading of Ambrose's preaching that led Augustine to understand Christ and his work beyond the categories of thought impressed on him by the Manicheans and Neoplatonism. Willard writes,

At some point, probably before his conversion (summer 386) and baptism (Easter 387), he moved away from Photinianism and affirmed the immutable, eternal Word of God as fully united with a mutable, mortal human being, a seemingly inconceivable joining – yet immutable Scriptures declared it so (7.19.25).¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Webber, Robert. *Ancient-Future Faith*. 73.

¹⁶¹ For extensive research see Harnack's and Courcelle's writings.

¹⁶² Millard, William. "Jesus Christ." *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald. (463-470) Grand Rapids, Michigan. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 464. The view that Jesus was an ideal Neo-Platonist sage, that he was not divine, but a human being who participated fully in the divine wisdom. The position of Photinus bishop of Sirmium (344-51), accounted heretical by the Catholic Church.

Flowing out of his conversion, Augustine's thoughts reflect the relationship between Christ and the Church. The dichotomy that so easily plagues contemporary debates¹⁶³ was something Augustine increasingly dealt with his local community. Harrison writes,

Paganism also persisted at a rather less exalted or obvious level in the everyday lives of the citizens of the Empire. Repeated references in Augustine's sermons to what he regards as a sort of vestigial paganism among his congregation are a good indicator of the prevalence of pagan superstitions—astrology (exp. Gal. 35).¹⁶⁴

In addressing such issues in sermons, Augustine demonstrates the close link between Christ's role and the welcoming aspect of the community of the church that brought wholeness without the help of additional cultural rituals of the time. The reality that one could no longer mix the teaching of the pagan culture with those of the church remained a complex issue in the 4th century. As Augustine began to see Jesus as holding the prominent role in the community of the church, acceptance of the Christ would mean acceptance of the Catholic Church and the opposite remained true as well. Bavel writes,

In the paradoxical situation of identity and nonidentity lies the strength of Augustine's concept of the church. There is no yawning gap between the body of Christ and the institutional church. The growth of the church is the growth of Christ, and whoever rejects the church, rejects Christ (Jo.ev. tr. 4.4).¹⁶⁵

This important distinction led to Augustine's development of Jesus as the physician of the community and the only one who brings wholeness through his community. These

¹⁶³ Here I am referring to the concept of 'privatization' the idea that one can have faith in Christ and have no need of the church since one's spiritual pursuits should remain private and the concept of 'relativism' that all religious claims can be amalgamated and at some level all be true.

¹⁶⁴ Harrison, Carol. *Augustine Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity*. 134.

¹⁶⁵ Bavel, Tarsicius J. Van. "Church" *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald. (169-176) Grand Rapids, Michigan. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 174.

two aspects of Augustine's developing ecclesiology would continuously remain in tension as he sought to embrace the Donatists.

The reality that Jesus was the ultimate physician was not a philosophical construct for Augustine. His deep rooted faith in Jesus as the only healer who reveals and heals our deepest wounds and accepts us nonetheless is Augustine's starting point for understanding Jesus as the physician and the church as a community of grace. Augustine expresses his own encounter with Jesus the Physician in book ten of *The Confessions*. He writes,

“When I have adhered (Ps 72:28) to you with the whole of myself, I shall never have “pain and toil” (Ps 89:10), and my entire life will be full of you. You lift up the person whom you fill. But for the present, because I am not full of you, I am a burden to myself....See I do not hide my wounds. You are the physician; I am the patient (10.28.39).¹⁶⁶

For Augustine this idea of Jesus as physician was an ever present reality in direct relation to his own ever present shortcoming. The expression of his own inadequacies revealed an honest need for the physician to be at work in his life as well as the life of his community. While this developing idea gradually surfaced, it was dealing with the Donatists that caused it to become a principal theme of his developing ecclesiology. The pressures of the schism and the ensuing scars led to the realization that the wounds that emerged in both Catholic and Donatist communities could only be healed and brought to reconciliation by Jesus the true physician. Bright explains,

The acknowledgment, the “confession,” of his profound and continuing woundedness leads to the further “confession” of his need to “adhere” to the only physician who can heal his condition—the Mediator between God and man.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Bright, Pamela. “Book Ten: The Self-Seeking the One Who Creates and Heals.” *A Reader's Companion to Augustine's Confessions*. Eds. Kim Paffenroth and Robert P. Kennedy. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville 2003. 155.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. 156.

Bright reiterates that for Augustine the only physician who can heal him, and the communities involved in the schism, was Christ Jesus.

Augustine, as bishop of Hippo, brought the theological and pastoral strength that the Catholic Church yearned for against the Donatists. Augustine had become the figure of strength who could argue with the leading intellects of his time and be seen as the pillar of strength in midst of the Catholic communities' disarray. With this as his leading role, Augustine adds a monumental component; that the leader and bishop was also wounded and that in the proclamation of such woundedness to the 'true physician' his woundedness could be seen as a pillar of ecclesial strength. Augustine lays bare his soul before the one who had called him. He writes, "You know my inexperience and weakness (Ps 68:6). "Teach me and heal me" (Ps 6:3 142:10)"¹⁶⁸

Bright remarks that Augustine's journey leads to the reality of his own inadequacies and need of the mediator to heal him. Bright's exceptional work on Book Ten of the Confessions leads to this deep realization. She writes,

Book Ten asserts unambiguously before his readers that the profound woundedness of the God-seeking self remains long after the life-giving waters of baptism. The history of conversion is ongoing, just as the confession of praise is ongoing. It is from the consciousness of this woundedness deep within the abyss of self (10.2.2.) that we confess our need to adhere to the Physician, the Mediator who is the way the truth and life.¹⁶⁹

It is here that Augustine's reaction to the Donatists' understanding of bishop came to full fruition. The Donatists held firm to the fact that their Bishops were untainted by the

¹⁶⁸ Augustine, *Confessions* 10.43.70.

¹⁶⁹ Bright, Pamela. "Book Ten: The Self-Seeking the One Who Creates and Heals." *A Reader's Companion to Augustine's Confessions*. Eds. Kim Paffenroth and Robert P. Kennedy. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville 2003. 157.

schism and therefore remained pure, providing an unblemished source for communal life including the sacraments (i.e. baptism). In this light Cutrone writes,

...just as Augustine can distinguish between the one who preaches and the word of God, he likewise makes a distinction between the minister and Christ, who operates through the minister. Christ is always the minister of the sacraments.¹⁷⁰

The Donatists' attacks on the purity of the Catholic bishops were mirrored by a personal attack on Augustine's woundedness as he journeyed toward the Father. For Augustine, the true source of holiness of the Church was found in the head who was Christ Jesus. Harrison writes, "The Church has only one source of holiness and unity and that is Christ in the Holy Spirit (s. 71). No one merits salvation, that, he achieves it is wholly due to God's grace."¹⁷¹ To overlook this point is to miss the very foundation of Augustine's ecclesiology. Christ had to remain central for the Church to fulfill her mandate, for this foundational principle Augustine would fight and debate anyone claiming otherwise. His responsibilities as bishop led not only to the defense of the reality of Christ as the center of his community, but also of Christ the sustainer and redeemer of his Church, the Body of Christ. For this reason these two aspects of Augustine's maturing ecclesiology must be held in constant tension.

The Body of Christ

One of Augustine's formative experiences with the church as "Body of Christ" came through an unlikely negative experience. Augustine was already committed to a life of gospel radicality when the community forcefully causes Augustine to quickly become involved pastorally in Hippo. Though it is evident that the contemporary reader might

¹⁷⁰ Cutrone, Emmanuel J. "Sacraments." *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald. 741-747. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 746.

¹⁷¹ Harrison, Carol. *Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity*. 155.

find this process unusual, it was a rather common occurrence during the period of antiquity.¹⁷² Harrison remarks,

Possidius tells us that he wept, not, as some thought, because he aspired to a bishopric, but because he feared the dangers to his way of life which church duties would impose (*vita* 4).¹⁷³

With this realization, Augustine was soon immersed in the work of the local church. His concern for the social needs of his community demonstrated Augustine's position that the church was an incarnational extension of the work of Christ left on earth as his divine representative community. The church as 'the body of Christ' who was to exude love, acceptance, holiness, and grace, was not to do so at the expense of showing mercy, being kind, giving, frugality etc.... Fitzgerald brings these thoughts to their intended culmination, He writes,

Christian mercy was thus participation in Christ and in the church, a means and a sign of the unity of Christians. That theme was addressed in a special way during Lent, when the works of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving were emphasized (sermo.210.8: "The whole body of Christ is spread into the whole world; this refers to the whole church"; cf. Verheijen 1980. 199).¹⁷⁴

For Augustine, the nature of the church as the body of Christ was at the heart of the gospel proclamation. It was in the practical duties of living in awareness of the 'other' and their needs, that one fulfilled the mandate of being the Body of Christ and in the process helped others encounter Jesus as Physician.

As it pertained to the 'other', the Donatist, it was exceptionally difficult for the Catholic community, including Augustine at times, to extend the love he so desperately believed would conquer this historical division. He writes,

¹⁷² Though Augustine was aware of this custom, it was also awkward when it happened to him.

¹⁷³ Harrison, Carol. *Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity*. 121.

¹⁷⁴ Fitzgerald, Allan D. "Mercy, Works of Mercy" *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald. 557-561. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 558.

...according to the various maladies of those whom we have undertaken, surely not to destroy, but to correct and heal. Consequently, we must heal one person in this way, another in that. Likewise, there are reasons why we chastise, rebuke, refuse admittance, or remove from membership in the Church.¹⁷⁵

Augustine is aware that the role of church was deeply complex, yet paramount to that role was the helping and restoring of those outside of the fold (ie. the Donatists). As it pertains to the schism, Augustine came to a climactic point in his approach to the Donatist. For Augustine, the use of force, after seeing and experiencing the atrocities of some of the Donatists insurgents, was the reluctant solution. This solution was not in itself the answer for Augustine as to rid North Africa of the Donatists, but to help them,¹⁷⁶ through force to possibly see their error and turn toward the Catholic community. Augustine writes,

...through the mercy of Christ, the laws which seemed to be opposed to them are in reality their truest friend; for through their operation many of them have been, and are daily being reformed, and return God thanks that they are reformed, and delivered from their ruinous madness...and now that they have recovered their right minds...and are filled with the same spirit of ardent love towards those who yet remain.¹⁷⁷

Augustine reinforces the Catholic position by his important reference to reformation through correction. This was central to strengthening the Catholic stance against the Donatists.

¹⁷⁵ Augustine, *On Faith and Works*. 3.4.26.

¹⁷⁶ I am aware of Frend's eschatological and political interpretation on Augustine's action, but I believe Augustine's numerous writings, as I have quoted above, reveal a different side of Augustine possibly missed. See Frend. *The Donatist Church*. 242.

¹⁷⁷ Augustine. *The Correction of the Donatists* 2.7.

Totus Christus

A central component which flows out of Augustine's understanding of the church as 'the body of Christ' is his idea of church and *Totus Christus*, (the Whole Christ). Mallard explains,

Augustine's term *totus Christus* (the whole Christ) refers to Christ and the church, with Christ not only as the Head but as the whole body, including its members (Jo. ev. Tr. 28.1). Christ incorporates believers into himself in such a church, and only in this incorporation is he "whole". Nevertheless, he remains the singular Head and Master of the church.¹⁷⁸

Once again, it is central to this thesis that Augustine's ecclesiology remains founded on the idea the Jesus and the church are inseparable, but not identical realities. Mallard's insights point to the argument that the holiness of the Church is founded and rooted in Christ and therefore the Donatist position is deeply flawed. The Donatists' position held that the Church, though founded by Christ, could exist in a pure state by its members will to remain pure and holy. It is this theological position that caused Augustine to develop and formulate an ecclesiology rooted in practical experience with historical foundations which would continue as the pillars of Western ecclesiology. Mallard helps by emphasizing the living experience of Augustine's community and Christ. He writes,

...the saving work of Christ is not intelligible apart from its actualization in the living community, the church, the "whole" Christ. One source of Augustine's thought on Christ in and through the church is, inevitably, his sermons, his pastoral instruction, where all matters of salvation are immediate, living issues.¹⁷⁹

This concept of *totus Christus* is just another way that exemplifies how Augustine is able to defend his stance on baptism. Augustine's understanding of the church as primarily

¹⁷⁸ Millard, William. "Jesus Christ." *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald. (463-470) Grand Rapids, Michigan. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 468.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 468.

Christological provided the long awaited response to Donatists who argued that the Catholic community had forfeited their position as part of the true Church and was no longer able to baptize others into the community of the Church. Augustine's view of the Church which gave Christ the central role allowed the Catholic Church to know that though their leaders were still capable of sinning, the community's advancements could not be hampered with Christ as their leader and sustainer. Fitzgerald writes,

Augustine's interpretation of the church is primarily Christological.... We can speak of Christ in three ways; as the divine Word according to his divinity; as human being united with the divinity, according to which he is the mediator; and as the whole Christ (*totus Christus*), embracing head and body, of which we are the members. Head and body form the church; "You are the body of Christ and members" (1 Cor. 12:27).¹⁸⁰

Fitzgerald reinforced the fact that to Augustine the Church was constituted in Christ's presences as the Head of the Body, giving meaning and purpose to its members who make up the body of Christ.

Augustine's developing ecclesiology was connected to the daily routines of the community as well as the constant controversies that afflicted the Church. His idea of the church as the body of Christ was part of the escalating battle against the Donatists. As the Donatists insisted that the Church should remain exclusively separated from the world, Augustine believed that the separation from the world did not have to mean hatred. For the church to truly exhibit Christ-likeness, Augustine remained adamant that a demonstration of the love of Christ would hopefully provide one to one day encounter the person of Christ as manifested through the community of believers.

¹⁸⁰ Bavel, Tarsicius J. Van. "Church" *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald. (169-176) Grand Rapids, Michigan. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 171.

The Parable of the Weed

While Augustine never came into contact with a Bible in its modern form as a bound book, his careful collecting and comparing of manuscripts witnesses to a deep passion to study the scriptures. In becoming a bishop Augustine quickly encountered a community of believers that would need constant assistance in pursuing a faith that was explained through the pages of a book. O'Donnell writes,

For him and his contemporaries, moreover, it is important that contact with the *scripturae*¹⁸¹ very often came through the ear rather than the eye: from hearing reading in church or elsewhere. Even for the small part of the population that was literate, books were scarce and expensive and the spoken word was still the most effective way of achieving wide distribution.¹⁸²

Although many of Augustine's anti-Donatist writings continually refer to numerous scriptural references in support of his ecclesiological views, few stand as central as Matthew's pericope of 'the Parable of the Weeds'. This parable adds the finishing touch to the primary principles of Augustine's ecclesiology. This component affirms all other aspects of his ecclesiology examined thus far, provides the eschatological element to Augustine's ecclesiology.

The parable of weeds allowed Augustine to welcome those among the Donatists who had decided they should not be part of the Church. By Augustine's inclusive ecclesiology he in no way affirmed that anyone should be part of the divine community, but he did insist that one leave the separating process to God as revealed through the characters in this parable. J. van Bavel, explains,

¹⁸¹ As O'Donnell explains, The body of texts we now think of as biblical came to him as "scripturae"—writings.

¹⁸²O'Donnell, James J. "Bible" *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald. (99-103) Grand Rapids, Michigan. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 100.

The first task of the church is to impart Christ's life. The church should let grow the darnel and the wheat together until harvest, because the church is formed by human beings who can be mistaken, for we read in Matthew 13:29; "I fear that in weeding out the darnel you might pull up the wheat with it" (s. 73.4.4). Her first mission is found in inviting and calling, as is said in Matthew 22:10....¹⁸³

Though Augustine's thoughts in the *City of God* would explain and expound his eschatological view on God's work in history, Augustine stresses that, until that 'time' was evident, the Church should continue to invite and call others to the journey of following Christ as Lord.

The last judgment was an intriguing area of reflection for Augustine. Though time does not permit to unravel its complexities it ties in to this parable. The *parousia*, as it is often referred as, was understood as the time in which God would return and the final judgment would take place and those who were not part of the community of the Church would be separated. Although these had infiltrated their way into the fold, as explained in the parable, the time would come when God would reveal all truth.

Conclusion

While the political events of Augustine's time caused many to apply anxiously specific passages of scripture to their present predicament, Augustine's exegesis allowed for an important hermeneutical application that precipitated for both present and future ramifications. Through this approach he demonstrated how communal grace did not negate the importance of ecclesial discipline, especially since God would one day make all things just through his omniscience, something that no one else possessed. This would be a foundational part of Augustine's overall influence in the schism.

¹⁸³ Bavel, Tarsicius J. Van. "Church" *Augustine through the Ages; An Encyclopedia*. Gen. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald. (169-176) Grand Rapids, Michigan. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999. 175.

Conclusion

Suddenly all the vanity I had hoped in I saw as worthless, and with an incredible intensity of desire I longed after immortal wisdom. I had begun that journey upwards by which I was to return to You (Confessions 3.4.7).

Coming to the conclusion of this thesis, Augustine's words ring true for me, as for many who have journeyed thus far. This excerpt gives a glimpse of Augustine's awareness that much of his knowledge¹⁸⁴ was inadequate to grasp firmly the immortal wisdom he desired. In this profound moment of awareness Augustine wonderfully pens what many who journey with him experience; a desire to return to the Creator. This return takes on many forms. For many it is a lonely journey filled with confusion and consequence that makes the return ever more joyful. For others, this return is filled with long and winding roads that lead, at times, to dead end paths. No matter what the circumstances, Augustine makes clear that a return to the Creator is the only solution to fulfill the longing desire of meaning and purpose.

For me, my own return has been enhanced and reinforced in the closing words of this thesis. While Augustine's return was initiated by his readings of Cicero's *Hortensius*, my return has been clarified and steered through my continuous dialogue with Augustine's life and works. Although time did not permit for an in-depth look at his numerous collected writings, the ones considered in this project have continuously raised a personal awareness and desire for a return to God. This journey, as seen through Augustine's own life can only begin with the realization that one's journey to return to God finds its origins in the unconditional love of God, a deep love that draws one to take a

¹⁸⁴ Augustine was c.a.19 years of age when he encountered Cicero's writings that propelled him into the pursuit of God's divine mystery.

introspective look at personal shortcomings and come face to face with one's inability to fully respond to this divine love. In this light, the return has commenced.

The significance of Augustine's contribution to historical ecclesiology stems from his ability to acknowledge his dependence on God through the different phases of his personal journey which enabled him to provide vital theological response to the issues that ensued out of the North African Schism.

Beginning with Diocletian's edicts and the consequential persecutions, a rift was formed giving birth to two specific communities within the North African region. The Catholics and the Donatists, the central parties involved in the schism, traversed differing circumstances as both made attempts to establish and articulate their theological positions concerning the nature, role and responsibility of the Church. It is his response to the claims of the Donatists and in defense of the position of the Catholic community that provides the context for Augustine's ecclesial prowess to take shape.

As the years progressed Augustine's own conversion experience propelled him into the drama of the schism thus making him the leading voice for the Catholic community. Though his voice was at times biased, the research, as argued through this thesis, highlights that his concern lay within a deep love for the Church and her unity. In order to make this point clear, this work has attempted to map Augustine's thought before and during his interaction with the Donatist community. Beginning with contextual information leading to particular characters involved in the schism, this thesis paints a picture of Augustine who was continuously concerned for the unity of the Church. In typical pastoral fashion he proclaimed,

For the Church, too is both mother and virgin: mother by the bowels of charity, virgin by the integrity of faith and piety. She brings forth diverse peoples, but they are members of Him whose body and spouse she is, and even in this respect she bears the likeness of the Virgin because in the midst of the many she is the mother of unity.¹⁸⁵

This proclamation to the Church was shared during the feast of nativity which Augustine took as an opportunity to highlight the metaphorical significance between the Virgin Mary and the Church. This is just one of Augustine's many attempts to reiterate his concern for the unity of the Church.

While the church's unity was of utmost importance, so was diversity and respect for his fellow brothers. It is in this respect that Augustine demonstrates his exemplary love for his brothers, the Donatists, who strongly disagreed with him. This thesis not only demonstrated Augustine's acuteness in responding to ecclesial issues of his time, but it also gave due respect to the Donatists, who though at times depicted as extremely troublesome, also demonstrated continuous concern and passion for church unity through their own ecclesial paradigm.

Due to the longevity of the schism, Augustine was given ample time to converse and develop a significant ecclesiology. The thesis attempts to show how Augustine's ecclesiology was shaped and matured through the interactions with the Donatists. Part of this maturing process is also credited to Augustine's own congregation who were of primary concern to him during his time as bishop of Hippo. As chapter four has demonstrated, Augustine's ecclesiology incorporated both an apologetic stance against the Donatist as well as strong pastoral concern for his congregation. Section two is specifically concerned with shedding light on Augustine as bishop of Hippo in

¹⁸⁵ Saint Augustine. Trans. Sister Mary Sarah Muldowney. *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons*. The Fathers of the Church. Washington DC. The Catholic University of America Press. 1959. Sermon 192 p33.

accordance with his role and responsibility in defending the Catholic position against the Donatists. What is essential to this thesis, is the convergence of both dynamics of Augustine's responsibilities which, when held in tension, reveal the acumen of Augustine's ecclesiology.

Augustine's ecclesiology, as it emerged out of his interaction with the Donatists remains a foundational element of his legacy within historical ecclesiology. The ecclesial themes explored in this study throw light on the rich and complex journey upward in return to the Father, and earning him the title of ecclesiologist of the Western World.

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