

The Bishops Of North Africa:  
Rethinking Practice And Belief In Late Antiquity

By

Bradley J. Daugherty

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Approved:

Robin M. Jensen, Ph.D.

J. Patout Burns, Ph.D.

Paul J. DeHart, Ph.D.

David Michelson, Ph.D.

David G. Hunter, Ph.D.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ATAE</i>	<i>Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia</i>
<i>BAntFr</i>	<i>Bulletin de la Société nationale des antiquaires de France</i>
<i>BCTH</i>	<i>Bulletin archéologique du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, Afrique du Nord</i>
<i>CCSL</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina</i>
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
<i>CRAI</i>	<i>Comptes rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres</i>
<i>CSEL</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>
<i>DACL</i>	<i>Dictionnaire d'Archeologie Chretienne et de Liturgie</i>
<i>ILCV</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres</i>
<i>MA</i>	<i>Miscellanea Agostiniana</i>
<i>MEFR</i>	<i>Mélanges de l'École française de Rome</i>
<i>NPNF</i>	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>
<i>REAug</i>	<i>Revue des Études Augustiniennes</i>
<i>SC</i>	<i>Sources Chrétiennes</i>
<i>SP</i>	<i>Studia Patristica</i>

### Ancient Authors And Works

<i>Act. Zeno.</i>	<i>Acta apud Zenophilium</i> (CSEL 26:185-97; Maier, 1:214-39)
Aug.	Augustine of Hippo
<i>Bapt.</i>	<i>De baptismo contra Donatistas</i> (CSEL 51:145-375)
<i>Bon. Coniug.</i>	<i>De bono coniugali</i> (CSEL 41:187-231)
<i>Coll.</i>	<i>Breviculus collationis cum Donatistas</i> (CSEL 149A:261-306)
<i>Cresc.</i>	<i>Contra Cresconium Donatistam</i> (CSEL 52:325-582)
<i>Doct. Chr.</i>	<i>De doctrina christiana</i> (CCSL 32:1-167)
<i>Don.</i>	<i>Post collationem aduersus Donatistas</i> (CSEL 53:97-162)
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i> (CSEL 34, 44, 57, 58; CCSL 31-31B)
<i>Ep. Divjak</i>	<i>Epistulae a Divjak editae</i> (CSEL 88)
<i>Eu. Io.</i>	<i>In euangelium Iohannis tractatus</i> (CCSL 36)
<i>Parm.</i>	<i>Contra epistulam Parmeniani</i> (CSEL 51:19-141)
<i>Petil.</i>	<i>Contra litteras Petiliani</i> (CSEL 52:3-227)
<i>Psal.</i>	<i>Enarrationes in Psalmos</i> (CCSL 38-40; CSEL 93.1A-95.5)
<i>Serm.</i>	<i>Sermones</i> (PL 38-39; CCSL 41, 41Aa, 41Ba)
<i>Serm. Denis</i>	<i>Sermones a Denis editi</i> (MA 1:11-164; CCSL 41:203-11, 218-29, 378-80, 418-22)
<i>Serm. Dolb.</i>	<i>Sermones a Dolbeau editi</i> (Dolbeau, <i>Vingt-six Sermons</i> )
<i>Serm. Guelf.</i>	<i>Sermones Moriniani ex collectione Guelferbytana</i> (MA 1:450-585)
<i>Serm. Lamb.</i>	<i>Sermones a Lambot editi</i> (PLS 2:744-840)
<i>Vid.</i>	<i>De bono uiduitatis</i> (CSEL 41:305-43)

<i>Virg.</i>	<i>De sancta uirginitate</i> (CSEL 41:235-302)
<i>Bru. Hipp.</i>	<i>Breuiarium Hipponense</i> (CCSL 149:30-53)
<i>C.Th.</i>	<i>Codex Theodosianus</i> , ed. T. Mommsen
<i>Cau. Apiar.</i>	<i>Canones in causa Apiarii</i> (CCSL 149:101-49)
<i>Col. Carth.</i>	<i>Gesta Conlationis Carthageniensis</i> (CCSL 149A)
<i>Con. Arel.</i>	<i>Concilium Arelatense</i> (CCSL 148:3-25)
<i>Con. Carth.</i>	<i>Concilium Carthaginense</i> (CCSL 149:2-19, 69-77, 149-63, 169-72, 255-83)
<i>Con. Hipp.</i>	<i>Concilium Hipponensis</i> (CCSL 149:20-21, 250-253)
<i>Conc. Serd.</i>	<i>Council of Serdica</i> (Turner, <i>Ecclesiae Occidentalis Monumenta Iuris Antiquissima</i> , 490–531)
<i>Con. Thel.</i>	<i>Concilium Thelense</i> (CCSL 149:54-65)
Cypr.	Cyprian of Carthage
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i> (CCSL 3A-B)
<i>Hab. uirg.</i>	<i>De habitu uirginum</i> (CSEL 3.1.187-205)
<i>Laps.</i>	<i>De lapsis</i> (CCSL 3:221-42)
<i>Sent.</i>	<i>Sententiae episcoporum de haereticis baptizandis</i> (CCSL 3E)
<i>Unit. eccl.</i>	<i>De catholicae ecclesiae unitate</i> (CCSL 3:249-68)
Hieron.	Jerome
<i>Iou.</i>	<i>Aduersus Iouinianum</i> (PL 23:221-338)
<i>Vir. ill.</i>	<i>De uiribus illustribus</i> (PL 23: 603-720)
Innoc.	Innocentius I
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i> (PL 20:463-608)

Optat	Optatus of Milevis
<i>Parm.</i>	<i>Contra Parmenianum Donatistam</i> (CSEL 26:3-182)
<i>Pas. Marc.</i>	<i>Passio benedicti martyris Marculi.</i> (Delehaye, <i>Domnus Marculus</i> , <i>Anal. Bolland.</i> , 53, 1935, p. 81-89)
<i>Pas. Isa. Max.</i>	<i>Passio martyrum Isaac et Maximiani</i> (PL 8:767-74, 778-84)
<i>Pas. Perp.</i>	<i>Passio Perpetuae</i> (Musurillo, 136-67)
Pont.	Pontius
<i>Vita Cypr.</i>	<i>Vita Caecilii Cypriani</i> (CSEL 3.3:xc-cx)
Possid.	Possidius of Calama
<i>Vita Aug.</i>	<i>Vita sancti Augustini</i> (PL 32:33-578)
<i>Rebapt.</i>	<i>De rebaptismo</i> (CSEL 3.3.69-92)
<i>Reg. Carth.</i>	<i>Registri ecclesiae Carthaginensis excerpta</i> (CCSL 149:182-228)
Tert.	Tertullian
<i>An.</i>	<i>De anima</i> (CCSL 2:781-869)
<i>Apol.</i>	<i>Apologeticus</i> (CCSL 1:85-171)
<i>Bapt.</i>	<i>De Baptismo</i> (CCSL 1:277-95)
<i>Cast.</i>	<i>De exhortatione castitas</i> (CCSL 2:1015-35)
<i>Cor.</i>	<i>De corona milititis</i> (CCSL 2:1039-65)
<i>Cult. fem.</i>	<i>De cultu feminarum</i> (CCSL 1:343-70)
<i>Fug.</i>	<i>De fuga in persecutione</i> (CCSL 2:1135-55)
<i>Idol.</i>	<i>De idolatria</i> (CCSL 2:1101-124)
<i>Ieiun.</i>	<i>De ieiunio aduersus Psychicos</i> (CCSL 2:1257-77)

<i>Marc.</i>	<i>Aduersus Marcionem</i> (CCSL 1:441-726)
<i>Mart.</i>	<i>Ad martyras</i> (CCSL 1:3-8)
<i>Mon.</i>	<i>De monogamia</i> (CCSL 2:1229-53)
<i>Or.</i>	<i>De oratione</i> (CCSL 1:257-74)
<i>Paen.</i>	<i>De paenitentia</i> (CCSL 1:321-40)
<i>Praescr.</i>	<i>De praescriptione haereticorum</i> (CCSL 1:187-224)
<i>Pud.</i>	<i>De pudicitia</i> (CCSL 2:1281-1330)
<i>Res.</i>	<i>De resurrectione mortuorum</i> (CCSL 1:921-1012)
<i>Scap.</i>	<i>Ad Scapulam</i> (CCSL 2:1127-32)
<i>Spec.</i>	<i>De spectaculis</i> (CCSL 1:227-53)
<i>Virg.</i>	<i>De uirginibus uelandis</i> (CCSL 2:1209-26)
<i>Trad. Apos.</i>	<i>Traditio apostolica</i> (SC 11bis)
<i>Tyc.</i>	Tyconius Afer
<i>Reg.</i>	<i>Liber regularum</i> , Texts and Studies, 3.1, 1894 (reprint, 2004)

## INTRODUCTION

We know relatively little about Catholic, or Caecilianist, Christianity outside of what Augustine himself tells us. The corpus of his writing is immense and his persona as the leader of African Christianity is even more outsized. Augustine's literary and theological skill and the sheer volume of his work have all but eclipsed the beliefs of his fellow Caecilianist Christians; in his shadow they all seem rather grey and featureless. When it comes to the beliefs of African Christians, or at least Caecilianist Christians, many scholars still assume that they thought as Augustine did. Augustine thus stands as the spokesperson of Caecilianist Christianity, its representative. With this assumption comes a corollary: if we want to understand Caecilianist, and even just African, Christianity, we study Augustine. Yet this is not the case. As scholars have increasingly come to realize, Augustine was exceptional in many senses of the word.

This dissertation is a study of the beliefs about and practice of episcopal ministry among Augustine's colleagues and co-religionists, the Caecilianist Christians of North Africa in the late-fourth and early-fifth centuries. The long-running schism of African Christianity and the polemical literature between Donatists and Caecilianists that it produced placed the ministry of the bishops among the issues at the forefront of the division. The Donatists labeled the Caecilianist bishops *traditors*, traitors; the Caecilianists accused the Donatist bishops of putting themselves in the place of God. Scholars have long taken this as evidence of genuine differences between the two communions' notions of the ministry of their bishops. This perspective has seemed



almost obvious given Augustine's lengthy and insistent detailing of the differences between himself and his opponents. If Augustine speaks for the Caecilianist church, it would appear that this was indeed one of the primary differences between the two parties.

Appearances, of course, can be deceiving. As this dissertation demonstrates, the understanding of episcopal ministry that Augustine forwarded against the Donatists was not shared across his communion. The traditional African theological understanding of the bishop and his ministry articulated by Cyprian and defended most stridently by the bishops of the Donatist communion continued to be the operative theology for Caecilianist Christians as well, despite Augustine's own reinterpretation of the ministry of the bishop. In practice, Caecilianist Christians continued to consider their bishops as possessing unique powers and embodying a distinct holiness, positions long thought to be characteristic of Donatist Christianity. To do so the dissertation focuses its analysis on the practices of Caecilianist Christianity and on the few extant non-Augustinian descriptions and explanations of such practices.

While the scholarship on North African Christianity is vast, and that on the fourth- and fifth-century schism between Donatists and Caecilianists only slightly less so, very little of that scholarship has been devoted to Caecilianists other than Augustine. In his reassessment of his own biography of Augustine and of the state of scholarship on Augustine, Peter Brown noted the need for a reassessment of the relationship between Augustine and his colleagues; other scholars have since affirmed this need.<sup>1</sup> This study engages in just such a reassessment, although it does not focus on these relationships

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, Rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 499.

between bishops on a personal or individual level. Instead it juxtaposes Augustine's doctrine of episcopal ministry with the beliefs about bishops at work in the practices of his fellow Caecilianists.

The classic work on African Christianity remains Paul Monceaux's magisterial seven-volume *Histoire Littéraire De l'Afrique Chrétienne*.<sup>2</sup> Though now dated in many respects, it remains the most comprehensive treatment of African Christianity. W. H. C. Frend's *The Donatist Church* remains the foundational modern study of Donatism, but it de-emphasized the religious nature of the conflict and by design was focused on Donatist, not Caecilianist, Christianity.<sup>3</sup> Numerous other studies have built upon, corrected, and critiqued Frend's work, but none of these have given attention to the potential of diversity within the Caecilianist communion, instead framing African Christianity as a contest between two factions that were more or less monolithic in their beliefs. Though Maureen Tilley has brought attention to the internal diversity of the Donatist communion in *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, the task of giving comparable attention to the internal diversity of their Caecilianist rivals remains.<sup>4</sup>

The theology of ministry in North African Christianity has likewise been the subject of a long and rich scholarly tradition, but nearly all of that scholarly work has been focused exclusively on Augustine. This is true of Lee Bacchi's *The Theology of Ordained Ministry in the Letters of Augustine*, Michele Pellegrino's *The True Priest*,

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Monceaux, *Histoire Littéraire De l'Afrique Chrétienne Depuis Les Origines Jusqu'à L'invasion Arabe*, (Paris: E. Leroux, 1901-23).

<sup>3</sup> W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church; a Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1952).

<sup>4</sup> Maureen A. Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

Émilien Lamirande's *Études sur l'ecclésiologie de Saint Augustin*, and Jacque Pintard's *Le Sacerdoce Selon Saint Augustin*.<sup>5</sup> All offer in-depth analysis of Augustine's theology of ministry or priesthood; none investigate African Christianity beyond Augustine. Rémi Crespin's *Ministère et Sainteté* goes beyond these studies in giving sustained attention to non-Augustinian sources, but they are still presented as part of a narrative in which Augustine offers the theological solutions to the problems posed by the Donatists.<sup>6</sup>

Several more recent studies have provided investigations of the beliefs and practices of African Christians without focusing on either Augustine or the Donatists. Of these Erika Hermanowicz's *Possidius of Calama* is among the most notable.<sup>7</sup>

Hermanowicz examines both Possidius' legal pursuits and the narrative of his *Vita Augustini* in order to demonstrate the ways that Possidius both differed from Augustine and reshaped the Augustine's legacy. Leslie Dossey's *Peasant and Empire in Christian North Africa* focuses on the peasantry of North Africa rather than one religious faction or the other, highlighting the economic and social conditions that contributed to the spread of Christianity in rural Africa and to what has been interpreted as a peasant rebellion.<sup>8</sup> In doing so she focuses on the social and economic, but not the religious, factors that

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<sup>5</sup> Lee Francis Bacchi, *Theology of Ordained Ministry in the Letters of Augustine of Hippo* (San Francisco: Intl Scholars Press, 1998); Rémi Crespin, *Ministère Et Sainteté; Pastorale Du Clergé Et Solution De La Crise Donatiste Dans La Vie Et La Doctrine De Saint Augustin* (Paris, Études augustiniennes, 1965); Émilien Lamirande, *Études Sur L'ecclésiologie De Saint Augustin.*, Les Publications Sériées de l'Université d'Ottawa 92 (Ottawa: Éditions de l'Université Saint-Paul, 1969); Michele Pellegrino, *The True Priest: The Priesthood as Preached and Practised by St. Augustine*, trans. by Arthur Gibson (Langley: St Paul Publications, 1968); Jacques Pintard, *Le Sacerdoce Selon Saint Augustin: Le Prêtre Dans La Cité De Dieu* (Paris: Mame, 1960).

<sup>6</sup> Rémi Crespin, *Ministère Et Sainteté; Pastorale Du Clergé Et Solution De La Crise Donatiste Dans La Vie Et La Doctrine De Saint Augustin* (Paris, Études augustiniennes, 1965).

<sup>7</sup> Erika T. Hermanowicz, *Possidius of Calama: A Study of the North African Episcopate at the Time of Augustine*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Leslie Dossey, *Peasant and Empire in Christian North Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

contributed to the spread of rural bishoprics in Africa on an unprecedented scale. Alexander Evers' *Church, Cities, and People* sheds light on the role of the *plebs* within the African church, emphasizing their position within the church rather than their beliefs.<sup>9</sup> Brent Shaw's *Sacred Violence* is a comprehensive and magisterial look at North African Christianity, by no means limited to key figures like Augustine, but its focus is elsewhere, on the question of religious violence. Yvette Duval's *Auprès des saints corps et âme* and *Loca sanctorum Africae* are just two examples of a larger body of scholarship utilizing the evidence of material remains to better understand the practices of African Christians and not only the beliefs of theologians.<sup>10</sup> Despite this growing literature, no study has yet investigated the relationship between Augustine's theology of episcopal ministry and that of his fellow Caecilianists.

This study is particularly indebted to J. Patout Burns and Robin Jensen's *Christianity in Roman Africa: The Development of its Practices and Beliefs*.<sup>11</sup> Burns' and Jensen's book offers detailed, diachronic accounts of the practices of North African Christians, situating them in both their material and theological contexts. Their work has been both the inspiration for the focus on practice in this study and the chief source of insight on the practices of African Christianity that are so important here. This is particularly so in chapters one and three, in which I have largely relied on their accounts

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<sup>9</sup> Alexander Wilhelmus Henricus Evers, *Church, Cities, and People: A Study of the Plebs in the Church and Cities of Roman Africa in Late Antiquity* (Leuven ; Walpole, Mass.: Peeters, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Yvette Duval, *Auprès des saints corps et âme: L'inhumation "ad sanctos" dans La chrétienté d'Orient Et d'Occident du IIIe au VIIe siècle* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1988); Yvette Duval, *Loca sanctorum Africae: Le culte des martyrs en Afrique du IVe au VIIe siècle*, 2 vols, Collection de l' Ecole française de Rome 58 (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 1982).

<sup>11</sup> Robin Margaret Jensen and J. Patout Burns, *Christianity in Roman Africa: The Development of Its Practices and Beliefs* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014).

of the practices of Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine, and the Christians of their eras. It is also so in conceiving of North African Christianity as a theological school, a fundamental aspect of the methodological approach of this dissertation.

### **Methodology**

This dissertation proceeds from the fundamental premise that North African Christianity developed a distinct school of theological thought and practice.<sup>12</sup> It was in North Africa that Christian theology was first conducted in Latin and that the scriptures began to be translated into Latin. Its leading figures – Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine – were among the most influential theologians of early Christianity. And they were just the most notable among a much farther-reaching group whose work shaped not only African Christianity but also Western Christianity at large.

As a school, these African thinkers were driven by a shared set of convictions and concerns. Fundamental to African Christianity was the belief that the church was the medium of Christ's salvific and sanctifying work, and the corresponding conviction that in order to carry on this work the church had to be holy. This pair of fundamental assumptions drove a sustained debate over the means by which the church was to safeguard and carry out this divine work. Over the course of nearly five hundred years, African theologians returned again and again to the same driving questions, forming a highly coherent and closely reasoned tradition of thinking about the correct form and understanding of the practices of Christian living in which they professed God to be at work.

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<sup>12</sup> Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, xlvi.

Thus the theology of African Christianity was particularly focused on Christian practices. Its theological debates were driven by conflicts over the practice of baptism, the reconciliation of sinners, the roles and authority of its clergy, the requirements of eucharistic communion, and the regulation of marriage and sexuality. These issues were crucial because of African Christians' abiding conviction that the church was the necessary mediator of salvation and that it was therefore absolutely necessary to safeguard the continued divine work in and through these practices. Arguments repeatedly returned to the necessary parameters of the church's rituals: who could be admitted to the church's Eucharistic communion and who had to be excluded? Who could perform the church's rituals and what was the basis of their authority to do so? How could they be sure of the rituals' efficacy? There was little doubt among African Christians that it was through the ministry of the church, and especially through its rituals, that Christ saved. But this very conviction led to a long-running and vigorous debate about the practical shape of this ministry.

This dissertation argues from the practices of African Christians. This is in part because it is difficult to get a sense of the theological perspective of Caecilianist Christians other than that of Augustine. Very few of Augustine's contemporaries in the Caecilianist communion left written works, and none left a body of work large enough or explicit enough to discern much in the way of explicit doctrinal positions. Focusing on the practices of Caecilianist Christians rather than exclusively on theological texts broadens the potential field of inquiry. The goal is to understand the Christian practices as they were lived and in so doing to have a better sense of the practice and

understanding of Christianity as it existed on the ground. The emphasis on practice here is an attempt to get a perspective on Caecilianist Christianity that is not dominated by the thought of Augustine.

The method taken in this dissertation is to interpret, or reinterpret, a series of practices by situating them in the specific context of the African theological school. The three practices that are investigated in this study – clerical penance, ecclesiastical reform and its expectations for the clergy, and the burial of bishops – can be and have been interpreted from a wide range of theoretical and methodological perspectives. This dissertation takes an approach that is much more focused on the distinctive regional character of African Christianity. These practices had meaning to African Christians within the framework of African beliefs and debates about the church, its rituals, and its ministry. This study seeks to understand the theological assumptions that were at work in these practices by interrogating how they fit specifically within this theological framework.

Thus the dissertation begins by foregrounding the theological debates about the nature of the episcopal office and ministry in chapters one through three, explaining the tradition within which the practices which are the focus of the study would have been interpreted. Only then do the investigations of chapters four through six reinterpret the evidence of these practices in light of the specifics of African theology. Proceeding from the assumption that these African Christians were formed by the same theological tradition as its more prominent figures, these chapters reveal the assumptions at work in and the particular theological arguments behind the practices. In this way they are able to

establish the theological understanding of the episcopal office and ministry implicitly at work in these practices, and so gain a more diverse and more accurate picture of Caecilianist Christianity.

### **Outline of Chapters**

This dissertation is divided into two sections of three chapters each. The first section is dedicated to establishing the contours of the African debate about the clergy, and specifically about the bishops, as bearers of spiritual power. These chapters proceed chronologically, beginning with the formation of the African tradition in Tertullian and Cyprian and then proceeding to show how that tradition influenced and was adapted by the Donatists and by Augustine, respectively. The second section is the heart of the dissertation. It focuses on fourth- and fifth-century Caecilianist sources other than Augustine. These three chapters examine three practices – clerical penance, church reform, and the burial of bishops – in order to determine the theological assumptions about the bishop and his ministry operative in them.

If a sustained argument over the adequacy of human organizations and ministers in mediating salvation was central to the African theological school, then it was Tertullian and Cyprian who set the terms of the argument. **Chapter one** traces the formation of this tradition and explains its key questions and doctrines. Focusing on these two seminal figures, it takes the same structure for each. It first describes the practice of the clergy; it briefly explains the ecclesiology of each; and finally it explains their theologies of the bishop and his ministry. As it will demonstrate, Tertullian and Cyprian



responded to the same set of problems in quite contrary ways: whereas Tertullian acknowledged the differentiation of roles within the church but denied that it had any direct relationship to the gift of the Holy Spirit or the possession of sanctifying power, Cyprian interpreted differences in position within the church as correlating to fundamental differences in spiritual power. For Cyprian, the bishops possessed a unique gift of the Holy Spirit and were the only holders of the power necessary to preserve the holiness of the church. It was Cyprian's theory that came to dominate in North Africa.

**Chapter two** establishes that the Cyprianic theology of the bishop did fundamentally shape the Donatist understanding of the bishop. It is principally an examination of two Donatist sources: the *passio Marculi*, written in the aftermath of the mission of Paul and Macarius in 347, and the works of Parmenian of Carthage, written during the period of Donatist ascendancy in the last third of the fourth century. Though these sources emerged out of different historical contexts, both evidence the continuing influence of the Cyprianic theory of the bishop as possessors of a special power granted by the Holy Spirit to them alone. As bearers of that power, bishops acted as human mediators of the grace of God and were looked upon as particularly holy. Their Caecilianist opponents accused the Donatist bishops of pride, vanity, and even of putting themselves in the place of God, but as this chapter will show the basis of these claims was in fact their ongoing adherence to the Cyprianic understanding of the bishop.

**Chapter three** explains Augustine's reinterpretation of the theological understanding of the bishop and his ministry. It shows that while Augustine upheld the inherited structures of ministry, he radically reinterpreted their theological significance in

order to defend changes in Caecilianist practice. The theory of episcopal ministry that he articulated drew on the African tradition but proposed a radical revision: that the power to forgive sins and sanctify was shared by all faithful Christians, clergy and laity alike. The chapter further demonstrates that Augustine's theory was not limited to the traditional arguments over sacramental powers; Augustine used this theory to explain the bishops' ministries of preaching and pastoral oversight as well and even applied it to the ministry of the laity. In maintaining that the ministries of the bishops and laity were grounded in a shared power and could be explained by the same theory, Augustine was in direct contradiction to core teachings of the Cyprianic tradition. Augustine's revision was more radical than has been acknowledged. As the remainder of the dissertation will demonstrate, it put him at odds with his fellow Caecilianists as well as the rival Donatists.

**Chapter four** is an examination of Optatus of Milevis' critique of the practice of clerical penance and the implications of this critique for his understanding of the holiness of the clergy. It argues that while the controversy over baptism prompted Optatus to articulate a thoroughly revised account of baptism and the minister's role in it, this revision did not lead to a broader shift in his understanding of the clergy. His criticisms of the Donatist use of clerical penance reveal that Optatus continued to adhere to the Cyprianic notion of the clergy as distinctly holy and recipients of singular spiritual gifts, a position he shared with his Donatist rivals.

**Chapter five** focuses on the reform efforts of the Caecilianist bishops at the Council of Carthage of 390. The decrees of the council are important evidence because they were agreed upon immediately before Augustine's ordination and subsequent rise to

influence in the African church and because they are thoroughly and decisively focused on the office of the bishop. The chapter offers an analysis of the decrees of the council and shows that for the bishops assembled in 390, reforming the church meant insuring that bishops were at the center of the churches, exercising their singular powers and maintaining their purity for the sake of their communities. In other words, reform meant insuring that the Cyprianic understanding of the bishop remained operative. The most striking evidence for this is the bishops' embrace of a rationale for clerical sexual continence that connects the efficacy of the sacraments with the (sexual) purity of the clergy. The insistence on a connection between clerical purity and sacramental efficacy would come under attack by Augustine as being "Donatist" in just a few short years.

**Chapter six** examines archeological evidence of the burial of bishops in light of the theological concerns of the conflict between Donatists and Caecilianists. It considers a series of sites, both Donatist and Caecilianist, at which Christians commemorated their bishops with special burials resembling *martyria*. Proceeding with a site by site analysis, it argues that the burial of these bishops in the manner of saints and martyrs is evidence of a shared inclination of Christians in both communions to consider their bishops to possess a holiness analogous to that of saints, a position that Caecilianist authors, particularly Augustine and Optatus, sought to portray as distinctly Donatist. According to the evidence of these burials, in practice Caecilianists considered their bishops as distinctly holy just as much as Donatists did.

### **On Terminology**

This dissertation refers to the two factions or communions of African Christianity in the fourth and fifth century as “Donatist” and “Caecilianist.” These are problematic terms. Both communions identified themselves as simply the Catholic church in Africa. Neither of the names used here would have been acceptable to the parties involved; insofar as they were used at the time, both appellations were cases of polemical name-calling. Nevertheless, some kind of category or naming is necessary. Though this dissertation is focused on the Caecilianist communion, this is not out of partisan preference. The adoption of the polemical names associated with the early fourth-century leaders of the two factions at least avoids taking sides. It also has the potential benefit of reminding the reader that these identities were highly contested and that this contestation was itself part of the ongoing African debate about the nature of the church and its ministries. Use of this nomenclature also means that the occasional use of the term “catholic” within this study is not meant as a reference to one of the two factions but to a much broader notion.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **THE THEOLOGY OF THE CLERGY IN EARLY AFRICAN TRADITION**

The theological basis of the clerical office and of the powers exercised by the clergy was a point of conflict from the time of our earliest sources for Christianity in North Africa. This is especially so in regards to the office of bishop. In this chapter I will trace this conflict in the two largest extant sources of the third century, Tertullian and Cyprian. Though Tertullian and Cyprian represent differing traditions about the relationship between the office of bishop and the spiritual power at work in the church's sanctifying rituals, they give evidence of a distinctly African emphasis on such questions and a particularly African set of commitments which shaped debate: the sanctifying power of the church was identified with the gift of the Holy Spirit, was mediated through the church's rituals, was held and exercised by specific individuals, and required maintenance by submission to a particular discipline. Considered together, they offer evidence of the early development of an African theological tradition regarding the church's clergy.

## Tertullian

### *The Practice of the Clergy in the Time of Tertullian*<sup>1</sup>

Tertullian was not himself a member of the clergy of the church of Carthage, but he did offer evidence regarding the different ranks of clergy and their varying roles in the church of Carthage at the end of the second and beginning of the third century.<sup>2</sup> He bears witness to the orders of bishop, presbyter, and deacon, and to a number of other roles within the Carthaginian church. It is clear from his surviving writings that the differing responsibilities and powers of these offices and roles were a matter of conflict within the Christian community at Carthage.

Tertullian recognized the orders of bishop, presbyter, and deacon as together making up the clergy of the church. He listed the three together on several occasions.<sup>3</sup> These three orders shared a distinct discipline: they could only be married once after baptism, and upon the death of a spouse had to remain widowers. He claimed that those who remarried were to be removed from office, though this was clearly a contested practice.<sup>4</sup> The clergy in these three orders were also prohibited from certain forms of business; it seems that the primary concern was with business that would require contact

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Robin Margaret Jensen and J. Patout Burns, *Christianity in Roman Africa: The Development of Its Practices and Beliefs*, 364-370, for this section.

<sup>2</sup> Earlier generations of scholarship attributed membership in the clergy to Tertullian, but contemporary scholarship has reached a consensus that there is no compelling reason to identify Tertullian as a member of the clergy. cf. Timothy David Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 3; Geoffrey D. Dunn, *Tertullian*, (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), 2-5; and Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 364, among others.

<sup>3</sup> Tert. *Praescr.* 41.8; *Bapt.* 17.1; *Fug.* 11.1; *Mon.* 11.1.

<sup>4</sup> Tertullian implied that this rule was not always followed or enforced. For his part, he argued that all Christians – and not only clergy – should be subject to the discipline of monogamy, or single marriage. cf. *infra*.

with idolatry, whether direct or indirect.<sup>5</sup> They were also held in particular honor; one expression of this was that they received double portions at the community's banquets.<sup>6</sup>

The bishop was the leader of the Christian community and oversaw its rituals, discipline, and doctrine. He was responsible for admitting new members through baptism;<sup>7</sup> leading the community in corporate prayers and the eucharistic ritual;<sup>8</sup> and excluding and re-admitting sinners through public repentance and reconciliation (*exomologesis*).<sup>9</sup> The bishop supervised matters of community discipline and piety such as fasting, and seems to have held the primary teaching office as well.<sup>10</sup>

Tertullian does not give as much attention to the roles of presbyters or deacons, but it is clear that they were subordinate to the bishop and under his authority. They could baptize, but only by delegation of the bishop.<sup>11</sup> Presbyters were singled out as prominent in the process of *exomologesis*, but there is no evidence that they had a direct role supervising the penitents or performing the ritual.<sup>12</sup> Tertullian is not explicit, but the presbyters may have been those from whom the bread and wine were received in common worship; they would also have served in leadership roles in the evening love feasts, presumably including presiding over rituals in those contexts.<sup>13</sup> Tertullian also

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<sup>5</sup> Tert. *Praescr.* 41.6.

<sup>6</sup> Tert. *Ieiun.* 17.4.

<sup>7</sup> Tert. *Bapt.* 17.1.

<sup>8</sup> Tert. *Cor.* 3.3; *Bapt.* 17.2-3.

<sup>9</sup> Tert. *Pud.* 14.16; 18.18; see also *Paen.* 10.8 and *Pud.* 1.6; 13.7; 21.16-17.

<sup>10</sup> Tert. *Ieiun.* 13.3; *Praescr.* 32.1; *Marc.* 4.5.1-2.

<sup>11</sup> Tert. *Bapt.* 17.1. They could also baptize in emergencies, when any male Christian could baptize.

<sup>12</sup> Tert. *Paen.* 10.8.

<sup>13</sup> However, there is some debate over the relationship (and possible overlap) between the office of presbyter and that of "elders," or *seniores*, prominent (lay) leaders within the community. Cf. *infra*.

states that they offered prayers for the dead before burials.<sup>14</sup> Tertullian gives no indication of the distinct role(s) of the deacons.

Beyond these three distinctly clerical offices, Tertullian bears witness to several other recognized roles in the church at Carthage that were not included among the clergy. These roles included martyrs and confessors, virgins and widows, lay elders, and spiritual prophets. The martyrs comprised an exceptional class within the church at Carthage in Tertullian's time. In this period the term referred to all who suffered for public witness to Christ.<sup>15</sup> They were understood to have distinct powers, including the power to forgive sins and restore penitents to the peace of the church.<sup>16</sup> Because not all martyrdom ended in death, living martyrs would have been present in the Christian community, and Tertullian bears witness to the practice of visiting martyrs while they were still in prison, both to feed and care for them and to seek their spiritual patronage.<sup>17</sup> This attribution of powers to the martyrs could become a source of tension with the responsibilities of the clergy and the penitential structures of the church.

Virgins and widows were distinct orders within the Carthaginian church and both were highly esteemed. Though their specific roles are not entirely clear, neither was solely or primarily an order for the purpose of financial support even though clearly some

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<sup>14</sup> Tert., *An.* 51.6-7.

<sup>15</sup> Thus Tertullian could address those currently imprisoned as martyrs in his *Ad Martyras*. Tert. *Mart.* 1.1. cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 368.

<sup>16</sup> cf. *infra* for further discussion of this phenomenon. On the basis of the *Pas. Perp.*, it seems that martyrdom may also have been held to grant the power to request visions. *Trad. Apos.* 10 asserted that public confession of this sort also granted status in the clergy, but this was not the case in Africa. cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 368.

<sup>17</sup> Tert. *Mart.* 1.1; cf. Andrew McGowan, "Discipline and Diet: Feeding the Martyrs in Roman Carthage," *Harvard Theological Review* 96, no. 4 (October 1, 2003): 455-76.



widows received such support.<sup>18</sup> Tertullian lists both virgins and widows alongside the other orders and offices, including bishops, deacons, teachers, and confessors.<sup>19</sup> Widows received the supplications of penitents alongside the presbyters, and like them were seated in a place of honor in the assembly.<sup>20</sup> Though he explicitly excluded them from sacerdotal roles, Tertullian indicated that they were expected to maintain the discipline of single marriage just as the male clergy were.<sup>21</sup> Virgins seem not to have had the degree of responsibility accorded to widows, though the precise nature of their role is difficult to determine. Tertullian described them as wedded to Christ, and they were visually distinguished in the Christian assembly.<sup>22</sup> It is evident that there was conflict over women's participation in leadership, including but not limited to widows and virgins. Tertullian's repeated attempts to delimit their roles indicate that he had opponents. He knew of and condemned women who taught, performed exorcisms, and even baptized.<sup>23</sup> He sought to prevent young unmarried women from serving as widows, though he acknowledged at least one case in which this happened.<sup>24</sup> Tertullian was concerned to delimit both the responsibility exercised by women and those who were eligible to exercise it, including virgins and widows.

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<sup>18</sup> That this was the case, and that there were two distinct orders, is clear from Tertullian's concern to keep the two groups distinct in *Virg.* 9.2, Cf. Charlotte Methuen, "The 'Virgin Widow': A Problematic Social Role for the Early Church?," *Harvard Theological Review* 90, no. 3 (July 1, 1997): 285–98.

<sup>19</sup> Tert. *Praesc.* 3.5

<sup>20</sup> Tert. *Pud.* 13.7; *Cast.* 11.2; *Virg.* 9.3.

<sup>21</sup> Tert. *Virg.* 9.1; *Monog.* 11.1.

<sup>22</sup> Tert. *Res.* 61.6; *Virg.* 2-8, 9.1, 13.1, 16.4. Tertullian bears witness that virgins indicated their special status by remaining unveiled in the Christian assemblies by way of his objection to the practice.

<sup>23</sup> Tert. *Praesc.* 41.5.

<sup>24</sup> Tert. *Virg.* 9.2. Cf. Charlotte Methuen, "Virgin Widow," who argues that Tertullian's primary concern was to prevent young, inexperienced virgins from attaining the rank and responsibilities that were held by widows in Carthage at that time.

The lay elders, or *seniores*, are a group attested only in Africa who were not clergy but who exercised both administrative and liturgical roles. They were the basic form of government in the small communities of rural Africa, responsible for all manner of village administration.<sup>25</sup> The evidence of the *seniores* as a group within the church, though less well attested than for the villages, is likewise limited to Africa alone. Much as they did in the villages, within the church the *seniores* served as representatives of the *plebs*, both administratively and liturgically. They were a distinct administrative structure from that of the clergy that held administrative responsibilities over material affairs within the church.<sup>26</sup> In early third century Carthage the *seniores* also seem to have exercised a liturgical role, possibly including: leading, singing and offering direction to the *plebs* in the assemblies and perhaps even presiding over Eucharistic celebrations at the evening love-feasts.<sup>27</sup> Though not clergy, the *seniores* were themselves a defined group of leaders within local Christian communities that exercised liturgical and administrative functions; though the extant evidence is much later than Tertullian's time,

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<sup>25</sup> These *seniores* are only attested for Africa. Brent Shaw, "The Elders of Christian Africa," in Étienne Gareau and Société des études anciennes du Québec, *Mélanges offerts en hommage au révérend père Étienne Gareau* ([Ottawa]: Éd. de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1982), 207, 224-26.

<sup>26</sup> Shaw, "The Elders of Christian Africa," 221-22.

<sup>27</sup> The sole reference in Tertullian is ambiguous. In *Apol.* 39.5 Tertullian referred to *seniores* as leaders of the community chosen for their character: *Praesident probati quique seniores, honorem istum non pretio, sed testimonio adepti, neque enim pretio ulla res dei constat*. However, this may have been a reference to the presbyters rather than lay elders. Greek lacks a distinction between the two, as *presbyteros* (*πρεσβύτερος*) can also simply mean "elder," while Latin does not. Burns and Jensen take this as referring to the presbyters because they interpret the passage as referring to the morning communal gatherings at which *seniores* would not have presided. The evidence of *Pas. Perp.* 12.4 is much clearer. There, the *seniores* are mentioned as a distinct group from the presbyters, and they are described as exercising a role in the heavenly liturgy, standing to either side of the Lord and seeming to "conduct" the service, announcing the actions which the martyrs are about to perform. As Shaw notes, this is surely a reflection of the earthly assembly. Shaw, "The Elders of Christian Africa," 210.

there are indications that some African Christians might have been inclined to think of them as an order analogous to the clergy as late as Augustine.<sup>28</sup>

Tertullian also bears witness to the presence of prophets among the Christians at Carthage. Modern scholars have shown that the prophetic utterances given by these prophets were often developments or expansions of scriptural texts in order to make them more directly relevant to the contemporary situation of the church.<sup>29</sup> Tertullian described these as ecstatic experiences, insisting that prophets at Carthage experienced visions and conversed with angels and “sometimes even the Lord.”<sup>30</sup> At least some of the time these ecstasies happened during the liturgy.<sup>31</sup> These oracles were recounted, recorded, and then tested by a group within the Christian community.<sup>32</sup> Thus, though in his later years Tertullian was willing to ascribe a unique role to the prophets as mouthpieces of the Paraclete, it was not a power which they could exercise *carte blanche*. The prophecies had to be tested by the community before being accepted as from the Paraclete.

### *Tertullian's Ecclesiology*

The North African church in Tertullian's time identified itself by the twin commitments of rejection of idolatry and commitment to and identification with Christ.

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<sup>28</sup> Though the evidence is from the time of Augustine, it may reflect earlier attitudes as well. Shaw, “The Elders of Christian Africa,” 222-23.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Dennis E. Groh, “Utterance and exegesis: Biblical interpretation in the Montanist crisis,” in Groh and Jewett, *The Living Text* (University Press of America: New York, 1985), 73–95.

<sup>30</sup> Tert. *anim.* 9.4; *virg.* 17.3. cf. William Tabbernee, “To Pardon or Not to Pardon? North African Montanism and the Forgiveness of Sins,” in *Studia Patristica*, ed. Maurice Frank Wiles, Edward Yarnold, and Paul M. Parvis (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 379-380.

<sup>31</sup> Tert. *An.* 9.4.

<sup>32</sup> A group affiliated with the New Prophecy movement. Tertullian alludes to his own involvement in this process, which included, at a minimum, writing out the “oracles,” in *Anim.* 9.4. cf. Tabbernee, “To Pardon or Not to Pardon? North African Montanism and the Forgiveness of Sins,” 380.

The fundamental boundary defining the church was that marked by the renunciation of traditional Roman and African gods, understood to be demonic.<sup>33</sup> The public enactment of this renunciation was a crucial aspect of the ritual of baptism.<sup>34</sup> After baptism, Christians were expected to avoid contact with and involvement in aspects of the surrounding culture that would involve them in idolatry: the games and spectacles,<sup>35</sup> marriage to non-Christians,<sup>36</sup> occupations that involved the production of idols or offices or professions that required participation in the Roman cult,<sup>37</sup> and even common superstitions.<sup>38</sup> In expressing this conviction, Tertullian could even go so far as to describe the imprisonment of martyrdom as a kind of respite: all Christians were required to renounce the world, but at least the martyrs were isolated from the idolatry of Roman society.<sup>39</sup>

In its commitment to Christ the church was identified with Christ. The confession of the church itself was added to the confession of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the baptismal oath. Across Tertullian's writings he portrayed the church as the body in which the Trinity dwelt, a kind of sacrament of the Trinity. Tertullian varied his usage and terminology for different intended audiences and to different ends.<sup>40</sup> In *On Baptism*, he described the church as the body of the Trinity confessed in the baptismal oath. In *On Penitence*, he identified the church with Christ in its intercession for the forgiveness of

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<sup>33</sup> Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 166ff.

<sup>34</sup> Tert. *Spec.* 4; *De Cor.* 3. On the baptismal rite as described by Tertullian, see Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 166-176.

<sup>35</sup> Tert. *Spec.* 4.

<sup>36</sup> Tert. *Idol.* 7-8, 11, 17, 21, 23.

<sup>37</sup> Tert. *Idol.* 7-8.

<sup>38</sup> Tert. *An.* 39.

<sup>39</sup> Tert. *Ad Martyras* 2.5.

<sup>40</sup> David Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 70-71.

sins; since Christ's intercession will not be refused, the church's own intercession could be trusted as efficacious.<sup>41</sup> This is likewise the imagery used in *On Prayer*, where the petition for daily bread in the Lord's Prayer is explained as a request that this identification be preserved.<sup>42</sup> In *On Modesty*, Tertullian shifted the imagery to focus on the Spirit in order to limit the power to forgive sins to the "spiritual," but he still emphasized that the church *is* the Trinity: "For the church is itself, properly and principally, the Spirit himself, in whom there is a trinity of one divinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit."<sup>43</sup> For Tertullian the church was the embodiment of God on earth, and it was this identification that gave it the power at work in the rituals of baptism and the forgiveness of sins.

In order to preserve the identification of the church with God, and thus its power to forgive sins, those who violated its discipline through serious sins were excluded from its eucharistic fellowship. Though not all Carthaginian Christians agreed, Tertullian insisted that the same discipline applied to all Christians.<sup>44</sup> This discipline was, he insisted, given by the Holy Spirit, and was even part of the economy of salvation.<sup>45</sup> His identification of the church with God helps to explain how this was the case. Just as the Holy Spirit was given to individual Christians in the baptismal ritual, the church as a social body was also filled with the spirit of God.<sup>46</sup> Were the church to lose this identity granted through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, its prayers and rituals would cease to

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<sup>41</sup> Tert. *Paen.* 10.6.

<sup>42</sup> Tert. *Orat.* 6. "And so by asking for daily bread we request continuance in Christ and inseparableness from his body."

<sup>43</sup> Tert. *Pud.* 21.16.

<sup>44</sup> Tert. *Cast.* 7. "There is one God, one faith - let there be one discipline also."

<sup>45</sup> Tert. *Pud.* 11.

<sup>46</sup> Tert. *Bapt.* 6-8.

be effective. This is the interpretation Tertullian offered of Paul's exclusion of the "fornicator" in 1 Corinthians 5.<sup>47</sup> Tertullian argued for a rigorous discipline as necessary to sustain the Church's commitment to and identity with Christ at both the individual and corporate levels.

### *Tertullian's Theology of Orders and Ministry*

Though Tertullian recognized and affirmed distinct offices and responsibilities for the clergy, he consistently denied that this meant that they possessed distinct powers or should be held to a different discipline. He argued that the distinctions made between the clergy and the rest of the Christian people were solely for the sake of the good order and peace of the church.

Tertullian recognized and accepted class distinctions within the church. As we have seen, Tertullian repeatedly listed the offices of bishop, presbyter, and deacon together as making up the clergy of the church. He likewise distinguished between the clergy and the laity or *plebs* of the church.<sup>48</sup> He traced the office of bishop back to the apostles, though he did not describe the apostles themselves as bishops.<sup>49</sup> Tertullian affirmed the distinct prerogatives of those holding clerical office. The right of giving baptism, for example, belonged first of all to the bishop; presbyters and deacons could

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<sup>47</sup> Tert. *Pud.* 13. "We must conclude, therefore, that he speaks of that spirit which is thought of as being in the Church and which must be shown forth safe in the day of the Lord – that is, free from the contagion of impurity after the incestuous fornicator has been expelled."

<sup>48</sup> cf. David Rankin, "Class Distinction as a Way of Doing Church: The Early Fathers and the Christian Plebs," *Vigiliae Christianae* 58, no. 3 (January 1, 2004): 302-304; Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 366.

<sup>49</sup> Tert. *Praescr.* 32.1; *Marc.* 4.5.1-2.

only baptize when so authorized by the bishop.<sup>50</sup> And while he acknowledged that the laity could perform baptism in emergencies, he immediately qualified this assertion by insisting that to do so in any other context would be to usurp the functions of the bishop and to violate proper humility. He stated explicitly that this arrangement of responsibilities was for the honor and peace of the church. He also turned this argument against those he identified as heretics, identifying their lack of this proper order as a sign of their falsehood.<sup>51</sup> Tertullian did not deny the validity of distinctions within the church.

Even as Tertullian acknowledged and affirmed the importance of upholding distinctions between the rights and roles of bishops and other clergy and those of the laity, he argued that all male Christians nonetheless possessed the power to perform baptism and other rituals. Tertullian argued that while it was the clergy, and especially the bishops, who were to exercise these priestly functions when the community was gathered together, all Christians had in fact equally been made priests by God. This is most clear and explicit in the treatise *On Chastity*. God has made all Christians priests, but ecclesiastical authority and the dignity of the clerical hierarchy are what distinguish between clergy and laity. Those among the laity cannot exercise priestly functions when the clergy are present. Yet even without any clergy present, a gathering of (at least three) laypersons is still the church. Thus when they gather and no member of the clergy is present, the laity can exercise their own priestly powers - and so baptize and offer the eucharistic sacrifice.<sup>52</sup> In *On Baptism*, Tertullian further specifies that laypersons are able

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<sup>50</sup> Tert. *Bapt.* 17.1-3.

<sup>51</sup> Tert. *Praesc.* 41.8 (*CCSL* 1:222): “Nam et laicis sacerdotalia munera iniungunt.”

<sup>52</sup> Tert. *Cast.* 7.3-6. Elsewhere, Tertullian notes that even his opponents were wont to lay claim to this text (Rev. 1:6) when it suited them. *Monog.* 12.

to give baptism because a person could give whatever he had received.<sup>53</sup> Per Tertullian, then, all male Christians possessed a priestly power that could be exercised in the appropriate context(s). For the bishops, this was at any assembly at which they were present. For the presbyters and deacons, this was as delegates of the bishop. For all other male Christians, they could baptize in cases of emergency and could preside over the eucharist in the evening love-feasts, a context in which laypersons would also have led prayers and forgiven one another's sins.<sup>54</sup> Tertullian seems to have held that these powers were given to the church, and that all (males) within the church could potentially exercise them in the proper circumstances.

It is evident, however, that not everyone in the Christian community at Carthage shared Tertullian's positions. Tertullian repeatedly argued that such powers were not inherently tied to offices but were rather the possession of all Christian faithful, and did so against opponents who were fellow Christians. Against a bishop who claimed the power to forgive sins due to his office, Tertullian insisted that the power to forgive sins had been given to the church rather than to its bishops. In *On Modesty*, Tertullian reports a change in the penitential practice in the church of Carthage. The received practice of the church had been to deny the peace of the church to those guilty of certain sins committed either directly against God or in violation of the temple of God. In practice, this meant especially the sins of idolatry, adultery, and murder, though Tertullian bears witness to

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<sup>53</sup> Tert. *Bapt.* 17.2 (CCSL 1:291): "quod enim ex aequo accipitur ex aequo dari potest." cf. *Bapt.* 17.1-3.

<sup>54</sup> In all likelihood, this adds to the range of functions exercised by the *seniores*. As leading members of the laity (and likely among the most wealthy), the *seniores* would possibly have been among the leaders of the evening love-feasts, and as such would have been in a position to exercise seemingly priestly functions at those meetings. Cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa* 307-8, 242-3.



other sins in this category as well.<sup>55</sup> These sinners were nonetheless encouraged to undertake penance in hopes of receiving forgiveness directly from God at the final judgment. Early in the third century the bishop of Carthage made a modification to this practice, decreeing that those guilty of adultery and certain other sexual offenses could undergo penance and be readmitted to the communion and peace of the church.<sup>56</sup>

Tertullian's treatise preserves not only the decree itself, but the bishop's rationale for the practice and for his authority to offer such forgiveness.<sup>57</sup> The bishop argued that sinners would not undergo penance if it did not end in forgiveness, and therefore in order to encourage penance he would offer forgiveness for these sexual sins.<sup>58</sup> The bishop asserted that the church had the authority to forgive sins.<sup>59</sup> More specifically, he claimed he had the authority to forgive these sins on the basis of Jesus' charge to Peter in Matthew 16, insisting that the power to bind and loose sins originally given to Peter was

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<sup>55</sup> cf. Tert. *Pud.* 21.2 for the explicit formula against God or God's temple. On the list(s) provided by Tertullian, cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 301, 304-8.

<sup>56</sup> Tert. *Pud.* 1. I am following the identification of the bishop as that of Carthage as argued in Barnes, *Tertullian*, 30-31, 141, 247. Other scholars have argued that Tertullian's episcopal opponent was the bishop of Rome; cf. Allen Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church in the Third Century: Communities in Tension Before the Emergence of a Monarch-Bishop* (Leiden ; New York ; Köln: E.J. Brill, 1995), 503-535, for one prominent example. This policy was only extended to these sexual sins; those guilty of idolatry and murder were still refused reconciliation. cf. *Pud.* 5.

<sup>57</sup> The decree itself, or at least the version of it that Tertullian relayed, is in *Pud.* 1.6 (CCSL 2:1282): "Ego et moechiae et fornicationis delicta paenitentia functis dimitto." "I forgive sins of adultery and fornication to those who have performed penance."

<sup>58</sup> Tert. *Pud.* 3.1-2 (CCSL 2:1286): "Si enim, inquirunt, aliqua paenitentia caret uenia, iam nec in totum agenda tibi est. Nihil enim agendum est frustra. Porro frustra agetur paenitentia, si caret uenia. Omnis autem paenitentia agenda est. Ergo omnis ueniam consequatur, ne frustra agatur, quia non erit agenda, si frustra agatur. Porro frustra agitur, si uenia carebit." "If some form of penance does not receive forgiveness, you will not perform it at all. Nothing is done in vain. Penance, however, would be performed in vain if it did not attain forgiveness. All forms of penance ought to be performed. Therefore, every penance should lead to forgiveness, so that it is not performed in vain — since it ought not actually be performed if it is in vain. It will be performed in vain, however, unless it receives forgiveness."

<sup>59</sup> Tert. *Pud.* 21.7.

also given to all subsequent bishops.<sup>60</sup> That is, the bishop claimed that the power to forgive sins was give to the holder of the office of bishop.

Tertullian responded by denying the linkage between episcopal office and the power of binding and loosing. First, he insisted that Peter had been given this power personally rather than as a function of any office.<sup>61</sup> Tertullian contrasted the power of forgiveness possessed by the apostles and prophets with the discipline that they taught.<sup>62</sup> He claimed that the received practice of denying reconciliation for sins committed against God or God's temple was the apostolic discipline.<sup>63</sup> Thus any ability to forgive sins beyond that prescribed in the discipline was a result of a divine power given personally to Peter and the other apostles, just as they were also granted the power to raise the dead and heal the sick. Tertullian drove home his point with a sarcastic condition by which to judge if the bishop truly had this power: if the bishop wished to claim the powers of an apostle, Tertullian would happily recognize that - just as soon as the bishop demonstrated this power by raising someone from the dead, as the apostles had.<sup>64</sup>

Second, he argued on the basis of Matthew 16:17-19 that Peter was not given the power to forgive sins committed against God but only those committed against other

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<sup>60</sup> Tert. *Pud.* 21.9.

<sup>61</sup> It is worth recalling that Tertullian described the bishops as successors of the Apostles but did not describe the Apostles themselves as bishops. cf. Tert. *Praesc.* 32.1. He extended this assertion to the other apostles and prophets as well: their powers were given to them personally. Tert. *Pud.* 21.

<sup>62</sup> See the commentary of Le Saint, Tertullian, *Treatises on Penance: On Penitence and On Purity*, ed. William Le Saint, Ancient Christian Writers, vol. 28. (Westminster, Md, Newman Press, 1959), 280 n. 626, on the relationship between *disciplina* and *doctrina* here and elsewhere in Tertullian.

<sup>63</sup> He appealed to Mark 2:7 and Luke 5:21, "Who can forgive sins but God alone," in regards to sins that the church could not forgive, and to Matthew 18:21-22 for the command to forgive sins against one another. Tert. *Pud.* 21.2-3.

<sup>64</sup> Tert. *Pud.* 21.1-5, particularly 21.5 (CCSL 2:1326): "Exhibe igitur et nunc mihi, apostolice, prophetica exempla, ut agnoscam diuinitatem, et uindica tibi delictorum eiusmodi remittendorum potestatem." cf. Acts 9:36-43 and 3:1-10.

humans.<sup>65</sup> Even though Peter was given the kind of miraculous powers described in Acts, this did not mean that he was able to forgive sins against God. Tertullian claimed that this power of forgiveness was limited to sins against others. Tertullian went on to specify the manner in which Peter did exercise the keys: by initiating faith through the proclamation of the gospel; by granting forgiveness of sins in baptism; by loosing from disease; by binding Ananias in death; and by declaring what of the law was to be binding on Gentiles.<sup>66</sup> The power to bind and loose did not extend to forgiving sins against God or God's temple.

Finally, Tertullian conceded that the church did have the power to forgive sins on the basis of its identity with the Holy Spirit but insisted that this power was held and was to be exercised by the truly spiritual people, those who would follow the discipline directed by the Paraclete. For Tertullian this meant those who followed the more rigorous discipline of the New Prophecy. In this sense, it was not a matter of the church lacking the *power* to forgive such sins, but rather that the Paraclete had commanded it not to do so: "The church can forgive offenses, but I will not do it, lest others then sin."<sup>67</sup>

Obedience to the Holy Spirit was evidenced, according to Tertullian, by following Christian discipline, and at this point he was convinced that this meant the discipline revealed by the Paraclete among the followers of the New Prophecy. Thus the bishop, who opposed this movement, was not following the directives of the Holy Spirit and so

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<sup>65</sup> Tert. *Pud.* 21.14-15.

<sup>66</sup> Tert. *Pud.* 21.11-15. Cf. Acts 2:2, 2:41, 3:1-16, 5:1-6, 15:10ff.

<sup>67</sup> Tert. *Pud.* 21.7. This was apparently one of the contemporary prophetic utterances of the New Prophecy. cf. William Tabbernee, "To Pardon or Not to Pardon?"

did not possess the Spirit's power to forgive.<sup>68</sup> The origin of the power was the Holy Spirit itself. The church possessed this power insofar as it was identified with the Spirit. It could only be exercised by those who were fully obedient to the Holy Spirit, which for Tertullian meant those following the discipline of the New Prophecy. Such power was not dependent on episcopal office.

Against those who appealed to the martyrs as spiritual patrons and possessors of the power to forgive sins and grant the peace of the church, Tertullian argued that martyrs received peace only for themselves and were examples for other Christians rather than spiritual patrons. Some Carthaginian Christians who were guilty of serious sins and potentially unable to receive forgiveness and peace through the church's penitential process sought out the martyrs that they might receive peace from them, clear evidence that the martyrs were in fact understood to possess such power.<sup>69</sup> Tertullian critiqued this practice explicitly in *On Modesty*.<sup>70</sup> The practice is corroborated in the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*, in which martyrs were presented as possessing distinct spiritual powers. Perpetua was portrayed as able to effect the situation of her dead brother

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<sup>68</sup> Tert. *Pud.* 21.17. "And in this sense the church of course will condone sins, but the church of the Spirit by means of a man of the Spirit, not a church as a number of bishops. For a lord has rights and freedom of decision, not a servant, that belongs to God himself, not to the priest."

<sup>69</sup> In his early address *Ad Martyras*, Tertullian warned the martyrs imprisoned in Carthage to continue to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit under whose influence they were able to confess the faith, and especially to preserve peace among themselves. This was necessary both so that they would remain faithful and because some who were outside the peace of the church would come to them seeking to be restored. They could not do this without the peace of the Spirit themselves. *Mart.* 1.3, 1.6.

<sup>70</sup> Tert. *Pud.* 22.1-3. "But you grant this power even to your martyrs. Just as soon as anyone is put in bonds – and by collusion they are easy enough in the merely nominal custody of these days – at once adulterers solicit him, at once fornicators approach him. Petitions echo round and pools of tears are shed by every *débauché*. There are none more eager to buy their entrance into prison than those who have lost their right of entrance into church. Violence is done to men and women in the dark, well known as the ordinary place of debauchery, and peace is sought from those who are in danger of losing it themselves. There are others who have recourse to the mines and come back as communicants from a place where a second martyrdom is already necessary for sins committed after the first."

Dinocrates, and her companion Saturus was portrayed as possessing the ability to broker peace within the church.<sup>71</sup> At least some of the Christians of Carthage looked to the martyrs as holders of the power to forgive sins and grant the peace of the church.

While Tertullian acknowledged a special status for martyrs within the Christian community, he argued that the martyrs should serve as examples for the Christian community rather than be considered holders of a special power. As early as his address *To the Martyrs*, Tertullian sought to shift the emphasis on martyrdom away from the particular prerogatives and powers of martyrs and toward martyrdom as a form of *ascesis*.<sup>72</sup> Tertullian worked to intergrate the imprisonment of martyrdom into a life of *ascesis* and rejection of idolatry. Much later, in *On Fasting*, Tertullian once again depicted the deprivations of martyrdom as of a piece with a life of discipline.<sup>73</sup> For Tertullian, Christians who kept the proper discipline would be prepared for the rigors of martyrdom because they had already begun to experience a kind of death to the world. Martyrdom was simply a part of Christian *ascesis*, the culmination of discipline.

Though Tertullian acknowledged that martyrdom effected the forgiveness of sins he rejected the notion that this forgiveness could be extended to others. In his earlier *To*

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<sup>71</sup> cf. McGowan, "Discipline and Diet," 466-7. In the vision of Saturus, the bishop Optatus and the presbyter Aspasius prostrate themselves before the martyrs and plead for the martyrs to restore peace between the two clerics. The scenario Saturus envisions in the narrative is a dramatization of the kind of process that Tertullian also describes.

<sup>72</sup> In that exhortation, he compared the privations suffered by martyrs to those undertaken by athletes, soldiers, and gladiators. He framed the martyrs' entry into prison as entering into the devil's own household to trample on him there, and argued that for those who have already denied the world, the prison is merely a place of seclusion, like the wilderness for the prophets of old. Tert. *Mart.* 2. cf. McGowan, "Discipline and Diet," 461-2.

<sup>73</sup> "For the prison must become familiar to us, hunger and thirst practiced, and tolerance both for the absence of food and for anxiety about it grasped. Thus the Christian may enter prison just as though leaving it—experiencing not a punishment, but discipline, and not the world's tortures, but his own habits..." Tert. *Jejun.* 12.2. Translation is from McGowan. According to McGowan, Tertullian focused on the martyr in order to set the pattern for how others will fast: the discipline of the martyrs was an exemplary version of what all Christians should do. McGowan, "Discipline and Diet," 462ff.

*the Martyrs* he had referenced the granting of peace by the martyrs without obvious critique, but by the time of *On Modesty* he rejected it outright. He argued that the forgiveness of sins such as adultery was reserved to God alone. Indicating the likely claims of his opponents, he caustically asserted that if the martyrs wished to claim that the presence of Christ in them granted them this power they should prove it by performing the same miracles that Christ did.<sup>74</sup> Tertullian acknowledged that martyrdom shared in the saving power of Christ, but only to the extent that it forgave the sins of the martyr and restored him or her to the peace of the church.<sup>75</sup> Across both early and late treatises, Tertullian portrayed martyrdom as a form of *ascesis* that did not provide the martyrs with a spiritual power that they could exercise for others but that was simply part of Christian discipline in an idolatrous world. Its benefits were only for those who underwent it, though it was a path open to all.

Against those who resisted his call for more rigorous ascetic discipline, Tertullian argued that all Christians shared in the same Spirit and priesthood and so must also share in the same discipline.<sup>76</sup> This is most clear in his defense of single marriage. In his *Exhortation to Chastity*, he insisted that the prohibition of remarriage was part of the discipline to be expected for all Christians. Tertullian's argument assumed a connection

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<sup>74</sup> Tert. *Pud.* 22.6-8 (CCSL 2:1329): "Habeo etiam nunc quo probem Christum. Si propterea Christus in martyre est, ut moechos et fornicators martyr absoluat, occulta cordis edicat, ut ita delicta concedat, et Christus est. Sic enim Dominus Iesus Christus potestatem suam ostendit: 'Quid cogitates nequam in cordibus uestris? Quid enim facilius est dicere paralytico: dimittuntur tibi peccata, aut: surge et ambula? Igitur ut sciatis filium hominis habere dimittendorum peccatorum in terris potestatem, tibi dico, paralytice: surge et ambula.' Si Dominus tantum de potestatis suae probatione curauit, uti traduceret cogitatus et ita imperaret santitatem, ne non crederetur posse delicta dimittere, non licet mihi eandem potestatem in aliquot sine eisdem probationibus credere."

<sup>75</sup> Tert. *Pud.* 22.4-5. cf. McGowan, "Discipline and Diet," 470. Tertullian described martyrdom as a second baptism, but like baptism only efficacious for the one undergoing it.

<sup>76</sup> Much as Tertullian asserted that martyrdom was an aspect of discipline potentially open to all Christians.

between priesthood and single marriage: since all (male) Christians were able to exercise priestly functions, all also needed to keep a priestly discipline. He did not anticipate his opponents objecting to this premise, but rather arguing that exceptions should be made for those who were not formally members of the clergy.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, in *On Modesty*, Tertullian suggested that Carthaginian Christians were willing to appropriate the language of priesthood for themselves when it suggested an equal dignity or even power with the clergy, but not the suggestion that they be under the same discipline as the clergy.<sup>78</sup> Thus many Carthaginian Christians assumed the propriety of a distinctly priestly discipline. Those who regularly exercised a priestly office were viewed as a distinct class within the Christian community, one with its own discipline. Tertullian acknowledged a distinction in office, but rejected the notion that such a distinction meant that some Christians should be held to a higher standard of discipline and of personal holiness than others. For Tertullian, all Christians were called to the same life of commitment to Christ and rejection of idolatry; all shared in the same Spirit; and thus all should share in the same discipline and, ultimately, have the same priestly powers.

## Cyprian

### *The Practice of the Clergy in the Time of Cyprian*

Cyprian's writings, especially his extensive extant correspondence, bear witness to a much wider range of clerical offices than do those of Tertullian. At the same time, they

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<sup>77</sup> He had his imagined interlocutor respond, "Yes, you will say, but allowance must be made in case of necessity." Tert. *Cast.* 7.2.

<sup>78</sup> Tert. *Monog.* 12.

show relatively little concern for non-clerical roles within the Christian community. Unlike Tertullian, Cyprian bears witness to a series of minor clerical offices that include subdeacons, acolytes, readers, and exorcists. The office of exorcist is the least well attested and there is no clear description of what it entailed.<sup>79</sup> Both acolytes and subdeacons appear in the letters of Cyprian as messengers who were tasked with delivering episcopal correspondence and, in the case of acolytes, material assistance. Both seem to have received monthly stipends from the community. The readers, or *lectores*, are the only of these minor offices for which we have clear sense of their liturgical function. In addition to carrying correspondence, they read the texts of scripture in the assembly and assisted the presbyters in instructing catechumens.<sup>80</sup> They seem not to have received a monthly stipend. This office may have served as the introductory office to a clerical career.<sup>81</sup>

Cyprian included the deacons as among those responsible for governing the Christian community.<sup>82</sup> Though the deacons were not the regular ministers of rituals, Cyprian granted them the authority to baptize and to reconcile penitent sinners in cases of emergency. They served the cup at the eucharistic celebration, and a deacon accompanied a presbyter for the purpose of celebrating the eucharist with the confessors in prison.

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<sup>79</sup> The lone reference to an exorcist in the Christian community at Carthage is in Cyprian's *Ep.* 23. It does not include a clear description of what the office entailed, though exorcism was certainly a part of the preparation for baptism. cf. *Cypr. Ep.* 69.15.2.

<sup>80</sup> It is possible that the readers were responsible for keeping and caring for the books of scripture themselves, although the evidence for this is later than the time of Cyprian. cf. *Act. Zeno*.

<sup>81</sup> cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 371.

<sup>82</sup> This is made clear by his repeated letters to the churches of both Rome (in the absence of their martyred bishop) and Carthage (while he was in exile) addressed to the presbyters and deacons alone. To Carthage: *Cypr. Ep.* 5; 7; 11; 12; 14; 15; 16; 18; 19; 26; 29; to Rome: *Ep.* 9; 20; 27; 25; 35. cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 372.



Deacons served as the bearers of important episcopal correspondence, and may have had responsibility for the church's material resources.<sup>83</sup>

The presbyters ranked beneath only the bishop in terms of prominence and range of responsibilities. They were seated alongside the bishop in a place of honor in the assembly, and in the absence of a bishop presbyters took full charge of the churches in both Rome and Carthage.<sup>84</sup> In this situation, Cyprian dealt with the presbyters in Rome as equals. Though presbyters do not seem to have offered the eucharist when the bishop was present, they were nevertheless regularly authorized to do so otherwise, both for the confessors in prison and when the bishop was not present in the assembly. Importantly, Cyprian described this as a right that he had the authority to rescind.<sup>85</sup> Presbyters were entrusted with baptizing catechumens and reconciling penitents in cases of emergency, and some were also responsible for instructing catechumens in preparation for baptism. The Carthaginian presbyters may also have been responsible for communities in different regions of the city.<sup>86</sup> They were also employed as bearers of particularly important episcopal letters and were entrusted with expanding on such letters verbally.<sup>87</sup> Alongside these more expansive responsibilities, presbyters also seem to have received a higher stipend and to have been subject to a minimum age requirement.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> At the least, they were responsible for the material care of the confessors in prison. Some were accused of misuse of church funds, which may imply responsibility for the same. Cypr. *Ep.* 41.2.1; 42; cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 372.

<sup>84</sup> On the bishop and presbyters being seated together in the assembly, Cypr. *Ep.* 39.5.2, 40.1, 45.2.5, and 59.18.1.

<sup>85</sup> Cypr. *Ep.* 16.4.2.

<sup>86</sup> Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 373.

<sup>87</sup> Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 374; cf. Cypr. *Ep.* 44.2.2.

<sup>88</sup> cf. *Ep.* 39.5.2, in which Cyprian reported both that the readers who had been confessors were to be given the presbyteral stipend, indicating that it was higher than what they would have otherwise received as readers, and that they were to be advanced to the rank of presbyter when they had likewise advanced in age.

Unlike Tertullian, Cyprian's writings do not bear witness to the influence or importance of non-clerical roles in the church other than that of the martyrs and confessors. There is no reference to lay elders, though this is probably not evidence of that role disappearing.<sup>89</sup> It is more likely that Cyprian's non-mention of lay elders was part of his campaign to consolidate leadership in the clergy.<sup>90</sup> There is also no evidence of challenges to episcopal authority from spiritual prophets. On the contrary, Cyprian himself repeatedly claimed to have received divine guidance through dreams and visions, claims for which he was criticized.<sup>91</sup> Cyprian made similar claims for other bishops, though it is not clear whether these indicate a claim for such power for the episcopal office more broadly.<sup>92</sup> If these roles were still prominent, Cyprian did not acknowledge them as such in his treatises or correspondence.

The roles of martyr and confessor, however, provided an even clearer challenge to the authority of the bishop in Cyprian's time than they had in that of Tertullian. The church at Carthage clearly acknowledged that martyrs had the authority to offer forgiveness for the sins of others, but in the aftermath of the Decian persecution the extent of this authority became a point of heated conflict. It was a fluid situation. The confessors

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<sup>89</sup> cf. Shaw, "The Elders of Christian Africa," who cites evidence of it in the fourth century and into Augustine's time.

<sup>90</sup> Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 384; Cyprian's desire to consolidate episcopal power is a prominent claim in Allen Brent, *Cyprian and Roman Carthage* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 286-9.

<sup>91</sup> Cyprian responded to such criticism explicitly on at least one occasion: *Cypr. Ep.* 66.10.1 (*CCSL* 3C:444.177-78): "itaque qui Christo non credit sacerdotem facienti postea credere incipiet sacerdotem uincidanti." It is not entirely clear, however, if these were claims made for his person alone or for the episcopal office more broadly. Cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 382-3.

<sup>92</sup> *Cypr. Ep.* 57.1.2, 2.1, 5.1-2. Pontius continued this portrayal of Cyprian in his *Life of Cyprian*, but this is not conclusive evidence of either position. It may simply have been a faithful portrayal of Cyprian's own claims, or it may suggest that the combination of episcopal and prophetic roles had become widely plausible in Africa.

themselves adopted varying positions towards the relationship between their powers of forgiveness of those of the bishop.<sup>93</sup> Some of the fallen laity agreed to submit to the authority of Cyprian as bishop, while others insisted on immediate reconciliation and looked to the confessors to provide it.<sup>94</sup> Similarly, Cyprian initially acknowledged the particular right of the martyrs to advise the bishop on the cases of specific penitents.<sup>95</sup> But when a separate communion formed around some clergy and martyrs who embraced immediate reconciliation, and when the confessors issued unqualified declaration of forgiveness for all the lapsed, Cyprian moved to limit the authority of the confessors.<sup>96</sup> He interpreted all those who had remained faithfully in the communion of the church as having resisted the devil's temptation and so having publicly witnessed to Christ, thus effectively making them confessors and undercutting the authority that had been particular to the confessors.<sup>97</sup> Cyprian then insisted that while the martyrs would be granted a special role as intercessors, it would only be at the Last Judgment, at which they would serve as advisors to Christ.<sup>98</sup> Until that time, Cyprian asserted, the bishop alone had been empowered to make all such judgments on earth.<sup>99</sup> Thus Cyprian reinterpreted the role of the martyrs in a way that both clarified and narrowed their role and consolidated the authority of the bishop over against that of the martyrs.

There is much more evidence about the roles and practices of the bishop in Cyprian's era than any of the other offices. The bishop was the central figure of the Christian

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<sup>93</sup> *Cypr. Ep.* 15.4; 22.2.1-2; 23.

<sup>94</sup> *Cypr. Ep.* 27.2.1-3.2.

<sup>95</sup> *Cypr. Ep.* 15.

<sup>96</sup> *Cypr. Ep.* 23; 26.

<sup>97</sup> *Cypr. Laps.* 2-3.

<sup>98</sup> Much like Cyprian had imagined they should function as advisors to the bishop in earthly life.

<sup>99</sup> *Cypr. Laps.* 17-20.

community, with responsibility for the community's rituals, discipline, and administration. The bishop was the primary and ordinary minister of the community's rituals of eucharist, baptism, and reconciliation. Other clergy - presbyters and, in emergencies, deacons - could perform these rituals only with the bishop's permission. The bishop was both *episcopus*, or overseer, and *sacerdos*, priest, a title used for the bishop alone.<sup>100</sup> The bishop exercised authority over the Christian community, supervising not only the clergy but also the discipline of the entire community. The symbol of this authority was his *cathedra*, the raised seat from which he presided in the assembly.<sup>101</sup> He was responsible for preaching the gospel in the assembly and otherwise interpreting the scriptures for the Christian community. The bishop was also responsible for administering the material wealth of the community.<sup>102</sup> Thus the bishop stood at the center of the Christian community's life, not simply as a particularly important member of the community but as the central figure of its ritual, moral, and organizational life.

While each bishop stood at the center of his local community, the bishops as a group actively collaborated in leading the church across the provinces of Africa and beyond. The most visible instances of this collaboration were the episcopal synods by which the African bishops set common policy and governed the African church. Such synods had already been a feature of African Christianity before Cyprian's episcopate, but under his leadership and in the aftermath of the Decian persecution the African bishops began to

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<sup>100</sup> cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa* 375n98. Cyprian very clearly laid claim to the tradition of the Israelite priesthood for the Christian bishop. *Cypr. Ep.* 43.7.1; 69.8.1; 73.8.1-2.

<sup>101</sup> *Cypr. Ep.* 73.2.3. cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 387.

<sup>102</sup> On the bishop as patron, cf. Geoffrey D. Dunn, "Cyprian and His Collegae: Patronage and the Episcopal Synod of 252," *Journal of Religious History* 27, no. 1 (February 1, 2003): 1-13; Alistair Stewart-Sykes, "Ordination Rites and Patronage Systems in Third-Century Africa," *Vigiliae Christianae* 56, no. 2 (May 1, 2002): 115-30.

meet on a regular basis.<sup>103</sup> At these meetings they worked out policies regarding such issues as dealing with the lapsed, the status of schismatic clergy, and how to receive converts who had been baptized in schismatic communions.<sup>104</sup> Though they acknowledged the possibility of dissent and differing practice, the African bishops acted as though their assemblies were guided by the Holy Spirit; on at least one occasion they openly doubted whether a dissenting bishop could truly be considered one of their number.<sup>105</sup> Collaboration between bishops was also enacted through a regular practice of episcopal correspondence. Cyprian carried on extensive correspondence with other bishops in Africa and also with the bishops of Rome and bishops as far-flung as Spain and Asia Minor. These letters could be relatively simple responses to particular inquiries, attempts to coordinate responses to difficult issues, or even interventions in the affairs of troubled communities. The periodic synods were thus built upon an ongoing practice of collaboration established by and acted out in the practice of episcopal correspondence.<sup>106</sup> The collaboration of the bishops, not only within Africa but across the (Roman) world, was real and ongoing despite the difficulties of distance.

The processes by which Christian communities handled transitions in the office of bishop highlight the multiple groups to which bishops were accountable. A bishop was simultaneously the head of the local clergy, the leader and central figure of the local

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<sup>103</sup> Cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 386.

<sup>104</sup> cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 386-7.

<sup>105</sup> *Cypr. Ep.* 68.3.2.

<sup>106</sup> cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 384-7. See also Geoffrey D. Dunn, Australian Catholic University, and Centre for Early Christian Studies., *Cyprian and the Bishops of Rome: Questions of Papal Primacy in the Early Church*, Early Christian Studies ;; 11; Variation: Early Christian Studies; 11. (Strathfield, NSW, Australia: St Pauls, 2007), and a series of articles, including (but not limited to): Dunn, "Censuimus : Cyprian and the Episcopal Synod of 253," *Latomus* 63, no. 3 (July 1, 2004): 672-88; "Cyprian and His Collegae: Patronage and the Episcopal Synod of 252," *Journal of Religious History* 27, no. 1 (February 1, 2003): 1-13.

Christian community, and a member of the worldwide body of bishops, and these potentially competing interests are all reflected in the practice attested for the election of a new bishop.<sup>107</sup> The clergy of the local Christian community offered input on the suitability of the candidate.<sup>108</sup> The people of the community accepted or rejected the proposed candidate.<sup>109</sup> A candidate thus approved was installed in office by a gathering of bishops of neighboring Christian communities. Upon his election, a new bishop would write to other bishops to seek their acknowledgement and to establish himself as part of their worldwide network. Thus while it was the local community - both the people and the clergy - who selected a new bishop, it was bishops themselves who inducted a new bishop into his office and whose recognition was required to ratify the selection. This process emphasized that a bishop was simultaneously the head of the local Christian community and a member of the worldwide college of bishops.

A bishop judged guilty of serious sin was removed from office and could never again serve among the clergy. The process for deposing a bishop was much like that of electing one, only in reverse: he was judged by a council of fellow bishops, rejected by the people, and had the recognition of other bishops withdrawn. Such a bishop could be reconciled to the peace of the church after undertaking penance but could no longer serve

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<sup>107</sup> On elections, see: Alexander Evers, *Church, Cities, and People: A Study of the Plebs in the Church and Cities of Roman Africa in Late Antiquity* (Leuven; Walpole, Mass.: Peeters, 2010); Peter Norton, *Episcopal Elections 250-600: Hierarchy and Popular Will in Late Antiquity* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Stewart-Sykes, "Ordination Rites and Patronage Systems in Third-Century Africa"

<sup>108</sup> cf. *Cypr. Ep.* 55.8.4.

<sup>109</sup> *Cypr. Ep.* 59.5.2; 67.5.1. These two groups did not always agree; such was the case in the election of Cyprian, and in that instance the will of the people prevailed over that of the majority of the presbyters. *Vita Cypr.* 5 and *Cypr. Ep.* 43.1.2. cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 376.

as clergy.<sup>110</sup> Cyprian explained that a bishop guilty of such sin was no longer able to represent the Christian community before God; that God would not hear his prayers;<sup>111</sup> and that he had lost the Holy Spirit and could no longer sanctify the waters of baptism or the eucharistic offering.<sup>112</sup> A congregation that refused to reject such a bishop - or, by implication, colleagues that refused to do the same - would share in his sin and so in God's condemnation.<sup>113</sup> A bishop who had committed such serious sin could no longer serve as the leader and central figure of the Christian community, even after reconciliation.

### *Cyprian's Ecclesiology*

African Christians in Cyprian's time retained the basic understanding of the church evident in Tertullian's time, but the pressures of the Decian persecution and Cyprian's leadership led to significant modifications and shifts in emphasis. African Christians, including Cyprian, continued to identify the church by its commitment to Christ and its rejection of the idolatrous world around it;<sup>114</sup> continued to insist that the church was the mediator of holiness and salvation;<sup>115</sup> and continued to emphasize

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<sup>110</sup> *Cypr. Ep.* 67.6.3; 65.1.1-2. cf. 64.1.1, which explicitly refers to a presbyter rather than a bishop. The practice of penance for clergy will be discussed in greater length in chapter four.

<sup>111</sup> *Cypr. Ep.* 67.2.2.

<sup>112</sup> *Cypr. Ep.* 65.2.2, 4.1; 66.5.1-2.

<sup>113</sup> "*Cypr. Laps.* 6-7; *Ep.* 65.3.1-3; 67.3.1-2. In these cases, the conflict was over allowing a return to office by bishops who had failed. Cf. *Cypr. Ep.* 67.5.4, 6.3, 9.1-3.

<sup>114</sup> So, for example, Cyprian references the importance of not even looking at idols or hearing the edicts requiring sacrifice to them being read. *Cypr. Ep.* 58.9.2. In *Hab. Virg.* 1, Cyprian describes the church's purity as its bond of faith, and in that treatise virgins are portrayed as the "living embodiment of the nature of the Church in its purity." Cf. Geoffrey D. Dunn, "Infected Sheep and Diseased Cattle, or the Pure and Holy Flock: Cyprian's Pastoral Care of Virgins," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11, no. 1 (March 1, 2003), 2.

<sup>115</sup> A belief that was part of the baptismal interrogation relayed by Cyprian: "Do you believe in the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting through the holy Church?" *Cypr. Ep.* 69.7.2. Tertullian, as we have

baptism as the way by which one entered that community.<sup>116</sup> In line with Tertullian's episcopal opponent (but decidedly contrary to Tertullian himself), Cyprian asserted that the power to forgive sins in baptism and reconciliation and otherwise mediate the sanctification of the Christian community was held exclusively by the bishop. Over the course of the Decian persecution and the response to it by the Christian community at Carthage, Cyprian strengthened that claim and offered a thoroughly developed theory to support it as one of several modifications to African ecclesiology in response to the trauma of the Decian persecution and its aftermath.

The Decian persecution was traumatic to the Christians of North Africa not only because of the violence to which it subjected some Christians, but also because it called into question the Christian communities' fidelity and commitment to Christ. Many Christians willingly offered sacrifice in accordance with the imperial edict, while others hid or avoided sacrifice through some other kind of compromise.<sup>117</sup> A relative few confessed their faith in Christ publicly and so suffered for it, and even fewer died as martyrs.<sup>118</sup> Though the African churches had identified their commitment to Christ above all in their opposition to and purity from the idolatry of the world, they had, in fact, failed *en masse* to resist such idolatry, challenging their very self-understanding as the church.

In Cyprian's community at Carthage the tensions arising from this failure led to a division of the Christian community into competing factions. Many of those who had

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seen, argued that salvation was possible for penitents outside the communion of the church through the church's intercession. Tert. *Pud.* 13.12, 18.18, 19.6.

<sup>116</sup> In *De Lapsis* 7, baptism is portrayed as an oath to Christ (*sacramentum Christi*) in the context of describing the Christian life as a battle against the idolatry enunciated in the edicts to sacrifice.

<sup>117</sup> For detailed treatments of the responses to the edict by Carthaginian Christians, Cf. Brent, *Cyprian and Roman Carthage*, 223-247, and Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, 17-24.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Cypr. *Ep.* 22; Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 19.



failed immediately sought the reconciliation and peace of the church and turned to the martyrs and confessors as mediators in order to intercede and secure the peace of the church for them.<sup>119</sup> While Cyprian acknowledged the martyrs and confessors as having some form of intercessory role for penitents, he insisted that no one could be reconciled to the church until the persecutions had ended, the full community could gather in peace to deliberate, and those who had failed in the persecution had undergone an adequate penance.<sup>120</sup> For some of the “lapsed,” this was not enough; with the patronage of the martyrs and confessors, they pressed the clergy for immediate reconciliation, in some cases without any process of penance at all. As a high-profile figure in Carthage, Cyprian had fled the persecution, and in his absence a communion formed around these insistent “lapsed” and the martyrs, confessors, and clergy who supported them. Other Christians in Carthage insisted that only by upholding its commitment to Christ and maintaining its purity from the contamination of idolatry could the church exercise its intercessory role and so be of any benefit to those who had fallen – or to anyone else.<sup>121</sup> Thus three different communions eventually emerged in Carthage: the “laxists,” who advocated readmitting the lapsed immediately by virtue of the reconciling power of the martyrs and confessors and in affirmation of the necessity of the church’s communion for salvation; the “rigorists,” who insisted on permanently excluding all those guilty of sacrifice in order to preserve the church’s holiness in purity from idolatry and so the efficacy of its intercession; and those who remained loyal to Cyprian as bishop. Cyprian responded to

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<sup>119</sup> A role that, as we have seen, was already claimed for and by martyrs and confessors in Tertullian’s time and was already controversial in that time as well.

<sup>120</sup> *Cypr. Ep.* 19.2.2.

<sup>121</sup> A position associated with Novatism and reminiscent of that forwarded by Tertullian.

this situation by advocating a limited program of penance and reconciliation and reasserting the exclusive authority of the bishop to reconcile sinners, forgive sins, and exercise the sanctifying powers of the church.

In response to the failure of the Christian community and the resulting schism, Cyprian worked to redefine the fundamental characteristic of the church's holiness and fidelity to Christ as its unity rather than its purity and rejection of idolatry. This unity was focused on the bishop, who alone had the authority and power to forgive sins and sanctify the Christian community. Those who broke communion with their bishop broke communion with the church itself and thereby lost any hope of forgiveness, sanctification, or salvation.

Cyprian consistently interpreted the persecution as allowed by God in order to discipline and purify the church. For Cyprian, the most important issue in the aftermath of the persecutions was to respond in accordance to this divine purpose.<sup>122</sup> For those who had failed, this meant undergoing penance for their failure and submitting to the discipline and authority of the church as exercised by the bishop. What was essential was remaining within the community of the church. It was there that sinners could act out repentance and there – and there alone – that forgiveness and sanctification were possible. By interpreting the persecution as a call to renewed commitment and discipline, Cyprian could focus response to it on remaining in unity with the church of the bishop and submitting to the church's penitential discipline. Unity itself could become a mark of fidelity.

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<sup>122</sup> *Cypr. Ep.* 11.1.1-5.3. cf. Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, 133-7.

In the face of the division of the Christian community at Carthage, Cyprian insisted that the unity of the church was unassailable and could not fail. Those who split off into other communions, no matter their reasons, did not divide the church but only removed themselves from its peace, communion, and salvation.<sup>123</sup> Cyprian reinforced this position in *De Unitate* through appeal to a series of scriptural texts which he applied to the church in its unity and indivisibility: it was like the seamless robe of Christ which remained undivided;<sup>124</sup> it was prefigured in the house of Rahab, the sole place in which the saved were gathered,<sup>125</sup> and in the Passover, in which the Paschal lamb (here applied to the Eucharistic meal) was only to be eaten inside a single home.<sup>126</sup> Just like the Ark of Noah, those found outside would perish.<sup>127</sup> This unity ultimately derived from the divine unity and stability. The church could no more be divided than the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit could be.<sup>128</sup> Those who left did not divide the church but rather turned against God and so lost all hope of salvation.

This indivisible church was always that communion gathered around its bishop. Applying the words of Christ in John 10:16 to the church and its bishop, Cyprian insisted that there could only be one church and one bishop in any place: “Does anyone think that in any one place there can be more than one shepherd or more than one flock?”<sup>129</sup>

Cyprian insisted that the election of a bishop was an expression of the will of God and

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<sup>123</sup> Cypr. *Unit.* 6-9

<sup>124</sup> Cypr. *Unit.* 7.

<sup>125</sup> Cypr. *Unit.* 8.

<sup>126</sup> Cypr. *Unit.* 8.

<sup>127</sup> Cypr. *Unit.* 6. Cf. *Ep.* 74.11.3.

<sup>128</sup> Cypr. *Unit.* 6 “Does anyone think that this oneness, which derives from the stability of God [*de divina firmitate*] and is welded together after the celestial pattern, can be sundered in the Church and divided by the clash of wills?”

<sup>129</sup> Cypr. *Unit.* 8. Cf. John 10:16: “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”

that only the bishop possessed the power to forgive sins and sanctify the church.<sup>130</sup> Therefore those who separated from the communion gathered around the bishop – in other words, the competing “schismatic” communions in Carthage – separated themselves from the true church, placed themselves in opposition to God, and cut themselves off from the only source of forgiveness, sanctification, and the hope of salvation. Outside the church there could be no salvation.

Cyprian eventually moved to include all the penitent in Eucharistic communion, even those guilty of idolatry and apostasy, despite the perceived risk to the purity of the church. In order to incorporate all of these penitent sinners – many of whom were of dubious commitment to Christ in the eyes of their fellow Christians – without jeopardizing the holiness and purity of the church, Cyprian differentiated between different classes within the Christian community. The bishop(s) alone possessed the power to forgive sins and to sanctify in the community’s rituals of baptism, eucharist, and reconciliation.<sup>131</sup> With this power came the personal responsibility to guard the purity and fidelity necessary to continue to possess it. As long as this power was active in the church’s sanctifying rituals, laity with a wide range of levels of faith and commitment could be included in the church’s communion. This modification was a response to the pastoral needs of the Christians of Carthage that built on the popular belief that participation in the Eucharistic communion of the church was necessary for salvation.

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<sup>130</sup> This theme will be developed in more detail *infra*.

<sup>131</sup> A power that was then delegated to the presbyters and deacons. Cf. *infra*.

This perceived necessity of communion helped prompt both a more open penitential policy and a reification of the powers of the bishop.<sup>132</sup>

The theology which Cyprian articulated in response to the crisis in the Carthaginian church was crystallized in a series of scriptural images. On more than one occasion, Cyprian applied texts from *Song of Songs* to the church, as in letter 69, where he specified that the Holy Spirit was speaking in the person of Christ about the church: “My dove, my perfect one, is but one...an enclosed garden is my sister, my bride, a sealed fountain, a well of living water.”<sup>133</sup> These scriptural images were deeply appropriate for expressing Cyprian’s ecclesiology and would have a long lifespan of ecclesiological interpretation in North Africa. For Cyprian, the church was indeed an enclosed or sealed community: only those who had forsaken the idolatry of the surrounding world, committed themselves to Christ, and been baptized could enter in. Within the boundaries of the church there was indeed a fountain of living water, the sanctifying power operative not only in baptism but in the Eucharistic offering and rituals of reconciliation as well. This sanctifying power did not circulate freely among all members of the church; it flowed from the bishop through the community’s rituals to the rest of the church. All those who were outside the ritual and social boundaries of the church lacked access to the forgiveness and sanctification of God mediated through the one true church by its one true bishop. Outside the church there was no salvation. For Cyprian this had everything to do with alienation from the bishop as the agent of God’s

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<sup>132</sup> Cf. Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*.

<sup>133</sup> Cypr. *Ep.* 69.2.1. cf. *Ep.* 74.11.2.

power. This is the context for Cyprian's theology of the bishop, which I will now develop in more detail.

### *Cyprian's Theology of the Bishop*

As we have seen, Cyprian insisted that outside the communion of the church gathered around its bishop there could be no holiness or salvation. This insistence on the bishop as the ultimate and sole earthly mediator of God's redeeming and sanctifying power entailed a refashioning of the theology of the episcopacy and an amplification of the bishop's authority, and this is evident in Cyprian's understanding of the selection of bishops. Cyprian insisted that bishops were not simply elected officers but were, in truth, divinely appointed and empowered leaders. Though the actual practice of episcopal elections took into account the desires of the people of the local Christian community, their clergy, and neighboring bishops,<sup>134</sup> Cyprian interpreted this process as simply the working out of God's will. God's choice was prior and determinative. The vote of the people and concurrence of the bishops conformed to and made manifest God's will, but it was God who made bishops, not the people nor other bishops.<sup>135</sup> Because of this fact, the people of the Christian community were to be entirely subject to the authority of their bishop. To oppose the bishop was to oppose God.<sup>136</sup>

As the divinely appointed leader of the local Christian community, Cyprian was willing to describe the bishop as acting in the place of Christ. The bishop as *vici Christi*

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<sup>134</sup> Cf. *supra*.

<sup>135</sup> Cypr. *Unit. Ep.* 59.5.2-3; 66.1.1-2; 68.2.1. In *Ep.* 43.1.3, Cyprian refers to the votes of the people as being divinely inspired.

<sup>136</sup> Cypr. *Unit. Ep.* 59.5.1-3.

extended to a wide range of roles for the bishop: from administrative (*praepositum* and *gubernatorem*)<sup>137</sup> to pastoral (*pastorem*) and, most prominently, hieratic or sacerdotal (*antistitem* and *sacerdotem*).<sup>138</sup> Thus while the most important roles for Cyprian were clearly those connected to the church's sanctifying rituals, the roles of judge and priest, it was not only while performing these ritual functions that the bishop acted in the place of Christ. That is, it was not only a ritually assumed role, but rather an expression of the place of authority given to the bishop by God.

Central to Cyprian's construal of the bishop was his role as priest, *sacerdos*, a role that drew on the liturgical practice of the community and which emphasized the bishop as a mediator between the church and God. Cyprian repeatedly applied the language of priesthood drawn from the Old Testament to Christian bishops. This use of priestly language for the rituals and officers of the Christian church was by no means unique to Cyprian; as we have seen, it was evident in Tertullian, though Tertullian applied it to all Christian males. However it assumed a new prominence and centrality in Cyprian's rhetoric, such that it could be seen as the constitutive aspect of the bishop's role. Part of the reason for this prominence was its usefulness as a polemical tool against the leaders of the other communions in Carthage. Cyprian made frequent recourse to scriptural texts that proclaimed judgment against those who rebelled against God's appointed priests,

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<sup>137</sup> It is noteworthy here, I think, that Cyprian uses "*gubernatorem*" rather than "*rector*," as becomes common in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Though the origin of this usage is by no means secure, it is most evident in Damasus in mid-4<sup>th</sup> c. Rome.

<sup>138</sup> Cypr. *Unit. Ep.* 66.5.1.

above all those texts referring to the condemnation of Core, Dathan, and Abiron.<sup>139</sup> These textual citations frequently connected rebellion against God's appointed priestly leaders with illegitimate exercise of ritual functions.<sup>140</sup> This brought together two essential aspects of the priestly role of the bishop according to Cyprian: the bishop was both the divinely appointed leader of the community and the only one authorized and endowed with the power to perform its rituals. Both were axiomatic for Cyprian and were also pointed critiques of his opponents, who were both opposing him and performing baptism, eucharist, and reconciliation apart from him. However, Cyprian's construal of the bishop as priest is not simply a function of his polemic against his opponents. It is fundamental to the role the bishop serves in the church. This priestly role is ultimately patterned on that of Christ as the Great High Priest, above all in the Eucharistic offering.<sup>141</sup> Thus to describe the bishop as priest is not only to assert his authority and ritual power, but also to emphasize his unique role as a mediator who acts in the place of Christ in the Christian community.

Cyprian likewise emphasized that the bishop exercised judgment in the place of Christ, a judgment displayed most prominently in overseeing the penitential discipline of the church. Cyprian frequently cast the power and authority of the bishop in judicial

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<sup>139</sup> Cf. Numbers 16:1ff. Cf. also Lev. 10:1ff., in which Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, offered "unholy" and uncommanded fire before the Lord and were killed, which Cyprian references in *Ep.* 73.8.1-2; and Deut. 17:12, cited in *Ep.* 43.7.1.

<sup>140</sup> cf. *Cypr. Ep.* 73.8.1: "We claim that all things have been divinely ordered according to a definite law and particular ordinance: no one, therefore, can simply usurp for himself, in opposition to the bishops and priests something that is not within his right or power. Hence, Core, Dathan, and Abiron tried to usurp for themselves, in opposition to Moses and Aaron the priest, the privilege of offering sacrifice, but their reckless and unlawful attempt did not go unpunished. So also the sons of Aaron, who placed alien fire upon the altar, perished forthwith before the eyes of their watchful Lord. That same punishment awaits those who bring alien water to their false baptism."

<sup>141</sup> *Cypr. Ep.* 63.14.4. "That priest truly serves in Christ's place who imitates what Christ did and he offers up a true and complete sacrifice to God the Father."



terms, such that it could serve as an all-encompassing term for the role of the bishop: “...in the church there is but one bishop and judge who acts in Christ’s stead for the time being.”<sup>142</sup> As with the language of the priesthood, the rhetoric of bishop as judge was frequently employed polemically against Cyprian’s opponents in Carthage: heresies and schisms were said to arise from those who do not recognize and submit to the authority of their bishop,<sup>143</sup> and those who sought to judge bishops rather than accepting their judgment were in fact placing themselves as judge over God and Christ.<sup>144</sup> The bishop stood in the place of Christ, again not only in his ritual functions but in his exercise of authority over the Christian community.<sup>145</sup>

Nevertheless the language of judgment was applied above all to the bishop’s authority to judge penitence and readmit excommunicated sinners to the peace and communion of the church. The bishop alone exercised the power to bind and loose sins, a power granted to the apostles and their successors, the bishops.<sup>146</sup> Though in practice he did not exercise this power apart from the influence of the other members of the church, Cyprian claimed the exclusive right to reconcile penitents.<sup>147</sup> While Cyprian claimed that he acted in the place of Christ in judging repentance, he also recognized a distinction

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<sup>142</sup> *Cypr. Ep.* 59.5.1. *unus in ecclesia ad tempus sacerdos et ad tempus iudex vice Christi.* cf. *Ep.* 3, 73.3.2, 66.3.2, *Sent.* Allen Brent has argued that Cyprian’s understanding of the authority of the bishop and of church order more broadly was decisively shaped by the pagan culture of third century Carthage, including specifically the “Roman jurisprudential principle of legitimate authority exercised within a sacred boundary spatially and geographically defined.” Brent, *Cyprian and Roman Carthage*, 1.

<sup>143</sup> *Cypr. Ep.* 59.5.1.

<sup>144</sup> *Cypr. Ep.* 66.4.2, citing Luke 10:16: “He who despises you despises me and Him who sent me.”

<sup>145</sup> In *Ep.* 66.3.2, Cyprian described the bishop as “the judge whom God has appointed for the time being” and then went on to describe his own work as serving fellow Christians and giving an individual welcome to all who come into the church. These are offered as evidence of Cyprian’s humility against his opponents, but they also serve as evidence of the breadth of activities that might fall under the bishop’s exercise of “judgment.”

<sup>146</sup> Cf. *infra*.

<sup>147</sup> *Cypr. Ep.* 59.15.1-4. Cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 329.

between his and his fellow bishops' judgment and that of Christ. The bishops' judgment was provisional. They had been appointed to judge in Christ's place on earth for the present time, but their judgments would be reviewed by Christ at the last judgment.

The provisional nature of the bishops' judgment applied only to the sins that they loosed. Those whom they judged to be inadequately repentant and so bound or retained their sins would not have the benefit of a review by Christ; they had already been judged, and that judgment would be honored in heaven. Those whose sins were loosed would have to appear before Christ to be fully and finally judged. This was an acknowledgment that bishops could and did err in their judgment. They could only rely on outward appearances, and some who seemed outwardly repentant may in fact not have been. But since God is able to judge hearts, no sinners could ultimately escape a just judgment.<sup>148</sup> This distinction between the powers to bind and loose was itself an expression and outgrowth of the belief in North Africa that participation in the communion of the church was necessary for salvation. If only those in the communion of the church could be saved, there was significant incentive to reconcile those undergoing penance even if the community harbored doubts about their ultimately sincerity.<sup>149</sup> The bishops could afford a degree of lenience because nothing could escape the judgment of God. This final judgment of God also, at least theoretically, served as a check on the unassailable

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<sup>148</sup> "If He finds the sinner's repentance to have been fully and satisfactorily completed, then He can ratify the verdict which we have determined here on earth. If, on the other hand, we have been fooled by someone's sham repentance, God, who is not mocked and who can see into the hearts of men, will pass judgment on matters which we have discerned ourselves but imperfectly, and the Lord will emend the sentence of His servants." *Cypr. Ep.* 55.18.1. cf. 57.3.3.

<sup>149</sup> *Cypr. Ep.* 57.1.1. "...as they departed from this world they should not, therefore, be sent on to the Lord deprived of reconciliation and communion." This was reflected in the practice of deathbed reconciliation cf. *Ep.* 18.2.1; 8.3.1; 20.3.1-2; 55.13.1; 19.2.1; cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 320; Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, 40, 71-2. It was also the rationale given for large-scale reconciliation of all those undergoing penance when rumors of renewed persecution spread. cf. *Cypr. Ep.* 57.2.

authority of bishops, for they too would be judged. If they were too harsh, they would be responsible to God for those they had thus lost.<sup>150</sup> The bishop acted as judge in the place of Christ in this life, but he would answer for his judgments to Christ in the next.

The power that the bishops exercised in the place of Christ was theirs alone. It could be delegated to the presbyters and deacons but it did not thereby become their own prerogative. For example, Cyprian commissioned the presbyters to celebrate the eucharist with the confessors in prison, but he also threatened to rescind their authorization to celebrate.<sup>151</sup> This reflected the pastoral and ritual practice of the church in Carthage, but Burns has shown how Cyprian attached theological or “cosmic” significance to these particularities of practice, thus reifying the distinctions between different groups within the Carthaginian church.<sup>152</sup> By insisting that these distinctions in spiritual and ritual power had their origin in God rather than in the social organization of the Carthaginian church, Cyprian could further consolidate the sanctifying powers of church in the person of the bishop. Thus he could claim that the power of the confessors and martyrs to confess Christ in the face of persecution was itself given by God through the eucharistic communion of the church and so dependent on the ministry of the bishop.<sup>153</sup> He could likewise argue that the communions that had broken fellowship with him were making claims to powers that they simply did not and could not have, even if they were free from

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<sup>150</sup> Cf. *Cypr. Ep.* 59.14.2. They would also be judged for failure to warn the people of their sins, *Ep.* 16.3.1. The notion that the judgment of bishops was answerable to God alone would show up prominently in later African Christianity, most notably at the “Council” of Circa in c. 306.

<sup>151</sup> *Cypr. Ep.* 5.2.1; 16.4.2.

<sup>152</sup> Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*.

<sup>153</sup> *Cypr. Ep.* 57.4.1-2.

the contamination of idolatry.<sup>154</sup> As the one and only person who acted in the place of Christ in the church, the exercise of all the powers that were entailed in that role were the bishop's alone, regardless of what role others might play in the actual practices of the church.

The theory that Cyprian elaborated to support this claim of unique powers for the bishops cast them as heirs of the apostles and of the powers given them by Christ himself. Cyprian first appealed to Peter as the symbol and exemplar of all bishops. In commissioning Peter, Cyprian argued, Christ had established the office of bishop; Peter was the first bishop.<sup>155</sup> Cyprian claimed that the bishops of each and every local church were, individually, successors of Peter.<sup>156</sup> Thus when Christ stated that Peter was the rock on which the church would be built this was not a reference to Peter personally but to Peter as bishop; the bishop was to be the foundation upon whom each local church was built.<sup>157</sup> In this way the claim that the bishop occupied a unique position and possessed unique powers was grounded directly in Christ's commission to Peter.

At the same time, Peter also served as a symbol of the unity of the episcopate as a whole. Cyprian insisted that though each bishop acted in the place of Christ in the local assembly, all bishops exercised a single power. When Christ had commissioned Peter to "feed my sheep," this was an indication that there was a single flock even though it was served by many pastors, the bishops.<sup>158</sup> Though each was responsible for his own congregation, individual bishops did not possess discrete powers that they could exercise

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<sup>154</sup> Cypr. *Ep.* 69.10.1, which was directed against the "Novatianists."

<sup>155</sup> Cypr. *Ep.* 33.1.1, 43.5.2; cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 394.

<sup>156</sup> Cypr. *Ep.* 33.1.1; 43.5.2.

<sup>157</sup> Cypr. *Ep.* 66.8.3; 70.3.1.

<sup>158</sup> Cypr. *Unit.* 4.

apart from the worldwide church. In expounding this claim Cyprian distinguished between the various gospel narratives of the giving of the authority to bind and loose. Cyprian first appealed to the giving of this authority to Peter alone as evidence that the power to bind and loose was a single power. Only then did he appeal to the granting of the power to all the disciplines, arguing that this indicated that this single power was to be held and exercised jointly.<sup>159</sup> Just as Peter was the first bishop, the apostles were the first college of bishops.<sup>160</sup> Thus the powers that each bishop exercised in his own church were in fact a single power, granted by the gift of the Holy Spirit to the apostles as the first college of bishops and passed on to all those who became members of the society of bishops. It could not be divided nor exercised outside the fellowship of bishops. This understanding of the bishops as constituting a single society responsible for the guidance of the worldwide church was reflected in the practices of collaboration that were a regular part of episcopal practice.<sup>161</sup>

The unique powers that Cyprian ascribed to the bishops alone meant that a bishop who committed a major sin posed a significant threat – not only to himself but to his congregation, the college of bishops, and potentially even the worldwide church. Bishops possessed the power to sanctify as a special gift of the Holy Spirit, so those who lost the Holy Spirit through their sin could no longer be conduits of the sanctifying power for their congregations.<sup>162</sup> Moreover, those who knew of such a bishop's sin and did not reject him would be complicit in and contaminated by his sin. Cyprian applied this same

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<sup>159</sup> *Cypr. Unit. eccl.* 4 (RT).

<sup>160</sup> *Cypr. Unit.* 4-5; *Ep.* 33.1.1; 43.5.2.

<sup>161</sup> cf. *supra*.

<sup>162</sup> *Cypr. Ep.* 65.4.1; 72.2.1-2.

principle to the college of bishops: if other bishops became aware of the sin of one of their fellows and yet continued to collaborate with him and recognize his ministry, Cyprian treated this as a willing participation in his sin. Thus, theoretically, the failure of a single bishop could contaminate the holiness of the college of bishops; and if their congregations did not, in turn, reject these complicit bishops, it could contaminate their congregations as well.

### **Conclusion**

Both Tertullian and Cyprian bear witness to an ongoing conflict in North African Christianity over the nature and basis of the powers of the clergy and their relationship to other roles within the church. Though they offer quite different solutions to these issues, they clearly worked within the same tradition. Tertullian consistently resisted the notion that the sanctifying power at work in rituals such as baptism, eucharist, and reconciliation was exercised on the basis of formal office. He rejected the claims of a bishop that the power to forgive sins and adjust penitential practices rested on his episcopal office; he likewise rejected the claims of martyrs to possess a personal power to forgive the sins of others. Such power, Tertullian argued, was God's alone. All those who had received the Holy Spirit could, if necessary, exercise the Holy Spirit's sanctifying power. This led him to argue that the laity could, in an emergency, baptize. The same principle was also at work during his period of involvement with the New Prophecy movement. Such power belonged to the Holy Spirit, which is why only those who followed the discipline revealed by the Holy Spirit could exercise it.

Tertullian's view was not the only one in his time, of course, and Cyprian provides evidence that it was the perspective of his episcopal opponent that prevailed. Much like Tertullian's episcopal opponent, Cyprian argued that he and the other bishops possessed the church's sanctifying power on the basis of their episcopal office. The theory he articulated to defend and advance this claim, however, shows that the terms of the debate remained fundamentally the same from those of Tertullian's time. Like Tertullian, Cyprian identified the sanctifying power of the church with the work of the Holy Spirit, insisted that it was held and exercised by individuals, and like Tertullian held that maintenance of this gift by individuals required submission to a particular discipline. However, whereas Tertullian had acknowledged the reality of a differentiation of roles within the church but denied that it had any relationship to the gift of the Spirit or the possession of sanctifying power, Cyprian made precisely the opposite move, interpreting differences of social position within the church as indicating fundamental differences in spiritual power. The bishops were not only holders of an important office; they were the holders of the power necessary to preserve the holiness of the church, the bearers of a unique gift of the Holy Spirit. In making this argument, Cyprian not only consolidated his own power but also provided a rationale for the inclusion of penitent idolaters of dubious fidelity that upheld basic North African ecclesiological commitments about the necessity both of the church's communion for salvation and of the church's purity and commitment to Christ.

The theory that Cyprian articulated to rationalize and consolidate the practical authority of the bishops came to dominate in North African Christianity. It offered a

powerful explanation for a series of claims and practices that dated at least to the time of Tertullian, and the North African bishops of Cyprian time and after seem to have found it persuasive and, likely, productive, given its reification of their own power and prerogatives. But it was not without its difficulties. Its internal tensions and potential weaknesses came to the fore in the aftermath of the next major crisis in the African church, the Diocletian persecution.



## CHAPTER II

### DONATIST THEOLOGIES OF EPISCOPAL MINISTRY AND THE HERITAGE OF CYPRIAN

Arguments about the clergy and their ministry were prominent in the conflict between the African communions after the schism early in the fourth century, and this point of disagreement has come to be a prominent way in which the conflict has been understood by modern scholars. No doubt this is at least partially due to the bias of our sources, for most of the back and forth has come down to us in Caecilianist texts. The image of the Donatist bishops and their self-understanding that emerges from these Caecilianist sources, particularly Optatus and Augustine, is that of a coterie of clerics convinced of their own sanctity and even sinlessness, insistent on their authority and the exclusiveness of their ritual powers, and nonetheless known to be guilty of all manner of sins. That is, in the portrayals of Optatus and Augustine, they were vain, prideful hypocrites. Though few scholars would put it so baldly today, the overall contours of these would-be descriptions continue to influence accounts of Donatist bishops.

Of course these were not descriptions but rather polemical attacks. Still, Donatist bishops did in fact make claims about their particular sanctity, their unique ritual powers, and their authority over the church. However, these claims were all part of their continuing commitment to a Cyprianic framework for the theology and practice of the office of bishop. The Caecilianist constructions of Donatist bishops were polemical distortions of continued Donatist commitment to this Cyprianic framework.

In order to demonstrate this, I will begin by briefly considering the Caecilianist polemical characterization of the Donatist bishops. I will then examine two different Donatist perspectives on the role of the bishop and of episcopal sanctity. The first is the *Passio Marculi*, which in the middle of the fourth century presented the bishop-martyr Marculus as an ideal construction of a Donatist bishop and put him forward for emulation by Donatist clergy. The second is Parmenian of Carthage, the African primate under whose leadership the Donatist bishops returned from exile and who led the Donatists through a period of growth, stabilization, and establishment in the mainstream of African religious life in the last third of the fourth century. These are not the only possible sources for a Donatist theology of clerical ministry, nor are they the only Donatist perspectives. But they will serve the purpose of this chapter, which is to show that across the fourth century Donatists continued to imagine their bishops to possess distinct ritual powers, ecclesial authority, and personal sanctity, and that this was a continuation of the heritage of Cyprian.

This chapter is not a comprehensive account of the Donatist theology of the episcopal ministry, let alone of clerical ministry more broadly. Such an account is necessary. Our understanding of Donatist theology has advanced along with our understanding of the distortions of Donatist theology and practice in hostile sources. However, this shift in our understanding of the division of African Christianity has not yet produced a comprehensive revision of the Donatist understanding of the clerical ministry. Such a revision would, unlike earlier approaches, treat Donatism as a diverse and dynamic tradition, which both changed its understanding and practice over time and

included a spectrum of differing opinions on any given issue, including the theology of the ministry. It would take into account our increased awareness of the diversity of sources for understanding Donatism: not only polemical treatises but also martyrdom accounts, archaeological and material remains, and, especially, the collections of anonymous Donatist sermons that are only now beginning to receive serious scholarly attention. Such an account, while desirable, is neither necessary for my purposes here nor within the scope of this chapter.

### **Caecilianist Constructions of Donatist Bishops**

An important aspect of the polemic of Optatus and, later, Augustine was their portrayal of Donatist bishops. Beyond the general character assassination that was part and parcel of such polemical and heresiological works, both Caecilianist authors drew on a similar repertoire of accusations and slanders in order to construct a very particular image of Donatist bishops as being prideful, claiming perfect sanctity, arrogating to themselves prerogatives that belong to God alone, and so ultimately being hypocrites. This particular repertoire of accusations served to caricature for polemical advantage Donatist beliefs about the role of the bishop in the Christian community, beliefs that had deep roots in the theology of Cyprian and third-century African Christianity. My primary focus here will be on Optatus, who developed this repertoire of accusations, although it was Augustine who sharpened it into a finely pointed doctrinal argument.

The first of this cluster of accusations was that the Donatist bishops were guilty of excessive pride. It is a charge that Optatus introduced at the outset of his second book,

in which he proposed to examine the nature of the one true church which, he asserted, was “that whose sanctity is gathered from the sacraments, not weighed by the pride of individuals.”<sup>1</sup> This dichotomy is key to understanding Optatus’ use of the accusation of pride; it is not simply an accusation of personal vice but a characterization of a Donatist sacramental theory that emphasized the importance of the bishop in the efficacy of the church’s sanctifying rituals. This is why Optatus contrasted what he described as a sanctity that relied on the sacraments (his characterization of his communion’s practice) with a sanctity that relied on “the pride of individuals,” that is, on the holders of episcopal office. Optatus repeated this accusation of pride throughout his treatise and especially in book two.<sup>2</sup> Augustine picked up on this charge and likewise used it throughout his anti-Donatist polemical works.<sup>3</sup>

Both Optatus and Augustine further specified the charge of pride by accusing the Donatist bishops of claiming to be sinless and perfectly holy. Optatus repeatedly linked this accusation with that of pride, as again in book two: "How does it come about, then, that in your pride you claim this perfect sanctity for yourselves?"<sup>4</sup> Optatus suggested that this holiness and sinlessness were part of the self-representation of the Donatist bishops; it was not only part of their self-understanding but also how they portrayed themselves to

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<sup>1</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.1.2 (SC 412:236): “Ergo ecclesia una est, cuius sanctitas de sacramentis colligitur, non de personarum superbia ponderatur.” English translations of Optatus are those of *Optatus Against the Donatists*, trans. Mark Edwards, Translated Texts for Historians (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> cf. Optat. *Parm.* 2.1 and 2.20, among others.

<sup>3</sup> cf. Aug. *Parm.* 2.7.13, 3.4.25.

<sup>4</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.20.3 (SC 412:282): “Vnde est ergo quod uobis perfectam sanctitatem de superbia uindicatis?”

their congregations.<sup>5</sup> He noted that this portrayal was especially connected to their granting of forgiveness of sins.<sup>6</sup> Though Optatus framed this as further evidence of audacious Donatist pride, the holiness of bishops was part of the sacramental theology articulated in the third century by Cyprian. This is a connection that Optatus chose to obscure, of course, since it behooved him to transform a traditional African concern with the role of the bishop in the working of the sacraments into a case of spiritual pride.

The Caecilianist polemicists further caricatured the Donatist bishops by portraying them as putting themselves in the place of God in their usurpation of divine prerogatives. These accusations often targeted Donatist ritual practices, especially baptism and penance.<sup>7</sup> Through these consistent calumnies, Optatus framed traditional African beliefs and practices about the role of the bishop in sacramental rituals as a Donatist usurpation of divine authority. Augustine continued this theme and made it one of the key talking points of his anti-Donatist works.

Once the Caecilianists had built an image of Donatist bishops as making claims to perfect sanctity and divine power, the stage was set to portray them as hypocrites. This was a tactic that Augustine in particular used to great effect, particularly in *Contra*

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<sup>5</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.20.1 (SC 412:280): “Etiam uos ipsis, qui sancti et innocents uideri ab hominibus uultis, dicite: unde est ista sanctitas quam uobis licentious usurpatis?” “Tell us yourselves, as you wish people to think you holy and innocent, where is that sanctity which you freely arrogate to yourselves?”

<sup>6</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.20.4, 5 (SC 412:282): “Cum enim seductis aliquos, promittitis uos indulgentiam peccatorum esse daturos, et cum uultis donare peccata, uestram profitemini innocentiam et remissionem peccatorum sic datis, quasi nullum habeatis ipsi peccatum!...Quid uocaris dum peccata confiteris tua? Si sanctus es dum dimittis aliena?” “For when you delude others, you promise that you will give indulgence for their sins, and, though your intent is to condone sins, you profess your innocence and give remission of sins as though you yourselves had no sin... What are you called when you confess your own sins, if you are holy when you forgive those of others?”

<sup>7</sup> cf. Optat. *Parm.* 2.10. On penance, 2.5, “you arrogate the keys of heaven for yourself;” 2.25.2 “Why do you invade the power of another, why are you so rash as to step up to God’s tribunal;” on baptism, 2.10, “No minister of this, being a man, would claim for himself what you do.” Optatus also raised this charge in regards to Donatist oath practices, 2.21.

*Epistolam Parmeniani*.<sup>8</sup> There, Augustine first insisted that it was well known that there had been and continued to be sinners among the Donatist bishops, thus making their claims to sanctity hypocrisy.<sup>9</sup> He then shifted his accusations slightly, targeting the Donatist insistence that even if such persons did exist, their rituals were still efficacious as long as the sin was hidden.<sup>10</sup> Not surprisingly, the charge of hypocrisy did not reflect the nuances of the Donatist position, which was, as I will show below, an effort to deal with an ongoing tension within the Cyprianic tradition of episcopal theory and practice. Caecilianist polemicists built a repertoire of accusations about Donatist bishops that were not faithful representations of them but rather polemical constructions that distorted aspects of the Cyprianic heritage.

### **Marculus as Model Bishop in the *Passio Marculi***

One of the most revered figures in Donatist Christianity from the second half of the fourth century on was the martyr-bishop Marculus. The account of his martyrdom, the *Passio Marculi*, was read annually in the liturgy on the anniversary of his death, and his death came to be one of the defining memories of the controversy. Marculus thus became one of the defining figures of Donatism, perhaps second only to Donatus himself, and a model for imitation. One of the important yet under-appreciated aspects of his *passio* is its presentation of Marculus as a model priest specifically. In doing so, the *Passio Marculi* offers a mid-fourth century ideal construction of the Donatist bishop and thus a window into Donatist notions of the priesthood.

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<sup>8</sup> Aug. *Parm.* 2.10.20-12.26.

<sup>9</sup> Aug. *Parm.* 2.10.20.

<sup>10</sup> Aug. *Parm.* 2.10.21.

The historical context for both the death of Marculus and the *Passio Marculi* are the events of the period of persecution under the imperial representatives Paul and Macarius that accompanied the imperial “Edict of Unity” in 347. Following the conflict of the original separation of African Christianity in the 310s, the African churches seem to have enjoyed a period of peace lasting almost three decades.<sup>11</sup> This peace was ruptured by the campaign of Paul and Macarius, the violence of which was remembered in the *Passio Isaac et Maximiani* and the *Passio Marculi* and became fixed in the memory of Donatists for generations.<sup>12</sup>

Though the exact sequence of events of the mission of Paul and Macarius and the “Edict of Unity” are somewhat vague, the key events from the perspective of Donatist Christians are clear: the deaths of Donatus of Bagai and Marculus as a result of the imperial action. Broadly speaking, the following sequence of events is reasonably clear.<sup>13</sup> The emperor Constans sent Paul and Macarius to Africa c. 347 in order to distribute benefactions, apparently in order to entice Donatist Christians to unite with the imperially recognized Caecilianist communion. They were largely unsuccessful and the effort was denounced by Donatus of Carthage with his famous proclamation, “What does the emperor have to do with the church?”<sup>14</sup> The real turning point occurred after the imperial officials left the environs of Carthage and headed into southern Numidia. At Bagai, the Donatist bishop of the city, Donatus, assembled a force to confront the imperial officials.

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<sup>11</sup> Brent D. Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 186.

<sup>12</sup> Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 178.

<sup>13</sup> Here I am following the recent work of Brent Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, Appendices D & E (822-827), who has clarified both the sequence of events and the limits of our knowledge of them.

<sup>14</sup> Optatus, *Parm.* 3.3.3 (*SC* 413:22): “Quid est imperatori cum ecclesia?”

A violent confrontation ensued that resulted in the slaughter of the assembled Donatists and the murder of the bishop Donatus at the hands of the imperial forces.<sup>15</sup> This kicked off a period of violent repression of Donatist Christians, and it was during this period of violence that Marculus was martyred.

With the situation going from bad to worse, the Donatist bishops gathered in assembly and sent a delegation of ten bishops, headed by Marculus, to meet with Macarius. The meeting took place at a rural estate at Vegesela and was a disaster. The ten bishops were arrested, bound to columns, and beaten with wooden clubs.<sup>16</sup> At least some of the bishops survived, including Marculus, and they were put on display as prisoners and cautionary examples as the imperial delegation traveled through the towns and villages of the region.<sup>17</sup> They were brought to a fort at the town of Nova Petra and imprisoned there. Before dawn on the morning of November 29, Marculus was marched by a group of Roman soldiers to the top of the precipice adjoining the fort and thrown from the heights to his death below. The time and method of execution was apparently intended to hide the killing by the cover of darkness and to deprive the Donatist faithful of his remains for veneration.

If that was the Roman officials' intent, it failed miserably. The *Passio Marculi*, apparently written shortly after his death, recounts the Donatist belief that his remains had indeed been recovered and is one demonstration of the ongoing significance of the

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<sup>15</sup> The events are related in Optat. *Parm.* 3.4.1-11. Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 163-7, offers a helpful description and analysis.

<sup>16</sup> As Shaw points out, this was most likely judicial torture, employed in the course of a judicial process to which the Donatist bishops refused to submit. Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 181.

<sup>17</sup> Maureen A. Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa*, Translated Texts for Historians (Liverpool Univ Pr, 1996), 77, states that only Marculus was detained after the torture.



cult that developed around him. Material remains of the cult of Marculus were also discovered at the site of modern Ksar-el-Kelb, which may have been the location of ancient Vegesela.<sup>18</sup> A basilica there had been renovated to include a *memoria*, which seems to have been designed to contain relics of Marculus. On the front of the *memoria*, facing the nave and visible to the people who would have gathered to worship there, was a plaque with the inscription *MEMORIA DOMNI MARCHULI*, “Memorial of Lord Marculus.”<sup>19</sup> The memory of “Lord Marculus” proved to be long-lasting among the Donatists. When the bishops of the two communions met face to face at Carthage in 411, the memory – and according to the Donatists the power – of Marculus was still strong. In the course of the long roll call of bishops, the Donatist bishop Dativus of Nova Petra announced his presence and added, “I have no adversary, because Lord Marculus is there, whose blood God will avenge on the Day of Judgment.”<sup>20</sup> Marculus was not just another martyr; Donatists remembered him as *the* greatest martyr of their age.<sup>21</sup>

The *Passio Marculi* has only recently begun to be the focus of scholarly attention. In her analysis of how Donatist self-identity evolved over time, Maureen Tilley has argued that in the period immediately following the Macarian persecution, Donatist martyr stories became more concerned with the long-term dangers of defecting to the Caecilianist communion than with the dramatic, momentary confession of the martyr’s

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<sup>18</sup> For more on this site, see chapter 6, *infra*.

<sup>19</sup> Pierre Cayrel, “Une basilique donatiste de Numidie,” *Mélanges d’archéologie et d’histoire de l’école française de Rome* 51, 1934, 134-5; image is at Cayrel, plate II, fig. 6.

<sup>20</sup> *Col. Carth.* 1.187 (*SC* 195:834): “Mandavi et subscripsi. Et adversum non habeo, quia illic est domnus Marculus, cuius sanguinem Deus exiget in die iudicii.”

<sup>21</sup> Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 752.

death.<sup>22</sup> This reflected a change in circumstance: though the violence of the Macarian persecution loomed large in Donatist memories, what it signaled in the martyrdom literature of the period was the unambiguous alignment of the power of the Roman state with their Caecilianist allies and against the Donatist communion.<sup>23</sup> The ongoing danger was less the traumatic violence of 347 than the long-term pressure to turn to the Caecilianist communion. Against this temptation, martyrdom accounts such as the *Passio Marculi* emphasized the martyrs' perseverance in the face of persecution, their separation from the world and from the *traditors*, and their intimacy with God. They were stories designed to support Donatist congregations in their struggle to remain faithful and pure.<sup>24</sup> In his monumental *Sacred Violence*, Brent Shaw argued that Marculus' death was the turning point in the relations between the African communions, becoming the basis of a hatred that the Donatists nourished for the duration of the conflict.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Lucy Grigg's reading of the *Passio Marculi* in *The Making of Martyrs in Late Antiquity* emphasized the power of the martyr narrative in the context of religious controversy, and she highlighted the importance of this narrative in the struggle between the African communions.<sup>26</sup>

What these previous studies have not adequately explored is the emphasis in the *Passio Marculi* on Marculus as priest.<sup>27</sup> While the *passio* is obviously a martyrdom

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<sup>22</sup> Maureen A. Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Pr, 1997), 69-76.

<sup>23</sup> Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, 74.

<sup>24</sup> Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, 74.

<sup>25</sup> Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 183; cf. 178-185, 751-55.

<sup>26</sup> Lucy Grigg, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity* (London: Duckworth, 2004), 54, 58.

<sup>27</sup> Shaw does note the particular outrage of the narrative on the violence perpetrated on the sacred bodies of holy bishops, as well as the superior social and spiritual standing of Marculus both before and, especially

narrative, it intertwines his martyrdom with his priesthood, presenting him as both a model of sanctity and a model bishop. His martyrdom, the ostensible focus of the narrative, becomes the culmination of a life of priestly virtue, and Marculus is put forward as a model for other Donatist clergy to imitate.

The intertwining of the martyrdom and priesthood of Marculus is accomplished above all in the introduction and conclusion of the *passio*, which frame the martyrdom narrative proper and which highlight Marculus' priestly sanctity. Both Grigg and especially Shaw have noted the "mini-biography" that precedes the martyrdom account, drawing attention to its presentation of Marculus as a man of high social status and virtue.<sup>28</sup> However, both Marculus' status and his virtue are themselves subsumed into a larger point: the proper exercise of his priesthood. The virtues ascribed to Marculus are described as self-evident, given his selection to the priesthood; his status as priest is treated as a commendation of his earlier life.<sup>29</sup> His martyrdom, in turn, is presented as a reward for the good exercise of his priestly office.<sup>30</sup> His priesthood is presented as the central, defining feature of his life, a reading reinforced by the introduction of Marculus, obviously already martyred, as "glorious Marculus, radiant with priestly honor."<sup>31</sup> The virtue and honor of his priestly life was sealed and made famous by his martyrdom, and the *passio* is explicit in placing his priesthood front and center.

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after, his martyrdom. *Sacred Violence*, 181. Pamela Bright, "Donatist Bishops," *ATAE*, 281, notes that Marculus was portrayed as the ideal bishop but without any elaboration.

<sup>28</sup> Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 180; Grigg, *Making Martyrs*, 54.

<sup>29</sup> *Pas. Marc.* 2.7 (*Anal. Bolland.* 53:65-6): "Quae uero in eo fuerit probitas conscientiae, quae illustrium morum innata uerecundia, quae gratia spiritalis in uultu, non arbitror diu multumque laborandum, cum superiorem eius uitam illa res probet, quod meruit sacerdotium."

<sup>30</sup> *Pas. Marc.* 2.8 (*Anal. Bolland.* 53:66): "Sacerdotium uero qualiter gesserit inde fit clarum, cui pro praemio dominus dignatus est praestare martyrium."

<sup>31</sup> *Pas. Marc.* 1.2 (*Anal. Bolland.* 53:65): "Marculi gloriosi, sacerdotali etiam honore fulgentem." English translations of *Pas. Marc.* are those of Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, unless otherwise noted.

The conclusion reprises the emphasis on Marculus as priest. In addition to being described as an example of virtue for all the devout, he is also put forward as an example for the clergy, highlighting the *passio*'s function as a pedagogical tool for instructing both laity and clergy in the proper form a clerical life should take.<sup>32</sup> His martyrdom does not define his life but was instead the culmination of a life that began with the renunciation of the world, by its virtue attained the priesthood, and ultimately bore witness to the power of God in martyrdom.<sup>33</sup> His martyrdom is not presented as exceptional or discontinuous from his priestly office but rather as a reward for a priesthood well exercised.<sup>34</sup> Marculus' renunciation of the world, priesthood, and martyrdom are presented as of a piece, united in exemplary fashion by Marculus, the model bishop.

In combining the roles of martyr and priest in the person of Marculus, the *passio* presents Donatist clergy with a model of how to respond to imperial and Caecilianist persecution. The martyrdom narrative itself emphasizes, as Tilley has suggested, the perseverance of the bishop in the face of persecution and his resulting intimacy with God. The actions of the story and of Marculus are centered around the imperial violence perpetrated on Marculus and his patient endurance of it. He fastens his own fetters to a column and endures a savage beating; Christ, present in him, removes both the pain and the bodily marks of torture; the bishop is dragged from town to town and passes four days in prison in contemplation and fasting, during which time he receives visions, celebrates the eucharist, and preaches to his companions. Even on the way to his death he is

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<sup>32</sup> *Pas. Marc.* 16.77 (*Anal. Bolland.* 53:75): "O appetendum deuotis omnibus inconcussae uirtutis exemplum! O necessarium uniuersis ecclesiasticis gradibus documentum, quo eius laudabilis uita meritam peruenit ad palmam."

<sup>33</sup> *Pas. Marc.* 16.77-79.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

described as “resolute,” “constant,” and even “joyful.” But once he reaches the summit of the precipice and the time for his death arrives, Marculus is no longer an active agent.<sup>35</sup> Marculus’ actions are not focused on his faithfulness in the moment he faces death, but rather on the days and weeks preceding it, the time of his ongoing resistance to imperial persecution and inducement to join the Caecilianist communion. The martyrdom narrative proper is a story of perseverance and continued devotion to Christ, a devotion that is rewarded with Christ’s personal presence and that culminates in martyrdom. In this martyrdom narrative, martyrdom is not the goal. Faithful perseverance, even resistance, is the goal.

The *passio* likewise presents Marculus as a model bishop, and in so doing offers insight into episcopal expectations among Donatists in the middle of the fourth century. First of all, the *passio* makes clear that to be a bishop is first and foremost to be a priest. This is the *passio*’s primary vocabulary for referring to both Marculus and his episcopal colleagues. The bishops who gather in council to send a delegation are an assembled council of priests.<sup>36</sup> Both Marculus specifically and bishops more generally are described as *summus pontifex*, high priest.<sup>37</sup> The office they hold is elsewhere described as *sacerdotium*.<sup>38</sup> The episcopal office is, primarily, a priestly one.

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<sup>35</sup> Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, 72-4, notes that there is not even a confession, which is atypical for martyr narratives.

<sup>36</sup> *Pas. Marc.* 3.12 (*Anal. Bolland.* 53:66): “antiquissimorum partum sanctissimus chorus et adunatum concilium sacerdotum.”

<sup>37</sup> *Pas. Marc.* 3.9 (*Anal. Bolland.* 53:66): “igitur dum in officii caelestium praeceptorum laudabiliter conuersatur, dum summus pontifex constitutes cum ceteris sanctis bono sacerdotii sui fruitur, ecce subito de Constantis regis tyrannica domo et de palatii eius arce pollutum Macarianae persecutionis murmur increpuit;” 7.30 (*Anal. Bolland.* 53:69): “ut summus pontifex, non solum ab illecebris saeculi uerum etiam a cibus eius alienus, ad imponendas Christi altaribus hostias tam purus accederet, ut fieri pro Christo hostia ipse mereretur.”

<sup>38</sup> *Pas. Marc.* 2.7, 2.8, 3.9, 16.78-79.

The *passio* subtly reinforces the centrality of Marculus' priesthood by integrating key episcopal responsibilities into the story. Though the narrative includes no reference to Marculus' own community it still manages to portray him as performing the ministry of a bishop, even while imprisoned. He both preaches a sermon to his brothers in prison and offers the Eucharistic sacrifice, complete with preparatory prayer and fasting.<sup>39</sup> Neither persecution, imprisonment at the hands of imperial officials, nor his impending martyrdom are impediments to Marculus exercising his priesthood.

This priesthood is portrayed as being bound up with a life of virtue. While there is no hint of concern about the relationship between the efficacy of the sacraments and the personal virtue of the minister, there is nonetheless an expectation that priests will have exceptional personal virtue. Marculus is described as having merited the priesthood on the basis of his virtue. Even more, the bond between virtue and priesthood is so strong that the mere status of priest can be used as evidence of personal virtue.<sup>40</sup> The implication is that it is the virtuous that are chosen for the priesthood, and so also that priests are therefore virtuous. Of course this need not have been the reality in every case; what matters is that the *passio* can present it as a plausible expectation.

A priest was not only expected to be virtuous; he was also to be holy. The *passio* elides the categories of "virtuous bishop" and what scholars have come to call the "holy man." Marculus not only preaches and offers the eucharist but is also an ascetic, a

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<sup>39</sup> *Pas. Marc.* 8.33.

<sup>40</sup> *Pas. Marc.* 2.7 (*Anal. Bolland.* 53:65-6): "cum superiorem eius uitam illas res probet, quod meruit sacerdotium." "...since his superior life is proved by the very fact that he merited the priesthood."

contemplative, a visionary and a combatant with diabolic forces.<sup>41</sup> The bishops who are tortured at Vegesela not only exercise a priestly office, they even have “priestly limbs,” and the violence perpetrated on these sacred, priestly bodies is one of the outrages of the text.<sup>42</sup> The priesthood is not just a ministry to be exercised. It is a way of life, one carried out by holy men who are models of perseverance, of devotion, of sacramental leadership, of closeness to God. As a way of life, it cannot simply be conveyed to just anyone; it must be lived by the holy.

The combination and interrelation of the roles of martyr and priest are most vividly displayed when Marculus offers the eucharist, for he becomes both priest and offering. He approaches the altar as *summus pontifex*, prepared for the offering by a fasting that is specified as a rejection of the “enticing” world and its food.<sup>43</sup> The enticements of the world evoke the ongoing temptation to abandon the Donatist church and go over to the imperially sanctioned Caecilianists, an ongoing concern for original audience; Marculus, the ideal priest, has appropriately resisted such enticements. In so approaching the eucharistic altar, Marculus himself is presented as an offering: “Truly, in approaching the altars of Christ to place on them offerings, he himself was worthy to become an offering for Christ.”<sup>44</sup> His martyrdom itself is turned into a priestly act, and Marculus is both priest and offering.

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<sup>41</sup> In this the *passio* is reminiscent of both the *Vita Antonii*, which was roughly contemporaneous with it, and the *Vita Cypriani*.

<sup>42</sup> *Pas. Marc.* 4.15 (*Anal. Bolland.* 53:67): “sacerdotalibus membris.” Cf. Brent Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 181: “Above all, it is the fact that these attacks were vented on the sacred bodies of bishops that raised the greatest anger... These were the bodies of holy men, men of Christ.”

<sup>43</sup> *Pas. Marc.* 7.30 (*Anal. Bolland.* 53:69): “ut summus pontifex, non solum ab illecebris saeculi uerum etiam a cibus eius alienus, ad imponendas Christi altaribus hostias tam purus accederet, ut fieri pro Christo hostia ipse mereretur.”

<sup>44</sup> *Pas. Marc.* 7.30.

In presenting Marculus as a model bishop and an object of emulation for Donatist clergy, the *Passio Marculi* offers a mid-fourth century ideal construction of a Donatist bishop. The bishop is above all the priest of God, offering the eucharistic sacrifice and interpreting the scriptures for a community under pressure to defect to the church of the *traditors*. He is also a holy man, an intimate of God and a model of piety and spiritual power; even his body is holy. His very martyrdom is a culmination of his priestly life, a priestly sacrifice offered to God. While using martyrological vocabulary rather than that of Cyprian, the image the *passio* offers is nonetheless in line with the Cyprianic tradition. The priesthood is not simply an office to be held or exercised. The bishops are a group apart, combining liturgical and ritual roles with closeness to God and a distinct, priestly holiness. They are responsible to resist the temptations and enticements of the world, not only for their own sake but for that of their ritual offices. In its pivotal aspects, the ideal bishop of the *Passio Marculi* remains true to the legacy of Cyprian.

### **Parmenian and the Cyprianic Tradition**

In turning to Parmenian we encounter a more direct engagement with the theory and practice of episcopal and priestly ministry. This was at least partially due to the genres and particular context of his known works, both of which were directly polemical. One of his primary critiques was the illegitimacy of the Caecilianist clergy and so likewise of their rituals, especially baptism. Through his critiques, his defense of his own practices, and the Caecilianist responses, the continuing influence of the Cyprianic tradition on Parmenian emerges in two ways. First, the contours of his own theology and



practice are clearly Cyprianic, even as some aspects have changed over time. Second, Parmenian responded to a particular, ongoing tension within the Cyprianic legacy: the question of how to understand and deal with the ministry of bishops who were secretly unworthy. The basic outlines of his position, the problems to which he responded, and even the resources he used to address those problems were all fundamentally shaped by the heritage of Cyprian.

Parmenian became the bishop of Carthage and the primate of the Donatist communion after the death of Donatus the Great, and in his long tenure presided over a period of dramatic change in the social and religious situation of the Donatist communion. It was during his tenure that the emperor Julian issued a decree allowing the Donatist bishops to return from exile. Sometime shortly after his return from exile and likely as part of an effort to reassert the rights and status of his communion, he wrote a treatise attacking the Caecilianists.<sup>45</sup> Though the treatise is not extant, many of its arguments have been preserved in the treatise of the Caecilianist bishop Optatus of Milevis known variously as *Contra Parmenianum* and *De Schismate Donatistarum*, the first version of which was written c. 365.<sup>46</sup> Sometime later, Parmenian wrote a letter rebuking the Donatist exegete Tyconius. This letter is also not extant, but once again we have some measure of access to it via the response of a Caecilianist opponent. Augustine acquired a copy of the letter after Parmenian's death and used it as a vehicle for his

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<sup>45</sup> Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 148. The original title of the work is unknown. Modern scholars often refer to it as *De ecclesia traditorum* (cf. Shaw, 74), though not always: Tilley cites it as *Adversus ecclesiam traditorum*, for example, as did Monceaux. Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, 97; Paul Monceaux, *Histoire Littéraire De l'Afrique Chrétienne Depuis Les Origines Jusqu'à L'invasion Arabe*, (Paris E. Leroux, 1901-23), 5.227.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. chapter 4, *infra*, for more on the work of Optatus.

critiques of contemporary Donatists, composing a response in three books c. 400.<sup>47</sup> Augustine adopted the method of quoting Parmenian extensively and then offering rebuttals to his claims, which allows modern scholars access to at least substantial portions of Parmenian's text. In both cases scholars are confronted with the difficulties of relying on texts written by hostile authors for understanding Parmenian's own positions. Despite the hazards of these circumstances, contemporary scholarship has made significant advances in distinguishing between the perspectives of hostile sources and those of their subjects.<sup>48</sup> Drawing on this work, it is possible to discern the outlines of Parmenian's theology of the bishop as distinct from the polemical characterizations of it by Optatus and Augustine.

As has been shown, both Augustine and Optatus accused Parmenian of looking to the Donatist bishops to effect the sanctification of believers and so preserve the holiness of the Donatist church. The accusations can sometimes seem plausible because they were grounded in a semblance of the truth. Even when taking into account the hostile perspectives of our sources, it is clear from what remains of his writings that Parmenian did in fact attribute a singular role to the Donatist bishops. He compared them to princes and rulers, and insisted that the faith and sanctification of the people was dependent upon

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Maureen Tilley, "Contra Epistulam Parmeniani," *ATAE*, 312; Monceaux, *Histoire Littéraire De l'Afrique Chrétienne*, 5.234.

<sup>48</sup> The work of Maureen Tilley has been especially influential in this regard. Cf. *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, 1-8, 93-100.

the status of their bishops.<sup>49</sup> However, this role was in keeping with the African, and specifically Cyprianic, heritage discussed in the last chapter.

In his known works Parmenian focused especially on the bishop in his role as the minister of baptism and argued that the minister of baptism played a necessary and determinative role in the faith of those receiving baptism. He insisted that what one received in baptism depended on who was giving it.<sup>50</sup> This basic insistence on the human agent in baptism was in line with the theology of the bishop worked out in the third century and articulated by Cyprian. The sanctifying power of the church was given to the bishops alone as the gift of the Holy Spirit. It was this power that made the rituals of the church, including baptism, efficacious. Only those sacramental rituals overseen by a true bishop were sanctifying. This Cyprianic understanding of the bishop is the proper frame of reference for understanding Parmenian's repeated appeals to the human agent of baptism. He held that the bishop had powers that the rest of the church did not; indeed, he held that the bishop's possession of such powers was essential for the church to be the true and holy church.

Despite Caecilianist construals to the contrary, Parmenian did not base this sanctifying power on the moral status of the bishops but on their possession of the Holy Spirit. Admittedly, some of his extant statements seem to be focused on moral status and can be misread in just this fashion. Most famous of these, perhaps, is his claim that God does not hear sinners. "God does not hear sinners; but if anyone worships the Lord and

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<sup>49</sup> Aug. *Parm.* 2.4.8 (*CSEL* 51:52-3): "Et illud quod scriptum est: 'secundum principem populi sic et ministri ipsius, et qualis rector est ciuitatis tales et inhabitantes,' ... non intellegimus hoc loco principem populi et rectorem ciuitatis episcopum significari..." The scriptural citation is Sirach 10:2.

<sup>50</sup> Aug. *Parm.* 2.11.23 (*CSEL* 51:72): "quod natum est de carne caro est et quod natum est de spiritu spiritus est."

does his will, he will hear him.”<sup>51</sup> Or, even more pointedly, “Someone who is baptized by a dead man, what does his washing profit him?”<sup>52</sup> Optatus and Augustine both portrayed assertions such as these as evidence of the prideful claims to holiness of Donatist bishops and of an undue focus on the agent of the sacramental rituals rather than their effect, and modern commentators have all too often adopted this reading as well.<sup>53</sup> Quite the contrary, Parmenian’s concern was whether or not the minister possessed the gift of the Holy Spirit and so was able to effectively convey cleansing and sanctification.<sup>54</sup> The allegation that a priest was contaminated, or “dead,” was not an accusation of sinfulness *per se*, but specifically of lacking the Holy Spirit. Likewise the allegation that God did not hear the prayers of the Caecilianist bishops because they were sinners was an application of a scriptural text (John 9:31) to the particular situation of North African Christians, not an assertion of a universal principle. Its meaning in that context was that God does not hear the prayers of those who, through their sinfulness, have lost the gift of the Holy Spirit; therefore all their rituals were worthless.

The “sinners” to whom Parmenian was referring were the Caecilianist bishops, and again the accusations against the Caecilianists were not fundamentally about their moral conduct. Their episcopal ancestors had, according to the Donatist version of the

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<sup>51</sup> Aug. *Parm.* 2.8.15 (*CSEL* 51:60): “In euangelio, inquit, scriptum est: deus peccatores non audiet; sed si quis dominum coluerit et uoluntatem eius fecerit, illum audiet.”

<sup>52</sup> Aug. *Parm.* 2.10.20 (*CSEL* 51:66): “qui baptizatur a mortuo quid proficit lauatio eius?” (A quotation of Sirach 34:30) Cf. Aug. *Parm.* 2.14.32 (*CSEL* 51:83): “numquam diuinae legis censura patietur, ut uiuificare quemquam mortuus possit, curare uulneratus, inluminare caecus, uestire nudus, emundare pollutus?”

<sup>53</sup> cf. Optat. *Parm.* 5.5.10 (*SC* 413:138): “Vos non dicitis: Quid accepistis? Sed: A quo accepistis? Et insectamini personas hominum et uultis iterare quod semel est.” “You say not, ‘What did you receive?’, but ‘From whom did you receive it?’, and you pursue people’s characters, and wish to repeat what is done once.”

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Aug. *Parm.* 2.10.20 (*CSEL* 51:66): “sanctus enim spiritus disciplinae effugiet fictum et auferet se a cogitationibus quae sunt sine intellectu.” Optatus, *Parm.* 5.6.1 (*SC* 413:140): “Redeo nunc ad illu uestrum quod dicitis: Qui non habet quod det, quomodo dat?”

schism's story, been *traditors*, meaning that they and their episcopal heirs had not received faith but faithlessness. The Caecilianist bishops had then confirmed their sinfulness by collaborating with the imperial suppression of the Donatist church, the true church. They were true sons of the faithless *traditors*, both in their lineage and in their actions. Thus their communion lacked the Holy Spirit and could not give birth to Christians in baptism, but only beget more children of the devil: "For in that church what Spirit can there be but the one who brings forth children of Gehenna?"<sup>55</sup> Because Caecilianist bishops lacked the gift of the Holy Spirit, their rituals were not sanctifying, and because they were traitors to the true church those who submitted to their rituals shared in their sin.

Thus in a very real sense the faith of local churches was indeed dependent on that of their bishops. Churches whose bishops had the gift of the Holy Spirit could receive faith and holiness from them. Those whose bishops did not could not, no matter their own intentions. In Parmenian's formulation, "The gift of baptism belongs to the giver, not the receiver."<sup>56</sup> Moreover, those who received the sacraments from a bishop who was known to be a *traditor* (i.e., a Caecilianist bishop) not only did not receive the Holy Spirit; they were in fact contaminated by their bishop's sin. This is the sense of Parmenian's assertion that the faith of the people depends on that of their bishop. Only those churches whose bishops retained the gift of the Holy Spirit could be said to be true churches at all, for any other gathering lacking the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. "Just as the prince of the

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<sup>55</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.7.2 (SC 412:256): "Nam in illa ecclesia qui spiritus esse potest nisi qui pariat filios gehennae?"

<sup>56</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.7.1 (SC 413:142): "Iam illud quam ridiculum est quod quasi ad gloriam uestram a uobis semper auditur: Hoc munus baptismatis esse dantis, non accipientis!"

people is, so also are his ministers, and as the ruler of the city is, so are the inhabitants.”<sup>57</sup>

Because he alone had been given the power to sanctify others, the bishop was the sole local conduit of faith and holiness for those in his assembly, the linchpin of the faith of his local community. Of course this was very much in line with the heritage of Cyprian, for whom local Christian communities were connected to the worldwide church through their bishops, who alone possessed the power to sanctify and convey the gift of the Holy Spirit. Though Parmenian utilized different imagery and different scriptural texts than Cyprian had, the basic role of the bishop remained the same.

Despite its Cyprianic pedigree, this articulation of the role of the bishop in preserving the faith and holiness of the church involved an apparent contradiction. This is because Parmenian seems to have claimed that while the rituals of Caecilianist bishops who had lost the power to sanctify through their sin were polluting rather than cleansing, the same was not true for ministers within the true church whose sins remained secret. Their sacramental rituals nonetheless remained sanctifying. This was a claim that both Augustine and Optatus did not hesitate to critique, in no small part because it seemed to contradict another basic tenant articulated by Parmenian: God does not hear sinners, and so the sacramental rituals of sinful bishops are not sanctifying. However, this apparently contradictory practice was itself a heritage of Cyprian. By distinguishing between known and unknown sins, differentiating between types of sins, and appealing to the *dotēs ecclesiae*, or endowments of the church, Parmenian sought to account for the conflicted practice that can be traced back to Cyprian’s own formulation.

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<sup>57</sup> Aug. *Parm.* 2.4.8 (CSEL 51:52): “Secundum principem populi sic et ministri ipsius, et qualis rector est ciuitatis tales et inhabitantes.”

Cyprian stipulated that a sinful bishop who continued to preside over the rituals of a Christian community would not only vitiate the rituals themselves but would also pollute all those who entered into communion with him. Cyprian repeatedly warned about the dangers of unworthy bishops who continued in their priestly ministry: they would incur God's wrath upon themselves; because they had lost the Holy Spirit, the sacramental rituals which they performed would not sanctify; the contagion of his sin would be shared with all those who participated in his rituals.<sup>58</sup> The logic of this position would seem to suggest that a bishop who had sinned so as to lose the Holy Spirit but whose sin had not become publicly known would pollute his entire community by means of their continued sharing in his eucharistic offering.

However, Cyprian's practice did not follow this logic.<sup>59</sup> His consistent practice in dealing with sinful bishops within the unity of the church was that once their sin was known, they had to be removed from office; failure to do so would mean participation in their sin. He did not show the same concern for the prospect of bishops who were secretly sinful.<sup>60</sup> Though he employed the language of ritual pollution, Cyprian seems to have been especially concerned with willful consent to a sinful bishop's ministry. He seems to have applied to the clergy a principle articulated in regards to the acceptance of laity into communion: the contagion of an unknown sin could not be transmitted within the unity of the church because it could be neither approved nor rejected.<sup>61</sup> Thus Cyprian's practice

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<sup>58</sup> Cypr. *Ep.* 65.2.1, 67.1.2 (on the danger to sinful bishops); *Ep.* 65.2.2, 65.4.1, 66.5.1-2, 67.2.2 (on their sacramental rituals); *Ep.* 65.3.1-3, 67.3.1-2, *Laps.* 6-7 (on sharing in their sins).

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, 141-144, 150.

<sup>60</sup> The one apparent exception came in a sarcastic, *reductio ad absurdum* response to criticism of his own ministry by a rigorist opponent, found in *Ep.* 66. Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, 143-44.

<sup>61</sup> Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, 149.

did not strictly follow the logic of his theory of the priesthood. Nor did he articulate an explicit alternative explanation for this variance in practice, leaving a point of tension that would resurface in the debates between Donatists and Catholics in the fourth and fifth centuries.

Both Optatus and Augustine sought to highlight the apparent contradiction in Donatist practice regarding sinful bishops. Augustine acknowledged that Parmenian had addressed the tension in Donatist practice in two ways but did not engage either of Parmenian's defenses on their own terms. First, Parmenian distinguished between known and unknown sins. If the sins of the priest performing baptism were unknown then the baptism was unaffected.<sup>62</sup> Though Augustine characterized the response as absurd and hypocritical, he acknowledged that it was a Donatist response to the question of secretly sinful bishops, and he similarly acknowledged elsewhere that Parmenian defended the sacramental ministry of bishops whose sins were unknown.<sup>63</sup> Parmenian seems to have followed the Cyprianic practice: bishops who were secretly sinful but within the unity of the true church were not a risk.

Second, Augustine indicated that another Donatist response to Caecilianist accusations about the sinfulness of their bishops was to make distinctions between kinds of sins, apparently indicating a shift in what sins were considered debilitating to episcopal ministry. The Donatists seem to have only regarded a select few sins as causing their bishops to lose the Holy Spirit and thus render their sacramental rituals useless: apostasy,

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<sup>62</sup> Aug. *Parm.* 2.10.21 (*CSEL* 51:69): "Hic enim dici non potest quod solent ineptissime atque impudentissime dicere, 'tunc posse a malo baptizari quemquam, si lateat malitia baptizantis.'"

<sup>63</sup> Aug. *Parm.* 2.11.23.



collusion in persecuting the church, and communion with those who had so failed.<sup>64</sup> In this regard the Donatists had departed from Cyprian, for whom a much wider range of sins would render a bishop unworthy of his office.

In another sense, however, the Donatists were continuing on a long established trajectory of African Christianity. The African church had progressively narrowed its most serious category of sins since at least the beginning of the third century. Tertullian had objected to the introduction of ritual forgiveness and reintegration into the church for those guilty of certain sexual sins, including adultery.<sup>65</sup> Cyprian reported this change of practice as a success and as an argument for extending a similar practice to those guilty of apostasy, a change that was ultimately enacted.<sup>66</sup> Those modifications of penitential practice had been for the laity; clergy who underwent public penance in Cyprian's time could only reenter the community among the laity. The Donatists made a similar move in regards to the sins of the clergy: only a select few sins were so serious as to call a bishop's ministry into question. This was an innovation, at least in comparison to the practice of Cyprian, but the tradition of narrowing the most serious category of sins was not.

Augustine bore witness to the ongoing tension between the theory of episcopal ministry articulated by Cyprian and the practice regarding the ministry of bishops who

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<sup>64</sup> Augustine made mention of the Donatist distinction between types of sin in *Parm.* 2.7.13, though he did not claim to quote Parmenian directly when doing so. It is possible, then, that this distinction was not original to Parmenian but rather indicative of Donatist responses in Augustine's own time. The list of specific sins is from Petilian: Aug. *Petil.* 2.7.14, 2.8.17, 2.32.72, 2.33.77, 2.93.202, 2.104.236. cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 197-99. However Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, 96-112, does attribute the exclusive focus on these "ecclesial" sins to Parmenian.

<sup>65</sup> Tert. *Pud.* 22.11-15.

<sup>66</sup> Cypr. *Ep.* 55.20-21.

were secretly sinful. Though he provided evidence of Donatist responses to this tension, he gave no evidence that they provided a theory that would adequately account for their practice.<sup>67</sup> Optatus, on the other hand, offered a more detailed witness to at least one way in which Parmenian attempted to deal with the problem of secretly sinful bishops, though scholars have not always clearly identified it as such.<sup>68</sup> Parmenian appealed to the *dotes ecclesiae*, the dowries or endowments of the church as the Bride of Christ, as somehow ensuring that the sacramental rituals of secretly sinful priests are nonetheless sanctifying; he insisted that “if a priest is in sin, the gifts can work on their own.”<sup>69</sup> Though the portion of book two in which Optatus discussed the *dotes* is notoriously obscure, it is best understood as an attempt to offer an explanation for the un-theorized Cyprianic practice of accepting the rituals of bishops who might be guilty of hidden sins.

Scholarly interpretations of the *dotes* have varied, though that they pertain to ecclesiological issues is obvious and widely accepted. They have frequently been described as a means by which one could distinguish the true church from the false, in a similar fashion to the much later “marks of the church.”<sup>70</sup> The primary function of the

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<sup>67</sup> He pointed out explicitly that the practice so far outlined would not account for sacramental efficacy in cases where the bishop was secretly guilty of serious sin in Aug. *Petil.* 1.4.5-5.6.

<sup>68</sup> A number of scholars have addressed the question of the *dotes ecclesiae*, but few of these have been in depth studies. For the most in-depth study, cf. Thomislaus Sagi-Bunic, “Controversia de Baptismate inter Parmenianum et S. Optatem Milevitanum,” *Laurentianum* 3 (1962), 167-209. Cf. also Yves Congar, “Introduction générale,” *Traité anti-Donatistes, Volume 1. Oeuvres de saint Augustin, BA 28* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1963), 9-133; W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church; a Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1952), 194-7; Mireille Labrousse, “Introduction,” *Traité contre les donatistes, Optat de Milève, SC 412*. (Paris: Cerf, 1995), 9-143; Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, 102-6, 111; Vischer, *Basiliius Der Grosse*, 79-82. Most recently, David Wilhite, “True Church or True Basilica?: The Song of Songs and Parmenian’s Ecclesiology Revisited,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 22, no. 3 (2014): 399-436, has put forward a revisionist interpretation of the *dotes* as references to material objects within Parmenian’s newly recovered basilica.

<sup>69</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.9.3. Dixisti enimquod si sacerdos in peccato sit, solae possint dotes operari. (SC 412: 260)

<sup>70</sup> cf. Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, 102; Frend, *The Donatist Church*, 195; Vischer, *Basiliius Der Grosse*, 79-82. Wilhite, “True Church or True Basilica?” has recently called this interpretation in

*dotes*, however, seems to be in the realm of sacramental theory, as several scholars have emphasized.<sup>71</sup> An even more specific context for Parmenian's articulation of the *dotes* is identifiable: the practical tension in the Cyprianic tradition around the question of secretly unworthy bishops. This interpretation situates the endowments in the African tradition of discourse about the ministry even as it further demonstrates the continuing influence of Cyprian on Donatist notions of the episcopacy.

The motif of the *dotes ecclesiae* depended on the allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs as an account of the relationship between Christ and the Church, his bride.<sup>72</sup> This interpretation had its roots in the third century and especially in the works of Cyprian, whose ecclesiological imagery drawn from the Song of Songs had become foundational for African debates about the church. While the specific use of the *dotes* employed by Parmenian and Optatus has no known antecedent, it was drawing on a long tradition of ecclesiological interpretation of the Song of Songs.<sup>73</sup> As they were the bridal gifts of Christ to the Church, only the true church could possess the *dotes*. Both bishops agreed that heretics could certainly not possess them; enlarging on the nuptial imagery, Optatus asserted that heretics were not wives but prostitutes and so possessed no such

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question, arguing instead that the primary function of the *dotes* for Parmenian was that of physical demonstrations of his church as the bride of Christ. Though Wilhite's theory is intriguing and his emphasis on the material aspect of the *dotes* is helpful, it is also highly speculative and seems to ignore what the sources tell us about Parmenian's own claims for the endowments: that they functioned even when priests were in sin.

<sup>71</sup> Labrousse, "Introduction," 108-114; Congar, "Introduction générale," 67-8; and especially Sagi-Bunic, "Controversia de Baptismate," 176-191.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, 102-7.

<sup>73</sup> The most comparable reference to the endowments of the church as the bride of Christ is in Novatian *De Trinitate* 29.9, but there the endowments refer to the spiritual gifts enumerated in the Pauline epistles. In Africa, Tertullian made reference to *dotes* as bridal dowries or endowments, but in the literal sense, in *Cult. Fem.* 2.9.

dowry.<sup>74</sup> Parmenian and Optatus agreed on such an interpretation of the Song of Songs and, apparently, on the validity of applying the *dotes* to the church as well.

From there the two bishops diverged in their accounts of the *dotes* and their significance. Parmenian enumerated six *dotes*, Optatus five.<sup>75</sup> Optatus' text is obscure, whether because of a lacuna or his writing style, and so even the list of the *dotes* is unclear and contested. Four of Parmenian's six are clear: the *cathedra*, the *angelus*, the *fons*, and the *umbilicum*. The remaining two are unknown, though scholars have offered numerous speculations.<sup>76</sup> The *cathedra* was clearly a reference to the bishop's chair.<sup>77</sup> The *fons*, or fount, was a reference to baptism, possibly to the water itself or to the baptistery.<sup>78</sup> The *umbilicus*, or navel, seems to have been a reference to the eucharistic altar.<sup>79</sup> To what the *angelus* referred is unclear, though the most commonly accepted theory is that it was a reference to the angel who stirred the waters of baptism.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 1.10.2 (SC 412:192): "Interea dixisti apud haereticos dotes ecclesiae esse non posse et recte dixisti. Scimus enim haereticorum ecclesias singulorum prostitutas nullis legalibus sacramentis et sine iure honesti matrimonii esse." They did not, of course, agree on which of their communions did possess them.

<sup>75</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.2.1.

<sup>76</sup> Edwards, *Optatus Against the Donatists*, 32 n. 8: *cathedra*, *angelus*, keys, Spirit, font, sacerdotium, unmbilicus; Frend, *The Donatist Church*, 194-5: *cathedra*, *angelus*, *fons*, *sigillum*, *umbilicus*; Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, 102: *cathedra*, *angel*, Spirit, seal, *umbilicus*; Pamela Bright, *The Book of Rules of Tyconius: Its Purpose and Inner Logic* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 166; *cathedra*, *angelus*, *spiritus*, *fons signatus*, *sigillum*, *umbilicus*; Labrousse, "Introduction," 109: *cathedra*, *angelus* (angel), spirit, *fons* (water of baptism), *sigillum* (Symbol), *umbilicus* (altar); Sagi-Bunic, "Controversia de Baptismate," 180-181: *cathedra*, *angelus*, Holy Spirit, font, *sigillum* (which is the catholic symbolum, and which is elsewhere described as the anulus/ring), *umbilicum*/navel/altar; Robert B. Eno, "The Work of Optatus as a Turning Point in the African Ecclesiology," *The Thomist* 37, no. 4 (1973), 682: *Cathedra*, *Angelus*, *Spiritus*, *Fons*, *Sigillum*, and *Umbilicus*; Vischer, *Basilii Der Grosse*, 79-82: 1 *cathedra*; 2 *angelus*; 3 *spiritus*; 4 *fons*; 5 *sigillum*; 6 *umbilicus*; Congar, "Introduction générale," 67-8: *cathedra*; the angel; the Spiritus; *fons*; *sigillum*; *umbilicus*; Wilhite, "True Church or True Basilica?" 413-35: *cathedra*, *angelus* (lampstand), *vas* (of chrism), *fons* (vessel for drinking eucharist), perhaps censer or plate (is unsure about the fifth gift), altar of sacrifice.

<sup>77</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.2.1.

<sup>78</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.6.2, 2.8.1, 3.2.2.

<sup>79</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.8.1.

<sup>80</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.6.1-2. Scholars have also hypothesized that the *angelus* was personified in the bishop (Congar, "Introduction générale," 68) or was a reference to the bishop himself (Bright, *The Book of Rules*

The *cathedra* was, emphatically, the first of the *dotes*.<sup>81</sup> Insofar as it indicated the physical chair of the bishop, it was a “concrete manifestation of the bishop’s presence.”<sup>82</sup> It was also symbolic of his authority.<sup>83</sup> The description of the *cathedra* as first was not simply ordinal; it was first in priority.<sup>84</sup> Possession of the rest of the *dotes* followed possession of the *cathedra*.<sup>85</sup> That is, it was possession of the *cathedra* that made the functioning of the rest of the *dotes* in the rituals of the church possible; the *cathedra* as *dotes* was an expression of the centrality of the powers exercised by the bishops in the church’s rituals. This connection was grounded in Cyprian’s articulation of the *cathedra* and of the bishop’s powers.<sup>86</sup> This prioritization of the *cathedra* elucidates that the powers being ascribed in some sense to the *dotes* are themselves based on, rather than placed in opposition to, the theology of the powers of the bishop articulated by Cyprian and defended by Parmenian. The power at work in the gifts is an extension of the power of the bishops. Thus in claiming that the endowments could work on their own, Parmenian cannot be advocating some kind of alternative system of sacramental efficacy but rather a clarification (or elaboration) of how that power works. When a Christian community possesses the *cathedra*, that is, is a see of the true church rather than of the *traditors*, the sanctifying power given to each bishop is at work in that community. This

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of Tyconius, 166), and that it was a personification of the church, as in Revelation 2.1ff., which Optatus cited.

<sup>81</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.2.1, 2.3.1, 2.6.1, 2.9.2.

<sup>82</sup> Willhite, “True Church or True Basilica?” 417.

<sup>83</sup> Willhite, “True Church or True Basilica?” 417, has argued that while some scholars have included the keys among the *dotes*, they were actually included in Optatus’ text as symbols of episcopal authority rather than as *dotes* in their own right.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Sagi-Bunic, “Controversia de Baptismate,” 180.

<sup>85</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.9.2. cf. also 2.2.1 and 2.6.1, which both specify that the *angelus* follows the *cathedra*.

<sup>86</sup> Labrousse, “Introduction,” 112-13, claims more specifically that the discussion of the *cathedra* in book two seems directly inspired by book four of Cyprian’s *De Unitate*.

remains true even if the bishop of the place himself happens to be sinful in some way that is not evident to the people of the church. The priority of the *cathedra* is important because it preserves the Cyprianic framework of the communion of bishops; the endowments can only function when connected to the college of bishops through the *cathedra*.

One possible advantage of the image of the *notes* for Parmenian was that they were given to the church as the bride of Christ and not to individual bishops themselves. Thus, though they were not strictly a separate power from that of the bishop (and could not be in the Cyprianic or Donatist understanding), they could in some sense potentially be seen as operating at some remove from any given cleric. Though an individual bishop might in truth be a sinner, as long as the church was the true bride of Christ it still possessed the *notes*. These could continue to operate in the sacramental rituals of the church, even when an individual bishop might have been sinful, even gravely sinful.

This reading corresponds with the shifts in Donatist ecclesiology during Parmenian's *floruit*. The evolution of Donatist ecclesiology has been the subject of a great deal of recent scholarship, particularly by Maureen Tilley.<sup>87</sup> In short, Tilley has argued that Parmenian focused on the holiness of the church as a body rather than the holiness of its individual members, including its bishops.<sup>88</sup> Thus the only sin that could truly invalidate a bishop's ministry was "ecclesial sin;" what mattered was membership

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<sup>87</sup> The most complete account is in Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, which has been accompanied by a series of articles and book chapters by the same author.

<sup>88</sup> Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, 102, 111-112.

in and faithfulness to the true church.<sup>89</sup> Granting such an ecclesiological shift, the *notes* fit into a pattern of focusing on the group rather than the individual.

Moreover, such an interpretation helps to clarify Optatus' confusing reference to the Spirit in the course of his attempt to claim the *notes* for his communion. Having made his case for why it was that his communion rather than the Donatists possessed the *cathedra* and the *angelus*, Optatus then turned briefly to the Spirit: "you cannot, on your own, claim the Spirit of God for yourselves."<sup>90</sup> This has led most commentators to list the Spirit as one of the gifts.<sup>91</sup> However, this passage is not a continuation of the enumeration of the gifts; it is a digression, a return to the theological differences at hand. Specifically, Optatus charged that the Donatists claimed the Spirit for themselves and sought to confine it, that they sought to restrict the divine freedom of the Spirit. This was an argument grounded in sacramental practice. Optatus was committed to defending his church's practice of accepting baptisms from Donatist churches as well as his own, a practice that seemed to imply that the Spirit was in some sense at work in both communions. Cyprian, though, had argued quite clearly that the sanctifying work of the Spirit happened only within the bounds of the true church, and the Donatists had continued this understanding.<sup>92</sup> What Optatus characterized as trying to confine the Spirit was in fact continued adherence to Cyprianic theology. The Donatists might plausibly

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<sup>89</sup> Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, 102. Cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 197-98.

<sup>90</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.7.1 (SC 412: 256): "Non enim spiritum Dei soli uobis uindicare poteritis."

<sup>91</sup> Bright, *The Book of Rules of Tyconius*, 166; Congar, "Introduction générale," 67; Edwards, *Optatus Against the Donatists*, 32 n. 8; Robert B. Eno, "The Work of Optatus as a Turning Point in the African Ecclesiology," *The Thomist* 37, no. 4 (1973): 682; Labrousse, "Introduction," 109; Sagi-Bunic, "Controversia de Baptismate," 180-1; Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, 102; Vischer, *Basiliius Der Grosse*, 80-1.

<sup>92</sup> cf. Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, 170 on this theme among Donatists, though in a later context.

have claimed to exclusively “possess” the Holy Spirit in just this sense and for this very reason to have confidence that the gifts would work in their churches. Optatus’ reference to the Spirit here is not an enumeration of one of the gifts but an indication of the theology undergirding the *notes*.

This interpretation also explains Optatus’ devaluation of the *notes*. Though Optatus did not reject Parmenian’s appeal to the *notes* outright, they played no significant role in his account of the church, the clergy, or the sacraments. Most of Optatus’ attention to the *notes* focused precisely on refuting Parmenian’s claim that the Donatists were the true church and that they alone possessed the *notes*. Thus Optatus subsumed his treatment of the *notes* into his argument about which church was the true church. He offered no alternative explanation of the *notes*. This was because even though Optatus seemed to accept the basic premise of the *notes* as legitimate, there was no clear reason for them from his perspective; they served no function in his understanding of the church or the sacraments. Indeed, after he had demonstrated to his own satisfaction that it was his communion that possessed the *notes*, he went on to criticize Parmenian for focusing on the *notes* rather than the sacraments themselves, which (continuing the bridal imagery) he described as the womb (*viscera*) by which the bride gives spiritual birth. Given his sacramental theology, Optatus had no particular need for the *notes*, for they relied on a theology and practice of the sacraments and clergy that were much more in line with the Cyprianic tradition than were those of his communion.

Seen in this light, Parmenian’s appeal to the *notes ecclesiae* was an attempt to deal with the ongoing tension between theory and practice regarding the sins of the



clergy. It was a theory that both relied on a Cyprianic theology of the episcopal ministry and its sacramental powers and was aimed at addressing problems within the Cyprianic tradition. In the face of new challenges, Parmenian continued to be shaped by the theology of the bishop articulated by Cyprian.

It was this continuing adherence to a basically Cyprianic theology of the bishop, evident not only in Parmenian but in the *Passio Marculi* as well, that was the context of Caecilianist polemic about the pride, vanity, and claims to sanctity of the Donatist bishops. According to the teaching of Cyprian, bishops genuinely were a class apart within the Christian community. They not only bore responsibility for the rituals of the community, they actually possessed special powers granted to them – and to them alone – by the gift of the Holy Spirit. In exercising that power, they acted as human mediators of the grace of God; their fellow Christians depended on them for the gifts of faith and sanctity. As bearers of that power, they were looked upon as particularly holy, worthy of distinct respect and placed under a distinct discipline. If this set of practices and beliefs was distinctly Donatist, as their opponents alleged, it was also decidedly Cyprianic.

## CHAPTER III

### AUGUSTINE: BISHOPS AS MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

The traditional African understanding of the bishop, with its roots in Cyprian's theology, remained as influential in Augustine's time as it had been in the middle of the fourth century. That Augustine modified this understanding in responding to the Donatists is well known. What is not nearly so well understood is the extent to which he refashioned it. Augustine's theological account of the ministry of the bishops was, in fact, a radical revision of the African tradition.

Augustine's theology of ministry has been and continues to be the subject of a number of studies, many of which have been comprehensive in scope.<sup>1</sup> The purpose and scope of this chapter are much more limited. This chapter will situate Augustine's theology of episcopal ministry within both the practical and theological tradition of North African Christianity, showing the extent to which his theory of ministry modified that tradition.

Though he accepted the established episcopal practice, in which bishops had distinct and exclusive authority over ritual, disciplinary, and administrative aspects of

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<sup>1</sup> Lee Francis Bacchi, *Theology of Ordained Ministry in the Letters of Augustine of Hippo* (San Francisco Intl Scholars Press, 1998); Rémi Crespín, *Ministère Et Sainteté; Pastorale Du Clergé Et Solution De La Crise Donatiste Dans La Vie Et La Doctrine De Saint Augustin* (Paris, Études augustiniennes, 1965); Émilien Lamirande, *Études Sur L'ecclésiologie De Saint Augustin*, Les Publications Sériées de l'Université d'Ottawa, 92, (Ottawa, Éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1969); Joseph T. Lienhard, "Ministry," *ATAE*, 567-9. Michele Pellegrino, *The True Priest: The Priesthood as Preached and Practised by St. Augustine*, trans. by Arthur Gibson (Langley, St Paul Publications, 1968). Most recently, Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, has devoted significant attention to the subject.

church life, Augustine radically revised the traditional theological significance of episcopal ministry. He maintained that despite the elevated status and distinct prerogatives of bishops within the church they possessed no power or sanctity that was not held in common with other faithful Christians. In his formulation all spiritual gifts were held in common by the whole church as the body of Christ. This included the spiritual gifts operative in particularly episcopal ministries, such as the sacraments, preaching, and pastoral oversight. Though the bishops were entrusted with performing these ministries, the church as a whole actually possessed them. Augustine applied this theory to the ministries of clergy and laity alike; all shared in the gifts of the Spirit that made the church's ministries possible. This theory, of course, was at odds with the fundamental Cyprianic principle that the bishops alone possessed the power to perform the sacraments.

This chapter begins with a brief account of the practice of episcopal ministry in Augustine's time, a practice that Augustine did not substantively challenge. After consideration of Augustine's explanation of the very evident distinctions between the bishops and the people in practice, it then turns to Augustine's defense and explanation of two Caecilianist practices: the acceptance of Donatist baptism and the acceptance of Donatist clergy in their orders. These practices contradicted Cyprian's teaching, and in order to defend them Augustine developed theories that ultimately came to structure his broader theology of ministry. Only then does the chapter offer a constructive account of Augustine's theology of episcopal ministry. It begins with his theology of priestly, or sacramental, ministry; because of the conflict with the Donatists this was the aspect of the

theory that he articulated in the most detail. It then shows that he applied this theory in his descriptions of the bishop as preacher and overseer, and that this same theory was also at work in his explanations of the ministry of the laity. That is, Augustine's theory of the episcopal ministry helped shape a theory of the ministry of the whole church.

### **The Bishops and the Practice of Ministry in the Time of Augustine**

Evidence for the practice of North African bishops in Augustine's lifetime is even more abundant than during that of Cyprian.<sup>2</sup> Despite some changes, the basic structure of the African clergy continued and even expanded.<sup>3</sup> Most importantly, the centrality of the bishop did not change; as had been the case since at least Cyprian's time, the bishop remained the central figure of the local Christian community and was responsible for its liturgical life, discipline, and administration.

The bishop stood at the center of the congregation's liturgical life. He was the primary minister of the congregation's rituals of eucharist, baptism, and reconciliation of sinners, responsibilities that he could and did share with presbyters under his authority.<sup>4</sup> The bishop alone was authorized to perform ordinations and to consecrate oil for anointing in baptism.<sup>5</sup> The bishop was also the primary preacher. In this regard, Augustine's own preaching duties as a presbyter were unusual, though the practice of

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<sup>2</sup> This is primarily due to the writings of Augustine himself, but also to the early fifth century conciliar legislation.

<sup>3</sup> For a fuller account of the African clergy in North Africa in Augustine's time than is possible here, see Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 402-432.

<sup>4</sup> Although presbyters were often responsible for rural parishes and were more or less independent. Cf. Aug. *Ep.* 65.

<sup>5</sup> *Con. Carth.* a. 390.3; *Bru. Hipp.* 34.

presbyters preaching in the presence of bishops seems to have spread in Africa during his lifetime.<sup>6</sup>

These liturgical duties were by no means the bishops' only responsibilities. They were likewise responsible for overseeing the discipline of their congregations.<sup>7</sup> They were responsible for rebuking and correcting sinners and calling them to repentance, whether publicly or in private. They urged private penitential practices for sins of daily living, oversaw the formal process of public excommunication and reconciliation of notorious sinners, and in this period even directed a more private form of penance for those guilty of crimes that were not publically known.<sup>8</sup> They oversaw the discipline and penance of their clergy as well, though the clergy were removed from office rather than subject to the public ritual.<sup>9</sup> They were responsible for interpreting and articulating the community's moral standards as well overseeing its rituals of penance and reconciliation.

Bishops also had wide-ranging and often very heavy administrative responsibilities. They managed church property, making decisions about receiving donations, buying, and selling property. They raised money as necessary for causes ranging from building projects to the ransoming of captives. They represented the church and often individual Christians before civil authorities. On a local or provincial level this was often for the purpose of either interceding for mercy for condemned criminals or

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<sup>6</sup> cf. Aug. *Ep.* 41.1.

<sup>7</sup> See Daniel Edward Doyle, *The Bishop as Disciplinarian in the Letters of St. Augustine* (New York: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2003), 27-61, for a study of the range of meanings that *disciplina* could take on in the letters of Augustine. Doyle noted 72 occurrences of *disciplina* and its cognates in Augustine's letters, and concluded that while Augustine exploited the full range of meaning of the term it was used most frequently in the sense of correction, with an emphasis placed on moral conversion. It was used for the purpose of "promoting the Christian life in its doctrinal, moral, and liturgical dimensions," 60.

<sup>8</sup> cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 337-343.

<sup>9</sup> Though in the course of the controversy, provision was made for some Donatist clergy to continue exercising their orders rather than commune with the laity. cf. Aug. *Parm.* 2.13.28.

pressing for the enforcement of decrees on behalf of the church, but bishops were also often sent to the imperial court by councils in order to promote African ecclesial interests.<sup>10</sup> Bishops were empowered to hear civil cases as well, and Augustine indicated that this was a particularly time-consuming and (to him) onerous aspect of a bishop's work.<sup>11</sup>

Upon their ordination into the clergy, bishops, presbyters, deacons, and subdeacons were subject to a distinct discipline that set them apart from other Christians. They were required to practice sexual continence. They had to cease any other occupations that might distract them from their duties or involve them in outside entanglements.<sup>12</sup> They could only eat or drink in inns when they were traveling.<sup>13</sup> Strictures were placed on their households as well: all members of their households had to be "Catholic" Christians; limits were placed on what women could live in their households; even the objects of gifts and bequests were regulated.<sup>14</sup> Augustine's clergy at Hippo had a further and even more distinct discipline. Augustine organized his clergy into a semi-monastic community. They were not allowed to marry nor retain private property. They lived together, ate together, and were supported from a common fund.

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<sup>10</sup> Individual bishops often went to the imperial court to plead for the interests of their local churches, so much so that legislative attempts were made to reign in the practice. cf. *Conc. Serd.* 8; *Bru. Hipp.* 25.

<sup>11</sup> *Aug. Ep.* 139.3; *C.Th.* 1.27.1; 1.27.2; cf. Frederik van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop; the Life and Work of a Father of the Church*, trans. Brian Battershaw and G. R. Lamb (London, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1961), 255-270.

<sup>12</sup> This included serving as guardians for minors, having legal responsibility for an estate, and administering property. The conciliar legislation prohibited anyone from giving them such responsibilities, *Con. Carth.* a. 345-8, 8-9; *Bru. Hipp.* 15; cf. *Aug. Ep.* 88; *C.Th.* 16.5.1, 16.6.1. Bishops were, however, often given charge over orphans and their legacies. cf. *Aug. Ep.* 176.2.

<sup>13</sup> *Bru. Hipp.* 35.

<sup>14</sup> They could only be made to Christians. *Bru. Hipp.* 16; *Reg. Carth.* 81.

Whatever else its aims, the discipline of the clergy in this period served to emphasize the distinctions between the clergy and laity.

As in Cyprian's time, the African bishops also had shared responsibility for the leadership of the African church. This leadership was primarily exercised in councils of bishops that could be either provincial or plenary. Within the episcopal college, African bishops occupied an equal office. Each province was led by a primate, or "first bishop," who assumed an administrative role, a role that was determined by length of tenure.<sup>15</sup> The one exception to this was the bishop of Carthage, who served *ex officio* as the primate of the province of Proconsular Africa and the primate of all Africa. The bishop of Carthage exercised a range of administrative functions that pertained to the whole church in Africa, and was recognized as having responsibility for all of Africa. Nevertheless even the bishop of Carthage was understood as an administrative role rather than a distinct office.<sup>16</sup> The African bishops prohibited the use of the titles "Chief of the Priests" or "High Priest" for any of the primates, titles that implied a sacerdotal hierarchy among the bishops.<sup>17</sup> Some bishops were clearly more influential than others, but the Caecilianist bishops insisted that the primates were simply "bishops of the first chair."<sup>18</sup> Though each

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<sup>15</sup> The primate called and presided over provincial councils; sent overseas correspondence in the name of the province; his approval was required for the ordination of bishops, establishing a new bishopric, and selling church property in his diocese; and communicated with the bishop of Carthage about administrative matters pertaining to all of Africa.

<sup>16</sup> The bishop of Carthage convened the plenary councils of African bishops, communicated their decisions to overseas churches, issued instructions to legates sent on missions by their fellow bishops, maintained the list of recognized bishops in Africa, communicated the date of Easter to the churches of Africa, and could call presbyters serving in one church to be bishops of another. cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 417-18.

<sup>17</sup> *Bru. Hipp.* 25 (CCSL 149.40.150-52): "Vt primae sedis episcopus non appelletur princeps sacerdotum, aut summus sacerdos, aut aliquid huiusmodi, sed tantum primae sedis episcopus."

<sup>18</sup> *Bru. Hipp.* 25.

occupied a lofty place within his own congregation, within their own order the African bishops were held to be equal.

The bishops remained the central figures of North African churches, leaders of their congregations' liturgical, disciplinary, and administrative lives. They occupied roles and performed functions that were their prerogative alone, and the discipline required of them further marked them (and the rest of the clergy) as different from the laity. The social and religious structures to which Cyprian had assigned cosmic importance still existed. The bishops could still aptly be called the "princes" of the church.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Status and Service of the Bishops**

As Augustine often acknowledged, bishops occupied an elevated status in comparison to the rest of the congregation. This situation prompted him to distinguish the ways in which the office of bishop did and did not set him apart from his fellow Christians. In his formulation, clergy and laity alike were all members of the body of Christ and servants of God; this common status as Christians was fundamental. His own status as bishop was secondary, taken up not for his own benefit but for the sake of his fellow Christians.

The episcopal office carried with it increasing social and economic status in late antiquity. The church's increased membership and property holdings meant access to wealth on a previously unthinkable scale, especially in larger or more affluent dioceses. As those responsible for managing this wealth bishops were men of financial means, even if those means were not their own personally. Augustine himself remarked that as a

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<sup>19</sup> Aug. *Psal.* 44.32.



bishop he was responsible for twenty times what his familial patrimony had been.<sup>20</sup>

Episcopal office likewise conferred increased social status for most bishops. The bishop was not only the singular representative of the Christian community, and as such could speak for a potentially large and influential constituency, but also functioned as a quasi-public official.<sup>21</sup> Episcopal office came to be viewed much like other public offices, as an *honor*, a perspective evident in its use in funerary inscriptions.<sup>22</sup>

Bishops also occupied an elite status within the Christian community. As we have seen, bishops exercised an ultimate if not exclusive authority over the liturgy and rituals of the congregation. This was made evident not only through presiding over the community's rituals but even by the bishop's physical location during the reading of scripture and the sermon: he sat upon a throne (*cathedra*) at the back of the raised apse, the better to be seen and heard by the people who stood in the nave below.<sup>23</sup>

Despite being raised above the people, Augustine insisted that the bishop's lofty status was for the benefit of the people rather than of the bishop himself. To do so he distinguished between the bishops' status as Christians and their status as those put in charge of the Christian community.

You see, we whom the Lord has deigned, thanks to no merits of ours, to set in this high station (about which a very strict account indeed has to be rendered) have two things about us that must be clearly distinguished: one, that we are Christians, the other, that we are placed in charge. Being Christians is for our sake; being in

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<sup>20</sup> Aug. *Ep.* 126.7.

<sup>21</sup> cf. Claudia Rapp, "The Elite Status of Bishops in Late Antiquity in Ecclesiastical, Spiritual, and Social Contexts," *Arethusa* 33, no. 3 (2000): 391, and more broadly Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Lienhard, "Ministry," *ATAE*, 567-569.

<sup>22</sup> This was true of other clerical offices as well. Cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 430-1.

<sup>23</sup> cf. Aug. *Serm.* 298.5; *Serm. Denis* 17(301A).2.

charge is for yours. It is to our advantage that we are Christians, only to yours that we are in charge.<sup>24</sup>

The bishop was placed in an elevated position for those to whom he ministered, not for himself. Though he acknowledged that some bishops did pursue it for their own gain, he argued that in fact the office of bishop was a burden and a danger to the one who held it.<sup>25</sup> A bishop had to give account for his flock as well as himself, and his own life as a Christian was made all the more difficult. Those who have been put in charge of the people were in fact their servants, and all were servants of God together.<sup>26</sup>

Without denying the very real distinctions between himself and his congregation, Augustine emphasized the shared status of all Christians before Christ, their common master and teacher. Though as bishop he was obligated to teach the people, he and his hearers were fellow students. On more than one occasion he portrayed Christ as sitting in the professor's chair in heaven, implicitly contrasting it with Augustine's own *cathedra* and thereby relativizing the distinction between himself and the people he taught.<sup>27</sup> In variations on the same image he elsewhere described bishops as older students merely advising younger ones or as being placed in a raised position simply because they had to deliver a speech.<sup>28</sup> Though he was at times keenly aware of the social status of bishops, he consistently minimized the theological distinctions between the bishops and other Christians. At one point he noted that it was the church itself that made bishops. In a subtle but no less significant contrast with Cyprian, Augustine remarked that while

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<sup>24</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 46.2. cf. *Serm.* 340.1.

<sup>25</sup> cf. George Lawless, "Augustine's Burden of Ministry," *Angelicum* 61 (1984): 295-315.

<sup>26</sup> *Serm. Guelf.* 32(340A).3

<sup>27</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 261.2; *Serm. Guelf.* 32(340A).4.

<sup>28</sup> Aug. *Serm. Denis* 17(301A).2; *Serm.* 298.5.

bishops occupied the place of the apostles and the church could call them “fathers” and even princes, they were actually sons; the church had given birth to them, not vice versa.<sup>29</sup>

The bishops possessed an elevated social status and important responsibilities within the church, and Augustine showed little concern that it should be otherwise. However, he did seek to present himself and other bishops as more fundamentally fellow Christians and servants of God rather than a class unto themselves. Their office provided them no advantages before God; if anything, it made living faithfully more difficult.

### **Historical Context: Changes in Practice**

Augustine’s theology of the episcopate was articulated in response to the challenges of the ongoing conflict with the Donatist communion. Though the beliefs and practices of the two communions were largely the same, by Augustine’s time the Caecilianists had adopted several practices that were departures from those considered traditional in Africa. Two of these practices in particular - accepting Donatist baptism and receiving Donatist clergy in their orders and allowing them to continue serving as clergy - required sustained explanation and apologetic work in light of the Caecilianist campaign to unite the two communions. Offering such an explanation meant dealing with the legacy of Cyprian. Though both communions had departed from the theology of Cyprian in their own ways, the authority of his theological legacy still loomed large in Africa.

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<sup>29</sup> Aug. *Psal.* 44.32. Cyprian, of course, had argued that the apostles were the first bishops; that all subsequent bishops became a part of the college of bishops of which the apostles were the first members; and that membership in this college granted the power to baptize, forgive sins, and offer the eucharist sacrifice, that is, the power by which the church gave birth to Christians.

Augustine's theology of the episcopate was structured by the need to explain his communion's practices in a way that made sense within the framework of this African theological tradition.

The condemnation and prohibition of repeating baptism can be traced back at least to the Council of Arles, which had also vindicated Caecilian.<sup>30</sup> In accepting the judgments of the council, Caecilian and those bishops in communion with him likewise abandoned the practice of rebaptism, even though it had been the established practice of African Christianity since at least the middle of the third century; the rival communion rejected the judgments of the council and continued to practice "rebaptism."<sup>31</sup> In Augustine's time, "rebaptism" had become the characteristic practice of its bishops while Caecilianists continued to accept the baptisms of their Donatist rivals.<sup>32</sup>

Though Caecilianist practice was in line with that of the overseas churches and the judgments of its councils, it was nonetheless at odds with traditional African practice and the authority of Cyprian. Donatist theologians such as Parmenian and Petilian drew on Cyprian's theology of baptism to defend the traditional African practice now branded as "rebaptism" and to critique Caecilianist practice. Cyprian's theory had focused on the bishops as exclusively empowered to convey the Holy Spirit, forgive sins, and offer the eucharistic sacrifice; only those bishops in the unity of the worldwide college of bishops

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<sup>30</sup> *Con. Arles.* 9 (8) (CCL 148:10-11.26-31).

<sup>31</sup> See chapter 2 for more on this topic. Cyprian had claimed that the practice in Africa dated to the leadership of one Agrippinus, seemingly some time in the first third of the third century. Explicit rejection of the practice among Caecilianists can be found in the judgments of the council held at Carthage under the leadership of Gratus c. 348, *Con. Afr.* a. 345-8 1.

<sup>32</sup> The Donatist communion did not practice "rebaptism" monolithically. cf. Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, 45; Frend, *The Donatist Church*, 167-8, 189, 224; Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 196-7.

possessed this gift, and only those in communion with such bishops could receive forgiveness and sanctification. According to this theory, not only could the Donatists accuse the Caecilianists of tolerating sinful and unworthy bishops and so contaminating and invalidating the ministry of their communion, they could (and did) argue that Caecilianist acceptance of Donatist baptism only served to prove the rightness of the Donatist cause. They claimed that even their rivals knew that their baptism was holy and feared to repeat it and that this proved that they, and not the Caecilianists, were the true church in Africa.

Augustine thus had to defend and explain his own practice in terms that could engage traditional African convictions. He had to explain how it was that baptism could be performed by bishops whom they considered to be in schism while still insisting that salvation and holiness could not be found outside the true church. He likewise had to show that while the church's ministry and communion were necessary to salvation, the faithfulness and holiness of its clergy were not.

In order to do this Augustine distinguished between the ritual of baptism and its effects, dedication to Christ and sanctification of the believer. The ritual itself was always effective when performed appropriately because Christ was the true giver of baptism. Thus the holiness of the clergy who performed the baptism did not matter. Though the ritual was always effective, only those who truly repented and believed in Christ retained its benefits. The unfaithful received baptism but lost the forgiveness and sanctification that it conferred; they received the ritual and its effects, but immediately lost its effects. The dedication to Christ effected in baptism endured while the forgiveness and

sanctification given did not.<sup>33</sup> This allowed Augustine to hold that baptism could be found outside the church even though salvation and holiness could not.

Following Cyprian and the African theological tradition, Augustine maintained that the sanctifying effect of baptism could be retained only within the unity of the true Church, the locus of holiness and salvation. The Holy Spirit had truly given the church the power to forgive sins and to sanctify, and only in unity with the church could this be effective. This meant that those who left or were outside of the unity of the church lost baptism's sanctifying effect, but it also meant that those who returned to faith and the unity of the church regained it. They need not be baptized again; their repentance and unity with the church made them once again subject to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. This theory did not depend on the holiness or status of the church's clergy but on membership in/unity with the church. It likewise explained why baptism did not need to be repeated: those coming from schism did not lack baptism but the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, available only within the unity of the true church. This theory of baptism and the role of the clergy in it would come to structure Augustine's theory of the priestly ministry of the bishops, and indeed of clerical ministry more broadly.

While it was the baptismal controversy that structured Augustine's articulation of his theology of the minister of the sacraments, it was the Caecilianist practice of accepting Donatist clergy in their orders that prompted his explanation of a theology of orders themselves. In explaining and defending this practice, Augustine claimed that while ordination was like baptism in that it was not to be repeated, it differed from

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<sup>33</sup> Augustine compared this enduring dedication to Christ to a military tattoo; both the tattoo and the service to which it obligated its bearer were permanent, even if borne by a deserter or a fraud. Aug. *Psal.* 39.1; *Serm. Dolb.* 3(293A).16; *Serm. Denis* 8(260A).2; *Eu. Io.* 6.15

baptism in being for the sake of others. Therefore the criterion for determining whether or not clergy should exercise their office within the church was not their personal sanctity or sinfulness but what would be good for the church. If their ministry was for the good of the church, their unity with the church would itself make their orders and ministry effective.

In the late fourth century the Caecilianist bishops began a program of actively seeking to bring Donatist bishops into the Caecilianist communion.<sup>34</sup> The proposal recorded in canon 37 of *Breuiarium Hipponense* was the first of a series of such proposals that, in slightly different ways, all provided ways for Donatist clergy to be received into the Caecilianist communion in their offices and be allowed to exercise clerical ministry therein.<sup>35</sup> It was a practice made necessary by a severe shortage of clergy, a shortage exacerbated by the reception of Donatist congregations into the Caecilianist communion.<sup>36</sup> However, it was also a controversial practice.

The practice of receiving schismatic clergy in their offices had significant historical precedents. Similar provisions for the reception of schismatic clergy had been made by the Roman synod under Miltiades at the beginning of the African schism and by the council of Nicaea, and the subsequent Council of Arles had declared that those who had been ordained by apostate bishops were to be allowed to remain in their orders.<sup>37</sup> In

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<sup>34</sup> The timing was apparently in response to the way the Donatist communion handled the schism of the Maximianists. Cf. J. Patout Burns, "Appropriating Augustine Appropriating Cyprian," *Augustinian Studies* 36, no. 1 (2005): 113-130.

<sup>35</sup> cf. Burns, "Appropriating," 116-19, for a list and analysis of this series of proposals.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Aurelius' introductory statement to the bishops gathered for the council of Carthage, 401. *Reg. Carth. proemium* (CCSL 149.195.427-30).

<sup>37</sup> *Aug. Ep.* 43.5.16; *Con. Arles.* 14 (13) (CCL 148:12.42-47). This practice seems to have been required of the Caecilianists as a condition of their recognition by and communion with the overseas churches, though the decree of Arles is not specifically referred to in the African councils.

the late fourth and early fifth century the Roman bishops Siricius and Innocent specified that those who had deserted their own communion for that of heretics or schismatics had to undergo penance and be barred from serving among the clergy; no such penalty was required for those who had originally become Christians while in schism and then been ordained.<sup>38</sup> In proposing to accept Donatist clergy in their orders the Caecilianist bishops were well within the precedents set by the overseas churches.

Despite these historical precedents, the African bishops proceeded cautiously in their program of integrating Donatist clergy. They repeatedly deferred to overseas councils and consulted the bishops of Rome and Milan.<sup>39</sup> Whatever strength of precedent may have been on their side, they were nonetheless advocating a practice that was clearly contrary to the theology of Cyprian. Cyprian, of course, had insisted that bishops who were schismatic or otherwise known sinners had to be removed from office; they had lost the Holy Spirit and so the power to sanctify and forgive sins. The Council of Carthage of 256 that met under his leadership had likewise decreed that all schismatic clergy must be received among the laity.<sup>40</sup> Though the African bishops had more recent precedent on their side they were nonetheless up against the teaching of Cyprian. Thus it is not all that surprising that they were consistently sensitive to the worthiness of the schismatic clergy, given how central of a concern it was in the Cyprianic theology.<sup>41</sup>

Augustine made a series of claims meant to defend his communion's practice and account for its variation from Cyprian's teaching. Some of these were more accurate than

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<sup>38</sup> Siric. *Ep.* 5; Innoc., *Ep.* 2.8.11; 17.5.11; 39; cf. Burns, "Appropriating," 120.

<sup>39</sup> Burns, "Appropriating," 119.

<sup>40</sup> Cyprian, *Ep.* 72.2.1.

<sup>41</sup> cf. Burns, "Appropriating," 122.



others. For example, Augustine claimed that Cyprian had known that some of his colleagues were unworthy and had nonetheless remained in communion with them; this was simply not true.<sup>42</sup> Cyprian had been dealing with clergy who had turned against him and against the church in which they had been ordained; they had deserted the true church and led others into schism. On this point Augustine and his fellow bishops were largely in agreement with Cyprian: their proposals to receive Donatist clergy in their orders did not include any who had deserted the unity of their communion. Their proposals only concerned Donatist clergy who had never been members of the Caecilianist communion.

Even more significant, though, was the theological rationale Augustine offered for receiving Donatist clergy in their orders. Making use of the explanation he had already developed for baptism, he argued that ordination, like baptism, was an enduring sacramental reality and not to be repeated.<sup>43</sup> Unlike baptism, however, it was not for the salvation of the individual; ordination was given for the sake of the salvation of others. Because of this, the criteria for the exercise of ordination were its furtherance of the good of other Christians and of the peace and unity of the church.<sup>44</sup> If allowing a former Donatist cleric to exercise his orders in the Caecilianist communion would further these goals there was no bar to him doing so. The question was not whether or not the church could forgive the sins of the clergy, nor whether the sacraments performed by such clergy would be sanctifying. It was a matter of what was judged to be good for the church as a whole.

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<sup>42</sup> Burns, "Appropriating," 124.

<sup>43</sup> Aug. *Parm.* 2.13.28.

<sup>44</sup> Aug. *Cresc.* 2.11.13-12.14.

Explaining how this could be the case required Augustine to modify the teaching of Cyprian. Unlike Cyprian and his peers Augustine harbored no doubts about the church's ability to forgive major post-baptismal sins.<sup>45</sup> Augustine offered a reinterpretation of the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit within the church that did not rely on the faithfulness or sanctity of the bishops but on the gift of the Holy Spirit at work in all the faithful in the unity of the church. This theory both meant that the personal faith and sanctity of the bishops was not determinative for the salvation of the rest of the people *and* explained how schismatic clergy could continue to exercise their ministry: their sins were forgiven and their ordination made effective in the unity of the church, through the prayers of the people in these (re)united congregations. It was a theory that was well-suited to the situation at hand, the integration of Donatist congregations as well as clergy, and one which Augustine utilized in multiple ways in explaining ministry within the church.

### **Augustine Theorizing Ministry**

As we have seen, the controversy with the rival Donatist communion drove Augustine to reinterpret the sacramental ministry of the bishops, taking into account both traditional African beliefs and contemporary Caecilianist practices. The controversy over baptism prompted him to articulate a revised theory of the minister of the sacraments; the Caecilianist decision to allow Donatist clergy to continue to exercise their orders in the Caecilianist prompted him to articulate a theory of orders themselves. The need to

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<sup>45</sup> *Aug. Ep.* 185.10.45, "It was not a despair of receiving pardon but the rigor of discipline that brought it about that the Church established the rule that after penance for some crime no one should enter the clerical state or return to the clerical state or remain in the clerical state." Cf. Burns, "Appropriating," 124-5.

explain and defend these Caecilianist practices structured his theory of the sacramental ministry of the bishops.

This theory, in turn, structured a more comprehensive theory of ministry within the church. Augustine employed the theory of the priestly ministry of the bishops developed in controversy with the Donatists to explain the ministries of the bishop as pastor and preacher as well. Though less frequently or extensively articulated, and likewise less accounted for in the scholarly literature, Augustine's accounts of the bishop as priest, pastor, and preacher were all aspects of an overarching theory of ministry. In fact, he did not limit his use of this theory to explaining the ministry exercised by the clergy, employing the same theory in explaining a variety of lay ministries.

Thus in this section I will begin by offering a more detailed explanation of Augustine's theory of the sacramental or priestly ministry of the bishop, because it was this account that came to structure the rest of his theory of ministry. I will then turn to his account of the ministries of the bishop as pastor and preacher, ministries that I will deal with jointly because Augustine's accounts of them so frequently overlapped. I will end by very briefly showing how this same theory was applied to a variety of ministries of the laity, indicating that for Augustine the ministry of the bishops ultimately arose from the same source as those of the laity.

I have been referring to Augustine's theory of the priestly ministry of the bishop in the singular, but in fact Augustine developed twin theories of ministry. These theories drew on two distinct strands of North African theology and were utilized in different contexts. The first theory drew on the North African tradition of debate over the gift of

the Holy Spirit and the possession of the power to forgive sins; in this theory Augustine utilized the work of Tertullian and Optatus to reinterpret that of Cyprian, whose own theory had become normative for most North African Christians. The second theory drew on a less prominent line of thought in North Africa that identified Christ and the church in order to explain the church's exercise of powers that were properly Christ's alone; this identification goes back to Tertullian but its most advanced form was developed by Tyconius, a lay Donatist exegete and theologian.

In drawing on these two strands of North African theology, Augustine did not use them to answer two distinct sets of questions or to develop entirely separate and parallel systems. He utilized the two forms of his theory somewhat interchangeably, and was willing to move back and forth between them; they were complementary rather than mutually exclusive. In a general sense, though, he did use them to address different contexts: the first was articulated primarily in controversy against the Donatists, while the second was used almost exclusively in his sermons. For the sake of clarity I will address the two theories in turn.<sup>46</sup>

*The Holy Spirit and the Power to Forgive Sins:  
Engaging the Tradition of Tertullian, Cyprian, and Optatus*

One of Augustine's preoccupations in his works against the Donatists was to offer a new interpretation of the long running African debate about the church's power to forgive sins, one that would account for Caecilianist practice on thoroughly African

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<sup>46</sup> In making this choice I am following the lead of Burns, first in J. Patout Burns, "The Holiness of the Church in North African Theology," in *Studia Patristica Vol 49* (Louvain: Peeters, 2010), 85–100, and then in Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 610–20, in articulating the holiness of the church.

terms. To accomplish this he engaged the same sources as his Donatist opponents: the works of Cyprian and the text of scripture. In order to reinterpret these sources he also drew on Tertullian and Optatus of Milevis. Building on but going well beyond their insights, Augustine argued that the power to forgive sins had not been given to any socially identifiable group within the church but rather to all faithful Christians. This power, which he identified as charity, was effective in all those who abided in intentional unity with the true church. Thus sacramental rituals could be performed outside the unity of the church but the forgiveness and sanctification that they were meant to confer were only available within the true church. While the bishops were charged with performing these rituals, they did not possess their power unless as members of the true church. It was charity, given through the Holy Spirit to the church, that worked forgiveness and sanctification rather than the ministrations of the clergy.

As has been discussed above, Augustine insisted that all baptism was Christ's baptism. It was Christ who truly baptized. Augustine distinguished between the authority to baptize and the ministry of baptism: though Christ would baptize through the ministry of others, all those who were baptized were in fact baptized by Christ and not by the ministers themselves. "For it is one thing to baptize through a ministry received, another to baptize on one's own authority."<sup>47</sup> Augustine went on to specify that while Christ could have given his own authority to baptize to another in such a way that it would truly be the possession of that servant, "such that what was the Lord's would be theirs," he had

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<sup>47</sup> Aug. *Eu. Io.* 5.6. cf. *Bapt.* 5.13.15.

refused to do so.<sup>48</sup> He had passed on the ministry of baptism but not the authority.<sup>49</sup> In making this claim Augustine was building on an argument of Optatus, who had described the clergy as waiters at a table serving food they had not themselves prepared.<sup>50</sup> For Augustine, the bishops did not possess the power of baptism; the “spiritual power of the sacrament” passed through them but was not theirs.<sup>51</sup>

Whereas Cyprian had claimed that the power to forgive and to sanctify had been given exclusively to the college of bishops and was held in common by them, Augustine argued that this power had been given to the church and was held in common by all faithful Christians. In making this argument he revisited John 20:21-23 and Matthew 16:17-19, the key texts in Cyprian’s account of the episcopal power to forgive sins, and added another pair of core texts, Matthew 18:15-18 and 1 Peter 4:8. As we have seen, Cyprian faced intense conflict over the question of who possessed the power to forgive sins. In the face of claims by proponents of the power of martyrs, schismatic bishops, and even the bishop of Rome, Cyprian insisted that only those bishops who were members of the worldwide college of bishops possessed this power, but that all such bishops could exercise it independently. In making his case for this theory, Cyprian had appealed to Matthew 16 and John 20. He argued that these texts demonstrated that the power to forgive sins had been given twice, first to Peter individually (Matt. 16:19) and then to the disciples as a group (John 20:21-23). The purpose of the gift to Peter was to demonstrate

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<sup>48</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.7. He also insisted that Christ was the true agent of baptism.

<sup>49</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.6-11.

<sup>50</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.7. Augustine used the same imagery of the bishop as waiter in *Serm.* 339.4 (*Sermones selecti duodeviginti*, ed. C. Lambot, 115): “minister sum, paterfamilias non sum.” Optatus also used the image of the clergy as dyers of wool who simply applied a color they had obtained from another source. *Parm.* 5.7.

<sup>51</sup> *Eu. Io.* 5.15.34-5 (CCSL 36:50): “Spiritalis... uirtus sacramenti.”

that the power to forgive was a single power. The gift to the gathered disciples clarified that the power was both given to all the apostles and that it was to be held jointly by them; Cyprian considered the apostles to have been the first bishops, and thus this applied equally to the members of the college of bishops.<sup>52</sup> All those outside of the college of bishops, whether non-bishops or schismatic bishops, lacked this power.

Augustine's interpretation of these texts joined them to Matthew 18:15-18 and argued that the power to forgive sins was given to the church as a whole. Using John 20 and Matthew 18 to interpret Matthew 16, Augustine repeatedly insisted that in the latter text Peter was a symbol of the whole church rather than of its bishops.<sup>53</sup> Thus the power to forgive sins granted to Peter in that text was given to the whole church. Augustine then appealed to both John 20 and Matthew 18 in support of this reading. He noted that in John 20 the gift of the Holy Spirit and the power to forgive sins had been given to all the assembled *disciples*, not only to the apostles.<sup>54</sup> Likewise he observed that in Matthew 18 the power to bind and loose had been given to all the faithful and grounded in their forgiveness of one another.<sup>55</sup> On the basis of this interpretation Augustine claimed that the power to forgive sins had not been given to the bishops but to the church itself, in its faithful members.

Augustine identified this power that all the faithful held in common as the Holy Spirit's gift of charity. In doing so he added 1 Peter 4:8 to the core texts in Matthew and

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<sup>52</sup> cf. Cypr. *Ep.* 33.1.1; *Unit. eccl.* 4-5.

<sup>53</sup> In fact, in *Serm.* 295.2 Augustine claimed that Peter "almost everywhere was given the privilege of representing the whole church." cf. *Eu. Io.* 50.12; *Serm.* 149.6-7; 232.3-4; 295.2.2; *serm. Guelf* 16(229N).2; *S. Lamb.* 3(229P).1.9.

<sup>54</sup> *Aug. Bapt.* 3.18.23; *Eu. Io.* 121.4; *Serm.* 99.9; 295.2.2.

<sup>55</sup> *Aug. Serm.* 295.2; *Eu. Io.* 22.7; 50.12; 118.4; 124.5.

John concerning the power to forgive sins.<sup>56</sup> In this interpretation, the power to forgive sins was the same power that was at work in all faithful Christians, binding them together in the unity of the church and moving them to love rightly, to perform good works, and to forgive one another.<sup>57</sup> This made further sense of how it was that the whole church could be said to possess the power to forgive sins, since this power was identical to that which moved people to become and live as Christians.

Of course, not all who were within the visible communion of the church seemed to actually be moved by charity to love rightly and perform good works. Augustine therefore specified that not all those in the visible communion of the church possessed the gift of charity, but only those who were truly faithful, a group he often referred to as the Dove. Unlike Tertullian and Cyprian, Augustine maintained that this group was not a visible social group. Tertullian had identified them as the keepers of the Spirit's discipline as revealed in the New Prophecy, and Cyprian as the college of bishops. Augustine maintained that it was *intentional* rather than visible unity that was fundamental; the gift of charity bound all faithful believers together to one another and to the unity of the church, moving them to love God and one another, to do good works, and to give and receive forgiveness. This group was coterminous with all true Christians even if it was not coterminous with all those who claimed to be Christians.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> 1 Peter 4:8: "Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins." *NRSV*.

<sup>57</sup> For a fuller treatment of Augustine's account of charity, see especially J. Patout Burns, *The Development of Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace*, Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 82 (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1980).

<sup>58</sup> In this sense Augustine was following Cyprian: the power to forgive was a single power held in common.



Though for Augustine it was intentional rather than visible unity that was determinative, charity was nevertheless effective only within the unity of the church. In this way Augustine continued to affirm that the church was the necessary mediator of forgiveness and sanctification. Apart from the power at work in the Dove, schismatic sacraments were not sanctifying; once joined in the unity of the Dove, both their baptisms and their ordinations became effective. But it was not only through these formal rituals that the power of charity worked to sanctify. Because charity not only made the sacraments efficacious but also moved the members of the Dove to love rightly, to perform good works, and to forgive one another, these works were sanctifying in the same way that the sacraments were. Indeed it was through such works that the sacraments of schismatics might become effective upon union with the church: when schismatic bishops were allowed to continue exercising their orders in united congregations, it was the prayers of the people themselves that would forgive the bishops' sins and vivify their ordinations.<sup>59</sup>

Thus while the bishops (and other clergy) carried out the church's rituals, it was the Dove, those in whom charity was at work, who possessed and exercised the church's sanctifying power. This was equally true when they forgave one another and when the bishop/priest baptized a new Christian or reconciled a sinner. The ministry of the sacraments had been given to the bishops, but the power at work in the sacraments had been given to all faithful Christians.

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<sup>59</sup> cf. *Bru. Hipp.* 37.

*The Church as the Body of Christ: Engaging Tyconius*

In addition to this theory that focused on the long standing African debate over who was granted the power to forgive sins, Augustine offered a second explanation that focused on the relationship between Christ as the only priest and mediator and the church's own priestly ministry. This account drew on a separate strand of North African theology and relied on the identification of the church as the body of Christ. Drawing especially on the work of the Donatist Tyconius, Augustine argued that Christ was the only true priest and the only one with the power to forgive sins, but that the church was the Body of Christ, animated by His spirit, and thereby shared in Christ's power to forgive sins. This power, along with all the gifts of the Spirit, was shared with the body as a whole. Though the bishops were charged with leadership of the church in its sacramental rituals and its priestly ministry of interceding for and forgiving sins, they did not possess the power to do so as their own, but only as members of the priestly body of Christ.

The identification of the church with Christ or as the body of Christ within the African theological tradition went back to Tertullian. He had identified the church with Christ on multiple occasions, most explicitly in describing its process of reconciling sinners: the church was Christ, and when the church interceded for its penitents it was Christ who was interceding.<sup>60</sup> It was Tyconius, though, who developed this identification into a thoroughgoing theory of the church. We have scant sources for the life of

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<sup>60</sup> Tert. *Paen.* 10.6. cf. *idem. Monog.* 13 and *Orat.* 6, in the latter of which Tertullian explicitly connected continuing to have life with both remaining in Christ and remaining in his body, as Augustine later would as well. Cf. also *Bapt.* 6.2 and *Pud.* 21.16, in which Tertullian identified the church as the body of the Trinity rather than the body of Christ. See chapter 1 for more on this topic.

Tyconius.<sup>61</sup> He was a lay Donatist theologian, active in the period of relative toleration of Donatism that began with accession of Julian as emperor. According to Augustine, Tyconius was excommunicated by a Donatist council overseen by Parmenian.<sup>62</sup> Of his four known works, only one is extant: *Liber regularum* (c. 382).<sup>63</sup> It was this work that exercised a profound influence on Augustine in articulating the relationship between Christ and the church, and so ultimately in his account of the priestly ministry of the bishops as well.

The *Liber Regularum* was simultaneously a handbook of hermeneutic reasoning and an investigation into the nature of the church.<sup>64</sup> As a treatise on hermeneutics it took the form of seven rules.<sup>65</sup> According to Tyconius there are certain laws, *regulae*, that are intrinsic to scripture; these *regulae* have been woven into scripture itself by its author, the Holy Spirit, to hide scripture's secrets.<sup>66</sup> What Tyconius claimed to offer was not a list of hermeneutical rules to be applied to the scriptural text, but rather an explanation of the

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<sup>61</sup> The only extant sources on the life of Tyconius are Augustine and Gennadius: Aug. *Parm.* 1.1.1, 2.13.31; *Ep.* 93.10.43-44; Gennadius, *Liber de viris illustribus* 18.

<sup>62</sup> According to Augustine, his excommunication was because he taught that the church was spread throughout the whole world. Modern commentators have judged this to be a very narrow explanation of the likely reasons and have highlighted the ways in which Tyconius' works were nonetheless at home in the Donatist tradition. cf. Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, 113; Fredriksen, "Tyconius," *ATAE*, 854; James S. Alexander, "Some Observations on Tyconius' Definition of the Church," in *Studia Patristica Vol 18, Pt 4* (Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian, 1990), 115-19; R. A. (Robert Austin) Markus, *Saeculum, History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 115-27.

<sup>63</sup> His other known works were *De bello intestine* (c. 370?), *Expositiones diversarum causarum* (c. 375?), and *Expositio Apocalypseos* (c. 385?). Fragments of the latter have survived; Roger Gryson has offered a reconstruction of the text of Tyconius' *Exposition on the Apocalypse* in *CCSL* 107A. Cf. *The Turin Fragments of Tyconius' Commentary on Revelation*, ed. Francesco Lo Blue (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963); Kenneth Steinhauser, *The Apocalypse Commentary of Tyconius: A History of Its Reception and Influence* (Frankfurt, 1987); Gerald Bonner, "St. Bede and the Tradition of Western Apocalyptic Commentary," *Jarrow Lectures* (Newcastle: J. and P. Bealls, 1966); Bonner, "Towards a Text of Tyconius," *SP* 10 (1970), 9-13.

<sup>64</sup> Bright, *The Book of Rules of Tyconius*, 86.

<sup>65</sup> The rules were: I. The Lord and His Body; II. The Lord's Bipartite Body; III. The Promises and the Law; IV. The General and the Particular; V. Times; VI. Recapitulation; VII. The Devil and His Body.

<sup>66</sup> Tyconius described these as the *secretorum legis*, or secrets of the law. *Tyc. Reg.* 2

*ratio* of the rules already present in the text; he claimed to have discovered the rules in scripture rather than developed them to apply to scripture.<sup>67</sup> Tyconius' seven rules explained a typological hermeneutic that was specifically focused on the church. Accepting the *ratio* of the rules would allow one to understand the hidden meanings of scripture by interpreting the prophetic utterances of scripture *spiritualiter*, that is, as applying to the church in the present. Tyconius' account of hermeneutics was also an account of the church.

Tyconius expanded on his ecclesiological typology by elevating the identification of the church with the body of Christ into a hermeneutical principle. The first of the seven rules noted that the scriptures often speak of Christ and his body, the church, as a single subject,<sup>68</sup> and that often when the scriptures seem to speak of Christ they are speaking of his body, the church.<sup>69</sup> Thus he argued that the scriptures, properly understood, reveal that the Church is the body of Christ, who is its head, and that therefore scriptural interpreters must discern between statements which refer to Christ and those which refer to the church. Recognition of this hidden rule of scripture led to a second: that the body of Christ is bipartite, including within it both good and evil

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<sup>67</sup> While the treatise has come to be known as *Liber Regularum*, in the prologue the text itself describes it as a *libellum regularem*. Thus it is a booklet pertaining to the rules, not a book of them. On Tyconius' scriptural interpretation, cf. Pamela Bright, *The Book of Rules of Tyconius*; Bright, "The Spiritual World, Which Is the Church': Hermeneutical Theory in the Book of Rules of Tyconius.," in *Studia Patristica Vol 22* (Louvain: Peeters, 1989), 213–18; Bright, "The Preponderating Influence of Augustine': A Study of the Epitomes of the Book of Rules of the Donatist Tyconius.," in *Augustine and the Bible* (Notre Dame, Ind: Univ of Notre Dame Pr, 1999), 109–28; Charles Kannengiesser, "Tyconius of Carthage, the Earliest Latin Theoretician of Biblical Hermeneutics: The Current Debate," in *Historiam Perscrutari* (Roma: Editrice LAS, 2002), 297–311; Kannengiesser, Bright, and Wilhelm H. Wuellner, *A Conflict of Christian Hermeneutics in Roman Africa: Tyconius and Augustine* (Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, 1989); Robert A. Kugler, "Tyconius's Mystic Rules and the Rules of Augustine.," in *Augustine and the Bible* (Notre Dame, Ind: Univ of Notre Dame Pr, 1999), 129–48.

<sup>68</sup> *Tyc. Reg.* 4, *de specie et genere*.

<sup>69</sup> *Tyc. Reg.* 1; cf. Fredriksen, "Tyconius," 854.

persons.<sup>70</sup> Tyconius applied a similar logic to the devil as well, arguing that scriptural references to the devil sometimes refer to Satan himself and sometimes to his followers, whom Tyconius described as his body.<sup>71</sup>

Augustine adapted Tyconius's exegetical approach and the identification of the church as the body of Christ in order to explain both the nature of the church's holiness and the sense in which it exercised Christ's own powers in its ministry. Whereas Tyconius had identified two ways in which the scriptures could speak of Christ, Augustine proposed three. First, they could speak of him as the divine Word of God. Second, they could speak of him as the Word incarnate, the Son of Mary and the head of the church. Third, they could refer to Christ as what Augustine described as "the Whole Christ in the fullness of the church" - that is, in the person of the church, comprised of head and members.<sup>72</sup> Augustine made further distinctions within this third category, pointing out that Christ often spoke in the voice of some group of members within his body: he might, for example, speak in the voice of penitent sinners even though as head

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<sup>70</sup> In elaborating on this second rule Tyconius drew on the long standing North African practice of appealing to the Song of Songs as referring to the church, insisting that its description of the bride as both black and beautiful was an indication that it included both good and evil members. *Tyc. Reg.* II.

<sup>71</sup> *Tyc. Reg.* 7, *de diabolo et eius corpora*; cf. Rule I as well. There is some evidence that Tyconius is representative of a larger body of fourth century Donatists who interpreted the Bible as he did and who identified the Church as the body of Christ. The key evidence for this is the *Sermo in natali sanctorum innocentium*, *PL Supplementum* 1, ed. Adalberto Hamman (Paris: Éditions Garnier Frère, 1958), 288-94, a Donatist sermon by an unknown author that identifies Christ and the church as well as identifying Herod and the devil. David Charles Robinson, "The Mystic Rules of Scripture: Tyconius of Carthage's Keys and Windows to the Apocalypse." (Bibliothèque et Archives Canada, 2011) has shown the common hermeneutical logic between Tyconius and the sermon. I would add that, given that the hermeneutical and ecclesiological are intertwined in Tyconius' *Liber Regularum*, it would be reasonable to suspect that if there are precedents to his hermeneutics, as Robinson argues, there would be precedents to his ecclesiology. This suggests, however tentatively, that both the hermeneutics and ecclesiology of Tyconius may have been more influential in Roman North Africa than previously believed.

<sup>72</sup> *Aug. Serm.* 341.1.

of the body he was guilty of no sin.<sup>73</sup> These three ways of understanding Christ as the subject of scripture appear often in Augustine's sermons, and the third way - as *Totus Christus* - appears almost exclusively in the sermons.<sup>74</sup> It was this understanding of the church as the body of Christ and part of the *Totus Christus* that was especially important in Augustine's account of the priestly ministry of the bishops.

In identifying the church as the body of Christ, Augustine maintained that it was held together and given life through the Holy Spirit. The church was a human society, and Christ became its head in becoming human; all those who later came to faith in Christ became members of that body.<sup>75</sup> Just as a human body draws life from its spirit, Augustine argued, so the body of Christ had its life from the Spirit of Christ, which bound the individual members into a single body.<sup>76</sup> This body united by the Holy Spirit was the same as that group which he elsewhere described as the Dove, those bound together by the Holy Spirit's gift of charity.<sup>77</sup> Those who were cut off from the unity of the church through any kind of sin against charity - including schism but not limited to it - were likewise cut off from the life-giving Holy Spirit. In a graphic illustration, Augustine compared such persons to an amputated hand or foot: they might continue to have the shape of a member but they were utterly without life.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> And though others of his body were already at rest and had ceased their struggle with sin. Aug. *Psal.* 40.6; 140.6; 101.1.2; 118.22.5. cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 615.

<sup>74</sup> cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 615n85, for an analysis of the rare instances (there are only four) in which the phrase *Christus totus* is present in Augustine's extant works.

<sup>75</sup> Aug. *Psal.* 44.3.

<sup>76</sup> Aug. *Psal.* 26.13.

<sup>77</sup> cf. Aug. *serm.* 354.1.

<sup>78</sup> Aug. *serm.* 267.4. cf. *Serm.* 71.32; 268.2.

Because all the members of the body of Christ shared the same Spirit, they held the Spirit's spiritual gifts in common as well. The foremost of these goods was, of course, the gift of charity, which bound the members of Christ together and moved them to love God and neighbor and perform good works. But the notion of the church as a community of spiritual goods did not stop there. Augustine applied this notion to the various spiritual gifts and virtues exercised by individual members of the community. Some worked miracles, some proclaimed the truth, some preserved chastity, but all these were spiritual gifts worked by the Holy Spirit itself in this or that member, and so all were held in common by the whole community.<sup>79</sup> As we have seen, Augustine maintained that it was the Holy Spirit's gift of charity that was operative in the sacramental rituals of the church, effecting the forgiveness of sins and the sanctification of believers. Thus the community of spiritual gifts within the church included the power at work in the sacraments. Though Christ alone possessed the power at work in baptism, the forgiveness of sins, and the rest of the sacraments, he shared that power with his body through the Holy Spirit.

This dynamic was the basis for Augustine's explanation of the priesthood of Christian bishops. Augustine was adamant that Christ was the only true priest, despite the fact that bishops were routinely called priests and had exclusive authority over the church's rituals. He explained the relationship between the priesthood of Christ and that of the clergy in a protracted sermon that built on the scriptural imagery of Christ as high

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<sup>79</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 267.4. Augustine also explained how the gift of languages given at Pentecost was now held in common by the whole church; it spoke in all lands, and so all its members could claim all its languages. *Psal.* 18.2.10; 147.19; *Eu. Io.* 32.7.

priest entering the heavenly sanctuary.<sup>80</sup> Augustine's explanation to the people was grounded in a pair of practices with which they would have been intimately familiar: the anointing given in baptism and the eucharistic offering. Augustine interpreted the Old Testament priesthood Christologically, arguing that it had prefigured Christ, the one true priest. The anointing of priests actually pointed to Christ's role as priest.<sup>81</sup> Emphasizing this connection between anointing and priesthood, Augustine pointed out that all Christians were anointed in baptism.<sup>82</sup> This shared anointing was indicative of a greater spiritual reality: all Christians shared in Christ's priesthood. This was true of bishops and laity alike: all were members of the body of the one priest together and all shared the same anointing and the same priesthood.<sup>83</sup>

In order to illustrate this Augustine compared the eucharistic offering with the sacrifice offered by the high priest in the holy of holies. Just as the priest had gone into the holy of holies alone while the people all waited outside, so Christ had entered the heavenly sanctuary while the people waited outside, on earth. The same parallel did not hold true for the eucharistic offering. As Augustine pointed out, the people did not wait outside while the bishops made the offering at the altar, as had been the case in ancient Israel. On the contrary, they were all gathered around the altar, and in their response of "Amen!" joined the bishop in making the offering.<sup>84</sup> The distinction made between priest

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<sup>80</sup> Aug. *Serm. Dolb.* 26(198\*).49-57. This was a sermon given on the "pagan" celebration of New Year; Dolbeau dated it precisely to January 1, 404. The imagery of Christ as high priest in the heavenly sanctuary is from the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, itself drawing on the levitical priesthood of the Old Testament.

<sup>81</sup> Aug. *Serm. Dolb.* 26(198\*).50, 52. Augustine noted that the very name "Christ" meant "anointed."

<sup>82</sup> Aug. *Serm. Dolb.* 26(198\*).50, 51, 53.

<sup>83</sup> Aug. *Serm. Dolb.* 26(198\*).53.

<sup>84</sup> Aug. *Serm. Dolb.* 26(198\*).53, 57. Though the bishop delivered the sermon while seated on his *cathedra*, he moved to stand at the altar following the sermon and for the remainder of the Eucharistic ritual. cf. J. Patout Burns and Robin M. Jensen, "Eucharistic Liturgy," *ATAE*, 335-8.



and people in the Old Testament did not correspond to a distinction between the clergy whom Christians called priests and the laity. Rather it pointed to the difference between Christ, the only true priest, and Christians, who pray to Christ as mediator. The clergy and laity alike gathered around the earthly altar and offered their prayers to Christ, the true priest.

As members of the body of Christ, all Christians were members of the body of the priest and joined in his priestly work.<sup>85</sup> When they interceded in prayer for one another, they were joining Christ in interceding for his members.<sup>86</sup> When they joined in the prayers of the eucharistic offering they were joining with Christ in his offering in the heavenly sanctuary. Even the pious practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving undertaken to win forgiveness for sins of daily living were portrayed as part of this priestly work; it was Christ who enabled his members to perform them and Christ who received them as the heavenly mediator.<sup>87</sup> As head of the church, Christ shared his priestly work with all of his body, the church.

Though Christ shared his priestly work with all Christians in this way, nevertheless the bishops were singled out with the name bishop (*sacerdos*). Augustine made clear that this was due to their position within the congregation and not because of any particular powers they possessed.<sup>88</sup> Though the bishops were called priests because they were in charge, the church itself was a holy people and royal priesthood as the body

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<sup>85</sup> Aug. *Serm. Dolb.* 26(198\*).57.

<sup>86</sup> Aug. *Serm. Dolb.* 26(198\*).57.

<sup>87</sup> Aug. *Serm. Dolb.* 26(198\*).56.

<sup>88</sup> Against Parmenian, Augustine insisted that those who claimed that the priesthood of the bishops meant that they stood between the people and God as a mediator were in fact blocking the way to Christ in the same way as Satan. *Serm. Dolb.* 26(198\*).55.

of Christ.<sup>89</sup> Though he maintained that the bishops had responsibilities and prerogatives within the church that were theirs alone, it was not and could not be because they possessed spiritual gifts given exclusively to them as priests. Christ was the only true priest, and he shared his priestly gifts with his whole body.

### **The Pastoral and Preaching Ministries**

This interpretation of the ministry of the bishops was not limited to their priestly or sacramental ministry. Augustine applied the same theory to their ministry as pastors in preaching and watching over the people. As we have seen, in Augustine's Africa the bishop had primary responsibility for the ministries of preaching and of overseeing discipline. Though these ministries are conceptually distinct, in Augustine's account of them they frequently overlapped. As a preacher, the bishop was a minister of God's word rather than his own; he was an interpreter and teacher of scripture, who was to defend truth, oppose error, win over the hostile, teach the ignorant, convince the doubtful, and rouse the careless.<sup>90</sup> Yet the preaching ministry was itself part of the ministry of discipline and oversight of the people, a ministry which Augustine variously described as that of the shepherd (*pastor*), watchman (*explorator*), or overseer (*superintendentor*). In one

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<sup>89</sup> *Serm. Dolb.* 26(198\*).53. "The reason, though, why all of us bishops are called priests is that we are the people in charge. However it is the whole universal Church which is the body of that one priest. To the priest belongs his body. That, after all, is why the apostle Peter says to the Church itself, 'A holy people, a royal priesthood.'" 49, "So brothers and sisters, we have one mediator, who is also our head. But as for us bishops, even though it is not together with you that we are the rulers of churches, still it is together with you, in the name of Christ, that we are members of the body of Christ. We all have one head, because the body which wants to have many heads is already a monster. But we were saying about anointing that in those days only the priest was anointed and the king, while nowadays it's all Christians. From this please observe that you all belong to the body of the one priest together with us bishops, which is because we are all of us the faithful. However those who are in charge of Churches are particularly called priests; this doesn't mean, all the same, that the rest of the body is not the body of the priest." cf. *Serm. Dolb.* 26(198\*).57.

<sup>90</sup> *Aug. Serm.* 114.1; *Doct. Chr.* 4.4.6.

of the sermons preached on the anniversary of his ordination, Augustine described the labor incumbent upon him as bishop as that of the lookout of Ezekiel 33:2-11: he was placed as a lookout to warn the people of their sins and tell them of God's desire that they should turn away from their sins and live.<sup>91</sup> Thus the task of preaching was folded into that of admonition or discipline; the bishop was "to preach, to refute, to rebuke, to build up, to manage for everybody."<sup>92</sup> Elsewhere he expanded on this image, describing bishops as guardians and watchmen placed in an elevated position to guard over the lives of their fellow Christians and using nearly his full spectrum of terminology for this aspect of the bishop's ministry - guardian, watchman, shepherd, instructor, and overseer.<sup>93</sup> Moreover he explicitly connected the title of *episcopus*, "superintendent or overseer," to this ministry of preaching and of discipline.<sup>94</sup> Though he employed a range of images, Augustine consistently treated the bishops' work of preaching and of discipline as facets of the same pastoral ministry.

Augustine explicitly employed his theory of the church as the body of Christ that shared Christ's gifts and powers in explaining this pastoral ministry. Though the bishops were charged with watching over the people as shepherds, it was Christ the one true shepherd who effected this ministry. On at least one occasion the whole theory was on display in explaining the pastoral and disciplinary ministry of the bishops: Peter stood for

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<sup>91</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 339.2.

<sup>92</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 339.4.

<sup>93</sup> Aug. *Psal.* 126.3.

<sup>94</sup> Aug. *Psal.* 126.3 (CCSL 40:1858): "The name they bear is ἐπίσκοπος in Greek, *episcopus* in Latin. It means superintendent or overseer, because they look down from a raised position." Custodiebat, **custos** erat, uigilabat, quantam poterat, super eos quibus praeerat. Et episcopi hoc faciunt. Nam ideo altior locus positus est episcopis, ut ipsi superintendant, et tamquam **custodiant** populum. Nam et graece quod dicitur **episcopus**, hoc latine **superintendor** interpretatur; quia superintendit, quia desuper uidet."

the church in receiving the keys of the kingdom of heaven; all the faithful possessed those keys and exercised the power to bind and loose, not only the bishops; the apostles and bishops both were shepherds; however the gospel says that there will be only one shepherd, Christ; therefore the bishops were shepherds insofar as they were members of the body of the one shepherd.<sup>95</sup> They were shepherds because they were members of the one Shepherd, living with one Spirit under that Head.<sup>96</sup> It was the Lord who effected the ministry of guarding and oversight. He expressed this in the language of Psalm 126: “Unless the Lord has been guarding the city, in vain has its guardian labored.”<sup>97</sup> The bishops exercised this ministry “according to human ability” and “in virtue of the duty assigned to us,” but in truth they were guarded by God along with the people.<sup>98</sup> Christ was the one who truly watched over the people; the bishops could be said to do so only as members of him, just as Augustine had insisted that they were priests only as members of the body of the priest.

Similarly, Augustine’s theory of the efficacy of the sacraments came to structure his explanation of the efficacy of preaching. He considered that in offering the sermon he was not providing anything that he possessed himself; he was serving them sustenance

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<sup>95</sup> Aug. *Serm. Guelf.* 16(229N).2-3. The gospel citation is John 10:16: “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” In Latin, shepherd and pastor are the same word, *pastor*, though it is sometimes translated one way and sometimes the other in the sermons.

<sup>96</sup> Aug. *Eu. Io.* 46.7.1. “How is there one shepherd? I have already said that they were shepherds because they were members of the Shepherd. They were rejoicing in that head, they were united under that head, they were living with one spirit in the structure of one body; and through this, all belonged to the one Shepherd.” cf also *Serm.* 46.30.

<sup>97</sup> Aug. *Psal.* 126.3.

<sup>98</sup> Aug. *Psal.* 126.3. “How then can we guard you? Only in the measure of our human ability, as best we can, as we have been given the grace.... In virtue of the duty assigned to us we guard you, brothers and sisters, but our desire is to be guarded by God along with you.”

from God, as a fellow servant in God's household.<sup>99</sup> Optatus had, of course, earlier used this image in explaining the bishop's role in the efficacy of the sacraments.<sup>100</sup> Elsewhere Augustine used imagery more suited to the vocal act of preaching itself: the preacher was God's attorney or herald, speaking in service of another. The preacher did not offer his own wisdom but the Lord's.<sup>101</sup> Augustine distinguished between the sermon he delivered and the understanding that God might grant through it, much as he had distinguished between the sacrament and the reality it symbolized and conveyed.<sup>102</sup> As bishop he was responsible for what the people heard in the sermon, but understanding was a gift from God, worked directly in the heart.<sup>103</sup> As he had insisted that it was Christ who baptized in the sacramental ministry of the bishops, so he could insist that in the preaching ministry that he exercised as bishop, the clergy and people would all together be taught by God.<sup>104</sup> Preaching required direct divine action on its hearers in order for it to be efficacious, and this could only happen by the gift of God.<sup>105</sup>

Therefore, just as in the case of the sacraments, Christians need not worry about a bad bishop's pastoral ministry. Augustine assured his congregation that they could benefit from the preaching of unworthy bishops because these would speak the words of

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<sup>99</sup> Aug. *Serm. Frig. Verbr.* 40(319A). Optatus had earlier applied this image to the minister's role in the sacraments, as noted above. cf. Aug. *Ep.* 261.2.

<sup>100</sup> Opt. *Parm.* 5.7.

<sup>101</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 339.9; 74.3.

<sup>102</sup> Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 284-6, note that Augustine increasingly made this distinction from the time of the Pelagian controversy onward.

<sup>103</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 152.1; 153.1; 264.4; *Psal.* 109.12; *Eu. Io.* 40.5.

<sup>104</sup> Aug. *Eu. Io.* 26.7, quoting John 6:45.

<sup>105</sup> In *serm.* 2.5-6, he compared the ministry of the preacher to that of the prophet. When the prophet speaks God is said to speak, "because whatever a man says by the gift of God, God says it." Not everything the preacher said would be from God, and they would have to turn God rather than the speaker if they would hear it. Augustine made an explicit connection between the preaching and sacramental ministries: the scriptural texts on which they preached could have "a hidden, mysterious, sacramental meaning." (2.6)

God, even if they did so for their own profit.<sup>106</sup> He cited Matthew 23:2 in support of this claim: the bishops sat in Moses' chair and their teaching of doctrine could be trusted even if their own lives could not.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, bishops were like the gold, silver, and earthenware vessels of 2 Timothy 2:20; it was not the vessel itself that mattered but rather what it contained.<sup>108</sup> Christians should not hope or trust in the holiness or example of the bishops, but rather in God alone, who works through both good and bad ministers.<sup>109</sup>

As fellow members of the body of the one shepherd, the laity could also exercise the ministries of preaching and pastoral care in ways appropriate to their roles, just as Augustine had argued was the case for the sacraments. Though he lacked as clear and powerful an example as the forgiveness of sins through the congregation's forgiveness of one another, he nonetheless did describe the laity as preaching and exercising pastoral oversight. The whole church preached Christ, not just the bishop, and it was through this "preaching" ministry of the laity that many came to be baptized.<sup>110</sup> Christ's words could be heard not only in the sermon, but also when the people discussed the scriptures among themselves.<sup>111</sup> Christ could even be said to be speaking through the voices of the people when they sang in the liturgy.<sup>112</sup> Augustine similarly insisted that Christians should not imagine that only bishops and clergy exercised ministries of watching over and caring for

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<sup>106</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 46.22; 152.1; 153.1; 264.4; *Eu. Io.* 26.7; 40.5; 46.6; *Psal.* 109.12.

<sup>107</sup> *Serm. Guelf.* 32(340A).9-10; *Serm.* 74.3-4; *Eu. Io.* 46.6.1-3

<sup>108</sup> Aug. *Serm. Guelf.* 32(340A).9.

<sup>109</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 46.2; *Serm. Guelf.* 32(340A).8. In *Serm.* 101.11, Augustine insists that they should be preaching out of love and peace. It is worth point out that for Augustine, these are not simply personal qualities or inclinations. They are what holds the church together in unity, given in the Holy Spirit to the Dove. It is possible, therefore, that this suggests the notion that preachers *should* be preaching out of their membership in the Dove, even if that is not necessary for the efficacy of preaching. This would once again be analogous to Augustine's account of the bishop as sacramental minister.

<sup>110</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 96.10. In *Serm.* 94, Augustine exhorted his congregation to "do my job in your homes."

<sup>111</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 17.3.

<sup>112</sup> Aug. *Serm.* 17.1.

one another. Christian heads of household, for example, exercised a kind of “episcopal function” for their households, preaching, teaching, disciplining, encouraging, and correcting those under their care.<sup>113</sup> While not as prominent as the people’s role in the forgiveness of sins, the participation of the laity in the pastoral and especially the preaching ministries of the church was more common than their exercise of the ministry of baptism, which Augustine had acknowledged in principle but was well outside the normal practice.<sup>114</sup> Though the bishops were the normal ministers of preaching and pastoral oversight, Augustine maintained that the people could also exercise these ministries in ways that were appropriate to their own roles in the church.

Though he did not explicitly invoke his theory of the church as a community of spiritual gifts, Augustine seems to be employing it here just as he did in his explanation of the church’s sacramental ministry. The laity were not the ministers of the sermon nor responsible for the oversight of the Christian community, but they nevertheless shared in these ministries as fellow members of the body of Christ and could exercise them in ways that were appropriate to their own roles, however limited or infrequent that might be. But no matter who exercised these ministries, it was ultimately Christ who worked them in his body.

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<sup>113</sup> Aug. *Eu. Io.* 51.12-13 (*CCSL* 36:444-5): “Pro Christo et pro uita aeterna, suos omnes admoneat, doceat, hortetur, corripat, impendat beneuolentiam, exerceat disciplinam; ita in domo sua ecclesiasticum et quodammodo episcopale implebit officium, ministrans Christo ut in aeternum sit cum ipso.”

<sup>114</sup> Aug. *Bapt.* 7.53.101-102. Cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 214.

## Ministry Beyond the Clergy

Augustine's application of this theory of ministry was not limited to the ministries that were normally the prerogative of the bishops. He applied the same logic to other specialized roles within the church, insisting that virgins, widows, monks, and even martyrs all made manifest spiritual virtues that were in fact held in common by the whole church.

This is most evident in Augustine's explanation of the church's vowed virgins. In defending and promoting the practice of virginity, Augustine framed its primary value as an ecclesial rather than an individual one. The church's vowed virgins embodied and made manifest a spiritual virtue held in common by the whole church. Paul had described the whole church as a "virgin betrothed to the one man Christ," yet only a few women within the church actually preserved bodily virginity.<sup>115</sup> Thus, Augustine suggested, the virginity of the church was the integrity of its faith, a virtue that was required of all the faithful. Vowed, inviolate virgins functioned as a sign of the church's pure fidelity.<sup>116</sup> Though few possessed bodily virginity, the spiritual gift which it symbolized – purity of faith – was shared by the whole church. And even the gift of virginity, which only a few had, was shared spiritually with the whole body: when the faithful rejoiced together with the virgins, they shared in their virginity.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Aug. *Virg.* 2. Quoting 2 Cor 11:2.

<sup>116</sup> Their physical integrity was necessary for the virgins to function symbolically. cf. Aug. *Bon. Coniug.* 18,21.

<sup>117</sup> Aug. *Virg.* 26-29. "The great numbers of the rest of the faithful, who are unable to follow the Lamb this far, will see you. They will see you, but they will not be jealous. They will rejoice with you because they will have in you what they do not have in themselves." *Virg.* 29.29.



Augustine applied this same logic to the church's vowed widows. Widows, like virgins, made manifest a spiritual virtue that the whole church held in common. The whole church suffered the physical absence of its bridegroom, and in that absence yearned in love for Christ and held fast to him in faith; in this sense the whole church was a widow.<sup>118</sup> Widows, then, embodied and made manifest the church's yearning for and complete dependence on its bridegroom.<sup>119</sup>

Augustine offered the most vivid application of this theory in considering the monastic life. The common life of monks, in its unity and sharing of material goods, made manifest that unity that was the result of the Holy Spirit's gift of charity. In commenting on the text of Psalm 132, Augustine noted its connection to monastic life; its praise of "how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity" raised the question of whether all Christians could be said to dwell in unity, or only a certain few.<sup>120</sup> Augustine explained that in the Psalm the head of Aaron, the priest, in fact referred to Christ, the one true priest; the oil that flowed down from this head was the Holy Spirit. It fell first upon the apostles and the martyrs, symbolized in the beard.<sup>121</sup> It then flowed down to the garment, which was the church. In specifying that the oil fell first on the border of the garment, the psalm indicated the formation of monasteries by the Holy Spirit's gift of

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<sup>118</sup> Aug. *Psal.* 145.18. "And so too the Church is a widow, because her bridegroom is away. He will come back, and even now he protects her, though she cannot see him but can only long for him. We are possessed by an intense longing, and, out of love for him whom we cannot see, we yearn for him. When we do see him, we shall be enfolded tightly in his embrace, as even now when we do not see him we are held fast by our faith in him."

<sup>119</sup> Aug. *Vid.* 4. Augustine was careful to point out that while the good of widowhood was better than that of marriage, it did not make a widow anything other than a member of Christ.

<sup>120</sup> Aug. *Psal.* 132.1.

<sup>121</sup> Aug. *Psal.* 132.7-8. Augustine appealed to the association of beards with strong men: "a beard is typical of young, vigorous, energetic, eager people." The apostles and martyrs were this sort in that they withstood the first attacks from the world.

charity. Augustine considered the unity and sharing of goods described in Acts 2:44-45 and 4:32-35 as an earthly imitation of heavenly life.<sup>122</sup> Those in monasteries lived out this unity more perfectly than others, but none could live in true unity except by the grace of charity.<sup>123</sup> Thus the common life of monks was a more perfect manifestation of the unity effected by the Holy Spirit's gift of charity, but that unity was a spiritual gift shared by all even if more perfectly lived by some.<sup>124</sup>

Even martyrdom was subject to this analysis. Martyrdom was the result of the Holy Spirit's gift of charity.<sup>125</sup> It was thus fundamentally a spiritual gift rather than an accomplishment; as a spiritual gift it would lie hidden in some until they were put to the test.<sup>126</sup> It was, moreover, a spiritual gift that the whole church shared as the body of Christ: the whole church bled in the suffering of the martyrs.<sup>127</sup>

Augustine's reinterpretation of the church's ministry as originating in its identification with Christ as his body was thus not narrowly limited to his explanation of the sacraments. Though it originated in and was structured by that explanation, he came to apply it to the full spectrum of the church's ministry, including those exercised by both the clergy and the laity. These ministries were fundamentally spiritual gifts shared with the church by Christ as his body, given through the Holy Spirit that bound the church

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<sup>122</sup> Aug. *Psal.* 132.2, 12; *Serm.* 355.2; *Serm. Dolb.* 26(198\*).48; cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 619.

<sup>123</sup> Aug. *Psal.* 132.9, 10, 12.

<sup>124</sup> Aug. *Psal.* 132.1

<sup>125</sup> Aug. *Psal.* 132.8.

<sup>126</sup> Aug. *Virg.* 44.45, 46.47.

<sup>127</sup> Aug. *Psal.* 140.4, in which Augustine interpreted Christ's sweating blood in the garden of Gethsemane as referring to the blood of the martyrs: "What was the meaning of this bleeding from his whole body if not that the whole church would bleed in the suffering of the martyrs?" cf. *Psal.* 118.30.5, in which Augustine interpreted, "Those who persecute me and harass me are many, but I have not turned away from witnessing to you," as Christ speaking in the person of the martyrs as members of his body.

together and to Christ. Though they might be exercised by individuals they were held in common by all who shared in the Holy Spirit.

### **Conclusion**

Augustine upheld the inherited structures of ministry in North Africa: the bishops retained their authority within the church, their ritual prerogatives, and their distinction even from other members of the clergy. However, Augustine drastically reinterpreted the meaning of those ministerial roles and structures. He repeatedly asserted that while the bishops certainly possessed particular responsibilities and ministries that set them apart from other Christians, these distinctions were only for the sake of the ministries themselves and for the good of the people. A bishop had no advantage before God. The people and their bishop were equally servants of God and members of the body of Christ.

Augustine insisted that despite their distinct role within the church, bishops did not possess any distinct spiritual powers. Quite the contrary, he claimed that the power to forgive sins and sanctify was actually shared by all faithful Christians, clergy and laity alike. Drawing on the African theological traditions examined here, he simultaneously maintained that the power at work in the church's sacraments and other ministries was Christ's alone *and* that the church truly possessed and was able to exercise these powers. He did this above all by identifying the church as the body of Christ, united with its Head by the Holy Spirit. Christ shared the gift of charity, which was the power at work forgiving and sanctifying Christians, with his body, the church. All who were truly

members of the body of Christ shared in the gift of charity and so shared in the sanctifying ministry of the church.

Though he developed this theory in defense of Caecilianist sacramental practice, Augustine applied it to the bishop's other ministries as well. Though the bishops were responsible to guard and watch over the people as their shepherd, Christ was the one true shepherd; it was Christ's own care that guarded the people, and the bishops only exercised their ministry as members of his body. Likewise, though the bishops were charged with preaching to the people, only God working directly in the hearts of the people could make their preaching effective. The explanations that Augustine articulated in conflict with the Donatists provided the theoretical structure for a broader reinterpretation of the episcopal ministry.

This theory was not limited to the ministry of the bishops. Augustine included the laity in the church's ministries, even those understood to be the prerogative of the bishops. Since the church was a community united in the Holy Spirit all its spiritual gifts were held in common. The laity could participate in the ministries that were normally the prerogative of the bishops in ways appropriate to their status, however circumscribed those ways might have been. The same was true of other religiously prominent members of the Christian community such as virgins, widows, and monks. The spiritual gifts that they exercised and made manifest were in fact held in common by the whole church.

Augustine's attempts to explain and defend Caecilianist practice led him to mine the resources of the African theological tradition and ultimately to reinterpret the theological significance of the ministry of the bishops. The conclusions to which he

ultimately came were radical revisions of the commonly accepted understanding of the bishops and their ministry, if not of their practice. As we will see, the traditional African understanding of the bishops as bearers of distinct spiritual powers and personal sanctity was not limited to Augustine's Donatist opponents. It also had strong roots among his Caecilianist colleagues. As such, Augustine's revision was even more radical than previously understood.

## CHAPTER IV

### CLERICAL PENANCE AND CLERICAL SANCTITY IN OPTATUS OF MILEVIS

Though he was considered an invaluable source in Augustine's time, Optatus of Milevis has been relegated to an afterthought in contemporary scholarship. Scholars who do turn their attention to Optatus typically fit him into one of two narratives: either he serves as a precursor to Augustine, anticipating later "catholic" doctrines; or he is a "mere" historian and polemicist, a lesser light not worthy of in-depth study. This is unfortunate, for the work of Optatus is an invaluable source for the beliefs as well as the history of Christianity in fourth-century Africa. Though he is often read as anticipating Augustine, in fact he offers a rare perspective – that of a late fourth century Caecilianist bishop who was untouched by the influence of Augustine and whose writing has remained extant.

This chapter is focused on the practice of penance as it was applied to the clergy in the time of Optatus. The purpose of examining this practice and Optatus' response to it is to better understand the theological perspective operative in Optatus' work. Much like his Donatist opponents, Optatus continued to hold that the clergy possessed a distinct sanctity not shared by other Christians. This assumption becomes clear in his critique of the Donatist use of penance on members of clergy. This chapter begins with a brief introduction to the person and work of Optatus. This is followed by a review of Optatus' explanation of baptism in order to contrast this explanation with his account of clerical

penance. From there, the chapter presents a brief history of clerical penance in Africa before demonstrating that Optatus' critique of Donatist use of penance for the clergy assumes and relies on an understanding of the clergy as being distinctly holy. It focuses on two aspects of Optatus' critique: his assertion that penance is both a spiritual death for clergy and a sacrilege against the unique work of the Holy Spirit in them, and his appeal to a spiritual "anointing" of the clergy in their ordination. Both point to a theological understanding of the clergy that had much more in common with his Donatist opponents and much less in common with Augustine than previously understood.

### **Optatus in History and Tradition**

Very little is known about Optatus outside of his own writings. He was the bishop of Milevis, located in Numidia near the border with Mauretania, when he wrote his anti-Donatist treatise in the second half of the fourth century.<sup>1</sup> He was no longer living when Augustine wrote *De Doctrina Christiana* in 397, in which Augustine included him among Christian luminaries who had received a pagan education before becoming Christians.<sup>2</sup> Beyond these basics all else is speculation.

Though it occupies a singular place in the history of the African controversy in the fourth century, the treatise itself has also been surrounded by questions. Neither the ancient sources nor the manuscripts offer a title for the work; in modern times, it has

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<sup>1</sup> Modern day Mila, about 30 miles northwest of Constantina.

<sup>2</sup> Aug. *Doct. Chr.* 2.40.61. cf. Alexander Wilhelmus Henricus Evers, *Church, Cities, and People: A Study of the Plebs in the Church and Cities of Roman Africa in Late Antiquity* (Leuven ; Walpole, Mass.: Peeters, 2010), 140. For a full account of the ancient witnesses to Optatus, cf. Labrousse, "Introduction," 9-11.

typically been called either *Contra Parmenianum* or *De Schismate Donatistarum*.<sup>3</sup> It seems to have been composed in at least two editions. The first edition, including the first six books of the treatise, was written shortly after the death of the emperor Julian (on June 26, 363). A reasonable estimate would be 365; a precise dating is not possible. The evidence for the second edition, in which Optatus added the seventh book and undertook some re-editing of the previous books, places it sometime between 385 and 390.<sup>4</sup>

The treatise was written in response to a polemical treatise of Parmenian, part of what Shaw describes as “a running war of tracts between the two churches.”<sup>5</sup> The larger context, though, is that of the situation brought about by Julian’s decisions in 362 that the Donatist communion was restored to legitimate status, its leaders were allowed to return from exile, and they were able to reclaim basilicas and other properties that had been appropriated by Caecilianists.<sup>6</sup> This change of circumstance prompted both polemical activity and physical confrontations between the communions. Polemically, Parmenian sought to consolidate his communion’s legal gains by restating their own case and branding the Caecilianists as *traditors*.<sup>7</sup> Physically, the attempt to reclaim basilicas in the

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Evers, *Church, Cities, and People*, 137 n. 1, for a brief history of the names given to the treatise.

<sup>4</sup> Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 149. Cf. Labrousse, “Introduction,” 12-14, for a detailed discussion of the dating of the text. The dating relies on Optatus’ statement within the text that he is writing “about sixty years after” the persecution of Diocletian and Maximian in Africa, which would suggest a date around 365, and a reference within the text to the death of Julian (which occurred on June 26, 363). Jerome *De viris illustribus* 110, wrote generally that Optatus wrote the treatise “in the reign of Valentinian and Valens,” but this is neither very precise, nor is Jerome very reliable in such matters. The seventh book was part of a later revision of the work, as seen in the plan Optatus laid out in book one; in Jerome’s reference to a work of six books; and in the apparent existence of the six-book version in the now lost *codex Cusanus*, upon which the first published edition of the treatise was based (Cochlaeus, Mainz, 1549). There are also examples of revisions made in the first six books, such as the addition of Lucianus and Claudianus to the list of Donatist bishops of Rome in order to bring it up to date. Such revisions, however, were not made consistently throughout the first six books.

<sup>5</sup> Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 148.

<sup>6</sup> Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 149.

<sup>7</sup> Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 149.



possession of Caecilianists led to violent altercations, bloodshed, and even death. Even after Julian's decree, with evidence of ownership prior to 347, and with a favorable court decision, it was still up to the plaintiff (in this case the Donatists) to seize the properties and enforce possession. This led to repeated instances of violence, as Donatists (led by their bishops) sought to repossess properties and Caecilianists sought to retain them.<sup>8</sup> The situation between the communions across North Africa in the 360's was one of instability, heated polemic, and bloody confrontations between Christians.<sup>9</sup>

Optatus wrote, then, in response not only to Parmenian's treatise, but also in response to the larger circumstances of recrimination, accusation, and physical violence. Many have emphasized Optatus' "conciliatory" approach and taken Optatus at face value in his protestations of peace and his desire for brotherhood.<sup>10</sup> However, the idea that this treatise might actually be expected to bring about reconciliation between the two communions ignores both the heated relations between the two communions and the acerbic tone characterizes the treatise. Shaw's characterization is much more plausible: first, that Optatus' reply needed to defuse some of the sting of the Donatist charges, and second, that he was in no position to adopt a harsher tone.<sup>11</sup> The Donatist return had put the Caecilianists on their heels, with some uncomfortable accusations to address regarding collusion with the state and the use of violence against fellow Christians, issues

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<sup>8</sup> cf. Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 148-159, for a detailed account of this process, and an analysis of the specific events that Optatus highlights. In short, Shaw argues that while some measure of violence in repossessing properties was likely common, the few specific cases that Optatus describes were almost surely exceptional, cases in which the routine violence of repossession got out of hand.

<sup>9</sup> cf also Labrousse, "Introduction," 14-18, for an overview of the circumstances surrounding the composition of the treatise. Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 148-159, also notes how this process would have evoked bitter memories of the events of 347.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Evers, *Church, Cities, and People*, 191; Merdinger, *Rome and the African Church*, 50-1; idem., "Optatus Reconsidered," 295.

<sup>11</sup> Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 148, 325ff.

that loom large in Optatus' treatise.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, even through the time of his revision of the treatise, the imperial government showed no inclination to use coercive force against religious dissidents, taking that option (a successful one in 347) off the table as a possible response. Optatus strikes a conciliatory posture, but given the circumstances he did not have many other viable options.

Though it has been the subject of relatively scant scholarly attention, the treatise is important for several reasons.<sup>13</sup> Along with its appendices, it is the primary source for the history of the early stages of the schism in African Christianity. In fact, it is one of very few sources at all on fourth century African Christianity before the last decade of the century. It is also the only major Caecilianist response to the schism prior to the ascendancy of Augustine and Aurelius.<sup>14</sup> As such, what attention scholars do give it is typically focused on its role in the development of certain "catholic" doctrines and practices central to the schism and important to African Christianity – particularly baptism, ecclesiology, and the authority of the bishop of Rome.<sup>15</sup> In those studies that are interested in theological questions, whatever else might be said about Optatus, he

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<sup>12</sup> Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 683, notes that three out of six books were devoted to the issue of appeal to the power of the state in the conflict between the two communions.

<sup>13</sup> cf. Evers, *Church, Cities, and People*, 139; Merdinger, "Optatus Reconsidered," 295; Edwards, xxix, who notes the lack of a complete commentary on Optatus in any language.

<sup>14</sup> cf. Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 62; Francois Decret, *Early Christianity in North Africa* (James Clarke & Co, 2011), 123.

<sup>15</sup> Eno, "The Work Of Optatus As A Turning Point In The African Ecclesiology;" Eno, "The Significance Of The Lists Of Roman Bishops In The Anti-Donatist Polemic;" Merdinger, "Optatus Reconsidered;" Merdinger, *Rome and the African Church*; Sagi-Bunic, "Controversia de Baptismate;" Walter Simonis, *Ecclesia Visibilis Et Invisibilis; Untersuchungen Zur Ekklesiologie Und Sakramentenlehre in Der Akrikanischen Tradition Von Cyprian Bis Augustinus* (Frankfurt am Main, J. Knecht, 1970); Vischer, *Basiliius Der Grosse*.

invariably has one role that he must play: precursor to Augustine.<sup>16</sup> Scholars may (and do) disagree about the extent to which Optatus continued to be influenced by Cyprian and just *how* closely he anticipated the sacramental and ecclesiological positions of Augustine, but this remains the historiographical narrative.

One difficulty with this approach, whatever virtues it may have, is that it assumes a basic correspondence between the Caecilianist Christianity of Optatus in the second half of the fourth century and that of Augustine at the turn of the century. It assumes that the theological, practical, and social distinctions between Donatists and Caecilianists described in the writings of Augustine hold true for earlier periods of African Christianity as well. Modern scholarship has increasingly shown that while the conflict between the two communions was real, their doctrine and their practices shared much in common. Given this state of affairs, the portrayal of Optatus as a somewhat less theologically sophisticated precursor to Augustine needs to be called into question and Optatus should be considered more explicitly as a source for understanding African Christianity *before* the influence of Augustine. That is the approach taken here. It will be shown that while Optatus does develop some positions that eventually come to be integrated into later “catholic” doctrine – including his theology of baptism – he also gives evidence of more traditional aspects of African Christianity that largely correspond with those of the Donatist communion. These latter include his understanding of the Christian clergy; despite his explicit reevaluation of the role of the minister in baptism, he did not offer a

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<sup>16</sup> This is the precise wording of Evers, *Church, Cities, and People*, 139, 191. But the same notion is found repeatedly: Monceaux, 5.306; Simonis, 49; Edwards, xxv. See, however, Eno, “The Significance of Lists,” for an example of a more nuanced account that considers Augustine’s use of Optatus rather than Optatus as precursor of Augustine.

thoroughgoing reassessment of the theology of the clergy, but rather continued to characterize the clergy as distinctly holy.

### **Optatus on Baptism**

The practice of baptism was one of the central areas of disagreement between the two communions, as Optatus himself notes.<sup>17</sup> Optatus offered a series of arguments that emphasized the Trinity as the true agent in baptism, relativized the role of the human minister as agent, and insisted on the importance of the faith of the recipient of baptism. These arguments were an attempt both to critique the Donatist practice of baptism and to defend and explain Caecilianist practice, which had deviated from traditional African practice. However, as explanations of a contested practice they were narrowly focused on baptism itself. Thus when Optatus argued against the importance of the clergy for the efficacy of the sacraments it was strictly a claim about baptism. It was not part of a broader reassessment of the role of the clergy within the church.

The two communions did not practice different rituals; Optatus asserted that the two shared the same sacraments and mysteries, and there is no other evidence of differing rituals.<sup>18</sup> The primary point of contention was in the way they used the ritual for defecting members of the other communion. Caecilianists accepted former Donatists as having already been baptized and received them through the ritual imposition of hands. Donatists, by and large, did not consider Caecilianist baptism to be true baptism, and so

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<sup>17</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.1.

<sup>18</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 3.9, 5.1. cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 198.

(re)baptized converts as though they were pagans.<sup>19</sup> With this difference in practice came different theories of baptism as well, and likewise differing relationships with prior African Christian practice.

There is no evidence that differences in the practice of baptism were one of the original causes of the schism. The first indication of baptism as an aspect of the controversy comes from the Council of Arles in 314, which had served as a court of appeal after the council led by Miltiades of Rome ruled in favor of Caecilian as the legitimate bishop of Carthage. The bishops at Arles upheld the ruling of the Roman council; they also condemned the practice of rebaptizing converts from schism and heresy.<sup>20</sup> Though African Christians had defended the practice of rebaptizing heretics and schismatics for the better part of a hundred years, Caecilian and those in communion with him accepted the judgment of the Council of Arles as a part of gaining overseas recognition as the true church in Africa, and with it the financial support of the imperial government.<sup>21</sup> Thus the conflicting practices of baptism between the two African

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<sup>19</sup> Rebaptism was neither universally nor continuously practiced within the Donatist communion. Cf. Tilley, "Theologies of Penance," 335; Crespín, *Ministère et Sainteté*, 30; and Monceaux, *Histoire Littéraire*, IV.336. For a farther-reaching critique of histories that treat the Donatist communion as monolithic, cf. Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, passim.

<sup>20</sup> This instruction is included in the letter of the bishops assembled at Arles to Sylvester, bishop of Rome. The letter is included among the appendices of Optatus' treatise as appendix four. The specific instruction is that those coming from heresy to the church should be questioned about their baptismal creed; if it was Trinitarian, they should be received with the laying on of hands; if not, they should undergo a full baptismal ritual. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 198, note that this was also provision made for the reception of Donatist clergy by the Council of Nicaea, at least according to the Latin version associated with Caecilian and stored in the archives of the Catholic church at Carthage. Cf. C. H. Turner, *Ecclesiae Occidentalis Monumenta Iuris Antiquissima* (Oxonii: E Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1899), I.1:122-24

<sup>21</sup> Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 187-188, 195-6. The African adoption of the practice of rebaptizing those baptized in heretical communions is traced back to a council under the leadership of Agrippinus. Cf. Cyprian, ep. 71.2.1, 75.19.3. Jean-Louis Maier, *L'épiscopat de l'Afrique romaine, vandale, et byzantine* (Rome: Institut suisse de Rome, 1973), 18, estimates that this council took place in the 220's. Under Cyprian's leadership the Africans came to apply this same practice to those baptized in schism.

communions were one of the outcomes of the schism rather than one of its causes.

Though the Donatists did not universally practice rebaptism, it did come to be a characteristic practice of their communion, at least in the polemic that passed back and forth between the two communions.<sup>22</sup>

Optatus bears clear witness that this conflict over baptismal practice was ongoing in his own period. He explicitly named the question of whether or not baptism is to be repeated after having been performed in the name of the Trinity, noting the strife this question had caused.<sup>23</sup> He also asserted that Caecilianists accepted those converting from Donatism without any concern about the need to baptize them.<sup>24</sup> Parmenian had begun his treatise with an attack on the baptism of Caecilianists as illegitimate;<sup>25</sup> Optatus, in turn, characterized Donatist (re)baptism of former Caecilianists as an abomination.<sup>26</sup> The status of baptisms performed in the rival communion was plainly a live issue for both sides.

Though Optatus did not name Cyprian, it is clear from his response in book five that Parmenian was relying on the Cyprianic theory of baptism.<sup>27</sup> Optatus focused his response on two points. First, he tackled head on the question of rebaptism, that is, the possibility of repeating baptism performed in the triune name. Parmenian had appealed to a series of biblical passages to insist that there is one true baptism and thus that the

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 196-8. Rebaptism of Caecilianist converts was characteristic of the Donatist communion from at least the period of their return from exile onward. Though there is evidence that some Donatist bishops had not performed such baptisms in the time of Augustine, neither the extent of nor the reasons for this are clear.

<sup>23</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.3.

<sup>24</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.3.

<sup>25</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.1.

<sup>26</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.11.

<sup>27</sup> See chapter 2 for an account of Parmenian's reliance on Cyprian.

baptism of the Caecilianists was a false baptism, indeed no baptism at all.<sup>28</sup> Optatus accepted both the premise that there is only one baptism and the biblical arguments Parmenian had adduced for it but turned these premises against Parmenian. He insisted that the one true baptism was that founded on the Trinity, no matter where or by whom it was performed.<sup>29</sup> He further pressed the oneness of true baptism by asserting that it was only to be administered once.<sup>30</sup> This argument was a defense of the baptismal practice Caecilianists had adopted in the wake of the Council of Arles.<sup>31</sup>

Second, and most substantially, Optatus focused his response on the proper understanding of the agent of baptism. In doing so Optatus moved from a defense of Caecilianist practice to a critique of Donatist practice. Optatus characterized the Donatist emphasis on the proper human agent of baptism as being a matter of pride in their own sanctity and power. This move was an attempt to deal with the legacy and authority of Cyprian.<sup>32</sup> The Donatists upheld the Cyprianic principle that only a rightful bishop in the unity of the true church could perform sanctifying rituals. Optatus' insistence on the pride and vanity of Donatist bishops in their assertion of the importance of the agent is evidence that this was a vulnerable point for Caecilianists, one that Optatus sought to deflect through polemic rather than challenge Cyprian's legacy head on. Frend noted that

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<sup>28</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.1. He had apparently compared the singularity of baptism to that of the flood and the circumcision of the Old Testament.

<sup>29</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.1. "Therefore the only water, and the true one, is that which is founded not upon the place or upon the person, but upon the Trinity."

<sup>30</sup> Of course, the Donatists would not have argued this point. They agreed that baptism was only to be performed once; they simply did not accept that baptism existed among the Caecilianists at all.

<sup>31</sup> However, Optatus did not mention the requirement issued by Arles and may not have been aware of it.

<sup>32</sup> cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 199. Augustine also responded to the authority of Cyprian and his legacy in regards to baptismal practice, in *Bapt.*, though he did so much more explicitly.

it was not an argument that was likely to have been very convincing to Optatus' contemporaries.<sup>33</sup>

This polemic is also the context of Optatus' well-known distinction of three elements of baptism: the Trinity, the faith of the recipient, and the minister of baptism. Optatus insisted that while the first two were essential and unchanging, the third – the human agent of baptism – was variable and not meaningful to the efficacy of the sacrament.<sup>34</sup> Optatus emphasized that the Trinity held the principal place: without it the rite was not possible.<sup>35</sup> This functioned as both a theological argument about the source of the rite's efficacy – God rather than human ministers – and as a liturgical argument: what mattered was baptism in the Triune name, what Optatus referred to as the “fountains of the three names.”<sup>36</sup> Indeed, he makes this liturgical argument explicitly, arguing that Christ specified the “form” of baptism but not its human agent: “whoever has baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit has fulfilled the work of the Apostles...therefore it is the name, not the work, that sanctifies.”<sup>37</sup> This, of course, was the very practice that Caecilianists had agreed to after Arles: baptism received in the Triune name was not to be repeated. Optatus' insistence that the Trinity is the true agent of baptism is a theological explanation and defense of the practice Caecilianists had adopted as a condition of the Council of Arles.

Optatus also employed this emphasis on the Trinity as the true agent of baptism polemically, using it to attack the Donatist emphasis on the proper human agent of

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<sup>33</sup> Frend, *The Donatist Church*, 196.

<sup>34</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.4.

<sup>35</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.4.

<sup>36</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.3.7 (*SC* 413:122-4): “...de aqua sancta quae de trium nominum fontibus inundate.”

<sup>37</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.7.



baptism. Parmenian had insisted that only those who had been given the power to baptize could perform true baptism, a power that was given by Christ first to the apostles and then to faithful bishops.<sup>38</sup> In this assertion he was following Cyprian.<sup>39</sup> Optatus, though, characterizes this position as Donatist pride and returns to this theme repeatedly: “reckoning yourselves more holy, you do not scruple to put your pride before the Trinity.”<sup>40</sup> The Donatist bishops encourage people to desire them rather than baptism itself,<sup>41</sup> they try to exclude God from his own gifts;<sup>42</sup> “as they have it,” God is idle in baptism;<sup>43</sup> they invade the domain of the father, and claim what is God’s for themselves;<sup>44</sup> they puff themselves up.<sup>45</sup> Optatus sought to transform their adherence to a Cyprianic theory of baptismal efficacy into evidence of their own sinfulness and pride.

Optatus’ assertion of the importance of the faith of the recipient was likewise used to undermine the Donatist emphasis on the human agent of baptism. He invoked a series of passages in which Christ himself assigned the efficacy of miracles to the faith of the recipient in order to contrast the example of Christ with that of the Donatists. Christ valued the faith of believers over his own holiness, and “you [Donatist bishops] cannot be more holy than Christ is.”<sup>46</sup> Thus he could claim that the Donatist formula, “It belongs to the giver, not the receiver,” was entirely wrong. In contrast, Optatus compared the clergy

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<sup>38</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.4, 5.6. The particular formula of Parmenian to which Optatus responds was, “How can he give who has nothing to give?” Similarly, Optatus cites the saying, “This gift of baptism belongs to the giver, not the receiver,” 5.7, 5.8. cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 197.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. chapter two for more on Parmenian’s dependence on Cyprian.

<sup>40</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.4.

<sup>41</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.4.

<sup>42</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.4.

<sup>43</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.6.

<sup>44</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.7, a reference to the parable of the vineyard in Matthew 20.16.

<sup>45</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.7.

<sup>46</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.8.

to waiters at Christ's banquet, serving food they had not prepared.<sup>47</sup> He likewise compared their role in baptism to that of dyers of wool – they could apply a dye but could not change the color of the wool by their own power.<sup>48</sup> The power at work in baptism was not something that the clergy possessed. Once again, Optatus was covertly attacking a Cyprianic position – that the efficacy of baptism depends on a minister who has received the power to sanctify, but is not harmed by recipients of dubious faith.<sup>49</sup>

Optatus articulated a baptismal theology that centered on and was secured by the divine activity in the sacrament and relativized the importance of the human agents of baptism. Any baptism performed in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was efficacious, regardless of the person by whom it was performed. God was the true agent of the sacrament. This explanation corresponded to Caecilianist practice, in which those baptized in the Donatist communion were accepted by the laying on of hands, in accordance with the ruling of the Council of Arles. It was the first known theological explanation of this practice in Africa.<sup>50</sup> This explanation was also an argument against the Cyprianic theory of baptism that had been traditional in Africa and that the Donatists continued to defend. In this sense Optatus can be identified as making a genuine departure from traditional African baptismal theology, one on which Augustine would later draw. However, as we will see, this departure in baptismal theory does not mean that Optatus diverged entirely from the Cyprianic heritage of African Christianity. On the

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<sup>47</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.7.

<sup>48</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 5.7.

<sup>49</sup> See chapter 1 for a more detailed account of Cyprian's theology.

<sup>50</sup> Though not the first critique of the practice of rebaptism. The anonymous *Treatise on Rebaptism* had done so sometime in the middle of the third century. cf. also Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 191-5; cf. Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, 124ff.

contrary, Optatus continued to insist on the particular sanctity of the clergy, even as he critiqued the Donatists for imagining their own bishops to be particularly holy.

### **The History of Clerical Penance in Africa**

We know surprisingly little about the practice of clerical penance in fourth century North Africa prior to the period of Augustine. Given the paucity of sources on clerical penance, it is surprising that scholars have given Optatus so little attention on this question. The purpose of this section is to trace an outline of the history of clerical penance in North Africa in order to place Optatus in the proper historical context. It is widely known and accepted that the question of whether or not the clergy were to be subjected to penance was a point of contention between the Donatists and Caecilianists in the period of Optatus. Optatus himself accuses the Donatists of subjecting clergy to penance and insists that this practice is forbidden. However, Optatus bears witness to far more than this bare fact. He describes in some detail the penitential practices of the Donatists, though scholars have overlooked or misconstrued these descriptions because of their polemical rhetoric. He also offers a theological rationale for the exclusion of clergy from penance, one that appeals to a spiritual anointing given in ordination. As I will show, this rationale is evidence of Optatus' continuing commitment to the distinct sanctity of the clergy.

The writings of Cyprian provide much more abundant evidence for the middle of the third century than is available for most of the fourth century. Cyprian's letters offer

several cases of clergy, including bishops, undergoing penance.<sup>51</sup> They indicate that the clergy were subject to the same penitential discipline as the laity.<sup>52</sup> Any bishop who underwent penance also had to be removed from office. Such a bishop lost the power to sanctify and any rituals he oversaw were deemed ineffective.<sup>53</sup> The lower clergy do not seem to have been subject to the same strictures, however, and may have been allowed to return to their offices after their penance.<sup>54</sup> Despite Cyprian's insistence on the removal and penance of bishops, he also bears witness to the belief that each bishop is ultimately responsible before God, and on this basis allowed for regional variation in practice.<sup>55</sup>

The gathering of bishops at Cirta in the aftermath of the Diocletian persecution shows both Cyprianic principles at work. The president of the gathering and primate of Numidia, Secundus of Tigisis, had called the meeting to question his colleagues about their suitability to participate in the consecration of a new bishop of Cirta.<sup>56</sup> In doing so he demonstrated the continuing influence of the Cyprianic principle that those guilty of apostasy were unable to oversee the church's rituals, in this case ordination. The examination revealed that several of the gathered bishops had cooperated with the imperial officials in one way or another and thus were guilty of *traditio* during the persecution. The guilty bishops, however, sought to excuse their various failings and each

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<sup>51</sup> Cypr. *Ep.* 67.6.2-3; 64.1.1, among many others. cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 322-23, for a full list.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 322-23.

<sup>53</sup> Cypr. *Ep.* 65.2.1-2; 67.6.3. cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 377-8; Tilley, "Theologies of Penance," 331-3. For a more detailed and nuanced account, cf. Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, 132ff. In practice, Cyprian only applied this principle to bishops whose sins were known.

<sup>54</sup> Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 323.

<sup>55</sup> Cyprian, *Ep.* 55.21.2, "Provided that the bonds of harmony remain unbroken and that the sacred unity of the catholic Church continues unimpaired, each individual bishop can arrange and order his own affairs, in the knowledge that one day he must render an account to the Lord for his own conduct." See also *Ep.* 72.3.2. cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 189; Tilley, "Theologies of Penance," 333.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 332.

in turn insisted he should be left to God. When Secundus himself was challenged regarding his own actions in the persecution, he allowed that they would all be deferred to the judgment of God – and the election proceeded.<sup>57</sup> The insistence that bishops are accountable to God is, again, evidence of the continuing influence of Cyprianic principles, though here deployed in a different fashion. Cyprian had appealed to this notion as a rationale for tolerating a diversity of practice within a single universal or even regional church.<sup>58</sup> The bishops gathered at Cirta, however, used it as justification for their own exemption from judgment by their fellow bishops, and so also from any process of penance. Though the gathering at Cirta shows that their practice was changing, the Cyprianic principles regarding the discipline of clergy continued to shape African practice.

The practice attested to at Cirta - excluding bishops from penance, allowing them to continue in office, and reserving their judgment to God – did not take hold in either Africa or Rome. One of the judgments against Donatus at the Roman council overseen by Miltiades was that he was guilty of laying hands in penance on lapsed bishops.<sup>59</sup> Though this was in keeping with the practice of Cyprian, the Roman council deemed it as “alien to the custom of the church.”<sup>60</sup> The Council of Arles of 314, called in response to a Donatist appeal of the Roman council under Miltiades, subsequently specified that while

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<sup>57</sup> Aug. *Cresc.* 3.27.30.

<sup>58</sup> Cyp. *Sent.* proemium (CCSL 3E.3-7.3-29): “Neque enim quisquam nostrum episcopum se episcoporum constituit aut tyrannico terrore ad obsequendi necessitatem collegas suos adigit, quando habeat omnis episcopus pro licentia libertatis et potestatis suae arbitrium proprium tam que iudicari ab alio non possit quam nec ipse possit alterum iudicare.”

<sup>59</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 1.24.

<sup>60</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 1.24. Cf. Tilley, “Theologies of Penance,” 333-5; Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 332.

those who were guilty of *traditio* were to be removed from the clergy, any that they might have ordained were not – such ordinations were valid. The specified punishment for clergy guilty of *traditio* was limited to removal from office – they were not required to undergo penance.<sup>61</sup> Thus the established practice in Rome, and possibly in Gaul, at the beginning of the fourth century seems to have been that the clergy were removed from office but not subjected to public penance.

What little evidence we have of Caecilianist practice in fourth century Africa reflects a practice like that of Rome rather than that of Cyprian. The Council of Carthage of 348 prescribed different treatment for sinful clergy and laity: the laity were to be subjected to penance, the clergy deprived of the honor of their office.<sup>62</sup> Optatus made the Donatist subjection of clergy to penance a major point of his polemic against the Donatists. The Caecilianist bishops gathered at the council of Hippo in 393 referred to previous councils that had forbidden the reception of Donatist clergy in their orders rather than among the laity, though no evidence of such councils has survived for Africa.<sup>63</sup> The Caecilianists seem to have adopted the Roman practice rather than continued the Cyprianic one.

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<sup>61</sup> *Con. Arel.* a. 314 14. Cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 332.

<sup>62</sup> *Con. Afr.* a. 390 2, 14.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 398. Both Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa* and Tilley, “Theologies of Penance,” reference the Roman council held in 386 under the leadership of Siricius, the decisions of which are known to have been communicated to Africa because they were accepted at the council of Thelense in 418. The council decreed that Novatian and Donatist clergy were to be received with the imposition of hands; it does not specify whether they were to continue in orders or not. Though Tilley, 335-6, suggests that this was the case, and takes this to be reflective of African practice as well, it would run counter to the Roman practice reflected in the decision of Miltiades and to the practice testified to in Siricius’ own epistle 1 - that those who undergo penance are not eligible to serve as clergy. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 398-9, on the contrary, interprets the Roman council of 386 as prohibiting the reception of Donatist clergy in orders.

For their part, the Donatists continued the Cyprianic practice of subjecting clergy to penance. When the Donatist bishops were permitted to return from exile in 362 and retook control of the basilicas and congregations that had been theirs before the mission of Macarius and Paul in 347, they subjected the clergy serving those churches – bishops, presbyters and deacons – to penance, disqualifying them from clerical office.<sup>64</sup> They also forced the laity into penance, making them ineligible to join the clergy. All had participated in the communion of the Caecilianists and therefore all had shared in their apostasy. Those who had been baptized as Donatists could not be baptized again and were subjected to penance; those who had been baptized as Caecilianists were rebaptized. Thirty years later, in the aftermath of the conflict between Maximian and Primian of Carthage, the Donatists took a different approach. Not only those who supported Maximian but even those who consecrated him as bishop in opposition to Primian were eventually allowed to return in their offices.<sup>65</sup> The difference was that these clergy could not be charged with apostasy; though they had broken communion with Primian (and thus committed schism), they had not joined with the Caecilianists nor colluded with the Roman authorities.<sup>66</sup> Over the course of the fourth century the Donatists came to distinguish between apostasy and schism; even clergy had to undergo penance and be removed from office for the former but not for the latter. Thus they continued the

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<sup>64</sup> On the history of the mission of Paul and Macarius; cf. Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 162-7, 825-7; on the return from exile of the Donatist bishops and the events surrounding it, Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 148-59.

<sup>65</sup> Aug. *Parm.* 1.4.9; 2.3.7; *Petil.* 1.10.11, 13.14; 2.83.184. cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 333. Though the decree of the Council of Bagai of 393 was that the clergy present at the consecration of Maximian, whether directly involved or not, were to be subject to penance, this was not what actually happened.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 333.

Cyprianic practice of subjecting the clergy to penance; their innovation was in distinguishing apostates from schismatics.

### **The Killing Curse: The Violence of Clerical Penance**

Optatus devoted significant attention to the issue of clerical penance in his treatise against Parmenian and the Donatists, making it a key point in his characterization of them as violent and impious. In doing so, he framed their subjection of clergy to penance as a kind of spiritual violence, both against the clergy themselves and against the Holy Spirit at work in the church. This rhetoric of violence has obscured Optatus' extended description and critique of clerical penance. Scholars have noted Optatus' explicit literal references to penance, but many of his descriptions of clerical penance have been mistaken for descriptions of bodily assaults.<sup>67</sup> Recognition of this rhetoric of violence as a characterization of Donatist use of public penance for the clergy both highlights Optatus as a valuable source for clerical penance and offers important insight into Optatus' understanding of the clergy.

The starkest description of clerical penance as a form of violence is Optatus' characterization of it as murder. Optatus introduces the correspondence between clerical penance and murder at the beginning of the final section of book two, an introduction to what will be his major evidence of Donatist "impiety."<sup>68</sup> He compares their subjection of

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<sup>67</sup> This is most clearly the case in Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 683-690. Optatus as a source for penance of the clergy is treated briefly in Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 332-3; Bernhard Poschmann, *Penance and the Anointing of the Sick*. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), 110-111; Bernhard Poschmann, *Die abendländische Kirchenbusse im Ausgang des christlichen Altertums* (München: J. Kösel & F. Pustet, 1928), 176-179; Tilley, "Theologies of Penance," 335-6.

<sup>68</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.21.1 (*SC* 412:286): "Nunc quoniam erubescenda gaudia uestra probauimus et furor uester tot locis ostensus est, restat de profunda impietate uestra aliquid dicere."



bishops and presbyters to penance first with wolves killing a shepherd, then with the violence of bandits.<sup>69</sup> In fact he insists that bandits are more humane! “The victims of your murder are still alive; the bandit gives the compensation of death to those whom he has cut off.”<sup>70</sup> This makes it clear that the victims of this Donatist “murder” are, in fact, still alive. What they have killed is the “honor” of the priests, and so have destroyed the work of God and ruined human souls.

The high point of this rhetoric of violence for the penance of the clergy comes in Optatus’ accusation that the Donatist clergy revel in their ability to kill with curses.<sup>71</sup> It is a strange passage. Optatus offers no objection to the truth of the Donatist claim even though elsewhere in this same section he challenged Donatist bishops to back up their claims with demonstrations of their power.<sup>72</sup> Instead, he chides Parmenian that one is not allowed to kill, whether by sword, by curse, or any other method. The Donatists, he accuses, are every bit as guilty of murder through their curses as is one who has killed through poison or suffocation.<sup>73</sup> “You are undoubtedly a murderer, if one who lived is dead because of you.”<sup>74</sup> Were Optatus referring to literal cases of murder, he would offer examples.<sup>75</sup> Here, however, he is referring to the penance of clergy: the Donatists have *spiritually* killed priests of God by forcing them to undergo penance.

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<sup>69</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.21.2, 2.21.4.

<sup>70</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.21.4 (SC 412:286-8): “In comparatione operis uestri latronum leuior uidetur immanitas. Vos uiuum facitis homicidium! Latro iugulatis dat de morte compendium.”

<sup>71</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.25.7ff.

<sup>72</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.22. There Optatus argues that if the Donatists claim to have divine sanction for oaths to be sworn through them, they should demonstrate their power by performing other divine miracles, such as not dying, commanding the clouds, and sending rain.

<sup>73</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.25.8.

<sup>74</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.25.8 (SC 412:298): “Indubitanter homicida es si per te mortuus fuerit qui uiuebat.”

<sup>75</sup> cf. Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 159.

This rhetorical construction of clerical penance as a form of violence and even murder is the frame of reference for understanding a series of descriptions of actions that might otherwise be interpreted as referring to physical mutilations. Optatus repeatedly refers to the Donatists having used the sword of their tongues to cut off Caecilianist clergy.<sup>76</sup> In part because of a history of this particular act of violence in North Africa, these passages have been interpreted as referring to an actual cutting out of the tongues of Caecilianist clergy.<sup>77</sup> In this particular instance, however, Optatus is describing Donatist application of penance to clergy using the imagery of Psalm 56. He makes this connection explicitly in introducing the imagery:

in order to take a bite from other people's honors, you have turned your teeth into arrows and weapons, you have sharpened your tongues into swords, you have fulfilled what is written of you in Psalm 56: Sons of men, their teeth are arrows and their tongue is a sharp sword.<sup>78</sup>

The Donatists have used these "swords" to cut and to kill, but they have cut off names rather than limbs, honors rather than bodies.<sup>79</sup> He returns to this imagery twice, each time explicitly connecting it to depriving clergy of their honor.<sup>80</sup> The most vivid and most specific invokes a series of individuals whom Optatus describes as victims of Donatist violence:

...you wantonly killed those who preached the law of God, that is his prophets, against the bidding of God, who says, And do not lay your hand upon my

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<sup>76</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.24.1, 2.25.5, 2.25.8, 2.25.10

<sup>77</sup> cf. Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 686-688.

<sup>78</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.23.4 (SC 412:290-2): "...ad infigendum morsum honoribus alienis dentes uestros in sagittas et arma uertistis, linguas acuistis in gladios, impletis quod de uobis in psalmo quinquagesimo sexton scriptum est: Filii hominum dentes eorum arma et sagittae et lingua eorum gladius acutus."

<sup>79</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.24.1 (SC 412:292): "Ergo linguas uestras acuistis in gladios, quas mouistis in mortes non corporum sed honorum, iugulastis non membra sed nomina."

<sup>80</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.25.5 (SC 412:296): "Esurit is honores innocentium sacerdotum. "You crave the honours of innocent priests." 2.25.10, Vixerunt postea homines, sed a uobis occisi sunt in honoribus Dei sacerdotes." "They lived on after this as human beings, but as priests who held God's honours they were killed by you."

prophets. Deuterius, Parthenius, Donatus, and Getulicus, the bishops of God, you cut off with the sword of the tongue, pouring out the blood not of the body but of their honour. They lived on after this as human beings, but as priests who held God's honours they were killed by you.<sup>81</sup>

Again, despite the violent rhetoric this is about clerical penance. By forcing these bishops to undergo penance, they were deprived of their office and thus were no longer able to preach the "law" of God, no longer able to function as prophets.<sup>82</sup> This is the violence they have suffered, a violence not of blood but of office.

This is also the case for another act of violence that Optatus attributes to the Donatists: the "piercing" of the knees of clergy. Again, the combination of Optatus' rhetoric and the reality of sectarian violence in the controversy has prompted the interpretation of this passage as a reference to physical mutilation – to "kneecapping."<sup>83</sup> Optatus' word choice makes such an interpretation tempting: he refers quite graphically

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<sup>81</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.25.9-10 (*SC* 412:298-300): "Credo uos obliuisci non posse quid per loca aliqua feceritis cum eos qui legem Dei praedicabant, id est prophetas, uelletis occidere contra iussionem Dei dicentis: Et in prophetas meos manum ne miseritis. Deuterium, Partenium, Donatum et Getulicum, Dei episcopos, lingua gladio iugulastis, **fundentes sanguinem non corporis sed honoris**. Vixerunt postea homines, sed a uobis occisi sunt in honoribus Dei sacerdotes." Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 687, translates this as, "Deuterius, Parthenius, Donatus, and Gaetulicus, who were bishops of God - these men you slashed with the sword of the tongue, **pouring out the blood not just of their bodies but of their honour**. These men did subsequently live, but you had murdered them in their positions as priests of God." (emphasis mine) The crucial part is *fundentes sanguinem non corporis sed honoris*, which Shaw seems unnecessarily to translate as "not just the blood of their bodies..." The Latin does not require this, nor does the context indicate it. The translations of both Edwards, *Optatus: Against the Donatists*, 55, and Labrousse, "Introduction," 298-300, both interpret this as disjunctive rather than correlative.

<sup>82</sup> cf. Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 689, who notes the connection here with the "removal of the priests' ability to speak the word of God from the position of his formal office," but who argues that it was joined to a physical removal of the tongue.

<sup>83</sup> cf. Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 688-89, who describes this as a "destruction of the knees" that would subsequently make kneeling for prayer impossible, and who translates the key part of the passage as "Nevertheless, none of those who avoided this ceremony physically attacked the lapsed or ordered the piercing of their knees." The Latin is *tamen nullus eorum qui euaserunt aut manum lapsis imposuit aut ut genua figerent imperauit*. (Optat. *Parm.* 2.25.10; *SC* 412:300) Shaw interprets the passage (and the violent action) as referring to an actual kneecapping, tracing its history to symbolically laden retribution for the act of kneeling in apostasy during the Great Persecution. However, Optatus explicitly states that this was *not* done in the time of persecution.

to the “piercing” of the knees.<sup>84</sup> As before, though, the practice being described here is not a physical maiming but rather the penance of the clergy. Optatus contrasts the treatment of lapsed bishops in the time of the Diocletian persecution with Donatist practice of those whom they consider lapsed. Though during the persecution some lapsed and offered incense, those who knew their sins neither laid hands on them nor ordered the piercing of their knees. The key phrase here is “laid hands on the lapsed,” *manum lapsis imposuit*. Though this might have echoes of physical apprehension, it is the normal way of referring to the laying on of hands in penance.<sup>85</sup> The charge is not that they have “physically attacked the lapsed,” but rather that they have laid hands on them in penance – which Optatus asserts was not done in the time of the persecution.<sup>86</sup> This pairing indicates that the “piercing” of the knees is another example of Optatus’ rhetoric of violence for the penance of the clergy; just as elsewhere he has referred to such penance as a form of murder and mutilation, here he refers to the kneeling of penance as “piercing” the knees.<sup>87</sup> Optatus did not accuse the Donatists of kneecapping Caecilianist bishops but of forcing them to do penance.

Nor did Optatus accuse the Donatists of scalping Caecilianist priests. Shortly after introducing Psalm 104 as a text about the special anointing of Christian priesthood, he accuses the Donatists of shaving the heads of priests. “Teach us where you are

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<sup>84</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.25.10 (SC 412:300): “...ut genua figerent imperavit,” that is, “ordered that they pierce the knees.”

<sup>85</sup> Kneeling is well-attested as part of the practice of penance. Cf. Tertullian, *Paen.* 9.4; Cyprian, *Laps.* 33.

<sup>86</sup> The quotation is from Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 689. Optatus’ insistence that this was not done in the time of persecution may be a reference to the “council” of Cirta, which he references elsewhere. Cf. Optat. 1.13-14.

<sup>87</sup> This is also how Labrousse, “Introduction,” 301, interprets the passage: “et pourtant aucun de ceux qui échappèrent à cela n’imposa les mains aux renégats ni ne leur ordonna de fléchir les genoux.”

commanded to shave the heads of priests, when there are so many instances on the other side to show that it should not be done.”<sup>88</sup> There is no indication that this was either a true scalping or even a “bloody shaving.”<sup>89</sup> The practice is introduced as evidence of Donatist violence against the “oil” of Caecilianist priests; shaving the hair was part of the Donatist imposition of penance on Caecilianist clergy.

In the final section of book two, Optatus focuses on the Donatist subjection of the clergy to public penance as a particularly vivid and egregious example of their impious opposition to the Holy Spirit, evidence that they are not the true church. His apparent descriptions of physical violence against the clergy are actually part of his polemical rhetoric. His extended critique of the subjection of clergy to penance not only gives us a number of details about the practice of penance in fourth century Africa; it also provides a theological rationale for the exemption of the clergy. That rationale focuses on the unique sanctity of the clergy, and in so doing provides evidence that Optatus’ notion of the clergy has not strayed far from either the African tradition or the rival Donatists.

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<sup>88</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.23.2 (SC 412:290): “Docete ubi uobis mandatum est radere capita sacerdotum, cum e contrario sint tot exempla proposita fieri non debere.”

<sup>89</sup> cf. Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 688, and Michael Gaddis, *There Is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire*, 2005, 120. Gaddis argues that this was not a scalping; Shaw agrees, but still focuses on the violent aspect of the act, describing it as a “bloody shaving.” For Shaw, the passage indicates that priests among the Donatists shaved their heads, and that they in turn shaved the heads of Caecilianist priests as part of their physical violence against them in mockery of what they claimed to be. Gaddis, on the other hand, argues that the “scraping” (*radere*) of heads described here is a kind of shaving and *not* bloody. Gaddis notes the combination of purification, degradation, and public humiliation involved in the act, and its possible connection to a “symbolic removal of the oil of consecration.” He does not, however, note its connection to clerical penance.

### **“You Shall Not Touch My Anointed Ones”**

Optatus described the purpose of book two as the demonstration that the Caecilianist communion was the true church, the “one church which Christ calls his dove and his bride.”<sup>90</sup> His extended critique of the Donatist practice of clerical penance at the end of book two finds its purpose within that polemical context; it is the last in a line of arguments Optatus deployed to that end. It built on the argument that immediately preceded it, that it is the Donatist communion that is grounded in acts of violence against its brothers, the Donatist communion that “feeds on bloody morsels and battens on the blood and flesh of the saints.”<sup>91</sup> As we have seen, Optatus continues this violent imagery and applies it to the penance imposed on the clergy, culminating in the accusation that the Donatists have murdered clergy by forcing them to undergo penance.

This line of attack was available to Optatus because the penance of the clergy was one of the few areas in which Donatist and Caecilianist practice were noticeably distinct. Public penance of the clergy was prohibited within the Caecilianist communion, while Donatist bishops had very publically subjected clergy to penance upon their return from exile. Like the reception of those baptized in other communions, it was one of the areas in which the practices of the two communions were quite explicitly different. Optatus seizes on this difference to demonize his Donatist opponents.

However, precisely because this was a contested practice, Optatus needed to construct an argument for *why* this practice was such a grave impiety. In doing so he offers a rare rationale for the exemption of the clergy from penance. Indeed, Optatus

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<sup>90</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.1.

<sup>91</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.14. This is the focus of the argument from 2.14 through 2.20.

offers the only extant rationale for this practice in fourth century Africa. Optatus constructed his argument through a series of polemical applications of scriptural texts to the Donatists. The argument focused on the unique status of the clergy based upon what they received in their ordination, which Optatus usually refers to as an anointing or, more simply, as “oil.” They could not undergo penance because this “oil,” which remained with them, would be harmed in the process. Thus the clergy were sacrosanct, at least in regards to public penance.

Optatus developed the core of this argument against clerical penance as an interpretation of Psalm 105, “You shall not touch my anointed ones, or lay a hand on my prophets.”<sup>92</sup> He invoked this text twice, forming an *inclusio* that brackets chapters 23-25 and marks them as an extended argument about clerical penance.<sup>93</sup> To this text he joined a series of other scriptural texts, most prominently a pair of passages from 1 Samuel that reference the anointing of Saul as king of Israel. The key image throughout is that of the “oil” of anointing that Christian priests receive in ordination and which is somehow analogous to that of priests and kings in the Old Testament. There is no evidence that anointing was part of the ordination ritual at this time, and Optatus is explicit that he is referring to an “oil conferred on a priest by God.”<sup>94</sup> This anointing is a spiritual charism rather than a liturgical rite.

Though Psalm 105 is the base text for Optatus’ argument, and he invokes the anointing of Old Testament priests by way of Psalm 133, he elaborates this theme

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<sup>92</sup> Psalm 104:15.

<sup>93</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.23.1; 2.25.9, 11. Optatus references this passage again in 4.4, which commences a section on the anointing of Christ; there he makes explicit that he is talking about a “spiritual oil,” which he distinguishes from the oil of humans. Here, similarly, he insists that the oil is “from God.”

<sup>94</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.25.2.

primarily through scriptural narratives about Saul and David.<sup>95</sup> The key point for Optatus is that though God rejected Saul as king because of his sins, he did not remove the anointing Saul had received. For Optatus this serves to prove that even those clergy who are known sinners cannot be subject to penance. Like Saul, they have received a special anointing of God; if God did not take the anointing away from Saul despite having repented of giving the anointing, then it is certainly beyond the prerogative of the Donatists to remove an anointing that they have not given.<sup>96</sup> Optatus makes much the same point just a short while later, this time describing in detail the encounter between David and Saul narrated in 1 Samuel 24. Though David had the opportunity to kill Saul then and there, had much to gain in doing so, and was urged on by his companions, he refused to do so because of the anointing that remained on Saul: “I shall not lay a hand on the Lord’s anointed.”<sup>97</sup> The respect paid Saul as the anointed of God becomes a scriptural model for the respect due to the clergy as God’s anointed. Hands are not to be laid on them in penance lest the anointing be harmed.

This anointing remained with the clergy and in some sense effected a change in them. Using the language of Psalm 11:3, Optatus described the clergy as having been perfected by the work of God in ordination.<sup>98</sup> The clergy are different from – holier than

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<sup>95</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.23.1 (SC 412:290): “Sicut unguentum in capite quod descendit in barbam Aaron.” “It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes,” Psalm 133:2.

<sup>96</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.23.3 (SC 412:290): “Igitur Deus si ut te doceret quod dedit auferre non potuit, per quod noluit, tu quis es ut auferas quod non dedisti?”

<sup>97</sup> 1 Sam. 24:6; Optat. *Parm.* 2.25.4.

<sup>98</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.21.5 (SC 412:288): “Perfecti enim fuerant illi opere scilicet Dei qui in eius nomine fuerant ordinati.” “For those who had been ordained in the name of God had of course been rendered perfect by his work.” The vocabulary derives from the scriptural passage Optatus invoked, Psalm 11:3. Therefore the language of “perfection” should not be stretched too far. Nevertheless, the notion that ordination “does”



– the other members of the church, and Optatus attributed this difference to their ordination. Thereafter they are marked out as uniquely sacred members of the community. It is this status that Optatus refers to repeatedly as the “oil” that cannot be touched.

This sacred status of the clergy is not grounded in their moral performance and endures despite any sins they may commit. Their sacred status is not tied to their sinlessness – an accusation he hurls at the Donatist bishops – but rather to the office itself.<sup>99</sup> No degree of faithlessness can undo their distinct sacred status, their anointing. Public penance is not forbidden for clergy because they do not sin, but precisely because the “anointing” of God rests on them *as clergy*. Despite their sins, the anointing remains; the sins of the clergy do not invalidate their sacred status.<sup>100</sup> Once the clergy have been anointed by God in ordination, they cannot be subjected to penance regardless of their sins. The process of public penance violates this sanctity, and so cannot be applied to the clergy.<sup>101</sup>

Though Optatus accused the Donatist bishops of claiming a unique holiness for themselves, his critique of clerical penance assumed a notion of the clergy as possessing a distinct sanctity. This sanctity of the clergy, explained in terms of their special anointing, is precisely the reason why they must not be subjected to public penance. Optatus frames this distinct sanctity in a way that distances the Caecilianist communion

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something to its recipients, that it makes them somehow more righteous, accords with what Optatus writes elsewhere.

<sup>99</sup> On Optatus’ accusation that Donatist bishops claimed a perfect sanctity, cf. Optat. *Parm.* 2.20.

<sup>100</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.25.11 (SC 412:300): “Oleum suum defendit Deus, quia si peccatum est hominis, unctio est tamen diuinitatis.” “God protects his oil, because, if sin comes from man, the oil is none the less from God.”

<sup>101</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.21.5, 2.25.12.

from his critiques of the Donatists: he accuses the Donatists of claiming a personal holiness while himself ascribing it to the special anointing they receive at their ordination. Nevertheless, his differing explanation of the sacred status of the clergy is not a repudiation of it. Quite the contrary, his account of the clergy arises from a North African *milieu* and needed to make sense not only to Parmenian, his nominative recipient, but more importantly to a broader audience of North African clergy and laity on both sides of the proverbial aisle caught in the middle of the upheaval of the 360's.

In Optatus' critique, the Donatists failure to recognize the special work of God in the clergy is one more example of their profound impiety. His argument depends on a perception of the clergy as particularly sacred for its effect. In the course of retaking control of their former basilicas and congregations, the Donatist bishops enacted a series of practices that dramatically indicated that these congregations were defiled and needed purification. They whitewashed the walls of the basilicas, either broke or scraped off the altars, and sold off the liturgical vessels.<sup>102</sup> They threw out vials of oil used for chrismation and poured out the Caecilianist eucharist to be lapped up by dogs.<sup>103</sup> Even worse, they exorcised the Holy Spirit by repeating baptisms, thus leading Christians into blasphemy. In introducing his critique of clerical penance, Optatus invokes these practices in conjunction with forcing clergy into penance.<sup>104</sup> All of these actions find their place as examples of what Optatus describes as the purpose of this final section, a

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<sup>102</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.21.2.; 6.1, 6.2, 6.5, 6.6.

<sup>103</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.19.

<sup>104</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.21.2, "You have given exorcism to the faithful and have washed walls without reason;" 2.21.6, "What is more evil than to exorcise the Holy Spirit, to break the altars, to cast the eucharist to beasts?"

description of the Donatists’ “profound impiety.”<sup>105</sup> The penance of the clergy finds its place alongside casting out the eucharistic elements, breaking the eucharistic elements, and even exorcising the Holy Spirit. What this list shares in common is the possession of a distinct sanctity that the Donatists have, according to Optatus, violated. In the final section of book two, the clergy become the primary example of this “impiety,” this Donatist disregard for and violation of what should be sacrosanct.

### **Optatus and Augustine on Ordination and Anointing**

The explanation that Optatus articulated for the prohibition of laying hands on clergy in penance differed in subtle but important ways from that later offered by Augustine. Though Augustine continued to embrace the same practice, his rationale for it was developed in response to a different set of circumstances in North African Christianity. Augustine did not at any point in his explanation of the practice appeal to the particular sanctity of the clergy. On the contrary, he clearly distinguished between the “sacrament” of orders and the sanctifying “unction” of the Holy Spirit’s gift of charity. This difference between Optatus and Augustine can be demonstrated by considering the way in which each figure described the parallels between baptism and ordination.

As has been shown, Optatus’ critique of clerical penance was polemically driven: it was a particularly vivid example of what he considered the sacrilege and impiety of the Donatists. In this regard it was much like rebaptism, and Optatus linked the two. Optatus argued that because baptism includes exorcism, when Donatist bishops baptized those who had already been baptized in the Caecilianist communion they were in fact

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<sup>105</sup> Optat. *Parm.* 2.21.1.

exorcising the Holy Spirit. Thus rebaptism was blasphemy. Likewise, the subjection of the clergy to the imposition of hands in public penance did violence to the particular holiness of the clergy that was, he argued, the work of God in ordination. It was a direct repudiation and assault on the work of God and therefore an “impiety,” a sacrilege.<sup>106</sup> In this sense rebaptism and clerical penance were, for Optatus, variations of the same Donatist crime: the express denial of and violence against the sanctity of God, whether in the Holy Spirit given in baptism or in the clergy as distinctive bearers of divine sanctity.

The parallel between baptism and ordination in Augustine is quite different. In his own *Against the Letter of Parmenian*, Augustine argued that ordination, like baptism, was a sacrament and a “kind of consecration” given to humans that could not be lost.<sup>107</sup> Schismatics retained them upon leaving the unity of the church and so they were not to be repeated.<sup>108</sup> In making this argument Augustine applied his theory of baptism to ordination: both created an enduring sacramental reality that could not be removed, even

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<sup>106</sup> Optatus is indeed willing to assert that the “oil” of ordination can be destroyed, *Optat. Parm.* 2.21.5.

<sup>107</sup> *Aug. Parm.* 2.13.28 (*CSEL* 51:79): “Utrumque enim sacramentum est et quadam consecratione utrumque homini datur, illud cum baptizatur, illud cum ordinatur, ideoque in catholica utrumque non licet iterari.”

<sup>108</sup> *Aug. Parm.* 2.13.28 (*CSEL* 51:79-80): “Nam illud quod quidam eorum ueritate conuicti dicere coeperunt: ‘baptismum quidem non amittit qui recedit ab ecclesia, sed ius dandi tamen amittit,’ multis modis apparet frustra et inaniter dici. Primo quia nulla ostenditur causa, cur ille, qui ipsum baptismum amittere non potest, ius dandi possit amittere. Utrumque enim sacramentum est et quadam consecratione utrumque homini datur, illud cum baptizatur, illud cum ordinatur, ideoque in catholica utrumque non licet iterari. Nam si quando ex ipsa parte uenientes etiam praepositi bono pacis correcto schismatis errore suscepti sunt, etiamsi uisum est opus esse ut eadem officia gererent quae gerebant, non sunt rursus ordinati, sed sicut baptismus in eis ita ordinatio mansit integra, quia in praecisione fuerat uitium quod unitatis pace correctum est, non in sacramentis, quae ubicumque sunt ipsa sunt. Et cum hoc expedire iudicatur ecclesiae, ut praepositi eorum uenientes in catholicam societatem honores suos ibi non administrent, non eis tamen ipsa ordinationis sacramenta detrahuntur, sed manent super eos. Ideoque non eis in populo manus imponitur, ne non homini, sed ipsi sacramento fiat iniuria. Et si quando ignoranter fit nec animose defenditur factum, sed pie corrigitur cognitum, uenia facilis impetratur. Deus enim noster non est dissensionis deus, sed pacis, nec ecclesiae sacramenta eius in eis qui ab ecclesia recesserunt, sed ipsi qui recesserunt inimici sunt. Sicut autem habent in baptismo quod per eos dari possit, sic in ordinatione ius dandi; utrumque quidem ad perniciem suam, quamdiu caritatem non habent unitatis. Sed tamen aliud est non habere, aliud perniciose habere, aliud salubriter habere. Quod non habetur, dandum est cum opus est dari; quod uero perniciose habetur, per correctionem depulsa pernicie agendum est ut salubriter habeatur.”

by schism.<sup>109</sup> Augustine developed this theory largely as a rationale for and defense of the Caecilianist practice of admitting Donatist clergy into the Caecilianist communion in their offices, a policy that the Caecilianist bishops embraced in the late fourth and early fifth centuries.<sup>110</sup> Like baptism, orders could not be lost because of schism. Those coming to the Caecilianist communion did not need to be re-baptized or re-ordained, but only to receive the gift of *caritas* in the unity of the true church so that they could exercise them for the good of the members of the body of Christ.<sup>111</sup>

It is within the context of this sacramental theory that Augustine explained why it was that the Caecilianist communion did not impose hands in penance on clergy returning from schism. Augustine continued to assert, as had Optatus, that this was “so that the sacrament itself might not be injured.”<sup>112</sup> However, for Augustine the sacrament of orders was not something that marked the clergy as peculiarly holy. Rather, orders were given for the sake of others.<sup>113</sup> The problem with subjecting the clergy to penance was that it would render this gift for the sake of others ineffectual, because those who underwent public penance could no longer function as clergy.<sup>114</sup> Though Augustine was willing to describe ordination in terms of both “sacrament” and, like Optatus, of “anointing,” these descriptions did not signify that ordination indicated or effected a greater degree of sanctity. He made this distinction explicit in his *Against the Letters of*

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<sup>109</sup> cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 425-8.

<sup>110</sup> This is discussed in great detail in chapter 3.

<sup>111</sup> Aug. *Parm.* 2.13.28.

<sup>112</sup> Aug. *Parm.* 2.13.28. cf. *Bapt.* 1.1.2.

<sup>113</sup> cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 426; Aug. *Cresc.* 2.11.13–12.14.

<sup>114</sup> Either that, or else it would confuse the issue. “The imposition of hands in penance might have given the impression to the faithful that the sacrament of orders could be removed, since the cleric was no longer allowed to exercise the office.” Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 398.

*Petilian*, responding to the Donatist bishop's citation of Psalm 133. Augustine distinguished between the "oil" as a sacrament or visible sign, which he insisted can exist in the bad as well as the good, and the "oil" as the anointing of the Holy Spirit in *caritas*, an anointing that is possessed by all those in the unity of the true church, clergy and laity alike.<sup>115</sup> Augustine identified the former meaning as that at work in the letters of *Petilian* – ordination as a unique anointing given to the clergy alone. It was also, as has been demonstrated, the idea of "anointing" at work in *Optatus*. Augustine, however, prioritized the latter interpretation of Psalm 133: the priestly anointing was not limited to the clergy but was shared by the whole body of Christ.<sup>116</sup> This careful distinction between the anointing of ordination and that of sanctification contrasts starkly with *Optatus*' linking of ordination and the sanctity of the clergy.

### Conclusion

The question of baptism loomed large in *Optatus*' polemic, and understandably so. Baptism was one of the few areas in which there was an obvious difference in practice between the two communions, and it was a flashpoint before *Optatus* ever waded into the controversy. In his critique of the Donatist practice of "rebaptism" and defense of his own communion's refusal to repeat baptism, *Optatus* articulated a baptismal and sacramental theory that emphasized divine agency in the ritual and sought to relativize the importance of the human agents, the clergy. This was not only a defense of

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<sup>115</sup> Aug. *Petil.* 2.104.239 (*CSEL* 52:155): *Discerne ergo visibile sanctum sacramentum, quod esse et in bonis et in malis potest, illis ad praemium illis ad iudicium, ab invisibili unctione caritatis, quae propria bonorum est.*

<sup>116</sup> Aug. *Petil.* 2.104.239. cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa* 428-431.

Caecilianist practice. It was also a critique of an African tradition that stretched back over a hundred years and that had been most clearly articulated by Cyprian. On this point, Optatus was advocating a position that was a departure from what had been traditionally African, a position that would be taken up and modified by Augustine and later Caecilianists.

This reassessment of the place of the clergy in sacramental theory was not representative of a larger change in understanding of the clergy for Optatus. Though he sought to ridicule the Donatists for emphasizing the holiness of the clergy as part of his polemic, Optatus himself continued to treat the clergy as being particularly holy. That this was so he can be seen in his treatment of the Donatist subjection of the clergy to penance. This was another area of genuine difference of practice: the Caecilianist communion prohibited the application of public penance to the clergy, while the Donatist communion allowed it. Seizing on this difference, Optatus used it to attack the Donatists. For him, it was a prime example of their impiety, their violent opposition to God and God's holy work. It was analogous to rebaptism: just as in rebaptism the Donatists blasphemed by exorcising the Holy Spirit, so in subjecting the clergy to penance they committed sacrilege. Though Optatus' explanation of the nature of clerical holiness emphasized that it came from God's anointing and not from the moral superiority of the clergy, it is nevertheless an assertion that the clergy are particularly holy.

The position that Optatus articulates regarding clerical penance indicates that the notion that the clergy possessed a distinct sanctity was not a defining difference between the two communions. Optatus, a late-fourth century Caecilianist, an active anti-Donatist

polemicist who specifically critiqued the Donatists for their emphasis on and claims to clerical holiness, nevertheless assumed that the clergy were in fact distinctly holy. Optatus employed this distinction against the Donatists, but his attitude towards clerical penance belies the truth of his claim. While there were very real differences in practice between the communions, not the least of which were whether converts from the other communion should be baptized, the role of the clergy in sacramental efficacy, and whether clergy should be subjected to penance, their attitudes towards the clergy were not one of these differences. Caecilianists were willing to appeal to the sanctity of the clergy as well as Donatists.



## CHAPTER V

### CLERICAL REFORM AND EPISCOPAL HOLINESS AT THE COUNCIL OF CARTHAGE OF 390

In June of 390, the Caecilianist bishops of North Africa assembled in Carthage under the leadership of Genethlius, bishop of Carthage and primate of Africa.<sup>1</sup> Modern scholarship has largely overlooked this council and its thirteen canons, typically referencing the council as little more than evidence of the dismal condition of the Caecilianist church in North Africa before the rise of Augustine.<sup>2</sup> Scholars have rarely examined the council for what it was: an effort at reform.<sup>3</sup> This is unfortunate because attention to the reform agenda of the bishops who assembled in 390 offers a glimpse of the concerns and assumptions of African Caecilianists on the very eve of Augustine's rise to prominence within the African clergy, and thus a rare non-Augustinian perspective on African Caecilianist Christianity in the late fourth century. Considered in this light, the concerns of the Council of Carthage of 390 show that Caecilianist Christians continued to treat the bishop and his role in the church in ways that were true to the legacy of Cyprian and that were not clearly differentiated from Donatist theory and practice. The distinctions that Augustine would draw, and which are echoed in the conciliar activity of 393 forward, are nowhere to be found in the canons of 390. The clergy of the Caecilianist

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<sup>1</sup> Frend specified a date of June 16<sup>th</sup>, 390. *The Donatist Church*, 245.

<sup>2</sup> The major exception to this regards its second canon, which calls for sexual continence for bishops, presbyters, and deacons. That canon had long played a major role in debates over clerical celibacy, and will be addressed below. It has not, however, led to further study of the council itself.

<sup>3</sup> See, though, Jane Merdinger, "On the Eve of the Council of Hippo, 393: The Background to Augustine's Program for Church Reform," *Augustinian Studies* 40:1 (2009): 27-36.

church in North Africa at the time of Augustine's ordination had a theory and practice of the episcopacy that was in broad agreement with that of the rival Donatists.

### **The Council in History and Literature**

The Council of Carthage of 390 has received relatively little scholarly attention, and what attention it has received has been unflattering.<sup>4</sup> It has typically been dealt with alongside the Council of Carthage of 348, both being considered more or less insignificant preludes to the conciliar activity under Aurelius and Augustine. Monceaux described the council as lacking a very precise purpose, and Hefele stated even more bluntly that it was “of no great importance.”<sup>5</sup> Modern scholars have paid the council a bit more attention, but primarily as a source for understanding the problems besetting the Caecilianist communion at the end of the fourth century. It was Frend who set the pattern for this historiography. He described the Caecilianist communion as an “Augean stable,” stating “the canons of Genethlius’ Council... show how much was required.”<sup>6</sup> Merdinger adopted this same narrative, and it is present in Peter Brown’s biography of Augustine as well, though there the council of 390 drops out of view entirely - a not uncommon

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<sup>4</sup> On the Council of Carthage of 390 in the historiography of North African Christianity, cf. Frank Leslie Cross, “History and Fiction in the African Canons.,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 12, no. 2 (O 1961): 227–47; W. H. C Frend, *The Donatist Church; a Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1952); Karl Joseph Von Hefele, *Histoire Des Conciles D’après Les Documents Originaux* (Paris: ALe Clère, 1869).

; Hamilton Hess, *The Early Development of Canon Law and the Council of Serdica* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Jane E. Merdinger, “On the Eve of the Council of Hippo, 393: The Background to Augustine’s Program for Church Reform;” Jane E. Merdinger, *Rome and the African Church in the Time of Augustine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Paul Monceaux, *Histoire Littéraire De l’Afrique Chrétienne Depuis Les Origines Jusqu’à L’invasion Arabe*, (Paris E. Leroux, 1901-23).

<sup>5</sup> Monceaux, *Histoire Littéraire*, III.228; Hefele, *Histoire Des Conciles*, II.405.

<sup>6</sup> Frend, *The Donatist Church*, 245-6.

occurrence in the scholarly literature.<sup>7</sup> The council of Carthage of 390 is rarely been given more than passing attention.

The other primary role that the council is given in the historiography is that of a prelude to the reforming councils of Aurelius and Augustine. Rather than being considered in its own right, it has been treated as background to these councils in which scholars have been truly interested. This perspective shows up repeatedly. Hess described the council of 390 explicitly as a “prelude” to the conciliar activity under Aurelius.<sup>8</sup> Cross and Markus both simply excluded the councils of 348 and 390 from the important North African conciliar activity at the end of the fourth century; Cross described a “classical period” of African canonical legislation beginning with Aurelius, and Markus described a “great series of African councils” that began in 393.<sup>9</sup> Only Merdinger and Munier depart from this narrative, and then only slightly. Munier claimed that one could see an outline of the reforms of Aurelius in the councils of Gratus and Genethlius.<sup>10</sup> More recently, Merdinger has argued for a more positive account of the Council of 390, pointing to it as an attempt to reform the church. Yet even as she has argued for a more positive account, she does not fundamentally leave the received historiography behind: the council of 390 set the stage for the reforms of Aurelius and Augustine.<sup>11</sup> The

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<sup>7</sup> Merdinger, *Rome and the African Church*, 78; cf. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, rev. ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 133. Brown employs the same narrative, describing the Caecilianist church in Africa as having “come to a standstill” and then listing its many vices.

<sup>8</sup> Hess, *The Early Development of Canon Law*, 51.

<sup>9</sup> Cross, “History and Fiction in the North African Canons,” 228; Markus, *Saeculum*, 127, 135.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Munier, “Vers une édition nouvelle des Conciles Africains (345-525),” *REA* 18 (1972) 249—259.

<sup>11</sup> Merdinger, “On the Eve of the Council of Hippo, 393;” *idem. Rome and the African Church*, 78. Merdinger likewise continues to draw a historiographical division between 390 and 393: Caecilianists were “experiencing a changing of the guard” with the death of Genethlius and the accession of Aurelius, *Rome*

scholarly literature is nearly unanimous in marking the series of councils initiated by Augustine and Aurelius in 393 as the real beginning of the reform of North African Caecilianist Christianity.

This portrayal is not entirely inaccurate. The reform efforts of Augustine and Aurelius were far more successful than those of Genethlius or any of his predecessors, and these councils played a significant role in both the African Caecilianist Church's program of internal reform and its campaign against the Donatists. Not only do the conciliar efforts reveal the ongoing problems within the Caecilianist communion, Augustine himself bears witness to the sorry state of the clergy in particular: "But with regard to strife and jealousy why should I say anything? For these vices are more serious, not in the people, but in our own number."<sup>12</sup> The Caecilianist communion faced serious internal problems and external threats in the late fourth century, and the reform efforts of Augustine and Aurelius accomplished much in addressing them.

However, one effect of this historiography placing the Council of 390 on the other side of this turning point in North African Christianity is to obscure its own efforts at reform, whether successful or not. The council of 390 was itself an attempt at reform and not merely an indirect report on the ills of the Caecilianist communion. As such, it offers a valuable source for the concerns and assumptions of the African Caecilianist bishops in the late fourth century. The bishops assembled there had their own notions of what the

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*and the African Church*, 65; similarly, "The challenges facing the African church were daunting. Disorganization was rampant; many clerics were poorly educated and ill disciplined; Donatism posed a constant threat. In 391/92 the situation began to change when Aurelius became primate. With Augustine he embarked on an ambitious program to revitalize the Catholic Church in Africa." Merdinger, "Councils of North African Bishops," *ATAE*, 249.

<sup>12</sup> *Ep.* 22.7.2.

most significant ills besetting their church were and their own notions of the most appropriate ways to deal with them. They had their own reform agenda and their own vision of what a properly reformed church would look like.

In this chapter, I will focus on the council of 390 as a distinct attempt at reform and not in relationship to the later councils held under the leadership of Aurelius and Augustine. In doing so I will show that the reform agenda of the council of 390 was not merely an inchoate version of the reform that began in 393. The decrees of the council offer a glimpse of what the bishops understood the church to be, a glimpse of their ecclesiology. Attention to the particular shape of the reform proposed by the bishops at the council of Carthage of 390 shows that their concerns centered on the proper role of the bishop in the church and that they deemed that a reformed church would be a church with the bishop properly at its center, exercising his distinct powers and maintaining his purity for the sake of his congregation. This, in turn, sheds light on their understanding of the office of bishop and of the role of the bishop within the church. Their reform emphases indicate that they held a view of the office of bishop that was still very much within the Cyprianic tradition, and that was in fact very similar to that of their Donatist rivals.

### **The Conciliar Context of the Fourth Century**

The council that met in Carthage in 390 was one of scores of councils that met across the Mediterranean in the fourth century. In broad strokes, its canons look very much like

those of other councils. However, the canons of 390 are particularly and singularly focused on the bishops; every one of the thirteen canons deals with matters related to the bishop, either directly or indirectly. This was not the case at other comparable councils. At the council of Carthage of 348, for example, the assembled bishops produced decrees that sought to regulate the graves of martyrs, the behavior of widows and widowers, and the communication by both laity and clergy at churches other than their own, in addition to decrees aimed at regulation and reform of the clergy. Similarly the council of Hippo in 393 produced decrees attempting to regulate virgins, the children of clergy, and the canon of scripture. Even when the council of 390 references or repeats canons from earlier councils, the bishops do so for their own reasons and not those of previous councils. The particular focus on the bishop in 390 reflects their own concerns.

Though it is often compared with that of 390, the council of Carthage held under Gratus in 348 does not share its particularly episcopal focus. The council of 348 was held in the immediate aftermath of the decree of Constans declaring unity between the two communions under Gratus.<sup>13</sup> Its primary purposes were twofold: to consolidate and enact the religious unity that the emperor had decreed, and to enact disciplinary reform.<sup>14</sup> Its first two canons are focused especially on the former, while the rest of its fourteen canons focus on disciplinary concerns. Nevertheless, despite the disciplinary focus of the canons, they are not exclusively focused on the bishops. They evidence concern for the discipline of laity as well as clergy, and also for clerical issues that do not immediately pertain to

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<sup>13</sup> Frend, *The Donatist Church*, 179, dates the publication of the decree in Carthage to August 15, 347. cf. *Pas. Isa. Max.* 1. The decree itself has not survived. See Monceaux, *Histoire Littéraire*, III.222 for dating.

<sup>14</sup> cf. Frend, *The Donatist Church*, 182-4; Monceaux, *Histoire Littéraire*, III.223-4.

the status of the bishop. So, for example, canon four seeks to regulate the living arrangements of widows and widowers; canon six prohibits clergy from acting as the administrators of estates, and canon nine from others appointing the clergy as such; and canon thirteen forbids clergy from lending money at interest.<sup>15</sup> All of these involve disciplinary concerns that are not directly related to particularly episcopal matters. The African bishops gathered at Carthage in 348 sought to reform and unify the church, but in doing so they did not focus exclusively on the office of bishop.

The council of Serdica of 343 was very focused on episcopal discipline, and in this sense makes for an important comparison with that of Carthage 390. However the disciplinary concerns of the bishops at Serdica discipline arose for very different reasons from those of the bishops at Carthage. The council of Serdica was held in response to the controversies that had roiled the church in the aftermath of the council of Nicaea and the many failed attempts to restore the peace of the church. In the most immediate sense, it sought to resolve the cases of Athanasius of Alexandria and others who had been dispossessed of their sees by those sympathetic to “Arianism.” The council also sought to address the underlying causes of this strife through a series of disciplinary measures focused on “the correction of episcopal abuses and the prevention of partisan action against individual bishops and other clergy.”<sup>16</sup> Thus there was a significant focus on episcopal discipline and prerogatives at Serdica, and there are numerous similarities

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<sup>15</sup> *Con. Carth.* a. 345-8 6 (CCSL 149.6.115-116): “Proinde aut clerici sint sine actionibus domorum aut actors sine officio clericorum.” *Con. Carth.* a. 345-8 9 (CCSL 149.7.145-47): “Et ipsis non liceat uel dominis clericos nostros eligere apothecarios uel ratiocinatores.”

<sup>16</sup> The western bishops assembled at Serdica also had some hopes of reaching a further doctrinal settlement to the theological crisis at hand. Hess, *The Early Development of Canon Law*, 143.

between the decrees of Serdica and those of the council of Carthage of 348; Gratus was present at Serdica, and even makes reference to some of its canons.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless the canons of Serdica were approved in response to a very specific set of circumstances that were not the preoccupation of the bishops assembled in Carthage in 348, and certainly not that of the bishops assembled in Carthage in 390.<sup>18</sup> Very similar canons, indeed substantially identical canons, can take on quite different significance in differing circumstances. The reception and reaffirmation of previously approved canons does not, by any means, indicate that the various assemblies of bishops had the same aims in view.

The focus of the bishops on the person and office of bishop in 390 is not typical of such assemblies, even though they were gatherings of bishops. Nor is it simply the case that the clergy were a sorry lot in 390, true as that may be; they were no less sorry in 348 or 393. The assembled bishops in 390 perceived the most important issues facing their church to be centered on the bishops. There was a reform centered on the bishop, and their focus on the office of bishop gives evidence of the continuing influence of the Cyprianic understanding of the office of bishop, even in ways that have come to be associated with the Donatist communion.

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<sup>17</sup> Hess, *The Early Development of Canon Law*, 115; Monceaux, *Histoire Littéraire*, III.224-25.

<sup>18</sup> “The series of disciplinary canons enacted by the Western Serdican synod reflects almost in its entirety the preoccupation and anxiety of the Western bishops with one of the stated purposes of the synod: the correction of episcopal abuses and the prevention of partisan action against individual bishops and other clergy.” Hess, *The Early Development of Canon Law*, 143. Hess goes on to describe the bishops as “single-minded.”



### **A Reform Centered on the Bishop**

Three themes can be identified in the council's focus on the office of bishop as the locus of reform: reinforcing the authority of the bishop over the community's rituals and delineating the proper relationship between bishops and presbyters; ensuring the proper functioning of the college of bishops as a society of peers; and stipulating the purity required for the bishop to exercise his role as priest of the community. Each of these can be situated within the Cyprianic tradition, though not always in ways that are associated with the Caecilianist communion of North Africa.

In seeking to regulate the relationship between bishops and presbyters, the assembled bishops focused on the limits of presbyteral performance of their communities' central rituals: celebration of the eucharist, reconciliation of penitents, and anointing and consecration of virgins. What the canons show is not an attempt to restrict the performance of rituals by presbyters, but rather a concern that such presbyteral ritual leadership not occur outside the authority of the bishop. In multiple canons the gathered bishops express their understanding of the bishop as the central figure in the community's ritual life and make it plain that other clergy, especially presbyters, can exercise ritual leadership only in subordination to the bishop.

It is clear that presbyters were reconciling penitents, anointing and consecrating virgins, and celebrating the eucharist without episcopal approval, at least in some cases. Yet the only full prohibition of these practices that the assembly offers is against the consecration of virgins. The focus is not on limiting the range of presbyteral ritual action. Canon five is evidence enough of this; in curtailing the appointment of bishops to places

that had not previously had a bishop, it effectively insures that in these places presbyters will continue to perform a whole range of ritual actions.<sup>19</sup> A strict concern to limit the ritual practices of presbyters would actually have encouraged more rather than fewer bishoprics. In fact, the authority of the bishop over his diocese - including his presbyters - was more important than simply restricting the ritual and liturgical actions of the presbyters.

Canons three and four attempt to regulate the anointing or reconciling of penitents and the consecration of virgins by presbyters. Canon three, introduced by Numidius of Maxulitanus with an appeal to past councils, prohibits these practices absolutely.<sup>20</sup> Canon four, however, quickly tempers the prohibition.<sup>21</sup> This time Genethlius offers the *relatio* and proposes that under some circumstances presbyters should not only be allowed to

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<sup>19</sup> *Con. Carth.* a. 390 5 (CCSL 149.14.64-77): “VT DIOECESIS QUAE EPISCOPUM NUMQUAM HABUIT NON HABEAT.

5. Felix episcopus Selemelitanus dixit: Etiam, si hoc placet santitati uestrae, insinuo ut dioeceses quae numquam episcopos habuerunt non habeant, uel illa dioecesis quae aliquando habuit habeat proprium. Et si accedente tempore, crescente fide, Dei populus multiplicatus desiderauerit proprium habere rectorem, cum eius uidelicet uoluntate in cuius potestate dioecesis constituta est, habeat episcopum: Secundum autem hanc prosecutionem, sanctitatis uestrae est aestimare quid fieri debeat.

Geneclius episcopus dixit: Si placet insinuatio fratris et coepiscopi nostri Felicis ab omnibus confirmetur. Ab uniuersis episcopis dictum est: Placet, placet.”

See below for further discussion of this canon.

<sup>20</sup> *Con. Carth.* a. 390 3 (CCSL 149.13-14.42-53): “VT CHRISMA ET BENEDICTIO PUELLARVM ET RECONCILIATION PAENITENTIVM A PRESBYTERIS NON FIAT.

Numidius episcopus Maxulitanus dixit: Si iubet sanctitas uestra, suggero, nam memini praeteritis conciliis fuisse statutum, ut chrisma uel reconciliatio paenitentium, necnon et et [sic] puellarum consecratio a presbyteris non fiat; si quis autem emerit hoc facere, quid de eo statuendum sit?

Geneclius episcopus dixit: Audiuit dignatio uestra suggestionem fratris et coepiscopi nostri Numidii; quid ad haec dicitis?

Ab uniuersis episcopis dictum est; Chrismatis confectio et puellarum consecratio a presbyteris non fiat, uel reconciliare quemquam publica missa presbytero non licere, hoc omnibus placet.”

<sup>21</sup> *Con. Carth.* a. 390 4 (CCSL 149.14.55-63): “VT PRAESBYTER PAENITENTES IVSSVS AB EPISCOPO SVU RECONCILIET.

Geneclius episcopus dixit: Si quisquam in periculo fuerit constitutes et se reconciliari diuinis altaribus petierit, si episcopus absens fuerit, debet utique presbyter consulere episcopum et sic periclitantem eius praecepto reconciliare. Quam rem debemus salubri consilio roborare.

Ab uniuersis episcopis dictum est: Placet omnibus quod sanctitas uestra necessario nos instruere dignata est.”

reconcile penitents, they should even be encouraged to do so. Specifically, while affirming the decision of canon three to prohibit presbyters from reconciling penitents, he argues that it is important to affirm that presbyters should reconcile penitents who are in danger of death - provided that the bishop is unable to do so and has given his permission. The assembled bishops accepted this point and affirmed the canon. This helps to specify the bishops' concern; presbyters can perform these rituals, but only under the clear authority of their bishops. These canons are not about which rituals presbyters can and can't perform, strictly speaking; they are about the ritual authority of bishops, and the decidedly derivative ritual authority of presbyters.

Similarly, canons eight and nine are both responses to presbyters who were celebrating the eucharist outside of episcopal authority, and in both cases those who do so are condemned. Canon eight concerns presbyters who have been excommunicated by their bishops but who continue to celebrate the eucharist.<sup>22</sup> Those who do so are described, in language reminiscent of Cyprian in his conflict with the presbyters in his own church, as raising up an altar to God separately and of making schism. Such

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<sup>22</sup> *Con. Carth.* a. 390 8 (CCSL 149.16.109-129): "VT EXCOMMVNICATVS PRESBYTER, SI SACRIFICARE PRAESVMPSERIT, ANATHEMATIZETVR.

Felix episcopus Selemsitanus dixit: Nec illud praetermittendam est, ut si quis forsitam presbyter ab episcopo suo correptus [aut excommunicatus], tumore uel superbia inflatus putauerit separatim Deo sacrificia offerenda uel aliud erigendum altare, contra ecclesiasticam fidem disciplinamque crediderit agendum, non exeat impunitus.

Geneclius episcopus dixit: Necessaria disciplinae ecclesiasticae et fidei congrua sunt quae frater noster Felix prosequutus est: Proinde quid exinde uideatur uestrae dilectioni, edicite.

Ab uniuersis episcopis dictum est: Si quis presbyter a praeposito suo [excommunicatus uel] correptus fuerit, debet utique apud uicinos episcopos conqueri ut ab ipsis eius causa possit audiri ac per ipsos suo episcopo reconciliari. Quod nisi fecerit, sed superbia, quod absit, inflatus, secernendum se ab episcopi sui communione duxerit ac separatim cum aliquibus schisma faciens sacrificium Deo obtulerit, [loco amisso] anathema habeatur. Nihilominus et de ciuitate in qua fuerit longius depellatur, ne uel ignorantes uel simpliciter uiuentes serpentina fraude decipiat. Secundum Apostolum: *Ecclesia una est, una fides, unum baptisma*. Et si quaerimoniam iustam aduersus episcopum habuerit, inquirendum erit."

presbyters are anathema. However, while the *relatio* offered by Felix of Selimselitanus is focused exclusively on the actions of presbyters who defy the discipline of their bishops, the rest of the canon betrays a more complicated set of concerns. The bishops enjoin presbyters to go to a neighboring bishop with any complaints so that they might be reconciled to their bishop rather than foment schism by continuing to celebrate the eucharist; the canon ends by enjoining an investigation if a presbyter's claims are seen to be just. Thus the problem was more complex than simply rogue or incorrigible presbyters; there were genuine problems around the just and proper discipline of the clergy by their bishop, and some recognition that the bishop could be the problem.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, though they implicitly acknowledge this possibility, the assembled bishops interpreted the situation as a problem of lack of discipline on the part of presbyters. The reform offered in response to this problem is that presbyters more assiduously pursue reconciliation with their bishops. If they cannot approach their own bishop, they are commanded to appear before neighboring bishops. In keeping with their focus on the proper authority of the bishop, the council insists that the proper response to concerns about the discipline imposed by bishops is more thoroughgoing respect for the authority of bishops.

Canon nine is concerned with presbyters presiding over eucharistic celebrations in household settings without episcopal supervision.<sup>24</sup> Presbyters who engage in this are

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<sup>23</sup> This was a recurring issue in this period, as can be seen in the repeated conciliar attempts to regulate the discipline of the clergy: *Con. Carth.* a. 345-8 11; *Con. Carth.* a. 390 10; *Bru. Hipp.* 6-10.

<sup>24</sup> *Con. Carth.* a. 390 9 (*CCSL* 149.16-17.130-141): "VT SI PRAESBYTER INCONSVLTO EPISCOPO AGENDAM CELEBRAVERIT, HONORE PRIVETVR."

deemed unworthy of their office. The question is not necessarily one of deception and outright rebellion; the bishops acknowledge that simple ignorance is also possible. Nevertheless, any celebration of the eucharist without first consulting one's bishop is forbidden. Thus the problem is not with domestic eucharists as such, nor with presbyteral celebration of the eucharist. Once again, the central issue is proper subordination to the bishop. The bishops assembled at Carthage in 390 sought in multiple canons to regulate the relationship between bishops and presbyters, with particular attention to the implications of their relationship for ritual leadership in Christian communities. In doing so, they evidence a concern for something more than a well-ordered clergy; they show their understanding of the bishop as the central figure of the community's ritual life. Other clergy, such as presbyters, may share in the bishop's ritual leadership, but only in subordination to him. A key aspect of their reform attempts is to strengthen this ritual centrality of the bishop, and in this they show a sense of the bishop's ritual and liturgical significance that remains in line with Cyprian and is not radically different from what we know of the Donatist communion.

A second aspect of the Cyprianic understanding of the episcopate evident in the canons of 390 is the notion of the bishops as a college of peers, sharing a single power among them but each exercising supreme authority within his community. The assembled bishops sought to reduce competition between bishops, and to emphasize each bishop's

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Numidius episcopus Maxulitanus dixit: In quibusdam locis sunt presbyteri qui, aut ignorantes simpliciter aut dissimulantes audaciter, praesente et inconsulto episcopo, cum plurimis in domiciliis agant agendam, quod disciplinae et in congruum esse cognoscit sanctitas uestra.

Geneclius episcopus dixit: Fratres et coepiscopi nostri dignae suggestioni tuae respondere non morentur. Ab uniuersis episcopis dictum est: Quisquis presbyter inconsulto episcopo agendam in quolibet loco uoluerit celebrare, ipse honori suo contrarius existit."

distinct authority, and in so doing emphasized the authority of each bishop within his own diocese as well as their common membership in the college of bishops.

Both canon eleven and canon seven seek to enforce respect for the authority and decisions of fellow bishops. In canon eleven, bishops are forbidden from transgressing the boundaries of other bishops;<sup>25</sup> such behavior is said to be against divine law and is characterized as a form of covetousness or illicit desire (*concupiscere*).<sup>26</sup> Canon seven similarly instructs bishops to respect the disciplinary decisions of their peers. It prohibits bishops from receiving into communion anyone who had been excommunicated from another church.<sup>27</sup> One bishop does not have the authority to override the disciplinary decisions of another.

In stipulating the punishment for such action, the bishops invoke yet another Cyprianic principle: any bishop who knowingly receives a sinner into communion will share in that person's sin. He is said to "cross over into" their fate and to have guilt equal

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<sup>25</sup> For a different perspective on the origins of the emphasis on ecclesiastical boundaries, cf. Allen Brent, *Cyprian and Roman Carthage*, 55-68. Brent argues that Cyprian's understanding of the *auctoritas* of the bishop was grounded in a pagan Roman religious ideology of a sanctified space within which political authority, or *imperium*, could be exercised.

<sup>26</sup> The canon is vague in regards to the particular practice(s) being forbidden, and this has not been resolved in the literature.

<sup>27</sup> *Con. Carth.* a. 390 7 (CCSL 149.15.91-106): "VT QVI EXCOMMVNICTVM ALTERIVS SVSCEPERIT EXCOMMVNICETVR.

7. Felix episcopus Selemselitanus dixit: Illud autem suggero uestrae sanctitati ut hi qui pro facinoribus suis de ecclesia pelluntur et ausi fuerint aut ad comitatum pergere aut ad iudicia publica prosilire, aut si forsitam ecclesiae catholicae limina attentare, episcopus uel clericus cuiuslibet plebis; de his quid censetis?

Epigonius episcopus [sic] Bullensium regionem dixit: Si quis episcopus communionem tenens catholicam huiusmodi hominem uanis blandimentis indederit, sciat cum iisdem reiectis se esse deprauatum, transiens in sortem eorum.

Geneclius episcopus dixit: Ergo recte suggerunt fratres et coepiscopi nostri ut qui facinorum merito suorum ab ecclesia pulsi sunt, et ab aliquot episcopo uel cleric fuerint communion suscepti, etiam ispe pari cum eisdem crimine teneantur obnoxios.

Ab uniuersis episcopis dictum est: Omnibus placet."

to that of the original crime.<sup>28</sup> The Cyprianic understanding of the communion of bishops, sharing a single power - and potentially sharing in the sins of others, as well - was still operative in the late fourth century.

The continuing influence of the Cyprianic theory of the college of bishops shows through clearly in canon twelve. The issue at hand in canon twelve is what ought to be done about bishops who ordain without the authority of the primate, but it is Genethlius' response that is most revealing. In the *relatio*, Numidius insists that those who would ordain others need to have received written authorization and the power to do so from the primate. Numidius addresses himself not to the assembly, but to Genethlius, whom he refers to as the *prima cathedra* of the assembly.<sup>29</sup> Genethlius, however, defers to the assembled bishops to decide the issue and in so doing clarifies the nature of the episcopal office: the honor of bishop is held jointly, even though it must be preserved by individuals.<sup>30</sup> The canon raises a tricky point in the theology and practice of ordination.

Genethlius disavows the notion that he, as primate, possesses some power apart from that

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<sup>28</sup> *Con. Carth.* a. 390 7 (CCSL 149.15.100, 104-5): "...transiens in sortem eorum; ...etiam ipse pari cum eisdem crimine teneantur obnoxius." At Serdica, such clergy are simply warned that they will be judged by a council; here at Carthage, they are explicitly said to share in the guilt of the condemned cleric. At Serdica, for example, it was repeated because of concerns about the activities of the Eusebian party, including receiving clergy who had been deposed and banished from their churches on account of Arianism. Hess, *The Early Development of Canon Law*, 175.

<sup>29</sup> *Con. Carth.* a. 390 12 (CCSL 149.18.165-180): "VT SINE CONSVLTV METROPOLITANI NVLLVS ORDINETVR EPISCOPVS.

12. Numidius episcopus Maxulitanus dixit: Aliqui episcopi usurpatione quadam existimant contempto primate cuiuslibet prouinciae suae ad desiderium populi episcopum ordinare, neque litteris ad se primae cathedrae manantibus neque potestate accepta. De hoc quid statuit sanctitas uestra?

Genethlius episcopus dixit: Quoniam communis est honorificentia quae debet unicuique seruari, de hoc ipso, fratres, uestrum est pronuntiare.

Ab uniuersis episcopis dictum est: Placet omnibus ut inconsulto primate cuiuslibet prouinciae tam facile nemo praesumat: licet cum multis, in quocumque loco, sine eius, ut dictum est, praecepto, episcopum non debere ordinare. Si autem necessitas fuerit, tres episcopi, in quocumque loco sint, cum primatis praecepto ordinare debebunt episcopum."

<sup>30</sup> *Con. Carth.* a. 390 12 (CCSL 149.18.172-174): "Geneclius episcopus dixit: Quoniam communis est honorificentia quae debet unicuique seruari, de hoc ipso, fratres, uestrum est pronuntiare."

of his fellow bishops; whereas Numidius had asserted that ordaining bishops needed to receive the power (*potestas*) from the primate, Genethlius employs the language of honor (*honorificentia*). He is also careful to point out that it is an honor that is held communally, even if it is exercised individually. In the end, the *practice* is affirmed: bishops are not to ordain without the consultation of the primate and the presence of at least two of their peers. In the process, though, Genethlius bears witness to the continuance of the Cyprianic idea of the college of bishops. The bishops are all members of a single college, exercising a single power and sharing in a single honor. Thus the authority of the primate is one of order and not of a distinct power (*potestas*). Genethlius' *sententia* in this canon shows that Cyprian's theory was still operative among Caecilianists in the late fourth century.

The effort to regulate the creation of rural bishoprics in canon five is likewise an attempt to reassert the distinct authority of the college of bishops. It is part of a wider concern over rural bishops in the fourth century, but the North African bishops embrace this concern for their own reasons. Their primary interest is to ensure that new bishoprics not be formed apart from the consent of the primate and thus the consent of the college of bishops.

There was broad concern about rural bishoprics and the proliferation of episcopal sees in the fourth century, but the nuances of this concern varied from context to context. In the east such concerns focused largely on the subordinate office of the *chorepiscopus*.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Hess, *The Early Development of Canon Law*, 154-7. This can be seen in a number of canons of eastern councils in the first half of the fourth century. While there were surely local variations of the office of



At the council of Serdica, again a useful comparison for Carthage, the assembled western bishops sought to limit the appointment of bishops to rural communities as part of a broader agenda at Serdica to control the appointment of bishops, which had become a key weapon in the conflict between Nicenes and Eusebians.<sup>32</sup> Neither of these concerns was operative among the North African bishops gathered in Carthage. In fact, the proliferation of bishops had a particular importance. Africa had far more bishops than any other region of the Roman Empire, and many of these were rural bishops.<sup>33</sup> The reasons for this proliferation of bishops are complex and a matter of scholarly debate, but one key aspect was the initiative taken by local communities to acquire a bishop.<sup>34</sup>

Dossey has recently argued that the primary initiative for the proliferation of rural bishoprics in Africa was from the rural *plebs* themselves. Local communities sought to have their own bishops (or *rectores*) in pursuit of such benefits as communal prestige,

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*chorepiscopus* and scholarly debate on this question continues, the consensus view is that the *chorepiscopus* was a stationary bishop of a rural Christian community who possessed limited episcopal powers and who was dependant in some way on a nearby urban church. Eastern councils sought to regulate the relationship of these bishops to other (city) bishops and to limit the right of appointment of such bishops to the city bishops under whose jurisdiction they would be, among other concerns. In the west, rural bishops were not subordinate to urban bishops, but rather possessed full episcopal powers and independent authority within their own dioceses, however small these might have been.

<sup>32</sup> Hess, *The Early Development of Canon Law*, 215. Canon six of the council of Serdica: "But permission is not to be granted indiscriminately. If, indeed, suddenly either a village or small city, for which one presbyter is sufficient, wishes to ask for a bishop to be ordained for that place, in order that the name and authority of bishop not be debased, those [bishops] invited from another province ought not to make a bishop, except in those cities which have had bishops, or if they are sufficiently populous to merit having a bishop." (The translation is that of Hess, 215.) Hess, 146-154, argues that canon six is specifically a restriction on the consecrations made possible by canon five, which makes provisions for the bishops of a neighboring province to consecrate a bishop when all the true (i.e., Nicene) bishops been deposed by the Eusebian party. He considers this situation to have been plausible for Egypt and Libya, at least. Canon six, then, is a clarification and restriction on that provision: bishops from a neighboring province may consecrate a bishop under such circumstances, but they should not do so for just any rural community that asks.

<sup>33</sup> Exact counts vary, of course. Leslie Dossey, *Peasant and Empire in Christian North Africa* (University of California Press, 2010), 125, numbers approximately 534 for Africa Proconsularis, Numidia, and Byzacena combined, and over 700 for North Africa as a whole. For comparison, she offers numbers of 242 for Italy, and 115 for Gaul.

<sup>34</sup> See Dossey, *Peasant and Empire*, 126, for a succinct overview.

selection of their own leader, and freedom from subjection to another place. Having a bishop brought rural communities a degree of real self-governance, including a local law court, a place for public assembly, and a literate intermediary with “the outside world.”<sup>35</sup> The attempt in canon five to restrict the consecration of bishops for such rural places should be seen as a response to these local efforts.

Still, the canons themselves do not tell the whole story. Despite the reticence of the assembled bishops to add rural bishoprics, it continued to happen. Two peculiarly African circumstances contributed to this: the ongoing schism between Donatists and Caecilianists, and the selection of primates by seniority rather than see. The schism meant that no matter how reluctant either communion might be about adding rural bishoprics (and both seem to have been), local communities could play one communion off the other. Giving a rural community a bishop was often necessary to keep them from going over to the other communion, and could also be a way to win over new communities.<sup>36</sup> That the primates of Numidia and Byzacena were selected by seniority meant that even a rural bishop might become primate, and such bishops were unlikely to be opposed to other rural bishoprics because they were rural.<sup>37</sup> The only bishops who seem to have been consistently opposed to the practice in Africa were those of urban centers and those whose territory would be reduced by the action.<sup>38</sup> The African bishops were not attempting to eliminate rural bishoprics. Their concern is that such bishops not be

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<sup>35</sup> Dossey, *Peasant and Empire*, 126.

<sup>36</sup> Dossey, *Peasant and Empire*, 131.

<sup>37</sup> And indeed, the number and proportion of rural bishoprics in Numidia and Byzacena was far higher than in Africa Proconsularis, where the bishop of Carthage served *ex officio* as the primate. Dossey, *Peasant and Empire*, 126-130.

<sup>38</sup> Dossey, *Peasant and Empire*, 132-33.

consecrated and bishoprics not be created without the consent of the primate and therefore outside of the oversight of the fellowship of bishops. The attempt to regulate the formation of new, rural sees is an attempt to manage the existing pressure towards adding rural bishops in a way that keeps control over membership in the college of bishops in the hands of the bishops themselves.

The council of Carthage sought to clarify the proper relationships between bishops, reducing competition among them and emphasizing their common membership in the college of bishops. In this we can see evidence of the continuing influence of the Cyprianic notion of the episcopacy as a college of peers, each with supreme authority within his own community but sharing the single power of the episcopacy with his fellow bishops.

Thirdly, the council shows a focus on the bishop as priest and on the purity required to exercise his priestly role. In mandating sexual continence for bishops, presbyters, and deacons, canon two offers the earliest extant requirement of clerical continence in North Africa.<sup>39</sup> In doing so, it is at home in the broader currents of clerical ascetic discipline in the west, currents that can be seen in the writings of Jerome, Damasus, and Siricius, and of course in the controversy over and eventual condemnation of Jovinian. The practice

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<sup>39</sup> *Con. Carth.* a. 390 2 (CCSL 149.12-13.25-40): “VT CASTITATIS A LEVITIS ET SACERDOTIBVS CVSTODIATVR.

Epigonius episcopus Bullensium regionum dixit: Cum praeterio concilio de continentia et castitate tractaretur, gradus isti tres qui conuictione quadam castitatis per consecrationem annexi sunt, episcopus inquam, presbyters and diaconus, tractatu pleniori, ut pudicitiam custodiant, doceantur.

Geneclius episcopus dixit: Ut superius dictum est, decet sacros antistites ac Dei sacerdotes necnon et leuitas uel qui sacramentis diuinis inseruiunt, continentes esse in omnibus, quo possint simpliciter quod a Domino postulant impetrare, ut quod apostoli docuerunt et ipsa seruauit antiquitas nos quoque custodiamus.

Ab universis episcopis dictum est: Omnibus placet ut episcopus, presbyter et diaconus, pudicitiae custodes, etiam ab uxoribus se abstineant ut in omnibus et ab omnibus pudicitia custodiatur qui altario inseruiunt.”

that the bishops mandate - that bishops, presbyters and deacons are to remain sexually continent, with the assumption that they will be married - is not unusual for the period. The theological rationale offered for the practice of clerical continence, however, is highly significant given the particular context of late fourth century Roman North Africa, and of the Donatist controversy in particular.

The assembled bishops base the requirement of sexual continence by the clergy on their service at the altar. In the initial *relatio*, Epigonius simply specifies the orders of bishop, presbyter, and deacon as being singled out for the requirement of continence. The reason for these three grades is made explicit, though, in Genethlius' *sententia*: they are the ones that oversee the sacraments.

“As has been said, it is fitting that holy bishops (*antistes*) and priests of God, as well as levites or those who take care of the divine sacraments, be continent in all things, by which they might be able in simplicity to obtain what they request from the Lord, that we might also guard that which the apostles taught and the ancient ones themselves preserved.”<sup>40</sup>

The agreed *sententia* to which the assembled bishops subscribe specifies even further that their focus is on service at the altar.

It is agreed by all that the bishop, presbyter, and deacon, guardians of modesty, also ought to withhold themselves from their wives so that in all things and from all things modesty might be preserved by those who take care of the altar.<sup>41</sup>

The assembled bishops do not simply recognize sexual continence as a required discipline for bishops, presbyters, and deacons; they explicitly ground its necessity in these orders' service at the altar.

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<sup>40</sup> *Con. Carth.* a. 390 2 (CCSL 149.13.31-36).

<sup>41</sup> *Con. Carth.* a. 390 2 (CCSL 149.13.37-40).

This ritual focus is further highlighted by the vocabulary that Genethlius chooses to refer to these three grades. Rather than *episcopi*, *presbyteri*, and *diaconi*, he employs *antistites*, *sacerdotes*, and *levitae*. This substitution replaces terminology from the New Testament with that drawn from the Old Testament, invoking offices with requirements of sexual continence and ritual purity and providing a much more ritually focused terminology. This substitution was a current one in pro-clerical continence sources of the late fourth century, one consistently used to highlight the ritual responsibilities of clergy and thus their need for ritual purity.<sup>42</sup>

The most striking part of the bishops' rationale for clerical celibacy, though, is when they specify that it is necessary to insure the efficacy of their eucharistic prayers. Sexual continence is necessary *quo possint simpliciter quod a Domino postulant impetrare* - so that "they might be able in simplicity to obtain what they request from the Lord."<sup>43</sup> The context, as we have seen, is clearly that of the eucharistic ritual; this is clearly a reference to the eucharistic prayers.<sup>44</sup> What this means is that the bishops assembled at Carthage in 390 not only construe the need for clerical continence to be because of ritual service, they are even willing to suggest that those who are not continent may not have their prayers answered, that their ritual actions may not be efficacious.

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Jerome *Adversus Jovinianum* 1.34; *Ad Gallos Episcopos* 5-6; Siric. *Ad Himerius* 9, *Cum in Unum* 3; Innoc. *Ep.* 18. cf. David Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovinianist Controversy*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford Univ Pr, 2007); idem., "Asceticism, Priesthood, and Exegesis: 1 Corinthians 7:5 in Jerome and His Contemporaries," in Hans-Ulrich Weidemann, *Asceticism and Exegesis in Early Christianity: The Reception of New Testament Texts in Ancient Ascetic Discourses* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 413-427.

<sup>43</sup> *Con. Carth.* a. 390 2 (CCSL 149.13.34).

<sup>44</sup> The immediate context of the canon is focused on the eucharistic rite, but it is possible that it might also have been a reference to other prayers offered by the clergy during the liturgy, especially as part of baptism.

Canon two of 390 is not the only North African canon calling for the sexual continence of the clergy, and the others bear examination. The closest parallel is the ninth canon of the Council of Thelense in 418.<sup>45</sup> The records of the council include nine canons, but after the prefatory materials they consist entirely of reading into the record the results of a council held in Rome in 386 under the leadership of Siricius. The epistle of Siricius (usually referred to as *Cum in Unum*) reporting the results of this Roman council is dominated by the final canon, a lengthy admonition to and defense of clerical continence.

This ninth canon is clearly responding to opponents of required clerical celibacy, and its response invokes the apostle Paul to insist that sexual continence is necessary for efficacious prayer. The canon invokes the challenge explicitly within its text, a challenge that appeals to a Pauline text: “Perhaps someone believes this [i.e., that sexual continence is not required of clergy] because it is written: “He must not have been married more than once.”<sup>46</sup> In response, Siricius, together with the gathered bishops, puts together an argument that draws on a string of specifically Pauline texts, and in so doing offers a clear and explicit rationale for clerical continence.<sup>47</sup> The central plank of the argument is

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<sup>45</sup> It is also sometimes referred to as the Council of Thelepte. Cf. Charles Munier, *Concilia Africae: a. 345 - a. 525* (Turnholt: Brepols, 1974), 54-56, for a discussion of the difficulties involved in identifying the precise location of this council. *Con. Thel.* 9 (CCSL 149.61-2.71-83): “Praeterea quod dignum et pudicum et honestum est suademus, ut sacerdotes et levites cum uxoribus suis non coeant, quia in ministerio ministri quotidianis necessitatibus, occupantur. Ad Corinthios namque Paulus sic scribit dicens: Abstinete, ut vacetis orationi. Si ergo laicis abstinentia imperatur, ut possint deprecantes audiri, quanto magis sacerdos utique omni momento paratus esse debet, munditiae puritate securus, ne aut sacrificium offerat aut baptizare cogatur? Qui si contaminatus fuerit carnali concupiscentia, quid faciet? Excusabit? Quo pudore, qua mente usurpabit? Qua conscientia, quo merito hic exaudiri se credit, cum dictum sit: Omnia munda mundis, coinquinatis autem et infidelibus nihil mundum?”

<sup>46</sup> *Con. Thel.* 9 (CCSL 149.62.84-85): “Forte creditor, quia scriptum est: Unius uxoris uirum? The reference is to 1 Timothy 3:2.”

<sup>47</sup> He cites 1 Cor 7:5, Titus 1:15, 1 Cor 7:7, and Rom 8:8-9.

based on 1 Corinthians 7:5, in which Paul instructed the Corinthians to to be continent for the sake of prayer. Siricius insists that for the higher clergy this means that they must be perpetually continent because of their responsibility for the eucharist and baptism.

“If lay people are asked to be continent so that their prayers are granted, all the more so a priest who should be ready at any moment, confident in the purity of his clean state (*munditiae puritate securus*), and not fearing the obligation of offering the sacrifice or baptizing. If he should be contaminated by carnal concupiscence, what would he do? What excuse will he have? With what shame, in what state of mind would he carry out his functions? What testimony of conscience, what merit would give him the trust to have his prayers granted, when it is said: ‘To all who are pure themselves, everything is pure; but to those who have been corrupted and lack faith, nothing can be pure.’”<sup>48</sup>

In this interpretation, Paul’s instructions regarding sexual continence were so that prayers would be *granted*, and priests who were not continent would have neither the testimony of conscience nor the merit that would enable them to trust that their prayers at baptism and eucharist would be granted. Sexual continence was required in order to insure the efficacy of the sacraments.

Though it receives a fuller treatment in Siricius’ epistle, complete with scriptural references, this is the same basic argument that the bishops at Carthage endorsed in 390. The sexual continence of the clergy was necessary so that their sacramental rituals would be efficacious. And, much like in canon two of Carthage 390, here the clergy are not bishops, presbyters, and deacons, but rather priests and levites.<sup>49</sup> In their full reception of the text of the letter of Siricius, the bishops gathered at Thelense embraced the rationale advocated by Siricius and the Roman council.

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<sup>48</sup> *Con. Thel. 9 (CCSL 149.61-62.75-83)*. Translation is that of Hunter, “Asceticism, Priesthood, and Exegesis: 1 Corinthians 7:5 in Jerome and His Contemporaries,” 420.

<sup>49</sup> *Con. Thel. 9 (CCSL 149.61.72)*: “Sacerdotes et levites cum uxoribus suis non coeant.”

This theological rationale does not reappear in any of the other North African canons related to clerical continence. There is one other canon focused specifically on mandating clerical continence, from the council of Carthage of September 13, 401.<sup>50</sup> Much like the council of Thelense, the bishops gathered at Carthage in 401 received and responded to a letter from the bishop of Rome, in this case Anastasius.<sup>51</sup> This time, however, the records of the council reflect their own pronouncements rather than the text of Anastasius' letters. The practice they prescribe is like that already described: married bishops, presbyters, and deacons are to remain sexually continent. What is conspicuously lacking, though, is the explicit theological rationale present in the other councils. The assembled bishops acknowledge charges that some clergy have been incontinent with their wives, and insist that those of the three highest grades who persist in this are to be removed from office. No rationale is offered.

In addition, since incontinence has been reported concerning certain of the clergy, although towards their own wives, it is indeed pleasing that bishops and presbyters and deacons be continent from (their) wives, according to previous statutes. Who, unless they will have done this, they will be removed from ecclesiastical office. But other clergy are not to be compelled to this, but the habit of each church ought to be observed.<sup>52</sup>

The bishops are content with prescribing practice, and make no reference to the theological argument that clearly circulated in both Roman and African circles - that

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<sup>50</sup> There were two councils held in Carthage in that year. The canon is listed as number 70 in *Reg. Carth.* (CCSL 149.302.650-657).

<sup>51</sup> *Reg. Carth.* proemium (CCSL 149.198-19.561-577).

<sup>52</sup> *Reg. Carth.* 70 (CCSL 149.201.650-657).



those who serve at the altar must be continent, so that their prayers will be answered and the rituals efficacious.<sup>53</sup>

This theological rationale is also missing from the other canons of the African collection concerning clerical continence, found in the Hippo Breviary.<sup>54</sup> These stipulate that clergy are not to live with unrelated women; that readers who have reached puberty must cease their service until they either marry or profess continence; and that continent clergy must remain separate from virgins and widows. The pattern is the same as at the council of Carthage of 401: the bishops are intent on regulating the sexual practice of the clergy and enforcing sexual continence, but they refrain from offering any theological rationale for doing so.

The rationale for the sexual continence of the clergy at Carthage in 390 and at Thelense in 418 was evidently Roman origin. Beginning with *Ad Gallos Episcopos*,<sup>55</sup> Roman bishops began to articulate variations of it and to promote it both in Rome and abroad. *Ad Gallos Episcopos* was addressed to bishops of Gaul; Siricius' *Ad Himerius* of 385 was addressed to Spanish bishops; and the Roman synod of 386 sent copies of *Cum*

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<sup>53</sup> There are some recensions of this canon that include a reference to service at the altar; canon 25 of the Apiarian canons (in some recensions) includes reference to subdeacons who handle the holy mysteries being continent as well. Yet even there, that is the extent of the reference; no further explanation is given.

<sup>54</sup> *Bru. Hipp.* 16, 18, 24. See Cross, "History and Fiction in the African Canons," for a full explanation of the history of these canons. In short, Cross argues that the canons of the Hippo Breviary originate from the Council of Hippo in 393 but were edited and redacted in preparation for the Council of Carthage of 397, and it is this redaction that is the basis of the extant versions of the canons.

<sup>55</sup> Recently ascribed to Damasus and dated to 382-4 by Duval, *Le decretal Ad Gallos Episcopos: son texte et son auteur*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 73, Leiden/Boston, 2005. Duval argues for the influence of Jerome on this particular theological rationale for continence. Cf. Hunter, "Asceticism, Priesthood, and Exegesis," 420.

*in Unum* abroad, including to Africa.<sup>56</sup> Though each of these letters varies the argument and scriptural references slightly, they all offer versions of the same basic theological rationale: that sexual continence is required of the higher clergy because of their service at the eucharistic altar. The dissemination of this Roman rationale is quite clear at the council of Thelense, but it is likely at work at Carthage in 390 as well:

When by past councils it had been discussed concerning continence and chastity, those three grades that with a certain constriction of chastity had been bound through consecration, I say, bishop, presbyter and deacon, having been discussed more completely, they ought to be taught that they ought to preserve modesty.<sup>57</sup>

As previous scholars have noted, this may very well be a reference to the Roman council of 386.<sup>58</sup> In any case, these councils provide clear evidence for the spread of a Roman theological rationale for clerical continence within Africa.

As we have seen, however, not all of the African councils embraced this rationale, and the breakdown of those that did and did not is significant. The councils that promoted clerical continence without embracing this theological rationale all occurred in the series of councils held under the authority of Aurelius of Carthage and with the support of Augustine. Conversely, those that explicitly embraced this theological rationale - Carthage 390 and Thelense 418 - were outside of the Aurelian-Augustinian program of reform. Carthage, of course, took place before Aurelius became bishop of Carthage and before Augustine was even ordained. Thelense took place in Byzacena, under the

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<sup>56</sup> Innocent was still making the same basic arguments for clerical continence, with the added benefit of appealing to the personal authority of Siricius and of being able to ascribe these teachings to “tradition.” cf. ep. 2, 6.

<sup>57</sup> *Con. Carth. a. 390 2 (CCSL 149.13.26-30)*: “Epigonius episcopus Bullensiam regionum dixit: Cum praeterio concilio de continentia et castitate tractaretur, gradus isti tres qui constriction quadam castitatis per consecrationem annexi sunt, episcopus inquam, presbyter et diaconus, tractatu pleniori, ut pudicitiam custodiant, doceantur.”

<sup>58</sup> cf. Monceaux, *Histoire Littéraire*, III.215.

authority of Donatianus of Theleptense. Though this theological rationale was strongly advocated in Rome and known across the western Mediterranean, including Africa, it is not present in the records of the series of councils held under Aurelius and initiated by Aurelius and Augustine.

The absence of this theological rationale is not accidental. Augustine explicitly opposed the application of scriptural texts about the Levitical priesthood to the Christian clergy. Tellingly, the objections are found in his critique of the Donatist council of Cebarsussa in 393. The council of Cebarsussa was comprised of schismatic “Maximianist” clergy who met to condemn Primian, the Donatist bishop of Carthage, on the basis of a host of charges.<sup>59</sup> Augustine’s commentary on the council of Cebarsussa is found in *en. Ps.* 36.2 and it is the only extant source for the council.<sup>60</sup> Augustine read the synodical letter of Cebarsussa to the assembled church of Carthage in the course of his sermon, primarily in order to use the Donatist handling of the Maximianist schism in polemic against them.<sup>61</sup> Augustine’s critique was in the form of commentary on the letter, though, and he also offered a critique of the understanding of the priesthood expressed by the bishops at Cebarsussa.

In announcing that they had gathered to hear Primian’s case, the bishops assembled at Cebarsussa explained that the character of a priest is of particular importance because of the intercession he makes for the people. Their hope had been,

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<sup>59</sup> On the division of the Donatist communion often referred to as the “Maximianist” schism, see Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 107-145.

<sup>60</sup> Augustine made reference to the actions of the council on several other occasions, but *Ps.* 36.2.20 is our only source of the text of the final decree issued by the council. Cf.

<sup>61</sup> This argument was one of Augustine’s most frequent against the Donatists.

they wrote, that the church at Carthage might be shown to have received “a bishop holy in all respects and blameworthy in none.”<sup>62</sup> This was important because,

A priest of the Lord ought certainly to be of such character that when the people’s prayers are of no avail, the priest may deserve to obtain from God what he asks on behalf of the people; as it is written, “If the people sin, the priest will pray for them; but if the priest sins, who will pray for him?”<sup>63</sup>

Here we see the same basic ideas invoked as at Carthage in 390 and in Thelense in 418: the priest obtains some kind of spiritual effect from God through his prayers, and requires some kind of merit for this to happen. The only significant difference between the councils of Carthage and Thelense and that at Cebarussa is that in the former this merit is connected to sexual continence, while in the latter the bishops are concerned more broadly with the character of the priest.<sup>64</sup> In both cases, though, the bishops apply notions of purity from the Levitical priesthood to Christian priests, and connect this purity to sacramental efficacy.

Augustine explicitly rejects this theory of priesthood in his sermon on Psalm 36.<sup>65</sup> Acknowledging its biblical roots in the Levitical priesthood, he first of all rejects the notion that the Levitical priests were any less sinful than other people, arguing instead that the Levitical priesthood pointed prophetically to the Priest who would intercede for

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<sup>62</sup> Aug. *Psal.* 36.2.20.

<sup>63</sup> Aug. *Psal.* 36.2.20 (*CCSL* 38:361): “Propterea utique talem esse oportet Domini sacerdotem, ut quod populus pro se apud Deum non ualuerit, ipse pro populo mereatur quod poposcerit impetrare, quia scriptum est: Si peccauerit populus, orabit pro eo sacerdos; si autem sacerdos peccauerit, quis orabit pro eo?” A priest of the Lord ought certainly to be of such character that when the people’s prayers are of no avail, the priest may deserve to obtain from God what he asks on behalf of the people; as it is written, “If the people sin, the priest will pray for them; but if the priest sins, who will pray for him?” The scriptural reference here is to 1 Sam. 2:25.

<sup>64</sup> Aug. *Psal.* 36.2.20.40 (*CCSL* 38:362): “Propterea utique talem esse oportet Domini sacerdotem.” Literally, the way priests ought acerdote

<sup>65</sup> See also Aug. *Serm. Dolb.* 26(198\*), and ch. 3, *supra*.

all and would need no one to intercede for him.<sup>66</sup> The Levitical priests had the image rather than the truth of this future priest.<sup>67</sup> Thus Augustine reinterprets the Levitical need for purity as a prophetic reference to Christ as the one priest and sole mediator between Christ and men.<sup>68</sup> In doing so he appeals to the notion that Christ is the only true priest and so also the only one to whom such priestly requirements of purity apply.<sup>69</sup> All other, earthly, priests are sinners, Levitical and Christian alike. The application of Levitical purity requirements to Christian priests thus misses the point of the Levitical requirements: to point prophetically to Christ as the one true priest. This critique of the use of Levitical purity codes in theologizing the Christian priesthood was directed at Donatists, but it would apply to the theories of the councils of Carthage and Thelense no less. It is thus not surprising that this theory, so prominent elsewhere, would be utterly absent from the councils at which Augustine was a leading figure.

As part of their emphasis on the centrality of the bishop in the reform of the church, the bishops assembled at Carthage in 390 insisted on the sexual purity of Christian priests in their service at the eucharistic altar. In doing so they advocated a position that was in line both with the Cyprianic heritage of the African church and with broader currents in the late fourth century western Mediterranean. However, it was a theory that also overlapped with that of their Donatist rivals; a theory that Augustine would explicitly critique; and a theory that councils at which Augustine was a leading figure would not embrace. The second canon of the council of Carthage of 390 is

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<sup>66</sup> Aug. *Psal.* 36.2.20.49-62.

<sup>67</sup> Aug. *Psal.* 36.2.20.55-6 (*CCSL* 38:362): “Habebat autem imaginem, non veritatem futuri cuiusdam sacerdotis.”

<sup>68</sup> Aug. *Psal.* 36.2.20.64-66.

<sup>69</sup> See chapter 3 for more on this topic.

evidence that on the eve of Augustine's rise to prominence in the African church, its leading figures held to an understanding of and emphasis on the bishop that was markedly similar to that of the Donatists.

### **Conclusion**

The reform agenda of the bishops assembled at Carthage in 390 is thoroughly and decisively focused on the office of the bishop. Their vision of a reformed church is one in which the bishops are properly at its center, exercising their distinct powers and maintaining their purity for the sake of their communities. As we have seen, this vision of reform assumes an understanding of the bishops' role in the church that is fundamentally Cyprianic in its focus on the bishop as the center of the community in both administrative *and sacral* roles. The council attests that the Cyprianic understanding of the church and of the bishop's role in it continued to be influential in the Caecilianist church into the late 4<sup>th</sup> century.

This is important because it shows that the Caecilianist and Donatist communions shared more religious practices and beliefs than has previously been believed. Both of the African communions continued to claim Cyprian's legacy. Most of the Cyprianic practice of the episcopacy was carried over in the reforms and reformulations of Augustine, as were some aspects of the theology. The concerns of the council about the proper relationship between bishops and the other orders of clergy and of the collegiality of the bishops could find their place, in one way or another, in the Augustinian understanding of the bishop and his role in the church. However, the notion of the bishops as possessing a

priestly power distinct from that of the laity, one that called for a distinct purity that could affect the efficacy of the sacramental rites themselves, was one of the central features of Augustine's theological critique of the Donatists. The council's willingness to embrace such a position casts new light on the depth of Cyprian's continuing influence on their understanding of the office of bishop and their ecclesiology. Just before Augustine's entry into the Caecilianist clergy and prior to his campaign against the Donatists, African Caecilianist bishops were advocating a theology and a practice of the episcopate that shared an emphasis on the bishop's ritual purity and priestly mediation with the rival Donatists. Caecilianist sacramental practice had changed in the aftermath of the Council of Arles, and with this came the work of revising their sacramental theology. But their theology of the bishop, so central to the Cyprianic ecclesiology that was the common African heritage, remained on the whole undifferentiated from that of the rival Donatists.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE BURIAL OF BISHOPS AND ITS THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Just as the preceding chapters have examined the practices of clerical penance and conciliar reform and their implications for Caecilianist beliefs about their bishops, so this chapter examines the practice of episcopal burial and commemoration. More specifically, this chapter reconsiders the material evidence of episcopal burials at a series of unusual but important archaeological sites in light of the theological debate in Africa over the sanctity of bishops. It argues for the first time that these seemingly disparate and peculiar burials should be considered evidence of a single phenomenon: the burial and veneration of bishops in the manner of saints and martyrs. Furthermore, it situates this phenomenon in the context of North African theology, taking this practice as evidence of the beliefs African Christians held about the sanctity and status of their bishops. What these burial practices suggest is that even as Augustine was arguing against the notion that bishops possessed any distinct sanctity, Christians of both communions were expressing their opinions to the contrary by burying and venerating their bishops precisely as though they were saints.<sup>1</sup>

The use of archaeological evidence to understand Christian practices is, of course, nothing new. W. H. C. Frend's *The Donatist Church*, the seminal modern work in

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter examines archaeological remains associated with both the Caecilianist and Donatist communions. Though the focus of this dissertation is on Caecilianist beliefs about their bishops, an important aspect of that claim is that these beliefs did not differ substantially from those of their Donatist rivals. The consideration of sites associated with both communions in this chapter makes this plain.



English on the Donatist conflict, employed archaeological evidence as part of his argument for fundamental social, economic, and ethnic differences as an explanation for the conflict and schism.<sup>2</sup> More recently, scholars have produced extensive and detailed studies on a range of practices and phenomena touching on Christian practice in North Africa, as well as detailed archaeological reports on specific Christian sites.<sup>3</sup> Among these studies are substantial investigations into the burial practices of African Christians, especially Yvette Duval's *Loca Sanctorum Africae* and *auprès des saints corps et âme*.<sup>4</sup>

There were a number of ways that Late Antique Christians honored some dead above and beyond others; for heuristic purposes, this chapter terms all those given such burials the “special dead.” This is only a provisional category; before examining specific instances of episcopal burials, this chapter will first briefly review the primary existing categories for interpreting such burials – *martyria*, *ad sanctos*, and privileged burial – and preview their relevance for interpreting the burials of bishops that are the focus of this study. Only after completing this overview will the analysis of each of the sites in turn begin.

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<sup>2</sup> For a history of archaeological investigation into Christianity in Roman North Africa, see Frend's *The Archaeology of Early Christianity: A History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996); For a survey of the archaeological remains, see Mattingly & Hitchner, Roman Africa: An Archaeological Review,” *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 85 (1995), 165-213.

<sup>3</sup> See Isabelle Gui, Noël Duval, and Jean-Pierre Caillet, eds., *Basiliques Chrétiennes d'Afrique Du Nord: Inventaire Et Typologie*, Collection Des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 129-130, (Paris: Institut d'études augustiniennes, 1992) for a comprehensive bibliography. See also Noël Duval, *Les églises africaines à deux absides: recherches archeologiques sur la liturgie chrétienne en Afrique du Nord*, Bibliothèque des écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, fasc. 218 (Paris : E. de Boccard, 1971); Yvette Duval, *Loca Sanctorum Africae: Le Culte Des Martyrs En Afrique Du IVe Au VIIe Siècle* (Roma: Ecole française de Rome, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> Yvette Duval, *Auprès Des Saints Corps Et Âme: L'inhumation “Ad Sanctos” Dans La Chrétienté d'Orient Et d'Occident Du IIIe Au VIIe Siècle* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1988).

Each of the sites examined in this chapter offers evidence of African Christians burying their bishops in ways that suggest they were regarded as analogous to the saints.<sup>5</sup> The first site considered is a funerary basilica at Tipasa often referred to as the “chapel of Alexander,” the bishop responsible for its construction. Tipasa is both analyzed first and given the most attention because it offers the most complete evidence: a fuller and better-documented combination of inscriptions and architectural remains than at any other relevant site. The more extensive and largely still extant evidence at Tipasa allows for a more thorough analysis. As argued below, the chapel of Alexander functioned as a *memoria* of the bishop, who was presented as a model of righteousness and honored in burial as though a saint or martyr. Part of this program of commemoration and glorification of Alexander was the translation and reburial of the previous bishops of Tipasa as though they too were saints, reinforcing the message that the episcopal office as such was their common source of sanctity.

After an in-depth analysis of the chapel of Alexander at Tipasa, the chapter considers a series of four other sites: Djemila, Benian, Chlef, and Ksar-el-Kelb. Each of these sites exhibits a similar practice of commemorating bishops in death and burial as though they were saints by employing features associated with *martyria* and the cult of the saints, though admittedly with less extensive evidence than at Tipasa. The chapter concludes with Ksar-el-Kelb in part because its evidence is the most fragmentary, though it is highly suggestive of a program very similar to that of Tipasa.

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<sup>5</sup> The burials occasionally include clergy other than bishops as well. Cf. the section on Benian in this chapter, *infra*.

## The “Special Dead” and the Burial of Bishops in North African Christianity

The most important form of burial of the special dead was that of the martyrs. The cult of the martyrs had deep roots in African Christianity, and both the archaeological and, to a lesser extent, the documentary record offer abundant evidence of its importance.<sup>6</sup> The material aspect of the cult could take a variety of forms, ranging from inscriptions that commemorated the martyr(s) but did not indicate the presence of remains to monumental burial shrines.<sup>7</sup> In order to establish the relationship between the cult of the martyrs and the burials of bishops, the specific forms of *martyria* that are relevant in this case are those that contained the remains of the martyrs. African Christians began constructing shrines for the bodies and relics of martyrs at least as early as the fourth century. In the fourth and fifth centuries these *martyria* could take several forms. In Africa, most were incorporated into churches; there are very few examples of freestanding *martyria*.<sup>8</sup> In many cases, a basilica was built outside the city in order to accommodate the cult of a martyr (or several martyrs); these memorial basilicas sometimes began as shrines and were later enlarged to become churches.<sup>9</sup> These sites outside the city walls seem not to have been designed for regular congregational worship

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<sup>6</sup> On the cult of the saints in North Africa, cf. Yvette Duval, *Loca Sanctorum Africae: Le culte des martyrs en Afrique du IV<sup>e</sup> au VIII<sup>e</sup> s.*, 2 vols. (Collection de l'Ecole française de Rome, 82; Rome, 1982). It is also worth noting that the earliest evidence of Christianity in North Africa is a martyrdom account, the *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs* (July 17, 180); cf. *Act. Scil.*, Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 86-89.

<sup>7</sup> cf. Yvette Duval, *Auprès des saints corps et âme : l'inhumation "ad sanctos" dans la chrétienté d'Orient et d'Occident du III<sup>e</sup> au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris : Etudes Augustiniennes, 1988).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 113. It is also worth noting that the African bishops at the council of Carthage of 401 called for the destruction of martyr shrines that could not be confirmed as authentic. *Reg. Carth.* 83 (CCSL 204-5:744-770)

<sup>9</sup> Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 113. In this chapter, the basilica at Tipasa is an example of this, and some have contended that at Benian is as well.

but rather for funerary rites practiced by families and for the circulation of pilgrims.<sup>10</sup> In other cases, buildings within city walls were dedicated to the martyrs. In these cases, the remains or other relics of the martyr(s) were translated to the site and typically placed either under the altar or in a crypt or some other kind of annex.<sup>11</sup> In Africa, a counter apse was sometimes used for this purpose.<sup>12</sup> When a *martyria* was integrated into a basilica it was usually marked by other architectural features, including some form of barrier (low walls, screens, etc.) that enclosed the shrine and kept the faithful at a distance from the remains themselves.<sup>13</sup> Though the burials under investigation here are those of bishops rather than martyrs, it will become evident that they share many of the same architectural features as those of *martyria* described here.

Much more common than, but also dependent on, martyrial burials was the practice of *ad sanctos* burial. First attested in the documentary record in the late third century,<sup>14</sup> the practice of *ad sanctos* burial is witnessed to by abundant archaeological evidence from at least the fourth century onward.<sup>15</sup> Christians were buried as close as possible to the tomb of a saint, reflecting a popular belief that by such a burial they might obtain

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 115. There is some indication of this at both Tipasa and Djemila.

<sup>11</sup> Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 113.

<sup>12</sup> Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 531. In this chapter, Castellum Tingitanum is an example of this, as is Tipasa according to a fashion.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 117. In this chapter, there is evidence of this in one fashion or another at Ksar-el-Kelb, Tipasa, Benian, and Castellum Tingitanum.

<sup>14</sup> Yvette Duval, *Auprès des saints corps et âme : l'inhumation "ad sanctos" dans la chrétienté d'Orient et d'Occident du IIIe au VIIe siècle* (Paris : Etudes Augustiniennes, 1988), 51. The *Acta* of the late-third-century martyr Maximilian at Theveste is an African source that provides one of the first recorded instances of burial *ad sanctos*. *Act. Max.* 3.4. See also Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 118-19. Cf. Augustine's *On the Care of the Dead*.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 543.

some additional assistance from the saint after death.<sup>16</sup> The practice of *ad sanctos* burial produced a distinctive pattern of clustering around the tombs (or memorials) of saints.<sup>17</sup>

As was the case elsewhere, *ad sanctos* burial was an important feature of African Christianity, one that began early and continued at least into the Byzantine period.<sup>18</sup>

Though the burials under investigation in this study share some features with *ad sanctos* burials, particularly the use of grouped burials, they cannot be adequately explained by this category.<sup>19</sup> These burials were central features and shared many of the architectural features associated with *martyria*. They were not simply *near* the tombs of saints; they were like them.

A less precise but no less important category for understanding the burial of the special dead is that of “privileged burials,” in which elites of various sorts expressed their status by securing prominent burials for themselves or for their relatives. Expressions of privilege in burial were not simple or unilateral, but complex and multilateral.<sup>20</sup> There

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<sup>16</sup> For a detailed discussion, including on the opposition to the practice by some bishops, cf. Yvette Duval, *Auprès Des Saints Corps Et Âme: L'inhumation "Ad Sanctos" Dans La Chrétienté d'Orient Et d'Occident Du IIIe Au VIIe Siècle* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1988).

<sup>17</sup> But cf. Ann Marie Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces in the Late Antique Mediterranean: Architecture, Cult, and Community*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2009), on other patterns of burial and commemoration in sacred spaces. *Ad sanctos* burial is clearly in evidence at Tipasa, though are indications of other patterns as described in Yasin as well.

<sup>18</sup> Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 118. According to Y. Duval, *Loca Sanctorum Africae*, 54, Africa provides the earliest extant example of this practice – at the site in Tipasa that is investigated here. However, this interpretation and dating of the *areae* at Tipasa has been contested by Eric Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 185-88.

<sup>19</sup> Some scholars have interpreted the sites in this chapter as cases of *ad sanctos* burial. There are clear similarities with *ad sanctos* burial at Tipasa and Benian, and Grabar argues that this is the case for Djemila as well. André Grabar, *Martyrium. Recherches sur le culte des reliques et l'art chrétien antique*, vol. 1 (1946; reprint, Paris: Collège de France, 1972), 449-50.

<sup>20</sup> Noël Duval, “L'inhumation Privilegiée en Tunisie et en Tripolitaine,” in *L'Inhumation Privilegiée Du IVe Au VIIIe Siècle En Occident: actes du colloque tenu à Créteil les 16-18 mars 1984*, Y. Duval et J.-Ch. Picard, ed., (Paris: De Boccard, 1986), 25-42; Paul-Albert Fevrier, “Tombs Privilegiées en Mauretanie et Numidie,” in *L'Inhumation Privilegiée Du IVe Au VIIIe Siècle En Occident: actes du colloque tenu à Créteil les 16-18 mars 1984*, Y. Duval et J.-Ch. Picard, ed., (Paris : De Boccard, 1986), 13-24.

were multiple ways in which this privilege could be expressed in burial: the material quality of the tomb or sepulcher; the construction of a distinct monumental building for the burial; the location of the burial within a church or related structure, or proximity to the *memoria* of a saint; and the presence of some form of embellishment, such as an inscription, distinct décor, or superstructure that marked off a burial as special.<sup>21</sup> Sources of privilege might include social rank, wealth, age, gender, status in the church, and membership in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. These privileged burials could belong to laity or clergy, and in fact the clergy were among the most likely to receive such a burial. Without doubt the burials under consideration here were privileged burials, but privilege alone is not an adequate category for understanding their significance.

These three categories – martyrial, *ad sanctos*, and privileged burial – do not adequately account for the series of burials of bishops across North Africa and across both communions under investigation here. While their architectural details vary, these burials handle the remains of bishops in the manner usually employed for martyrs. The remains of these bishops were placed under altars, in counter-apses, in crypts and chapels, and incorporated into *memoriae*. Often they were designed to accommodate the veneration, and possibly even pilgrimage, of the faithful. Despite such treatment in death these bishops were not martyrs; none of the extant inscriptions in this study make any such claims. Nevertheless, the architectural arrangements make claims that the inscriptions avoid. These burials blur the lines created by the established categories of

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<sup>21</sup> N. Duval, “L’inhumation Privilegiee,” 27-28, also includes material provisions for veneration as a criterion, though only after explicitly excluding cases that involve the veneration of saints and martyrs. As I will show in the specific case of the burial of bishops, this dichotomy between the veneration of saints and martyrs and that of the merely “privileged” is unwarranted and unsustainable.

martyrial, *ad sanctos*, and privileged burial. These bishops were not martyrs, but these are more than simply privileged burials.

### **Tipasa**

Though scholarly treatments of the late fourth or early fifth century funerary basilica known as the “chapel of Alexander” have acknowledged its clerical focus, they have not explored the implications of this focus within the context of North African debates over the theological understanding of episcopal office. The site honors Alexander specifically, and this focus on Alexander transforms the basilica into a kind of *memoria* writ large. The episcopal emphasis of the site becomes important in the context of this commemoration insofar as it makes clear that the most important aspect of Alexander’s sanctity and the reason for the veneration he received was that he was a bishop. This is not simply an expression of clerical status and privilege. It is also a witness to a notion of holiness based on episcopal status, and this is significant in the context of the theological debates in North African Christianity.

This section will first give a brief overview of the history of excavations and of scholarship on the site and a general introduction to the site itself, focusing on the funerary basilica. It will then offer a more detailed account of three aspects of the site: the program of mosaic inscriptions arranged so as to be read by visitors and which focused on the bishop Alexander; the eastern platform which was the location of the reburials of the *priores*, Alexander’s predecessors in the episcopal see of Tipasa; and various other special burials incorporated into the site, including the counter-apse in which Alexander’s

are believed to have been deposited. Finally, it will offer an interpretation of the site that places its focus on Alexander in the context of the North African debates over the theology of the clergy.

### *Site Overview and General Description*

Tipasa was on the coast of Caesarea Mauretania, nearly 700 km to the west of Carthage.<sup>22</sup> It was a major Christian center with a substantial and active Christian population in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. It seems to have been a Caecilianist stronghold throughout the late fourth and fifth centuries, and Optatus mentions Tipasa as a site of particular violence between Donatists and Caecilianists upon the return of Donatist leaders from exile in 362.<sup>23</sup> The city boasts remains of at least six church buildings that date to this period, including a massive cathedral basilica at the far western end of the city proper, just inside the city walls.<sup>24</sup> (fig. 1)

The remains of the chapel of Alexander were first discovered and excavated in modern times in 1892 by Saint-Gérard. After the discovery of the site by Saint-Gerard, a series of early studies followed highlighted by those of Duchesne, Gsell, and Carcopino.<sup>25</sup> Excavation resumed in 1939 under the direction of Louis Leschi.<sup>26</sup> Since the

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<sup>22</sup> For a brief history of the city, see Gareth Sears, *Late Roman Urbanism: Continuity and Transformation in the City* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2007), 66-70.

<sup>23</sup> cf. Sears, "Late Roman Urbanism," 68-70. Frend, *The Donatist Church*, 51, 189-90, 230, 305. Optat. *Parm.* 2.18.4. However, there is no record of a bishop of Tipasa from either communion at the conference of Carthage in 411.

<sup>24</sup> cf. Sears, *Late Roman Urbanism*, 101-105.

<sup>25</sup> Saint-Gérard, "Une basilique funéraire à Tipasa," *BCTH*, 1892, 466-484; Duchesne, *CRAI*, 1892, 80-81, 111-114; Gsell, "Tipasa, ville de Maurétanie Césarienne," *MEFR*, 1894, 292, 389-92; Id. *Mon. ant. de l'Algérie*, II, 335; Carcopino, "Mosaïque tombale avec épitaphe d'un évêque découverte à Tipasa," *CRAI*, 1914, 211-215. Cf Isabelle Gui, Noël Duval, and Jean-Pierre Caillet, eds., *Basiliques Chrétiennes d'Afrique*



publication of the results of the excavations under Leschi, critical studies have focused on particular aspects of the site: as an example of privileged burial, of an *area martyrium*, as an example of a double-apsed church, and on the mosaics, inscriptions, and burials.

The funerary basilica was part of a larger complex of structures situated in a necropolis some 200 meters outside the city walls to the west of the city.<sup>27</sup> The basilica was connected to funerary enclosures to both the north and the south. (fig. 2) The uneven topography of the site meant that the basilica and the two enclosures were all at different elevations. This topography has partially determined the plan of the site, as substantial rock formations bound the eastern and southern walls of the basilica.<sup>28</sup>

Situated within these rock formations the basilica was oriented east/west, with an apse on its western end and a platform or bema on its eastern end. The structure's overall size was 22.8 m x 15 m Its interior was divided into three zones: two side aisles set off by rows of 5 columns and a central nave 6.4 m wide. The shape of the building was irregular: the south wall was composed of two parts that meet at an angle, none of the other walls intersected at right angles, and the axis formed by the columns and the central nave was not at a right angle to either the eastern or western wall. (fig. 3) Both entrances

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*Du Nord, I: Inventaire de l'Algérie, 1. Texte, 2. Illustrations*, Collection Des Études Augustiniennes 129. (Paris: Institut d'études augustiniennes, 1992), 32-33, for a more comprehensive bibliography.

<sup>26</sup> Louis Leschi, *Tipasa De Maurétanie*. (Alger, Direction de l'intérieur et des beaux-arts, Service de la Direction des antiquités, 1950); Louis Leschi, *Études D'épigraphie, D'archéologie Et D'histoire Africaines*. (Paris, Arts en métiers graphiques, 1957).

<sup>27</sup> The structure is often described as a "chapel," in large part to its size, location, and somewhat unusual function. That terminology is used some here, but so the term "funerary basilica." Basilicas took many forms, and in using that terminology I intend "basilica" in the most generic sense, as a designation of a kind of structure. I designate it a "funerary basilica" to indicate its distinction from those basilicas regularly used for the gathering of the entire Christian assembly. When, for convenience, it is shortened to "basilica," that distinction is still intended. cf. Richard Krautheimer and Slobodan Curcic, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 41-3.

<sup>28</sup> Lancel, *Tipasa de Mauretanie*, 45; Gui, Duval, and Caillet, eds., *Basiliques Chrétiennes d'Afrique Du Nord*, I.1.33.

to the basilica were in the north wall, with the principle entrance at the far western end of the wall. These entrances shared an exterior corridor with the northern enclosure. From this corridor, entered from the east, one could enter the basilica to the left or descend a stairway to the right into the northern funerary enclosure.

The site offered a wealth of extant mosaics and inscriptions. The pavement of the central nave was entirely covered with a series of mosaics, and there were additional mosaics in the exterior corridor and the entryway in the northwest corner.<sup>29</sup> The orientation of these mosaics reflects the orientation of visitors to the basilica. They could be seen as upright as one enters the northwest door, then enters the central nave and turns left, or eastward. There were four mosaic panels in the central nave, two of which were figurative and two of which commemorated the bishop Alexander. Thus the interior of the basilica was oriented toward the platform at its eastern end.

This platform contained a group of burials that was one of several sets of important burials within the basilica. The eastern platform was raised nearly a meter above the level of the floor in order to contain nine sepulchers. As will become clear, these burials were an important aspect of the architectural and cultic program of the structure. The western apse, which seems to have been a later addition to the structure, contained four burials, probably including that of Alexander.<sup>30</sup> There was also access to a crypt in the southeast corner of the basilica, a vaulted chamber 6.5 m x 3 m accessed by descending three steps. The crypt seems to have pre-dated the basilica and to have at least partially accounted for its irregular plan. In addition to these architectural features that

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<sup>29</sup> There are, additionally, at least 3 other (extant) mosaic inscriptions in the aisles of the basilica. cf. Leschi, *Études D'épigraphie, D'archéologie Et D'histoire Africaines*, 371-88.

<sup>30</sup> cf. Gui, Duval, and Caillet, eds., *Basiliques Chrétiennes d'Afrique Du Nord*, I.1.34; Grabar, 449.

each provided the space for a group of burials, there were numerous individual burials within the basilica. Of course the funeral *areae* to the north and south contained even more burials, including *memoriae* and *mensae* of several martyrs in the northern *area*.<sup>31</sup>

### *The Program of Mosaic Inscriptions*

The basilica was furnished with a series of pavement mosaics that began in the access corridor and continued through the northwestern entryway and then up the central nave. This series of mosaics included 6 mosaic inscriptions and 2 figurative mosaics, oriented such that visitors to the site would view them as they approached, entered, and processed through the site. (fig. 3) This series of inscriptions culminated with those commemorating the bishop Alexander and his role in constructing the basilica and depositing the remains of the *iusti priores*. Taken as a whole, these inscriptions presented Alexander as both a model bishop and a model of righteousness and indicate that the honor given him in death was due to his episcopal office.

The four inscriptions in the corridor and entryway of the basilica focused on the goal of eternal life and made very clear that what was expected of visitors who hoped to attain that goal was giving alms. Considered consecutively, as those entering the basilica would have encountered them, they clearly articulated a coherent message. The first, on the floor of a landing in the corridor to the north of the basilica, read:

Whoever among you is a Christian,  
Who are truly reaching out toward the sublime,  
And who desire to walk the path of the just by faith,  
Do alms and live in the celestial kingdom.  
For this is the work that makes us live forever.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Duval, *Loca Sanctorum Africae*, 357-380.

The next inscription, on the floor of the porch just outside the northwestern (primary) entrance:

The one who believes that there will be a resurrection of the flesh,  
rising again, will be like the angels in heaven.<sup>33</sup>

Immediately upon crossing the threshold into the basilica:

Live happily, you who have been established and chosen  
Keep the commandments that you might reign in eternal life.  
For to give alms -  
This is to demonstrate Christianity.<sup>34</sup>

And, up to steps to the floor of the basilica, the fourth and final mosaic inscription that encountered before entering the central nave:

The end of righteousness is to hope for martyrdom with vows.  
You also have something similar, to do alms with all your strength.<sup>35</sup>

The emphasis on eternal life is perhaps not entirely surprising in a basilica located in a necropolis. What is striking, though, is the thoroughgoing emphasis on almsgiving as the primary requirement for attaining eternal life.<sup>36</sup> Read consecutively the inscriptions articulate a view of the Christian life announced straightforwardly in the first inscription: giving alms is the work that leads to eternal life. This is elaborated in the succeeding

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<sup>32</sup> “Quisquis es christianus, ad sublimia vere qui tendis./Justorumque uiam ex fide gradi qui cupis,/Aelemosinam facito et vivis, in regno caelesti./Hoc est opus enim quod facit vivere semper.” Leschi, *Études D'épigraphie, D'archéologie Et D'histoire Africaines*, 375-6.

<sup>33</sup> “Resurrectionem carnis/futuram esse qui credit/angelis in caeles/resurgens similis erit.” Leschi, *Études D'épigraphie, D'archéologie Et D'histoire Africaines*, 374-5.

<sup>34</sup> “Vivite felices quibus haec sunt condita lecta./Servate praecepta ut regnetis in vita aeterna./Aelemosinam enim facere/Hoc est christianum monstrare.” Leschi, *Études D'épigraphie, D'archéologie Et D'histoire Africaines*, 373-4.

<sup>35</sup> “Clausula iustitiae est martyrium votis optare./Habes et aliam similem aelemosinam [pro] viribus facere.” *CIL VIII.20906*.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Y. Duval, *Loca Sanctorum Africae*, 366. Duval notes the way in which almsgiving has been explicitly juxtaposed with martyrdom as a way of achieving both virtue and eternal life, and also points out its similarity to the expression *iusti priores* for the previous bishops of Tipasa on the inscription inside the basilica.

inscriptions. Those who believe in the resurrection of the flesh, visitors are assured, will indeed rise and be like the angels in heaven. But those who wish to attain this goal must keep the commandments, and the chief way that this is expressed is through giving alms.

The fourth inscription is the most revealing in the comparison it introduces between almsgiving and martyrdom. Here, in the midst of a necropolis and just a few meters away from the *memoriae* of martyrs in the funerary enclosure below, one might expect that martyrdom would be considered the highest expression of the Christian life, its “demonstration,” as in the third inscription. Instead, the fourth inscription correlates martyrdom with almsgiving. While the desire for martyrdom may indeed be the “end” of righteousness, readers of the inscription are said to have something like it in their power: almsgiving. For the readers of the inscription, the virtue of martyrdom is not abandoned but is rather transferred to that of almsgiving, which reinforces the idea that almsgiving is a “demonstration” of the Christian life, as in the previous inscription. These initial inscriptions reinterpret almsgiving equally with martyrdom as the primary virtues of Christian faith. This becomes all the more important in light of the succeeding inscriptions in the central nave of the basilica, which will be discussed in detail below.

Proceeding forward visitors to the basilica would have entered into the central nave, the pavement of which was covered with a series of large mosaic panels. The first, immediately in front of the western apse, was a decorative panel featuring fish and other marine creatures. Turning toward the east and moving toward the platform at the other end of the basilica one would encounter, in order, an epitaph of Alexander the bishop, a decorative mosaic of geometric pattern, and a dedicatory inscription commemorating the

construction of the basilica and Alexander's role in it. The largest and most prominently placed of the mosaics in the basilica complex, and the only inscriptions located within the central nave, focus attention on Alexander as bishop and leader of the Christian community of Tipasa.

The first inscription commemorates bishop Alexander as the leader of the Christian people of Tipasa, a member of the Caecilianist clergy of Tipasa, and a model bishop. In blue letters on a white background, the inscription read,

Alexander the bishop, born in the very laws and altars,  
Completed the stages and honors in the catholic church;  
Guardian of chastity, devoted to charity and peace,  
By whose teaching the innumerable *plebs* of Tipasa flourish.  
Lover of the poor, devoted to every almsgiving  
By whom they were never abandoned and by whom the heavenly work was  
accomplished  
Whose soul refrigerates and whose body rests here in peace  
Expecting the future first resurrection of the dead  
That he might become a companion of the saints in possession of the kingdom of  
heaven.<sup>37</sup>

The inscription clearly identifies Alexander as a member of the Caecilianist clergy, specifying his devotion to *karitas* and *pax*.<sup>38</sup> The inscription enunciates paradigmatic virtues for bishops in late antiquity: he has completed the clerical *cursus*; he is chaste; his teaching benefits the people of his city; he is a lover of the poor.

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<sup>37</sup> "Alexander episcopus [s] i]egibus ipsis et altaribus natus,/aetatibus honoribusque in ecclesia catholica functus,/castitatis custos karitati pacique dicatus,/cuius doctrina floret innumera plebs Tipasensis,/pauperum amator aelemosinae deditus omnis,/cui nunquam defuere unde opus caeleste fecisset:/huius anima refrigerat corpus hic in pace quiescit/resurrectionem expectans futuram de mortuis primam,/consors ut fiat sanctis in possessione regni caelestis." *ILCV* 1:1103; *CIL* VIII.20905.

<sup>38</sup> Though Donatists also claimed the description *catholica*, the constellation of terms *catholica*, *karitas*, and *pax* indicate Caecilianist usage.

Proceeding toward the eastern platform and over the decorative mosaic of fish, visitors would come upon a second inscription commemorating Alexander, this time for the construction of the building:

Here where the walls in such gleaming buildings are praised,  
You see that the roofs and sacred altars shine,  
It is not the work of nobles, but rather the glory of so great a work  
Extols the name of Alexander the *rector* through the ages.  
As fame makes known his honorific labors,  
They rejoice that he has placed the righteous predecessors in a beautiful  
resting place,  
Whom long-lasting rest was cheating of the possibility of being seen  
Now they shine forth in the light, resting on a decorated altar  
And they rejoice that their garland, having been gathered together, is blooming,  
Which the honorable guardian, clever in mind, brought about.  
Infused with a desire to behold, a Christian generation comes from all around,  
And happy to touch the sacred thresholds with their feet,  
All singing sacred songs, rejoicing to stretch out their hands to the  
sacrament.<sup>39</sup>

The inscription commemorates the construction of the edifice, but the focus is on the care Alexander has shown for the remains of the *iusti priores* and their significance for the Christians of the area. The inscription seems to refer to a translation of the remains of these “righteous predecessors,” whose new burial places them in view of the people and is described as a focus for pilgrimage.

These two inscriptions were not entirely local creations, but rather local adaptations of a now-lost prototype. A nearly identical inscription was found installed in

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<sup>39</sup> “Hic ubi tam claris laudantur moenia tectis/Culmina quod nitent sanctaque altaria cernis/Non opus est procerum set tanti Gloria facti/Alexandri rectoris ovat per saecula nomen/Cujus honorificos fama ostendente labores/Iustos in pulchram sedem gaudent locasse priores/Quos diuturna quies fallebat posse videri/Nunc luce praefulgent subnixi altare decoro/Collectamque suam gaudent florere coronam/Animo quod sollers implevit custos honestus/Undiq[ue] visendi studio crhistiana aetas circumfusa venit/Liminaque sancta pedibus contingere laeta/Omnis sacra canens sacramento manus porrigere gaudens.” *CIL* VIII.20903.

a basilica in Djemila.<sup>40</sup> As Albertini demonstrated, the two inscriptions shared a common prototype, which he suggested was a model inscription for the use of mosaic artisans.<sup>41</sup> This prototype was modified in different ways at each site: the inscription was divided into two panels at Tipasa but combined in a single panel at Djemila; the personal and place names were customized at each locale; and lines 11-13 at Tipasa and 11-15 at Djemila were modified substantially.<sup>42</sup> According to Albertini, the lines that have been modified locally are of noticeably poor quality Latin. Because both inscriptions are largely copies of a model inscription, the details of these two inscriptions cannot be considered as sources for precise, local historical details. The epitaph is not, for example, an individualized portrait of either figure, any more than the remains of the *priores* rested upon the altar at Tipasa.<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, while the inscriptions at Tipasa cannot offer us any peculiar or specific details about the life and career of Alexander or a detailed description of the construction or ritual of the site, they still offer evidence of the self-understanding of the community and its bishop. The prototype was adopted and modified for local use, and so the text as it stands was deemed an appropriate description of the bishop and his works. The epitaph was meant to praise Alexander, and the fact that its terms of praise could have been applied to other bishops in no way suggests that they were inappropriate for him as well. It was reasonable to describe this bishop – as well as other bishops – as a lover of the poor, as a keeper of chastity, and so forth. Similarly, while the dedicatory

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<sup>40</sup> For analysis of the basilica complex at Djemila and of the inscription there, see *infra*.

<sup>41</sup> E. Albertini, “Inscription chrétienne sur mosaïque provenant de Djémila,” *BCTH*, 1922, p. xxvi-xxxii.

<sup>42</sup> In addition to a number of other minor variations and modifications. Cf. Albertini, “Inscription chrétienne sur mosaïque provenant de Djémila,” xxvii-xxix.

<sup>43</sup> Albertini, “Inscription chrétienne sur mosaïque provenant de Djémila,” xxxii.



inscription cannot be relied upon for architectural details specific to the site, the act for which it praised Alexander – building an edifice to house and highlight the remains of the community’s *iusti priores* – must have been plausible in order to account for its incorporation into the basilica.

The site presented Alexander as a model of virtue and righteousness. The inscriptions in the corridor and entryway framed almsgiving as the central act of righteousness, the very demonstration of Christianity and equal to martyrdom. The mosaics of the central nave, in turn, framed Alexander as a model bishop: chaste, a teacher of doctrine and, most crucially, a “lover of the poor” who was devoted to almsgiving. At a site that depicted almsgiving as the highest of the virtues, Alexander was positioned as the paradigmatic giver of alms.

This praise of Alexander as “lover of the poor” was part of a broader emphasis on almsgiving in Late Antique Christianity. The care of the poor was considered one of the primary duties of a bishop in the Roman world in the 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>44</sup> As Brown explains, these “poor” were not only the utterly destitute, though of course those existed among their number. On the contrary, the “poor” for whom the bishop was expected to care included a much wider range of people, including many who belonged to a “middling” class of Roman society that ranged from those holding relatively important

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<sup>44</sup> Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire*, The Menahem Stern Jerusalem Lectures, (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2002), 45. In the paragraphs that follow, I largely follow Brown’s account of the relationship between “poverty” and episcopal leadership in late antiquity. For a more comprehensive account of the role of wealth in the rise of Christianity in the west in Late Antiquity, see Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012). For a study of similar issues regarding poverty and religious leadership in Late Antique Egypt, see Ariel G. López, *Shenoute of Atripe and the Uses of Poverty: Rural Patronage, Religious Conflict, and Monasticism in Late Antique Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

roles such as the *grammaticus* to skilled laborers and artisans and all the way down to day laborers. These people were not destitute; what they lacked was the security and relative autonomy possessed only by the Roman elite. They were constantly in danger of slipping into poverty and even destitution. In such a situation, what these “middling” persons needed were a kind of social safety net as well as a protector and patron. Increasingly in late antiquity, the church provided the former and the bishop functioned as the latter. Thus when a bishop was said to be a guardian or lover of the “poor,” this was not only a matter of distributing alms but also of intervening with civil or imperial officials, adjudicating legal cases in the bishop’s court, and generally serving as a patron for those in his church.

This is not to minimize the importance of almsgiving within the care of the poor. The flow of Christian almsgiving ran through the bishop, giving the bishop a great deal of both flexibility and power in the distribution of alms. Large gifts in the tradition of classical *euergetism* were rare; what was expected of Christians was small but frequent giving of alms. While some of this giving went directly to beggars, most of it was directed through the bishop, who was expected to know how best to distribute it. It was through just such giving, by and large by the same “middling” poor, that the wealth of Christian communities was built up. Thus the exhortation to give alms, such as that found at Tipasa, meant something different for the laity than it did for a bishop such as Alexander. For the *plebs*, the common people of the church, almsgiving meant especially the frequent and consistent giving of small gifts to the church to be distributed by the bishop. For the bishop himself, being a giver of alms meant primarily distributing the

alms of the entire Christian community. This reinforced the social distinction between the bishop and his congregation and strengthened his role as guardian (*custos*) and leader (*rector*) of the community. As a guardian of the poor, the more elevated the bishop was over his people the better; they benefitted from and often expected a patron or social mediator as bishop.<sup>45</sup>

The depiction of almsgiving in the program of inscriptions at Tipasa reinforced the bishop Alexander's centrality in the Christian community and his place as an exemplar of virtue. The inscriptions exhorted visitors to give alms and portrayed it as the central virtue of the Christian life. This was joined with a commemoration of Alexander as especially devoted to this virtue. Given the contours of Christian almsgiving of the period his was a practice that few, if any, of the Christian laity of Tipasa could have matched. Thus by portraying almsgiving as central to the Christian life and joining this portrayal to a monumental commemoration of Alexander's own care of the poor, Alexander was placed at the pinnacle of Christian virtue. This elevation only served to reify the practical reality of Christian giving in this period: the bishop was responsible for almsgiving on a scale and in a fashion not available to the laity, and for carrying this out was put forward as a model of virtue. The visitors to the basilica were exhorted to participate in this almsgiving, but they could never expect to match it.

If the virtue of being a "lover of the poor" was a distinctly episcopal virtue, so too were the other praises of Alexander offered in the inscriptions in the nave of the basilica.

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<sup>45</sup> One particularly telling example of this dynamic in North Africa is the case of Antony of Fussala. Even after he had subjected the people of Fussala to spate of abuses, some of the locals still chose to remain under his leadership. A local and effective advocate, even if he was something of a scoundrel, was a figure of some value.

The first inscription praised him as having passed through the various stages of the clerical *cursus*; of practicing chastity; of teaching the people (*plebs*); and of course as a lover of the poor. The second inscription continued this image of episcopal virtue and praised him as responsible for the construction of the building (or possibly even for the whole series of buildings on the site) as well as for translating the remains of the *iusti priores* so that they would be visible to the people, and it specifically refers to him as leader (*rector*) and guardian (*custos*).<sup>46</sup> The praises offered were high but not extraordinary; these were all conventional expectations of Late Antique bishops. The inscriptions honored Alexander in terms that were distinctly episcopal and that could have been applied to bishops across the Mediterranean world. The likelihood that the inscription was based on a prototype only underscores this point. Alexander was not being honored because of some extraordinary achievement or quality, such as martyrdom or the working of miracles, but simply for being a bishop – although apparently a well-respected one.

Alexander is unknown to us outside of the evidence of this site. The inscriptions offer us a sense of the ways in which he was perceived by the Christian community of Tipasa, of the kinds of praises that were plausible and considered appropriate for a figure worthy of such a monumental commemoration. What they indicate is that Alexander was praised and commemorated for virtues and actions that were distinctively and very conventionally episcopal. The honor given him at this site was for his status and actions as bishop. No other reasons were given nor, apparently, deemed necessary.

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<sup>46</sup> This last (*custos*) is used in the context of describing his translation of the remains of the *priores*, suggesting an image of Alexander as the guardian and patron of these saint-like figures.

### *The Eastern Platform and the Iusti Priores*

The inscription that commemorated Alexander's responsibility for constructing the basilica highlighted the translation of the remains of his predecessors, the *iusti priores*, which were deposited in the basilica's eastern platform. This platform was situated against the eastern wall of the basilica, where a rock formation precluded the construction of an apse. The platform spanned the width of the central nave (6.40 m) and extended out into the nave to the depth of the first columns (3.60 m). It was elevated nearly a meter above the level of the floor and was accessed by stairways (1.0 m wide) at each end. The platform was marked off from the rest of the nave by a chancel rail installed between the two sets of stairs. Though this distinction might seem to imply the location of the altar, there was no evidence of a permanent altar either on the platform or on the floor of the basilica.<sup>47</sup>

The platform contained, or rather was built upon, nine sarcophagi. (fig. 3, 4) These sarcophagi were installed at the level of the floor of the basilica and were flush with and perpendicular to its eastern wall. The platform was constructed around the sarcophagi, with the sarcophagi at the far northern and southern ends of the platform taking the place of retaining walls.<sup>48</sup> The sarcophagi were approximately .75 m wide and 0.85 m high and were of varying lengths and finished with different methods.<sup>49</sup> The lids of the sarcophagi formed a kind of extended pavement across the platform, which was also covered by a layer of concrete. The sarcophagi were arranged and the platform

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<sup>47</sup> Though that is not necessarily remarkable since such evidence is rare. There is also the question of the *mensae* present in the aisle, which may have been used for eucharistic observance.

<sup>48</sup> J.-B. Saint-Gérard. "Une basilique funéraire à Tipasa," *Bulletin archéologique du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques*, 1892), 477.

<sup>49</sup> Saint-Gérard, "Une basilique funéraire à Tipasa," 478.

constructed at the eastern end of the basilica, the typical location of the apse and altar, as a focal point for this space.

The suspicion that these sarcophagi might have contained the remains of the *iusti priores* mentioned in the inscription immediately in front of the platform was corroborated by the discovery of an identifying inscription on one of the sarcophagi.<sup>50</sup> The cover of the second sarcophagus from the south bore the inscription, *MEMORIA RE/NATI EPISCOPI/ M[... ]OLACV/[... ]IT*.<sup>51</sup> This inscription, identifying it as holding the remains of a bishop Renatus, has been taken as confirmation that the *priores* were the previous bishops of Tipasa and the occupants of the sarcophagi in the platform.<sup>52</sup> The arrangement of the sarcophagi into the platform of the basilica then corresponds to the account of the inscription describing the *priores* as being placed in a location where all could see and approach them. The sarcophagi and platform are the result of the translation of the remains of the previous bishops of Tipasa.

The surface of the platform had been covered with an additional mosaic that, though severely damaged, made further reference to Alexander. The covers of the sarcophagi had been covered with a layer of concrete on which this mosaic was installed. Its decorations were, according to Saint-Gérand, more varied and finer than those on the floor of the nave. Within a border of scrollwork in green, yellow, and red, in a field 4.5 m

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<sup>50</sup> The original excavator, Saint-Gérand, had not completely uncovered the sarcophagi in hopes of preserving the mosaic that covered the pavement on top of the platform. Cf. *infra*.

<sup>51</sup> Jérôme Carcopino, "Mosaïque tombale avec épitaphe d'un évêque découverte à Tipasa," *CRAI*, 1914, 214. The mosaic seemed to have continued on to the sarcophagus to the south, though that portion of the mosaic was lost. The only other of the sarcophagi with identifying marks was the second from the north, which bore a small Christogram on its western facing side. Cf. Saint-Gérand, "Une basilique funéraire à Tipasa," 478.

<sup>52</sup> So Carcopino, "Mosaïque tombale avec épitaphe d'un évêque découverte à Tipasa," 214-15. This remains the accepted interpretation, although with a degree of uncertainty.

wide, were the remains of a poorly preserved inscription. Only fragments of the first four lines remained; the final lines, nearest the front of the platform, had been completely destroyed. What remained is, nonetheless, significant:

Concilium fidei sacrar[...]/  
Clarus amor pat [...] nomen/  
Sanctu[...]lexand[...]cessit/  
Futu[...]em e[...]onatus<sup>53</sup>

Though any reconstruction of this text is necessarily highly speculative, one aspect of it is clear: Alexander is clearly referred to as *sanctus*, as a saint. This mosaic is probably later than those of the nave floor, given both its different craftsmanship and color scheme and the fact that the inscription of Renatus was paved over in order to install it.<sup>54</sup> The material remains of the platform both corroborate the mosaic inscription's account of the translation of the remains of Alexander's predecessors and demonstrate that at some point, in all likelihood after initial construction of the basilica, the Christian community at Tipasa came to regard the deceased Alexander as a saint.

At least two points must be made about the placement of the remains of the *priores*. First, the remains of the *priores* were treated in the manner of the remains of martyrs. Their remains have been translated and placed in a prominent location.<sup>55</sup> The commemorative inscription described them in images evocative of the martyrs: their *coronam* blooms, and Christians visit from all around to approach them at the altar.

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<sup>53</sup> Anatole Toulotte, *Géographie de l'Afrique Chrétienne*, vol. 4, *Maurétanies*, (Rennes: Oberthur, 1894), 170, reconstructed the text as: "Concilium fidei sacrar [ium karitatis apei fortitudo]/Clarus amor pat[riae in eo eluxit cui] nomen/Sanctu[s A]lexand[er episcopus qui nos prae]cessit/Futu[ram resurrection]em e[]xpectans a Deo multa d[omi]onatus."

<sup>54</sup> However, this dating is not conclusive.

<sup>55</sup> The inscription describes them as "under the altar," though there is no archeological evidence of a permanent altar at the site. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 530.

Despite this treatment, they are not described as *sanctus* or *martyrus* but simply as *iustos*, righteous. Though the circumstances of their (re)burial suggest the burials of martyrs, the extant inscriptions indicate that they were simply bishops.

Second, the translation and display of the *priores* serves to augment the site's portrayal of Alexander as himself worthy of commemoration. The inscription articulates this relationship regarding Alexander's responsibility for their translation and display: the *priores* are said to rejoice at what Alexander has done for them while he is described as their "guardian" (*custos*). It is to him that the glory of the work accrues. Something similar can be said about their relative sanctity. If they can be buried and commemorated in forms that evoke the martyrs on the basis of being his episcopal predecessors, then this status is implicitly accorded to Alexander – himself a bishop and their "heir" – as well. If their holiness approximates that of the martyrs, then so too does his. This creation of a kind of episcopal lineage of sanctity reinforces the emphasis of the inscriptions on Alexander's status as bishop and corroborates the site's emphasis on a decidedly episcopal sanctity. Even though neither the precise identities of these *priores* nor the specific details of their translation are available to us, it is nevertheless the case that at this site they function to glorify and honor Alexander. Whatever their identity in life, in death the *priores* became predecessors of Alexander as both bishops and examples of sanctity, which in this case were one and the same.



### *The Crypt, Apse, and Areae*

Though devoted to the memory of Alexander and his predecessors, the basilica sits in the midst of the tombs and *memoriae* of martyrs and it incorporated several other sites dedicated to the veneration of the dead. The site included funerary enclosures to the north and south of the basilica. The enclosures either predated or were contemporaneous to the basilica.<sup>56</sup> These enclosures contained the tombs and *memoriae* of several martyrs.<sup>57</sup> Thus in constructing the site, the Christians of Tipasa chose to make the basilica and its commemoration of Alexander central despite the presence of the remains of numerous saints already at the site. Instead of these martyrs they translated the remains of the *priores* and honored Alexander and the *priores* with the construction of a funerary basilica. The enclosures were rendered secondary to the basilica at the site, a point reinforced by the program of mosaics in the corridor that were oriented toward the basilica. Within the basilica, the entire length of the axis was focused on Alexander: the two mosaic inscriptions in the central nave which commemorated him, the platform containing the *priores* for which he was responsible and which was described as glorifying him, and the western apsidial burial chamber in which Alexander's remains were likely deposited (see *infra*). Both within the basilica and within the context of the entire complex, Alexander was the central figure.

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<sup>56</sup> Éric Rebillard, "Les *areae* Carthaginoises (Tertullien, *Ad Scapulam* 3, 1): Cimetières Communautaires Ou Enclos Funéraires de Chrétiens ?," *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome. Antiquité* 108, no. 1 (1996): 184–88, has argued that the enclosures in their extant state are best understood as have been constructed contemporaneously to the basilica of Alexander.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Duval, *Loca Sanctorum Africae*, 357–380, for detailed descriptions of references to the cult of the martyrs at Tipasa. Of the ten entries for Tipasa in Duval (169–178), at least four are from this site (#173–176).

At the southeast corner of the basilica itself was a door that opened into a subterranean crypt. The door, integrated into the southern wall of the basilica, was 1.8 m tall and 0.7 m wide and shows evidence of having had a locking door. It gave access via three descending steps to a room that is 6.5 m meters long, nearly 3 m wide, and 2.5 m high at its highest point. The doorjamb, lintel and threshold were all integrated into the structure of the basilica; in combination with the irregular layout of the southeastern corner (see fig. 3), this suggests that this chamber predates the basilica and that the basilica was built so as to accommodate it into its plan.<sup>58</sup> This chamber held a series of burials in a plan that suggests a funerary chapel or *cubiculum*. There are two rows of five graves dug into the floor. The combined width of these tombs exceeds that of the chamber, so the outer end of each is engaged in the wall. At the far end of the room is an elevated ledge of rock into which a solitary grave had been carved. An opening in the roof of the chamber (1.75 m wide by 0.8 m long) allowed light to fall directly onto this ledge. Additionally, a deep niche was carved into the wall immediately to the right of the entrance, possibly as a cabinet or storage space for cultic items.<sup>59</sup> Leschi argued that the arrangement of the room suggests a cultic space, a *cubiculum* or funerary chapel, with the raised ledge at the far end of the room serving as an altar. Some scholars have hypothesized, therefore, that this may have been the former resting place of the *priores*, an attractive but unproveable hypothesis.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Louis Leschi, and Algeria Service des antiquités., *Études D'épigraphie, D'archéologie Et D'histoire Africaines*, 387-8.

<sup>59</sup> Leschi, *Études D'épigraphie, D'archéologie Et D'histoire Africaines*, 378.

<sup>60</sup> This was the hypothesis of Leschi, *Études D'épigraphie, D'archéologie Et D'histoire Africaines*, 387-8, among others.

At the western end of the basilica was a funerary chamber in the form of a semi-circular counter-apse. It was of an equal width and depth of 3.5 m, but was not open to the central nave across its entire width. Instead there was an opening 0.5 m across, in the threshold of which were two holes for the hinges of double doors. The chamber contained four sarcophagi placed on a floor 1.15 m below the level of the nave floor. Though the sarcophagi had no identifying inscriptions, it is possible that this counter-apse was the location of the burial of Alexander's remains.<sup>61</sup>

The veneration of Alexander in the basilica is thus central to a site that is replete with the commemoration of the dead and even the cult of the martyrs. Rather than be buried near one of the local saints of Tipasa (*ad sanctos*), or even build a shrine for these saints in which he too could be buried, Alexander and the Christians of Tipasa built a funerary basilica in which he and his episcopal predecessors could be venerated and made this the dominant structure of the complex. In so doing they transformed a necropolis into a site focused on the memory of a line of holy bishops, and above all on Alexander.

### *Interpretation*

The chapel of Alexander venerates Alexander in the manner of a saint on the basis of his episcopal status and episcopal sanctity. It presents him as the most important figure

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<sup>61</sup> N. Duval, *Les églises africaines à deux absides*, 19, contests this hypothesis. The dating of this chamber is unsure. This apsidial structure seems to be a later addition to the basilica. The "apse" was clearly later than the western wall against which it has been constructed. However the wall itself may predate the construction of the basilica, making the chronological relationship between the construction of the basilica and that of the apse inconclusive. cf. N. Duval, *Les églises africaines à deux absides*, 11-20, for more on this.

to be commemorated in a setting marked by holy figures and portrays him as a model of sanctity. The particular shape of his sanctity is decidedly and even conventionally episcopal, a point made clear by the treatment given the *priores*. Taken as a whole the basilica functions as a *memoria* for Alexander. The only reason given for this commemoration and the only basis presented for Alexander's sanctity is his exercise of episcopal ministry.

The basilica was built in a necropolis that contained the remains of martyrs and numerous other forms of the commemoration of the dead. Rather than highlight any of these, the Christian community of Tipasa centered the site on a basilica devoted to Alexander. The other forms of the cult of the dead were then integrated into, if not subordinated to, the basilica itself. In doing so the basilica signaled that the commemoration of Alexander and his predecessors was in no way secondary to that of the martyrs at the site. Quite to the contrary, it transformed the necropolis into a site focused on the bishops of Tipasa.

Within the basilica itself, the program of inscriptions portrayed Alexander as a model of Christian righteousness. As has been shown, the virtues for which Alexander was praised were distinctively episcopal virtues. The most prominently displayed of these virtues was that of almsgiving, which offered the people of Tipasa a way to practice their own righteousness while also highlighting the bishop's role as chief almsgiver and guardian and mediator of the community's gifts. Thus the program of inscriptions reasserted Alexander's elevated status and righteousness even as it invited the laity to participate in the virtue in which their bishop excelled. Throughout these inscriptions,

Alexander was praised precisely as a bishop and never for anything considered outside the normal responsibilities of his office. The available evidence indicates that his commemoration was for his excellence as a bishop rather than for some extraordinary virtue, such as martyrdom.<sup>62</sup> He was not remembered for anything spectacular, but simply for being the bishop of Tipasa. Nevertheless this was enough to merit a basilica devoted to him.

The exclusively episcopal reason for his veneration is confirmed by the translation and display of the *iusti priores*. They were (re)buried in a manner typically associated with the cult of the saints, and the inscription commemorating their translation uses language redolent of the cult of the saints as well. The inscription even portrays the *priores* as objects of pilgrimage. Yet the veneration given them is described as glorifying Alexander, and the fact that it was as his predecessors that they were buried and venerated in this way only reinforced the episcopal focus of both the site and of the commemoration of Alexander. And if the site did receive pilgrims, the emphasis on Alexander would not have been lost on them, especially given the later inscription describing Alexander as *sanctus*. At this site, Alexander's status and his sanctity were central and would have been amplified by the treatment given his predecessors.

In sum, the basilica functioned as a *memoria* for the bishop Alexander. Though he was not, at least initially, described formally as a saint, the treatment given him in death effectively blurred the line between righteous bishop and the saints and martyrs, and even

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<sup>62</sup> The one apparent piece of evidence to the contrary, the later and highly degraded mosaic inscription on the platform that described Alexander as a saint, is actually best read as confirmation of the program of veneration described here. On the premise that the inscription is later, it would seem that the Christians at Tipasa of some later period interpreted the veneration of Alexander as evidence that he was a saint and described him accordingly.

implied that the former might be more important than the latter. The program of inscriptions and burials at the basilica clearly indicated that both Alexander and his predecessors were especially holy, that their holiness was a function of their episcopal office, and that they deserved to be buried and commemorated in ways that emulated the martyrs. At Tipasa, the lines between holy bishops and holy martyrs were blurred, at least in death, offering evidence that the Christians of Tipasa embraced an understanding of bishops as particularly holy figures.

### **Djemila**

At Djemila, identified as ancient Cuicul, twin basilicas were connected to an extensive crypt complex. Though the early excavation of the site left no identifying evidence from within the crypt itself, the southern basilica contained an inscription that offers an explanation for the exceptional crypt. This inscription was nearly identical to those in the chapel of Alexander commemorating the bishop and his translation of the *iusti priores*. In the early fifth century, the Christian community of Djemila and its bishop, Cresconius, seem to have undertaken a program similar to that at Tipasa, including burial and commemoration of the bishop and the translation of the remains of his predecessors. This not only offers an explanation of the elaborate crypt; it also indicates a similar reverence for the community's bishops as worthy of such veneration. This practice is all the more striking given that the inscription at Djemila also added clear anti-Donatist allusions, meaning that the Christian community there was engaging in anti-

Donatist polemic even as they treated their bishops in ways that Augustine's own polemics insisted were distinctly Donatist.

The basilicas of the episcopal complex at Djemila were excavated by A. Ballu from 1913-1922. This excavation, which followed a superficial excavation by A. Ravoisié in 1840, uncovered the southern basilica and the crypt for the first time. Unfortunately the excavation eliminated any traces of the furnishings of the crypt and did not leave a detailed plan with locations of the mosaics of the southern basilica. The site has since been partially restored and most of the mosaics have been installed in the on-site museum. The excavations of the early twentieth century produced a first generation of scholarship on the site, most notably by Monceaux, Albertini, and Ballu.<sup>63</sup> More recently the site has been the focus of studies by Fevrier, Duval, and Christern.<sup>64</sup>

#### *Site Overview and General Description*

The southern basilica and its crypt were part of a larger complex of buildings that have come to be seen as the "episcopal group" of Djemila. This complex was located on high ground just southeast of the main city and included two basilicas, positioned adjacent and parallel to one another and aligned east/west. The northern basilica sat on higher ground and was somewhat smaller than the southern basilica; between the two was

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<sup>63</sup> Monceaux/Ballu, *CRAI*, 1922, 391-398; Albertini, "Inscription chrétienne sur mosaïque provenant de Djémila," xxvi-xxxii; Ballu, *Guide illustré de Djémila (Antique Cuicul)*, Ancienne Maison Bastide-Jourdain, 1926, 19-24.

<sup>64</sup> P.-A. Fevrier, *Djemila*, Algiers, 1968, 73-83; Jürgen Christern, *Das frühchristliche Pilgerheiligtum von Tebessa : Architektur und Ornamentik einer spätantiken Bauhütte in Nordafrika*, Wiesbaden : F. Steiner, 1976, 137-144; N. Duval, *Groupes épiscopaux de Syrie et d'Afrique du Nord: Colloque Apamée de Syrie, Bruxelles, Musées royaux d'art et d'histoire, 15-18 avril 1972*, Bruxelles : Centre belge de recherches archéologiques à Apamée de Syrie, 1972.

a small corridor. The basilicas were both connected to a crypt that ran the length of the episcopal complex beneath its eastern side, some 3.5 m below the floor of the northern basilica. To the west of the northern basilica was a monumental baptistery, itself connected both to baths and to a smaller basilica often distinguished from the other two as a “chapel.”<sup>65</sup> These major buildings were further connected to other structures, and the group as a whole has been interpreted as a “Christian quarter” of Djemila. (fig. 5, 6)

The complex and especially its basilicas have proven difficult to date. The traditional dating placed the northern basilica in the 4<sup>th</sup> c. and the southern basilica in the 5<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>66</sup> P.-A. Février challenged this theory, arguing that the two basilicas should be considered contemporaneous and both should be dated to the late 4<sup>th</sup> or early 5<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>67</sup> Février’s theory has not been universally accepted, and Duval has offered the clearest assessment of the state of the question: it is not possible to securely date the two basilicas either absolutely or relatively on the basis of current evidence, and the existing theories all involve contradictions.<sup>68</sup> However, even though a precise timeline for the basilicas is not possible, all theories date the southern basilica to between the late fourth and mid-

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. Gui, Duval, and Caillet, eds., *Basiliques Chrétiennes d’Afrique Du Nord*, I.1.98-99.

<sup>66</sup> According to Monceaux and Albertini. Cf. Gui, Duval, and Caillet, eds., *Basiliques Chrétiennes d’Afrique Du Nord*, I.1.92.

<sup>67</sup> Février’s argument, which he articulated in several publications, was based primarily on their identical masonry and on the corridor of the crypt complex that connected them, which took as indication of a single architectural plan. Cf. Février, “Notes sur le développement urbain en Afrique du Nord. Les exemples comparés de Djemila et de Sétif,” *Cahiers archéologiques* 14 (1964), 14-17; “Remarques sur les mosaïques de basse époque à Djemila,” *BAntFr* (1965), 88-92; N. Duval, *Groupes épiscopaux de Syrie et d’Afrique du Nord*, 240. cf. Gui, Duval, and Caillet, eds., *Basiliques Chrétiennes d’Afrique Du Nord*, I.1.93.

<sup>68</sup> Christern, *Das frühchristliche Pilgerheiligtum von Tebessa*, 137-144, accepts it; N. Duval, *Colloque Apamée*, 237-241, does not. Duval argued that an adequate answer as to whether or not the two basilicas were contemporary constructions would require an examination of their foundations.



fifth centuries, the period under consideration here.<sup>69</sup> The more pressing question is the dating of the mosaic inscription in the southern basilica, a question that will be taken up below.

The southern basilica was the largest of the complex, measuring approximately 29 m wide and 44 m long.<sup>70</sup> The nave was divided into five aisles by four rows of ten supports, with a central nave just over 8 m wide. It was preceded by a vestibule that not only served as an entrance area for the basilica but also provided access to the parts of the complex to the north and south. Christern has hypothesized galleries over the outer aisles of the basilica, entered by way of a stairway in the corridor north of the basilica.<sup>71</sup> The apse has not survived, but likely reproduced the plan of the crypt below, in which case the apse would have been approximately 9 m deep and 8 m wide at its opening.<sup>72</sup> It was also probably raised about 1 m.<sup>73</sup> In its excavated state, the chancel occupied the final four spans of the central nave; it was separated from the rest of the nave by rails and was raised about 0.4 m above the rest of the nave by a masonry platform. However, this platform was a later addition to the basilica as it was built on top of a mosaic inscription

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<sup>69</sup> The northern basilica continues to be dated earlier than or contemporaneous to the southern basilica. Most date the original structure no later than the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Cf. the discussion in Gui, Duval, and Caillet, eds., *Basiliques Chrétiennes d'Afrique Du Nord*, I.1.93-98.

<sup>70</sup> The length is an approximation, because the apses of both the north and south basilica are no longer extant. Monceaux gave the dimensions of the south basilica as 30.5 m. x 28 m. without the apse and 39.5 m. with it; more recently, Christern estimated the restored dimensions at 44.75 m. x 29.2 m., on the premise that the plan of the crypt below reproduced that of the apse above. Cf. Gui, Duval, and Caillet, eds., *Basiliques Chrétiennes d'Afrique Du Nord*, I.1.97.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Gui, Duval, and Caillet, eds., *Basiliques Chrétiennes d'Afrique Du Nord*, I.1.97; Christern, 139-40. This is primarily on the basis of the proportions between the length of the nave, the height of the supports within it, and the theorized height of the building. There is, at the least, clear evidence of high windows in the building.

<sup>72</sup> Gui, Duval, and Caillet, eds., *Basiliques Chrétiennes d'Afrique Du Nord*, I.1.97-98.

<sup>73</sup> Christern, *Das frühchristliche Pilgerheiligtum von Tebessa*, 140, on the basis of the (presumed) height of the columns that supported the ceiling of the crypt. Cf. Gui, Duval, and Caillet, eds., *Basiliques Chrétiennes d'Afrique Du Nord*, I.1.98.

commemorating one Cresconius.<sup>74</sup> This inscription is particularly important because it highlights a connection to the chapel of Alexander at Tipasa and because it offers evidence of the purpose of the extensive crypt at Djemila.

### *The Mosaic of Cresconius*

The inscription preserved under the chancel platform of the southern basilica is nearly identical to those commemorating Alexander at Tipasa, and like those it highlights the importance of the local bishop, Cresconius, and his role in displaying the remains of his *priores*. Because the masonry that covered it had remained intact, the mosaic inscription was preserved almost perfectly. Its letters are 0.85 m high, white on a red background. It combines the two inscriptions from the central nave at Tipasa and is arranged in two columns.

Here where the walls in such gleaming buildings are praised,  
You see that the roofs and sacred altars shine,  
It is not the work of nobles, but rather the glory of so great a work  
Extols the name of Cresconius the *rector* through the ages.  
As fame makes known his honorific labors,  
They rejoice that he has placed the righteous predecessors in a beautiful  
resting place,  
Whom long-lasting rest was cheating of the possibility of being seen  
Now they shine forth in the light, resting on a decorated altar  
And they rejoice that their garland, having been gathered together, is  
blooming  
which the honorable guardian, clever in mind, brought about.  
Having been infused with a desire to visit, a Christian generation rushes from all  
around  
To declare praises to God in a single gathering  
And happy to touch the sacred thresholds with their feet,  
All singing sacred songs, rejoicing to stretch out their hands  
to accept the medicine of schism through the sacrament of God.

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<sup>74</sup> According to Albertini, "Inscription chrétienne sur mosaïque provenant de Djémila," xxvii, the masonry platform bore an ornamental mosaic.

Cresconius, born in the very laws and altars  
 And anointed with honors in the catholic church  
 Guardian of chastity, devoted to charity and peace  
 By whose teaching the innumerable plebs of Cuicul flourish.  
 Lover of the poor, devoted to every almsgiving  
 By whom they were never abandoned and by whom the heavenly work was  
 accomplished  
 Whose soul refrigerates and whose body rests in peace,  
 Expecting the future first resurrection in the garland of Christ  
 That he might become a companion of the saints in the place of the  
 kingdom of heaven.<sup>75</sup>

As discussed above, this inscription and those at Tipasa were modeled on a common prototype that was modified locally in both instances. The primary portion of the inscription modified for use at Djemila is lines 11-15, and the modifications made in that section offer important clues for understanding the context and dating of the inscription.

Two major additions to the text were made at Djemila, both of which contain allusions to the conflict between Donatist and Caecilianist Christians.<sup>76</sup> First, in line twelve, the Christians of Djemila are described as being united in a single gathering to declare praises to God, *in unam congeriem deo dicere laudes*. Though it was not exclusive to them, *Deo laudes* was a cry particularly associated with the Donatists; to

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<sup>75</sup> “Hic vbi tam claris laudantvr moenia tectis/cvlmina qvod nitent sanctaqve altaria cernis/non opvs est procervm sed tanti gloria facti/cresconi rectoris ovat cvm saecvla nomen/qvibvs honorificos evm ostendente labores/ivstos in pvlcrha sede gavdent locasse priores/qvos divtvrna qvies fallebat posse videri/nvnc lvce profvlgent svbnixi altare decoro/collectamqve svam gavdent florere coronam/animo qvod sollers inplevit cvstos honestvs/vndiqve se visendi stvdio cristiana decvrrit/aetas in vnam congeriem deo dicere lavdes/liminaqve sancta pedibvs contingere laeta/omnis sacra canens manvs porrigere gavdet/sacramento dei medicinam svmere c[...].ismae/cresconivs legibvs ipsis et altaribvs natvs/honoribvsqve in eclesia catolica vinctvs/castitatis cvstos caritatis paci qve dicatvs/cvivs doctrina floret innvmera plebs cvicvlitana/pavpervm amator elemosin deditvs omni/cvi nvnqvam defvere vnde opvs celeste fecisset/hvivs anima refrigerat corpvs in pace qviescit/resvrrrectione expectans fvtvram in cristo corona/consors vt fiat sanctis in sede regni celestis.” ILAlg II/3 8299 = AEpigr (1922) 25.

<sup>76</sup> cf. Albertini, “Inscription chrétienne sur mosaïque provenant de Djémila,” xxx-xxxii.

specify that it was offered *in unam congeriem* seems a clear reference to the unification of the two communions after the Conference of 411.

Second, line 15 reads *Sacramento Dei medicinam sumere (s)c[h]ismae*, which is poorly constructed but seems to mean something like, “to accept the medicine of schism through the sacrament of God.”<sup>77</sup> This is, in all likelihood, a reference to the conflict between the two communions in the Donatist conflict.<sup>78</sup> Taken as a whole, lines 11-15 seem to reflect a local situation dealing with the unification of the two communions: they have gathered to declare praises to God in a single assembly and to receive the eucharistic sacrament as the medicine of schism. These local modifications to the inscription thus suggest that the text of the inscription at Djemila was composed during the period of conflict with the Donatists, probably in the period immediately following the Conference of Carthage of 411.

Outside of these modifications, the inscription corresponds to that of Tipasa and so indicates a similar set of circumstances. Once again, the inscription cannot be considered a source for detailed descriptions of the Christian community of Djemila since most of its text comes from a prototype, but as at Tipasa the text as it stands was

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<sup>77</sup> Albertini, “Inscription chrétienne sur mosaïque provenant de Djémila,” xxx-xxxi. Février argues, however, that *(s)c[h]ismae* should be reconstructed as *crismae*. Cf. Gui, Duval, and Caillet, eds., *Basiliques Chrétiennes d’Afrique Du Nord*, 1.93.

<sup>78</sup> It could also be a reference to the schism between Arians and Caecilianists in the Vandal period. However, that would not match the evidence of a Cresconius in 411 or 553. The former would suggest the Donatist controversy, and the latter would be in the Byzantine rather than Vandal period. Augustine made reference to the medicine of the church healing schism and heresy in *Bapt.* 1.7.9 (*CSEL* 51.154.3-15): “Iam enim, ne uidear humanis argumentis id agere, quoniam quaestionis huius obscuritas prioribus ecclesiae temporibus ante **schisma** donati magnos uiros et magna caritate praeditos patres episcopos ita inter se compulit salua pace disceptare adque fluctuare, ut diu conciliorum in suis quibusque regionibus diuersa statuta nutauerint, donec plenario totius orbis concilio quod saluberrime sentiebatur etiam remotis dubitationibus firmaretur, ex euangelio profero certa documenta, quibus domino adiuuante demonstro quam recte placuerit et uere secundum deum, ut hoc in quoquam **schismatico** uel haeretico ecclesiastica **medicina** curaret in quo uulnere separabatur, illud autem quod sanum maneret agnitum potius adprobaretur quam inprobatur uulneretur.”

considered an appropriate description of the bishop and his works. That description parallels that of Alexander and his predecessors. At Djemila, the bishop Cresconius, described in the same fulsome and decidedly episcopal terms of praise as Alexander, was responsible for erecting the basilica or some portion thereof and for translating the remains of the *iusti priores* so that they might be visible to the Christian people, who come from all around to visit them. As at Tipasa, the inscription does not identify Cresconius or the *priores* as *sanctus* or *martyrus* even though the translation of their remains would seem to suggest such a status. The similarity between the two texts implies a similar set of circumstances: the local bishop has translated the remains of his predecessors and made them accessible to the Christian community.

Unlike Alexander at Tipasa, Cresconius of Djemila is known from literary evidence as well. In fact, two bishops of Djemila named Cresconius are attested in the literary record, one at the council of Carthage of 411 and the second at the Council of Constantinople of 553.<sup>79</sup> Several factors point to the fifth-century Cresconius as the most probable referent of the original inscription. First, though the precise is contested, all theories agree that the southern basilica was constructed sometime between the end of the fourth century and the middle of the fifth. Second, the allusions in the inscription to the conflict with the Donatists point to a date in the fifth century, probably in the period immediately following 411. Third, the correspondence with the inscription at Tipasa also implies a fifth century date. The inscription at Tipasa dates to the early fifth century and it is highly implausible that the same prototype, unknown anywhere else, would have

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. Christern, *Das frühchristliche Pilgerheiligtum von Tebessa*, 141.

been used in two inscriptions some 150 years apart.<sup>80</sup> If the inscription refers to one of the two known Cresconii of Djemila, it is the Cresconius of 411, and the inscription dates to the first half of the fifth century.<sup>81</sup>

The primary objection to this theory is based on the style of the mosaic. Its lettering and color scheme both are more indicative of a later date, potentially even as late as the Byzantine period, and some variations in spelling from the Tipasa mosaics also suggest a later date.<sup>82</sup> Christern attributed the stylistic difference between the Tipasa and Djemila mosaics to different workshops.<sup>83</sup> While this is plausible, it is more likely that the mosaic (and possibly the basilica itself) was reworked or replaced at some point after its initial installation. A similar scenario has been suggested at other sites, such as Chlef. In that case, the initial text of the inscription would date to an earlier period than the extant mosaic itself, and would account for the stylistic differences.<sup>84</sup>

### *The Crypt*

The crypt that ran along the eastern side of the primary basilicas was 3.5 m below the level of the nave of the north basilica and could be accessed from staircases in the northeast corners of both basilicas. The crypt was served by a corridor (2.6 m wide) that

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<sup>80</sup> cf. Christern, *Das frühchristliche Pilgerheiligtum von Tebessa*, 144.

<sup>81</sup> Of course it is possible that it refers to yet another Cresconius of Cuicul who is otherwise unknown to history. But given the evidence, this is unlikely.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Février, “Remarques sur les mosaïques de basse époque de Djemila,” *Bulletin de la Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France*, 1965, 88-92.

<sup>83</sup> Christern, *Das frühchristliche Pilgerheiligtum von Tebessa*, 144.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Robin Margaret Jensen, “Reconsidering the Ancient Algerian Basilica of Chlef and Its Mosaics,” *Acta Ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia, Institutum Romanum Norvegiae, Universitas Osloensis*, 2014, 108-9; Caillet, J.-P. Caillet, “Le dossier de la basilique chrétienne de Chlef (anciennement El Asnam ou Orléansville),” *Karthago* 21, 1987, 150.

stretched the full length of the two basilicas and beyond, over 90 m long.<sup>85</sup> The crypt included several rooms, the most prominent of which was a dual-apsed chamber under the apse and chancel of the north basilica. The “counter-apse” of this chamber was a 4.5 m semi-circle with a vaulted half-dome which extended to the west, under the chancel. To the east was an even wider apse, presumably mirroring the dimensions of the apse above. Within this apse were two columns and, at the far eastern end, a foundation block. (fig. 7, 8) Monceaux and Nussbaum both argued that this was the base of an altar, but more recently Christern has argued that it was the base for holding the remains of Cresconius and his predecessors.<sup>86</sup> Farther to the south, the crypt included another chamber under the apse of the south basilica. Here the crypt included another apsidial chamber under the apse of the basilica above, 8.1 m wide at its opening and 3.5 m deep and supported by a pair of columns. However, in lieu of a “counter-apse” under the chancel there were three niches, each 1.5 m wide.<sup>87</sup> (fig. 7) These apsidial chambers were just two of many rooms connected by the crypt’s corridor. Though interpretations have varied because no ornamentation or inscriptions have been preserved from the crypt, scholars have agreed that the space was used for cultic purposes and likely was designed to accommodate pilgrimage.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> The corridor provided access to rooms at its north end and also seems to have stretched on to the south; the southern extremity of the crypt has not been excavated. Christern, 140.

<sup>86</sup> Monceaux, CRAI, 1922, 387; O. Nussbaum, *Altar*, 182-183; Christern, *Das frühchristliche Pilgerheiligtum von Tebessa*, 143.

<sup>87</sup> Gui, Duval, and Caillet, eds., *Basiliques Chrétiennes d’Afrique Du Nord*, I.1.98.

<sup>88</sup> cf. Christern, *Das frühchristliche Pilgerheiligtum von Tebessa*, 142; Duval (N.), “La basilique cimétériale de l’Est à Djémila : une église à crypte méconnue” (avec P.-A. Février) (EACNA, XX), in *Aevum inter utrumue* (Mélanges Sanders Steenbrugge-La Haye, 1991), 133-143; Grabar, *Martyrium*, 448-9. Duval and Février describe the organization of the site at Djemila as original (and certainly indicative of a martyrological cult). The closest parallel to the crypt is that of St. Demetrius at Salonica. Grabar, *Martyrium*, 449-457.

### *Interpretation*

The inscription in the south basilica points to a similar program of episcopal commemoration and glorification as at Tipasa. An especially revered bishop, Cresconius was responsible for the translation and reburial of the remains of his predecessors in the episcopal see of Djemila. Cresconius himself was presented as a model of righteousness for the Christians of Djemila, and the display of the remains of his predecessors for veneration served to reinforce the exceptional sanctity of the bishops of Djemila and of Cresconius particularly. The inscription was not modified to name any of these figures as *sanctus* or *martyrus*, indicating that they were neither martyrs nor strictly named as saints, even though their burials trouble that distinction.<sup>89</sup> The adoption of a similar program of episcopal veneration as at Tipasa points to a similar understanding of episcopal sanctity as well.

The program of episcopal veneration pointed to by the inscription is the most likely explanation for the purpose of the massive crypt of the basilica complex. Unlike the basilica at Tipasa, there is no evidence of the burial of the *priores* in the nave of the basilica itself. Instead, the inscription provides an explanation for the crypt below the basilicas: it was the location for the remains of both Cresconius and his predecessors. As others have argued, the crypt was designed so as to allow for visitors or even pilgrims.<sup>90</sup> Whereas the Christians at Tipasa constructed a separate cemeterial basilica and *areae*,

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<sup>89</sup> cf. Christern, *Das frühchristliche Pilgerheiligtum von Tebessa*, 143. Christern argues that neither Cresconius nor the *priores* were martyrs, but that they came to be regarded as such by the people of Cuicul – the *priores* through the passage of time and Cresconius by virtue of his episcopal service.

<sup>90</sup> Christern, *Das frühchristliche Pilgerheiligtum von Tebessa*, 143-144, argued both that the facilities were designed to accommodate pilgrims and that it shared a general program as the basilica of Alexander at Tipasa.



those of Djemila incorporated the reburial and veneration of their bishops into their primary “complex” of basilicas itself through the construction of a crypt connected to both basilicas.

This practice is all the more striking because of the clear anti-Donatist allusions in the Cresconius inscription. As has already been seen, the practice of episcopal veneration evident at Tipasa and Djemila ran counter to the explicit theology of the clergy articulated by Augustine, and is in fact reminiscent of the anti-Donatist critiques leveled by Optatus and Augustine. The allusions in the inscription to the conflict with the Donatists show that the Christians of Djemila were attentive to the concerns of the conflict with the Donatists; they knew at least some of the polemical moves to make, appropriating the *Deo laudes* and describing the Donatists as schismatics who needed the healing medicine of receiving the eucharist in the unity of the true church. Despite this attention to the conflict, they do not seem to have considered the practice of venerating their bishops to be problematic. Their practice was not due to ignorance of the conflict and its issues; they did not consider it to be in conflict with correct “catholic” belief.

Even more, the explicit anti-Donatist allusions here raise the question of whether the emphasis on the *priores* itself might be understood as an implicit argument against Donatism. The question of episcopal lineage was a recurring theme in the polemic between the two communions. At the Conference of Carthage in 411 it was the Donatists who pressed this point, with Petilian of Carthage pressing Augustine on the question of

who had ordained him.<sup>91</sup> The issue was likewise raised in the exchange of treatises between these two that has come down to us only as Augustine's *Contra Litteras Petiliani*, in which Augustine cited as a basic principle of Petilian that "the *res* of everything depends upon its origin and root, and if the head does not have something, it is nothing."<sup>92</sup> However, it was not only the Donatists who emphasized the question of episcopal lineage or *origo*. It was a major theme for Cyprian, and Optatus employed as well in his treatise against Parmenian. Though Augustine sought to deemphasize the importance of the question of episcopal lineage, it was nonetheless a part of the Caecilianist polemical repertoire, the more so the more closely they relied on Cyprian.<sup>93</sup> The language of *priores*, which can mean not only predecessors but also ancestors, might have been an invocation of this line of polemic; at Djemila at least, where several anti-Donatist allusions were incorporated into the inscription, the language of *priores* may have had an added resonance of asserting the sanctity and validity of the Caecilianist episcopal lineage of Djemila over that of the Donatist communion.

The basilicas and crypt at Djemila show that the practice of episcopal veneration at Tipasa was not anomalous. Other Caecilianist Christians in Africa likewise found that practice interesting and appropriate; they likewise looked to their bishops as models of righteousness and worthy of a veneration in death that was very much like that accorded

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<sup>91</sup> *Acta Conl. Carth.*, III.221 (SC 224.1162); III.32 (SC 224.1004); III.222 (SC 224.1162); III.229, 231 (SC 224.1168, 1170); III.230, 233 (SC 224.1170, 1172). cf. Robert Eno, "Radix catholica," *Revue des études augustiniennes*, 1997, Vol. 43, n. 1, 10.

<sup>92</sup> Aug. *Petil.* 1.4.5 (BA 30.142): "Omnis res enim origine et radice consistit, et si caput non habet aliquid, nihil est." The topic is taken up again in Aug. *Cresc.*, Cf. 3.37.41. cf. Eno, "Radix Catholica," 10.

<sup>93</sup> cf. Robert Eno, "The Significance of the Lists of Roman Bishops in the Anti-Donatist Polemic," *Vigiliae christianae* 47.2, 1993, 158-169, 163; Eno, "Radix catholica," 3-13; as well as Merdinger, *Rome and the African Church*, 43-49; and Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa*, 101ff.

to the martyrs. This treatment was not due to ignorance of the issues of the conflict with the Donatists or to some kind of sympathy with their opponents; the Christians at Djemila incorporated anti-Donatist polemic into the inscription commemorating their bishop. Quite the contrary, they seemed to consider such reverence and veneration of their bishops as a valid and even laudable practice for Caecilianist Christians.

### **Benian**

Benian is a small town in northwestern Algeria, south-southeast of modern Oran. It was also the site of the ruins of ancient Ala Miliara, which seems to have taken its name from a military camp installed under Septimus Severus.<sup>94</sup> Ala Miliara was near the western end of the Roman province of Mauretania Caesariensis. The early fifth-century basilica that was found there (and has since been destroyed) was one of just a few securely identified Donatist basilicas.<sup>95</sup> It was home to the tomb of a martyr, Robba, and to several other important figures – mostly clergy – that formed a single group with her in burial. Though the grouping of these tombs with the tomb of a martyr at the center evokes *ad sanctos* burial, this was not a case of the remains of privileged Christians gradually accruing around the tomb of a martyr. On the contrary, these tombs were arranged as a single architectural group; the martyr Robba was given pride of place, but the other figures were given analogous burials within the same grouping. The Christians of Benian deemed their clergy deserving of honor and commemoration in death

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<sup>94</sup> Gui, Duval, and Caillet, eds., *Basiliques Chrétiennes d'Afrique Du Nord*, I.1.5-6.

<sup>95</sup> Lists of Donatist basilicas vary, due in large part to the lack of clear and secure categories for identifying them. Mascula/Khenchela is considered to be one, as are Uppenna and (in all likelihood) Timgad.

comparable to that of a holy martyr, implying that their sanctity in life was likewise comparable to hers.

The basilica at Benian was excavated incompletely at the end of the nineteenth century and its remains have subsequently been destroyed, limiting modern studies of the site to reliance on the turn of the century reports. The excavation of the basilica was funded by the French historical association for the study of Africa in 1899, and Stéphane Gsell entrusted the excavation to Rouziès, a teacher in nearby Tizi who had already excavated one of the inscriptions at the site.<sup>96</sup> Gsell subsequently published the results of the excavation.<sup>97</sup> However, the original excavation was not completed due to lack of resources, and the remains have since been destroyed. Thus what little modern research has been done on the site has been forced to rely on the published reports of Gsell. These modern studies include an analysis of the crypt by Grabar; a study of the inscription of the martyr Robba by Yvette Duval; and a study of the origins and nature of the structure by Lenoir, which was subsequently challenged by N. Duval.<sup>98</sup>

### *Site Overview and General Description*

The basilica possessed a single apse and a three-aisled nave. The structure's overall size was approximately 27 m x 16 m. The nave itself was approximately 21 m x 15 m and divided into three aisles by two rows of seven supports, with a central nave that

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<sup>96</sup> That of Nemessanus, a bishop of Ala Miliara, d. 422.

<sup>97</sup> S. Gsell, *Fouilles de Bénian*, Paris, 1899; Gsell, *Mon. ant.* II, n. 22, p. 175-179; cf. Gui, Duval, and Caillet, eds., *Basiliques Chrétiennes d'Afrique Du Nord*, I.1.6.

<sup>98</sup> Grabar, *Martyrium*, I, p. 446-7 with plan, fig. 102; Duval, *Loca Sanct.*, n. 194, p. 408-411, fig. 264 on p. 409 (a reproduction of the plan of Gsell); Maurice Lenoir, "Une martyre près des principia. À propos du camp et de la basilique d'Ala miliaria," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Antiquité* T. 98, n. 2., 1986, 643-664; N. Duval, *La Basilique de Bénian, L'Africa romana*, 8 (1990), 1079-1089. These burials are also mentioned by P.-A. Février in "Tombe Privilegiées," 18.

was about 7 m wide. (fig. 9) The building was oriented on an east-northeast rather than an east-west axis. The front of the basilica was furnished with a portico and a single entryway in the center of its façade. The floor of the nave was concrete and showed no evidence of mosaics. The single semi-circular apse was elevated above the floor of the nave by 1.5 m, with access provided by two stairways located on either side of a masonry platform that extended from the front of the apse. The apse had an opening of 6.8 m and was covered by a vaulted half-dome, and was surrounded by a wall that also created sacristies on each side of the apse. The sacristy on the right was on the same level as the apse and offered access to it; that on the left was lower, perhaps on the level of the nave.

#### *The Crypt and Burial Chambers*

The apse of the basilica was elevated in order to accommodate a crypt underneath, which offered access to the grave of a local martyr, Robba. The entrance to the crypt was located in the base of the lateral wall of the right sacristy, near the northeast corner of the basilica. A stairway led to the first of two rooms, a rectangular vaulted chamber located beneath the sacristy. This room, in turn, offered access to a room directly under the apse and of the same plan. In the curved portion of the outer wall, in line with the axis of the nave above, was a niche that was furnished with a fenestra equipped with a grill and a shutter. This window opened into the burial chamber of a martyr, Robba.

The burial chamber of Robba was at the center of a series of seven similar burial chambers, all aligned in a row as a single group. (fig. 9) The burial chambers were built outside the basilica and crypt on ground that sloped away from the apse. (fig. 10) As a

group, they spanned the width of the basilica, were aligned as a unit, and were furnished with an additional thin enclosure, accessible from both sides of the basilica but clearly marking them off as a distinct space.<sup>99</sup>

These burial chambers contained the remains of at least seven people, at the center of which was the martyr, Robba. The epitaph of Robba, removed by Rouziès and now at the Louvre, identified her as the sister of Honoratus, the bishop of Aquae Sirensis, as well as a martyr at the hands of *traditors* (fig. 11):

Memoria of Robba, consecrated to God, sister of Honoratus, bishop of Aqua Sirensis. Injured by the blows of traditors, she earned the dignity of martyrdom. She lived 50 years and gave up her spirit on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the kalends of April in the 395<sup>th</sup> year of the province.<sup>100</sup>

This inscription is one of the few extant commemorating a Donatist martyr. Robba was, in addition to being a martyr, a vowed ascetic and sister to a bishop. These latter traits become important in light of the identities of those buried in the chambers on either side of her. Starting from the northeast, the vaults contained: Nemessanus, bishop of Ala Miliara, died 422, and his sister, Iulia Geliola, apparently a vowed ascetic, in the same chamber;<sup>101</sup> Victor, a presbyter, died 433; Donatus, bishop of Ala Miliara, died between 440 and 446; Robba; Crescens, presbyter, died 434; an unidentified chamber; and

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<sup>99</sup> Though there is disagreement as to the degree of their alignment as a single unit. N. Duval saw it as an irregular plan, and on that basis deemed them to have occurred successively; P.-A. Février saw a regular plan and argued that they were contemporary. Noël Duval, “La basilique de Bénian (Ala Miliaria) est-elle un remploi de ‘principia’ militaires ?,” *L’Africa romana. atti dell’VIII convegno di studio, Cagliari, 14-16 dicembre 1990* 8, no. 2 (1991): 1086. Février, “Tombes Privilegiées,” 18.

<sup>100</sup> “Mem(oria) Robbe, sacre Dei. german(a)e/ Honor[ati A]qu(a)siren(sis) ep(i)s(cop)I, c(a)ede/tradi[torum] vexata, meruit digni/tate(m) martiri(i). Vixit annis L et red/didit sp(iritu)m die VIII kal(endas) apriles (anno) pro(vincia) CCCXCV.” *ILCV* 2052. Cf. Y. Duval, *Loca Sanctorum Africae*, 410-11.

<sup>101</sup> The inscription identifies her as “*sacra Dei*.” Cf. Y. Duval, *Loca*, 411.

Donatus, presbyter, died 446.<sup>102</sup> The clerical nature of the grouping is evident: all the men buried in the chambers were clergy, and except that of Robba all the chambers with identifying inscriptions contained clergy.<sup>103</sup> Though the central figure was the martyr Robba, the series of chambers emphasized the commensurate status of the clergy alongside her.

The dating of the site is contested, but the burial inscriptions do provide a firm reference point. The earliest of the deaths of those interred in the burial chambers was in 422; Robba died in 434; and the latest death was 446.<sup>104</sup> Though Robba seems to have been the catalyst for this group of burials, her death came after those of several of these figures. This suggests that at least some, and possibly all, of the burials at the site were secondary burials and the remains were translated to this site. Also, because Robba's epitaph includes a clear reference to *traditors*, the site can be confidently identified as having been a Donatist basilica at the time of her death in 434. Though the basilica was eventually taken over by Caecilianists, Donatists were in control of the site and continued to bury revered clergy here until at least 446.

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<sup>102</sup> See the chart of Pierre Salama, "Ala Miliara," *Encyclopédie berbère*, III, 1986, 432-438. Reproduced in Gui, Duval, and Caillet, eds., *Basiliques Chrétiennes d'Afrique Du Nord*, I.1.9.

<sup>103</sup> One, of course, contained the remains of both the bishop and his sister. She, unlike Robba, did not get a burial chamber to herself.

<sup>104</sup> Gsell maintained that the burial of Robba was the catalyst for the basilica and therefore dated its construction to sometime between 434-439, a theory which Grabar followed. Lenoir argued that the chambers had been built next to a pre-existing church, meaning a *terminus ante quem* of 422 for the basilica, a theory adopted by N. Duval as well. Lenoir, "Une martyre près des principia. À propos du camp et de la basilique d'Ala miliaria," 643-664; N. Duval, *La Basilique de Bénian*, 1088-89; Grabar, *Martyrium*, 447.

### *Interpretation*

The chronology of the deaths of those buried at the site are important for understanding its significance. Given the centrality of Robba's burial chamber and its connection to the crypt, as well as the arrangement of the burial chambers as a group, the burials could not have occurred sequentially at the time of death. This means that the remains of Robba and the others were translated to this location, quite possibly simultaneously. Thus the burial chambers represent the gathering together of a series of holy figures with the tomb of the martyr Robba at its center.

The site cannot be adequately interpreted as simply a case of *ad sanctos* burials, in which Christians of privilege secured burials as near to that of a martyr as possible. On the contrary, here the remains of locally important Christians – that is, clergy – have been translated in order to form an architectural grouping highlighted by the remains of a martyr. They are not clustered around her *ad hoc*, but rather organized into a group, one whose boundaries have been visibly delineated by the thin enclosure that both shielded them and marked them off. Their inscriptions and the access to them provided by the enclosure suggest that they were meant to be visible – and so visited – as well.<sup>105</sup> These were not simply privileged figures who managed to acquire for themselves burial near a martyr; the Christians of Ala Miliara gathered these remains and reburied them, highlighting their commonality. The way in which these burials have been grouped *with* rather than *around* the martyr suggests that they, too, were meant to be visited and potentially even venerated.

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<sup>105</sup> In analyzing this site, N. Duval highlights the connection between the presence of crypts and the likelihood of pilgrimage in Africa. Duval, *La Basilique de Bénian*, 1087-1088.



By gathering these figures around the remains of the martyr Robba and presenting them, like her, as objects of veneration and possibly pilgrimage, the Christians of Ala Miliara likewise identified these figures as particularly holy figures. Robba is central, but in a way that sets the tone for how the other figures are to be understood. They are, much like her, revered holy figures and models of sanctity. They do not, however, share in her martyrdom; they are not martyrs, nor are they designated as “sanctus.” What they share in common is their status as clergy. While Robba was revered as a martyr, the others buried here have nothing to recommend them but their status as clergy. The implication is that it is their status as clergy that marks them as distinctly holy, as worthy to be both buried and revered alongside the martyr. The only apparent exception here is Iulia Geliola, buried in the first chamber along with her brother. But this is instructive: the only tomb that contained someone who was *not* a member of the clergy was also the only tomb that was shared. She was deemed worthy of inclusion in this group, but she was not buried separately from her brother, a bishop.

The inclusion of Iulia Geliola also points to another important aspect of the burials at Benian: they emphasize that the practice of venerating deceased bishops was adaptable and not, in fact, limited strictly to bishops. Not only Iulia – a vowed ascetic much like Robba had been – but also three presbyters, Victor, Crescens, and Donatus, were included in the burial grouping. The practice of according not only privileged but also venerated burials on the basis of ecclesial office was not limited to that of bishop. It was not a matter of doctrine but rather one of local perception of the religious leaders of the community. At Benian, the Christian community considered their bishops and

presbyters to be comparable to the martyr Robba, enough so that they might form a single group with this holy martyr in death and burial.

### Chlef

The remains of the Christian basilica at contemporary Chlef, identified with ancient Castellum Tingitanum, have long been considered among the earliest extant in Africa. The basilica gave several indications of a particular emphasis upon the clergy, the most distinct of which was a *memoria* of the bishop Reparatus in a counter-apse. This *memoria* was the result of significant renovations to the basilica in order to bury and commemorate Castellum Tingitanum's late-fifth century bishop Reparatus.

Architecturally, the counter-apse resembled a *martyrium*; only the preservation of its mosaic makes it clear that it was not. The Christians of Castellum Tingitanum buried Reparatus in the way that other communities buried their martyrs, suggesting that they considered their bishop to be holy and worthy of commemoration akin to that of the martyrs.

The remains of a Christian basilica at what is now Chlef<sup>106</sup> were first discovered in 1843. The discovery prompted a series of studies, beginning with a first schematic plan in 1845 by Giacinto Amati that was subsequently elaborated by François Prevost; Stéphane Gsell undertook a more scientific study at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> The Arabic name for the site was Al-Asnam, which meant "Statues" and was a reference to the Roman statuary in the town. The French named the town Orleanville in the course of their conquest and colonization of Algeria, and the site is still often referred to in this way.

<sup>107</sup> G. Amanti, *Viaggio da Milano in Africa*, 1845, Milan; F. Prevost, "Notice sur Orleanville," *Revue archéologique* 4.2, 1847, 653-659; Prevost, "Sur le tombeau de Réparatus," *Revue archéologique* 5, 1848, 372-374; Prevost, "Notice sur la signification du labrynth de la basilique de Réparatus à Orleanville

In the 1930's archaeologists lifted several of the basilica's mosaics and then covered the site. The mosaics were installed in a modern church that was built over the ancient site, and the church's vicar, Gabriel Vidal, published a small pamphlet on the site that included photographs of the mosaics *in situ*. Since then there have been very few studies of the site.<sup>108</sup> The modern church that housed the ancient mosaics suffered from two major earthquakes (in 1954 and 1980) as well as the Algerian war of independence (1954-62). The ancient mosaics were almost completely destroyed, the only exceptions being a damaged panel that was installed in a modern church in Algiers and a few fragments installed in the city park.<sup>109</sup> Very little of the actual archeological remains are thus extant, and scholars are left with photographs, drawings, and previously completed plans as extant sources for studying the site.

The site has been identified as that of Roman Castellum Tingitanum, in the province of Mauretania Caesarensis, some 200 km west of Algiers. Little is known about the Christian community in this place outside of the evidence provided by the basilica itself. The basilica has been deemed the earliest surviving Christian basilica in Africa on the basis of a dedicatory inscription in the central nave which asserted that the church

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(Algérie),” *Revue archéologique* 8, 566-571. S. Gsell, *Les Monuments antiques de l'Algérie*, Paris, 1901, vol. 2:236-41.

<sup>108</sup> The exceptions to this are J.-P. Caillet, “Le dossier de la basilique chrétienne de Chlef,” 135-161, and now Jensen, “Reconsidering the Ancient Algerian Basilica of Chlef and its Mosaics,” 99-118. Cf. also N. Duval, “Les églises à deux absides d'Algérie,” 121-127, and N. Duval, *Les Églises Africaines À Deux Absides*, Recherches Archéologiques Sur La Liturgie Chrétienne En Afrique Du Nord, Paris, 1971.

<sup>109</sup> The church in which the mosaic was installed is the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart. The mosaic remains there.

was founded in 324.<sup>110</sup> However more recently scholars have contended that the basilica as excavated should be dated to a later period, identified as the structure's final phase.<sup>111</sup>

### *Site Overview and General Description*

In its final phase the basilica was approximately 26 m x 16 m with semi-circular apses enclosed by perimeter walls at both its eastern and western ends. (fig. 12) The nave was divided into five aisles by four rows of columns,<sup>112</sup> with a central nave 7 m wide. There was evidence that suggests galleries, which may have been added in the late 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>113</sup> The basilica was oriented east/west, and congregants seem to have faced east (on the basis of the orientation of several mosaics on the floor of the central nave). The eastern apse would have been primary, and it was elevated more than a meter above the level of the nave and was considerably deeper than the western apse. Underneath the apse was a large crypt that contained two empty sarcophagi. The western apse, which seems to have been a later addition, was raised just a few centimeters above the level of the nave and included a single burial.

Even in its partially preserved state in the early twentieth century, the pavement of the basilica included an abundance of extant mosaics; the floor seems to have been

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<sup>110</sup> Jensen, "Reconsidering Chlef," 108. Literally, "The 285<sup>th</sup> year of the Province and on the twelfth day before the kalands of December, the foundations of this basilica were established."

<sup>111</sup> However this (rather indefinite) dating is not sure. The mosaic shows evidence of having been restored at some point, possibly much later than its referenced date, and in fact the mosaic panel may not date to this period at all; it could refer to an earlier church on the same spot. It may have been built on an early fourth-century foundation, and this mosaic may be a reproduction of an earlier mosaic. Jensen, "Reconsidering Chlef," 104-5; cf. Caillet, "Le dossier de la basilique chrétienne de Chlef," 150.

<sup>112</sup> There is disagreement in the sources as to whether these were columns or piers. Cf. Jensen, "Reconsidering Chlef," 100.

<sup>113</sup> There was evidence of stairs at the western ends of both the north and the south aisles. Beyond this, though, very little can be said with confidence about the placement, extent, or dating of the galleries.

almost entirely covered with mosaics. Most were of abstract design, but six panels offer important details about either the basilica itself or about the practice of Christianity in Mauretania Caesariensis.<sup>114</sup> Three of these are of particular interest for understanding the significance of the clergy and the practice of episcopal burial. The most important, that in the western apse, will be discussed in some detail below. Secondly, there was a small square panel immediately to the south of the eastern apse and abutting its platform. This panel was inscribed with a palindrome composed of the name and title of a cleric, *[M]ARINUS SACERDOS*. It is not clear to whom the inscription refers, but two possibilities are known: a Marinus of Arles who was the president of the Council of Arles (314) and a Marinus who was listed among the African bishops who ratified the decrees of the Council of Sardica in 342/3.<sup>115</sup> Beyond these faint possibilities, the identity of this Marinus is unknown, and in fact no evidence exists for any bishop of Castellum Tingitanum outside that of the basilica itself.<sup>116</sup> Thirdly, and more tentatively, there was the dedicatory inscription at the center of the westernmost panel that includes the witness to the foundation of the basilica in 324. Much of the inscription is missing, but that which remains requests that a “servant of God” (*seruum Dei*) be “kept in mind” (*in mente habeas*). While the name of this “servant of God” has not been preserved, scholars have

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<sup>114</sup> Cf. Jensen, “Reconsidering Chlef,” 102. “One offers information about the foundation of the church, another illustrates the likely design and location of the church’s altar, two refer to the importance of the church as a symbol of unity for African Christians, and the last two reflect the particular tradition of burying clergy beneath the presbyterium or, alternately, devoting an entire counter apse as a shrine for a particularly honored bishop or cleric, in a manner parallel to the cult of the saints or martyrs.”

<sup>115</sup> Jensen, “Reconsidering Chlef,” 103. Cf. G. Vidal, *Un témoin d’une date célèbre: la basilique chrétienne d’Orléansville*, Algiers, 1936, 42; J.-L. Maier, *L’Épiscopat de l’Afrique romaine vandaleet byzantine*, 26, 126, 356. The Council of Arles, of course, vindicated Caecilian of Carthage and ruled against the party that would come to be referred to as “Donatists,” and likewise ruled against rebaptism and reordination. This could offer some basis, however tenuous, for reference to the non-African Maurinus who presided at Arles.

<sup>116</sup> Jensen, “Reconsidering Chlef,” 108. Cf. Maier, *L’Épiscopat de l’Afrique*, 54, 125, 418; Serge Lancel, *Actes de la conférence de Carthage en 411 (SC 194)*, Paris, 1973, vol. 1, 140 n. 3.

argued that it referred to the founder of the basilica, likely a bishop and perhaps even the Marinus of the palindrome.<sup>117</sup> These inscriptions hint at the importance and prominence of the clergy to the people of Castellum Tingitatum, a theme that is made explicit in the western apse.<sup>118</sup>

### *The Western Apse and the Burial of Reparatus*

At some point in the fifth century, the Christians of Castellum Tingitanum added a western nave in order for the burial and commemoration of a particularly venerable bishop. Though it is well integrated into the plan of the nave, the western apse was likely a later addition to the basilica; its presence would have precluded a main entrance at that end of the basilica. The addition would have been no earlier than the early mid-fifth century, but the apse in its final state would have dated to some time after 475, the date of the death of Reparatus as witnessed in the epitaph.<sup>119</sup> The purpose of this renovation to the basilica is clear: it was a space for the burial and commemoration of the community's late fifth century bishop Reparatus.

The design and purpose of the space are evident from photographs taken in the 1930s by Vidal and, especially, from its mosaic floor (fig. 13), which reflected the design

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<sup>117</sup> Cf. Jensen, "Reconsidering Chlef," 104; N. Duval & P.-A. Fevrier, "Le décor des monuments chrétiens d'Afrique du Nord," *Actas Del VIII Congreso Internacional De Arqueologia Cristiana, Barcelona, 5-11 Octubre 1969*, *Studi di antichità cristiana* 30, Barcelona, 1972, 8, 24; Caillet, "Le dossier de la basilique chrétienne de Chlef," 150, who argues that this figure was "an ecclesiastic," but on the inconclusive evidence of the use of the term "*seruum Dei*."

<sup>118</sup> The palindrome commemorating "Marinus Sacerdos," like the epitaph of Reparatus, draws attention to the theologically significant role of the bishop as priest; its location immediately next to the eastern apse, which stood over a crypt containing two burials, suggests the possibility (admittedly unverifiable) that one of the tombs might be that of Marinus. The unidentified "servant of God" commemorated in the dedicatory inscription was likely, though not certainly, a member of the clergy as well. All of these features hint at a particularly clerical focus at Chlef, a focus that is nevertheless made quite explicit in the burial of Reparatus.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Jensen, "Reconsidering Chlef," 107.

of the space and indicated its purpose. The apse was raised by just a few centimeters above the level of the nave floor, from which it was also separated by a low masonry barrier.<sup>120</sup> As the mosaic indicates, the apse possessed a triple-arched opening supported by fluted columns with Corinthian capitals and stepped bases, and was covered by a semi-dome. The central arch, wider and taller than those on its right and left, was topped with a tympanum. The left and right arches of the mosaic included motifs of vases, birds, flowers, and wreathed rosettes, while the central arch displayed a much larger rosette in which was inscribed the epitaph of Reparatus.

Here rests our father of holy memory, Reparatus the bishop, who served in the priesthood for eight years and eleven months and went ahead of us in peace on the eleventh day before the Kalends of August in the 436<sup>th</sup> year of the province.<sup>121</sup>

The counter apse was plainly added in order to honor and commemorate the bishop Reparatus. The substantial renovation required to do this – the relocation of the basilica’s entrances and the addition of a counter apse – and the monumental nature of the addition indicate the importance of Reparatus to the Christians of Castellum Tingitanum.

### *Interpretation*

The reverence given to Reparatus by the Christians of Castellum Tingitanum was by all indications on the basis of his exercise of the episcopal office and not due to martyrdom nor to any broader renown. There are no other known references to Reparatus. The epitaph describes him simply as bishop and as having exercised the

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<sup>120</sup> Jensen, “Reconsidering Chlef,” 107. The barrier was visible in the photograph of Vidal.

<sup>121</sup> “Hic requiescat sanctae memoriae pater noster Reparatus e.p.s. qui fecit in sacerdotium annos VIII, men. XI et precessit nos in pace die undecimu. Kal. Aug prounc. CCCCXXX et sexta.” ILCV 1.1104; *CIL* 8:9709.

priesthood.<sup>122</sup> He occupied this office for less than nine years, a surprisingly brief tenure given the reverence and honor he was shown in death. The epitaph offers no account of his accomplishments or virtues and employs no other honorifics. The epitaph does honor Reparatus as *sanctae memoriae*, “of holy memory,” but this does not indicate that he was a saint or, even less, a martyr. This phrase is distinct from the honorifics used for those considered saints (“sanctus”) or, of course, martyrs (“*martyrus*”).<sup>123</sup> On the contrary, *sanctae memoriae* was a common honorific for bishops in literary sources of the period.<sup>124</sup> The honor paid Reparatus in death was not because he was a saint or martyr, but because of his exercise of the office of bishop and priest.

Though revered as a bishop rather than a saint or martyr, the architectural setting of his burial belies a straightforward privileged clerical burial. Most obviously, it required extensive renovations to the basilica: the addition of a western apse and the relocation of the structure’s primary entrances. The apse itself was furnished with architectural elements that set it off: the columns, the triple-arched opening, the tympanum, and the low masonry barrier witnessed by Vidal all marked the space as particularly important. Set opposite the eastern apse with its presbyterium and, immediately in front of it, the altar, the architecture of the western apse suggests a second cultic space. This second cultic space was not only devoted to the commemoration of Reparatus; a casket was discovered just behind the apse that may have contained the bishop’s remains. If this

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<sup>122</sup> As we have already seen, *sacerdos* was a title usually reserved for bishops in this period. Its inclusion here may be taken as further emphasis on his liturgical role and its importance for the local community.

<sup>123</sup> Jensen, “Reconsidering Chlef,” 113; cf. Caillet, “Le dossier de la basilique chrétienne de Chlef.”

<sup>124</sup> Jensen, “Reconsidering Chlef,” 113. Though not in the epigraphic record, at least in Africa. Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine all used the phrase to describe highly regarded, deceased, bishops. Petilian also used the phrase to describe Donatus at the Council of Carthage in 411. *Col. Carth.* 2.10; 3.32. As Jensen points out, the term could also be used for lesser clergy, but these instances are relatively rare.



casket was evidence of a secondary burial, as Jensen has suggested, this would imply that the local Christians of Castellum Tingitanum treated the remains of Reparatus as relics.<sup>125</sup> Such treatment is, of course, more characteristic of the burials of saints and martyrs than beloved bishops. Despite the clear evidence of the epitaph that Reparatus was honored as a bishop rather than as a saint or martyr, the Christians of Castellum Tingitanum buried him in an elaborate, purpose-built space that, architecturally, was not significantly different from a *martyrium* or martyrial *memoria*, and that, much like at the “basilica of Alexander” at Tipasa, might best be thought of in terms of a *memoria* of Reparatus. The burial of Reparatus blurs the line between episcopal burial and martyrial *memoria*, and in so doing suggests that Christians of North Africa were willing to consider their bishops as akin to saints and martyrs in death and – potentially – in life.

### **Ksar-el-Kelb**

The remains of the basilica at Ksar-el-Kelb offer tantalizing yet incomplete evidence of the burial and veneration of bishops. The site may be that of ancient Vegesela, the place of the trial of a delegation of Donatist bishops, and it included the only extant remains of the cult of the leader of that delegation, the martyr-bishop Marculus, in the form of a *memoria* that included a reliquary.<sup>126</sup> The apse also contained a series of burials analogous to those at the chapel of Alexander in Tipasa. Because the burials were not accompanied by any extant inscriptions, it is impossible to identify

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<sup>125</sup> Jensen, “Reconsidering Chlef,” 114. The lead and wooden casket was discovered in 1844 and at that time was assumed to contain the remains of Reparatus. Jensen suggests that this may have been a secondary burial, implying that the Christians of Castellum Tingitanum may have considered his remains sacred relics.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. chapter 2, *supra*, for a discussion of the *Passio Marculi*.

whose remains they contained. On the basis of received ideas about Donatist practice and assumptions about who could be buried in an apse, earlier scholars hypothesized that these were martyrs. However, the burials examined in this chapter have shown that one did not need to be a martyr in order to receive such a burial. The physical evidence at Ksar-el-Kelb most closely parallels that of the other sites considered here, especially that of Tipasa, suggesting that revered clergy are just as likely to have been the recipients of the honored burials at Ksar-el-Kelb as were martyrs.

Though first noted in 1876 by Bosredon, the basilica at Ksar-el-Kelb was not excavated until the 1930's when two excavations were conducted. The first of these, under Cayrel in 1933, was incomplete. Courcelle continued the excavations in 1935 excavating the apse, the nave, and the sacristies. Since that time, the building has been completely destroyed, though the location was still identifiable in 1971 according to N. Duval. This helps to explain the dearth of modern studies on the site: though it has been included in a series of topical studies, the only modern work devoted specifically to it is an article on its sculptures by N. Duval.<sup>127</sup> Nevertheless, the site offers important evidence of the ways in which African Christians buried and commemorated their very special dead, and shows intriguing parallels with the other sites under consideration here, especially Tipasa.

#### *Site Overview and General Description*

The basilica at Ksar-el-Kelb was oriented nearly east/west with a single apse at the eastern end. Its overall dimensions were approximately 29 m x 12 m, with a 26 m x

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<sup>127</sup> N. Duval, *BCTH, Afrique du Nord* 8, 1972, 103-110.

12 m nave divided into three zones by two rows of 7 supports and a central nave 4.5 m wide. The opening of the apse was likewise 4.5 m, the full width of the central nave, and it was just over 2 m deep. The apse was elevated nearly 1.5 m in order to accommodate burials beneath it (cf. *infra*).<sup>128</sup> There were two sacristies; that to the north was at the level of the nave and offered access to the apse by a small stairway; that to the south, identified as a “*diaconium*,”<sup>129</sup> was at the level of the apse. It was in this space that the *memoria* of Marculus was located (cf. *infra*). The chancel was the full width of the central nave and extended 5.2 m from the apse. It was surrounded by an enclosure or rail<sup>130</sup> that extended into the easternmost span of the south aisle in order to enclose the *memoria* of Marculus. Though Courcelle dated the basilica’s origins to the 4<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>131</sup> in its excavated state it had clearly been extensively remodeled, partially to integrate the remains of Marculus.

Ksar-el-Kelb may be ancient Vegesela, the rural Numidian estate where a delegation of ten Donatist bishops was arrested and tortured by the imperial agent Macarius. This identification had been proposed as early as 1882, and Cayrel and Courcelle both argued that the excavations of the site and the discovery of the *memoria*

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<sup>128</sup> Pierre Courcelle, “Une Seconde Campagne de Fouilles À Ksar-El-Kelb,” *Mélanges D’archéologie et D’histoire* 53, no. 1 (1936): 178, specified the elevation of the apse as 1.46 m. Courcelle, 178.

<sup>129</sup> Courcelle, “Une Seconde Campagne de Fouilles À Ksar-El-Kelb,” 175.

<sup>130</sup> Courcelle, “Une Seconde Campagne de Fouilles À Ksar-El-Kelb,” 174-78. The enclosure was not extant, but the recesses in the floor for its supports were evident.

<sup>131</sup> Courcelle, “Une Seconde Campagne de Fouilles À Ksar-El-Kelb,” 174. Courcelle made this determination primarily on the basis of a Constantinian chrism discovered in the interior of the sarcophagus located under the altar.

of Marcus made this identification secure.<sup>132</sup> Though this identification has subsequently been disputed, it has recently been accepted by Shaw on the basis of the evidence of the Antonine Itinerary.<sup>133</sup> If it is indeed Vegesela, then by 411 it had been taken over by Caecilianists, as an exchange at the Conference of Carthage demonstrates.<sup>134</sup> The basilica was clearly in use by the Donatist communion, at least at the time of its renovation. Given this timeline, the renovations that included the introduction of the *memoria* could be no later than the early 5<sup>th</sup> century.

### *The Memoria of Marcus and the Unidentified Burials*

The *memoria* of Marcus was, remarkably, the only extant material remains of the cult of Marcus. Marcus was the head of a delegation of Donatist bishops that met with the imperial notaries Paul and Macarius at Vegesela in 347.<sup>135</sup> The meeting went exceedingly poorly, and “the bishops were taken into custody” and tortured. The others were then released, but Marcus remained a prisoner and, after being marched from city

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<sup>132</sup> Cf. Pierre Cayrel, “Une Basilique Donatiste de Numidie,” *Mélanges D’archéologie et D’histoire* 51, no. 1 (1934): 139-140, for a brief history of the various identifications of the site; cf. Courcelle, “Une Seconde Campagne de Fouilles À Ksar-El-Kelb,” 166-7, 196-97.

<sup>133</sup> Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 183. Cayrel and Courcelle had argued that the presence of the relics of Marcus secured the identification of the site as Vegesela. Delehaye and Y. Duval rejected this premise, arguing that the relics of Marcus may have spread throughout the region. Delehaye, 89; Y. Duval, *Loca Sanctorum*, 705.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 575. The Caecilianist bishop of Vegesela was present in 411, while the Donatist bishop of Cillium claimed both to have clergy and people there and that they were denied access to the places and *memoria* of their martyrs. *Col. Carth.* (SC 195:756): “Et accedente Donato Cillitano episcopo, idem dixit: ‘Dianonos illic habeo, vicina plebs agit, diocesis mea est.’ Privatianus episcopus ecclesiae Catholicae dixit: ‘Ubi convenient?’ Donatus episcopus dixit: ‘Et loca et memorias martyrum tamen prohibuisti. Candidum non habui presbyterum inde?’” As Shaw points out, this suggests that the Caecilianists had taken over the basilica and were denying access to the shrine of Marcus. However, there is also the claim of the Donatist bishop of Nova Petra, *Col. Carth.* 1.187. (SC 195:834): “I have no rival, because there is the Lord Marcus, whose blood God will avenge on the day of judgment.” Y. Duval, *Loca Sanctorum*, 2.705, points to this as evidence of the tomb of Marcus at Nova Petra.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. chapter 2, *supra*, for a discussion of these events and of the *Passio Marculi*.

to city in Numidia, was eventually executed at Nova Petra. Marculus had been a prominent figure within the Donatist communion before his death and afterwards was among the most revered of Donatist martyrs.<sup>136</sup> The *memoria* at Ksar-el-Kelb was complex. (fig. 14) It included a *mensa* installed in the floor of the *diaconium*, which had been expanded into the southern aisle for this purpose. There was a cavity in the middle of the *mensa* which, per Courcelle, would have held a reliquary.<sup>137</sup> In front of this *mensa* was a small stone vessel, which Courcelle theorized was a stoup. In front of this vessel was the inscription identifying the *memoria*: *Memoria do/mni Marchuli*. The entire installation was enclosed by an extension of the chancel barrier into the south aisle at the first span. Thus it seems to have included relics, a *mensa*, a stoup, and an inscription, visible but not physically accessible to the laity.

In addition to the *memoria* of Marculus, the basilica had nine burials in important cultic areas. Eight of these burials were under the apse and were the reason for its elevation. (fig. 15) Of the burials in the apse, six were in sarcophagi and two were carved in the rock on which the apse rested. They were arranged in two rows of four each, but were not aligned and gave no other evidence of any discernible order; their dimensions, form, and manner of construction were all disparate.<sup>138</sup> Still, the apse in its final state was constructed in order to contain the burials and is contemporaneous with them.<sup>139</sup> The

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<sup>136</sup> Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 180. *Pas Marc*. emphasizes his high social standing, virtue, and prominence among the bishops of his communion, though later Caecilianist interpreters rejected the image of Marculus as man of social standing. Pamela Bright, "Donatist Bishops," 281 describes Marculus as the ideal bishop. cf. Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, 77-87.

<sup>137</sup> Courcelle, "Une Seconde Campagne de Fouilles À Ksar-El-Kelb," 177-78. The reliquary had, unfortunately, been despoiled.

<sup>138</sup> Courcelle, "Une Seconde Campagne de Fouilles À Ksar-El-Kelb," 179.

<sup>139</sup> Courcelle, "Une Seconde Campagne de Fouilles À Ksar-El-Kelb," 179-180.

ninth burial was discovered under the presumed location of the altar.<sup>140</sup> There, aligned axially with the head to the west, was a single monolithic stone sarcophagus.<sup>141</sup> Though the location of this burial suggests a martyr, no identifying inscriptions are extant for this burial or any of the others. Courcelle identified them as the companions of Marculus at Vegesela.<sup>142</sup> It is a tempting hypothesis, especially since the number of burials matches precisely the number of Marculus' companions, but it is entirely unverifiable.<sup>143</sup>

### *Interpretation*

Despite the very limited physical evidence provided by the site, Courcelle assumed that the person buried under the altar was a martyr and those under the apse saints on the basis of nothing other than location and the assertion that the Donatists did not permit burials within churches except in the case of "true" martyrs.<sup>144</sup> Though this identification outstrips the existing evidence, it does highlight the importance attached to particular zones within Christian basilicas. The locations of their burials – in the apse and under the altar – were enough to suggest that they were martyrs. A more modest proposal better fits the evidence: their intentional placement in these key cultic areas of the basilica suggests that these figures were of particular cultic or religious significance to the Christian community at Ksar-el-Kelb.

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<sup>140</sup> Courcell, "Une Seconde Campagne de Fouilles À Ksar-El-Kelb," 173-74. Within the chancel enclosure and under a *ciborium*, the remains of which were discovered.

<sup>141</sup> Though it did have a Constantinian chrismon carved on the inside of the sarcophagus (cf. *supra*).

<sup>142</sup> Courcelle, "Une Seconde Campagne de Fouilles À Ksar-El-Kelb," 182.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Y. Duval, *Loca Sanctorum*, 160.

<sup>144</sup> Courcelle, "Une Seconde Campagne de Fouilles À Ksar-El-Kelb," 180-182.

The urge to identify these burials as the companions of Marculus is understandable. Were that identification true, these burials would offer a paradigmatic example of a supposedly distinctive Donatist veneration of their bishops. They would blur the lines between martyrs and bishops, treating bishops as though they shared the sanctity of martyrs. The addition of the relics of Marculus, the martyr-bishop, would only confirm this image of Ksar-el-Kelb (or, perhaps, “Ve gesela”) as a basilica devoted to venerating bishops – Donatist bishops – in the manner of saints.

As it stands, the site shares significant physical similarities with the basilica of Alexander at Tipasa, a fact that raises questions about the differing interpretations of the sites. At Ksar-el-Kelb, like at Tipasa, a series of revered figures were interred as a group under the principal eastern platform, which was constructed unusually high above the floor of the nave specifically to accommodate these burials. (fig. 15) In both cases, the groups of figures were not the primary focus of the site; at Tipasa that honor belonged to Alexander, and at Ksar-el-Kelb presumably to the figure under the altar and, later and much more certainly, to Marculus. In neither case have identifications of those buried survived.<sup>145</sup> These parallels are highly suggestive; the arrangement at Tipasa – an arrangement that has already been shown to have analogs at Djemila and Benian – might serve as an explanation of that at Ksar-el-Kelb. Nine revered figures, particularly important to and considered particularly holy by the local Christian community, were given visibly honorific burials that mark them as holy. They need not be martyrs nor deemed *sanctus*, for as has been demonstrated this sort of burial did not require such

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<sup>145</sup> With the exception of the lone inscription of Renuatus at Tipasa.

status. On the basis of the other sites it is entirely possible, though not necessary, that they were simply revered clergy.

Moreover, the material aspects of the *memoria* of Marculus are no more architecturally prominent than those of Alexander at Tipasa, Reparatus at Chlef, or Cresconius at Djemila. The *memoria* of Marculus at Ksar-el-Kelb is remarkable, to be sure, but primarily because it is the only material evidence of a cult that is also so clearly attested to in the literary record. As for the material remains themselves, there are differences in form but not in architectural prominence. The *memoria* of Marculus incorporated a *mensa* and seems to have held only relics rather than his complete remains. By contrast, the *memoria* of Alexander and Reparatus seem to have been complete burials.<sup>146</sup> Despite Marculus' renown, his *memoria* was installed in the *presbyterium* of the basilica rather than in a more prominent location. The renovation did not disturb the centrality of the burials under the altar or in the apse. Nor was this a matter of access for the laity, since the chancel barrier was modified to include the *memoria* in this restricted space. In contrast, the entirety of the funerary basilica at Tipasa functioned as a *memoria* of Alexander, and at Chlef a counter-apse was added to the basilica for the *memoria* of Reparatus. On the basis of the architectural remains alone it would be difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish which sites were dedicated to martyrs and which were simply dedicated to clergy.

In the absence of identifying evidence, the burials at Ksar-el-Kelb and the basilica itself have been interpreted in light of received accounts of supposed Donatists practice.

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<sup>146</sup> Presumably the burial of Cresconius was as well, though the evidence for that has not survived.



But the basilica and its burials are more plausibly interpreted in light of the parallels between Ksar-el-Kelb and the other sites examined here. Given the phenomenon of episcopal veneration demonstrated in this chapter, the burials and *memoria* at Ksar-el-Kelb look less like curious examples of Donatist cultic practices and more like another example of episcopal veneration by African Christians. In that case, the notion that Donatists revered their bishops in supposedly peculiar ways looks even less sustainable.

### **Conclusion**

These burial practices considered in this chapter indicate that at least some African Christians regarded their bishops as uniquely holy whether they were martyrs or not, and even if they could or would not claim them explicitly as saints. This practice takes on particular significance in North Africa in the fourth and fifth centuries, in which the sanctity of the clergy was a frequent subject of controversy. Even as Augustine argued that the clergy possessed neither a distinct sanctity nor a power to sanctify others that was different from that shared by the whole Body of Christ, African Christians were busy constructing edifices proclaiming the distinct sanctity of their bishops. These *memoriae* honored these dead bishops in ways that blurred the distinctions between saints, martyrs, and bishops. This was true of both Christian communions, Donatist and Caecilianist. The distinction between the cult of the saints and the commemoration of bishops breaks down in these cases because these North African Christians regarded their bishops as particularly holy. They did not need to invent a tradition of martyrdom in order to treat their deceased bishops as saints. For them, the bishops simply *were* holy,

like the saints. This explanation not only makes sense of the otherwise rather anomalous material remains; it also corresponds to the known concerns of African Christianity in which the holiness of the bishops was such an important and hotly contested issue. By burying their bishops as other communities might saints, these Christians – both Donatist and Caecilianist – were making their beliefs clear: their bishops were indeed exalted and holy figures.

## CONCLUSION

Our earliest sources for Christianity in Africa bespeak a deep concern over the human and social mediation of divine life, and from that concern arose conflict over who could exercise that power and on what basis. In the middle of the third century a consensus formed around the teaching of Cyprian, in which the distinctive ritual powers of the bishops were reified into a theory of their exclusive possession of the power to forgive sins and sanctify. In this system, the bishops had to be pure in order to serve as effective channels of divine power. For Christians in the fourth century this understanding was an accepted aspect of the African tradition.

The Donatists continued this theory, albeit with some modifications. They insisted that the bishops alone possessed the power to forgive sins and to sanctify and that as such they were in some sense mediators of the grace of God. Their unique role as bearers of divine power meant that they were looked upon as particularly holy. Later Caecilianist polemic construed these claims as prideful, but they were in fact part of their ongoing adherence to the Cyprianic system.

Augustine undertook a profound revision of this tradition in order to account for the changed historical context of the fifth century and especially to explain the changed religious practices of the Caecilianist communion. In Augustine's theory the power to forgive sins and to sanctify was held in common by all faithful Christians. Differences of position within the church did not indicate spiritual difference. The church's ministries

were spiritual gifts held in common by the whole body. Augustine put this theory forward as the true one, following Optatus in branding the Donatists as having forsaken the truth.

The religious practices of Caecilianist Christians of the time tell a different tale. Outside of the works of Augustine, the Caecilianist understanding of the bishops and their ministry looks surprisingly like that of the Donatists. Though Optatus disagreed sharply with his Donatist opponents over the use of penance on the clergy, his arguments against the practice relied on the Cyprianic theory. They had been transformed by a distinctive spiritual anointing, and to subject them to penance would be a sacrilege akin to exorcising the Holy Spirit. Indeed, it would result in a kind of spiritual death. On the eve of Augustine's ordination, the bishops who gathered at Carthage to reform the Caecilianist church sought to do so by strengthening the bishops' place at the center of their communities. For them, the bishops alone possessed the power to sanctify, and with that power came the necessity of maintaining their own (sexual) purity so that their sacramental ministry would continue to be effective. Their vision of reform entailed strengthening, not resisting, a Cyprianic theory of episcopal ministry. And across North Africa, both Caecilianists and their Donatist rivals continued to commemorate their bishops with burials that look suspiciously like *martyria*. These Christians did not claim that these bishops were martyrs, or even "saints;" they did not need to because for them the bishops were exalted and holy figures in their own right.

These conclusions challenge prior conceptions of the relationship between Augustine and his Caecilianist colleagues. Though he was its most skilled and most effective proponent, Augustine was not representative of Caecilianist Christianity. At

least when it came to the question of the role of the minister in mediating the divine life, one of the core issues of African theology, Augustine's theory was peculiar even within his own communion. Far from offering the conclusive "orthodox" answer to the "heresy" of the Donatists, as has long been the scholarly narrative, Augustine's theory of ministry was ingenious, nuanced, deeply influenced by the African tradition – and idiosyncratic. His fellow Caecilianists did not stray nearly so far from their Cyprianic roots. His vision of episcopal ministry, in which all Christians shared the Church's spiritual gifts and the bishops were simply fellow members of the body of Christ elevated to a lofty position for the sake of their peers, was not widely accepted. Caecilianists continued to look upon episcopal office as an honor and continued to consider its holders as distinctly holy.

This study has also challenged the notion that the understanding of the episcopal ministry was a major point of contention between the two communions. The scholarly consensus has long been that the two factions shared a basic doctrinal perspective and a more or less common liturgy but disagreed fundamentally over the nature of the sacraments and ministry. This study has shown that this consensus is incorrect. There were some significant differences in practice between the two communions, and these differences in practice drove some theological reinterpretation. But the picture that emerges from the works of Augustine (and that continues to shape scholarly discourse) of the Caecilianists and Donatists having fundamentally different understandings of the nature of episcopal ministry is false. *Augustine* and the Donatists had fundamentally different perspectives. In practice, Caecilianists continued to view their bishops much as African Christians had since the time of Cyprian – as the divinely empowered figures at

the center of their church. Despite polemical claims to the contrary, the theological understanding of the ministry of the bishops was not a meaningful difference between the two communions.

The results of this study raise significant questions for future research. Much work also remains to be done on theologies of clerical and episcopal ministry in Late Antiquity. Scholarship on this question has thus far not taken seriously the regional differences of Christianity. If African Christians not only possessed a distinct and well-established theory but even multiple African theories, this raises the question of how Christians in other regions and theological traditions understood and explained the ministry of their clergy and calls for more focused regional investigations.

That Augustine was not describing two static understandings of the bishops and their ministry, “Donatist” and “Catholic,” but rather offering a newly revised theory raises questions about the purposes and functions of Augustine’s polemic against the Donatists. The consensus that formed around Cyprian’s teaching in the middle of the third century was in part a result of a campaign of letter writing and conciliar activity. The renewed African conciliar activity spearheaded by Augustine and Aurelius of Carthage beginning in the late fourth century is an understudied aspect of African Christianity, and one potential avenue of future research is the relationship between these conciliar efforts and the simultaneous campaign against the Donatists.

## APPENDIX



Figure 1: Tipasa, cathedral (photograph by R. M. Jensen, used with permission)

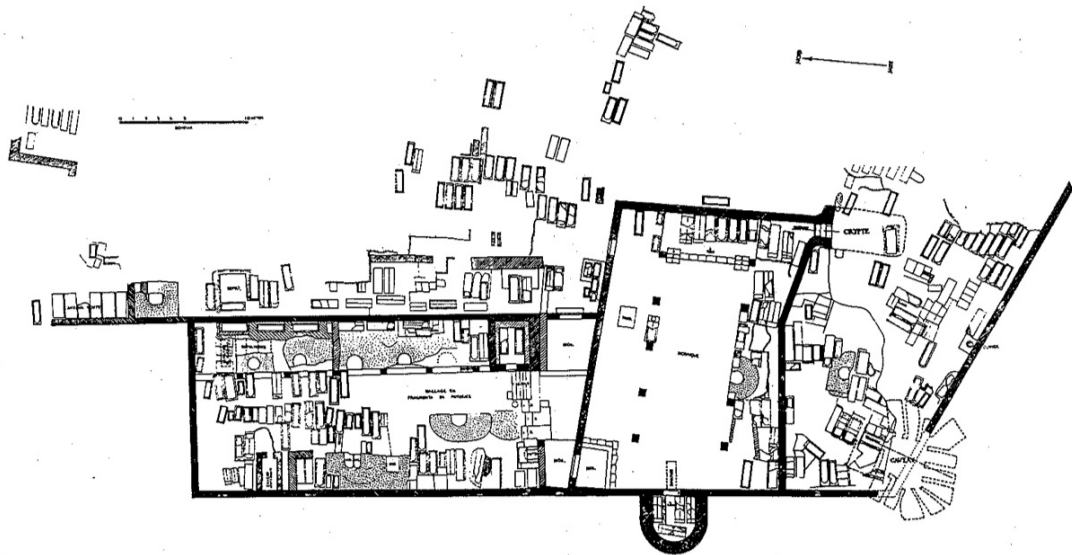


Figure 2: Tipasa, approximate site plan of funerary basilica of Alexander and surrounding complex (Noël Duval, *Les Églises Africaines À Deux Absides, Recherches Archéologiques Sur La Liturgie Chrétienne En Afrique Du Nord*, vol. II. Paris: E. de Boccard, 1973, 13).

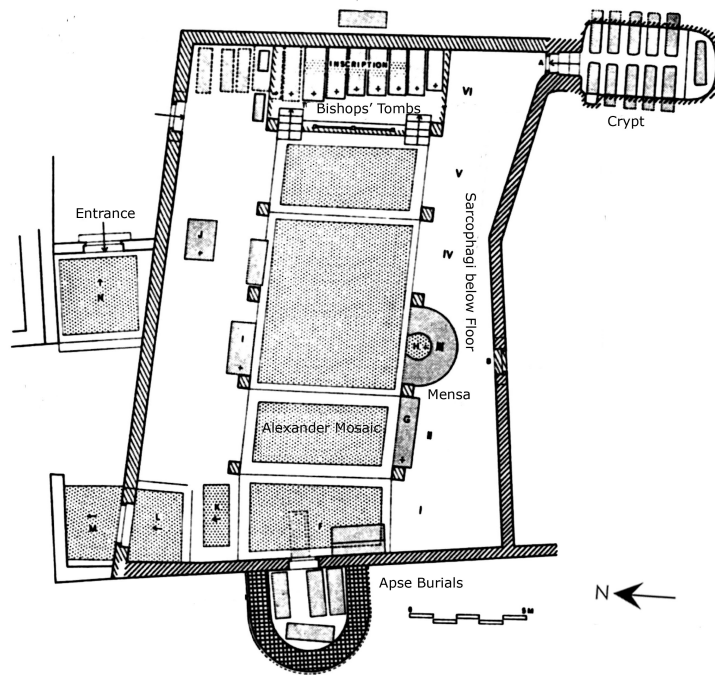


Figure 3: Tipasa, plan of funerary basilica of Alexander, Tipasa (Noël Duval, *Les Églises Africaines À Deux Absides, Recherches Archéologiques Sur La Liturgie Chrétienne En Afrique Du Nord*, vol. II. Paris: E. de Boccard, 1973, 14).





Figure 4: Tipasa, sarcophagi in eastern platform (photo by R. M. Jensen, used with permission)

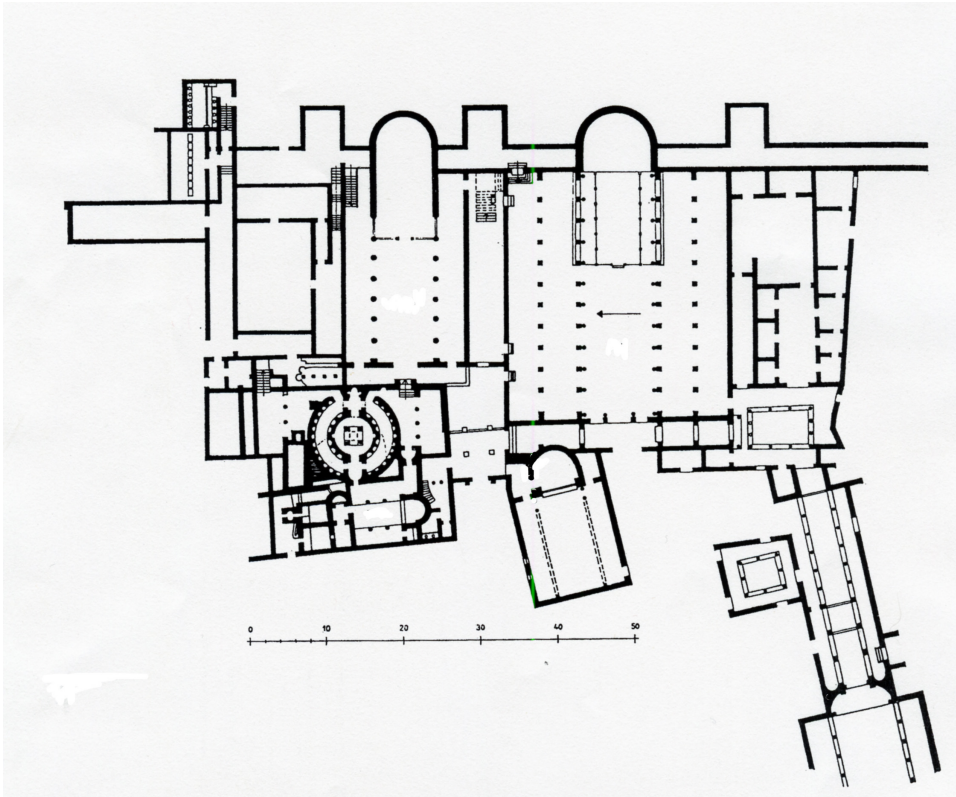


Figure 5: Site plan of episcopal complex, Djemila, (Christern, *Das frühchristliche Pilgerheiligtum von Tebessa*, 138)



Figure 6: Djemila, double churches with baptistery in background (photo by R M Jensen, used with permission)

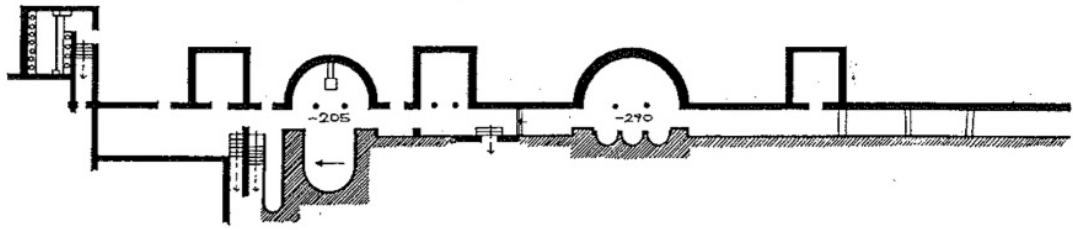


Figure 7: Djemila, approximate plan of crypt (Christern, *Das frühchristliche Pilgerheiligtum von Tebessa*, 139)



Figure 8: Djemila, crypt, from south basilica (photo: author)

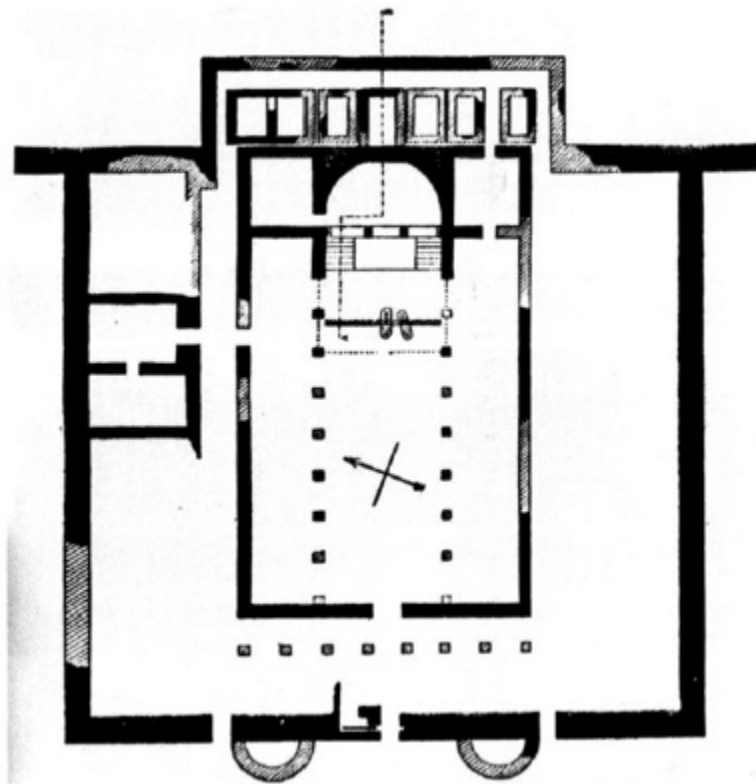


Figure 9: Benian, approximate plan (S. Gsell, *Les Fouilles de Benian (Ala Miliara)*, Paris, 1899), fig. 5)

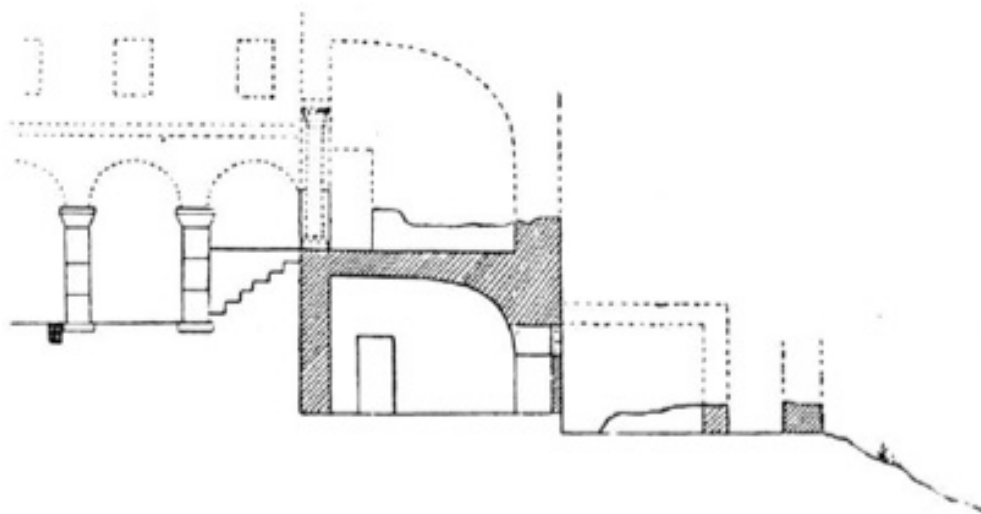


Figure 10: Benian, elevation of crypt and burial chambers (S. Gsell, *Les Fouilles de Benian (Ala Miliara)*, Paris, 1899), fig. 10)



Figure 11: Benian, inscription commemorating Robba (S. Gsell, *Les Fouilles de Benian (Ala Miliara)*, Paris, 1899), fig. 7)

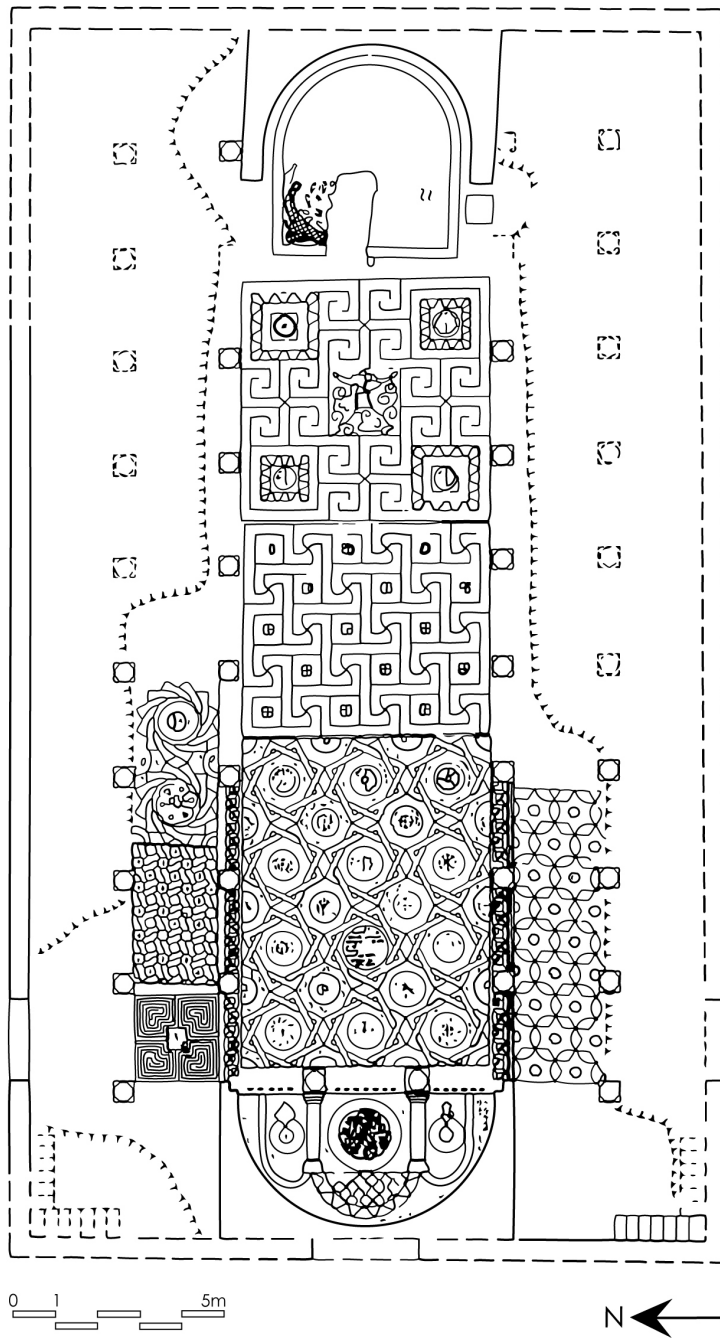


Figure 12: Chlef, approximate plan of basilica. Chlef, approximate plan of basilica (Plan after M.P. Reynaud, in Caillet, redrawn by E. Brown, in Robin M. Jensen, “Reconsidering the Ancient Algerian Basilica of Chlef and its Mosaics.” In *Acta ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia*, vol. XXVII, Rome: Bardi Editore, 2014, 101)

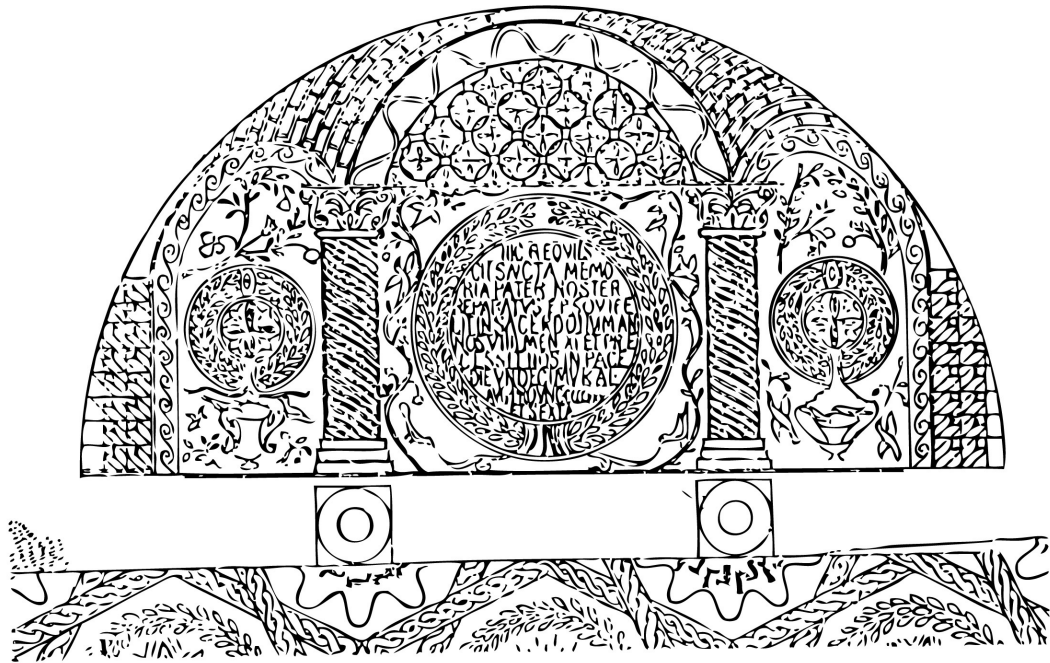


Figure 13: Chlef, Reparatus epitaph and mosaic in counter-apse (drawing from DACL 12.2, fig. 9229, in Jensen, “Reconsidering the Ancient Algerian Basilica of Chlef and its Mosaics,” 108).

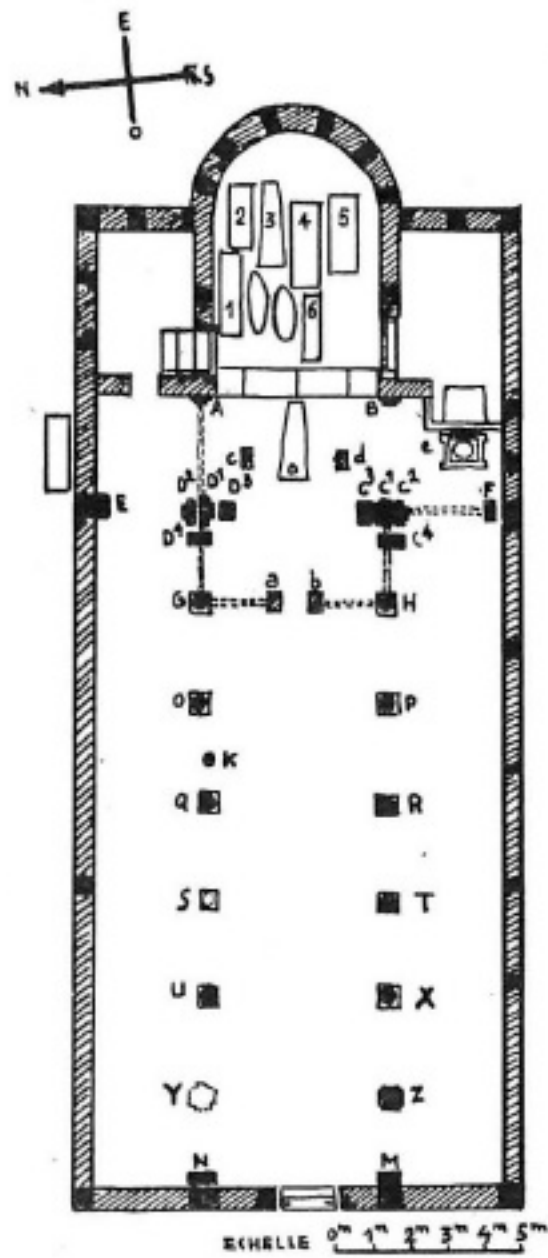


Figure 14: Ksar-el-Kelb, approximate plan (Courcell, "Une Seconde Campagne," 1936, 167, fig. 1)





Figure 15: Ksar-el-Kelb, sarcophagi in apse (Courcell, "Une Seconde Campagne," 1936, plate 2, fig. 7)

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