

Confessing with St Augustine

Augustine's Later Career

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Returning to Africa: Thagaste & Carthage

- After Monica's death in Ostia, A returned to Thagaste in 388 to retire to a life of leisure as a *servus Dei*.
- He soon suffers the deaths of Adeodatus, his son, and Nebridius, his friend of the last 15 years.
- A's writing in this period largely targets the Manichees. *Vera Religione* and his early commentary on Genesis each target Manichaeism and its dualistic notion of good and evil as equal principles of the world. He quickly acquires a reputation as a defender of the Catholic faith.



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Calling and Ordination

- During his time in Africa, A avoided towns w/o Bishops, so as not to be conscripted into an “active” life, a pattern in African churches.
- In 391, he moves to Hippo Regius hoping to found a monastic community based on contemplative ideals.
- Meets Valerius, who preaches a sermon on the church’s need of a Presbyter. The congregation forces Augustine forward as a candidate. A cried, the church believed, b/c he was disappointed for not being made bishop, but A thought it a punishment from God.
- A is ordained and Valerius, being Greek, breaks convention, having A preach almost immediately though he was not yet a Bishop.



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Monastic Community in Hippo Regius

- Aurelius, Primate of Africa, helps A found a monastic community in the garden of the Basilica in Hippo. Alypius, Evodius, & Possidius, all future Bishops, were members.
- Prayers, hymns, periods of silence and contemplative study would have regimented the day. Cooking, cleaning, care of the sick, and taking dictation were shared duties.
- No formal rule or vow was taken, but a vegetarian diet observed, possessions shared, w/ obedience & celibacy expected.
- A carved into the dinner table: “Whoever thinks that he is able, To nibble at the life of absent friends, Must know that he’s unworthy of this table” (Brown, p. 195).



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Early Ministry in Hippo Regius

- Preaching duties were regular. Attendance on feast days was high, but otherwise there seemed to be more in the music hall than in the pews.
- In 390, Theodosius I, Christian Emperor of Constantinople, ordered pagan sacrifice outlawed, bringing many “hypocrites” into the church.
- In 392, A publicly debates Fortunatus, a Manichaean Priest and former classmate in Carthage.
- 394 seeks to reform the *laetitia* — banquets for the dead, which were an occasion for drunkenness and magic.



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Elevation to Bishop

- 396, Valerius dies leaving Augustine the sole Bishop.
- Pastoral care was a big part of the job. A would visit jails, intervene on behalf of criminals or debtors, & use church funds to alleviate community needs.
- Bishops were arms of government and functioned like judges. A would have spent long hours listening to and rendering judgments on local disputes, one of the reasons he gives such attention to law and judicial themes.



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Rising Religious Hostilities in Northern Africa

- Catholics were a minority in Numidia w/ a history of hostility w/ the Donatists.
- In 345, Macarius was sent to end the Donatist conflict. He was cruel, & inspired Donatist resistance, sometimes w/ suicide, instantly making them martyrs.
- “Circumcellions”, a band of militant nomads (dating to 1st Century?), sided in with the Donatists against the Empire.
- Catholics became their targets: vandalising their churches, destroying their shrines, assaulting their people, and sometimes blinding them w/ a mix of vinegar & lime (Chadwick, p. 103).



The Breaking Point

- 390 — The Donatists Bishop forbids the bakers to make bread for Catholics.
- 397 — Laws forbidding Catholics to inter-marry with Donatists, or pass property to non-Catholics.
- 399 — Emperor Honorius defeats a Numidian Usurper allied to the Donatists. This led to a new regime eager to please the Catholic Honorius by cracking down on paganism and Donatism.
- 404 — Donatists beat, slash, and throw the newly consecrated Bishop of Bagai, Maximinian, off a tower. He lives & travels to Ravenna to show the Emperor his scars.
- 405 — Edict of Unity identified Donatism as a heresy, closing their churches, removed their bishops, and refusing to allow inheritances to pass to them.



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The “Disciplining” of the Donatists: 397-405 AD

- A disapproved of the use of capital punishment and torture to deal with the Donatist crimes, recommending only fines.
- But he does promote & defend the imperial reforms, arguing for a positive function of government in disciplining not only the social but religious lives of citizens.
- He welcomes this as an opportunity to provide instruction. A is heavily criticised for this by fellow Catholics, and outside Hippo, these measures resulted in renewed violence.
- A uses a phrase taken from the parable of the wedding feast, “compel them to come in”, to justify coercive force. This line of reasoning would be used by Inquisitors in the Middle Ages, but w/o A’s moderation.



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The Colloquy at Carthage: 411 AD

- The Imperial Commissioner, Marcellinus, a Catholic and friend of Augustine, calls a colloquy in Carthage before several hundred bishops.
- Catholics suggest that he decide how best to unify the church. If for the Donatists, the Catholic bishops will resign, if for the Catholics, the Donatist bishops will be received or, failing that, all bishops will resign and new ones appointed.
- Though Marcellinus decides for the Catholics, the Donatists accuse him of bias, and the colloquy becomes a renewed basis for hostilities.
- Donatism continues in (esp. S.) Numidia until the 7th C Muslim occupation of Africa.



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Controversies: Augustine versus the Empire

- The final years of A's life were spent writing & engaged in controversy.
- Following the Donatist Colloquy, A engages a new segment of African society in Carthage that blames the sack of Rome in 410 by Alaric & the Visigoths on the insurgency of Christianity, and the collapse of the old religion.
- From 413-427, A will occupy himself with writing *The City of God*, an apologetic against the Roman Empire and in defence of the Christian faith. Notably, it contains a more moderate account of Christianity in human government.



Controversies: Augustine versus the Pelagians

- Pelagius, a British monk educated in Gaul, was unsettled by the low morals of Christians in Rome but helped by an early essay of A's, *On Free Choice*.
- Hears a passage from *The Confessions*, “grant what you command, and command what you please”, and reacts strongly. It could only curtail moral responsibility.
- Pelagius and Julian of Eclanum will write treatises against A in defense of the freedom of the will, arguing A was still a crypto-Manichaeism.
- A defends himself in a series of treatises defending the priority of grace and divine action.



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Death

- In the final 2 years of his life, A now in his 70s, writes his *Retractiones*.
- A dies 28 August 430, just as the Arian Vandals invade Roman Numidia. His final command is to preserve his writings and library.
- Possidius compiled a list of his works and carried his books to Rome.



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