

CONFESSING WITH SAINT AUGUSTINE

HPRS5094/6094

Dr Angus M Slater





3 — AUGUSTINE'S BIOGRAPHY II



OUTLINE

1. Retreat at Cassiciacum; baptism; return to North Africa
2. Augustine's ordination
3. Augustine as Bishop of Hippo
4. Donatist and Pelagian controversies
5. Later works



POST-CONVERSION AND LATER CAREER (386-430)

386: RETREAT AT CASSICIACUM, ITALY

A communal retreat at Cassiciacum for several months with his mother Monica and friends.

Concept of otium –“cultured retirement” (otium liberale); in this case a “Christian otium.” Retirement from a public career for “creative leisure” – morning prayer, study and thinking.

Philosophical dialogues with friends

- The Happy Life (De beata vita)—on the nature of happiness
- On Order (De ordine) —a defence of the study of the liberal arts as preparation for philosophical contemplation and the reception of higher truths
- Against the Skeptics (or Against the Academic Skeptics; Contra Academicos) —evaluates the skeptical theory of knowledge

Soliloquies (Soliloquia) (around the time of the Cassiciacum dialogues) — Augustine’s internal dialogue between reason and the soul; on the desire to know God and the soul; describes his love for Wisdom.

BAPTISM IN MILAN, 387

Instructed (catechized) and baptised by St Ambrose

“Disquiet about our past life vanished from us.”
(Confessions 9:6.14)

Augustine delighted in “considering the profundity
of your purpose for the salvation of the human
race.” (Confessions 9:6.14)

Plans to return to North Africa with his mother, son
and friends.



VISION AT OSTIA AND THE DEATH OF MONICA, 387

Experience of a vision of Wisdom with Monica
(Confessions 9:10.23-25)

Monica falls ill and dies before returning to North Africa.

Monica's death is the final main event recorded in Confessions (Book 9).

Writings:

- De quantitate animae (388)
- On the Free Choice of the Will (De libero arbitrio) – Book I (Books II-III finished later)



RETURN TO NORTH AFRICA: 388-391

388: Return to Carthage with Evodius

Moves to family estate in Thagaste

Ascetic retreat with Alypius and other friends

Servants of God (Servi Dei) – Christian laymen

Death of his son Adeodatus and friend Nebridius

Moves to Hippo in 391.



WORKS: 388-391

Focuses on “central mysteries of the Christian faith”
(Brown, Augustine, 127-128)

Anti-Manichaeian themes

- Commentary on Genesis against the Manichees (De Genesi contra Manichaeos)
- Eight-Three Different Questions (De diversis quaestionibus): a collection of questions as discussed in Thagaste
- On Music: on metre and rhythm; the underlying principles ordering everything in the universe; the dependence of beauty on mathematical proportions
- The Teacher (De Magistro): a memorial to his son Adeodatus; on how humans communicate truth by participating in divine Reason.
- On True Religion (De vera religione): Anti-Manichaeian; attempt to convert Romanianus (Augustine's earlier patron); on the one Church; an appeal to what is universal in nature and reason

AUGUSTINE IN NORTH AFRICA: 391-396

Ordained a priest (presbyter) in Hippo, 391 by bishop Valerius

Augustine defends the Christian faith: writes, preaches, debates Fortunatus (a Manichee), expounds the creed to bishops at the General Council of Africa

Monastic community in Hippo: a desire for a self-disciplined Christian life

- Daily chanting of the Psalter
- Ascetical life
- No formal vow of poverty, but property is held in common
- Formally vested in a monastic habit
- Significance: a “seminary” for later bishops in North Africa

Consecration as coadjutor bishop, 395 (supported by bishop Valerius)

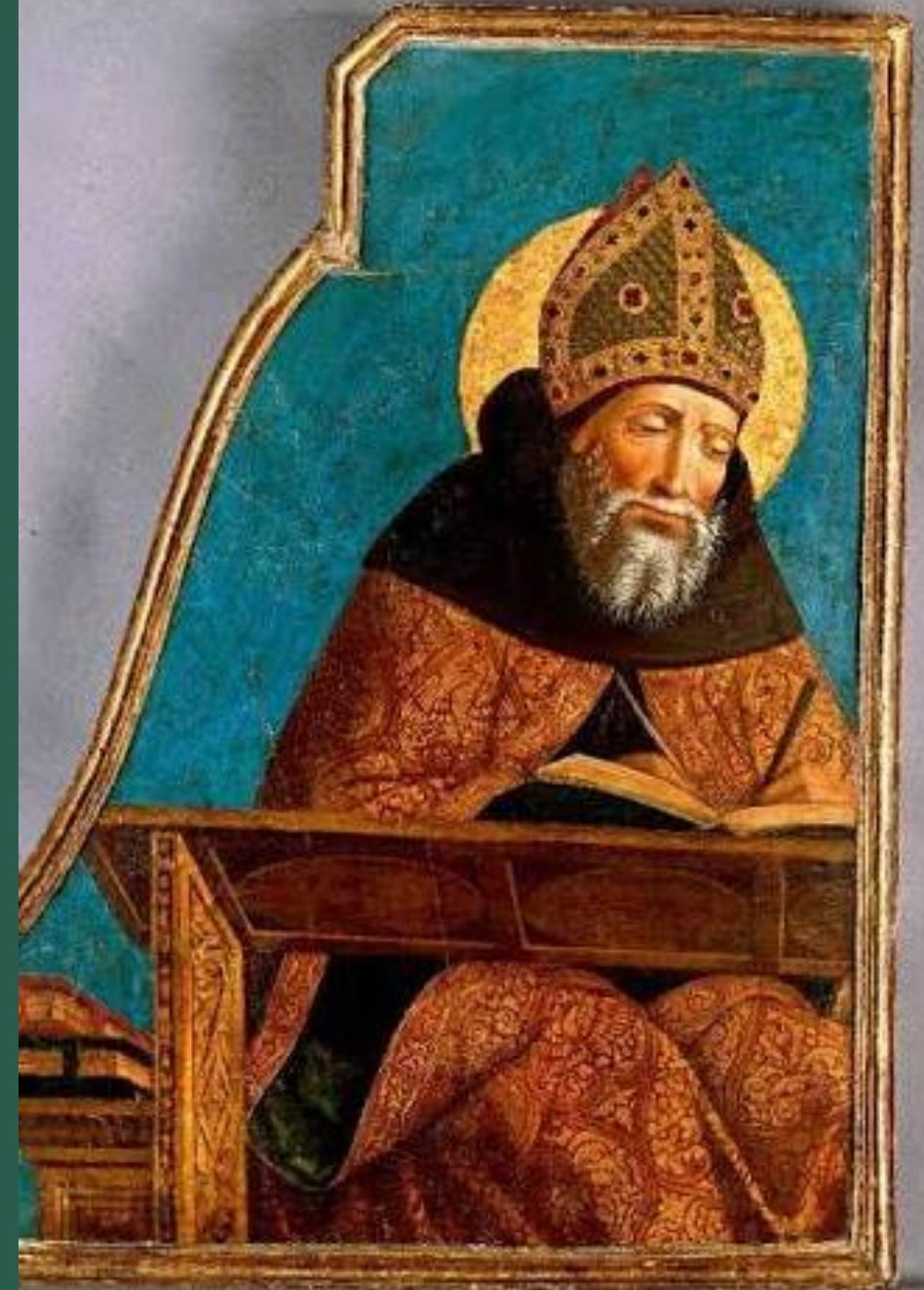
AUGUSTINE AS BISHOP OF HIPPO

The term “bishop” — from episkopos (Greek), “overseer”

Pastoral care

Arbitrating in certain lawsuits

Confessions, 397/401





THE DONATIST CONTROVERSY



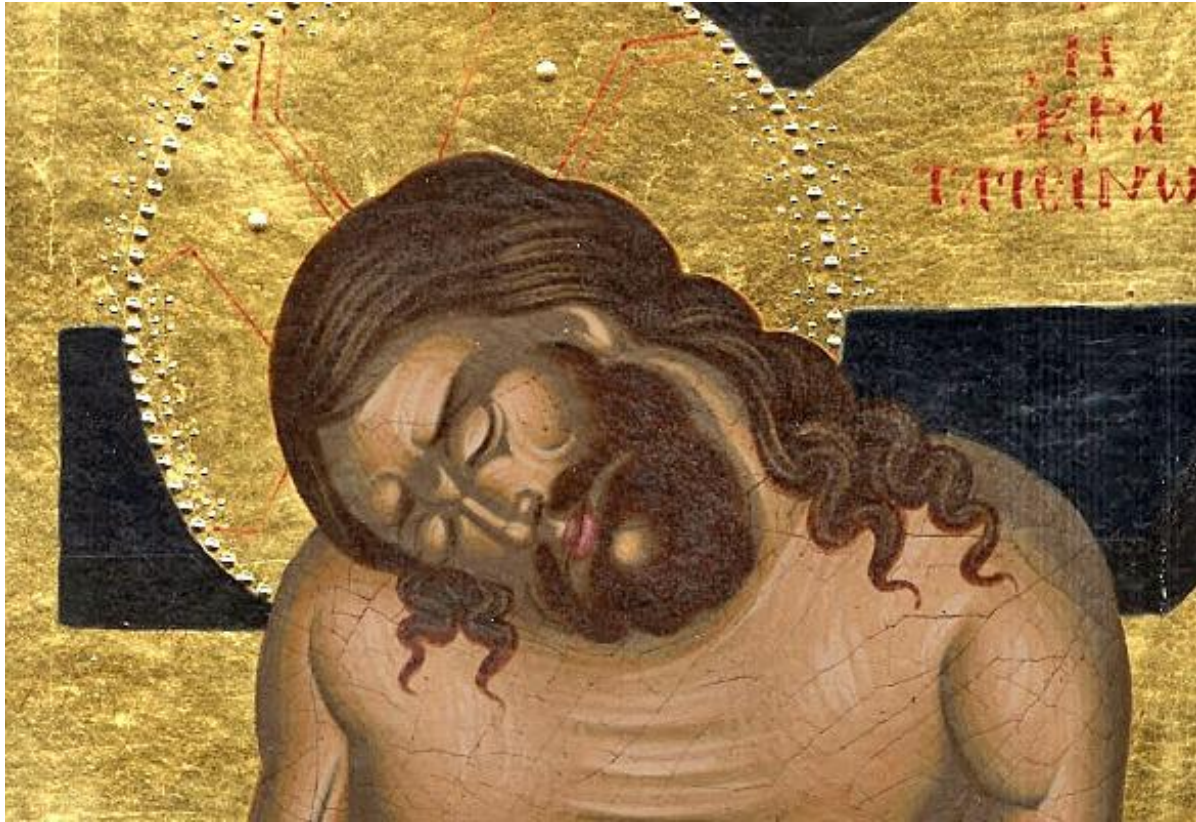
THE DONATIST CONTROVERSY, 4-5TH C

The Donatists – a Christian sect in Roman North Africa in the early 4th century; named after bishop Donatus

Donatist beliefs:

- the validity of priestly ritual acts depends on the personal character of priests;
- referring to those who during Diocletian's persecution (303-305) gave up copies of Scripture to be destroyed
- known as traditores (from traditor; tradere "hand over").

Implications regarding which persons were recognised as validly ordained (for example, Caecilian, bishop of Carthage vs Donatus)



THE DONATIST CONTROVERSY, 4-5TH C

A division in North Africa about attitudes towards members of the Church with regard to their individual purity.

Donatists:

- strict views – preserving Christian Law (religion) means the Church should remain entirely pure;
- the prayers by which “unworthy” bishops baptise or ordain are considered ineffective.

Catholics:

- the Church’s identity is independent from the purity of individual members;
- the sacraments are objectively effective in any case.



DONATIST CONTROVERSY: CRISIS (390S -C.405)

Donatists and Circumcellions (military millenarian bands)

Growing crisis and conflict: 390s-400s –
Donatists vs Catholics

- Donatists forbidden to bake bread for Catholics.
- Catholics forbid inter-marriage with non-Catholics.
- Clergy could not donate to non-Catholics.
- Violence against the Catholic Bishop Maximinian of Bagai.



DONATIST CONTROVERSY: CRISIS (390S -C.405)

Augustine's involvement, 397-405

Not sympathetic to Donatist views; made concerted efforts against the Donatist Church (pamphlets, preaching).

Recommends fines; disapproves capital punishment in dealing with Donatist crimes; advocates imperial reform for disciplining citizens.

405: Edict of Unity – Donatism declared a heresy; Emperor Honorius commands Donatists to rejoin the Catholic Church.



DONATIST CONTROVERSY: CRISIS (390S -C.405)

Carthage Colloquy, 411 —enquiry into the schism

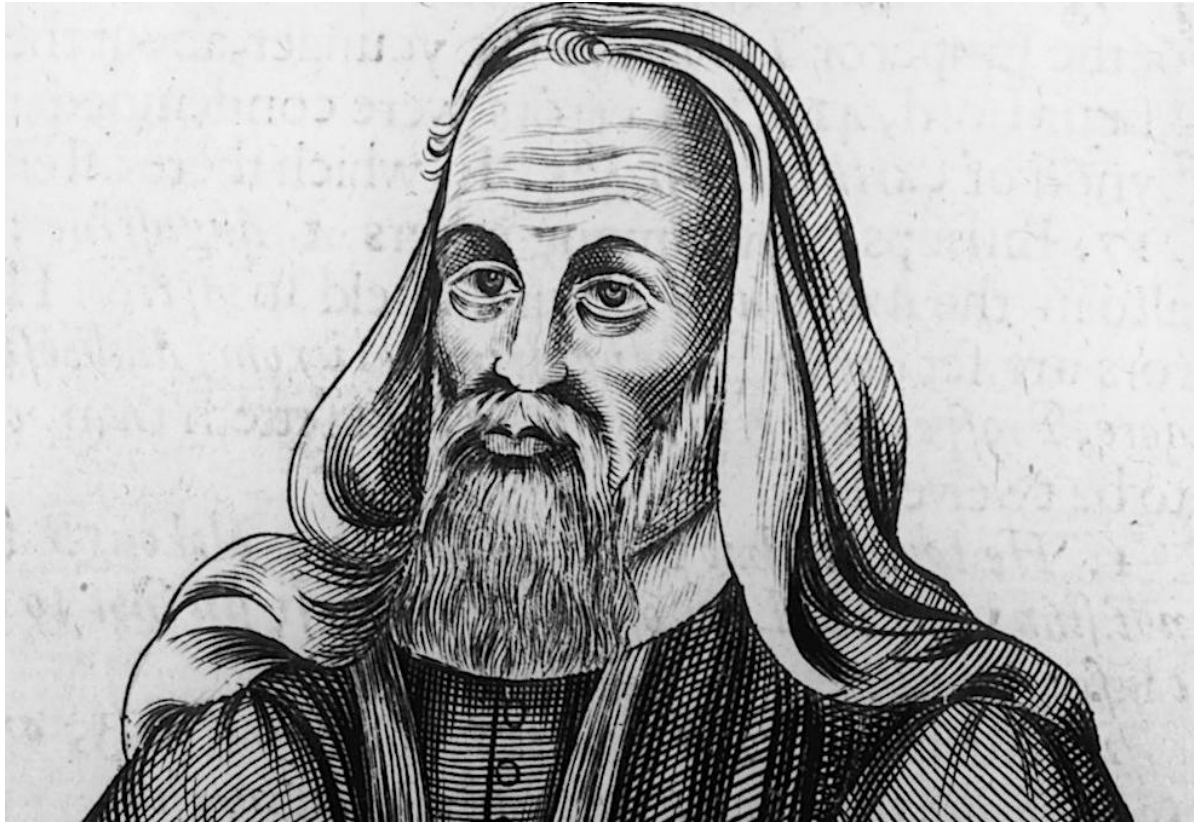
- Led by Marcellinus (Catholic; imperial commissioner)
- Attended by hundreds of Donatist bishops
- A debate on the nature of the true Church
- Decided in favour of the Catholics
- Anti-Donatist laws

Renewed violence: Marcellinus is later executed as part of a retaliation

Donatism does not disappear entirely; exists until the 7th century in Numidia.



THE PELAGIAN CONTROVERSY



PELAGIANISM

Pelagianism – named after Pelagius; a 5th-century heresy which denied original sin and the Christian notion of grace

Bodily death and concupiscence are natural – not the result of original sin.

Adam's sin provided an example of sin for his descendants.

The human will is sufficient to attain virtue – asceticism is necessary.

Christ's redemption opposes Adam's bad example; human nature can overcome sin and gain eternal life without the aid of divine grace.

Notable followers of Pelagius: Caelestius and Julian of Eclanum



PELAGIAN CONTROVERSY: PATTERNS, 411-431

Pelagius and his followers publish works which then Augustine refutes – reoccurring pattern.

Enquiry into the Pelagian controversy.

Attempts to settle the status of Pelagius and his followers (Caelestius and Julian of Eclanum).

411: Pelagius and Caelestius arrive in North Africa (near Hippo) and try to promote Pelagian ideas, which become regarded as heretical. (Augustine occupied with the Donatist controversy at the time.)



PELAGIAN CONTROVERSY: PATTERNS, 411-431

414 (onwards): Augustine composes responses to Pelagius: *De natura et gratia* and others

415: synod — Pelagius distances himself from various Pelagian claims.

416: A work by Pelagius addressed to Pope Innocent suggests that Pelagius is inclined towards Augustine's notion of grace; but Pelagius does not retract his earlier views.

417: Pope Innocent excludes Pelagius and Caelestius from communion with the Church.

Augustine: "causa finita est." — "The question is settled."

PELAGIAN CONTROVERSY: PATTERNS, 411-431

417: Pope Zosimus reopens the matter.

418: Council of Carthage; attended by 200 bishops; Pelagianism decided a heresy; the Church's position on original sin and grace is confirmed:

- Death came to Adam through sin, not physical necessity;
- Infant baptism necessary because of original sin;
- God's grace is necessary for good works, and helps avoid future sins.

418: Emperor Honorius banishes Pelagians from the cities of Italy. Pope Zosimus condemns it as a heresy.

431: Pelagianism condemned at the Council of Ephesus



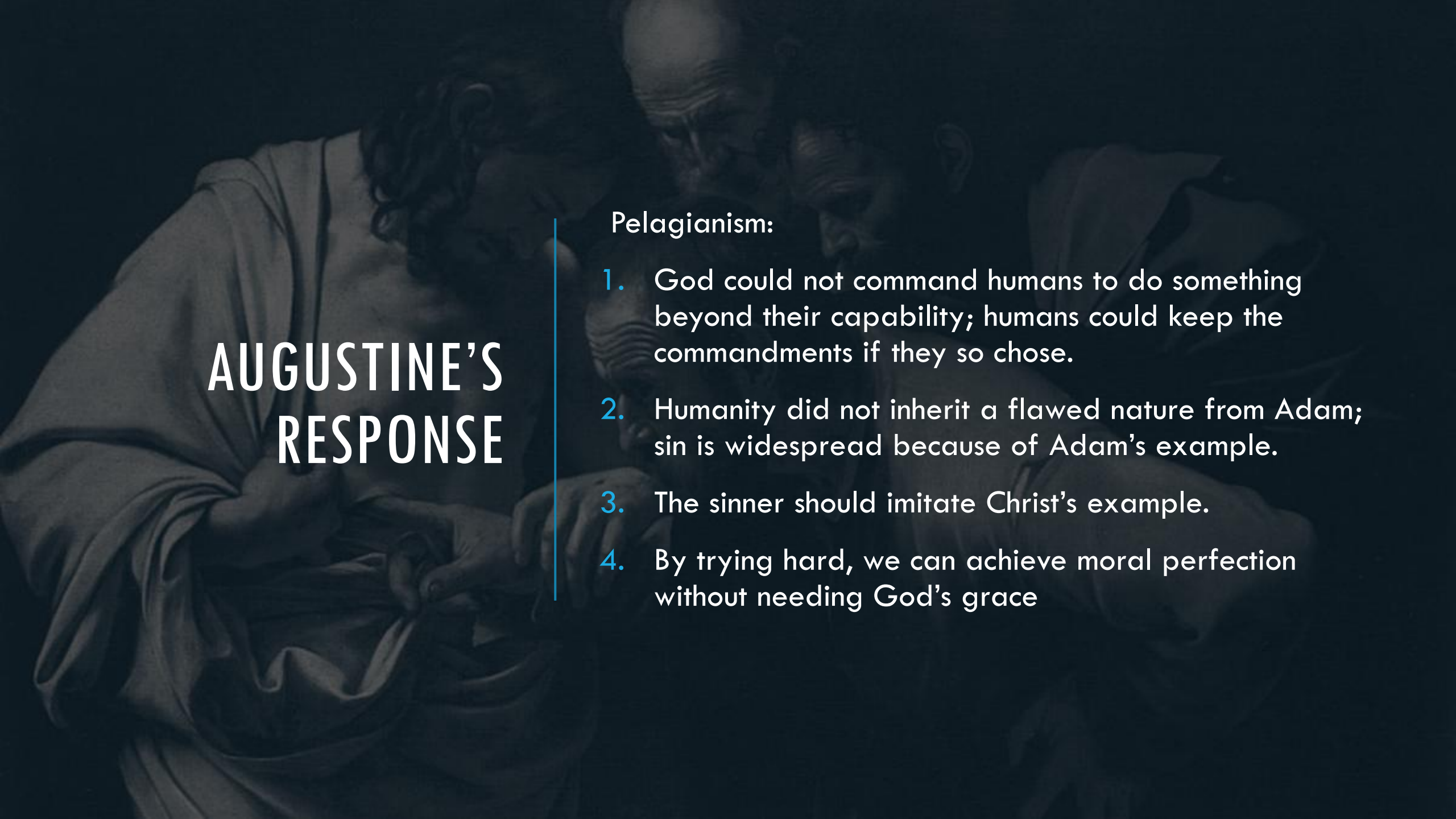
AUGUSTINE'S RESPONSE

414 onwards: Augustine's works against Pelagianism defend the priority of grace and divine action

Responds to Julian of Eclanum – *Contra Iulianum*

428: An account of the Pelagians in *De haeresibus*

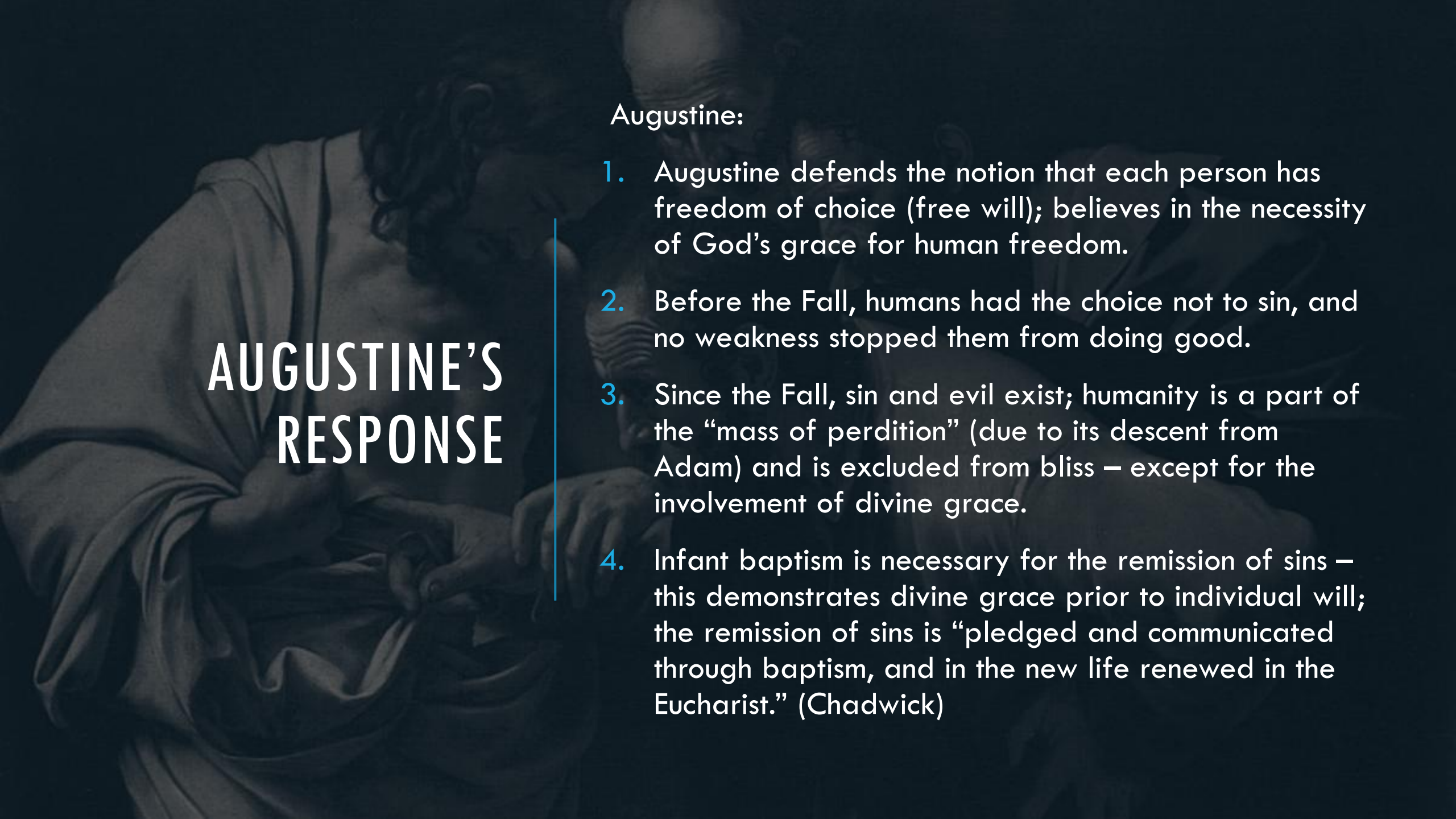




AUGUSTINE'S RESPONSE

Pelagianism:

1. God could not command humans to do something beyond their capability; humans could keep the commandments if they so chose.
2. Humanity did not inherit a flawed nature from Adam; sin is widespread because of Adam's example.
3. The sinner should imitate Christ's example.
4. By trying hard, we can achieve moral perfection without needing God's grace



AUGUSTINE'S RESPONSE

Augustine:

1. Augustine defends the notion that each person has freedom of choice (free will); believes in the necessity of God's grace for human freedom.
2. Before the Fall, humans had the choice not to sin, and no weakness stopped them from doing good.
3. Since the Fall, sin and evil exist; humanity is a part of the "mass of perdition" (due to its descent from Adam) and is excluded from bliss – except for the involvement of divine grace.
4. Infant baptism is necessary for the remission of sins – this demonstrates divine grace prior to individual will; the remission of sins is "pledged and communicated through baptism, and in the new life renewed in the Eucharist." (Chadwick)



LATE WORKS AND DEATH (413-430)



LATE WORKS, 413-430

City of God (413-427): defending the Christian faith; describes the existence of the City of man and the city of God throughout history.

On the Trinity (appears in 414)

Revisions/Reconsiderations (426): defends and comments on previous writings

On Christian Doctrine (397-426): on the interpretation of Scripture



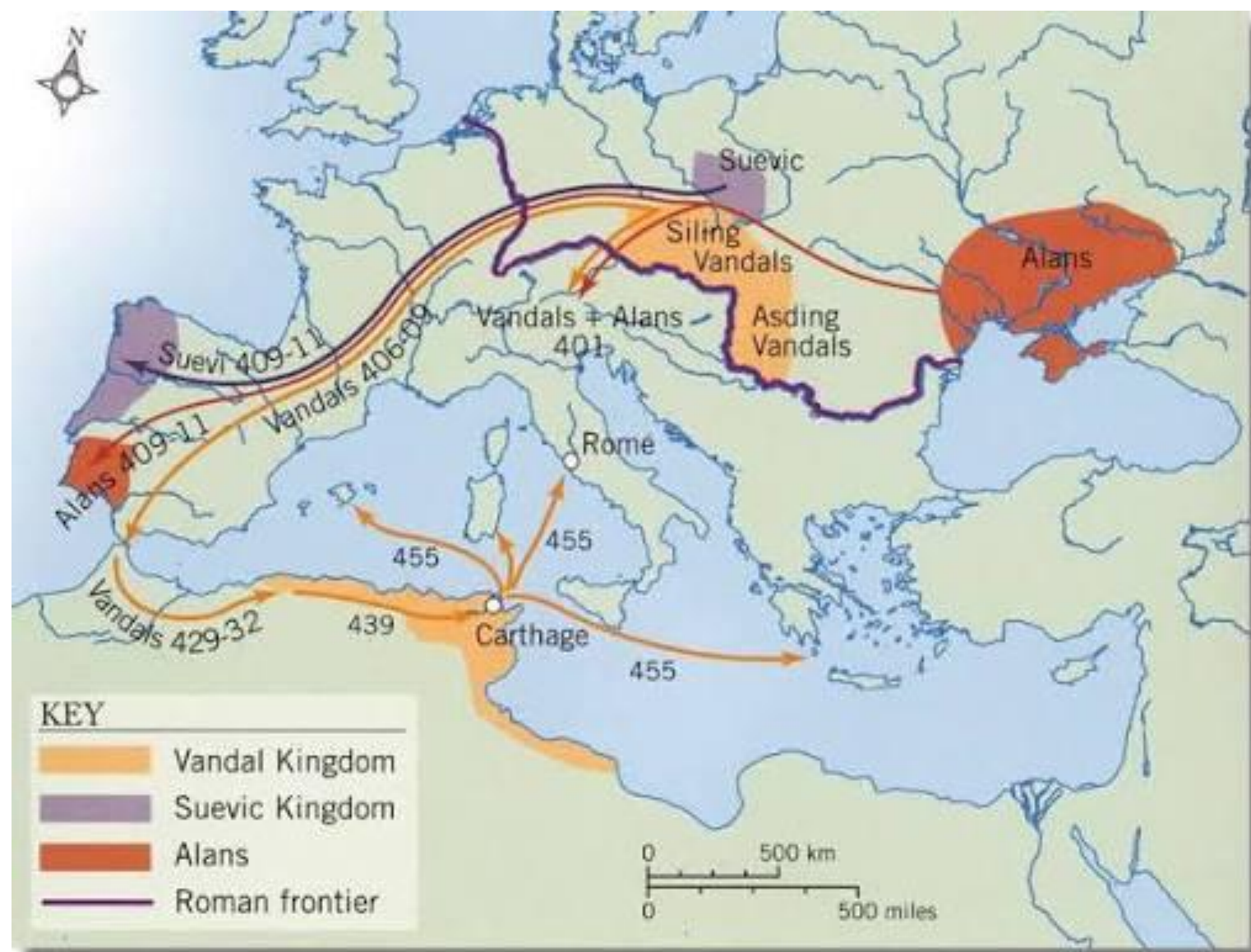
THE VANDAL INVASION

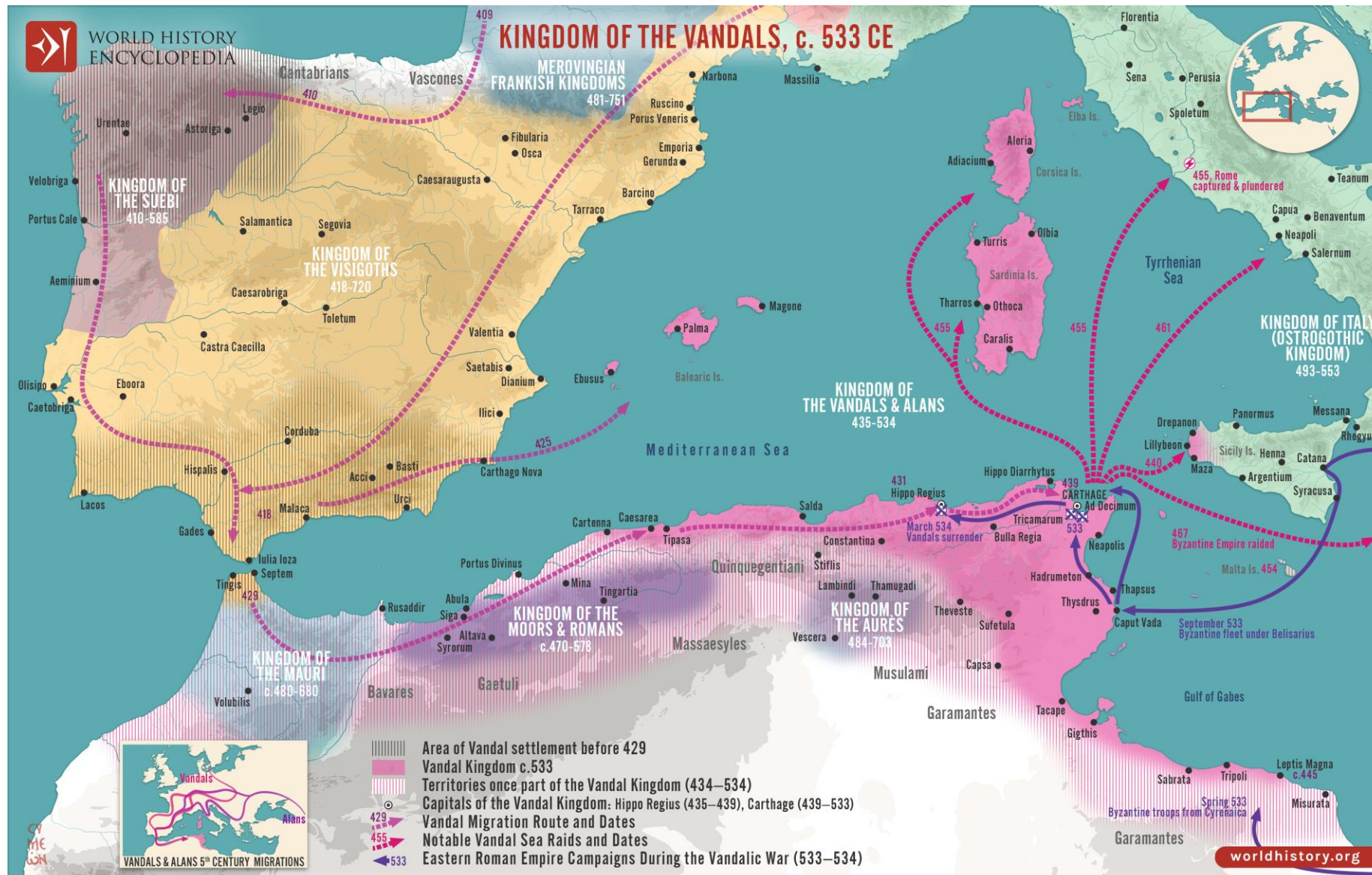
Political context: the invasion of North Africa by Vandals and some Gothic tribes.

The gradual collapse of the Imperial administration and the Roman Empire.

Invasion:

- Augustine perceives the “dangers and the deaths of souls”; churches left without priests; Hippo is burned.







FINAL YEARS AND DEATH IN 430

Account by Possidius in the Life of Augustine (Augustine's biographer)

Augustine falls ill during the siege of Hippo.

Death: August 28, 430

Final wishes: orders the preservation of the Church's library and his works.

Possidius compiles a list of Augustine's works, ensuring the authority of his corpus.

READING

Confessions, Book V **Confessions, Book VI**

Brown, Peter. *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California University Press, 1967; 2000), pp. 187-190; 210-239. (On the Donatist controversy.)

Bonner, Gerald. "Augustine and Pelagianism." *Augustinian Studies* 24 (1993): 27-47. - An outline of the development of Augustine's thought during the Pelagian controversy, pp. 31ff.

O'Donnell, James J. "Augustine." In *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, edited by Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 8-25; esp. pp. 1-19 on Pelagianism and the Donatist controversy

