

UBI ECCLESIA?<sup>1</sup>

The imagination of African Christians of the time of Augustine had become riveted on the idea of the Church. This Church was the 'strong woman'.<sup>2</sup> 'It would not be decent for us', Augustine said, 'to speak of any other woman.'<sup>3</sup> In a land which, to judge from Monica, had a fair share of formidable mothers, the *Catholica*, the Catholic Church was The Mother: 'One Mother, prolific with offspring: of her are we born, by her milk we are nourished, by her spirit we are made alive.'<sup>4</sup>

This Church was thought of as a preserve of safety and cleanliness in a world ruled by demonic powers.<sup>5</sup> It existed to protect the believer. The African came to church, less because he was 'thirsty . . . and heavy laden', but because he wished to survive in a battlefield: the Psalms of deliverance from the hands of enemies predominate notably in their inscriptions.<sup>6</sup> The rite of baptism, therefore, was thought of as a drastic purification: with the bishop's 'spell', Christ, the 'Great Fish', slipped into the water of the baptismal pond;<sup>7</sup> for a week afterwards, the initiates would wear special sandals, lest their 'pure' feet touch the earth.<sup>8</sup> They wished to find that their Church was what it was said to

<sup>1</sup> W. H. C. Frend, *Donatist Church*, ch. xx. pp. 315-332, is a classic juxtaposition of Donatist and Catholic attitudes; his *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church 1964*, has added a further dimension to the contrast. P. Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne*, notably vols. v-vii, 1920-1923, remains indispensable for the literature of the controversy. R. Crespin, *Ministère et Sainteté: Pastorale du clergé et solution de la crise donatiste dans la vie et la doctrine de S. Augustin*, 1965, is a valuable study of Augustine's reaction to Donatism.

<sup>2</sup> *Serm.* 37, 2, citing *Prov.* 31, 10.

<sup>3</sup> *Serm.* 37, 1. (His audience knew, and enjoyed, this theme: *Serm.* 37, 17.)

<sup>4</sup> Cyprian, *de unitate*, 5; cf. *Aug. Ep.* 34, 3, on a young man who had both beaten his mother and abandoned the Catholic Church.

<sup>5</sup> Frend, *Donatist Church*, p. 113.

<sup>6</sup> e.g. Diehl, *Inscript. Lat. Christ. vet.*, i, no. 2413, 2415 and 2415A.

<sup>7</sup> Optatus of Milevis, *de schism. Don.* III, 2, (P.L. xi, 990).

<sup>8</sup> *Ep.* 55, xix, 29.

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be in the *Song of Songs*: that it was morally 'without spot or wrinkle'; that they had come into a 'shut-in garden, a sealed fountain, a well-spring of living water, a paradise (an oasis) bearing the fruit of apples'.<sup>1</sup> 'This is the door of the Lord', they wrote on the lintel of a church in Numidia, 'the righteous shall enter in.'<sup>2</sup> 'The man who enters', however, wrote Augustine, 'is bound to see drunkards, misers, tricksters, gamblers, adulterers, fornicators, people wearing amulets, assiduous clients of sorcerers, astrologers. . . . He must be warned that the same crowds that press into the churches on Christian festivals, also fill the theatres on pagan holidays.'<sup>3</sup>

It was a disconcerting double-image. The Africans' view of the church had depended on their being able to see in it a group different from the 'world', an alternative to something 'unclean' and hostile. The spread of Christianity in Africa, by indiscriminately filling the churches, had simply washed away the clear moral landmarks that separated the 'church' from the 'world'. In the conditions of the third century, S. Cyprian could well expect his convert or his penitent, to find himself 'among the saints';<sup>4</sup> Augustine knew only too well that he was just as likely to rub shoulders with the most notorious landgrabber of the neighbourhood.<sup>5</sup>

Ever since 311, the African Christians had been divided on the attitude they should take, to the contrast between the ideal holiness of the church, and the actual quality of its members. The issue, briefly, was this. The Donatists had claimed, against the Catholics that, as the church was a unique source of holiness, so no sinner could have a part in it. The Church had to survive in its full holiness: it was a 'true vine', and like a vine, it had to be drastically pruned.<sup>6</sup> It could only survive as pure, if unworthy bishops were excluded: for the guilt of a bishop automatically rendered ineffective the prayers by which he baptized and ordained.<sup>7</sup> What is more, this guilt actually threatened the identity of the true Church: it created an anti-church, a sinister *Doppelgänger*, a 'Church of Judas', held together by the 'original taint' of its founders.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Song of Songs*, 4, 12-13.

<sup>2</sup> Diehl, *Inscript. Lat. Christ. vet.*, i, No. 2421.

<sup>3</sup> *de cat. rud.* xxv, 48.

<sup>4</sup> Cyprian, *Ep.* 70, 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Serm.* 164, 8.

<sup>6</sup> pseudo-Aug., *C. Fulgentium*, 26, (P.L. xliii, 774). The most illuminating treatment of Donatist attitudes to the Church is by J.-P. Brisson, *Autonomisme et christianisme dans l'Afrique romaine*, 1958, pp. 123-153. Donatist pamphlets of the time of Augustine have been reconstructed by Monceaux, *Hist. littér.*, v, pp. 309-339.

<sup>7</sup> Cyprian, *Ep.* 65, iv, i. v. inf. p. 218.

<sup>8</sup> *C. litt. Petil.* II, xi, 25. This ambivalent view of the religious community, the good group always dogged by a bad imitation, has been traced back to the Dead Sea Scrolls (Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, p. 61), and forward, to late medieval popular belief

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Both sides appealed to the authority of S. Cyprian;<sup>1</sup> but they applied his answers to very different questions. The times had changed. What was at stake in the late fourth century, was the attitude which the Church should take up to the 'world' at large; and their concern with the inner composition of their respective churches was important only because it determined this attitude.

The problem was acutely relevant. Christianity was the only religious group that had expanded in Roman society. Both churches had played a dramatic role in bringing about the end of paganism in Africa. They were faced by the fundamental problem of the relationship of any group to the society in which it lives. Briefly, the Donatists thought of themselves as a group which existed to preserve and protect an alternative to the society around them. They felt their identity to be constantly threatened: first by persecution, later, by compromise. Innocence, ritual purity, meritorious suffering, predominate in their image of themselves. They were unique, 'pure': 'the Church of the righteous who are persecuted and do not persecute.'<sup>2</sup>

The Catholicism of Augustine, by contrast, reflects the attitude of a group confident of its powers to absorb the world without losing its identity. This identity existed independently of the quality of the human agents of the Church: it rested on 'objective' promises of God, working out magnificently in history, and on the 'objective' efficacy of its sacraments.<sup>3</sup> This Church was hungry for souls: let it eat, indiscriminately if needs be.<sup>4</sup> It is a group no longer committed to defend itself against society; but rather, poised, ready to fulfil what it considered its historic mission, to dominate, to absorb, to lead a whole Empire. 'Ask Me, and I shall give the uttermost parts of the earth as Thy possession.'<sup>5</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that Africa, which had always been the home of articulate and extreme views on the nature of the Church as a group in society, should, once again, in the age of Augustine, become the 'cockpit of Europe', for this, the last great debate, whose outcome would determine the form taken by the Catholic domination of the Latin world until the Reformation.

and Luther: J. Ratzinger, 'Beobachtungen z. Kirchenbegriff d. Tyconius', *Rev. études augustini.*, ii, 1958, p. 181, n. 45.

<sup>1</sup> v. esp. Brisson, *Autonomisme et christianisme*, pp. 138-153 and 178-187. v. *de Bapt.* I, xviii, 28; V, xvii, 22.

<sup>2</sup> The claim of the Donatist statement of their case in 411: *Coll. Carthag.* iii, 258, (P.L. xi, 1408-1414, at 1408B).

<sup>3</sup> v. esp. Brisson, *Autonomisme et christianisme*, pp. 153-178, and Crespin, *Ministère e Sainteté*, pp. 209-284.

<sup>4</sup> *Serm.* 4, 19.

<sup>5</sup> *Ps.* 2, 7-8.

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Until the time of Augustine, the tide of feeling in this debate had flowed consistently towards the Donatist attitude. Their case was, very briefly, this:<sup>1</sup>

Around 311, the African communities found themselves in a position similar to that of members of a Resistance movement whose country had begun to settle down to the complexities and compromises of peacetime. Too many bishops, it was thought, had 'collaborated' during the last, the Great, Persecution of Diocletian, in 303-305. They had handed over copies of the Holy Scriptures to be burnt by the pagan magistrates. This craven act, the *traditio*, the 'handing-over' of the Holy Books, would have deprived the guilty bishop, the *traditor*, of all spiritual power. It was believed that Caecilian, bishop of Carthage, had been ordained by such a *traditor*. It was a simple matter for 80 Numidian bishops, in 311, to declare his ordination invalid, and to elect another bishop in his place. This 'pure' bishop of Carthage was soon succeeded by another, Donatus: and, it was he, who, as rival bishop of Carthage, gave his name to what we call 'The Donatist Church' — the *pars Donati*, 'the party of Donatus.'

Caecilian held on against his rivals. The case of the Numidians was extremely flimsy: many of them, also, had been *traditores*. The rest of the Latin Church was more prepared to tolerate 'collaborators'. Above all, the Roman Emperor himself, Constantine, had become a Christian. He wanted to patronize a unified and respectable church. Caecilian was the existing bishop: Constantine, therefore, supported him against what appeared to non-Africans as exaggerated and parochial grievances.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the support enjoyed by Caecilian was widespread, but distant; that of Donatus, confined to Africa, but firmly-rooted. Each side was confident of victory; both ended by drifting into irreconcilable division. Around 347, the 'party of Caecilian' resorted to violence.<sup>3</sup> An Imperial commissioner, Count Macarius, frightened Africa into submission to the Catholic Church. He was praised by the Catholics as an 'agent of a holy task':<sup>4</sup> the torn garment of African Christianity had been decently and briskly 'sewn up'.<sup>5</sup> But the schism would never be healed again, except by renewed force. In Numidia, the 'Time of Macarius' was remembered by Donatists, in the same way as the 'Time of Cromwell' was remembered in Ireland. This solution based on force had been transient. The short reign of a pagan Emperor, Julian the

<sup>1</sup> v. esp. Friend, *Donatist Church*, pp. 3-23; 141-168.

<sup>2</sup> Monceaux, *Hist. littér.*, v, p. 18, citing Aug. *Ep.* 43, v, 14.

<sup>3</sup> Friend, *Donatist Church*, pp. 177-192.

<sup>4</sup> P.L. viii, 774.

<sup>5</sup> Optatus of Milevis, *de schism. Don.* III, 9, (P.L. xi, 1020).

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Apostate (361-363) upset it, by bringing renewed tolerance for the Donatists. Now it was the turn of the Catholics to be all but buried in the avalanche.

Only after this setback, did the Catholics deign to argue with their rivals. 'On the Donatist Schism', by Optatus, Catholic bishop of Milevis,<sup>1</sup> contained the first appeal on either side for direct negotiation between rival bishops. But Optatus wrote a generation too late. The 'Time of Macarius' and the revanche of the Donatists in the reign of Julian, now stood like a wall between the contemporaries of Optatus, and the exact sequence of events in Carthage in 311. The rights and wrongs of the 'case of Caecilian' could never sway men as potently as did their own direct experience of violence at the hands of Christian 'brothers'.<sup>2</sup>

In this way then, the Donatist Church had become the dominant church in Numidia: 'You say (to a Donatist): "You are perishing in your heresy, in this schism of yours: you will come straight to damnation."'

— "What has that to do with me" (he would reply): "as I lived yesterday, so I shall live today; what my parents were, so I intend to be."<sup>3</sup>

Augustine came to the problem of Donatism from the outside. Thagaste was a Catholic stronghold; he had been a Manichee;<sup>4</sup> he returned to Africa even more a foreigner in spirit, for the future pattern of his life had been set 'across the waters', in Milan. He did not even read the same translation of the Bible as his opponents.<sup>5</sup> Above all, his ideal of the Catholic Church had already grown to majestic proportions outside the African tradition. It had developed in a polemic against Manichees and pagan Platonists, that had no place in the writings of Cyprian. He had defended the Catholic Church as a philosopher: only the *auctoritas*, the persuasive force of this venerable, international institution, seemed to be able to hold and purge the minds of men.<sup>6</sup> The Catholic Church, indeed, was essential to what Augustine most dearly valued in himself, the continuing search for truth. Now he returned to Africa to find that this church had been divided by nothing

<sup>1</sup> transl. O. R. Vassall-Philips, *The Work of S. Optatus bishop of Milevis against the Donatists*, 1917. Monceaux, *Hist. littér.*, v, pp. 241-306, remains the best characterization.

<sup>2</sup> Forcefully described by Freund, *Donatist Church*, pp. 191-192.

<sup>3</sup> *Enarr. in Ps.* 54, 20.

<sup>4</sup> v. W. H. C. Freund, 'Manichaeism in the Struggle between St. Augustine and Petilian of Constantine', *Aug. Mag.*, ii, 1954, pp. 859-866.

<sup>5</sup> *Retract.* I, 20, 5.

<sup>6</sup> v. esp. Holte, *Blatitudo et Sagessse*, pp. 303-327; Bonner, *St. Augustine*, pp. 231-235.

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more important than the rancours of its bishops. 'Snap out of it! I am not dealing with an obscure problem', he would tell them, 'I am not dealing with some hidden mystery, where no human mind, or very few, can make headway. The matter is as clear as day.'<sup>1</sup> The Donatist bishops expounded the same Bible as himself, they professed the same creed, they celebrated an identical liturgy; yet they refused to see the obvious truth about the Catholic Church — 'They go down with open eyes into Hell.'<sup>2</sup>

Sympathetic to the Manichees, who held out 'the unvarnished promise of Truth',<sup>3</sup> Augustine studiously withheld his sympathy from the Donatists. It has recently become fashionable to make this bitter conflict between fellow-Christians palatable by explaining it away: to say that the religious differences were only the expression of the social and ethnic cleavages of Roman North Africa; and that the Donatists represented a popular tradition which Augustine, as a Romanized townsman, could not be expected to understand.<sup>4</sup> In fact, no great differences in class, race or education separated Augustine from the Donatist bishops, whose views he caricatured in his pamphlets. In any case, such a theory adds little to our understanding of what, for Augustine, was all-important: that is, that watershed of ideas and highly personal assumptions, which in his own mind, separated him from his Donatist rivals.

Augustine rapidly absorbed the African tradition that Catholics shared with Donatists.<sup>5</sup> Yet he approached it from a different direction, with a highly personal training as a philosopher, and with an attitude that had evolved in the course of his own adjustment to becoming a bishop. He will transform the firm and narrow ideas of his contemporaries, and so his writings against the Donatists will mark a final stage in the evolution of Early Christian ideas on the church, and its relation with society as a whole.

If we are to understand what it was like to be a Donatist, we should read their versions of the *Acts* of the martyrs of the Great pagan Persecution, and their descriptions of persecutions by the Catholics.<sup>6</sup> For these were the novels of Augustine's day.

<sup>1</sup> *Ep.* 43, iii, 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Enarr. in Ps.* 54, 16.

<sup>3</sup> *C. Ep. Fund.* 4.

<sup>4</sup> Notably by Freund, *Donatist Church*, pp. 229-238. I am unconvinced: v. Brown, 'Religious Dissent in the Later Roman Empire: the case of North Africa', *History*, xlvii, 1961, pp. 83-101. Many aspects of Dr. Freund's thesis have been criticized in detail by E. Tengström, *Donatisten u. Katholiken: soziale, wirtschaftliche u. politische Aspekte einer nordafrikanischen Kirchenspaltung*, (*Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia*, xviii), 1964.

<sup>5</sup> v. esp. J. Ratzinger, *Volk u. Haus Gottes*, 1954.

<sup>6</sup> *Monumenta ad Donatistarum historiam pertinentia*, P.L. viii, 673-784.

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In the *Acts*, the Donatists admired an attitude such as the orthodox Jew had to the Torah.<sup>1</sup> Their religion also was thought of as a 'Law'. Like the Maccabees, whose example moved them profoundly, their martyrs had died for 'their holy laws'.<sup>2</sup> 'I care for nothing but the Law of God, which I have learnt. This I guard, for this I die; in this I shall be burnt up. There is nothing in life other than this Law.'<sup>3</sup>

The feeling of having defended something precious, of preserving a 'Law' that had maintained the identity of a group in a hostile world, these are potent emotions. Such feelings had preserved, and would preserve, the amazing integrity of Judaism. In the lines of any Donatist manifesto, we can still sense the power of such feelings: they had led the Christian Church, always thought of as a 'True Israel', embracing in its past also Moses, the prophets, and the Maccabees, to victory in Africa. Such a Church was 'catholic' in what the Donatists regarded as the most profound sense of the word: for it was the only church that had preserved the 'total' Christian Law.<sup>4</sup>

A church could only preserve the Christian 'Law' in its entirety by remaining 'pure'. The Donatists were not 'Puritans' in the Northern European sense. Augustine (who was far closer to that modern type) expected his readers to believe, that the Donatists had claimed such personal purity for themselves: and it gave scope to his journalistic talents to show that some of their leading bishops were far from being 'saints'.<sup>5</sup>

The Donatist idea of 'purity' drew its strength from a different source. It was the purity of the group in its relationship to God, that mattered. This group, like the ancient Israel, enjoyed a special relationship with God: for its prayers only were heard by Him.<sup>6</sup> The anxiety, that genuinely haunted the Donatist bishops, was that, by tolerating any breach in a narrow and clearly defined order of ritual behaviour, they might alienate God from His Church.<sup>7</sup> They will always quote those passages of the prophets of Israel in which they tell of how God had closed His ears to His Chosen People because of their sins.<sup>8</sup>

Anyone who reads a Donatist pamphlet, or, indeed, a work of S.

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Cyprian,<sup>1</sup> will be struck by the power of the idea of ritual purity that stemmed straight from the Old Testament: the fear of a sudden loss of spiritual potency through contact with an 'unclean' thing,<sup>2</sup> and the elemental imagery of the 'good' and the 'bad' water.<sup>3</sup> Such ideas had lost little of their force in fourth century Africa. Even the sophisticated Roman still regarded religion as a precise code of rites, designed to establish the correct relationship of the community to its God (or gods). Augustine shared this attitude: rebaptism genuinely shocked him as a 'sacrilege', for it 'defaced' the correct, Catholic rite.<sup>4</sup> The Donatist enthusiasts carried clubs called 'Israels';<sup>5</sup> they would 'purify' Catholic basilicas with coats of whitewash; they would destroy the altars of others.<sup>6</sup> Such men could understand, far better perhaps than Augustine with his sophisticated, 'spiritual' exegesis of the Old Testament, the urgent need for 'separation', for the active, physical destruction of the 'unclean', that runs as a constant refrain through the pages of the Bible.<sup>7</sup>

Logically, the emphasis on the need to form a small 'pure' group, might seem to favour any minority which claimed to be holier than its neighbours. Augustine will emphasize the existence of 'splinter-groups' in Donatism, which in his opinion had crumbled their church into 'so many crumbs'.<sup>8</sup>

Such splinter-groups, however, were not very frequent in Donatism. The basic Donatist idea was of a Chosen People, that had preserved its identity without compromise with the 'impure' world. Far from fostering a 'minority mentality', such an idea could gain the unwavering support of a whole province. It contained the secret of a success unparalleled in the history of the Early Church. For like Nonconformity in Wales, the Donatist Church had won over a provincial society, isolated, self-respecting, suspicious of the outside world, to its form of Christianity.

For the Donatist Church was 'pure' in an obvious and not particularly exacting sense: it had kept itself pure *from* a single, unspeakable crime, from *traditio*, the sacrificing of the Christian 'Law'; that is, from

<sup>1</sup> Brisson, *Autonomisme et christianisme*, pp. 89-105.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. *Isaiah* 52, 11.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. Fulgentius in Monceaux, *Hist. littér.*, v, pp. 335-339.

<sup>4</sup> e.g. *Enarr. in Ps.* 145, 16; v. C. *Faustum* XIX, 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Enarr. in Ps.* 10, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Optatus of Milevis, *de schism. Don.* VI, 1-3, (P.L. xi, 1063-1072); cf. *Aug. Ep.* 29, 12.

<sup>7</sup> M. Simon, 'Le judaïsme berbère dans l'Afrique ancienne', *Rev. d'hist. et de philos. relig.*, xxvi, 1946, 1-31 and 105-145 (= *Recherches d'Hist. Judéo-Christienne*, 1962, pp. 30-87, esp. pp. 46-47).

<sup>8</sup> *C. Ep. Parm.* II, xviii, 37.

<sup>1</sup> v. W. H. C. Friend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, esp. p. 362, on the possible links between Judaism and African Christianity.

<sup>2</sup> *Macc.* 7, 9: *C. litt. Petil.* II, viii, 17, (Monceaux, *Hist. littér.*, v, p. 312).

<sup>3</sup> *Acta Saturnini*, 4, (P.L. viii, 692).

<sup>4</sup> *C. litt. Petil.* II, xxxviii, 90 and *Coll. Carthag.* iii, 102, (P.L. xi, 1381D).

<sup>5</sup> e.g. *C. Ep. Parm.* II, iv, 8. v. inf. p. 228.

<sup>6</sup> v. esp. *Acta Saturnini* 20, (P.L. viii, 702-703).

<sup>7</sup> e.g. *C. Ep. Parm.* II, vii, 12; cf. the citations in *Acta Saturnini* 19, (P.L. viii, 702).

<sup>8</sup> e.g. *C. Ep. Parm.* II, iii, 6.

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a crime committed by total strangers in a conveniently distant past.<sup>1</sup> Its caste of 'pure' bishops were often eminent men in Roman towns that had maintained their prestige.<sup>2</sup> In the eyes of their congregations, these bishops stood for the uninterrupted succession of the 'Church of the Martyrs': a Donatist priest would be told by an angel the precise 'line of descent of Christianity' that culminated in the bishop of his town.<sup>3</sup> In a society that valued sheer physical continuity in life and death (Monica, after all, had once wished to 'rejoice in grandsons after the flesh',<sup>4</sup> and had hoped to be buried in her home soil),<sup>5</sup> these bishops were thought of as the 'sons of the martyrs' as surely as the despised Catholics were the 'sons of Caecilian'.<sup>6</sup> The memory of these martyrs would be constantly relived, beside their graves, by pilgrimages, and by uproarious festivals that crystallized the tenacious loyalty of simple men for venerated ancestors.<sup>7</sup>

The archaeologist is in the best position to appreciate the strength of Donatism in Numidia; for it is, appropriately enough, in the ground, that we can see the traces of those strong roots, which a community of farmers and small townsmen had created for their religion.<sup>8</sup> There were the 'great churches', Tingad and Bagai<sup>9</sup> — huge basilicas, with great warehouses, shrines and a hostel for pilgrims.<sup>10</sup> In the shadow of these 'holy cities' of Donatism, the hillsides were studded with villages that had gained a new sense of importance from the new religion. They could now boast a bishop of their own;<sup>11</sup> they would combine to build churches;<sup>12</sup> these churches would become the centre of intense loyalties;<sup>13</sup> and so they would unite, as only a village could, to repel outsiders.<sup>14</sup> They were 'the flock of the Lord', 'brought to lie down in the South'.<sup>15</sup>

Such, briefly, were the ideas that had formed the Donatist church. These ideas enjoyed the widespread support of simple men; and yet in the age of Augustine, they were also held by sophisticated men.

<sup>1</sup> v. R. Crespín, *Ministère et Sainteté*, pp. 221–225, and A. C. de Veer, in *Rech. augustini*, iii, 1965, pp. 236–237. Augustine chose to overlook this vital distinction: he has persuaded too many modern historians of Donatism, but may not have convinced his Donatist opponents. The distinction is, of course, a fine one; a Donatist layman, for instance, failed to make it: e.g. *C. Crescon.*, III, vii, 7.

<sup>2</sup> v. Brown, 'Religious Dissent', *History*, xlvii, 1961, pp. 91–92. <sup>3</sup> *Ep.* 53, i, 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Conf.* VIII, xii, 13. <sup>5</sup> *Conf.* IX, xi, 28. <sup>6</sup> *Coll. Carthag.* iii, 221, (P.L. xi, 1402A).

<sup>7</sup> *C. Ep. Parm.* III, vi, 29. v. esp. H. I. Marrou, 'Survivances paiennes dans les rites funéraires des donatistes', *Extrait de la Collection Latomus*, ii, 1949, pp. 193–203.

<sup>8</sup> v. esp. Friend, *Donatist Church*, pp. 211–212. <sup>9</sup> *Enarr. in Ps.* 21, 26.

<sup>10</sup> Friend, *Donatist Church*, p. 209.

<sup>11</sup> Brown, 'Religious Dissent', *History*, xlvii, 1961, p. 95.

<sup>12</sup> *Année épigraphique*, 1894, 25 and 138; Warmington, *The North African Provinces*, p. 84 and n. 4.

<sup>13</sup> *Ep.* 44, vi, 14.

<sup>14</sup> *Ep.* 209, 2.

<sup>15</sup> *Song of Songs* 1, 7; v. *Serm.* 46, 35.

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Augustine felt that such ideas were inadequate because they were essentially static. The Donatist church was a group on the defensive: it was immobilized by anxiety to preserve its identity. The Church, a Donatist bishop had said, was like the Ark of Noah. It was well-tarred inside and out. It was watertight: it kept within itself the good water of baptism; it had kept out the defiling waters of the world.<sup>1</sup>

For Augustine, it was not enough for the Christian church to preserve a holy 'Law'. This attitude would have condemned Christianity, as in Augustine's eyes it had condemned the Donatist church, to remaining isolated, like the old Israel, content to guard a static alliance of 'obedience' between itself and God. Instead, he presented the Catholic Church as the heir of a will, about to take over a vast property.<sup>2</sup> The Church's expansion was foreordained. The Donatist opinion, that the unworthiness of some of its members had placed this expansion in jeopardy, that it had, for the moment at least, reduced the 'true' Church to Africa, drew from Augustine some of his most angry outbursts.<sup>3</sup> For to claim this was tantamount to allowing the free will of frail human beings to stand in the way of the omnipotence and foresight of God: 'Who shall remove the preordained course (the *praedestinatio*) of God?'<sup>4</sup> It is in such outbursts, that we recognize clearly the future exponent of the doctrine of the predestination of the elect.<sup>5</sup> Augustine would turn upon this great rival church the ominous contempt of a man, who knew that the ineluctable course of history was on his side: 'The clouds roll with thunder, that the House of the Lord shall be built throughout the earth: and these frogs sit in their marsh and croak — We are the only Christians!'<sup>6</sup>

However, such a rapidly expanding church could never claim to be 'holy' in any sense that was immediately apparent. Here the Donatists could appeal to the obvious. If the church was defined as 'pure', if it was the only body in the world in which the Holy Spirit resided, how could its members fail to be 'pure'? Augustine, however, was a man steeped in Neo-Platonic ways of thought. The whole world appeared to him as a world of 'becoming', as a hierarchy of imperfectly-realized forms, which depended for their quality, on 'participating' in an Intelligible World of Ideal Forms. This universe was in a state of constant, dynamic tension, in which the imperfect forms of matter

<sup>1</sup> *Ep. ad cath.* v, 9.

<sup>2</sup> v. esp. *Enarr. in Ps.* 21, 28 f., in the racy translation of Edmund Hill, *Nine Sermons of St. Augustine on the Psalms*, 1958, pp. 56–60.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. *Enarr. ii in Ps.* 101, 8.

<sup>4</sup> e.g. *Ep. ad cath.* ix, 23.

<sup>5</sup> *Enarr. iii in Ps.* 32, 14; cf. *C. Ep. Parm.* I, iv, 6.

<sup>6</sup> *Enarr. in Ps.* 95, 11.

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strove to 'realize' their fixed, ideal structure, grasped by the mind alone. It was the same with Augustine's view of the Church. The rites of the church were undeniably 'holy', because of the objective holiness of a Church which 'participated' in Christ.<sup>1</sup> The 'true church' of Augustine is not only the 'body of Christ', the 'heavenly Jerusalem', it is also deeply tinged with the metaphysical ideas of Plotinus:<sup>2</sup> it is the 'reality', of which the concrete church on earth is only an imperfect shadow.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the men who received and administered these rites merely strove imperfectly to realize this holiness, 'according to a certain shadow of the reality.'<sup>4</sup>

Thus the rites of the church take on an objective and permanent validity. They exist independently of the subjective qualities of those who 'participate' in them: in a way which Augustine never claimed to understand, the physical rites of baptism and ordination 'brand' a permanent mark on the recipient, quite independent of his conscious qualities.<sup>5</sup> At the same time as he wrote *On Baptism*, Augustine wrote his *Confessions*. In them also, the youth of a Catholic boy is portrayed as studded with reminders of the potency of the sacraments: his Manichaean friend, who had been baptized when unconscious, comes to his senses strangely changed;<sup>6</sup> even his intellectual development is now seen as penetrated, at every turn, by the mysterious force of the 'Name of Christ'.<sup>7</sup>

Augustine endowed the concrete rites of the Catholic Church with a mysterious and enduring validity. Yet he did so in order to make the Church itself a field of innumerable, personal evolutions. The individual Catholic was only 'guarded' by his sacraments: he still had before him the long processes of spiritual growth.<sup>8</sup> Once the visible church is seen in this way, the type of relationship that could be established between its members becomes immeasurably more complex and dynamic. For, as Augustine saw it, the Donatists had solved the problem of evil in the men around them, merely by refusing to establish any relationship with it. They had withdrawn from contact with an 'unclean' society into a coterie of their equals. For Augustine, inno-

<sup>1</sup> e.g. *Ep.* 261, 2.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. *Conf.* XII, xi, 12-13. v. J. Pépin, "Caelum Caeli", *Bulletin du Cange*, 23, 1953, esp. pp. 267-274, and J. Lamirande, *L'Église céleste selon S. Augustin*, 1963, (with the suggestive comments of A. H. Armstrong, *Journ. Theol. Studies*, n.s., xvi, 1965, pp. 212-213).

<sup>3</sup> A. Wachtel, *Beiträge z. Geschichte theologie d. Aurelius Augustinus*, 1960, pp. 118-119.

<sup>4</sup> *C. Ep. Parm.* II, iv, 8.

<sup>5</sup> *de Bapt.* IV, xxiii, 30.

<sup>6</sup> *Conf.* IV, iv, 8.

<sup>7</sup> *Conf.* III, iv, 8.

<sup>8</sup> *de Bapt.* I, xv, 24; III, xiv, 19; and IV xv-xvi, 23, on theological misconceptions in the convert similar to those held by Augustine himself in Milan: v. *Conf.* VII, xix, 25.

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cence was not enough. It was only 'one third' of the full range of human relationships to which the good Christian had to expose himself.<sup>1</sup> He must perform a threefold task: he must himself become holy; he must coexist with sinners in the same community as himself, a task involving humility and integrity; but he must also be prepared, actively, to rebuke and correct them.<sup>2</sup> The stern qualities which the Donatists would merely direct to those outside their group, would, in the Catholic Church, be turned inwards: a 'foreign policy' directed exclusively against the 'world' outside the church, becomes a 'home front' against the 'worldly' within the Church.

Augustine's critique of what he considered to be the Donatist attitude contains far-reaching assumptions. For it treated the Catholic community as essentially a community made up of two layers. This community would always contain a large, even a predominant, element of seemingly intractable human material, surrounding a core of 'true' members. The dividing-line between 'true' and 'false' members was, of course, invisible: this core would later harden into Augustine's 'defined number of the elect'.<sup>3</sup> But Augustine both envisaged such an élite, and had no doubts about the practical duties which every Catholic clergyman had to perform: over against the mass of men, they must not only be innocent, not only tolerate their fellows, but they must also be prepared, whenever possible, to take the offensive with measured severity, and an active, paternal authority; 'for the rod has its own kind of charity.'<sup>4</sup>

While the Donatist view of the Church had a certain rock-like consistency, Augustine's Church was like an atomic particle: it was made up of moving elements, a field of dynamic tensions, always threatening to explode.

His view of the Church had perched it on the brink of a war of conquest. In Augustine's thought, tenacious bonds could be seen to run out from this institution, throughout Roman society. The bishops already ruled large communities; and Augustine had as good as admitted that such communities would only respond to a measure of severity.<sup>5</sup> In the late fourth century, it was easy for such an ideal of active authority to overstep the boundaries of the Catholic communities proper. Already, invisible tentacles, the sacraments of baptism and ordination administered in schism by the Donatists, linked the remaining Christians in Africa to their true owner, the Catholic Church.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *C. Ep. Parm.* II, xxi, 40.

<sup>2</sup> *C. Ep. Parm.* II, xxi, 41.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. *C. Ep. Parm.* III, iv, 25.

<sup>4</sup> *C. Ep. Parm.* III, i, 3; cf. *C. Ep. Parm.* III, v, 26.

<sup>5</sup> *Ep.* 22, 5.

<sup>6</sup> *de Bapt.* IV, ix, 13 and xi, 17.

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For these sacraments were like the tattoos which soldiers in the Imperial armies had branded on the back of their hands,<sup>1</sup> so as to identify deserters: in the same way, Christ the Emperor of the Catholic Church was entitled to recall to the ranks of His Church, those who had received His brand.<sup>2</sup>

This image reflects the quality of Augustine's age. It was a harsh age, that thought, only too readily, in terms of military discipline and uniformity. The Emperors were also devout Catholics: it would only be a matter of a decade before they would decide to round up 'spiritual' deserters from the ranks of the Catholic Church.<sup>3</sup>

*C'est le premier pas qui coûte.* Augustine had already taken a decisive step almost ten years before he wrote his first pamphlets against the Donatists. Ultimately, the Donatists regarded their church as an alternative to society, as a place of refuge, like the Ark. Augustine believed that the Church might become coextensive with human society as a whole: that it might absorb, transform and perfect, the existing bonds of human relations. He was deeply preoccupied by the idea of the basic unity of the human race. God had made all men from one man, Adam, in order to show, that 'nothing is more rent by discord than this human race, in its flawed state; though nothing was so plainly intended by its Creator for living together'.<sup>4</sup> The idea of a common kinship in Adam is the mould into which Augustine, in his middle age, will pour his continuing preoccupation with friendship, with the true relations between human beings.<sup>5</sup> The poignant sense of the need to regain some lost unity is perhaps the most distinctive strand in Augustine's mystique of the Catholic Church. The Donatists might be content to find themselves in the Ark: Augustine was concerned with a deeper problem; the human race was divided, communication between fellow men in society was difficult; the image of the Division of Tongues at the Tower of Babel came to dominate his thought.<sup>6</sup> The Catholic Church was a microcosm of the re-established unity of the human race: it had already united all the tongues of men at Pentecost;<sup>7</sup> and we should never forget that Augustine, in founding his monastery, wished to recreate around him exactly the same community, as the Apostles had created when they received this gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Serm.* 317, 5.

<sup>2</sup> *de Bapt.* I, iv, 5 and III, xix, 25. v. esp. M. Ch. Pietri, in *Mélanges d'archéol. et d'hist.*, 74, 1962, 659-664: a Christian is shown on his sarcophagus, 'enrolling' like a soldier.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. *C. Gaud.* xx, 23. The recipient was, himself, an officer; v. inf. p. 335.

<sup>4</sup> v. esp. *de civ. Dei* XII, 28; cf. *Serm.* 268, 3. <sup>5</sup> e.g. *de bono coniug.* I, 1; cf. *Serm.* 90, 7.

<sup>6</sup> e.g. *Enarr. in Ps.* 54, 9. <sup>7</sup> *Serm.* 269, 2, and 271; cf. *Enarr. in Ps.* 95, 15.

<sup>8</sup> *Serm.* 356, 1.

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Such a monastery was to be a microcosm of the ideal human relationships that might be partially re-established in the Catholic Church.

A man who feels intensely that the existing bonds of men in society are somehow dislocated, but that the group to which he belongs can consolidate and purify them, will regard the society around him as so much raw material to be absorbed and transformed. He will be very different from the man who feels that he can only create an alternative to this society — a little 'Kingdom of Saints', sheltering beneath a bishop, the only possessor of a divine Law in a hostile or indifferent world.<sup>1</sup>

Augustine's writings against the Donatists betray his increasing absorption of the common stock of ideas available to African Christians — above all, of the idea of the Church as a clearly distinguished group in society, marked out as the sole possessor of a body of 'saving' rites. Behind these ideas, however, there still lurks the great 'mirage' of his early middle age, all the more potent for never having to be analysed in controversy. This was his image of the Catholic Church as it had appeared to him in Milan and in Rome. It was not the old church of Cyprian, it was the new, expanding church of Ambrose, rising above the Roman world like 'a moon waxing in its brightness'.<sup>2</sup> It was a confident, international body, established in the respect of Christian Emperors, sought out by noblemen and intellectuals,<sup>3</sup> capable of bringing to the masses of the known civilized world the esoteric truths of the philosophy of Plato,<sup>4</sup> a church set, no longer to defy society, but to master it. *Ecclesia catholica mater christianorum verissima*: 'The Catholic Church, most true Mother of Christians. . . .

'It is You who make wives subject to their husbands . . . by chaste and faithful obedience; you set husbands over their wives; you join sons to their parents by a freely granted slavery, and set parents above their sons in pious domination. You link brothers to each other by bonds of religion firmer and tighter than those of blood. You teach laves to be loyal to their masters . . . masters . . . to be more inclined to persuade them than to punish. You link citizen to citizen, nation to nation, indeed, You bind all men together in the remembrance of their first parents, not just by social bonds, but by some feeling of their common kinship. You teach kings to rule for the benefit of their people; and You it is who warn the peoples to be subservient to their kings.'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *ep. ad cath.* xiii, 33.

<sup>2</sup> *de util. cred.* vii, 18-19.

<sup>3</sup> Ambrose, *Ep.* 18, 24, (P.L. xvi, 1020).

<sup>4</sup> *de vera relig.* iv, 6.

<sup>5</sup> *de mor. eccl. cath.* (I), xxx, 63.