

NOTE

AUGUSTINE, EVIL, AND DONATISM: SIN AND SANCTITY BEFORE THE PELAGIAN CONTROVERSY

It has long been commonplace that the Pelagian controversy prompted Augustine to advertise humanity's bondage to sin. He understood the Pelagians to say that human free will, unassisted by grace, could achieve a state of righteousness roughly comparable to that lost by Adam and Eve. From 410 until his death in 430, Augustine emphasized the pervasiveness of sin, urging Christians to rely more completely on God's goodwill and grace. Recently, from G. R. Evans and Elaine Pagels, we have learned something more about how and why Augustine came to think of humanity as a *massa damnata*, how and why the influential bishop attributed to every descendant of Adam and Eve "a runaway tendency to will evil."¹ Evans concentrates on Augustine's disenchantment with the Manicheans and on the philosophical foundations of his subsequent discoveries. Pagels connects the discoveries and the popularity of Augustine's doctrine of universal corruption with fourth-century political developments. Following accepted practice, both Evans and Pagels show the importance of Pelagian claims in eliciting Augustine's counterclaims. The purpose of this paper is to suggest that, despite these two fine and lively books, the exposition of Augustine's pronouncements on sin and evil is still missing a critical chapter, to suggest, more specifically, that the indefatigable bishop's efforts to suppress the Donatist schism shaped his sensibilities and suspicions even before he formulated his opposition to the Pelagians.

SANCTITY AND THE SCHISM

Augustine inveighed against Donatism both before and after the Council of Carthage (411), at which Marcellinus, the emperor's deputy, proscribed the Donatist church. My argument obliges me to draw primarily from anti-Donatist treatises composed during the first decade of the fifth century and before Augustine was preoccupied with Pelagianism.² The Donatist schism, of course, originated nearly a century before that, when

¹ G. R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (New York: Cambridge University, 1982); Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1988).

² Notably *Contra epistolam Parmeniani* (400; hereafter cited *C. Parm.*); *Contra litteras Petiliani* (401, 405; *C. Petil.*); and *Contra Cresconium grammaticum* (405-6; *C. Cresc.*). For Augustine's strategies at the Council of Carthage, see Serge Lancel, ed., *Actes de la conférence de Carthage en 411* (3 vols.; Paris: Cerf, 1972) 1:266-70.

dissidents objected to the consecration of Caecilian as bishop of Carthage. They complained that Felix, one of the presiding bishops, had collaborated with the church's persecutors. The emperor, advised by European prelates, dismissed the complaint and confirmed Caecilian's appointment, but secession spread from Carthage through Numidia and to other North African provinces, largely due to the tenacity and organizational ability of Caecilian's chief rival, Donatus of Casae Nigrae.³ In Thagaste, where Augustine grew up, there were relatively few Donatists. But Donatism was popular in Hippo Regius, where he served as priest and then bishop, soon after he returned from Italy. Secessionists probably outnumbered worshipers at his church, whom they dubbed "Caecilianists." Everywhere in North Africa they divided the world into two irreconcilable parts or parties; they believed themselves summoned by the words of St. Paul to withdraw from one Christian church, contaminated by the sins of collaborators and their heirs, and to establish and defend another (1 Cor 5:9-13: "Drive out the wicked person").⁴

At the Council of Carthage the Donatists' spokesmen ridiculed the idea that the good and evil, wheat and tares, could live peaceably in the same church. They showed no inclination to repent of their secession. Old Testament prophets, they said, had warned of contamination; the evil would surely corrupt the good.⁵ Augustine was aware of the problem. He admitted that wickedness, if unpunished, seduced the innocent and made a muddle of Christian morality. The solution, however, was not to secede from the wicked but to punish them. Augustine encouraged colleagues to discipline wayward priests and laity, yet he also reminded them and the Donatists that God was the church's conscientious and reliable custodian, watching over it and restraining its criminal elements. God would separate the righteous from the obstinately unrighteous in the final reckoning; until then good Christians wait for the Lord (Ps 27:14), wait in the church, segregating themselves from the wicked morally, but not physically and institutionally.⁶

The Donatists could not wait. Their ancestors challenged Caecilian's

³ See Emin Tengström, *Donatisten und Katholiken: Soziale, wirtschaftliche und politische Aspekte einer nordafrikanischen Kirchenspaltung* (Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1964) esp. 93-99, 127-28, 146-53, 160-62; W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952; reissued 1985) 166-71, 281-84. Also consult Geoffrey Willis, *Saint Augustine and the Donatist Controversy* (London: S.P.C.K., 1950); Gerald Bonner, *Saint Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963).

⁴ *C. Parm.* 3.2.12; and *C. Petil.* 3.38.44. For Donatism in Thagaste and Hippo Regius, see Rémi Crespín, *Ministère et sainteté: Pastorale du clergé et solution de la crise donatiste dans la vie et la doctrine de saint Augustin* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1965) 140-44.

⁵ *Lancel.* *Actes* 3:1198-1202.

⁶ *C. Parm.* 3.3.17 and 3.43.95-96; *C. Petil.* 3.3.4-3.5.6; *C. Cresc.* 2.26.31 and 3.81.93.

consecration because they believed that prelates who co-operated with persecutors forfeited their powers. If Felix was a *traditor*, a priest or bishop who handed over sacred books to hostile authorities, Caecilian was improperly consecrated. The priests he then ordained and the bishops he consecrated were imposters. The sacraments they administered were worthless. Hence one invalid consecration could conceivably deprive the church of religious consolation within a generation. No sincere Christian would face with equanimity the prospect that the remission of his or her sins was ineffective. On the contrary, waiting for the Lord, as Augustine advised, Christians would be tormented by the possibility that they were waiting in the wrong chamber, listening to bogus bishops utter fraudulent promises. Christians consulting the Donatist bishop Petilian on this point heard news that could only increase their anxieties. Augustine heard, or thought he heard, statements deriving from the featherbrain idea that corruption and evil infected only one church, while the other, the Donatist church, was without spot or wrinkle. For Petilian insisted that anyone in communion with a *traditor* was “a dead man,” notwithstanding the legitimacy of his baptism or ordination. Baptism gave a priest new life, and ordination provided him the power to give new life to others, but his association with *traditores* and their heirs and defenders made him an accomplice in their fraud. Consequently he was equally culpable and equally incapable of administering effective sacraments. Whoever receives baptism and remission from a *traditor* or an accomplice receives nothing. Petilian apparently urged Christians to follow Christ’s orders, to let the dead bury their dead (Mt 8:21–22), and to join the Donatist church, in which Christians could count on the pedigree and morality of their priests and on the success of their sacraments.⁷

Jean-Paul Brisson suggested that Donatist separatism and puritanism derived from the early Christians’ fascination with martyrs’ virtues and misfortunes. Even in relatively peaceful times, when confiscated properties were returned to them, Donatists circulated stories of their martyrs’ adversities. The narratives reminded the faithful of Donatist fugitives who had sacrificed everything, even life itself, to preserve the purity of their religion.⁸ Bishop Cyprian of Carthage had a special place in the catalogue of “saints.” His suffering and death in the third century

⁷ *C. Petil.* 2.7.14: “Mortuus est ille qui baptismo vero nasci non meruit, mortuus est ille similiter qui justo baptismo genitus mixtus est traditori. Ambo vitam baptismi non habent, et qui numquam penitus habuit et qui habuit et amisit.”

⁸ Jean-Paul Brisson, *Autonomisme et christianisme dans l’Afrique romaine* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1958) 292–94, 307, 311. Also see Ernst Ludwig Grasmück, *Coercitio: Staat und Kirche im Donatistenstreit* (Bonn: L. Röhrscheid, 1964) 120–30; and the *Passiones* collected in PL 8:752–74.

predated the start of the schism, and his pontificate was marked by a battle against puritanical Christians whose ideas were curiously close to those of later Donatists. Nonetheless, on one critical issue Cyprian anticipated Donatist doctrine: he required the rebaptism of individuals who joined the church after having received their first baptism among impious or heretical Christians.⁹ As Augustine pointed out, Cyprian's stipulation was probably a reaction to the apparent failure of heretical baptisms to inspire charitable dispositions, compromises, conformity, and reunion. Heretics baptized to perpetuate their heresies, so there must have been something wrong with their baptisms.¹⁰ The Donatists, however, considered the requirement of rebaptism an unambiguous injunction. Cyprian's word was law, and his "law" seemed to them simply to enshrine in doctrine important truths accessible to common sense: the polluted (*maculosus*) cannot purify, the soiled (*sordidus, immundus*) cannot launder and absolve others' sins, the faithless cannot impart faith.¹¹

Donatists were quick to draw their conclusion from this list of disqualifications: inasmuch as sinners could not remit sins, Christians should submit only to those priests whose consciences reflected a martyr's commitment to the purity of Christianity. Augustine answered that it was difficult to read just what was reflected in a priest's conscience. The sin there was not always discernible. Clever delinquents could conceal their wickedness. To address those objections and vindicate his church's position, the Donatist layman Cresconius seems to have executed a memorable maneuver. At first he gave ground to Augustine, admitting that scandals could go undetected and that it was unreasonable to expect the laity to probe the personal histories and consciences of all priests administering their sacraments. Cresconius' argument survives in the fragments scattered in Augustine's rejoinder, so the concession and subsequent assertions cannot be ascribed to Cresconius with complete confidence; still, the simple rule advanced as his, once Augustine's obvious interpolations have been purged, complements what we know of Donatist ecclesiology and follows nicely from the concession. Cresconius seems to have instructed laypeople, who were baffled by priests' behavior and who could not swear to the caliber of their consciences, to rely on priests' reputations, trusting that a good report (*bona fama*) signaled a clear conscience. It was enough for Cresconius that the priest from whom he received the sacraments had not yet been condemned by Christians notorious for their intolerance of immorality, i.e. by Donatists who had

⁹ Frend, *The Donatist Church* 125–40.

¹⁰ See Augustine's *De baptismo* 5.15.18 and 6.1.1.

¹¹ *C. Cresc.* 3.5.5.

separated from sinful Christians and whose intolerance, separation, and suffering marked their superior sanctity.¹²

Augustine was also intolerant—but in ways that Petilian and Cresconius would understandably have failed to appreciate. He agreed to accept the government's help in suppressing the schism because he believed his rivals' sinister persistence in error a striking demonstration of evil's powers over the intellect and imagination. Donatist apostates, he said, were grateful for their release, even when coercion was used to pry them loose from the *pars Donati*.¹³ Meanwhile more stubborn Donatists decried the use of force and scolded Augustine and his friends for having appealed for political intervention. They accused the church of persecuting its puritan critics, whose merits increased with their suffering and hardships. Allowing that Donatists had always been quick to accuse yet slow to convict, Augustine frequently acquitted himself by acquitting Caecilian and Felix; if wrong from the start, the Donatists could hardly be right at the finish.¹⁴

Augustine regularly remarked that the Donatists' cases against Felix and Caecilian had been speedily dismissed by church and government authorities. The Donatists of his day, however, still chanted the charges as if they were sacred verses. To silence them, Augustine retrieved the canons of the Council of Arles in 314. Prelates then admitted that convicted *traditores* should be expelled from clerical office. But they declared offenders' sacraments, ordinations, and consecrations valid. Hence, if some new disclosure reversed the verdicts favoring Caecilian, Donatists still could not use Felix' guilt as a lever against Caecilian or use Caecilian's guilt against those whom he ordained and consecrated. Augustine accordingly stressed the distance between clerics' sins and sacraments. He granted that Donatists were correct to complain about some priests' unrighteousness, but he insisted that they were wrong to infer that clerical misconduct sabotaged sacraments administered by that handful of priests who sought their own profit rather than God's will and glory. Those miscreants were indeed "dead men," as Petilian claimed, but they were also instruments of the living God who guaranteed the effectiveness of any absolution or remission given in His name.¹⁵ Augus-

¹² *C. Cresc.* 2.17.21; 2.21.26; 2.37.47; 3.66.75.

¹³ *C. Petil.* 2.83.184—2.84.186; and Augustine's letter to Vincent of Cartenna (408) in CSEL 34:445–46.

¹⁴ Lancel, *Actes* 3:1008. Also see *C. Petil.* 2.92.202–4; Brisson, *Autonomisme* 376–77.

¹⁵ *C. Parm.* 1.4.7–8; *C. Petil.* 2.7.15 and 2.13.29–30. For Arles see Grasmück, *Coercitio* 46–63; but also consult E. Lamirande, "Le concile d'Arles et la primauté romaine," in *Bibliothèque augustinienne: Oeuvres de saint Augustin* 32 (1965) 732–33; and P. Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne depuis les origines jusqu'à l'invasion arabe* (7 vols.; Paris: E. Leroux, 1901–23) 4:216–28.

tine implied that Petilian had forgotten that God could bestow grace and fulfil the promises of forgiveness and redemption in whatever ways He wished. Petilian's indignation and the Donatist outcry against clerical corruption were creditable, to a point. That point was reached, however, as soon as Petilian's position on sin and conscience made God seem powerless in the face of clerical crime. In Augustine's judgment Cresconius carried this nonsense to an extreme, suggesting that the Donatist church should designate prelates through whom God would then be permitted to work.

PETILIAN, CRESCONIUS, AND THE *CONTRA CRESCONIUM*

It is true that Cresconius simply assembled some of the ecclesiological implications of Donatist puritanism. But Cresconius' expressions seemed unpardonably arrogant to Augustine. The *Contra Cresconium* (405-6) develops Augustine's historical arguments, challenging the Donatists' competence to make commendable distinctions between good and evil, wheat and tares. The treatise also advances theological arguments that prefigure Augustine's "mature position" on the pervasiveness of sin.

Augustine's historical arguments invariably feature the misgivings and misrepresentations that started the schism. Dissidents thought Felix guilty; he was declared innocent. But Augustine also amended the Donatists' presentation of their subsequent history. By and large they reported their past in terms of martyrdom and persecution. Virtue and suffering belonged on their side of the schism; cruelty and tyranny belonged on the other. Augustine answered that Donatism's claims to superior sanctity were unhinged by Donatists' known associations with vagabonds and vagrants called (by him) Circumcellions. He alleged that these criminals mugged, blinded, and murdered clergy of the opposition. They demonstrated that Donatists could make martyrs of their enemies as well as of their eulogized ancestors. Augustine seasoned his narratives with sensationalist accounts of the Circumcellions' felonies, assuming they would embarrass Donatist moderates. Churches purporting to enforce the highest standards of clerical morality simultaneously condoned notorious terrorists: here was a contradiction worthy of a harangue and many a homily! Cresconius had insinuated that Donatists were so scrupulous that among them priests' reputations were infallible indications of their character. The Circumcellions were key figures in Augustine's relentless campaign to show that Donatists were neither scrupulous nor saintly. To strike decisively against Cresconius, to bedevil moderates, and to justify the government's expanding role in the suppression of schism, Augustine painted the blackest possible picture of Circumcellion exploits. He identified Circumcellions as the Donatists' indelible disgrace

and as a tremendous threat to civil order in North Africa. Borrowing a page from the Donatists, he divided his world into two irreconcilable parts: thieves everywhere preyed upon the innocent, and the Donatist church had become a den of thieves.¹⁶

Augustine maintained that Donatists' pronouncements on good and evil, purity and impurity, wheat and tares could not paper over the history of Donatist affiliations with villains. Donatist arbiters and Circumcellion aggressors were sole and heel of the same shoe. Leading Donatists disavowed responsibility for the Circumcellions' crimes, yet that did not deter Augustine. He believed he possessed sufficient evidence to link Donatist prelates with their unruly partisans, and he knew the linkage was polemically advantageous.¹⁷

To show that Donatists' presumption of sanctity could not clear close inspection, even if the few repudiations of Circumcellion misconduct were credited to their account, Augustine argued that the Donatist church invited criticism by having failed to excommunicate Bishop Optatus of Thamugadi. Optatus had not been a Circumcellion, but he had conspired with militants in the late-fourth-century insurrection that very nearly made North Africa independent of Rome. The rebels were beaten and Optatus executed; reports of his treachery circulated widely after the emperor's deputies regained control. Had there been no risk of division within the Donatists' ranks, the reports, if not the execution, would have provided adequate incentive for vigorous Donatist disclaimers: Optatus would have been condemned and his followers reabsorbed into the church, but only after rebaptism. Yet leading Donatist prelates could not have denounced Optatus and declared his sacraments invalid without antagonizing significant factions and perhaps episcopal colleagues who sympathized with the rebels. Official Donatist restraint handed Augustine a convenient club. He contended that Donatists' refusal to rebaptize in this instance signaled their conviction that, contrary to received opinion

¹⁶ *C. Cresc.* 3.42.46–47. Also see *C. Parm.* 2.3.6; 2.9.19; 3.3.18; 3.6.29; *C. Petil.* 2.88.194–95; *C. Cresc.* 3.48.53 and 4.50.60; *Breviculus collationis cum Donatistis* 3.11.21. For the Circumcellions see Hans-Joachim Diesner, "Methodisches und Sachliches zum Circumcellionentum," and idem, "Die Circumcellionen von Hippo Regius," reprinted in Diesner's *Kirche und Staat im spätrömischen Reich* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlaganstalt, 1963) 53–90, which critically analyze Augustine's correspondence. Also consult Diesner's *Der Untergang der römischen Herrschaft in Nordafrika* (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1964) 129; and E. Lamirande, "Rapports des Donatistes avec les Circoncillions," *Bibliothèque augustiniennne: Oeuvres de saint Augustin* 32 (1965) 716–17.

¹⁷ *C. Petil.* 2.11.26. For Donatist disavowals see Lancel, *Actes* 1:89–91, and Brisson, *Autonomisme* 344–45. Also note Albert de Veere, "Les violences d'après le témoignage de saint Augustin." *Bibliothèque augustiniennne: Oeuvres de saint Augustin* 31 (1968) 819–20.

and imperial decree, Optatus was guiltless.¹⁸

Having all but exonerated Optatus, the Donatists proved to Augustine that they were untrustworthy judges of guilt and innocence, good and evil. And there was more proof at hand. In 394 a Donatist council excommunicated Bishops Felicianus and Praetextatus for having consecrated the renegade Maximianus. Later the pair were readmitted without performing penance; persons who received baptism from them during the period of their estrangement were not rebaptized after the reconciliation. Historians could draw one of two conclusions. If, as their rehabilitation indicated, Felicianus and Praetextatus had been innocent, the initial condemnation was mistaken. That would have made it easy for Augustine to show that Donatist distinctions and judgments were sometimes un dependable. If the two bishops were guilty as initially charged, reunion without penance and rebaptism, although a politically prudent concession, compromised Donatist principles and damaged the argument with which Donatist secession had been defended, the argument that evil and impure priests and bishops contaminate the church. It then appeared to Augustine as if Donatists were willing to forgive and forget crimes that their councils had uncovered and detailed, yet unforgiving when other allegations (against Felix and Caecilian) had been dismissed as false and malicious by earlier councils to which the first Donatists appealed.¹⁹

At some length Augustine rehearsed the details of Donatist controversies. He exploited inconsistencies in his rivals' record, which purportedly exposed as a contemptible conceit the Donatists' expert ability to distinguish the pure from the impure, the sinless from the sinful. His theological argument explained why such distinctions could not and should not be made. They could not be made because the appearance of innocence was always deceptive: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 Jn 1:8). They should not be made, not only because they were necessarily inaccurate but because they pre-empted the final judgment of God.

Wanting to dramatize Donatist error, arrogance, and impiety, Augustine probably made Donatist puritanism seem more perfectionist than it actually was. His comments on Donatist origins are generally sound. The enemies of Caecilian asserted that the crimes of *traditores* created an ecclesiastical emergency early in the fourth century; *traditores*, they said, corrupted the church, which nonetheless continued baptizing, ordaining, and consecrating—business as usual—as if sin and evil were not contagious. Augustine was also close to the mark when he repeated the complaints of the Donatists of his day who protested that the church

¹⁸ C. Parm. 2.4.8 and 2.7.13; C. Petil. 2.35.82 and 2.101.232; C. Cresc. 3.12.15.

¹⁹ C. Cresc. 4.14.16—4.15.17.

from which their ancestors had seceded was still overindulgent and indifferent to the influence of unrighteousness, that standards, such as they were, accommodated the spread of clerical immorality. In sermons that no longer survive, leading Donatists may only have assured their friends that the Caecilianists' crimes would not affect them, that the Donatist church shielded them from some sins and errors, not all. But Augustine inferred from their protests that the Donatists presumed perfect righteousness possible in their communions. He replied by defending attempts to discipline delinquents in his church and by branding the Donatist defense of discipline pride and posturing.²⁰

Set up and set upon in Augustine's anti-Donatist treatises, opposition spokesmen appear to have boasted that their priests and bishops were irreproachable and their laypeople uniformly pious. Having held that prelates' shortcomings did not compromise their sacraments, Augustine could not very well deny that Donatist clergy effectively pardoned sinners. Nonetheless he said that the pardon was immediately vitiated because Donatists stubbornly remained in schism. The most upright Donatist was still a wicked Christian. All Donatists, rejecting pleas for the unity and peace of the church, embraced an eccentric, silly, and subversive doctrine rather than the consensus expressed clearly from the moment church councils pronounced against the enemies of Caecilian. Augustine succinctly summarized the Donatists' dangerous misconception: they believed that priests transferred their righteousness or wretchedness to persons receiving their sacraments. Such foolishness could undermine the day-by-day administration of the church by encouraging laypeople to shop for priests of impeccable character or, as Cresconius seemed to suggest, for priests who made the best impressions, i.e. priests with the best reputations. That would turn the church into a marketplace and make peddlers of priests. It would induce laity to trust their priests' salesmanship rather than God's promises.²¹

Augustine voiced these objections in his replies to Petilian. He reiterated them when Cresconius entered the controversy, because Cresconius seemed to have credited priests' good reputations with the perpetuation of righteousness in the Donatist church. It was foolish to wager, with Petilian, that one's assessment of another's character or conscience was infallible and then to risk salvation on the results of direct observation and inquiry, no matter how thorough. In the context of the Donatist

²⁰ *C. Petil.* 3.37.43—3.39.45. Compare A. Schindler, "L'Histoire du donatisme considérée du point de vue de sa propre théologie," *Studia patristica* 17.3 (1982) 1312–13.

²¹ *C. Petil.* 2.5.11—2.6.13. Also consult Johannes Stelzenberger, *Conscientia bei Augustinus* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1959) 99–102; F. Floëri, "L'Argument de la 'réviviscence des péchés' dans le *De baptismo*," *Studia patristica* 6.4 (1962) 383–89.

argument, it was preposterous to gamble, with Cresconius, that undetected lies and scandals were inconsequential. There was no sense Donatists feigning that secret or concealed sins did not disqualify priests, when leading Donatist spokesmen insisted that any sin corrupted a priest and his sacraments.

For Augustine the value of Cresconius' intervention was that it demonstrated how irrational and unscriptural Donatists became when they attempted to vindicate their crude understandings of righteousness and sin. In St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians Augustine found a formidable response. The apostle confirmed that "neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God gives growth" (3:7). Augustine extended the metaphor: God furnished the seed, fertilized the soil, and fashioned the appropriate climate. Seed, soil, climate, and God, who "gives the growth," are unconcerned about the planter's piety, as long as the crop is planted (and baptism administered in God's name). "It is better to take refuge in the Lord," Augustine repeated, "than to put confidence in man" (Ps 118:8). "Cursed is the man who trusts in man" (Jer 17:5). Augustine stretched the point to scold Cresconius for inferring righteousness from reputation: "If one who trusts in man is cursed, one who trusts in the erroneous opinion of man is cursed all the more."²² Cresconius apparently made a fatal slip. He agreed with Petilian that, if righteousness were to prosper, the planter must be—or be perceived to be—righteous. Yet he agreed with Augustine that perceptions were misleading, that candidates for ordination might be artful dodgers, dissemblers, and perhaps perjurers. Cresconius was content to trust the Donatist consensus until disclosures ruined the good reputations of wicked prelates. Hence Augustine turned a familiar phrase against his opponents. Donatists doubted that sincere Christians could worship complacently, suspecting that a *traditor's* secret shame was lodged in their priest's past. Augustine doubted that scrupulous Donatists could worship confidently, acknowledging that their priest might be a hypocrite. Priests and bishops who left unconfessed sins buried in their pasts were wicked men, but those who built a good yet false reputation on a foundation of lies were "more profoundly mendacious."²³

Reputations were largely predicated on ostensible behaviors. Augustine gathered that Donatists came to conclusions about sin and righteousness after observing their prelates' conduct, but he suggested that judgments about sin and righteousness require a more profound and theological

²² *C. Cresc.* 3.8.8—3.9.9 ("Porro si maledictus est qui spem suam ponit in homine, quanto magis qui spem suam ponit in falsitate opinionis humanae"). Also see *C. Cresc.* 4.22.27; *C. Petil.* 1.3.4 and 2.101.233; *De baptismo* 4.12.18.

²³ *C. Cresc.* 2.26.31. Also see *C. Parm.* 2.10.20.

analysis. The senses do not take us where contemplation can. To spare their churches any unpleasantness, ecclesiastical umpires might be tempted to overlook indiscretions; theologians know that seemingly insignificant missteps as well as inexcusable crimes attest that we deceive ourselves if we say we have no sin. Augustine allowed that most Donatists could justifiably deny they were murderers or adulterers. Most Christians, if not all, by the end of the fourth century could deny they were *traditores*. No one could say, however, that he or she was without sin. Augustine declared that it was arrogant and heretical to boast, even to think, that one could be completely purged of sin in this life.²⁴ If Donatists imagined they could withdraw from evil and sin as well as from overtly sinful Christians by withdrawing from the church administered by Caecilian's friends and heirs, they were sadly mistaken and theologically naive.

Augustine's position in the *Contra Cresconium* (405–6) anticipated the one he developed in his early anti-Pelagian treatises. In 412, for instance, he explained more fully than he had done before why we deceive ourselves if we say we have no sin. His remarks on merit, forgiveness, and baptism reduce to this: humanity's original sin stains every individual, even the person who appears to live faultlessly. Doubly mourn infants who die without baptism. Death robs them of their pilgrimages on earth; the sin of Adam and Eve bars them from eternal life. Saints, whose conduct was impeccable, unexceptionably noble and pious, were blameless but not sinless. Their righteousness actually started with self-accusation, with an awareness of the great sin that soiled their character and conscience.²⁵ Donatists initially drew Augustine's attention to the problem of conscience. Their claims that purity was possible in this life, a purified conscience and a purified church, provoked his historical arguments, which underscored Donatist tolerance of evil, and his theological arguments, which alluded to the pervasiveness of sin. Pelagians thought perfect righteousness within the reach of morally serious Christians. To Augustine, however, the perfectly righteous Christian of the Pelagians must have seemed a mere hypothesis when placed alongside the "sons of martyrs" whom Parmenian, Petilian, and Cresconius transformed into a libel against Christians on Augustine's side of the schism. The Pelagian hypothesis prompted Augustine's more consistently speculative rejoinders. The *pars Donati* confronted him with ignorance masquerading as truth, and with fanaticism and arrogance masquerading as virtue. His

²⁴ *C. Cresc.* 2.28.35.

²⁵ *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 1.9.9; 1.12.15; 2.7.8; 3.4.8.

anti-Donatist treatises, therefore, are more like scrapbooks, containing the grit and stubble of controversy. Without them, however, our understanding of the influential abstractions which mark the theological anthropology in Augustine's later polemic would be incomplete.²⁶

University of North Carolina

PETER IVER KAUFMAN

²⁶ Evans may be hinting at this on the single page she devoted to the Donatist schism (*Augustine on Evil* 28). Although she volunteered that "Augustine's writings against the Donatists are the works in which he is perhaps least concerned with the problem of evil" and that the composition of those works "gave him employment for his mind and a period of comparative detachment from his old preoccupations," she intimated that Augustine "had been making progress with [those preoccupations with evil] unawares." Neither she nor Pagels (*Adam* 124) thought that progress worth elaborating; but cf. Stelzenberger, *Conscientia* 20-21, 96-99, 128-31, 173.