

ARTICLES

"What Has the Emperor to Do with the Church?" Non-Nicenes and Constantinian Retractions

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This paper reexamines the entanglement of church and state by returning to the earliest and most persistent critics of imperial intervention in Christian affairs: the Donatists. Using Donatus's famous question—"What has the emperor to do with the church?"—as a guiding thread, the study traces a counter-tradition of resistance to coercive Constantinianism from the fourth century through the Reformation and into modern Baptist Landmarkism. After reviewing Constantine's involvement at Nicaea and his earlier engagement with the Donatist controversy, the paper situates Donatism within a broader African lineage that includes Tertullian and Lactantius, both of whom articulated early notions of religious liberty. It then follows the afterlives of Donatist ideas as later dissenting movements, from Anabaptists to English Separatists and Landmark Baptists, were labelled "Donatist" for opposing state control of the church. Finally, the paper proposes a reconsideration of Augustine's political theology—especially in light of his own ambivalence and the later "Augustinian" resistance to imperial interference—to suggest constructive resources for contemporary Christians seeking to affirm both conciliar orthodoxy and robust religious freedom. The study argues that the Christian defense of liberty of conscience long predates modernity and remains essential for the church's public witness today.

"What has the emperor to do with the church?" That question was asked around the year 314 by an African Christian leader named Donatus (recorded in Optatus, *Against the Donatists* 3.3).¹ Donatus was the bishop of Carthage who was not invited to Nicaea. Instead, his rival, Caecilian, attended. Since Nicaea represents the first major instance of imperial involvement in Christian doctrine, I will use Donatus's question as a way to revisit the relationship between the church and state, both in the earliest centuries and in the Christian tradition that comes down to us today.

The notion of a "separation" of church and state, or a division between the spheres of religion and politics, was almost unthinkable to the ancient world (Barton and Boyarin 2016). The world included the political realm, and it entailed competing forces, even superhuman forces. Whichever army won a battle, it did so because God, a god, or the gods wanted it to do so. If a new

¹ Latin: *Quid est imperiori cum ecclesia?* (All translations of ancient texts are my own, unless otherwise noted.)

ruler came into power, that ruler had divine favor—at least for a time. And yet, I have to stipulate that the separation of religion and politics, sacred and secular, church and state, was *almost* unthinkable, because there was a group of early Christians who had that exact thought: the Donatists.

In what follows, I will first briefly review Constantine's involvement in the council of Nicaea, since Constantine's actions stem from his earlier engagement with the Donatists. I will, therefore, introduce Donatism not only as a movement from the fourth century but as a type or foil for many later movements that dared to criticize government involvement in church affairs. Of the many groups called Donatists, there is one acute group among Baptists known as Landmarkists, who claimed to be in the line of true succession to Christ's teachings, because they said there had always been true churches (such as the Donatists) who opposed the false church (backed by worldly rulers).

Reviewing this history will then provide us with the chance to ask what resources are available to anyone who wishes to reconsider Constantinianism, by which I mean the governmental control over the church. I suggest that returning once again to the sources of Constantine's time can be a fruitful exercise, especially if one considers all of the sources—that is, not just those loyal to Constantine and Nicaea but also non-Nicene voices like the Donatists.²

In what follows, I will show that the Donatists were not alone, but in fact represented a tradition that had pressed for religious liberty long before, and long after, Constantine. I will end by assessing the claims of this tradition—a tradition that includes pre-Donatist voices like Tertullian and Lactantius, and even the later, decidedly anti-Donatist thinker, Augustine, who was indebted to the same African tradition. Augustine is without doubt the most influential thinker for western Christendom, and yet he leaves a mixed message when it comes to Constantinianism. When seen in light of his ancient African tradition, however, I believe his views can provide a way forward for all Christians today.

Constantine at Nicaea

Constantine loomed large at Nicaea. He summoned the council, and then he moved the council's location to Nicaea, near Nicomedia, the eastern capital at the time, so he could be present (Drake 2021, 111–32). According to Eusebius of Caesarea, he provided official transportation, meals, and held the gathering in his palace's great hall (Eusebius, *Life* 3.6; 3.9–10). When the council began, the bishops stood as he entered, and he “glittered as it

² Just as “Pro-Nicene” is used in a general way by scholars, I use “non-Nicene” to indicate those who were not at Nicaea or did not explicitly endorse the council. This is not the same as anti-Nicene.

were with rays of light, reflecting the glowing radiance of a purple robe, and adorned with the brilliant splendor of gold and precious stones” (3.10).³ He then humbly waited for permission from the bishops to be seated—as if anyone would deny that to him (3.10).

Constantine also governed over all of the proceedings, even though various people were appointed to preside for individual sessions. He spoke first (in Latin, the official state language), and then “he gave permission” for those who presided to give their own speeches in Greek (3.13). In response to each speech, Constantine “appeared in a truly attractive and amiable light, persuading some, convincing others by his reasonings, praising those who spoke well, and urging all to unity of sentiment, until at last he succeeded in bringing them to one mind and judgment respecting every disputed question” (3.13). In other words, Constantine offered commentary at the end of every speech, which undoubtedly had an impact on each speaker that followed.

When the council ended, Constantine offered a banquet that was “splendid beyond description” (3.15). The celebration was guarded by Constantine’s own bodyguards, who stood outside with drawn swords, allowing no one else to enter (3.15). Then he sent the bishops home with gifts (3.16). Of course, this depiction by Eusebius may be inaccurate or at least exaggerated. Even so, whatever level of involvement Constantine had in the council, it included enforcement of the council’s decision.

To be fair, Constantine did not determine the outcome of Nicaea. When an overwhelming number of bishops at Nicaea sided against the “Arians” (a term only used decades later), Constantine approved, seeking to build and support a consensus.⁴ Even so, it is clear that not everyone was happy with the emperor’s actions. Two bishops were exiled, and in the decades that followed many successfully petitioned him to support the *homoiousion* (with the added *iota*) or “Arian” position.

Constantine, it seems, wanted to be a catalyst, but not the deciding voice. Nevertheless, the new Christian emperor set a precedent for the generations that followed. His “hands off” approach would be replaced by his sons who were decidedly more “hands on.” Later still, Emperor Theodosius I, who summoned the second ecumenical council, Constantinople 381, took much more decisive actions. Theodosius passed laws against religious freedom when it came to idolatry, heresy, and Judaism, and he had a decisive hand

³ For all Eusebius quotes, I have used the translation from the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers series (Schaff and Wace 1952).

⁴ He may have gone so far as to introduce the word *homoousios*, as claimed by Eusebius of Caesarea (see his *Letter to the Caesareans* 4, in Athanasius, *On the Council of Nicaea*, appendix). However, this may have been a way of saying that whoever put it forward was in Constantine’s inner circle of advisors, and so Constantine *in effect* put this forward. Eusebius, after all, makes this claim in a letter to his congregants, explaining why he supported a nonbiblical word—in essence, a claim that “the emperor made me do it!” (see Drake 2021, 126n51).

in defining orthodoxy. If Constantine gave Christians the religious freedom within the empire (and imperial support), Theodosius made Christianity the official religion of the empire (and restricted the religious freedom for everyone else). So Constantine clearly is not Theodosius. While it would be more accurate to speak of “Theodosianism” than “Constantinianism,” it is still Constantine who pushed the first domino and set the precedent for government intervention in church affairs.

Long before Constantine, the Roman emperors presided as the *pontifex maximus*, or the chief of all religious ceremonies in the empire. The ancients could not imagine a government not being “religious,” that is, not regulating the sacrifices to the gods.⁵ Even ancient Israel saw the palace and the temple as interconnected. This changes, however, when Christians come on the scene: they have their own king, Jesus the Son of David, God’s Messiah, who had risen from the dead, and thereby proven his authority over the Roman rulers who had killed him, and he promised to return to judge and rule the world. In the meantime, the present age was one where, as one second-century author put it, “[Christians] live in their own countries, but only as nonresidents; they participate in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners” (*Epistle to Diognetus* 5.4).⁶ Pre-Constantinian Christians remembered Peter exhorting them as “exiles,” awaiting “the last time,” who must live “as resident aliens” (1 Peter 1:1, 5; 2:11). To be sure, they must “be subject to ... the emperor,” but this is especially a call to follow Jesus’s “example” and to walk “in his steps”; he suffered unjustly at the hands of evil rulers, so “he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly” (2:13, 21, 23). In short, the pre-Constantinian Christians did not imagine a day when the emperor would profess allegiance to Christ. They awaited Christ to return to judge the emperor. This all changed with Constantine.

We need not bother with the theory that Constantine only embraced Christianity for political expediency. Even if that motive had a part to play, scholars widely agree that Constantine was sincere and believed his actions were in service to God. After all, Constantine’s involvement at Nicaea was not his first interference in church affairs. As it turns out, he first got involved at the request of Donatists! Therefore, to understand his actions, we need to review the precedents to Nicaea, and thereby see a particular group of non-Nicenes who would come to be critical of Constantine’s actions.

⁵ For the problems with the concept of “religion” in antiquity, see Barton and Boyarin (2016).

⁶ Translation by Holmes (2007, 703).

Precedents to Constantinianism

What made Constantine think he could interfere in ecclesial affairs? This question, as I have already indicated, betrays a thoroughly modern mindset. As mentioned above, rulers involved themselves in all public affairs, and in antiquity the public space included sacred rituals. The emperor was the patron, and patronage involved the regulation (*religio*) of sacral matters.

Even so, the question remains: why did Constantine think that he should move from involvement in public rituals (which would now include the “offerings” of Christian prayers) to the inner decisions of church affairs and teachings? To answer this, we have to look at what came before Nicaea. Constantine’s actions at Nicaea were not entirely without precedent.

The first known case of imperial involvement with church affairs comes in the year 269, when the Christians in Antioch ousted Paul of Samosata from the bishop’s office for his heretical teaching.⁷ Paul, however, refused to surrender the basilica, and so after a few years the Christians appealed to Emperor Aurelian for help. Aurelian did not act directly, but instead he asked “the bishops of Italy and the city of Rome” to decide the matter (Eusebius, *Church History* 7.30.19).

Another case worth mentioning took place just a few years before Constantine embraced Christianity. Sometime after coming to power in 306, Maxentius ended the persecution against the Christians, but Eusebius claims this was simply out of “flattery toward the Roman people” (*Church History* 8.14.1). Here again, the emperor takes notice of church affairs, but allows Christians to carry out their business without his enforcement. The case will be different when Constantine gets involved.

In one of early Christian history’s great ironies, Constantine got involved at the request of the Donatists. The Donatists were a party in Africa that refused to recognize Caecilian as the rightful bishop of Carthage in 312. They appointed their own bishop, Majorinus, who soon died and was replaced by Donatus. Donatus reigned until his death in 355, and his communion came to be known as the Donatists; they claimed to be the “catholic” church in Africa, as did their opponents, which the Donatists called “the party of Caecilian.” When neither party could agree, the Donatists appealed to Caesar.⁸

⁷ It is possible that the Armenian kingdom, which had converted to Christianity before Constantine’s time, served as precedent as well. However, the accounts of King Tiridates III, who reigned from around 298 to 330, visiting Constantine and the pope are later and offer no valid historical evidence of such an encounter.

⁸ This is according to Optatus, *Against the Donatists* 1.22, who wrote over fifty years after the event. Augustine, *Letter* 53.2.5, follows Optatus on this point. Even so, the scholarly consensus accepts this as fact.

A century later, Augustine will not let the Donatists forget this fact, and he uses it to undermine their claim to be the “pure” church that eschews government interference. Augustine, however, does not fairly represent this appeal. Timothy David Barnes argues that the Donatists requested their case be tried by bishops from outside of Africa, not by government officials, much the same way the Antiochene Christians did in response to Paul of Samosata (Barnes 1975, 20–21). To support this view, Barnes points to the fact that Constantine interpreted the appeal exactly in this way by following Aurelian’s precedent and deferring the case to the bishops of Italy and Gaul (Eusebius, *Church History* 10.5.21).

Although Constantine already seemed to have sided with the Caecilianists (Frend 1952, 146),⁹ he allowed the Council of Rome 313 to adjudicate (Eusebius, *Church History* 10.5.18–20). The council sided with Caecilian, but the Donatists refused to accept its ruling and appealed again (Eusebius, *Church History* 10.5.21–24; Optatus, *Against the Donatists* 1.25).¹⁰ This time, Constantine summoned bishops from “a great many places” to Arles, providing them with transportation (Eusebius, *Church History* 10.5.23). He clearly attempted to show a wide consensus in this decision, but fewer than fifty bishops attended. This council also sided with Caecilian, and yet once again the Donatists refused to accept the ruling. They likely did not think that such a small number of bishops was sufficient to overturn their own numbers. A century before Arles in the year 258, Cyprian of Carthage, the Donatists’ patron saint, could gather eighty-seven bishops in Carthage. In that council, the African bishops sided with Cyprian in his dispute with the bishop of Rome and his smaller Italian council of bishops. A few years after Arles in the year 336, Donatus held a conference where 270 African bishops sided with him against the Roman ruling (Augustine, *Letter* 93.43).¹¹ In short, while the Donatists did appeal to Constantine to ask for a council, they did not accept the council’s validity, given how unrepresentative it was of the wider church. Constantine seems to have learned from this, because when he summons the next council to settle a dispute, it will be an “ecumenical” one at Nicaea in 325, with as many as 381 bishops.

As for the Donatists, Constantine had lost patience with their appeals by the year 317. That was when he sent soldiers to seize the church properties from the Donatists in Carthage. In one case the confrontation escalated to physical violence: the Donatist crowd, which refused to leave the basilica, was beaten, and some in the crowd were even killed. After the year 321, Constantine turned his attention elsewhere, which in effect restored religious freedom to

⁹ Citing the tax exemption to clergy within Caecilian’s party mentioned by Eusebius, *Church History* 10.7.1–2.

¹⁰ The Donatists claimed they were not given a hearing at Rome, according to Constantine’s letter to Aelafius (appendix 3 in Optatus, *Against the Donatists* [Maier 1987, 156]), but according to Eusebius, they merely claimed that there were not enough bishops to decide the case (*Church History* 10.5.22).

¹¹ On the importance of this council, see Merdinger (2013).

the Donatists—a point we will return to in our conclusion. In the decades that followed, the Donatists experienced a few years of peace, but then things turned violent again in 347. Constantine's son, Emperor Constans, sent two officials into Africa, and they persecuted and killed many Donatists.

It is worth noting that the Donatists also had their violent side. At this time a group known as the Circumcellions emerged among the Donatists. They were known to terrorize the Caecilianists as they traveled through the countryside. Throughout the rest of the fourth century, hostilities continued on and off from both sides. Also, during this time, two major uprisings took place in Africa, one under General Firmus in 372 and one under his brother Gildo in 395–398. The Donatists were accused of siding with these rebels, and so the Roman rulers soon took more decisive action against them.

When Augustine became a priest of Hippo in 391, and then its bishop in 395, he and other Caecilianist bishops aligned with him began to appeal to the emperor to stamp out Donatism once and for all. At first, this began with the lesser means of coercion, like fines, seizure of properties, and scourging. Donatist mobs often responded in turn with violence, and the governing officials then invoked the death penalty against Donatists who physically harmed any Caecilianists. The Emperor Honorius took decisive action. On August 25, 410 (the day after Alaric defeated the city of Rome), the emperor ordered the Donatists to be compelled into unity with the Caecilianists “by blood” (*Theodosian Code* 16.5.51). The Donatists were invited to a “council” in Carthage in 411, but in reality they were being put on trial as schismatics.

Both parties paraded into the gathering with as many of their bishops as possible. The Donatists claimed they exceeded four hundred bishops altogether, but only 285 could attend (see Shaw 1992, 27). The Caecilianists only mustered 266 bishops, which cast into doubt their claim to be the “catholic” party in Africa. The proceedings halted until twenty more Caecilianist bishops could be found (from somewhere!) which brought their number up to 286, outnumbering the Donatists by one.¹² During this debate, one Donatist bishop uttered his party's most famous slogan: “The True Catholic Church is indeed with us, a Church which endures persecution, not one that instigates it” (*Conference of Carthage* 3.22).¹³ In other words, the litmus test for the true church is that it is persecuted, not the persecutor. The notion of the true church as persecuted, not persecuting, will be one that is remembered long after these Donatists' voices fell silent. Despite their vigorous debate, the outcome was predetermined: Emperor Honorius had

¹² For the numbers of sees with competing or single bishops, see Dossey (2010, 128–29). For the episcopate in North Africa more generally, see Maier (1973).

¹³ Latin: *Apud nos est enim vera catholica, quae persecutionem patitur, non quae facit*. Text from Lancel (1975, 3, 996). Translation from Hermanowicz and McLynn (2025, 216).

sent Marcellinus, the same one to whom Augustine dedicated his *City of God*, to preside over this “council,” and—unsurprisingly—Marcellinus declared that Augustine’s party was the “catholic” church in Africa.

What comes next for the Donatists is more difficult to determine. Their properties were confiscated, and they largely disappeared from the sources. And yet Augustine’s later writings reveal that they did not altogether submit to the imperial decision. Instead, they were, according to Peter Brown, “driven underground” (1967, 335). What is clear is that for the rest of Christian history, Donatists will be remembered as the dissident group who refused to accept impure sacraments and the group who refused to accept government interference in the church.¹⁴ Therefore, any later groups that espouse these views will be labeled “Donatists.”

Labeling Latter-Day Donatists

Centuries later the memory of the Donatists still haunted Christendom.¹⁵ From very early in the Reformation, the Protestants were called Donatists by their opponents. Luther was not merely denounced by the pope in the sixteenth century; he was put on trial by the emperor, Charles V, in 1521. For his refusal to acquiesce, he was denounced that same year as a “Donatist” (Fisher 1521).¹⁶ A few years later, Thomas More himself characterized all Lutherans as “Donatystes” (1533, cccxxxix).¹⁷ The Lutherans, however, did not formally reject government involvement in the church. They merely rejected the involvement of rulers who were Catholic.

The outright rejection of royal power over the church was taught by various groups that would come to be known as Anabaptists. At the Diet of Speyer in 1526, a temporary truce allowed for different regions to be Protestant or Catholic, based on the proclivities of the region’s ruler. This, in effect, established the famous axiom *cuius regio, eius religio* (“whose realm, his religion”). However, in 1529 the next Diet of Speyer overturned this decision because it had helped the Reformers. Those who issued a formal “Protest” to this decision were labeled “Protestants.” The Catholics did not agree that a Protestant king should rule over a Protestant church. And yet Protestants and Catholics did agree that *some* king should still be involved in church affairs. Only the “Anabaptists” disagreed with this tenet, and for their view,

¹⁴ E.g., in the sixth century, Justinian’s *Body of Civil Law: New Law* 37.5: “Arians, Donatists, Jews, and others” (*neque Arianis neque Donatistis nec Iudaicis nec aliis*) who do not belong to the emperor’s religion. During this same time, Facundus of Hermiane was accused of being a Donatist because he criticized the emperor’s involvement in church doctrine; see his *Against Mociannus*. Later, around 590, Gregory the Great wrote a series of letters dealing with—what he thought were—Donatists; see his *Letters* 1.72; 1.75; 1.82; 2.39; 2.43; 4.32; 6.63.

¹⁵ For further details on what follows, see Wright (1998, 281–93); and Hoover (2013). These and other studies focus on the schismatic tendencies, whereas I will show that the label “Donatist” is used just as much in regard to the various groups who invoke some form of religious liberty.

¹⁶ He also likens Luther to the “Donatystes in Affrycke.”

¹⁷ More adds, “Let us aske saynt Austayn the question ... agaynste the Donatystes such heretykes then in Affryke as these be now in Almayne.”

they were singled out at Speyer 1529 as “Donatists” (Williams 1962, 1–12).¹⁸ In other words, it was not simply the Anabaptist desire to establish a “pure” church of believers (that is, a church distinct from those thought to have received baptism incorrectly) that earned them the label of Donatists, but it was especially for their insistence on severing government control of the church, which was deemed revolutionary and seditious (Hoover 2016).

On the British Isles, the Reformation began in 1531 when King Henry VIII declared himself, via Parliament, the “head of the Church of England.” As the Reformation developed, many known as Puritans would challenge certain “popish” practices, and eventually some separated from the Church of England over these disagreements, earning them the label “Separatists.” One such thinker spoke in particular about the separation of church and state. His name was Robert Browne. And yes, his followers were labeled “Brownists.” (The reader should prepare for a veritable parade of new labels.)

In his *Treatise of Reformation without Tarying for Anie*, Browne insisted that the church could reform itself without the authority of civil magistrates ([1582] 1903, 27).¹⁹ For this way of thinking, even Puritans castigated him as a “Donatist.” For instance, Stephen Bredwell claimed, “We can soundly, and so may safely proue and denounce him for a Donatist, and not worthy to liue in any land of Christian gouernemet” (1588, 53). Perhaps this jab stung too deeply, for Browne eventually rejected Separatism and rejoined the Church of England, leaving the other “Brownists” dismayed.

Other Separatists stepped into the gap left by Browne and called for the church’s independence from the government. One example is Henry Barrow and his followers, labeled “Barrowists.” In his *Brief Discovery of the False Church*, written in 1590, he faulted Christian rulers going all the way back to Constantine. For this stance, a certain Richard Alison responded that same year, explaining that this “is no new fansie but an ancient heresie,” because Barrow’s separatist teachings “were like the frutes of Donatisme” (Alison 1590, A3v). An even more extensive argument came in 1590 from the Puritan George Gifford in his work *A Short Treatise Against the Donatists of England, Whome We Call Brownists*. He primarily focuses on the schismatic impulse of both Browne and the Donatists,²⁰ but in his next work, *A Plaine Declaration that our Brownists be Full Donatists by Comparing them Together from Point to Point out of the Writings of Augustine*, he also notes how both the Brownists and the Donatists refuted Christian engagement in political

¹⁸ Text provided in Williams (1962, 238). See discussion in Brewer (2021, 6).

¹⁹ His full statement reads as follows: “Let vs not tarie for the Magistrates: For if they be christians thei giue leaue and gladly suffer & submit the selues to the church gouernemet... And if they be not christians, should the welfare of the church or the saluation of mens soules, hang on their courtesie?”

²⁰ “They be not onely a Schisme, yea a vile Schisme, rending themselues from the Church of England, and condemning by their assertions, the whole visible Church in the worlde, euen as the *Donatists* did of olde time” (Gifford 1590b, A2r).

power. Gifford claims both groups teach that “the sauieur of Soules the Lord Christ, to insinuate faith sent fishers and not Souldiers” (1590a, 66). Barrow did not budge on his separatist stance, but the next year he did respond, insisting he was not a Donatist (Barrow 1591).

It would take a few generations before a group would arrive on the scene who would proudly claim to be Donatists. One historian states, “As far as I am aware, no-one appropriated the designation for himself, as though it were a badge of honour, yet there was no shortage of controversialists ready to stigmatize others with one or more of the errors of the Donatists” (Wright 1998, 282). That is true, until the Baptists.

The first Baptist congregation was founded by English Christians in 1609 in Amsterdam, but then most of the members moved back to England in 1612 under the leadership of Thomas Helwys. Thus, the Baptists were clearly part of the earlier English Separatist movement. Some Baptists, however, came to see themselves as heirs to a much wider trend in Christian history. By the nineteenth century many Baptists claimed a direct line of succession to the true churches that preceded the Reformation.²¹ For example, in 1838 George Herbert Orchard wrote a work entitled *A Concise History of Foreign Baptists: Taken From the New Testament, The First Fathers, Early Writers, and Historians of All Ages*. On his first page, Orchard claimed John the Baptist as the first to represent this true expression of Christianity, because Jesus said (in Matthew 11:12), “From the days of John the Baptist till *now*, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent taketh it by force” (Orchard 1838, 1).²² (Thus, you can still hear it said among my fellow Baptists today, “They didn’t call him ‘John the Presbyterian!’”)

Beginning with John and throughout the centuries that followed, Orchard saw the persecuted congregations under the Roman Empire as true Baptists. He traces groups like the Novatianists and then the Donatists, calling them “dissidents” and praising them for rejecting Constantine’s coercion and thereby defending “religious liberty.” He added, “Constantine’s conduct *in the church* has proved a kind of Pandora’s box to the interest of religion, and *the hope* of deliverance has tried the faith of the godly to this day”

21 Thomas Crosby (1738–1740, 1:lx) connected Baptists with Anabaptists, Wycliffe, Hus, and “the practice of the Fathers,” but he stipulated that even though the Donatists practiced “rebaptism,” they also administered baptism to infants (1:xliv). One who came closer is Benedict 1813, 1, 9, who applauded the Donatists for asking, *Quid est imperatori cum ecclesia?*, to comment, “These sentiments of the old Donatists relative to the union of church and state, and the interference of the civil powers in religious concerns, are precisely those which the Baptists have always maintained.” Another successionist (Cramp 1871, 47), likewise traces commonalities with groups like the Donatists, but finds the Donatists in particular to have been pedobaptists and so rejects the direct link with them. Thomas Armitage (1887, 201), following Cramp (see Armitage 1887, 11).

22 Note that this quotation is not from the King James Version, and so the italicized “now” seems to be Orchard’s own emphasis.

(Orchard 1838, 56, original emphasis). In the rest of the work, Orchard reviews the cases of other dissident groups throughout Christian history on the continent.²³

Just a few years later, some Baptists in the American South took up this same logic. James Robinson Graves, the editor of the Tennessee Baptist newspaper, demanded that Baptist churches must keep closed membership, closed communion, and closed pulpits, because individuals from any tradition that practices pedobaptism (namely, all mainline churches) and teaches baptismal regeneration (namely, all Campbellites) are not true believers (Graves 1880, xii). Graves helped publish several of his supporters' essays, and he called one of the tracts written in 1854 by J. M. Pendleton "An Old Landmark Reset." This name comes from the biblical tradition that says, "Do not remove the ancient boundary stone" (Prov. 22:28 NIV), or as the KJV reads, "the ancient landmark."²⁴ From this, those who disagreed with Graves and Pendleton called their position "Landmarkism."

Using this imagery, Graves lists seven "marks" of the church, and—unsurprisingly—the only churches that retain these marks are Baptists. Graves then traces the unbroken succession of the "community" and "kingdom" of true believers throughout history, including the Donatists (1880, 127). It is important to note that he denies that Landmarkists believe in apostolic succession of offices or even of churches. The succession is one of teaching, since Christ's kingdom and church cannot be defeated (Graves 1880, 122–24, citing Dan. 2:44 and Matt. 16:18).

Graves claims the Donatists and others like them because they are "substantially like the Baptists of this age" in that they retained these landmarks and so have "suffered the bitterest persecution from the earliest ages until now" (1880, 127). In other words, whereas earlier Protestant groups rejected the label of Donatist,²⁵ the Landmark Baptists turned this accusation around and embraced it because it proved that they were not a novel sect, but a representation of the true church that had existed throughout all ages.

In the next century, Landmarkism spread through the popular book entitled *The Trail of Blood*, written in 1931 by James Milton Carroll. Carroll's book was brief, consisting of five lectures, which made the work affordable and popular.²⁶ In it Carroll added one "mark" to Graves's list: the "Complete

23 It should be noted that Congregationalists sometimes took up this same strategy. E.g., George Huntington (1885, 10) claims the Donatists also promoted "liberty of conscience," citing Donatus's question, "What has the emperor to do with the Church?" Huntington also pointed to "Aerians" and others who did the same, so he clearly is not claiming a kinship in doctrine with these groups (1885, 11).

24 Cf. Deut. 19:14; 27:17; Job 24:2; Prov. 23:10; Hos. 5:10.

25 Early Protestants often did claim to belong to the ancient tradition of Christians wrongly persecuted by Rome, even the Roman church (Krumenacker 2006, 259–89).

26 It also included a famous chart of Christian history, identifying "Baptist" churches throughout history.

separation of Church and State. No combination, no mixture of this spiritual religion with a temporal power. ‘Religious Liberty,’ for everybody” (Carroll 1931, 5).²⁷ While admitting that most of the dissident groups did not remain “always loyal in all respects to the New Testament,” Carroll praised groups like the Donatists for upholding religious freedom, for which they were persecuted (1931, 22). After all, the true church is persecuted, never persecuting.

Following Carroll, Landmarkism’s popularity varied among Baptists, and it is now difficult to quantify how many Baptists still hold this view (Noll 2017, 872–73; Maples 2018, 149–206). To my knowledge, it is no longer taught in any Baptist school,²⁸ but many local congregations still assume it as a theological, if not a historical, fact. Even so, resistance to Landmarkism did arise, and it did so on a number of fronts.

First, the Baptist historians of the twentieth century altogether rejected it as untenable, and instead insisted that Baptists arose as part of the English Separatist movement.²⁹ Second, at a more popular level, the work of Billy Graham and the rise of an “Evangelical” identity that worked across denominational lines made the Landmarkist isolationism unfashionable.³⁰ Additionally, the church growth movement, with its “seeker-friendly” strategy, prompted many churches to practice open membership and open communion, which tacitly acknowledged the status of those from other denominations as true believers, which in turn tacitly acknowledged the churches from which they came as true churches.

So the question facing current Baptists, not to mention others who insist on religious liberty, is how to protect this freedom while also valuing ecumenical relationships, represented in conciliar decisions like Nicaea. I suggest that returning to our shared Christian history can offer ways of reimagining things today.

27 Carroll does not actually enumerate the marks in his first lecture, so it is unclear if he has actually expanded the list of seven further, or merely divided up the list a certain way because of the style of his lecture notes. He is explicit that he is adding this particular one: “I venture to give one more distinguishing mark.”

28 The exceptions, I assume, are those affiliated with the American Baptist Association of Churches, which is a Landmarkist denomination. For their list of seminaries, see <https://www.abaptist.org/seminarydirectory>.

29 Even those who contend for Anabaptist influence over Baptists do not attempt to claim any direct descent. See discussion and bibliography in Bebbington (2018, 36–50).

30 The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association organized the World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin in 1966. It and several similar conferences that followed worked across denominational lines. Graham’s success and popularity attracted most Baptists to his approach. Notable scholarly objections include Garrett et al. (1983, 166), who insisted that Baptists are not Evangelicals, due to a concern with religious liberty. They famously declared, “Make no mistake about it, we come from different wombs. Evangelicals are the descendants of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century Protestant Scholasticism. They are the children of English and American Millenarians and Fundamentalists. ... Baptists, by contrast, are the descendants of the persecuted and harassed dissenters of the seventeenth century who came forth from the womb crying for liberty.”

Nicaea and Religious Liberty Revisited

To return to the original Donatists, it is worth noting that their resistance to imperial interference was not novel but was part of their own tradition. Years before that controversy, around the year 197, Tertullian of Carthage wrote his *Apology* or “Defense” of Christianity against Roman persecution, and therein Tertullian explicitly responds to accusations made against the Christians. After a lengthy rebuttal, he attacks the Romans for taking away what he called “religious liberty” (*libertas religionis*) (*Apology* 24.6).

This does not seem to be a one-off remark from Tertullian. Years later, in what may be his last work, he writes another defense of Christianity, this time addressed *To Scapula*, the Roman proconsul over Africa. Speaking again on how Christians and other societies have their own “religion” (*religionem*), Tertullian points to “the human right and the natural law” (*humani iuris et naturalis potestatis*) for each person to worship as they choose (*To Scapula* 2.2). This surely would have sounded strange to the Roman governor, and—for that matter—to anyone else in antiquity. For Romans knew of no laws, natural or otherwise, that gave such “rights,” which is why the historian Peter Garnsey concluded that this statement is “a breakthrough that only a Christian could make” (1984, 16).

To speak in general terms, ancient citizens owed piety to their civic gods as a matter of natural birth and civic law. The thought of sacrificing to another people’s deity would be nearly unthinkable, since the enemy’s gods supported the enemy. To be sure, empires expanded and the gods were shared, but always in a clear pecking order: Rome set up temples to her gods, known as the Capitoline Triad, in virtually every municipality across the empire in the highest and most prominent place geographically. All other shrines reside in their shadow, at least figuratively.

Tertullian sees things differently. He explains that religious liberty comes from his Christian faith: “By our discipline, we are ordered to love our enemies ... For everyone is bound to love friends; but enemies are loved only by Christians” (*Ita enim disciplina iubemur diligere inimicos ... Amicos enim diligere omnium est, inimicos autem solum Christianorum*) (*To Scapula* 1.3). In other words, Christians do not pray to gods of war. They revere the Commander who ordered them to love all of God’s creatures, and so Christians cannot help but think of religion as something available to all people. Out of love for everyone, even one’s enemies, all must be free in their worship and not be made to worship by coercion.

To be sure, there is still a role for government, according to Tertullian. Christians pray for the emperor and honor him: “A Christian is an enemy to no one, especially not the emperor. A Christian knows the emperor was set up by the Christian God, so it is necessary to love and honor the emperor” (*Christianus nullius est hostis, nedum imperatoris, quem sciens a Deo suo*

constitui, necesse est ut et ipsum diligat) (2.6). This, however, still relegates the emperor only to temporal affairs. The emperor can try to coerce Christian worship, but it will end badly for him, as Tertullian shows by listing examples of persecutors whom God punished (3.1–5). The message is clear: no one should coerce another in their faith, not even the emperor.

These same themes show up a century later in another African writer named Lactantius. Around 300 Lactantius moved to Nicomedia, the new capital of the eastern empire. There he taught rhetoric. Under Diocletian's persecution, he resigned this post, but later he was hired by Constantine to teach his son Crispus. Despite serving under two emperors, Lactantius died in extreme poverty (Jerome, *Chronicle* 2330), apparently having withdrawn from governmental employment late in life. He wrote *The Divine Institutes* around 309 during the Diocletian persecution, in which he outlines the basics of Christian beliefs in apologetic terms, answering non-Christian detractors.

When challenging the way the Romans tried Christians, Lactantius invokes the same ideas as Tertullian. Specifically, he speaks of “the right of humanity” (*humanitatis iure*) to have a fair trial about one's religious practices (*Divine Institutes* 5.19.1). A few paragraphs later, he retorts, “religion cannot be by compulsion” (*religio cogi non potest*) (5.19.11). This statement, like Tertullian's, is made at a time when the persecution of Christians is carried out by non-Christians. Therefore, it may not be surprising that in this text Lactantius never says a positive word about Constantine. And yet, Lactantius's views may, as I have argued elsewhere, be applicable to Constantine once he comes to rule the west (Wilhite 2017, 183–94).

In his work *On the Death of the Persecutors* (written after Constantine's conversion around 314), Lactantius still credits the famous “Edict of Milan” to Licinius, not Licinius and Constantine together, the way Eusebius and other Christian historiographers did (*On the Death of the Persecutors* 48).³¹ Furthermore, Lactantius's version includes the emphatic statement, “We have given free and absolute permission to these same Christians to practice their religion” (*nos liberam atque absolutam colendae religionis suae facultatem isdem Christianis dedisse*) (48.5).³² Regarding this point, J. L. Creed adds a comment on how “this clear expression of the principle of religious freedom is something from which Constantine would later retreat” (1984, 122).³³ By that, of course, he means that Constantine did not allow such freedom for the Donatists.

31 Although the text itself is explicitly from “Constantine and Licinius,” Lactantius introduces the letter as by Licinius alone. Lactantius then devotes the rest of his work to Licinius, not mentioning Constantine again. Cf. Eusebius, *Church History* 10.5.2–14.

32 Translation from Creed (1984, 70–71).

33 He references Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 2.45; 3.45–48.

The persecution of the Donatists may be in mind at the end of Lactantius's text, which was completed by 317 at the height of Constantine's legal actions against the Donatists. Lactantius closes with a stern warning. A certain "Donatus," to whom the work is dedicated,³⁴ is told to pray for God "to defend his people against all the traps and attacks of the devil" (*omnes insidias atque impetus diaboli a populo suo arceat*) (*On the Death of the Persecutors* 52). This correlation should at least cause us to ask what Lactantius's view of Constantine is. In answering that, it can come as a shock to realize that Lactantius never mentions Constantine favorably. That is a shock, at least, when compared to the praises heaped upon him by Eusebius and other later writers.

For Lactantius, the only possible exceptions are found in an alternate version of his *Divine Institutes*. Scholars have long known that there were two manuscript traditions for this text, one which includes a number of interpolations, known as the *Constantino dedicationes*. These consist of several direct asides to "Emperor Constantine" (*Constantine imperator*).³⁵ Modern scholars have debated whether these additional passages were later deleted because they also contained questionable doctrine, or whether these were later interpolations to an originally shorter text. Eberhard Heck convinced most scholars that both versions came from Lactantius himself, with the additions about Constantine added around 324 (Heck 1972). That date is not arbitrary; it is the last possible date that someone like Lactantius could safely express non-Nicene theology. To my mind, this is special pleading. The interpolations do praise Constantine, and the accompanying questionable orthodoxy happens to have been acceptable just before Constantine began enforcing Nicene theology. I suspect these interpolations are not from the hand of Lactantius.

Regardless, my argument does not require that Lactantius never favorably mentioned Constantine. Perhaps Heck is correct and Lactantius later came to see Constantine in a more Eusebian light as the defender of the faith. This, however, would have been (coincidentally?) after Constantine left the Donatists to themselves, after the year 321 (which we reviewed above). Furthermore, if Heck is wrong, then it is even more alarming that Lactantius never offered praise for the new Christian emperor.

Given the fact that Lactantius is from Africa and wrote these works when the Donatist controversy emerged, it is reasonable to assume he had them in mind when writing. Conversely, it should be expected that those in Africa, like the Donatists who are indebted to Tertullian's and Lactantius's thought, quickly touted their belief that the emperor should not coerce anyone's

³⁴ Donatus was a popular name in North Africa. Therefore, most scholars assume this is a different Donatus than the leader of the party.

³⁵ See details and bibliography in Quasten (1986, 2, 397–98) and Barnes (1981, 291).

religious practice. After all, what has the emperor to do with the church? We have already summarized the Donatists' position, so at this point I will turn to one more source from this context that shares this sentiment at least in part. That source, perhaps surprisingly, is Augustine of Hippo.

Retracting Augustine's *City of God*

Obviously, Augustine was no Donatist. In addition to his approval of things like capital punishment and just war, he even came to endorse state-sponsored forced conversion for the Donatists. He used Jesus's parable of the great banquet, where the servants must go "to the highways and the hedges" to find potential guests and "compel them to come in" (Luke 14:23 KJV).³⁶ So, according to this interpretation, the public servants of the (now "Christian") empire should "compel" the Donatists into forced unification with the Caecilianists. This compulsion began with fines and seizure of properties, but it even extended to corporal punishment and death (see Augustine, *Letters* 88.6–9; 133.1; 134.2; 139.1–2).³⁷ Brent D. Shaw remarks, "This persuasion was of the bicycle-chain and lead-pipe variety" (1992, 13).

Even so, Augustine's posture toward earthly government is to a certain extent unsettled. His original stance was to persuade the Donatists apart from the use of force (see Augustine, *Letter* 93.5.17). When it was pragmatic to do so, he reluctantly called on government officials to act: the Donatists, as discussed above, were the first to appeal to Caesar, so Caesar is already involved whether we like it or not. If one steps back from the specifics of the Donatist controversy and examines Augustine's overall reflections on government, there is a note of ambivalence.

Augustine famously contrasts the heavenly city to the earthly. And while every earthly city is an instantiation of the love of self and the lust for domination, it is the city of Rome in particular that draws Augustine's ire. He wrote *The City of God* in response to the fall of Rome to Aleric in 410 because many "pagans" blamed Christianity for Rome's destruction. This is calmly explained in his other work, whose Latin title is *Retractiones*.

The translation of this title could sound sensational: "Retractions," or at least "Revisions."³⁸ In reality, the Latin term *retractiones* is much more mundane in meaning: the aged bishop may offer a few minor "revisions" of particular statements and mistakes, but his main aim is simply "retracing" his steps. In doing so, he ensures that future readers of his work interpret him correctly.

³⁶ Cf. Vulg.: *compelle intrare*. See Augustine, *Letters* 93.2.5; 173.10; and 185.6.24.

³⁷ It should be noted that Augustine urged the government officials to avoid killing Donatists whenever possible, lest they be made into martyrs in the eyes of their party. For the nuances of Augustine's view, see Lancel (2002, 265, 268–269); and see Hermanowicz (2008, 98–99), for Augustine's development on this issue.

³⁸ *Revisions* is the preferred term chosen by Boniface Ramsey, who translated the English edition of this in the Works of Saint Augustine series (Augustine 2010).

Then, from time to time, there are hints in Augustine's *Retracting* that he has had deeper reconsiderations. With his *City of God*, for instance, he inserts this curious aside, "But lest anyone blame us for having only disproved what other people say and for not having explained our teachings, there is another part to this work which is devoted to that purpose" (2.43.2). This is an odd concern. Why would anyone "blame" a Christian author for only offering a defense of the faith, that is, only a refutation of false gods, instead of also offering a full explanation of the Christian alternative? It turns out that this is the exact denunciation that one of Augustine's contemporaries, Jerome, laid against one of Augustine's African predecessors, Lactantius.

When describing earlier Latin writers, Jerome starts with a list of famous African authors, like Tertullian and Lactantius. For Lactantius, Jerome adds, "I wish he had been as capable of building up our faith, as he was at easily destroying that of others" (Jerome, *Letter* 58.10). It appears that this jibe gave Augustine pause. Although he would attack the gods of Rome, like Lactantius, he made sure—and in his *Retractiones* he made sure his readers noticed—that he would not only attack Roman religion.³⁹ In addition to the "destroying of others," he would offer the Christian alternative, a "building up of our faith." Even so, he did attack Rome, and he did so vehemently.

In light of Augustine's eagerness to "retrace" his steps in the *City of God* correctly, I will offer my own brief reconsideration of this facet of his argument. Against the charge that Christians are to blame for the fall of Rome, Augustine does more than offer a simple Christian-versus-pagan polemic. Augustine's response turns especially vitriolic when it comes to Rome in particular, and in doing so, he draws on the same kinds of anti-Roman rhetoric found in earlier African writers like Tertullian and Lactantius.⁴⁰

Consider the following examples wherein Augustine maligns the founders and heroes of Rome. Romulus and Remus's "she-wolf," it turns out, was a prostitute (*City of God* 18.21); Aeneas's mother was also an adulteress (3.3); and Lucretia, Augustine insists, enjoyed her attack by the Roman tyrant, Sextus Tarquinius (1.19).⁴¹ On this last point, Peter Brown comments, "[To Romans,] the *controversia*, in which he piles on innuendoes against the chastity of Lucretia, would have appeared in singularly bad taste" (1967, 309). Next, Augustine mocks the death of Regulus, who by all Roman accounts was a pious patriot who died for the eternal city's security (*City of God* 3.20; cf., 1.15; 1.24). Likewise, Augustine refers to Scipio "Africanus"—whose title was awarded for defeating the Carthaginians, and whose era is celebrated

39 See Alimi (2024, 9), for how Augustine knew Lactantius's *Divine Institutes* "and in many ways patterned the *City of God* after it."

40 Also see the statements made by Minucius Felix and Commodianus. For specifics, see Willite (2017, 122–25, 137–40, 155–58, 183–88).

41 See Livy 1.57–60; and cf. Cicero, *Republic* 2.46; *On Ends* 2.66. For full review of primary sources, ancient rhetorical uses, and Augustine's treatment, see Trout (1994, 53–70).

by Sallust as the golden age of Rome—sarcastically as “the great,” and he mocks his late-life exile from Rome, the irony of which is itself too great for Augustine to pass over in silence (3.21). Similarly, whereas Caesar Augustus is celebrated by Virgil as the pinnacle of Rome’s history, destined by the fates to rule the world, Augustine declares him “to have stolen all freedom (*libertatem*)” from the people (3.21).⁴²

All of this stems from Augustine’s clear denunciation of the earthly city’s expansion and conquest by force. Rome, he says, is “the imperious city [which] has imposed not only a yoke but its language upon the subjugated nations as a societal peace ... this has come about by copious and extensive wars” (19.7). Roland Bainton comments on this passage: “Augustine was an African with a deep sense of the wrongs of the conquered” (1960, 91).

If Augustine rejected the earthly city’s right to subjugate people by force, then perhaps we should retract, or reconsider, his two cities paradigm when it comes to Constantinian interference in church affairs. It is true that Augustine explicitly defended such actions when it came to the Donatists, but these read more like *post hoc* justifications for what members of his party were already doing, and less like a full-throated theological endorsement (Atkins 2024). I would point to the next generation of African writers who saw themselves as upholding Augustine’s teachings—writers like Ferrandus, Reparatus, Verecundus, Primasius, Facundus, Pontianus, and Liberatus, all who vehemently opposed the Emperor Justinian for interfering in church affairs during what was known as the three chapters controversy. For this stance, these Augustinians were called—you guessed it—“Donatists” (Facundus, *Against Mocian*; and see Markus 1979, 145–46).

Conclusions for Contemporary Donatists

What would it look like to rethink Augustine’s paradigm? His two cities approach has been used for centuries to justify things like war, capital punishment, and even religious coercion. After all, in one’s private life, as a citizen of heaven, one can love one’s enemies, but at the same time, if one is a citizen of an earthly city (or nation), then one must tolerate certain actions that seem to contradict Jesus’s teachings. Admittedly, this is an oversimplified caricature of Augustine’s view. Nevertheless, this is how the Augustinian version of Constantinianism looked to the Anabaptists, Separatists, and early Baptists. And for naming it as wrong and for rejecting it, these groups were called “Donatists”; they were persecuted; and they were even killed.

⁴² It is also worth noting that in this paragraph, Augustine in effect blames the fall of Rome on Rome’s cruel victory over Carthage in the Punic wars.

To sweep with even broader strokes, the crusades between Christians and Muslims, the wars of religion between Protestants and Catholics, and the colonial forced conversions of native peoples worldwide have all unmasked the un-Christlike nature of religious coercion. I speak in over-generalizations because, thankfully, most Christian traditions now agree with the so-called Donatist claim that “the true church is always persecuted, never persecuting” (*Conference of Carthage* 3.22).⁴³ There is a well-known quote from the early Baptist Thomas Helwys (discussed above), who around 1611 insisted, “Neither may the king be judge between God and man. Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews, or whatsoever, it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure” (Helwys 1998, 53). Although Christian history is littered with those who abused power and blocked religious liberty, in our present day Helwys’s quote could be said by virtually any major spokesperson of Christian doctrine. In other words, the supposedly Enlightenment value of religious freedom as a human right did not arise solely in modernity; it stems from the ancient Christian tradition, which was repeatedly retrieved by various Christian groups throughout history (Shah 2016; Wilken 2019).

Soon after Helwys made his declaration, many Baptists would flee to the new world to have a place where they could worship freely, and they eventually influenced many of America’s founding fathers, including Thomas Jefferson. Although Jefferson was not a traditional Christian, he wrote his famous “Wall of Separation” Letter defending religious liberty. And this letter, it is worth remembering, was written to a group of Baptists. Therein, Jefferson affirms his shared commitment with the Baptists, “Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God, [and] that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, [and] that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions” (Jefferson 1802).

Jefferson’s affinity with the Baptists is interesting, but it turns out they were not the only voice he considered on this matter. Thomas Jefferson also happened to own a volume containing Tertullian’s *To Scapula* (discussed above). In his personal copy, he underlined the phrase, “human right and natural law” (*humani iuris et naturalis potestatis*) which was part of Tertullian’s argument for religious freedom (*To Scapula* 2.2; Tertullian 1686; Shah 2016, 57–58). This apparently stuck with Jefferson, or at least it reinforced his commitment, and so the sentiment has continued to guide both Christian and political thought in the centuries that followed.

The Vatican II document *Dignitatis Humanae* (1965) also used Tertullian’s same language about “the human ... right [*humanam ius*] to religious freedom” (§2). The statement goes so far as to insist that this right “was constantly proclaimed by the Fathers of the Church,” citing Lactantius and

43 My paraphrase; see the earlier precise quotation above.

Augustine (§10n7).⁴⁴ Obviously, the Vatican Council left out Tertullian and the Donatists who made the same claim, but such omissions are entirely understandable. The point is that religious liberty is a value long espoused by Christians. It is true, this value was decidedly not championed at Nicaea where Constantine inserted himself, but it is one which all adherents to Nicaea should now embrace.⁴⁵ We do not need to claim—as the Landmarkists did—to be the Donatists’ heirs. The Donatists, on this point, were in fact upholding a value widely shared in Christian antiquity. Therefore, we can draw on these various sources for inspiration.

What does the emperor have to do with the church? However we answer that question, we can at least agree to cling fiercely to our human right to remain free citizens of heaven, while simultaneously seeking the welfare of the earthly city, “for in its peace you will have peace” (Jer. 29:7; cited in Augustine, *City of God* 19.26).

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⁴⁴ Citing Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 5.19; Augustine, *Letter against Petilian* 2.83; *Letters* 23, 34, 35, and others. Notice that these texts represent Augustine’s early views, before having to justify the violence used by the state to enforce his party’s position.

⁴⁵ Even Baptists, who are officially non-creedal, need not be *anti*-creedal. Many do confess the ancient creeds, and virtually all believe their doctrine. At the inaugural meeting of the Baptist World Alliance in 1905, the delegates stood and recited (from memory?) the Apostles’ Creed to demonstrate the faith they shared with the wider Christian world.

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