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THE COLLAPSE OF A COLLEGIAL CHURCH: NORTH AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY ON THE EVE OF ISLAM

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[A high degree of collegiality characterized the organization and operation of the Christian churches in Roman North Africa. Explanations for the rapid conversion of North Africa to Islam must take into consideration weaknesses in that structure. Attacks on African collegiality came from both East and West, from Byzantine emperors, Vandal invaders, and even bishops of Rome. Consideration of repeated blows to the native ecclesiology makes the loss of North Africa more understandable than recourse to solely military factors.]

CHRISTIANITY IN NORTH AFRICA was as distinctive for its rapid diffusion in the second century as it was for its eclipse in the eighth century.[1] The reasons given for its collapse are often external to Christianity.[2] Some scholars suggest that the internal decay in both the Vandal administration (439–533) and Byzantine reoccupation (533–647), coupled with Berber incursions during both periods, set the stage for the rapid advance of the Arab military forces in the mid-seventh century.[3] Surely the record of the

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[1] Earlier versions of this article were presented for the Practice of Christianity in Roman North Africa seminar of the American Academy of Religion in 1999, and at the International Medieval Congress, Leeds, U.K., in 2000. I would like to acknowledge the bibliographical assistance of Erin Baratta, graduate research assistant at the University of Dayton, and the help of the University's Interlibrary Loan staff in the preparation of this material.

[2] I do not wish to imply that Christianity disappeared entirely but merely faded in a way that is not paralleled among other Christian areas, e.g., Spain, Egypt, or Syria, with which it shared similar histories.

[3] See *Chronica Gallica a DXI* in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* [=MGH]: *Auctores Antiquissimi. Chronica Minora Saec. IV, V, VI,* 2 vols. (Berlin: Wiedmann, 1892–93; repr. Munich: MGH, 1981) MGH 9.658; and L. R. Holme, *The Extinction*

chroniclers and historians provides no dearth of intrigue and revenge which weakened the defenses of North Africa.[4] Other scholars fault factors more closely related to the nature of North African Christianity, such as the supposedly limited influence Christianity had on rural areas[5] or the insufficient indigenization of Latin Christianity among the Berbers.[6] If one accepts these factors, one might have some sympathy with the view that the similarity of Allah and pre-Christian divinities made Islam attractive to Africans.[7] One might wish to consider the possibility that religious submission was closely linked to military submission among the Berbers.[8] Whatever the case may be, scholars investigating the collapse of North African Christianity need to consider a convergence of elements internal to the distinctive structure of the Christian Church in North Africa in addition to external pressures. Between the fifth and seventh centuries the distinctively collegial and episcopal structure of North Africa was weakened by persecution during the Vandal occupation and then was attacked by two converging factors: from the East, by changes in relationships between the African bishops and civil power of the Byzantine Empire; and, from the West, by attempts of the bishops of Rome to take on a larger role in North Africa. Between the two piercing prongs of the pincers, the leadership structure of the North African Church was severely weakened well in advance of Islam. With the collapse of the episcopacy the stage was set for the eclipse of Christianity. The chart on p. 5 illustrates the decline which the following pages describe.

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of the Christian Churches of North Africa (1898; repr. New York: Franklin, 1969) 4 and 77.

[4] E.g., *Chronica Gallica a DXI* (MGH 9.652); Victor of Vita, *History of the Vandal Persecution,* trans. with notes and introduction by John Moorhead, Translated Texts for Historians 10 (Liverpool: Liverpool University, 1992); and Procopius, *Procopius* with an English trans. H. B. Dewing, vol. 2 of 7: *History of the Wars, Books III and IV,* Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1979).

[5] W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952; repr. 1970) 333–35.

[6] Chris J. Botha, "The Extinction of the Church in North Africa," *Journal of Theology for South Africa* 57 (December 1986) 24–32; and Ulrich Schoen, "The Death of a Church: Remarks on the Presumed Reasons for the Disappearance of the 'First Church' in North West Africa," *Theological Review* (Beirut) 1 (1979) 3–20.

[7] On pre-Roman religion, see Marcel Le Glay, *Saturne Africain: histoire* (Paris: E. Boccard, 1966); Serge Lancel, *Carthage: A History*, trans. Antonia Nevil (Boston: Blackwells, 1995) 194–253 and 432–36; and J. B. Rives, *Religion and Authority in Roman Carthage from Augustus to Constantine* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995) 17–96.

[8] Michael Brett, "The Spread of Islam in Egypt and North Africa," in *North Africa: Islam and Modernization,* ed. Michael Brett (Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass, 1973) 1–12, at 4. Based on data for Egypt, Brett extrapolates to the Maghreb.

Chronology of the Eclipse of the North African Hierarchy

ca. 200	Council under Agrippinus	70 bishops from all of Africa*
252	Council of Carthage	42 bishops from Africa Proconsularis
254	Council of Carthage	37 bishops from Africa Proconsularis
256 (early)	Council of Carthage	71 bishops from Africa Proconsularis & Numidia
256 (Fall)	Council of Carthage	87 bishops from Africa Proconsularis, Numidia & Mauretania
397	Council of Carthage	40 bishops from Africa Proconsularis, Numidia & Mauretania (Bishops of Byzacena all absent)
411	Conference of Carthage	280 Catholics + 320 Donatists = 600 (present and named absent)
418	Council of Carthage	>200 bishops from all Africa
419	Council of Carthage	419 bishops from all Africa
ca. 428	Eve of the Vandal invasion	700 sees (594 named cities)
428–477	Gaiseric reigns	
429	Vandals enter Africa; Boniface breaks from the Byzantine Empire & allies with the Vandals.	
435	Byzantines recognize Vandals as *foederati*	
439	Vandals take Carthage	
441–442	Ineffective Byzantine campaign to retake North Africa	
476	Byzantines recognize Vandals as rulers of major parts of Africa	
477–484	Huneric reigns	
484–496	Gunthamund reigns	412 bishops
496–523	Thrasamund reigns	
497	Thrasamund exiles seventy bishops	
523–530	Hilderic reigns; has Catholic sympathies	
525	Council at Carthage	60 bishops from all Africa except Byzacena
533	Vandals depose Hilderic; Gelimer becomes king	
533–548	Byzantine campaign against the Vandals in North Africa	200–250 bishops
548	Byzantine suppression of Berber revolt	
550	African council condemns Vigilius for his condemnation of the Three Chapters (The number of bishops is unknown).	
647	Defeat of the Byzantines under the exarch Gregory at Sbeitla	200–250 bishops
670	Establishment of Kairouan as the Arab capital of the Maghreb	
ca. 700		41 bishops
1076	Last Christian epigraphy	
11th century		5 bishops
1176	Last listing of Carthage in the *Liber Censuum* in Rome; no bishops known	

* The number of bishops attending councils does not, of itself, indicate the full complement of bishops, but it does provide a relative indication of episcopal strength.

THE EMINENTLY EPISCOPAL HIERARCHY

From its inception, Christianity in North Africa seems to have taken on a hierarchical structure that relied strongly on bishops. The bishop was the focus of the Church. Well into the Byzantine period the word *sacerdos* applied only to bishops.[9] Priests rarely exercised any independent judgment.[10] When Cyprian went into exile in 249/250, a half dozen or so presbyters along with the confessors tried to fill the power vacuum, but with the return of the bishop, the normal course of church government was restored.[11] Even in Augustine's time, a priest-delegate of the larger episcopal college could care for a rural diocese, but only temporarily, and he would not have the authority of or respect due a bishop. Priests were not even allowed to witness the formal vows of virgins without prior consultation with their bishop.[12]

Bishops were the agents of pastoral care in every village and hamlet. No town of any size seemed to be without one, and few towns had priests.[13] These bishops were not like the *chorepiskopoi*, the country bishops in Egypt, Asia Minor, and Syria.[14] In those areas, men were ordained to the

[9] See, e.g., Victor of Tunnenna, s.a. 466, in *Victoris episcopi Tonnennensis Chronica (444–567)* in MGH AA 11/1.187.

[10] See Cyprian, Ep. 66.8.3 in *S. Thasci Cypriani. Opera Omnia,* ed. William Hartel, CSEL 3 (Vienna: Geroldi, 1873) 733; and Maurice Bévenot, "*Sacerdos* as Understood by Cyprian," *Journal of Theological Studies* 30 (1979) 413–29.

[11] On the number of presbyters, see Graeme W. Clarke, *The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage,* 1: *Letters 1–27,* Ancient Christian Writers 43 (New York: Newman, 1984) 39–41. For the role of presbyters and confessors, see Michael M. Sage, *Cyprian,* Patristic Monograph Series 1 (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1975) especially chap. 5.

[12] *Breviarum Hipponense* 34 in *Concilia Africae A. 345–A. 525,* ed. C. Munier, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 149 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1974) 42; see F. L. Cross, "History and Function of African Canons," *Journal of Theological Studies* 12 (1961) 227–47, at 231.

[13] On the ubiquity of episcopal sees, even without presbyters and deacons, see Adolf Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries,* 2 vols., trans. James Moffatt (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1908) 1.281-86. See the bishops lists in Jean-Louis Maier, *L'Episcopat de l'Afrique romaine, vandale et byzantine* (Rome: Institut Suisse de Rome, 1973) and the discussion of bishops at the Conference of Carthage in 411 in *Actes de la Conférence de Carthage en 411,* Vol. 4: *Addiamentum criticum, notices sur les sièges et les toponymes, notes, complémentaires et index,* ed. Serge Lancel, Sources Chrétiennes 373 (Paris: Cerf, 1991). On the low number of priests, see Christopher Ocker, "Constantine, Episcopal Interests and the Papacy in Late Roman Africa," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 42 (1991) 179–201, at 183.

[14] See Henri Leclercq, "Chorévêques," *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie,* ed. F. Cabrol, H. Leclercq, and H. Marrou (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1907–1930) 3.1423-52.

episcopate but were known not as episkopoi or bishops, but as chorepiskopoi, country bishops. Their authority was limited by the bishops of the cities whose delegates they were. In North Africa, on the other hand, bishops in even the smallest of hamlets exercised full jurisdiction and authority.[15] They were, in fact, well integrated into the fabric of community life, as leaders whose authority, both civil and ecclesiastical, depended as much on the personalities and family connections as on their offices.[16]

The fact that North Africans did not emulate the churches of the eastern Mediterranean with its *chorepiskopoi* or Europe with presbyters as permanent delegates of the bishops is noteworthy because by the late 300s North Africa was experiencing a tremendous clergy shortage. This may have been occasioned by the spread of Christianity toward the frontiers. Whatever its cause, the North Africans did not resort to priest-delegates on a regular basis. Rather they sought imperial permission to ordain monks to the episcopate, they quarreled about the proper residency of clergy, and they failed to observe the temporal interstices between promotion to various grades of the clergy, making deacons directly into bishops.[17]

The episcopal structure itself was collegial. From the earliest years of Christianity in Africa, councils of bishops selected candidates for episcopal ordination, made provincial policy, and took care of disputes between priests and other clergy. While there were outstanding theologians, both young and old, at their councils, speakers were heard according to seniority.[18] In the third century Cyprian acted as a kind of primate for Africa as

[15] For the unique, almost egalitarian, organization of bishops, see Robert A. Markus, "Carthage—Prima Justiniana—Ravenna: An Aspect of Justinian's Kirchenpolitik," *Byzantion: Revue internationale des études byzantines* 49 (1979) 277–302, especially 279–81; and "Country Bishops in Byzantine Africa," in *The Church in Town and Country,* ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Ecclesiastical History Society and Blackwell, 1979) 1–15; both repr. in Robert Markus, *From Augustine to Gregory the Great: History and Christianity in Late Antiquity* (London: Variorum, 1983).

[16] Ocker, "Constantine, Episcopal Interests and the Papacy in Late Roman Africa" 183–85.

[17] Serge Lancel, "Le recrutement de l'Église d'Afrique au début du V^e^ siècle: aspects qualitatifs et quantitatifs," in *De Tertullien aux Mozarabes: Mélanges offerts à Jacques Fontaine,* 1: *Antiquité tardive et christianisme ancien (IIIe–VIe),* ed. Louis Holtz and Jean-Claude Fredouille (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1992) 328 and 336–37 with documentation; and the case of Antoninus of Fussala as an example in Augustine, *Ep.* 209.2–3 in *Sancti Aureli Augustini Hipponensis Episcopi Epistulae,* ed. A1. Goldbacher, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 57 (Vienna: Tempsky; and Leipzig: Freytag, 1911) 348–9 and *Ep.* 20*.3–4 in *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin: Lettres 1*–29*,* ed. by Johannes Divjak, Bibliothèque Augustinienne 46B (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1987) 296–98.

[18] *Sententiae episcoporum de haereticis baptizandis* in Cyprian, *Opera Omnia,* CSEL 1.435 ff. and Paul Zmire, "Recherches sur la collégialité épiscopale dans l'Église d'Afrique," *Recherches augustieniennes* 7 (1961) 3–72, at 16 and 60.

an undivided ecclesiastical province. His successors as bishops of Carthage continued this sort of primacy. In the fourth century when the civil province of Africa was divided and ecclesiastical administration followed suit, the two new provinces, Proconsularia and Numidia, each had its own primate. In the newer province, Numidia, primacy was tied to term in office and not to a particular city. Yet the collegiality between the provinces and their primates endured: the primate of Proconsularia was ordinarily ordained by the primate of Numidia. In the early fifth century, a further splitting of Africa into the ecclesiastical provinces of Byzacena, Tripolitania, and the Mauretanias (Sitifensis and Caesariensis) did not dilute the primatial system.[19] In each of these new provinces a primate, by seniority, exercised a leadership role within the province, but the bishops themselves governed the province jointly on matters of common concern. This particular and peculiar structure was submerged by persecution during the Vandal occupation but was restored under the Byzantines.[20] Though close to sovereign in their own dioceses, bishops of all the North African provinces assembled often, as regularly as circumstances allowed, to decide issues of joint interest and promulgate common policy.[21]

This collegial pattern was reproduced across the Donatist-Catholic divide. Each party had its respective bishops and primates. Both parties multiplied bishops by dividing dioceses, making sure that every hamlet had at least one of their party in charge of the local partisans so adherents of neither party would be forced to seek ministrations of the other party's bishops. Catholics tried to put a stop to the multiplication of dioceses in 387 at the Council of Carthage with their order that no new dioceses be erected.[22] They seem to have been ineffective: two decades later another Council of Carthage passed legislation requiring the consent of the primate, the provincial synod, and the affected bishop if a new diocese were created.[23] By the early 400s, there were hundreds of overlapping sees, at

[19] John Albert Eidenschink, *The Election of Bishops in the Letters of Gregory the Great with an Appendix on the Pallium,* dissertation, Catholic University of America Canon Law Series 215 (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1945) 9.

[20] Markus, "Country Bishops" 3.

[21] For the records of their councils, see Munier, CCL 149. The exception to this pan-African collegiality seems to have been the lately established Mauritania Tigitania which appears only in exceptional cases to have participated in ecclesiastical life in Africa, viz., a single council in Carthage in the seventh century. See Charles Diehl, *L'Afrique byzantine: Histoire de la domination byzantine en Afrique (533–570)* (Paris: Leroux, 1986) 412. This lack of participation in African ecclesiastical affairs probably mirrored the province's civil status as united to Hispania. See Holme, *The Extinction of the Christian Churches of North Africa* 175.

[22] *Council of Carthage 390* 5 (CCL 149.14).

[23] *Registri Ecclesiae Carthaginensis Excerpta* 53 (CCL 149.189); see Holme, *The Extinction of the Christian Churches of North Africa* 340.

least 286 Catholic and 279 Donatist, a total of 565. Both the Catholic and Donatist parties had their own primates and their own councils, making sure that each village had a bishop and that there was local participation in collegial provincial and interprovincial affairs.

Relations with Rome were those of a sister church, reflecting the North African pattern among themselves. If bishops in North Africa could not agree among themselves, they submitted their problem to another bishop in the province or to a provincial council. It is in this same spirit of an appeal to an unbiased outsider that cases went to Rome. However, they believed that bishops alone, not lower clergy such as the presbyter Apiarius (*fl.* 417/418), should have the right to enlist overseas consultors.[24]

At this point, one needs to note that Roman interest in North Africa, even before the advent of the Vandals, was more than that of a sister church. Not only did Roman bishops claim to be the appellate court for North Africa in the case of Apiarius, but the bishop of Rome had been gifted with many estates throughout North Africa and thus had some stake in religious affairs in various places from Byzacena in the east to Mauretania in the west.[25] Yet the Roman representation was on an ad hoc basis and was primarily interested in the income from Roman-held estates. Thus when the Vandals entered North Africa, the invaders found a hierarchy used to cooperation and collegiality with minimal overseas interference.

THE VANDAL OCCUPATION

In this section, I sketch the vacillating Vandal policies to show how they weakened the episcopal structure of Catholic Christianity.[26] Although the Vandals were Arian Christians with their own hierarchy, at first the persecution of Catholic Christians seemed to have more to do with native

[24] Zmire, "Recherches sur la collégialité épiscopale dans l'Eglise d'Afrique" 60; and Ocker, "Constantine, Episcopal Interests and the Papacy in Late Roman Africa." See Robert Eno, "Authority and Conflict in the Early Church," *Église et Théologie* 7 (1976) 41–60, at 56, commenting on their polite but firm rejection of a papal legate who came as if he represented a higher authority. On the case of Apiarius who appealed over the heads of the North African bishops to Rome, see Jane Merdinger, *Rome and the African Church in the Time of Augustine* (New Haven: Yale University, 1997) chap. 8.

[25] See *Liber Pontificalis* 34 on the estates of Silvester (314–35) and their annual income in *Le Liber Pontificalis: texte, introduction et commentaire,* 3 vols., ed. L. Duchesne (Paris: E. Boccard, 1955–1957) 1.175. For an annotated translation up to the year 715, see *The Book of the Pontiffs (Liber Pontificalis),* trans. with an intro. by Raymond Davis, Translated Texts for Historians, Latin Series 5 (Liverpool: Liverpool University, 1989). It is probable that these estates were bequests of Romans who owned North African properties rather than being bequests of North Africans.

[26] I use the term 'Catholic' here, not to exclude any remaining Donatists, but to contrast the native clergy with those of the invading Vandals who were Arian.

wealth coveted by the invaders than with their religious affiliation,[27] but ecclesiastical leaders, such as Possidius of Calama, could get caught in the exiling of influential men. Whether he was exiled as a civic or ecclesiastical leader—and he was both—the result was the same: his diocese was bereft of a leader.[28] By the end of Gaiseric's reign persecution for religious reasons alone seems to have begun to play a role.

The see of Carthage represents the sort of persecution the Vandals inflicted. As Gaiseric took control of the appointment of bishops in 429,[29] this Arian king had the power to prevent the election of bishops. This he did. After the bishop Quodvultdeus died in 439, the see was vacant for 15 years. Many other sees had the same experience.[30] Under pressure from Valentinan, Gaiseric acquiesced to the election of Deogratias of Carthage in 454. When the bishop died three years later, Gaiseric effectively prevented the see being filled. For 23 years it remained vacant.[31] During that time, the presbyters of the diocese were also persecuted. In 475 they were given the choice of going into exile or being made slaves.[32] What little ecclesiastical leadership remained was gutted. This in turn affected the next generation of episcopal candidates. Their models in pastoral administration and in preaching were either nonexistent, in hiding, or lackeys of the Vandals.

Toward the end of his life (476–477), Gaiseric moderated his attitude toward the Catholics. This seems to have been a response to Zeno's solicitation of religious tolerance for the Catholics with the promise of toleration for Arians in the Byzantine Empire. In 477 at his accession, Gaiseric's heir Huneric even allowed Catholic Christians to reclaim their churches.[33] Finally in 479, under pressure again from the Byzantine emperor Zeno and his consort Placidia, Huneric permitted the election of Eugenius as bishop of Carthage.[34] The conditions surrounding the ordina-

[27] John Moorhead, "Introduction" to *Victor of Vita* x–xi. Hereafter Moorhead with lower case Roman letters indicates Moorhead's introductory remarks and Moorhead with Arabic numbers indicates pages in the text of his translation.

[28] For the exile of Possidius among the *clariores,* see Prosper Tiro, *Epitoma Chronicon* 1327 (for the year 437) (MGH AA. 9/2.475). For the identification of this "Possidius" as the bishop of Calama, see Pierre Courcelle, *Histoire littéraire des grandes invasions germaniques,* 3rd ed. (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1964) 126.

[29] *Victor of Vita* 1.14–15 (Moorhead 8–9).

[30] *Victor of Vita* 1.23 (Moorhead 11).

[31] For the bishop lists and details of their reigns, see H. Leclercq, "Listes Épiscopales," *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et liturgie,* ed. F. Cabrol, H. Leclercq, and H. Marrou (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1907–1930) 9.1251–1437; and Maier, *L'Episcopat de l'Afrique romaine, vandale et byzantine.*

[32] *Victor of Vita* 1.14 (Moorhead 9).

[33] *Victor of Vita* 2.1 (Moorhead 24).

[34] *Victor of Vita* 2.3 (Moorhead 25).

tion were a compromise. Arians were allowed to continue their missionary efforts, especially in non-Romanized areas, and no Arians were allowed to convert to the Catholic faith.[35] But this benevolence exposed the pernicious effects of the absence of ecclesiastical leadership for close to a generation. The end of persecution was not without price—literally. As long as a bishop lived he was allowed to occupy his see, but at his death no new ordinary could be elected without the Vandal government seizing the assets and property of the diocese. Only when a large sum had been paid might the newly elected bishop be consecrated.[36] Eventually the vacillating Huneric sent several thousand members of the clergy of all ranks into exile in the desert.[37]

In the years immediately following this mass exile, Huneric again alternated between toleration and persecution. While he allowed Eugenius of Carthage to remain in his see, he ordered all the remaining Catholic bishops in his realm as well as the Arian bishops to assemble for a conference on June 25, 484, to debate Christology. Reminiscent of the Conference of Carthage in 411 between Catholics and Donatists, this assembly seemed to be little more than a show trial.[38] While all bishops were invited, only a few representatives were allowed to speak. Cyrila, the Arian "patriarch" presided. Like the verdict of Marcellinus in 411, the verdict of Cyrila was a foregone conclusion. He pronounced against the Catholics, sending their remaining bishops into exile again, along with the Catholic monks.[39]

During their bishops' exile many of the Catholic laity lapsed and subscribed to Arianism. But as vacillating as the king was, many Catholics simply did not stay lapsed but sought to return to the Catholics. In the absence of leadership in North Africa, Felix I, the bishop of Rome, called for a synod at the Lateran basilica in Rome during 487. With only four exiled African bishops in attendance the Italians tried to create a policy to govern the return of the Catholics who had lapsed and wished to return.[40]

[35] *Victor of Vita,* 2.6, 9 (Moorhead 26–27).

[36] *Victor of Vita* 2.23 (Moorhead 32); see Holme, *The Extinction of the Christian Churches of North Africa* 127.

[37] *Victor of Vita* 2.26–32 (Moorhead 33–38); Victor of Tunnenna, *s.a.* 466 (MGH 11/2.187).

[38] See Maureen A. Tilley, "Dilatory Donatists or Procrastinating Catholics: The Trial at the Conference of Carthage," *Church History* 60 (1991) 1–19.

[39] On the conference, see *Victor of Vita,* 2.56–101 (Moorhead 44–63); H. Leclercq, *L'Afrique chrétienne,* 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Paris: Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1904) 2.190–95; and Holme, *The Extinction of the Christian Churches of North Africa* 131–35. On the exile of four thousand monks, see *Isidore of Seville, History of the Goths, Vandals and Suevi* 78, trans. Guido Donini and Gordon B. Ford, 2nd revised ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1970) 36.

[40] Maier, *L'Episcopat de l'Afrique romaine, vandale et byzantine* 73; Holme, *The Extinction of the Christian Churches of North Africa* 150.

Gunthamund succeeded Huneric in 476. More conciliatory than his predecessor, he allowed Eugenius to return in 487. The bishop even prevailed on the king to recall the clergy from a decade of exile in 494.[41]

Gunthamund's successor Thrasamund (r. 484–496) was not so kind. While he did not immediately exile the bishops who returned under Gunthamund, he deliberately created a policy to impoverish the Catholics and deny them leadership. He refused to allow any episcopal elections in his jurisdiction and in 497 he closed Catholic churches and exiled 70 bishops to Sardinia where they were supported by the Roman bishop Symmachus.[42] As a result, from 504/505, when Eugenius died, until 523 the see at Carthage and many others were again vacant. Only in Byzacena did the Catholic bishops challenge the Vandal order. They reasoned that whether persecution would abate or grow more intense, people in the villages needed episcopal leadership. Therefore, in 507/508, they gathered and elected bishops for the vacant sees of their province, including Fulgentius of Ruspe. However, the situation was so desperate that they could not even find some of the men they elected.[43] Fulgentius was certainly not eager to leave monastic life to become an urban bishop in this hostile environment and he governed his diocese from his monastery.[44] Like Fulgentius too, many of these men wound up being exiled.[45] At the death of Thrasamund in 496, Hilderic recalled the few banished clergy who were still alive. The see at Carthage remained vacant until Boniface was elected in 535. He held the see until the final days of the Byzantine reconquest in 548.[46]

Meanwhile, when the bishops of all of Africa met in council in 525, only 60 were present. These represented all of the Church of Carthage, i.e., Proconsularia, and of Numidia and Byzacena. No representatives came from Tripoli or the Mauretanias. If one questions whether distance or the vacancies of sees was the issue, the answer is probably vacancies. Proconsularia offers a clue. Of the 148 episcopal cities of Proconsularia near to the meeting, i.e., the area surrounding Carthage, where distance was not the problem, only 48 were represented.[47] Nearly a century of intermittent

[41] Victor of Tunnenna, *s.a.* 479 (MGH 11/2.189).

[42] Victor of Tunnenna, *s.a.* 497 (11/2.193); *Liber Pontificalis* 53 on Symmachus (Duchesne, *Liber Pontificalis: texte, introduction et commentaire* 1.263).

[43] *Vita Fulgentii* 13–14, in *Fulgentius: Selected Works,* trans. Robert B. Eno, Fathers of the Church 95 (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1997) 28–31; erroneously Vita 16–17 in Holme, *The Extinction of the Christian Churches of North Africa* 155.

[44] *Vita Fulgentii* 16–17 (Eno 33–35).

[45] *Vita Fulgentii* 17–18 (Eno 35–36); *Isidore* 81 (Donini and Ford 37).

[46] *Vita Fulgentii* 28 (Eno 54); Victor of Tunnenna, *s.a.* 523 (MGH 11/2.197).

[47] Maier, *L'Episcopat de l'Afrique romaine, vandale et byzantine* 74–76; Diehl

persecution by the Vandals had reduced the network of bishops substantially, even in Proconsularia.

A single example, that of Carthage, again provides a striking example of the disaster of the Vandal occupation. Between the fall of the city in 439 and the accession of its first bishop after the liberation of the city by Belisarius in 533, a span of 94 years, the city had no bishop—resident or in exile—for 41 years. Other cities suffered the martyrdom or exile of their bishops or the interdiction of elections in similar fashion. Not only were they deprived of bishops but also of lower clergy. The most outspoken and courageous were martyred, leaving only the less well-trained and brave for the next round of purges. New bishops were repeatedly installed and then taken from the cities, villages, and hamlets. The carefully cultivated collegiality could not long endure under these circumstances.

In the first third of the sixth century, the final days of Vandal hegemony, and throughout the period of the Byzantine reconquest (533–48), Berbers pressed their attack more insistently from the southern desert.[48] Catholics were subject to the same liabilities as the Vandals themselves. When the Berbers attacked from the frontiers, they did not differentiate Arian Vandals from native Catholics.[49] Thus even after liberation from the Vandals, the African hierarchy with its people were attacked.

PRESSURE FROM THE EAST: THE BYZANTINE RESTORATION

Under a more benevolent Byzantine administration, Fulgentius and the other bishops returning to Africa had to deal with the effects of a century of repeated disruptions of ecclesiastical government. Their task was the reorganization of the Catholic churches. This duty included the establishment of dates of accession for the purpose of the computation of seniority, the demarcation of diocesan boundaries, and the regulation of relations between diocesan bishops and monasteries.[50]

With the restoration of Byzantine dominance in Africa under Belisarius, one would think that the North African troubles would be over. As the recovery started, here was reason for optimism. Reparatus took up his

409; Holme, *The Extinction of the Christian Churches of North Africa* 160. The names of only thirteen others are known for that year.

[48] For a detailed chronology and a discussion of the role the Berbers played in the eclipse of Christianity, see J. Corbon, "Réflexions sur la mort d'une église," *Proche Orient Chrétien* 8 (1958) 197–226.

[49] E.g., *CIL* 8.9286; see Holme, *The Extinction of the Christian Churches of North Africa* 148.

[50] *Vita Fulgentii* 27 (Eno 50–2); Holme, *The Extinction of the Christian Churches of North Africa* 158–60.

office as bishop of Carthage in 535 and began to lead the hierarchy in Proconsularia. Beginning around 544 Justinian ordered that the ecclesiastical properties taken by the Vandals be restored to the Church and that new monasteries and churches be erected, including the spacious Carthaginian cathedral Damous-el-Karita.[51] Church councils regained their ancient status and the Church once again received financial support.[52] Carthage regained its primatial privileges and clergy were to be judged only by ecclesiastical courts.[53] Imperial officials were obliged by law to accept the counsels of the bishops.[54]

However, the sovereign's liberality was grounded in the notion that he was the absolute ruler of both state and church. Justinian exercised a much tighter control over internal ecclesiastical affairs than that to which the Africans had grown accustomed either before or during the Vandal occupation. Displacing the primates, the emperor convoked and presided at councils and sanctioned their legislation. Displacing the bishops in council, he made ecclesiastical law and composed formulas of faith.[55] While restoring the independence of the Church from Vandal oppression, he tied it more tightly to Constantinople. The restoration of the privileges of Carthage as metropolitan see was not simply the *status quo ante*. The bishop of Carthage was now expected to impose his own authority on the bishops of Proconsularia on behalf of the emperor. The primate of Byzacena was no longer expected to act in concert and consensus with other bishops of North Africa but was to report directly to the imperial throne.[56] As for the properties restored to the church, bishops could claim them only if they paid years of back taxes due on them.[57]

The bishops of North Africa had been used to achieving their own dis-

[51] Novella 130 in *Imp. Iustiniani pp. A. Novellae quae vocatur sive Constitutiones quae extra codicem supersunt chronologico digestae,* ed. Zachary A. Ligenthal, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1881) 2.158.

[52] See the specific prescriptions for Byzacena in Novellae 132 (*a.* 541) (Ligenthal 2.174).

[53] Novellae 34 (*a.* 535) and 140 (*a.* 542) (Ligenthal 1.207–11 and 2.209–10); see Diehl 419 who erroneously cites Novella 45.

[54] Diehl 513.

[55] For Justinian's *modus operandi* in promulgating doctrine and securing ecclesiastical support, see Milton Anastos, "Justinian's Despotic Control over the Church as Illustrated by his Edicts on the Theopaschite Formula and his Letter to Pope John II in 533," in *Mélanges Georg Ostrosky,* 2 vols. (Belgrade: Vizantoloski Institute, 1963–1964) 2.1–11.

[56] Diehl 418; John Albert Eidenschrink, *The Election of Bishops in the Letters of Gregory the Great with an Appendix on the Pallium,* Catholic University of America Canon Law Series 215 (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1945) 10 n. 24, citing the confirmation by Justinian II (565–578) of the right of the primate of Byzacena to appeal directly to the emperor.

[57] Jean Durliat, "Les attributions civiles des évêques byzantins: l'exemple du

ciplinary consensus. At times they acted independently of the larger church without splitting from it, e.g., on the question of rebaptism in the third century. At other times, they sought the formal approval of the emperor, e.g., for the ordination of monks, or the approval of other churches, e.g., when they asked for overseas approval in details of the reintegration of Donatist bishops, both conscious innovations approved in the late fifth century. But whether achieving consensus at home or reaching out to overseas bishops, it was always *their* initiative. They were accustomed to using external arbiters occasionally, but not to receiving orders from outsiders. Nevertheless, Justinian imposed his own interpretations of faith and order and forced bishops to submit on both doctrinal and disciplinary issues.[58]

The Byzantine administration also pressed its own expectations down to the level of the management of ecclesiastical property. Byzantine religious and political leaders expected ecclesiastical property to be managed by priests, as they were in the East and as they were in Carthage. When the number of priests were insufficient to manage all of the holdings throughout Africa, the bishops did not simply ordain more priests to conform to the Byzantine pattern and to satisfy Constantinople. The Africans resisted alien expectations and fell back on their own native traditions and appointed not a single presbyter but legal groups of *principales*, similar to the *seniores laici*, the nonclerical property managers of the pre-Vandal period.[59]

A decade of Justinian's enforcement of his expectation and the approval of his handpicked men as bishops made the collegial life of North African bishops more difficult than ever. Then the situation became even worse as Justinian tried to control the bishop of Rome and as North Africans became caught up in the controversy of the condemnation of the Three Chapters.

In 537 at Rome Belisarius had enforced Justinian's will by deposing and

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diocèse d'Afrique (533–709)," in *Akten XVI Internationaller Byzantinistenkongress* II/2 (Vienna: Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1962) 73–84, at 73. I am indebted to Professor Dr. Andreas Schwarcz of the Institut für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung who points out that because Justinian was conducting costly military exploits during the reconquests, the rate of taxation would have been much higher than in previous years, thus posing an additional obstacle to the restoration of the properties.

[58] Diehl 433.

[59] Durliat, "Les attributions civiles des évêques byzantins" 74 and 79. Durliat may be mistaken in proposing the *principales* or *praepositi* as laity, but it is significant that the property was managed by a group of senior members of the church, a North African custom, rather than by a single person, the Byzantine usage. For the possibility of construing *praepositi* as clergy, see Clarke 167, 175, and 222.

exiling the bishop Silverius and forcing Vigilius on the Roman electors. Vigilius was supposed to be a compliant puppet, but out of fear of his own constituency, he was less malleable than the emperor would have hoped.[60] In 544 Emperor Justinian ordered the bishops of East and West to join him in condemning the writings of theologians deemed to have favored monophysitism, the Three Chapters of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret, and Ibas of Edessa, who were considered Nestorian sympathizers. But Arianism, not Nestorianism, had been the concern of the North Africans and of Italy. In North Africa, Arianism was less a theological problem than it was part of the culture of the occupying Vandals. In the wake of the Vandal defeat, North African and Italian bishops needed to provide for the integration of Arians into the larger church. It was a delicate task even without the complication of a thoroughly foreign Christological problem.[61] Thus they did not see the writings of the Three Chapters in the same light as the East. In fact, they refused to condemn posthumously men whose works they had accepted as orthodox within their lifetimes. They saw a condemnation of the Three Chapters as a betrayal of Nicaea whose doctrines differentiated them from Arians.[62] Pontianus of Thyna added his fears of general religious chaos which would be ascribed to the emperor as he pled: "If you condemn the dead, the disobedient living will be killed and then you will have to answer to the One who will come to judge the living and the dead."[63] So on both theological and political grounds they reacted negatively to Justinian's demands.

All over Western Europe bishops resisted. In Rome, there were similar pastoral problems, similar opinions to that of North Africa, and similar pressure from Justinian. After resisting for several years, including time under arrest in Constantinople, the Roman bishop Vigilius was forced to condemn the Three Chapters in 548.[64] The Africans held out longer. In 550 they assembled at a general council, proclaimed themselves defenders of the Three Chapters, excommunicated Vigilius, and sent their solemn protest to the emperor.[65] In response, Justinian summoned to Constantinople

[60] Liberatus of Carthage, *Liberati diaconi Brevarium* 22 (PL 68.1046).

[61] See the discussion and references in Walter Kaegi, "Arianism and the Byzantine Army 533–546," *Traditio* 21 (1965) 23–53, at 38–39.

[62] Diehl, 434; see Robert Markus, "Reflections on Religious Dissent in North Africa in the Byzantine Period," in *Studies in Church History* 3, ed. G. J. Cuming (Leiden: Brill, 1966); repr. in Robert Markus, *From Augustine to Gregory the Great: History and Christianity in Late Antiquity* (London: Variorum, 1983).

[63] Pontianus, *Epistula Pontiani Episcopi ad Justinianum Imperatorum* (PL 67.998a).

[64] The original condemnation, the *Judicatum* (548), condemns the writings and their authors. The *Constitutum* (553) condemns only the writings.

[65] See the discussion of the context of the incident in Claire Sontiel, "Autorité

the leadership of North Africa.[66] Once there, Reparatus of Carthage was deposed and exiled to Euchaita in Asia where he died, and Primasius of Hadrumetum, the delegate of the ailing primate of Byzacena, was sent to a monastery in Constantinople where he too expired.[67] Verecundus of Iunca fled the capital.[68] Firmus, the primate of Numidia, was first swayed to condemn the Three Chapters, but later, thinking the better of it, he withdrew his support and died on the return voyage to Africa.[69] The abbot Felix died in prison at Sinope on the Black Sea.[70]

With the leaders of the North Africans detained, in exile, or dead, Justinian was free to pressure North African Christians more directly. He exiled both bishops and abbots who refused his will.[71] He deposed others and installed new bishops by force, jailing some clergy and forcing others to flee for fear of exile among the Berbers or in other inhospitable places.[72] At Carthage, in place of Reparatus, he installed Primosus the deacon as bishop. Primosus received his see (against the will of the clergy and the laity of the city) with the charge that he was to secure the acceptance of the condemnation of the Three Chapters.[73] Then Justinian was able to bring his own handpicked North Africans to Constantinople to act as Western representatives to Chalcedon. When some of even these refused to sign condemnations, he sent them into exile.[74]

PRESSURE FROM THE WEST: ROMAN IMPERIALISM

Persecution by the Vandals and pressure from the Byzantines were not the only attacks on the authority of North African bishops. From the early fifth century onward, they saw their authority eroded by encroachments from the West, specifically from Rome. While there was a long history of

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pontificale et pouvoir impériale sous le règne de Justinien: Le pape Vigile," *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome, antiquité* 104/1 (1992) 439–63.

[66] Diehl 438–40, citing Victor of Tunnuna. *s.a.* 550 (MGH 11/2.202) and the letter of the Italian clerics in MGH, *Epistulae* 3.438–42. See Diehl, ibid. 434 for full documentation of the correspondence between North Africa and Constantinople on the issue.

[67] Averil Cameron, "Byzantine Africa—the literary evidence," in *Excavations at Carthage* 7, ed. J. H. Humphrey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1982) 29–62, at 47–48.

[68] Cameron, "Byzantine Africa—the literary evidence" 48.

[69] Victor of Tunnenna, *s.a.* 553 (MGH 11/2. 202–3).

[70] Diehl 448.

[71] Holme, *The Extinction of the Christian Churches of North Africa* 187, citing Victor of Tunnenna, *s.a.* 553 et al.

[72] Diehl 433.

[73] Victor of Tunnenna, *s.a.* 552 (MGH 11/2.202); Diehl 441.

[74] Diehl 444 and Cameron, "Byzantine Africa—the literary evidence" 49.

Roman concern for the Church of North Africa, several incidents demonstrate that the ways in which Rome expressed its concern for the African Church undercut the methods by which the African bishops were trying to rebuild the Church in their own territory.[75]

From the early fifth century, Roman bishops had tried to extend their appellate jurisdiction to North Africa. The extension radically undermined the authority of the bishops individually and collectively. The case of Apiarius is an outstanding example.

In 418 Bishop Urban of Sicca Veneria excommunicated the presbyter Apiarius. The surviving records do not indicate the exact nature of the crimes that warranted this disciplinary action, but they must have been serious. Against the judgment of his bishop he appealed, not to his primate or a council of African bishops, but directly to Rome, in contravention to African canon law that allowed only bishops to appeal overseas.[76] Basing his judgment on the canons of Nicaea, Zosimus of Rome took up the appeal. But the canons he relied upon were not really from Nicaea but were actually canons of a regional council at Sardica (ca. 343) which had been copied into the Roman version of the records of Nicaea. This council did indeed allow lower clergy to appeal, but the acts of the council were never universally accepted. In 419 the African bishops respectfully challenged the basis for this interference and showed the successor of Zosimus, Boniface, that Apiarius had no right to the appeal.[77] In addition, they adopted the canon passed in Hippo in 393 that not only could bishops alone appeal overseas, but also, if they or any other clergy wished simply to travel abroad, they needed permission of their primate, and finally that those lower clergy who dared to appeal overseas would be excommunicated.[78] The Africans eventually proved to the Roman bishop that his copy of the canons of Nicaea was defective and the defense of their rights was successful temporarily.

However, again in 425/426, Apiarius was accused of sexual crimes and he

[75] For the earlier history of Roman-North African relations, see Merdinger, *Rome and the African Church* (New Haven: Yale University, 1997).

[76] *Brevarium Hipponensis* 27 (*a.* 393) in CCL 149.41.

[77] *Epistula Concilii Carthaginensis ad Bonifatium papam* (May 26, 419) in CCL 149.156–61. At least formal respect is granted Boniface in the salutation *Domino beatissimo et honorabili fratri,* and the closing of the letter, *beatissime frater* (159 and 161). See the *Concilium Carthaginense* (419) (CCL 149.91) for the African acknowledgment of the authority of Nicaea and the exposure of the canons on which Zosimus relied as not Nicene.

[78] *Canones in causa Apiarii* 28 (CCL 149.109–10), repeated in *Registri Ecclesiae Carthaginensis Excerpta* 125 (227). See the argument of Merdinger that the unspecified overseas location was actually Rome (95).

was excommunicated a second time.[79] Once more he appealed over the heads of the Africans to the bishop of Rome. This time with full knowledge that he stood on no Nicaean precedent, the bishop of Rome intervened on Apiarius's behalf. When Apiarius finally confessed his transgression in the presence of the Roman legate and the bishops of Africa,[80] the Roman legate withdrew. Regardless of the actual outcome of this specific case, the second intervention radically challenged the appeals process erected by African canon law and the authority of the African bishops in their own provinces, and the Africans appealed to Rome and counseled its bishop that at the very minimum he ought to follow the canons of Nicaea and let the African bishops handle their own disciplinary affairs.

The case of Apiarius was not the only one in which the Roman bishops accepted appeals. Antoninus of Fussala, the appointee of Augustine who was ordained directly from the lectorate, turned out to be more than administratively immature: fiscal corruption and intimidation were the hallmarks of his episcopal administration.[81] But since he was a bishop, unlike Apiarius, he could appeal overseas. He did so even though the deadline for appeals had passed. Through devious machinations he obtained a required letter of introduction from his primate and sailed for Rome. Once the Roman legates arrived and learned of Antoninus's character, Antoninus scorned their authority and appealed to his primate who took up the case again. While nothing more came of Roman intervention in this case, the precedent for appeal to Rome and a corresponding Roman interest in internal affairs in Africa has been set and reinforced.

In the demoralizing period of the early Vandal occupation, Rome continued to assert its perceived responsibilities for the oversight of Africa. During this period, the bishops of North Africa attempted to cope with the long vacancies in dioceses. In 446 when the opportunity came for elections, the bishops of Caesarea Mauretania moved quickly to fill vacant dioceses with able administrators. In imperious language Leo the Great scolded them. He did not think their candidates worthy. He objected to their election of men who were not long enough in previous rank. He rejected men who remarried.[82] The problem was not so much widowers who married a second time, betraying their inability to keep continent; rather it was marriage to a widow, a sign of a man's inability to resist seduction by a woman who had been sexually active, an even greater weakness in Leo's eyes.

[79] *Concilium Carthaginense a. 424–425* (CCL 149.170).
[80] *Concilium Carthaginense a. 424–425* (CCL 149.170–71).
[81] See Augustine, *Epp.* 209 and 20* and Merdinger, Chapter 10.
[82] Leo, *Ep.* 12.2–4 in *St. Leo the Great: Letters,* trans. Edmund Hunt, Fathers of the Church 34 (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1957) 50–51.

However, he did recommend his own dubious candidates, one a former Novatianist, another a former Donatist, provided that they expressed their loyalty, not to the orthodox Church, holy doctrine, or even their metropolitan, but to Leo personally.[83] As the African bishops attempted to exert their influence in rural areas against both the Arian episcopacy and the non-Christian Berbers, Leo wrote them a letter upbraiding them for the multiplication of dioceses and for having bishops resident in small towns and villages. For Leo, the rural residence of bishops diminished their honor by attaching them to small towns as opposed to great cities. (It also meant that the bishops were less accessible to Leo's oversight.) In addition, Leo wrote, partitioning a larger diocese to create a small rural one brought the senior urban bishop into disrepute by reducing the area he controlled. Leo's counter-recommendation that not bishops but priests be sent to smaller towns directly inverts the emphasis of the North Africans that bishops, not priests, should have authority even in rural areas of small populations.[84] He ended his letter with the command that the bishops send him a report indicating that his orders had been followed.[85] We do not know whether the bishops heeded the letter, but the conditions that Leo found troubling give witness to the attempt of the North African bishops to maintain a hierarchy that relied heavily on bishops and generally did not seek to substitute presbyters as leaders for local, especially rural, communities.

The next time North Africa seems to have captured the attention of Rome was during the reign of Gregory the Great (590–604). Like Leo, he was anxious for the Church of North Africa, but his understanding of good order also flew in the face of North African tradition. He often bypassed the bishops and appealed directly to the Byzantine exarch Gennadius to maintain ecclesiastical discipline.[86] He also requested Gennadius to order the bishops to change the method of choosing their primate. He wanted the primate to be attached to a particular see.[87] The bishops of Numidia protested this interference in their age-old custom of electing the most senior bishop, and Gregory backed down. His sole concern he later said was that the customary rule of seniority not lead to a former Donatist becoming primate.[88] He wrote directly and often to his correspondent bishop Columbus in Numidia regarding abuses that allowed the Donatists to keep

[83] Leo, *Ep.* 12.6 (Hunt 54).
[84] Leo, *Ep.* 12.10 (Hunt 55–56).
[85] Leo, *Ep.* 12.13 (Hunt 57).
[86] Gregory, *Book 4 Ep.* 7 (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 2nd series 12.146–47; hereafter NPNF).
[87] Gregory, *Book 1 Ep.* 74 (NPNF 2nd series 12.98).
[88] Gregory, *Book 1 Epp.* 75 and 77 (NPNF 2nd series 12.98–99). For a full discussion of this problem, see Markus, "Country Bishops." For Markus's judgment

their episcopal lines in succession.[89] He tried to undermine the authority of the primate of Numidia by appeal to other bishops in his area.[90] Whatever the issue was, the appearance was one of Rome trying to refashion the North Africans on its own model, against the pattern the North Africans themselves saw as most useful.[91]

The opposition to his interference in episcopal affairs through government officials did not cease and he continued to apply pressure on the bishops through Pantaleo the Prefect, motivating him by threats of divine sanction: "[O]ur God will require at your hand the souls of the lost, if you neglect to amend, so far as possibility requires of you, so great an abomination [as not suppressing 'Donatists']."[92] He even exhorted the African bishops not to enforce the rulings of their own councils when he perceived them as too harsh.[93] Like Leo, Gregory was concerned with the quality of men being ordained and he even tried to force Roman models of authority on the North African bishops' relationships to abbots.[94]

While Leo and Gregory might be cast as spiritual reformers who had the best interests of the North African Church at heart or simply landowners concerned about the property they had inherited from Silvester, their methods of effecting church reform worked against the very developments of the North African tradition that the African bishops themselves espoused. By denigrating the authority of the bishops as individuals and as a collegial body, both Roman bishops served to weaken the episcopacy in Northern Africa in the days preceding the rise of Islam.

CONCLUSION

In the two centuries before the advent of Islam (429–647), the episcopacy in North Africa was severely weakened by three factors. First, persecution

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that Gregory's use of the epithet 'Donatist' was mistaken, see "Reflections" 143–49; and "The Problem of 'Donatism' in the Sixth Century," in *Gregorio Magno e il suo tempore,* ed. Vittorino Grossi (Rome: Institutum Patristicum "Augustinianum," 1991) 159–66.

[89] E.G., Gregory to Columbus, *Book 2 Ep. 47* (NPNF 2nd series 12.115–16).

[90] Greogry to Columbus, *Book 12 Epp.* 8, 28 and 29 (NPNF 2nd series 12.87–88 and 89–91).

[91] Gregory, *Book 1 Epp.* 75 and 77 (NPNF 2nd series 12.98–99).

[92] Gregory, *Book 4 Ep.* 34 (NPNF 2nd series 12.157); see Gregory to Columbus, *Book 4, Ep.* 35 (158).

[93] Gregory to Dominicus of Carthage, *Book 5 Ep.* 5 (NPNF 2nd series 12.163) on the repression of Donatists.

[94] See *Book 3 Epp.* 48 and 49 (NPNF 2nd series 12.134–35) and *Book 7, Ep.* 35 (227). See also Yvette Duval, "Grégoire et l'Église d'Afrique. les 'Hommes du Pape'," in *Gregorio Magno e il suo tempore* 129–58, for Gregory's concern with the unity of the African Church.

by the Vandals decimated the episcopacy either by exile or death and diluted the pool of energetic leadership. Especially hard hit were the more talented and outspoken of the bishops. Second, less than 20 years after the defeat of the Vandals, the leadership of the African episcopacy was once again attacked, this time by Justinian in the controversy over the Three Chapters. Finally, when the episcopal talents of North Africa were at their lowest ebb, and bishops seemed to be scraping the bottom of the barrel for priestly appointments, the papacy demoralized the Africans with attacks of the qualifications of their clergy. Even the structure of episcopal leadership was attacked as Gregory the Great advocated the removal of bishops from the villages and hamlets where they were the only effective pastoral agents. Little wonder then that Islam made inroads in North Africa as nowhere else in Christian lands. Repeated challenges to episcopal authority proved too much for the bishops, and their number and influence declined. In this power vacuum North Africans lacked the leadership necessary to maintain widespread allegiance to Christianity.

A bit anachronistically yet cogently Victor of Vita (from the late fifth century) provides an epitaph:

> "All comeliness and charm have departed" (Lam 1:6, Vulg) from her face; "her virgins" have learned to walk along bitter paths. "and her young men." brought up in the halls of monasteries; "they have gone away into captivity" (Lam 1:18) among the Moors, while "her holy stones are scattered," not only "at the corners of all the streets" (Lam 4:1). but also in the foul places of the mines. Say "to God our protector" (cf Ps 41:10), with the confidence of one at prayer, "since she is afflicted and her bowels disturbed" (Lam 1:20) by her weeping, that "she sits among the nations and does not find rest, neither is there one to console her" (Lam 1:3, 2). She has sought from the fathers of the East "one who might share her sorrow, and there was none, and one to console her, and she did not find him . . . ." (cf. Ps 68:21f).[95]

[95] *Victor of Vita* 68 (Moorhead 91–92).