

Augustine and the African Councils 393-427

奧思定與非洲教會會議393-427

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摘要：奧思定是在第一和第二次大公會議之後才走進神學領域，並在第三次大公會議舉行前去世。但這並不代表他沒有在教會會議的歷史上留名。本文旨在闡述奧思定在393至427年間舉行的一連串非洲教會會議中的參與和貢獻。

關鍵詞：奧思定、教會會議、非洲教會會議

Abstract: *Augustine came onto the theological arena after the first two ecumenical councils and died before the third one was held. But it does not mean that he has not left his mark in the history of the councils of the Church. This paper surveys Augustine's involvement in and contribution to the series of African councils held from 393 to 427.*

Keywords: *Augustine, Church councils, African synods*

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Augustine was a key player in a series of councils in the church of Africa. This church witnessed its first series of regular councils early as 248-258 under Cyprian of Carthage. Ironically, it was the feast of the saint and martyr Cyprian that sparked a second series of councils in Africa. Prompted by his displeasure towards the twisting of the feasts of martyrs into pretexts for orgies, Augustine devised a series of councils together with his friend Aurelius of Carthage for the purposes of disciplinary reform. This series of councils from 393 to 427 began even before Augustine was ordained bishop in 395 and ended as the Bishop of Hippo entered semi-retirement due to his ailing health. While most of these councils met at Carthage, which was the seat of the primate of Africa, the first and the last of the series were held at Augustine's Hippo. The fact that it was half a century later before another African council was held highlights Augustine's irreplaceable contribution to the history of the councils in the church of Africa.

1. Augustine's Knowledge of Councils

A detailed account of Augustine's participation in and knowledge of councils as well as their importance is provided by Sieben in "Konzilien in Leben und Lehre des Augustinus von Hippo (†430)" (1979, orig. 1971). Sieben shows that Augustine was present in many of the African councils.¹ Being a prominent figure in the series of

¹ According to Sieben, Augustine was present at the Councils of Carthage (26th June 397, 399, 13th September 401, 403, 404, 407, 410, 1st May 418, 419, 424, 426), Cirta (412), Hippo (393, 427), Milevis (402, 416); probably present at the Councils of Carthage (394, 16th June 401, 405), Hadrumetum (394); not present at the Councils of Carthage (13th October 408, 411, 416); and his presence could

African councils, Augustine would not only be familiar with the content of their discussions but also understand that they aim to rectify Church discipline and put forth Church teaching under the authority of these gathering of bishops.

According to Sieben, Augustine was familiar with the creedal formula of Nicaea (325) as well as its turbulent history. But he never followed the tradition of associating the mystical number 318 with the number of bishops at Nicaea. He seems to be unaware of the Council of Constantinople (381), but he knew about the Council of Sardica (343) as well as Hilary of Poitiers's *De synodis*. Since his acquaintance of respective councils corresponds to his theological and apologetic concerns, despite the extensiveness of Arianism-related councils between the ecumenical councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381), given that Arianism was not an imminent threat to him, his understanding of these councils was less than profound.² Sieben remarks that Augustine has not cited the complete *fides Nicaena* in his works. While abiding by its content, Augustine

not be ascertained at the Councils of Carthage (28th August 397, 16th June 408, 409, 417 or 418, end of 418, 421, 422 or 423), Numidia (423), Thysdrus (417), Thelepte (418). Hermann Josef Sieben, "Konzilien in Leben und Lehre und Lehre des Augustinus von Hippo (†430)," in *Die Konzilsidee der Alten Kirche, Konziliengeschichte* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1979), pp. 68-77. For a survey of the African councils and canons Augustine had cited in his works, see *Ibid.*, pp. 84-86. The aforementioned essay is based on Sieben, "Zur Entwicklung der Konzilsidee IV: Konzilien in Leben und Lehre des Augustinus von Hippo," *Theologie und Philosophie* 46, no. 4 (1971): 496-528.

2 Sieben, "Konzilien in Leben und Lehre," pp. 80-83. Of the African councils, Augustine had a good knowledge of the Cyprian councils from the letters of Cyprian and an adequate knowledge of the post-Cyprian councils from council records due to his anti-Donatists concerns. For the non-African councils, his main source was Eusebius of Caesarea's *Historia ecclesiastica*. Though he knew about the Council of Arles (314), it appears unlikely that he had its canons. *Ibid.*, pp. 78-80.

strove to avoid a mere reproduction of its words. In *Epistula 238* to Pascentius the Arian count, he prefers to proclaim his faith in his own words rather than be pinned down by the word *homoousios*. In *Conlatio cum Maximino Arrianorum episcopo*, the written record of his debate with Maximinus the Arian bishop from Illyricum, he demands that his opponent should declare his personal faith rather than use council formulas. This attitude of Augustine should be seen in the context of the gradual reception of Nicene formula in the West.³ Indeed, which councils should constitute as ecumenical would only be defined at the Council of Chalcedon (451). “Beforehand, and for many communities long after, it was not clear which councils should be considered ecumenical and therefore binding upon all Christians. As a result, the distinction between ecumenical and regional councils, including the difference in their respective authorities, was often unclear.”⁴

2. Augustine’s Attitude towards Councils

Augustine is a firm believer in the effectiveness of councils, demonstrated in his *Epistula 22* to Aurelius, the bishop of Carthage, on the feasting and drunkenness at the cemeteries of the martyrs. He beseeches Aurelius to use his authority as the primate to wield “the heavy sword of councils” to heal the church of Africa from

3) Sieben, “Konzilien in Leben und Lehre,” pp. 87-89.

4) Norman Tanner, *Was the Church too Democratic?*, in *The Church in Council: Conciliar Movements, Religious Practice and the Papacy from Nicaea to Vatican II* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), p. 74.

its “many carnal diseases and illnesses.”⁵ He finds “the plague of this evil is so great that it cannot ... be completely healed except by the authority of a council”⁶ while maintaining the preeminence of Scripture, commenting that the task of dissuading such orgy would have been easier had there been an explicit prohibition of it in Scripture.⁷ Merdinger thinks that *Epistula 22*—probably dated 392 when Aurelius just became the bishop of Carthage—is the first evidence that either Aurelius or Augustine “conceived the idea of holding a series of councils to spark the rejuvenation of the Church. (Whether it was Aruelius or Augustine is difficult to say).”⁸ Six-Means sees *Epistula 22* as Augustine’s “charter of catholicization” towards a “reinvigoration of a tradition of Church governance that could be tied back at least to Cyprian.”⁹

5 “In fact, we hope intensely that our Lord and God can by the authority of your person, ... heal by the heavy sword of councils and by your earnestness the many carnal diseases and illnesses that the African church suffers in many, but bemoans only in a few” / “quod dominus et deus noster per auctoritatem personae quam geris, ... multas carnales foeditates et aegritudines quas Africana ecclesia in multis patitur, in paucis gemit, conciliorum grauitate et tua uiuacitate possit sanare.” Augustine, *ep. 22.1.2* (CCL 31: 52-53, trans. Roland Teske, WSA, *Letters*, II/1: 59). The term “heavy sword” in the English translation does not find its corresponding Latin term “*grauit ense*” in the critical edition of CCL 31, but “*grauit ense*” is in the earlier 1895 CSEL critical edition, with the phrase being “conciliorum graui ense et tua grauitate posse sanari” (CSEL 34: 55).

6 “tanta pestilentia est huius mali, ut sanari prorsus ... nisi concilii auctoritate non possit.” Augustine, *ep. 22.1.4* (CCL 31: 54, trans. Roland Teske, WSA, *Letters*, II/1: 60).

7 “it seems to me to be easier to dissuade them from this foul and shameful practice if it is also forbidden by the scriptures” / “mihi uidetur facilius illis dissuaderi posse istam foeditatem ac turpitudinem, si et de scripturis prohibeatur.” Augustine, *ep. 22.1.6* (CCL 31: 55, trans. Roland Teske, WSA, *Letters*, II/1: 60).

8 J. E. Merdinger, *Rome and the African Church in the Time of Augustine* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 66.

9 Horace E. Six-Means, *Augustine and Catholic Christianization: The Catholicization of Roman Africa, 391-408* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 48, 56.

For Augustine, there is a hierarchy of authority of councils. A universal or ecumenical council is more authoritative than a plenary or general council, which is in turn more authoritative than a provincial or local council. Sieben elucidates Augustine's understanding of such hierarchy as follows. The Donatist heresy comes precisely from a lack of differentiation between particular versus ecumenical councils. Still, council teachings have to be measured against the supreme authority of canonical Scripture and not vice versa. Plenary councils carry greater weight than non-plenary councils since there is a quantitatively greater number of attending bishops. Particular councils help the pilgrim Church in its search for truth—truth to be ratified in universal councils. Universal councils bear the authority of the *Catholica*, the whole Church, which concretely manifests the apostolic succession that transmits the truth handed down from Christ.¹⁰

But we are given to understand that those practices we observe which are not in scripture, but in tradition, and which are observed throughout the whole world, are maintained as taught and established either by the apostles themselves or by plenary councils, which have an authority in the Church most conducive to salvation.¹¹

10 Sieben, "Konzilien in Leben und Lehre," pp. 90-96. Eno cautions that one should not presume Augustine had any "pre-formed definition" of ecumenical council. "His terms were still fluid." Robert B. Eno, "Doctrinal Authority in Saint Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 12 (1981): 163. According to Eno, Augustine "believed that Scripture was inerrant and that the universal Church taught the truth. The thrust of Augustine's thinking points to support for the authority of these councils, under Scripture, to make decisions." *Ibid.*, p. 164. Though Eno is right that Augustine gives very high regard to universal councils, Augustine's writings show that he is much more eager to defend the prime authority of Scripture than to comment on whether universal councils could err.

11 "Illa autem quae non scripta sed tradita custodimus, quae quidem toto terrarum orbe seruantur, datur intellegi uel ab ipsis apostolis uel plenariis conciliis, quorum est in

Though the judgement of a plenary council counts more than that of a provincial council, Augustine views that even the decisions of prior plenary councils may be amended by later councils, as in the case of a later plenary council ruling against Cyprian's view that heretics joining the Catholic Church ought to be rebaptised. This does not suggest that prior councils are fallible. Instead, it implies that later councils may progress towards a more profound understanding of the truth.¹² Augustine uses the term "*firmare*" to suggest that councils serve to confirm as well as strengthen the truth. He does not mystify the authority of the councils. Councils are not merely external events. As both "*confirmatio*" and "*auctoritas*," they help to bring out and to enforce the truth, thus overcoming human infirmity and leading the soul in an internal movement from faith to understanding.¹³

ecclesia saluberrima auctoritas." Augustine, *ep.* 54.1 (CCL 31: 226, trans. Roland Teske, WSA, *Letters*, II/1: 210). Cf. Robert B. Eno, "Authority," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Alan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), p. 81.

- 12 Fritz Hofmann, "La signification des conciles pour le développement de la doctrine ecclésiastique d'après Saint Augustin," trans. Robert Givord, in *Eglise et Tradition*, ed. Johannes Betz and Heinrich Fries (Le Puy and Lyon: Éditions Xavier Mappus, 1963), pp. 69-72. Cf. Eno, "Authority," p. 81; Basil Studer, "Augustin et la foi de Nicée," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 19 (1984): 139; Augustine, *bapt.* 2.3.4. Cyprian's view was based on the Council of Agrippinus. Augustine believes that if Cyprian were still alive when the later plenary council ruled against his view, "he would have accepted the conciliar decision, as his love of unity and refusal to go into schism for his own opinion showed." Eno, "Doctrinal Authority in Saint Augustine," pp. 154-155. Cf. Augustine, *bapt.* 2.4.5. The fact that plenary councils are not infallible is demonstrated by the Donatist Council of Bagai (394), which was considered by the Donatists as a plenary council. The 310 attending bishops, "after condemning the Maximianist bishops in violent terms, ... proceeded to receive them back without rebaptism, in contradiction to their own theory," a fact mocked by Augustine in *Contra epistulam Parmeniani* 3.4.21. Eno, "Doctrinal Authority in Saint Augustine," pp. 159-160 (quotation from p. 159).

- 13 Sieben, "Konzilien in Leben und Lehre," pp. 97-102.

Hence, councils carry an enormous weight of authority for Augustine—a weight only second to Scripture. Ironically, Augustine makes very little explicit use of the most representative council he is aware of—the Council of Nicaea. This suggests that the anti-Arian concern of Nicaea is not so much a personal concern for Augustine. More importantly, it demonstrates Augustine’s conviction that solid theological exegesis is a more effective polemical tool against heresies than citations from councils. It is the authority of Scripture, evaluated within the context of tradition or *regula fidei* that gives councils their important didactic role.

3. African Councils

Together with Aurelius of Carthage, Augustine was the orchestrator of a series of councils in Africa which marked a brilliant page in the history of the African church. He was the “moving spirit” behind these councils “to give the Catholic bishops a united front.”¹⁴ He would personally attend these councils whenever he could, striving to defend the faith of the Church.¹⁵ It was mainly through

14 Henry Chadwick, *Augustine of Hippo: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford, 2009), p. 111.

15 “Whenever he was able, Augustine attended the councils of the holy priests which were held throughout the various provinces, seeking in them not his own but the things of Jesus Christ, that the faith of the holy Catholic Church might remain inviolate or that some priests and clergy who had been justly or unjustly excommunicated might be either absolved or rejected” / “Sanctorum concilia sacerdotum per diversas provincias celebrata cum potuit frequentavit, non in eis quae sua sunt, sed quae Iesu Christi quaerens, ut vel fides sanctae ecclesiae catholicae inviolata maneret, vel nonnulli sacerdotes et clerici, sive per fas sive per nefas excommunicati, vel absolventur vel abicerentur.” Possidius of Calama, *Vita Augustini* 21.1 (Bastiaensen: 184, trans. Herbert T. Weiskotten, *The Life of Saint Augustine*, Reprint, Merchantville NJ: Evolution Publishing, 2008, p. 30). The councils were also opportunities for Augustine to meet those who were

these councils under his and Aurelius' direction that Augustine had great influence on various ecclesiastical legislation of his time.¹⁶

The rapport between African bishops and councils did not begin with Augustine and Aurelius. The first documented African council was held around 220-230, and the famed series of seven councils was convened by Cyprian of Carthage around 248 to 258 in response to the persecution in 250-251.¹⁷ At the ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325), Africa was represented by Caecilianus of Carthage.¹⁸ The

originally with him. "Severus, Possidius, Evodius, Alypius, Profuturus will go away from Hippo, to become the bishops of distant cities. Augustine will even become reconciled to travelling; for only in travelling, could he recreate his old relationships. The friends would often arrange to travel together to the many councils in Carthage and Numidia." Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, new ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles 2000: University of California Press), pp. 196-197.

- 16 Through councils, Augustine strove to achieve a variety of goals which ranged from curbing orgies at the feast of martyrs, dealing with the crises of vocations, tightening the discipline of priests, to restoring peace and unity to the Church. Charles Munier, "L'influence de saint Augustin sur la législation ecclésiastique de son temps," in *Augustinus Afer: Saint Augustin: africanité et universalité. Actes du colloque international Alger-Annaba, 1-7 avril 2001*, ed. Pierre-Yves Fux and Jean-Michel Roessler and Otto Wermelinger (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 2003), pp. 109-123.
- 17 Jane E. Merdinger, "Councils of North African Bishops," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Alan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 248-249. At the time of Augustine, Carthage was the capital of Proconsular Africa. It was economically as prosperous as Alexandria, and politically only less powerful than Rome. It fell to the Vandals in 439 until the Byzantine reconquest in 553. Naomi J. Norman, "Carthage," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Alan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), p. 133; Margaret R. Miles, "Roman North African Christian Spiritualities," in *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, and Expressions*, ed. Jacob K. Olupona (New York: Crossroad, 2000), p. 351.
- 18 Georges Folliet, "L'Épiscopat Africain et la crise Arienne au IV^e siècle," *Revue des Études Byzantines* 24 (1966): 196.

Council of Carthage (390)¹⁹ was a general council held by Genethlius of Carthage, and all present were made to declare adherence to the Nicene Creed²⁰ and to a Trinitarian doctrine of the Nicene calibre.²¹ As Tanner puts it, “local councils fed into, and followed on from, the ecumenical councils: there was a close interconnection between the matters covered.”²² The church of Africa was pro-Nicene at the time of Augustine. Even before Augustine’s priestly ordination in 391, it was already well aware of the significance of the Council of Nicaea.

The Council of Hippo (8th October 393)²³ was the first among the series of “Carthaginian” councils organised by Aurelius and

19 Charles Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae: A. 345 - A. 525*, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 149 (Turnholt: Brepolis, 1974), p. xix. Hefele mentions that there were two less important councils at Carthage. The first, held at 386 or 389, was an introduction to the second, held under bishop Genethlius of Carthage at 387 or 390. Charles Joseph von Hefele, *Histoire des conciles d'après les documents originaux*, vol. 2, trans. H. Leclercq (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1908), p. 76. These councils were preceded by the Council of Carthage (348), which was a general council presided by Gratus of Carthage that celebrated a reunion with the Donatists while condemning the practice of rebaptism by Donatists. Merdinger, *Rome and the African Church*, p. 76; Merdinger, “Councils of North African Bishops,” p. 249. Merdinger is convinced that the effort of Genethlius and the canons from Gratus’ council helped set the stage for the series of African councils under Aurelius and Augustine. Jane Merdinger, “On the Eve of the Council of Hippo, 393: The Background to Augustine’s Program for Church Reform,” *Augustinian Studies* 40, no. 1 (2009): 36.

20 Merdinger, *Rome and the African Church*, pp. 78, 204. This council was held after Cyrus of Carthage, who succeeded Restitutus of Carthage, reconciled with Rome and accepted the Nicaea doctrines in the 380s. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

21 Folliet, “L’Épiscopat Africain,” pp. 222-223.

22 Norman Tanner, “The African Church,” in *The Church in Council: Conciliar Movements, Religious Practice and the Papacy from Nicaea to Vatican II* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), p. 131. However, one must beware that not all African councils were orthodox in nature. For instance, the Council of Cebsarsussa (24th June 393) was a Donatist council at which Maximianus went into schism.

23 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xx.

Augustine. The fact that it opened at Hippo, home to Augustine who was then only a priest, rather than Aurelius' episcopal see of Carthage, "is a sufficient proof that Augustine was the motive power behind it."²⁴ There were 43 participants.²⁵ There it was decided that each year there would be a plenary council and each of the five provinces would send representatives.²⁶ Merdinger describes these yearly meetings as "an ambitious program to revitalize the Catholic Church in Africa," "the linchpin" where religious issues could be settled with "a renewed sense of purpose instilled in the episcopate."²⁷ Augustine delivered a speech at the inaugural Council of Hippo (393) which has come down to us as *De fide et symbolo*. His explanation of the creed

24 F. L. Cross, "History and Fiction in the African Canons," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series 12, no. 22 (1961): 229. Lancel also notes the unusualness that the series of councils would begin outside the mother-city of Carthage. "The choice of Hippo in 393 was more than a simple coincidence with Augustine's recent ordination to the priesthood." Serge Lancel, *Saint Augustine*, trans. Antonia Nevill (London: SCM press, 2002), p. 157.

25 Hofmann, "La signification des conciles," p. 66.

26 Hofmann, "La signification des conciles," pp. 65-66. Cf. "Vt propter causas ecclesiasticas, quae ad perniciem plebium saepe ueterescunt, singulis quibusque annis concilium conuocetur, ad quod omnes prouinciae quae primas sedes habent de conciliis suis ternos legatos mittant, ut minus inuidiosi minusque hospitibus sumptuosi conuentus plena possit auctoritas esse." *Hippo Breviary* canon 5, in Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. 34. The *Hippo Breviary* is so called because its content was "initially recorded at Hippo in an abbreviated format." While previously a plenary council would only be convened when deemed necessary by the primate of Carthage, more frequent plenary councils had then become necessary for combating Donatism. Merdinger, *Rome and the African Church*, p. 74.

27 Merdinger, "Councils of North African Bishops," p. 249. Cf. Six-Means, *Augustine and Catholic Christianization*, p. 56. The abridged acts and canons of the council became the Breviary of Hippo, "whose articles subsequently formed the basis of the Church of Africa's conciliar legislation, notably in matters of ecclesiastical discipline, and as such was often reproduced, or at least quoted, at later councils." Lancel, *Saint Augustine*, p. 159.

again demonstrates the adherence of Africa to the Nicene faith.²⁸ His catechizing endeavours along with the series of councils also helped boost the African bishops' awareness of the significance of the Council of Nicaea.²⁹

The Council of Carthage I (16th June 394)³⁰ began the series of councils held at Carthage under Aurelius. This council was a provincial one, where bishops of Proconsular Africa were delegated to go the Council of Hadrumetum.³¹ The Council of Hadrumetum (394)³² was a general council of the churches of Africa,³³ but political instability made the annual plenary councils impossible in 395, 396 and 398.³⁴ The Council of Carthage II (26th June 397)³⁵ was only a provincial council.³⁶ At the Council of Carthage (13th August 397),³⁷ the bishops of Byzacena who had arrived too early for the upcoming council on 28th held a preliminary meeting, "with Aurelius probably in the chair, and agreed to compile an epitome of the Hippo canons of

28 Folliet, "L'Épiscopat Africain," p. 223. Six-Means asserts that this council and Augustine's preaching at the council "are key parts of the early stages of Catholicization as a plan of social formation." Six-Means, *Augustine and Catholic Christianization*, p. 32.

29 Merdinger, *Rome and the African Church*, p. 204.

30 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xx. The numbering of the Carthage councils follows that in Hefele, *Histoire des conciles*.

31 Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 97.

32 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xx.

33 Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 97.

34 Merdinger, "Councils of North African Bishops," p. 249.

35 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xx; Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 98.

36 Merdinger, "Councils of North African Bishops," p. 249.

37 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxi.

393.”³⁸ At the plenary Council of Carthage III (28th August 397),³⁹ the *Hippo Breviary*, which contains an edited version of the canons drafted at the Council of Hippo (393) as well as the Nicene Creed, was thus ratified.⁴⁰ Folliet perceives this as evidence that Africa’s faith had been Nicene faith, from the time of Caecilianus, who attended the Council of Nicaea (325), all the way to the ratification of the *Hippo Breviary* in 397.⁴¹ Without doubt, Augustine has inherited this theological background and his Catholic faith was categorically Nicene in nature.

The Council of Carthage IV was held on 27th April 399.⁴² The Council of Carthage V (16th June 401)⁴³ emphasised the importance of destroying remnant idols.⁴⁴ The Council of Carthage VI (13th

38 Cross, “History and Fiction,” p. 230.

39 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxi; Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 100.

40 Jane E. Merdinger, “Code of the Canons of the North African Church,” in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Alan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), p. 218. Cf. Merdinger, “Councils of North African Bishops,” p. 249. Augustine’s name is among the list of 43 bishops who subscribed to the *Hippo Breviary*, ratified in the Session of 28th August 397. Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. 49; Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 102. The *Breviarium Hipponense* includes the Nicene Creed in Latin, a first series of 5 canons (A-E), a second series of 37 canons (1-37) and two added canons 38 and 39 in *Canones breviario Hipponensi additi*. Cf. Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, pp. 30-46; Six-Means, *Augustine and Catholic Christianization*, p. 59. The *Breviarium* was transcribed as the minutes of 8th October 393 and that of Carthage 28th August 397 in the *Carthage Register*. Cross, “History and Fiction,” p. 247.

41 “Et c’est encore le même Credo, apporté en Afrique par Caecilianus au lendemain de Nicée soixante-douze ans plus tôt, qui figure sur les actes du concile de Carthage de 397.” Folliet, “L’Épiscopat Africain,” p. 223.

42 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxiv; Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, pp. 120-121.

43 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxiv; Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 125.

44 Henry Chadwick, “Augustine on Pagans and Christians: Reflections on Religious and Social Change,” in *History, Society and the Churches*, ed. Derek Beales

September 401)⁴⁵ petitioned the emperors to order the wiping out of all pagan shrines since previously the pagans claimed immunity for their holy groves or trees.⁴⁶ Several canons of this council deal with issues related to Donatism.⁴⁷ Augustine was present at this council.⁴⁸

The Council of Carthage VII, also called the Council of Milevis (27th August 402),⁴⁹ was a plenary council that followed the plan

and Geoffrey Best (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1985), p. 12. “Wherefore the most religious Emperors should be asked that they order the remaining idols to be taken entirely away throughout all Africa; for in many maritime places and in divers possessions the iniquity of this error still flourishes: that they command them to be taken away and their temples, (such as are no ornament, being set up in fields or out of the way places) be ordered to be altogether destroyed” / “Instant etiam aliae necessitates a religiosis imperatoribus postulandae: ut reliquias idolorum per omnem Africam iubeant penitus amputari—nam plerisque in locis maritimis atque possessionibus diuersis adhuc erroris istius iniquitas uiget—ut praecipiantur et ipsa deleri, et templa eorum, quae in agris uel in locis abditiis constituta, nullo ornamento sunt, iubeantur omnimodo destrui.” African Code canon 58, in Henry R. Percival, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series 14 (Reprint, Edinburgh: T&T Clark; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), p. 472; Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. 196.

45 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxiv; Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 126.

46 Chadwick, “Augustine on pagans and Christians,” p. 12. Cf. “Item, it seemed good to petition the most glorious Emperors that the remains of idolatry not only in images, but in any places whatever or groves or trees, should altogether be taken away” / “Item placuit ab imperatoribus gloriosissimis peti, ut reliquiae idolatriae non solum in simulacris sed in quibuscumque locis uel lucis uel arboribus omnimodo deleantur.” *African Code* canon 84, in Percival, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, p. 482; Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. 205.

47 Cf. Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, pp. 127-129. Bishops at both of the 401 councils voted in favour of relaxing restrictions for ex-Donatists who would want to join the clerical order. Merdinger, “Councils of North African Bishops,” p. 249.

48 Augustine was among the bishops sent from this Carthage council to deal the problem of the church of Hippo Diarrhytus regarding declining the communion of bishop Equitius. Cf. *African Code* canon 78, in Percival, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, p. 480; Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. 203.

49 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxv; Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 134.

of Augustine and Aurelius “for occasional assemblies outside the capital.”⁵⁰ Augustine was among the participants who signed the decisions made at the Council of Hippo (393) and a certain Council of Carthage (401?) read aloud by the presider Aurelius of Carthage.⁵¹ His presence shows the great weight he puts on the authority of councils. The Council of Carthage VIII (25th August 403)⁵² was a plenary council at which the bishops attempted to reconcile with the Donatists, but reunion was prevented by violence.⁵³ Augustine assisted at this council.⁵⁴ Then, the Council of Carthage IX (16th June 404)⁵⁵ was a plenary council at which bishops decided in favour of imperial restrictions against the Donatists.⁵⁶ The anxiety of the Catholics is understandable, as this sect, “which had begun in Carthage in 311,” had by Augustine’s time “won over the majority of African Christians.”⁵⁷ In 405, Emperor Honorius promulgated the Edict of Unity (*edictum*

50 Merdinger, “Councils of North African Bishops,” p. 249.

51 James B. McSwain, “Council of Milevis,” in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Alan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), p. 562.

52 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxvi; Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 154.

53 Merdinger, “Councils of North African Bishops,” p. 249.

54 Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 154. At the council, Alypius referred to Augustine as “sancti fratres Augustinus” when speaking on the bishops of Numidia. Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. 209.

55 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxvi.

56 Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 155; Merdinger, “Councils of North African Bishops,” p. 249.

57 Peter Brown, “Religious Coercion in the Later Roman Empire: The Case of North Africa,” in *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 303. According to Lancel, many peasants became Donatists “to be in tune with their peasant grass-roots” against “the *de facto* authorities formed by the great landed property-owners” more than for theological conviction. Lancel, *Saint Augustine*, p. 276.

de unitate)—"the legal death warrant of Donatism."⁵⁸ But its laws were "known to provoke feigned conversions" to Catholicism, as penalties like loss of civic rights were repealed upon conversion.⁵⁹ While some consider that Augustine changed his attitude in 405 from preferring rational discussion as a means to combat heresies and schisms to favouring coercion due to the success of the imperial edict, Brown believes that this change "can be traced back for a whole decade, at least," during his anti-paganism and anti-Manichaeism campaigns.⁶⁰ He argues that even during the height of the Catholic campaign against the Donatists in 403-405, Augustine was against full coercive measures, for he was aware of the problem of pretended

58 Lancel, *Saint Augustine*, 290. The policy of coercion shows the "symbiosis" between the bishops and the imperial court. Brown, "Religious Coercion," p. 302. Imperial actions in Africa would be ineffective without their being put into operation by the Catholic Church. *Ibid.*, p. 321. The rise of bishops in Africa to prominence "was closely connected with the role of the bishop in the application of the laws against heretics." *Ibid.*, p. 329.

59 Brown, "Religious Coercion," p. 305. Coercion was imposed "directly only on the leaders of the movement and on the upper classes of provincial society." *Ibid.*, p. 309. From 405 to 409, only 3 out of 23 of the Donatist sees converted by their own will; other sees were "converted" by removing their bishop or preventing them from filling a vacant see. *Ibid.*, pp. 309-310.

60 Peter Brown, "St. Augustine's Attitude to Religious Coercion," in *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), pp. 263, 276 (quotation from p. 276). Brown suggests that Augustine might have begun to favour coercion since his visits to Carthage during the peak of anti-pagan efforts from 399 to 401. *Ibid.*, pp. 265-266. Augustine also needed to justify coercion in the Old Testament to the Manichees, claiming the "permanent utility" of the Old Law despite its "incomplete existence." *Ibid.*, p. 273. Nevertheless, Augustine considers that death sentences should be avoided. Brown, "Religious Coercion," p. 325. Cf. Augustine, *ep.* 133.2, 139.2. Munier, on the other hand, gives a much later date for Augustine's change in attitude. He outlines the evolution of Augustine's thinking in three stages. Augustine initially tended towards conciliation at the Councils of Carthage of 401 and 403. He later became favourable to repressive laws at the Council of Carthage (404). When Honorius imposed the Edict of Unity in 405, Augustine would then even justify such measures with numerous writings. Munier, "L'influence de saint Augustin," p. 119.

conversions under imperial laws on the one hand, and confident in the power of grace and predestination on the other.⁶¹ Augustine uses *correptio* rather than *cohercizio* for the word coercion, suggesting that it should not be merely punitive but also corrective.⁶²

The Council of Carthage X (23rd August 405)⁶³ was another council on Donatist issues. This plenary council sent messengers to express gratitude to the emperor⁶⁴ for responding to the bishops' request for imperial sanctions against Donatists in 404 with the Edict of Unity in 405. The council also decided to ask civil judges to use their influence to effect the reconciliation of Donatists with the Church.⁶⁵ The next African council was the Council of Carthage XI (13th June 407),⁶⁶ and Augustine was present.⁶⁷ This plenary council recognised the burden of annual plenary councils on bishops and decided that plenary councils should only be convened when demanded by issues that concerned the whole of Africa.⁶⁸ If yearly general councils had

61 Brown, "St. Augustine's Attitude," pp. 268-269. Augustine's attitude to coercion "admit an acute polarity—a polarity of external impingement and inner evolution, of fear and love, of constraint and freedom." *Ibid.*, p. 271.

62 Brown, "St. Augustine's Attitude," pp. 274-275.

63 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, xxvi; Hefele, *Histoire des conciles II*, p. 156.

64 Merdinger, "Councils of North African Bishops," p. 249.

65 Hefele, *Histoire des conciles II*, p. 156.

66 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxvii; Hefele, *Histoire des conciles II*, p. 156. This council is also referred to as the Council of Thubursicum.

67 Augustine was among those whom bishop Maurentius addressed, on the issue of converted ex-Donatists. Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. 217.

68 Hefele, *Histoire des conciles II*, p. 157; Winrich Löhr, "Western Christianities," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 2, *Constantine to c. 600*, ed. Augustine Casiday and Frederick W. Norris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 40-41; Merdinger, "Councils of North African Bishops," p. 249. Cf. "It seemed good that there should be no more the yearly necessity of fatiguing the brethren; but as often as common cause, that is of the whole of Africa, demands, that letters shall

made the bishops weary, their mastermind Augustine must be more so.

The Council of Carthage XII (16th June 408)⁶⁹ and the Council of Carthage XIII (13th October 40)⁷⁰ decided to send ambassadors to the emperor on the Donatist affair.⁷¹ The Council of Carthage XIV (15th June 409)⁷² was only a provincial council.⁷³ The Council of Carthage XV (14th June 410)⁷⁴ sent an embassy to the imperial court for repealing Honorius' Edict of Tolerance (410) which had helped the Donatist cause, and the emperor responded positively.⁷⁵ The Catholics also asked the emperor to convene a conference between them and the Donatists, so the Carthage Conference was held in June 411. Augustine had convinced the Catholic bishops that for the sake of unity they would yield their episcopal sees to the Donatists

be given on every side to that see in this matter, that a synod should be gathered in that province, where the desirability of it induces; but let the causes which are not of general interest be judged in their own provinces" / "Placuit ut non sit ultra fatigandis fratribus anniuersaria necessitas, sed quoties exegerit causa communis, idest totius Africae, undecumque ad hanc sedem de hac re datae litterae fuerint, congregandam esse synodum, in ea prouincia ubi opportunitas persuaserit; causae autem, quae communes non sunt, in suis prouinciis iudicentur." *African Code canon 95*, in Percival, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, p. 490; Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. 215.

69 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxvii; Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 158.

70 *Ibid.*

71 Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, pp. 158-159.

72 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxviii.

73 Cross, "History and Fiction," p. 238; Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 159. Plenary councils appeared to have been phased out until 418. This and the next Carthage councils decided to urge Emperor Honorius for tighter laws against pagans and heretics. Merdinger, "Councils of North African Bishops," p. 249.

74 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxviii.

75 Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 159; Lancel, *Saint Augustine*, p. 295. This edict sent by Emperor Honorius to Heraclianus, the army leader of Africa, granted freedom of worship to heretics and pagans. Lancel, *Saint Augustine*, p. 294.

if the Donatists were to win, and would share responsibilities with them if the Catholics were to win. The judgement was made in the Catholics' favour.⁷⁶ Augustine's generously reconciliatory attitude to the Donatists towards whom he had found coercion acceptable shows his confidence that truth would prevail.

After years of anti-Donatist councils, the Council of Carthage (411)⁷⁷ was the first of a series of anti-Pelagian councils.⁷⁸ Caelestius, the disciple of Pelagius, was excommunicated.⁷⁹ This was a local council which Augustine knew little about as he was in Hippo then.⁸⁰ But the Synod at Diospolis in Palestine (20th December 415)⁸¹ declared Pelagius innocent⁸² and worthy of ecclesiastical communion

76 Munier, "L'influence de saint Augustin," p. 120; Lancel, *Saint Augustine*, pp. 297-300. Flavius Marcellinus, the imperial commissioner charged to arbitrate the conference, was later executed in 413 for the judgement he made at this conference, despite Augustine's effort to intercede for him. *Ibid.*, pp. 267-268, 300.

77 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxviii.

78 Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 168. The acts of the council no longer survives in full, except for two fragments, one of which is in Augustine's *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali* 2.2-4. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

79 Merdinger, "Councils of North African Bishops," p. 249. Merdinger dates this council at 411/412. Kelly says that Caelestius was condemned early in 412. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed. (London and New York: Continuum, 2009), p. 361. It was Caelestius rather than Pelagius who had incited the Pelagian crisis in Africa, and his opinions were much more radical than that of his master. P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, pp. 344-345. The main accuser of Caelestius was Paulinus, who later wrote Ambrose's biography at the request of Augustine. Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, pp. 170-171. After the Council of Carthage *in causa Caelestii*, there was a Synod at Circa on 14th June 412. Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxix.

80 Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, p. 345.

81 Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, p. 280. 14 bishops were present. Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 178.

82 Mark Edwards, "Synods and councils," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 2, *Constantine to c. 600*, ed. Augustine Casiday and Frederick W. Norris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 375.

after he condemned certain propositions of Caelestius as not being his own, and anathematised all that went against Catholic doctrines.⁸³ Thus, two provincial councils that followed took upon the task of warning Pope Innocent I about the dangers of Pelagianism.⁸⁴ First, the Council of Carthage was held at the summer of 416.⁸⁵ Its only surviving document is a synodal letter sent from the bishops of Proconsular Africa to Pope Innocent, which has come down to us as one of Augustine's letters.⁸⁶ Second, the Council of Milevis (summer 416)⁸⁷ also sent a synodal letter to Pope Innocent, which shows Augustine's presence at the council.⁸⁸ Later, another letter on the Pelagians was sent to the same Pope by five African bishops including Augustine.⁸⁹ Consequently, Pope Innocent confirmed the excommunication of Pelagius and Caelestius.⁹⁰ Eno comments that "the confirmation of the African position by Rome carried with it a

83 Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 182.

84 Merdinger, "Councils of North African Bishops," p. 249.

85 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxix.

86 Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 183. This synodal letter is Augustine's *ep.* 175. In the letter, the bishops ask Pope Innocent to anathematise the erroneous teachings of Pelagius even if he believes that Pelagius was justly acquitted in the Synod of Diospolis. Hefele explains that Augustine's name is not on this letter from the bishops of Proconsular Africa because his see of Hippo-Regius belongs instead to the province of Numidia. *Ibid.*, p. 184.

87 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxix.

88 Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 184. The synodal letter is Augustine's *ep.* 176. Augustine was among the 59 bishops who signed the letter which requests the Pope's intervention against Pelagianism. McSwain, "Council of Milevis," p. 562. Brown mentions that 300 Catholic bishops were present at this council. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, p. 358.

89 Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 185. This is Augustine's *ep.* 177 from Aurelius of Carthage, Alypius of Thagaste, Augustine of Hippo, Evodius of Uzalis and Possidius of Calama.

90 Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 186.

cachet of ecumenical prestige that no other regional council could outweigh.”⁹¹

Nevertheless, Zosimus, who succeeded Innocent in 417, employed an opposite policy towards the church of Africa and declared Pelagius and Caelestius innocent.⁹² Hence, the Council of Carthage (end of 417)⁹³ sent a synodal letter to Pope Zosimus to ascertain that the sentence pronounced by Pope Innocent against Pelagius and Caelestius should remain.⁹⁴ According to Hofmann, the Pelagian affair was the first time the sentence of African councils was deemed definitive. Still, Augustine did not see a fundamental error in Pope Zosimus when he gave the Pelagians a favourable judgement which Augustine regretted.⁹⁵ To Augustine, the important authority of the Church, which comes only after Scripture and *regula fidei*, must

91 Eno, “Authority,” p. 81. This is also because in the three letters sent to Pope Innocent, Augustine and his confreres “were not asking Rome to inform them of the truth but to confirm their decision.” Eno, “Doctrinal Authority in Saint Augustine,” p. 169.

92 Cross, “History and Fiction,” pp. 240-241.

93 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxx. According to Hefele, this council was held either at the end of 417 or the beginning of 418. Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 189. The Council of Thysdrus (417) was held prior to this council. Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxx.

94 Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, pp. 189-190. Despite the difficult relation between Africa and Rome during the Pelagian crisis, there was dialogue between Africa and other apostolic sees, demonstrated by the newly discovered *ep. 4** of Augustine to Cyril of Alexandria and *ep. 6** to Atticus of Constantinople on the Pelagian controversy. Charles Pietri, “Les Lettres nouvelles et leurs témoignages sur l’histoire de l’Église romaine et de ses relations avec l’Afrique,” in Johannes Divjak et al., *Les Lettres de Saint Augustin Découvertes par Johannes Divjak. Communications présentées au colloque des 20 et 21 Septembre 1982* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1983), pp. 350-351.

95 Hofmann, “La signification des conciles,” pp. 72-73.

be heeded. This authority realises itself in concrete form in councils as well as in papal decisions.

If a council decision against the Pelagians were to be backed by that of the emperor, its authority would become unquestionable. Indeed, Emperor Honorius supported the African bishops and issued an anti-Pelagian decree on 30th April 418.⁹⁶ This was followed immediately by the Council of Carthage XVI (1st May 418).⁹⁷ More than 200 bishops were present at this plenary council to definitively condemn the Pelagian heresy, with representatives not only from all provinces of Africa but also Spain.⁹⁸ Many of the canons of this council were directed against the Pelagians and the Donatists.⁹⁹ This council also decided that each province should choose three judges as legates such that not all bishops would be kept in council for an extended period of time. For the province of Numidia, Alypius, Augustine and Restitutus were chosen.¹⁰⁰ The bishop of Hippo was

96 Löhr, "Western Christianities," p. 41.

97 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxxi; Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, 191. Prior to this council, the Council of Thelepte (24th February 418) was held. Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxxi. Cf. Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 68. After this council, another Council of Carthage (end of 418) was held. Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxxiii. Cf. Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 197.

98 Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 191; Merdinger, "Councils of North African Bishops," p. 249.

99 Cf. Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 192.

100 "Item, it seemed good, lest all the bishops who are assembled at a council be kept too long, that the whole synod should choose three judges of the several provinces; and they elected ... for the province of Numidia Alypius, Augustine, and Restitutus" / "Item placuit, ne diutius uniuersi episcopi qui ad concilium congregati sunt tenerentur, ab uniuerso concilio iudices ternos de singulis prouinciis eligi. Et electi sunt: ... de prouincia Numidia: Alypius, Augustinus et Restitutus." *African Code* canon 127, in Percival, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, p. 503; Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. 227.

unable to “benefit” from this ruling—his involvement in councils remained heavy.

The Council of Carthage XVII (25-30th May 419)¹⁰¹ dealt with the Apiarius affair. There were 271 participants in this plenary council.¹⁰² Augustine took an active part in this council.¹⁰³ He spoke about the problem of Apiarius, who was excommunicated by his local bishop Urban but sent an appeal to Rome.¹⁰⁴ In the late summer of 418, Pope Zosimus sent a delegation with a *commonitorium* which supported Apiarius, but he died on 25th December, so the Council of Carthage (419) convened to negotiate the matter with his successor Pope Boniface I instead.¹⁰⁵ Zosimus had overruled the African verdict based

101 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxxiv; Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, pp. 198, 208. This council is counted as the 17th Council of Carthage by the *Carthage Register* which gives a list of the plenary councils, counting Hippo 393 as the first one, followed by 17 councils. Cf. Cross, “History and Fiction,” p. 237.

102 Hofmann, “La signification des conciles,” p. 66; Merdinger, “Councils of North African Bishops,” p. 249.

103 Augustine as the legate of Numidia was on the list of bishops who subscribed to the first session of 25th May 419. Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. 150. He was also on the list of those who were present and those who subscribed to the session on 30th May 419. *Ibid.*, pp. 229, 233.

104 “Augustine the bishop, the legate of the Numidian province, said: Deign to enact that if any perchance have been rightly on account of their crimes cast forth from the Church, and shall have been received into communion by some bishop or presbyter, such shall be considered as guilty of an equal crime with them who flee away from the judgment of their own bishop” / “Augustinus episcopus legatus provinciae Numidiae dixit: Hoc statuere dignamini ut si qui forte merito facinorum suorum ab ecclesia pulsi sunt et siue ab aliquo episcopo uel presbytero fuerint in communione suscepti etiam ipse pari cum eis crimine teneatur obnoxius refugientes sui episcopi regulare iudicium.” *African Code* canon 9, in Percival, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, p. 447; Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, pp. 135-136 (cited), 103, 120 (slightly variant). The specific nature of Apiarius’ offence was not known. Cross, “History and Fiction,” p. 241.

105 Cross, “History and Fiction,” pp. 241-242; J. Stevenson and W. H. C. Frend, ed., *Creeeds, Councils and Controversies: Documents Illustrating the History of*

on canons which were supposedly Nicene canons but were actually canons 3 and 4 of the Council of Sardica (343).¹⁰⁶ But the African council insisted that appeals should not be made outside of Africa.¹⁰⁷ It was recorded on the act of 25th May 419 that Augustine professed his adherence to and the need for a careful study of the Council of Nicaea.¹⁰⁸ So the council sent a letter to Pope Boniface dated 26th May 419, stating that it would be willing to observe the Pope's order of counting Apiarius as restored until the arrival of the accurate Greek copies of the Nicaea canons requested from the churches of Antioch, Alexandria and Constantinople. The African fathers claimed that in the many Latin copies they had read, they had not found the decrees as that in the *commonitorium* sent from Rome. Nor did they find them in any Greek copies in their possession. Augustine was among the bishops who signed the letter.¹⁰⁹ The authentic copies of the Nicene

the Church, AD 337-461, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), pp. 284-285.

106 F. L. Cross, "The Collection of African Canons in 'Madrid University (Noviciado) MS. 53,'" *The Journal of Theological Studies* 50 (1949): 201; Cross, "History and Fiction," p. 242; Lühr, "Western Christianities," p. 41. For canons 3 and 4 of the Council of Sardica (343) regarding appeals to Rome, see Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, pp. 762-769.

107 Edwards, "Synods and councils," p. 374.

108 "Cumque recitaretur, Augustinus episcopus ecclesiae Ypponiensis prouinciae Numidiaie dixit: et hoc nos seruatuos profitemur, salua diligentiore inquisitione Nicaeni concilli." Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. 93.

109 This letter to Pope Boniface I was recorded as *African Code* canon 134, in Percival, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, pp. 506-507; Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, pp. 156-161. It was Alypius who noted that there were no such canons in the Greek copies of the Nicene canons. Cross, "History and Fiction," p. 242. Cross suggests that the confidence of the African bishops shows that they "knew perfectly well all along that the disputed canons were not Nicene." *Ibid.*, p. 242 n. 1. The rescript from Cyril of Alexandria to the African council acknowledging the request for accurate copies of the Nicene decrees was recorded as *African Code* canon 135,

canons from Atticus of Constantinople and Cyril of Alexandria arrived a few months later, justifying the claim of the council, and the *Apiarian Codex* was consequently compiled to celebrate the African triumph against Rome.¹¹⁰ The first canon of the *Apiarian Codex* was Aurelius' declaration that the statutes of the Council of Nicaea must be kept firm.¹¹¹ Hence the African bishops counted the testimony of Nicaea as even weightier than the command of the Pope in this Apiarian incident.¹¹² For Africa—and therefore also for Augustine—Nicene faith was Catholic faith.

The *Carthage Register* was also compiled in 419, to serve as “a foundation for the Church of Africa’s disciplinary practice.” It was compiled mainly by Aurelius and his Carthaginian priests, “but very

in Percival, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, p. 508; Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, pp. 162-163.

110 Cross, “History and Fiction,” pp. 235, 242, 244. It is uncertain whether the African council had received a reply from Antioch. *Ibid.*, p. 242. The *Apiarian Codex* was compiled “not for its list of canons, but to substantiate the claim of the African Church to jurisdictional independence of the Roman see.” *Ibid.*, p. 235. The *Apiarian Codex* contains dossiers that the Council of Carthage (419) had sent to Rome to justify their case against Apiarius. It comprises the proceedings of the Council of Carthage (419) and 33 canons representative of the African church. Merdinger, “Code of the Canons,” p. 217.

111 “Aurelius the bishop said: Such are the statues of the Nicene Council, which our fathers at that time brought back with them: and preserving this form, let these things which follow, adopted and confirmed by us, be kept firm” / “Aurelius episcopus dixit: Haec ita apud nos habentur exemplaria statutorum quae tunc Patres nostri de concilio Nicaeno secum detulerunt, cuius formam seruantes, haec quae sequuntur constituta firmata a nobis custodientur.” *African Code* canon 1, in Percival, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, p. 444; Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, pp. 133 (cited), 101, 117 (slightly variant).

112 “The emergence of the Nicene decrees as a guarantor of orthodoxy threw Africa’s relationship with Rome into sharp relief. Nicaea’s canons and creed were to be considered inviolate.” Merdinger, *Rome and the African Church*, p. 206.

probably with the help of Alypius and perhaps of Augustine.”¹¹³ Africa’s own “Caecilianic” Nicene canons used at the Council of Carthage (419) were incorporated into the *Carthage Register*, and this “may well have been the occasion when what was to become an official African version of the Nicene documents was made for the first time.”¹¹⁴ The version of Nicene canons from Atticus of Constantinople and probably that of Alexandria were also incorporated, “to settle once for all the claims of the African Church to independence from Rome.”¹¹⁵ Later, Dionysius Exiguus, a sixth-century monk, selected canons from the *Hippo Breviary*, the *Carthage Register*, and the *Apiarian Codex* to form the *Code of the Canons of the African Church (African Code)*.¹¹⁶ Canon 1 of the Apiarian Codex on the inviolability of Nicaea became canon 1 of the *African Code*, which once again shows the significance of Nicaea in the African tradition.

The Council of Carthage XVIII (13th June 421)¹¹⁷ and the Council of Carthage XIX (422 or 423)¹¹⁸ were followed by the Council of

113 Lancel, *Saint Augustine*, p. 359. The *Carthage Register* includes notices of the Council of Hippo (393), the Councils of Carthage (June 394 and 28th August 397), the *Hippo Breviary*, and 100 canons of African councils from 393 to 418. Merdinger, “Code of the Canons,” p. 217.

114 Cross, “History and Fiction,” pp. 242, 244. Cross suggests that these Nicene documents were probably the original Greek texts. *Ibid.*, p. 244.

115 Cross, “The Collection of African Canons,” p. 201.

116 Merdinger, “Code of the Canons,” p. 217.

117 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxxiv. The acts of this council are lost. Merdinger, “Councils of North African Bishops,” p. 250.

118 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxxv. Cf. Hefele, *Histoire des conciles II*, p. 214 n. 2.

Numidia (423).¹¹⁹ The Council of Carthage XX (424 or 425)¹²⁰ was a provincial council that dealt with the remnant problem of the Apiarius case.¹²¹ The council sent a letter to Pope Celestine I and requested him not to restore Apiarius, who had been excommunicated by the African council, back into communion as stipulated by canon 5 of the Council of Nicaea, since there was nothing about that possibility in the more authentic copies sent to them from Constantinople and Alexandria.¹²² Once again, the bishops of Africa appealed to the authority of Nicaea.

At the Council of Carthage (425 or 426?),¹²³ Leporius of Marseilles, who had been helped by Augustine and Aurelius to see his

119 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxxv. Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 214. The Council of Numidia (423) deposed Antonius of Fussala. Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 214. Antonius was nominated by Augustine to oversee an ex-Donatist community but was proven to be an unfit shepherd of his flock. Brown, "Religious Coercion," p. 314. Antonius appealed to Rome and was reinstated by Pope Boniface I. Augustine thus wrote (*ep.* 209) to Pope Celestine I, Boniface's successor, about his anxiety concerning Antonius. Stevenson and Frend, ed., *Creeeds, Councils and Controversies*, p. 287. The Fussala affair was also the theme of the newly discovered *ep.* 20* from Augustine to the Roman noble lady Fabiola. Cf. Pietri, "Les Lettres nouvelles," p. 354.

120 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxxv. Hefele dates this council at 424. Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 214.

121 Merdinger, "Councils of North African Bishops," p. 250. Merdinger dates this council at 425 or 426.

122 Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, pp. 214-215. The letter to Pope Celestine I was recorded as *African Code* canon 138, in Percival, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, pp. 509-510; Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, pp. 169-172. Cf. "Concerning those, whether of the clergy or of the laity, who have been excommunicated, the sentence is to be respected by the bishops of each province, according to the canon which forbids those expelled by some to be admitted by others." Concilium Nicaenum I, "Canon 5," in Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (London: Sheed and Ward; Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), p. 8.

123 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxxvi. Hefele dates this council at about 426. Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 215.

pre-Nestorian tendency, retracted his errors and made a confession of faith at this council.¹²⁴ Augustine's use of persuasion rather than coercion to help Leporius understand the *communicatio idiomatum* prevented an outbreak of a form of Nestorianism in Africa.

The Council of Hippo (24th September 427)¹²⁵ was the last council that Augustine participated in. This general council was held in the Leontian basilica (old church), presided by Aurelius of Carthage, who at the council thanked Augustine for sponsoring it.¹²⁶ Merdinger conjectures that it was Augustine's poor health that caused the council to be held at Hippo.¹²⁷ The inseparable link between Augustine and the African councils can be seen in the fact there would be a gap of over 50 years before the next African council. That would be the Colloquium of Carthage (1st February 484)¹²⁸ and later the Council of Carthage (5th February 525).¹²⁹

4. Conclusion

Augustine came onto the theological scene after the first two ecumenical councils. He had some knowledge of the Council of

124 Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 215.

125 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxxvi.

126 Lancel, *Saint Augustine*, p. 238; Merdinger, *Rome and the African Church*, p. 207. Cf. Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. 250. Augustine was among those who subscribed to the council. *Ibid.*, p. 253. The canons of this council deal with the same disciplinary concerns as the previous councils. Merdinger, "Councils of North African Bishops," p. 250.

127 Merdinger, *Rome and the African Church*, p. 208.

128 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxxvi; Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 931.

129 Munier, ed., *Concilia Africae*, p. xxxvi; Hefele, *Histoire des conciles* II, p. 1069.

Nicaea (325) and seemed unaware of the Council of Constantinople (381). The emperor had actually sent a letter to invite him to the Council of Ephesus (431) on account of his fame, but the imperial official brought back the news that he had died on 28th August 430.

Though Augustine was not present at any of the ecumenical councils, it does not mean that he has not left his mark in the history of the councils of the Church. His debut on the theological stage was his speech to the bishops at the plenary council of the province of Africa at his home base of Hippo only two years into his priesthood. This Council of Hippo (393) was the first of a series of African Councils, which spanned over three decades and coincided with the period of Augustine's most active theological career. The Council of Hippo (427) was the last in this series, held just a year after Augustine named Heraclius as his successor to the see of Hippo and entered into semi-retirement.

The first ecumenical council at Nicaea has had its influence on Augustine as well as Africa. His explanation of the creed to the bishops gathered at Hippo in 393 suggested the pro-Nicene sentiment of Africa at the time as well as helped further foster it. The Nicene Creed was included in the *Hippo Breviary* ratified in 397. The Council of Carthage XVII (419) witnessed the request for authentic copies of the Nicene canons in order to settle the Apiarius case. It can thus be said that there was considerable rapport between the first ecumenical council and the series of African councils masterminded by Augustine.

Augustine could not be physically present at the Council of Ephesus (431) and less so at Chalcedon (451). Yet, his theological language resonates with that of Ephesus. What is more, his doctrine—especially his use of *communicatio idiomatum*—anticipates and has an unmistakable impact on the fourth ecumenical council held at Chalcedon. Nonetheless, the rapport between Augustine and these later ecumenical councils would belong to the scope of a different paper.

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