

The Donatist Controversy II

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THE WORKS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE

A Translation for the 21st Century

Part I - Books

Volume 22: The Donatist Controversy II

The Donatist Controversy II

I/22

Answer to Cresconius

(Contra Cresconium grammaticum)

Translated by + Philip Amidon,
and introduced and annotated by Jesse Hoover

On the One Baptism in Answer to Petilian

(De unico baptism contra Petilianum)

Translated, introduced and annotated by Charles G. Kim

Summary of the Conference with the Donatists

(Breviculus collationis cum Donatistis)

Translated by + Philip Amidon,
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To the Donatists after the Conference

(Post Collationem Contra Donatistas Liber Unus)

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A Sermon to the People of the Church of Caesarea

(Sermo ad Caesariensis ecclesiae plebem)

Translated, introduced and annotated by Alden Bass

Proceedings with Emeritus, a Bishop of the Donatists

(Gesta cum Emerito Donatistarum episcopo)

Translated, introduced and annotated by Geoffrey Dunn

Answer to Gaudentius

(Contra Gaudentium)

Translated, introduced and annotated by Boniface Ramsey

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Introduction to Volume II of the Anti-Donatist Works

Augustine's pamphlet war against the Donatists continued into the last decade of his life. This second and concluding volume devoted to the Donatist controversy in *The Works of Saint Augustine* contains Augustine's surviving anti-Donatist writings from the period between the years 405 and 420. When comparing them to the titles that Augustine mentions in his *Revisions*, we find that much has been lost: *A Book of Proofs and Testimonies in Answer to the Donatists*,¹ composed soon after *Answer to Cresconius*, which opens this volume, along with *Answer to a Certain Donatist*² who, Augustine notes with surprise, claimed "to be a Donatist, just as though that was what he was called";³ one "brief" and another "not very brief" pamphlet about the Maximianist schism;⁴ and a book written *For Emeritus, a Bishop of the Donatists, after the Conference*, which shows "with suitable brevity the facts whereby they are defeated."⁵

The seven works in this volume that have survived, however, give us a valuable insight into the final struggle between the rival Catholic and Donatist communions for dominance in North Africa. An entire century of conflict over the coveted title of "catholic" came to a head during the first two decades of the fifth century. The first text in this volume, *Answer to Cresconius*, written in 405 or 406, is in effect a continuation of the multiple *Answer[s] to the Writings of Petilian*, translated in the earlier volume of Augustine's anti-Donatist works.⁶ In this latest round, a Donatist grammarian by the name of Cresconius steps up to defend Petilian's claims against Augustine's original rebuttal in the first book of *Answer to the Writings of Petilian* and is resoundingly buried under the

1. See *Revisions* II,27 (54).

2. See *ibid.* II,28 (55).

3. *Ibid.* II,27 (54).

4. *A Notice to the Donatists about the Maximianists and On the Maximianists in Answer to the Donatists*; see *Revisions* II,29 (56); II,35 (62).

5. *Ibid.* II,46 (73).

6. See *The Donatist Controversy* I, trans. Maureen Tilley, in *The Works of Saint Augustine* (Hyde Park, N.Y. 2019) 47-264.

bishop of Hippo's four books in reply. But by this time works like those against Petilian and Cresconius are already relics of an earlier age: by February 405 the emperor Honorius had issued his Edict of Unity, which officially declared Donatism a heresy and called for the confiscation of Donatist churches. The second text included in this volume, *On the One Baptism in Answer to Petilian*, is the last gasp of this type of literary tit-for-tat. Written in late 410 or early 411, it is a point-by-point rebuttal of a pamphlet written by Augustine's old rival, Petilian, defending the Donatist practice of rebaptizing Catholics.

After 405, the Catholics of North Africa were increasingly moving away from attempts to debate individual Donatists in favor of a grand conference that would decide the issue once and for all. First suggested in 403 in a letter to the proconsul of Africa,⁷ the idea of a final refutation of the Donatist cause gained more traction after the failure of the Edict of Unity to decisively end the controversy. Over the course of three sessions held in early June 411 at the Gargilian Baths in Carthage, around 280 Catholic bishops and their Donatist counterparts met under the watchful eye of Flavius Marcellinus, the emperor's personal representative. While the verdict was predetermined, the course of the debate was not. Few Donatists emerged from the Baths convinced that their bishops had been outmatched: "Rumor has frequently brought it to our ears," Augustine observed when writing to a group of Donatists after the conference, "that your bishops say that the imperial commissioner was bribed."⁸

The next two documents in this volume reflect Augustine's desire to recast the narrative of what had happened during the conference's three sessions. The official records of the conference were far too long and, though Augustine does not admit it, too ambiguous for the Catholic side to effectively utilize.⁹ The *Summary of the Conference with the Donatists* is intended to create an easy-to-read digest of those records that could be read out annually in ex-Donatist congregations.¹⁰ Written shortly after the conference had ended, its real purpose, of course, was to show

7. Preserved in *Acts of the Conference of Carthage* III, 174.

8. Letter 141, 1.

9. For the Latin text see *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* CIV. For an English translation, see Erika Hermanowicz and Neil McLynn, trans., *The Conference of Carthage in 411* (Liverpool 2025).

10. See Letter 28*, 2.

explicitly “how the Donatists were defeated in every way.”¹¹ Similarly, *To the Donatists After the Conference* was written in either late 411 or early 412 as a point-by-point refutation of arguments brought forth by the Donatist bishops at the conference.

The success of such literary endeavors backed by imperial force was noticeable. In 418, while traveling to Caesarea, the provincial capital of Caesarea Mauretania, on other business, Augustine encountered one of his old rivals, Emeritus, one of the seven Donatist delegates whom he had debated at the conference seven years previously. Emeritus was now a bishop without a congregation, as both his basilica and his flock had been taken over by the Catholic bishop Deuterius. Nevertheless, his continued recalcitrance had proved a thorn in the side of the newly-combined congregation. An initial attempt on the part of Augustine to persuade Emeritus to debate him during the Sunday service ended in failure, leading to the impromptu *Sermon to the People of the Church of Caesarea*, in which Augustine forcefully restates the Catholic case for the benefit of potentially wavering ex-Donatists in the congregation. Two days later, a more formal debate was called to definitively refute Emeritus. Once again, however, the Donatist bishop refused to speak, leading to a one-sided refutation of the Donatist cause that was recorded and later disseminated in the *Proceedings with Emeritus*.

Unlike Caesarea, the old Donatist stronghold of Thamugadi had not yet been successfully reunited with the Catholic Church. When the imperial tribune Dulcitius was finally sent to enforce the dissolution of his congregation in 420, the Donatist bishop Gaudentius barricaded himself and his congregation in their basilica. His two letters to Dulcitius justifying his actions and threatening to burn the basilica down around him were sent by Dulcitius to Augustine, who responded to them in the first book of his two-book *Answer to Gaudentius*. When Gaudentius received this response, he wrote a letter directly to Augustine; the bishop of Hippo’s reply is contained in the second book. In these final rejoinders to an old adversary, Augustine dwells on the same issues that had haunted the controversy since the beginning. Gaudentius, he avers, was not a potential martyr, because he was not a true shepherd of his flock; he was merely a hireling who was destroying the souls of his flock and would shortly

11. Letter 185,2,6.

kill their bodies.¹² True to form, Augustine's last words to the recalcitrant bishop are an invitation to debate: "Do not stray from the topic or wander off into superfluities.... Respond to what has been said not by deceitfully evading it but by rationally discussing it.... For what you accomplish with your wordy response, or rather what you do not accomplish," Augustine promises, "I shall point out more carefully in another work if it seems necessary and if the Lord allows it."¹³

12. See *Answer to Gaudentius* I,16,17.

13. *Ibid.* II,13,14.

Answer to Cresconius

Introduction

Throughout the 390s Augustine had sought to directly engage his Donatist opponents, with little to show for it. Despite multiple overtures to Donatist bishops to debate either face-to-face or by letter,¹ the only actual confrontation that we are aware of was Augustine's encounter with the Donatist bishop Fortunius of Thiave, which occurred sometime in 396/397.² While Augustine fared slightly better with Donatist laymen,³ the general attitude of the Donatist bishops to the newly-ordained upstart from Hippo is well captured at the beginning of *Answer to Cresconius*: "I am, you say, insistent, and always challenge your people 'to debate with me to determine the question of truth; but your people act with greater prudence and patience.'" ⁴ For much of the 390s, then, Augustine was relegated to engaging in proxy debates with the writings of already-deceased Donatist leaders.⁵

By 400, however, Augustine was able to acquire a fragment of a circular letter which Petilian, the Donatist bishop of Constantine, had sent to his clergy defending the practice of rebaptism, and he jumped at the chance to respond to it.⁶ Book I of *Answer to the Writings of Petilian*

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1. See Letters 34 (to Proculeian of Hippo, c. 396) and Letter 49 (to Honoratus, probably 398).
 2. See Letter 44.
 3. See the correspondence between Augustine and a group of Donatist partisans preserved in Letters 43-44 (c. 396/397) and the now-lost *Answer to What Centurius, One of the Donatists, Presented*, a response to a set of proof-texts given to Augustine by the Donatist layman Centurius c. 400/401.
 4. *Answer to Cresconius* I,3,4.
 5. I.e., Donatus (the now-lost *Answer to a Letter of the Heretic Donatus*, c. 393/394) and Parmenian (*Answer to the Letter of Parmenian and Baptism*, both c. 400).
 6. Augustine would later acquire the entire letter, which is able to be reconstructed from his line-by-line response to it in *Answer to the Writings of Petilian* II. From this reconstruction, it appears that the original fragment he possessed only covered the first fifth of the letter; compare *Answer to the Writings of Petilian* I,26,28 with II,18,40.

was the result. A rather short pamphlet (elsewhere, Augustine refers to it as a letter rather than a book⁷), it kicked off a literary war that would define Augustine's anti-Donatist writings up through the Conference at Carthage in 411. Having finally obtained a complete copy of Petilian's letter later in the year, Augustine quickly moved to write up a more definitive refutation, which would ultimately become Book II of *Answer to the Writings of Petilian*. Meanwhile, his Donatist opponents were busy. Petilian, stung by Augustine's unsolicited response, soon composed a caustic reply that accused the bishop of Hippo of deliberately leaving out portions of his letter and that derided him as a crypto-Manichaean. And elsewhere, a Donatist grammarian named Cresconius took up his pen.

We do not know anything about Cresconius other than the contextual clues found in his letter; neither, probably, did Augustine. His hometown is unknown, though trace clues in the letter may point to a Numidian origin.⁸ We are less in the dark concerning his profession. In *Revisions* II,26 (53), Augustine identifies Cresconius as a "grammarian"—that is, a teacher responsible for students who had reached the second stage of a traditional Roman education. Grammarians were expected to familiarize their pupils with the classical poets (recall Augustine's weeping over Dido in *Confessions* 1,13,20), develop their speaking and writing skills, and introduce them to the study of Greek. In the excerpts from his letter that are preserved in *Answer to Cresconius*, Cresconius often embraces the stereotype, lecturing his opponent on the comparative degree and criticizing him over perceived declensional improprieties (II,1,2; III,73,85).

It is easy, given the fact that we only encounter Cresconius's arguments through Augustine's rebuttal of them, to underestimate the effectiveness of the Donatist grammarian's letter. Though his non-semantic arguments tend to be derivative rather than original, Cresconius was reasonably well-educated in the theological issues at stake. Most of his

7. See *Revisions* II,25 (52).

8. In II,10,12 Cresconius mentions two Donatist bishops, Candidus of Vilaragia and Donatus of Macomades, who had gone over to the Catholics. Neither is mentioned elsewhere in Augustine's corpus, leading to the possibility that Cresconius is remembering relatively local events rather than *causes célèbres*. Both bishoprics are located deep in Numidia. Cresconius's relative unfamiliarity with the events of the Maximianist schism in III,14,17 may also point to an origin outside of Africa Proconsularis or Byzacena, though this is less certain.

scriptural citations, such as the account of Paul's rebaptism of John's disciples in Acts 19:1-5 (II,31,37) and the reference to the "enclosed garden" of Sg 4:12, are instantly recognizable as Donatist shibboleths, and he cites multiple passages from Cyprian's letter to Jubaianus (II,32,40) and the African council on rebaptism held in 256 (III,32,38), as well as (likely) from the letter of Firmilian of Caesarea (III,1,2) to support his position. Cresconius was well aware of his own side's interpretation of the origins of the schism (III,30,34; 69,80) and its subsequent repression under Macarius (IV,49,54). Of particular interest is his attempt to demonstrate his communion's overseas connections by citing the opening lines of the Council of Serdica (III,34,38), convened in 343, a tactic also deployed by Fortunius of Thiave.⁹ More threateningly, Cresconius knew of the rumors surrounding Augustine's past. He was aware, for instance, of a letter written by Megalius, the recently-deceased primate of Numidia, which questioned whether Augustine's conversion from Manichaeism was sincere (III,79,91-80,92).

The precise time when Cresconius composed his defense of Petilian can be inferred from the chronology of Augustine's writings. As mentioned earlier, Book I of *Answer to the Writings of Petilian* was composed c. 400, and, from a chance allusion to Anastasius as the current bishop of Rome in Book II, we can assume that Augustine's later rebuttal of the complete letter predates Anastasius's death on December 27, 401. Cresconius, however, does not appear to be aware of Book II. As will be demonstrated, his defense is solely focused on Book I. Indeed, he may not have had independent access to Petilian's letter, given that he never cites a passage from it that does not also appear in Book I of *Answer to the Writings of Petilian*.¹⁰ Neither does Cresconius seem to know of Petilian's scathing response to Augustine's initial salvo, as he does not argue that Augustine has suppressed the words "holily" and "knowingly" from Petilian's crucial phrase, "Attention is paid to the conscience of the one who gives *holily*, which would cleanse the recipient's [conscience]."

9. See Letter 44,3,6.

10. *Answer to Cresconius* III,11,14 might be a possible exception, as Augustine cites a quotation "from Petilian's letter cited by you [i.e., Cresconius]" that is fuller than the quotation found in *Answer to the Writings of Petilian* 1,8,9. The wording, however, makes it unclear whether Augustine is saying that the quotation itself was present in Cresconius's letter or simply that this quotation is to be found in the letter that Cresconius is defending.

For one who has received *knowingly* from a faithless person receives not faith but guilt.”¹¹ Petilian makes this alleged deletion a cornerstone of his rejoinder in *Answer to the Writings of Petilian* III,¹² yet it is entirely absent from Cresconius’s letter, which uses an entirely different tactic to defend the phrase (II,17,21). In all likelihood, then, the letter was composed soon after the publication of Book I, around the same time that Augustine, having finally obtained the full text of Petilian’s letter, was busy writing Book II and Petilian himself was formulating his own response—i.e., sometime between 400 and 402.

Augustine, however, would not receive Cresconius’s letter until nearly 405, or, as he states at the beginning of the work, “Your [letter] has reached me at last, even though long after you wrote it” (I,1,1). The reason for the delay is unclear. While the letter directly addresses Augustine, Albert De Veer may be correct in positing that it was primarily intended for an internal audience and was thus not forwarded immediately to the bishop of Hippo.¹³ Once made aware of Cresconius’s attempt to defend Petilian’s honor, Augustine wrote a detailed refutation of its contents in what he himself calls “three substantial volumes,” likely dwarfing the size of the original letter (IV,1,1). Indeed, while the first three books of *Answer to Cresconius* are not quite a line-by-line refutation of the text in the style of Book II of *Answer to the Writings of Petilian*, they are detailed enough that it is possible to reconstruct the contours of Cresconius’s argument.

Even as they were written, however, Augustine realized that “a response could be made to everything he had written if I focused simply upon the case of the Maximianists,”¹⁴ schismatics from the Donatist fold whose treatment by the mainstream communion eerily paralleled the events that, at least in Augustine’s eyes, had provoked the original schism. Accordingly, he wrote a companion volume that reexamined Cresconius’s arguments from the perspective of the Maximianist schism, a project that ultimately saw the light of day as Book IV of *Answer to Cresconius*. Some time seems to have passed between the composition

11. See Petilian, quoted by Augustine in *Answer to the Writings of Petilian* II,3,6; 4,8.

12. See *ibid.* III,15,18–24,28. Augustine, for his part, says that the words were missing from the original fragment he had obtained; see *ibid.* III,22,26.

13. See Bibliothèque Augustinienne XXXI, 10.

14. *Revisions* II,26 (53).

of this fourth volume and the first three books—enough, at least, for Augustine to consistently refer to them as a separate undertaking (IV,1,1; 43,50; 46,55; 55,65).

In *Revisions* II,26 (53), Augustine states that “the emperor Honorius had already issued laws against the Donatists” when he wrote these books—a reference to the Edict of Unity that the emperor proclaimed on February 12, 405, which was promulgated in Carthage on June 26 of the same year.¹⁵ How long it took after the publication of this edict for the first three books to be completed, or whether they were initially published separately or together with the fourth book, is not known, though a likely date would hover around 406.

At first glance, the four books that make up *Answer to Cresconius* seem somewhat haphazard. This is because Augustine organized the text around Cresconius’s own letter. While not quite the line-by-line refutation that characterizes Book II of *Answer to the Writings of Petilian*, the first three books of *Answer to Cresconius* replicate the sequential order of the Donatist grammarian’s text. The same strategy of replying to each argument “in its turn in your letter” characterizes Book IV, though this time Augustine’s responses are drawn exclusively from the Maximianist schism (IV,24,31). Of course, since Cresconius’s letter is itself a sequential refutation of Book I of *Answer to the Writings of Petilian*, and that book is in turn organized around the first part of Petilian’s original letter, what we are really seeing in *Answer to Cresconius* is a Russian nesting doll of previous volleys.

To better understand Augustine’s strategy in *Answer to Cresconius*, then, it is necessary to appreciate the content of Cresconius’s polemical letter. Cresconius begins by praising Augustine’s sophisticated style of speech, only to argue that such eloquence is inappropriate when discussing matters such as the schism that divides them. Due to his skill in dialectic, the “evil art” that both Plato and the Scriptures oppose (I,1,2; 2,3),¹⁶ Augustine can easily dominate any debate. Instead, the Donatist leaders rightly refuse to meet with him, “knowing that, if the divine law and the

15. See *Theodosian Code* XVI,5,38; 6,3. For the date, see the Donatist chronography *Liber genealogus* 627 in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* IX,196.

16. Augustine gives a very brief definition of dialectic in I,13,16: “What is dialectic but skill in debate?” While acknowledging that dialectic can be abused, Augustine also points to its positive use in the Scriptures, especially by Paul and Jesus himself (I,8,10-20,25).

great many proofs from the canonical Scriptures cannot persuade you of what is better and truer, then human authority can never recall” him “to the rule of truth” (I,3,4; IV,3,3). Book I contains Augustine’s response to these claims. Here he argues that, according to Cresconius’s definition, Christ and the apostles could be classified as dialecticians. Moreover, the apostle Paul did not shrink from debating with the Stoics, the supreme practitioners of the dialectic arts in the ancient world (I,14,17). “Christian doctrine has never feared this art, which is called ‘dialectic,’” Augustine concludes, in marked contrast to his Donatist interlocutor (I,20,25).

After his initial salvo against eloquence, Cresconius begins to critique *Answer to the Writings of Petilian* I’s opening attack on “the sacrilegious error of the Donatist heretics.”¹⁷ Augustine, Cresconius argues, is wrong both grammatically and theologically. Donatists are not heretics, “for a heresy is a sect of those who follow different things, while a schism is a separation of those who follow the same things” (II,3,4). If Donatists and Catholics both have “the same Christ born, died, and risen, one religion, the same sacraments, and no difference in Christian practice, what has happened is called a ‘schism,’ not a ‘heresy’” (ibid.). Furthermore, if Catholics really believed that their opponents were heretics, why do they accept their baptism and allow their converting bishops to retain their rank (II,12,15)? Besides, Augustine has gotten his declensions wrong: following standard Latin practice, his opponents should be called “Donatians,” not “Donatists” (II,1,2; IV,9,11). In his response, which takes up the first part of Book II, Augustine accepts the grammatical quibble, though reminding Cresconius that the term “Donatist” is widespread in North Africa, and argues that the practice of rebaptism is the heretical issue that divides the two communions.

The debate then turns to the question of rebaptism itself. In *Answer to the Writings of Petilian* I, Augustine had critiqued the Donatist bishop’s claim that “attention is paid to the conscience of the one who gives holily, which would cleanse the recipient’s [conscience]” by asking, “What if the giver’s conscience is hidden and perhaps stained? How could it cleanse the recipient’s conscience?”¹⁸ Cresconius argues that Petilian had *meant* that one must look to a bishop’s external reputation (II,17,21), not to hidden sins which, once brought to light, would

17. *Answer to the Writings of Petilian* I,1,1.

18. Ibid. I,1,2.

warrant excommunication. Augustine, however, refuses to grant this explanation: if Petilian had meant to write “external reputation” rather than “internal conscience,” he would have done so. Book II ends with Cresconius’s appeal to the precedent established by the universally venerated third-century bishop and martyr, Cyprian of Carthage, for the practice of rebaptism, countered by Augustine’s standard reply that, despite his alleged rebaptismal views, Cyprian’s primary concern was for unity within the Church, which the Donatists have torn asunder. Besides, Cyprian’s writings are not canonical; while Augustine is “incomparably inferior to Cyprian,” he is nevertheless free to disagree with him on this issue, just as Paul disagreed with the apostle Peter on the question of forcing the gentiles to Judaize (II,32,38).¹⁹

Cresconius brings his argument in favor of rebaptism to a close near the beginning of Book III, triumphantly concluding that “all that has been written by the holy Petilian (or whoever the author was), has been rightly said,” to which Augustine replies, “I think rather that I myself conclude that all of that was *not* rightly said” (III,11,12.14). Cresconius then attempts to respond to Augustine’s allegation, in *Answer to the Writings of Petilian* I,10,11-18,20, that the Donatists were inconsistent in their treatment of the Maximianist leaders Felician of Musti and Praetextatus of Assuras when they allowed them back into the mainstream communion without requiring rebaptism. This claim seems to have genuinely taken Cresconius by surprise; he writes in his letter that, when he first heard about it, he was “deeply disturbed” and “immediately inquired more carefully of [his] bishops” (III,14,17). What he was told reassured him:

When a great many bishops...were inclined toward Maximian’s error, a council of ours was held in which judgment was pronounced against all those who persisted in his schism.... It was nonetheless decided by a decree of the council to grant a postponement of the deadline, within which anyone who decided to be corrected would be held innocent. It thus happened that not only the two whom you mention but many others as well returned to the Church exonerated and innocent. (III,15,18)

Augustine shatters this rosy scenario by proving from court records that Felician and Praetextatus were reconciled to the mainstream Donatist church long after the deadline. It is a devastating blow to Cresconius’s

19. See Gal 2:14.

case. “You thought that I had lied in this case of the Maximianists,” Augustine concludes in a passage from Book IV: “I will not pay you back in the same coin, since you may have said what you were led to believe in your unwary friendship, not what you fabricated in your deceitful mind. We are human; what vigilance can finally guarantee that we do not ever slip in thought or speech? But we should not be deaf to the medicine of correction.” (IV,42,49).

In the remainder of Book III, Augustine responds to Cresconius’s accusations that he has knowingly joined the “church of the *traditores*.”²⁰ The letter from the Council of Serdica, which allegedly demonstrated that the East was aware of the supposed crimes of Caecilian, the early-fourth-century bishop of Carthage,²¹ in fact proves no such thing; its authors were Arians, heretics who were condemned by Cresconius himself (III,34,38). The early Donatist bishop Silvanus, banished, Cresconius says, “when he refused to enter into communion with Ursacius and Zenophilus during their persecution,” was in reality a *traditor* (III,30,34); the alleged martyrs of the Macarian persecution (Cresconius lists bishop Marculus and three others whose names are not given) were suicides (III,49,54).²²

20. In this context the Latin word *traditores*—i.e., “traitors” or “betrayers”—refers to clerics who compromised their faith by surrendering sacred books to pagan officials during the persecution of the emperor Diocletian in the early 4th century. The actual deed of surrendering these books was referred to as *traditio*—i.e., “surrendering” or “handing over.” The Donatists claimed that sacraments performed by *traditores*, or by sinners in general, were invalid and that, since the clergy of the time were largely corrupted by being *traditores*, the Catholic Church itself was irretrievably corrupt. From this perspective, Donatism, whose clergy were supposedly untouched by this corruption, was the pure and true church.

21. Caecilian was bishop of Carthage from 311 until after 325. His election to the episcopate was controversial, partly because he was not a universally popular figure; in addition, one of the bishops who ordained him, Felix of Abthungi, was supposedly a *traditor*, which cast doubt on the validity of Caecilian’s ordination. Although both Caecilian and Felix were soon declared innocent of any alleged crimes by church councils, the vociferous opposition to Caecilian led to the fracturing of the Church in Carthage and thus to the Donatist schism.

22. Macarius was an emissary of Emperor Constans who was sent to Africa c. 347 to attempt to settle the conflict between the Catholics and the Donatists. The Donatists accused him of persecuting them (hence the “Macarian persecution”) and siding with the Catholics. See also *Answer to the Writings of*

The book concludes with a brief tit-for-tat over the universal Church—Cresconius points out that the Catholic church is not, in fact, in communion with many churches in the East, while Augustine responds that these churches are heretical (III,65,74); and a skirmish over Augustine's own alleged Manichean connections (III,80,92).

Sometime later, Augustine returned to the contents of Cresconius's letter in what would become Book IV of *Answer to Cresconius*. In this book, Augustine resolved to use only evidence derived from the Maximianist schism to counter his opponent, in order to show "from this one case alone...how vainly and uselessly you said everything which you wrote in that letter" (IV,1,1). Heavy with citations from the Donatist Council of Bagai, held in 394, which condemned the Maximianists, and with more recent court records, which documented the mainstream Donatist communion's attempt to reclaim property lost to the Maximianist schismatics, Book IV concludes Augustine's thorough deconstruction of Cresconius's arguments. Apart from the entry in *Revisions*, Augustine never mentions the Donatist grammarian again.

An outside observer would likely conclude that Augustine won this literary debate, not least because of his ability to utterly demolish Cresconius's claim that the Maximianist bishops were brought back into the fold before the deadline. Without this crucial element, Cresconius's rebaptismal argument, at least as it appears in the letter, is severely undermined. (Witness, for example, Cresconius's own allowance in III,15,18 that "those who stubbornly persisted with Maximian even after the aforesaid day were subject to the judgment of condemnation and lost at once both baptism and church.") Nevertheless, Cresconius's insistence that his communion could not logically be called heretical if its bishops were accepted by the Catholics with full honors (II,10,12) as well as his defense of Petilian's rebaptismal theology were likely more threatening than has often been recognized. It is telling, for instance, that Augustine repeatedly attempts to return the argument over rebaptism to Petilian's exact words rather than responding to Cresconius's understanding of their meaning (II,17,21-18,22; 19,25-20,26; III,3,7; 11,12; IV,12,14; 19,22).

Taken together, the four books of *Answer to Cresconius* showcase the bishop of Hippo's defense of eloquence as a legitimate tool for Christian polemic as well as his dawning realization that the key to undermining

his opponents' rebaptismal theology lay in emphasizing their failure to apply it in practice during the Maximianist schism. *Answer to Cresconius* also preserves several documents relating to the schism which are found nowhere else, including the minutes of the Council of Cirta in 305 (III,27,30), the most complete record of the Donatist Council of Bagai in 394, and the legal petition of the lawyer Titian against the Maximianist bishops Felician and Praetextatus in 395 (III,56,62).

The present translation, the first in English, is based on the Latin text in the *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* LII, 323-583.

Father Philip Amidon, S.J., passed away on May 13, 2020 after completing this translation of *Answer to Cresconius*. We are grateful for his contribution to this volume and for his many years in the service of both the Church and the academy.

Revisions II, 26 (53)

Four Books in Answer to Cresconius, a Grammarian of the Donatist Party

A certain Donatist grammarian,²³ Cresconius, found my letter in which I had refuted those first sections of Petilian's letter then available to me, and he thought that I should be answered, and he wrote as much to me. I replied to his work in four books, in such a way that in three of them I completed what an overall reply required. But when I saw that a response could be made to everything he had written if I focused simply upon the case of the Maximianists, whom [the Donatists] had condemned as their own schismatics and some of whom they had taken back with their honors intact and had not repeated the baptism administered by them outside of their communion, I added a fourth book as well, in which I showed that very thing as thoroughly and clearly as I could. Now, when I wrote these four books, the emperor Honorius had already issued laws against the Donatists.²⁴

The work begins: "I did not know, Cresconius, when my writings might reach you."

23. A *grammaticus*, or grammarian, was responsible for teaching boys who had reached the second stage of a traditional Roman education. Under his tutelage, students would be introduced to the writings of classical poets, develop their speaking and writing skills, and study Greek. For Augustine's own memories of studying under a *grammaticus*, see *Confessions* I,13,20-17,27.

24. These laws were published on February 12, 405.

Answer to Cresconius

First Book

Augustine's decision to reply to Cresconius

1,1. I did not know, Cresconius, when my writings might reach you, but I never doubted that they would, since your [letter] reached me at last, even though long after you wrote it. You decided to write in opposition to the brief and partial response that I made, as best I could, to Petilian, your bishop of Cirta,²⁵ who has striven to support the repetition of baptism and to harass our communion not with the weight of any evidence he can bring to bear but with the folly of the curses he likes to air. For I had not received his whole letter but only the short first part. It does not matter why that happened, since the whole work came to us later and I did not mind replying to the thing as a whole.²⁶ If, then, I had not replied to the letter of yours that you sent me, you might have thought me rude; I fear, on the other hand, that you might think my reply argumentative. But if, from your awareness of a certain ability that you have, you thought it your duty to take up your pen against my letter, even though it was not addressed to you, simply because it appears to confute a bishop of the party of Donatus itself, because you are of his communion, even though you are not assigned to any rank of the clergy, how much less may I carry about the burden of my office if I do not speak against Petilian or against you, when he attacks the Church to which I am in service, when you plan, elaborate and execute a work of the same sort directed explicitly at me!

A debate over eloquence

1,2. In the first part you strove to render eloquence suspect to people. I mean that—while you seemed to praise my style of speech and, on the

25. I.e., the first book in *Answer to the Writings of Petilian*.

26. In *Answer to the Writings of Petilian* II, Augustine deconstructs Petilian's letter line-by-line.

other hand, to fear lest with this style I might deceive you or anyone else by persuading you of falsehood—you proceeded to accuse eloquence itself, making use even of testimony against it from the Holy Scriptures, which you thought said, *In much eloquence you will not avoid sin*. It does not actually say *in much eloquence* but *in loquaciousness* (Prv 10:19). Loquaciousness is excessive speech, a vice proceeding from the love of speaking. Most people love to speak, even those who do not know what they are saying or how to say it, whether this has to do with soundness of expression or with what is taught by grammar—namely, correct pronunciation and word order. Eloquence, though, is the ability to speak, to explain fittingly what we think. It is to be used when what we think is correct. The heretics have not used it in this way. For, if their views had been correct, there would have been nothing wrong with their eloquence, by which they could have expressed something of value. It is to no purpose, therefore, that you use their example to denounce eloquence. A soldier is not to be deprived of his weapons for his country's sake just because some have taken up weapons against his country, nor should good and well-trained physicians not use surgical instruments to help people just because untrained persons of the worst description abuse them to harm people. For who does not know that, just as medicine is useful or useless in proportion to the usefulness or uselessness of what is sought, so also eloquence, meaning skill and ability in speech, is useful or useless in proportion to the usefulness or uselessness of what is said? I am sure that you realize this.

2,3. I believe, though, that when you saw that many considered me eloquent, you thought that eloquence was to be criticized in order to discourage any interest which readers or listeners might take in me; those terrified by you would no longer pay attention to what I said when this very eloquence of mine would mark me as someone to be shunned and avoided. Be careful, then, lest what you have done turn out to belong to “that evil art” which, as you quoted from Plato, “many have rightly thought should be banished from the city and from human society.”²⁷ [What Plato is referring to] is not eloquence, in which I wish I had progressed as much as I desire, so that I might express what I think, but rather the malignant profession of the sophist, whose aim is not to speak sincerely but in whichever way disputation or opportunity may suggest,

27. *Laws* 11,937e-938c.

for everything and against everything. Holy Scripture says of this, *The one who speaks sophistically is hateful* (Sir 37:23 Old Latin). The apostle Paul seems to me to be keeping the youthful Timothy from this when he says, *Avoid disputatious speech, which is quite useless; it only ruins those who listen to it* (2 Tim 2:14). And, lest he be thought to have kept him from being trained in correct speaking, he immediately adds, *Strive to show yourself to God as a commendable worker, dealing with the word of truth without embarrassment* (2 Tim 2:15). This was doubtless the attitude that you adopted when in your eagerness to oppose us you portrayed us as eloquent and you criticized eloquence (not that you thought this way, but you wanted to divert from us the interest of those who want to learn). For how can I believe that you acted sincerely here, since I know how you people like to proclaim the eloquence of Donatus, Parmenian, and others of yours? What would be more useful than if it flowed forth so abundantly for Christ's peace, for unity, truth, and charity! But why do I speak of others? Have you not disclosed in your own self the extent to which your criticism of eloquence sprang not from what you really felt but from your determination to argue? You have tried by means of your eloquence to make everything that you have written persuasive and to accuse that same eloquence so eloquently.

3,4. For I beg you to tell me how your words are relevant when you say that you are "inferior to us in the art of speaking and quite uninstructed in the patterns of the Christian law."²⁸ Have I forced you to write a reply against what I wrote? Is this, then, the voice of someone refusing or excusing himself? If you are quite uninstructed, why do you not instead keep silent or speak in such a way as to express your desire to be instructed? I am, you say, "insistent, and always challenge" your people "to debate" with me "to determine the question of truth, but" your people "act with greater prudence and patience."²⁹ They teach the people in the Church only what is commanded in the Law, and they do not bother about replying" to us, "knowing that, if the divine law and the numerous proofs from the canonical Scriptures cannot persuade" us "of what is

28. From Cresconius's letter. All citations, unless otherwise noted, are from Cresconius's letter.

29. Augustine mentions previous debates with Donatist opponents in Letter 44 and *Revisions* I,19 (46). By 403, Catholic bishops had won the right to officially summon their Donatist counterparts to public hearings; see *Acts of the Conference of Carthage* III,174.

better and truer, then human authority can never recall” us “to the rule of truth when error has been dissipated.” Why, then, did you decide to speak against us when they are silent? If they are doing well, why do you not imitate them? If badly, why do you praise them?

The Donatist schism is not unresolvable

3,5. You say that I believe “with intolerable arrogance” that I alone “can settle what has seemed to others unresolvable and therefore should be left to God’s judgment,” when you also said earlier that I “wanted to conclude what had not been able to be concluded after so many years, after so many judges and arbiters, with so many learned bishops from either party debating [the issue] in the presence of the princes.” Do I really suffice for this by myself? Do I really desire to resolve this issue by myself by debating it? For I think that, if you had wanted to blame our people alone for attempting this, you would not have spoken of your people, too, as involved in the attempt. Since, then, you can no longer criticize that attempt, that determination and persistence, at least on account of your own people, I do not want to be excluded from such a good work. Why do you criticize? Why do you reprove? Are you envious? That ought not to be believed lightly of you. What is left, then, is that it is from the love of argument that you blame me for what you are forced to praise in your own people.

4,6. But [you say that] it is intolerably arrogant to presume that one person can resolve by himself what has not been resolved among so many qualified people. But please do not attribute this [thought] to me alone; there are many of us who are intent on resolving [the issue] or, rather, on making it known that it has already been resolved. For those who say that it has not been resolved are the ones who do not want to accept its resolution, which they have concealed from you, so that you who have been deceived by their authority may believe that it has not been resolved. From the time that it was resolved, however, our people have never ceased from their efforts to make the resolution known, doing all they could in public and private to this end, lest anyone who persisted in this most dangerous error were to complain at the Last Judgment of the indolence of God’s ministers in their regard. We do not, then, wish to rehearse the entire course of the case that has long been concluded but to show how it was resolved, especially for the benefit of those who do not know of this.

Thus, when the defenders of error are proved wrong, having been set right once they were freed from it, or at least having been refuted even if they persist in open obstinacy, those who are more desirous of the truth than of argument may see what path to follow.

5,7. This has not been fruitless, contrary to whatever you may think. For, if you saw how widely that error had spread throughout Africa and how few are the places in it that are left which have not yet been corrected and gone over to the Catholic peace,³⁰ you would never consider the determination of the supporters of Christian peace and unity to be fruitless and vain. Even if, though, there are places where the diligent application of this treatment has not been effective, it is enough—for the account to be rendered to God—that its application has not ceased. For, just as the evil persuader to sin justly incurs the punishment due to the deceiver, even if his persuasion had been ineffective, so may it never be that the faithful preacher of righteousness, even if he is rejected by people, is deprived of the recompense of his office. It is something certain that relates to something uncertain. By “uncertain” I mean not the reward of the one who does the work but the attitude of the one who listens. For we cannot be certain if the one to whom the truth is preached will assent to it, but it is certain that the truth ought to be preached even to such people. And it is certain that a worthy compensation awaits those who preach it faithfully, whether they are accepted or spurned or even suffer various things on account of it for a time. The Lord says in the Gospel, *When you enter, say, Peace to this house. If those who are there are worthy, your peace will rest upon them, but otherwise it will return to you.* (Mt 10:12-13; Lk 10:5) Did he assure them that those to whom they preached that peace would accept it? What he did assure them of was that they were to preach it without delay.

6,8. The apostle Paul says, too, *The servant of the Lord should not quarrel but be gentle with everyone, teachable, patient, correcting mildly those of different views, in the hope that God might grant them a change of heart to know the truth and that they might recover their senses from*

30. In *Answer to the Writings of Petilian* II,84,184, Augustine concedes that there were once so few Catholics in Hippo that the Donatist bishop of the city was able to interdict their bread-supply. By the time he wrote *Answer to Cresconius*, however, the emperor Honorius had recently issued his Edict of Unity requiring all Donatist congregations to merge with their Catholic counterparts; see *Revisions* II,26 (53).

the snares of the devil, by whom they have been captured to do his will (2 Tim 2:24-26). See how the one whom he does *not* want to be quarrelsome he *does* want to be mild in the correction of those of different views, lest the servant of God take the prohibition to be rude as an excuse for laziness. It is true that many consider the very correction which is administered mildly to be vexing and annoying, whether because they enjoy their sins or because they can find no answer but do not yield to the truth. Those who are earnest about dealing with them and do not pretend that they are not refuting their error they call quarrelsome and contentious. For falsehood, which fears to be exposed and refuted, charges the diligence of truth with the vices which truth condemns. Does that mean that determination is to be abandoned? See how the same Apostle warns Timothy not to slacken his efforts at preaching because of people who find the preaching of truth disagreeable. *I adjure you*, he says, *before God and Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, by his manifestation and his kingdom: preach the word, press on with it in favorable or unfavorable moments; admonish, exhort, reproach in complete forbearance and devotion to teaching* (2 Tim 4:1-2). Is there anyone who hears this and serves God faithfully who would cease from this diligence and persistence? Who would dare to respond to this affirmation with indolence? Your eloquence would not drown us out in this cause: with the help of the Lord our God we preach entirely the benefit, piety and holiness of unity; we preach in favorable moments to those who are receptive and in unfavorable moments to those who are resistant, and we demonstrate as powerfully as we can, and for whom and against whom, as far as we are able, that the issue between us and the party of Donatus has long since been resolved.

7,9. Let those who with obstinate craftiness support falsehood, or who with envious ostentation proclaim the truth, acknowledge in themselves the name and crime of contentious enmity. The apostle Paul speaks of both kinds of contentiousness. The first has to do with Alexander, of whom he says, *Alexander the coppersmith did me a great deal of harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him, for he strongly opposes our words.* (2 Tim 4:14-15) The other has to do with those of whom he says, *Some there are who proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry, not sincerely, their aim being to stir up trouble for me in my chains* (Phil 1:15.17). For these people doubtless proclaimed the same message as Paul, but not with the same attitude, not with the same

purpose, not out of charity but out of envy, as he says, but out of rivalry, wanting in their pride to excel in that very proclamation and to outdo the apostle Paul. He did not take it badly but instead rejoiced when he saw proclaimed by them what he desired to be known more widely. *What does it matter*, he says, *as long as Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether by happenstance or in truth?* (Phil 1:18) For they were proclaiming the truth—that is, Christ—not from the truth of their heart, because not from a sincere intention, but from contentious rivalry. You, therefore, since you cannot be the judge of the recesses of our heart, focus your intention solely on whether we resist the truth or whether we desire to overcome those who resist the truth. For there is no doubt that, if we persuade to the truth and refute error, even if we do so not from what is true about our own intention but from our quest for the rewards of this world and for human glory, then the lovers of truth should rejoice, since it is an occasion for the truth to be proclaimed; as the Apostle says, *I will rejoice even in this* (Phil 1:18). If, however, we spend ourselves with the pious concern of charity in the work of this stewardship (and this is something known best by God, and something which could be known by you yourself, to the extent that human ability avails, if you lived with us), then I think that our ministry can in no way be criticized if we fight ardently for the truth against any opponents of the truth.

8,10. For if to you we seem argumentative, an impetuous spreader of discord who tries to initiate or promote debates with anyone, then consider what your opinion may be of the Lord Jesus Christ himself and his servants, the prophets and apostles. Did the Lord himself, the Son of God, speak about the truth solely with the disciples and the crowds who believed in him and not also with his enemies, who tested, criticized, questioned, resisted, and cursed him? Did it irk him to debate with one woman the question of prayer against the opinion and heresy of the Samaritans?³¹ You will say, though, that he foreknew that she would believe. So how often did he speak directly and at length against the Jews, Pharisees, and Sadducees, who not only were not going to believe him in the least but were even going to contradict and persecute him to the utmost? Did he not, furthermore, question them when he wanted and about what he wanted, so that he might refute them from their answers? When they asked him crafty questions, did he not give them straightforward

31. See Jn 4:20-26.

replies that silenced them when they were refuted? When he did so, we do not read that any of them were converted to following him. Yet from his foreknowledge he surely knew that, when he said these things to them or against them or in contradiction to them, they would be of no benefit to their salvation. But perhaps by his example he has strengthened us, since we cannot foreknow the faith or lack of faith that people will have, lest when we have spoken fruitlessly in terms of their salvation to those who are very hard and very perverse, we weary and give up the effort to preach, since it is irksome to labor in vain. And yet the Son of God refuted the devil himself—who not only God but even human beings cannot doubt will never be converted to righteousness—by his replies from the Holy Scriptures, when he was tempting him craftily and laying the snares of his questions from the Holy Scriptures, and Christ did not judge it unworthy of himself to converse with Satan about the divine utterances.³² Did he not foresee that what had not benefited the Jews and the devil would benefit the gentiles who would believe?

8,11. We also read that the prophets were sent to people so disobedient that God himself, who sent the prophets, foretold that those to whom he sent them would not heed their words. I pass over the fact that, thanks to the prophetic spirit by which they perceived the future, they could have known as well that their words would be despised by those to whom they nevertheless vigorously insisted on speaking them. The Lord says quite openly to the prophet Ezekiel, *Go and enter into the House of Israel, and speak my words to them, because you are not being sent to a people of unknown language but to the House of Israel, nor to many peoples speaking different or difficult languages, whose words you could not understand. If I had sent you to such people, they might have listened to you. The House of Israel, though, will not listen to you, because they do not want to listen to me. For the whole House of Israel is hard and restless of heart. But I have made your face resolute against their face, and I will strengthen your struggle against their struggle.* (Ezk 3:4-8) See, God's servant is sent and is ordered to speak to those who would not listen to that very Lord who sent and ordered him to speak, foretelling that they would not listen. For what reason, for whose advantage, for what gain, for what result is he sent to the struggle of preaching the truth against those who would contend and not obey? Would anyone dare to say that

32. See Mt 4:3-10; Lk 4:3-12.

God's holy prophets incurred the reproach that you level at me when you say, "If you know that the matter in question cannot be resolved by you, why do you undertake fruitless labor? Why work at what is vain? Why do you struggle pointlessly and without results? Is it not a great error to want to explain what you cannot, seeing that the Law, too, warns us, *Do not seek what is above you, and do not examine what is mightier than you* (Sir 3:21), and again, *The haughty man stirs up quarrels, and the irascible man magnifies sin* (Prv 29:22)?" You would certainly not say this to Ezekiel, who is sent with God's word to struggle with men who would not obey, who would think, say, and do the contrary. For if you were to say as much, he might reply to you in the same way as the apostles replied to those same Jews, *Whom should we obey? God rather than men?* (Acts 5:29) I would make the same reply to you.

9,12. If at this point you demand that I show where God has ordered me, too, to do what you forbid, then remember that the epistles of the Apostle were written not only to those who listened to them at the time they were written but to us as well; there is no other reason why they are read in the Church. Listen as well to what the Apostle says: *Do you want proof that it is Christ who speaks in me?* (2 Cor 13:3) And remember not what Paul said but what Christ said through him, which I mentioned somewhat earlier: *Preach the word, press on with it in favorable or unfavorable moments* (2 Tim 4:2),³³ and so forth. Notice as well how, when he explains to Titus what sort of person a bishop should be, he also says that he must persevere in teaching the trustworthy word: *He should be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict him. For there are many who are insubordinate, idle talkers who lead minds astray, especially those from the circumcision; they must be rebutted.* (Tit 1:9-11) He does not say, then, that only those from the circumcision are like that but that they are especially so, and he confirmed with the clearest possible rule that the bishop must refute and rebut in sound doctrine the idle talkers and those who lead minds astray. Hence, I know that this is enjoined upon me, too; I carry it out as best I can; I press on with this work perseveringly as much as he who ordered it helps me. Why do you resist it? Why do you protest? Why do you forbid it? Why do you criticize? Are you to be obeyed, or God?

33. See I,6,8 above.

10,13. But perhaps you think that the prooftexts which I have presented from the Holy Scriptures are to be interpreted in the way that you praised your [teachers] for [interpreting them], meaning that only the people in the Church are taught what is commanded in the Law. Perhaps you think that it is there that those of different opinions are to be corrected and refuted, so that each individual teacher would, by argument and preaching, correct only the error of his own people; if he sets out to do something of the sort with those outside [the Church], he is then held to be outrageous, argumentative, and quarrelsome, since, as you say, “Ezekiel himself and the other prophets were sent with God’s words to their own people, Israelites to Israelites.”

11,14. I shall reply to you about this as well. As I already mentioned to you previously,³⁴ the Lord Jesus himself, who presented himself for imitation to his disciples, did not disdain to speak the truth and to reply concerning the Law not only to the Jews but also to the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Samaritans and the devil himself, the prince of all deceptions and errors. Lest you suppose, though, that this was permitted to the Lord but is not allowed to his servants, listen to what is read in the Acts of the Apostles: *A Jew named Apollos from Alexandria, a man well-versed in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. He had been taught the way of the Lord and spoke in the fervor of the Spirit and taught with great accuracy what concerned Jesus, although he knew only the baptism of John. He had also begun to do so confidently in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him and explained to him more precisely the way of the Lord. Now, when he wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he came, he contributed a great deal to those there who believed, for he vigorously refuted the Jews in public, showing through the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.* (Acts 18:24-28) What do you say to that? Would you not perhaps accuse him of being an argumentative, intemperate provoker and inciter of rifts, were you not held in check by the lofty authority of the Holy Book?

12,15. Because a Jew³⁵ believed in Christ, did he therefore have to refute the Jews publicly who resisted the Christian faith and denied that Jesus was the Christ, while we who have never belonged to the party of Donatus do not have to refute the party of Donatus when it resists

34. See I,8,10 above.

35. I.e., Apollos.

Christian unity? Was the apostle Paul ever a worshiper of idols or a member of the heresy of the Epicureans or Stoics? And yet he was not ashamed or irked to speak with them on the topic of the living and true God. Listen to what is written in the same Book about this matter: *When Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was angered in his spirit when he saw how concerned the city was with idols. He debated, therefore, with the Jews in the synagogue and with the gentiles and with the worshipers, and day after day in the public square with those who came. Indeed, some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers met with him, and some said, What is this apparent sower of words trying to say? But others [said], He seems to be a propagandist for foreign deities.* (Acts 17:16-18) See how the apostle Paul did not refuse to meet with the Stoics and Epicureans, heresies that differed and were at odds not only with him but with each other. He debated with them not only outside the Church but even outside the Synagogue, nor did he stop preaching the Christian truth out of fear of their mockery, as though avoiding quarrels and disagreements, for notice what Holy Scripture testifies to after that: *They took him, it says, and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, May we know what it is that you are saying? For we are hearing some unusual things from you, and so we want to know what they may be. For the Athenians and their foreign guests spend all their time in saying or hearing something new. Paul, therefore, stood in the middle of the Areopagus and said, Men of Athens, I see that you are in every way devoted to religious observance, for when I was walking about and looking at your images, I found an altar on which was written, To the Unknown God. The one, therefore, whom you worship without knowing it is the one whom I proclaim to you* (Acts 17:19-23), and so forth in the passage too long to cite.

For what concerns the topic we are now investigating, though, I beg you to observe the Apostle, *a Hebrew from the Hebrews* (Phil 3:5), standing and conversing not in a synagogue of the Jews nor in a church of the Christians but in the Areopagus of the Athenians, the most argumentative and godless of the Greeks. For that is where the wordiest of the philosophers arose, not a few of whom, like the Stoics mentioned here, battle over the contrariety in words rather than in things, which the Apostle forbids Timothy to do, saying that it is useful for nothing except the ruin of those listening.³⁶ For it is concerning this, as you know, that Tully

36. See 2 Tim 2:14.

says, “Conflicts about words have long tormented the Greeklings, who are more desirous of argument than of truth.”³⁷ These were the people, though, whom our Paul was willing to speak to and to correct, and he was not terrified by the very name of the place, which echoes that of Mars,³⁸ whom they call the god of wars. There he spoke fearlessly of peace to those who were to believe; girded with spiritual weapons, he defeated the destructive errors; he feared neither the argumentative in his supreme meekness nor the dialecticians in his supreme simplicity.

Reasons why Christians may use the tools of dialectic

13,16. For you know how greatly dialectic flourished among the Stoics, although the Epicureans themselves, whose ignorance of the liberal arts was a source not of shame to them but even of pleasure,³⁹ would nonetheless boast of possessing and teaching certain rules of debate, the use of which would keep anyone from being defeated. Now, what is dialectic but skill in debate? The reason I thought to touch upon this subject is that you have wanted to hold [dialectic] against me, as though it does not accord with Christian truth, and thus your teachers have considered me someone rightly to be avoided and shunned as a dialectician rather than refuted and rebutted.⁴⁰ Not that they have persuaded you of this, for it does not irk you to debate us even in writing, while accusing me of dialectic, by which means you deceive the ignorant and praise those who have refused to meet with me for debate. But do you not use dialectic when you write against us? Why, then, have you run such a risk of entering into debate, since you do not know how to debate? Or, if you do know how, why do you, as a dialectician, condemn dialectic? Are you so reckless or ungrateful that you either do not restrain an ignorance by which you might be defeated or condemn

37. Cicero, *The Orator* I,11,47. “Greeklings” (*homines Graeculos*) is a derogatory term that Cicero, whom Augustine calls by his common name of Tully, uses to refer to the argumentative Greeks.

38. I.e., the Areopagus, Mars being the Roman equivalent of the Greek Ares.

39. Epicurus was well-known in the ancient world for his opposition to the liberal arts (*paideia*); see, e.g., Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives* 10,6; Plutarch, *Moralia* 14,75,1094D.

40. A similar argument is made by Petilian in *Answer to the Writings of Petilian* III,16,19.



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