

Joseph McCabe

This is the referenced material I titled, *J. McCabe X3*, that the reader of my *AD 508 Source Book* was directed to from my Introduction, footnote ²¹.

One of the giants of not only English atheism, but world atheism, Joseph McCabe left a legacy of aggressive atheist and antireligious literature that remains fresh and insightful today. His many works-- he wrote nearly 250 books--could constitute a library of atheism by themselves.

Born in 1867 and became a Franciscan monk at the age of nineteen. Gifted with the ability of the original languages and highly educated but disgusted with his fellow monks and the deceptions of Christianity and her doctrines, he left the priesthood for good on February 19, 1896.

Not long afterwards, he began to write--first against the priesthood itself and then for the position of Atheism. He was one of the founding members of Britain's Rationalist Press Association, and was a prolific writer for Haldeman-Julius Publications. He was also a much-respected speaker, giving, by his own estimate, three or four thousand lectures in the United States, Australia, and Great Britain by the age of eighty. Still fighting against the injustices and dishonesties of religion, he died on January 10, 1955, at the age of eighty-seven. He was truly a thorn in the flesh for the papacy. The epitaph he requested was: "He was a rebel to his last day."

His experience with Catholicism left him bitter against Christianity and rendered him an infidel but his exposing of Catholicism has proven to be honest and accurate. On those grounds I highly recommend the reader to examine these three short articles I compiled in one PDF file I named, *J. McCabe X3*. Joseph McCabe describes the true nature, rise, and history of the papacy during the first six centuries that has been so whitewashed by Rome and Roman sympathizers. Remember, deception is the watchword when analyzing church history.



The Truth about the Catholic Church

Chapter I The Origin of the Papacy

“OF all the fictions which still shelter from the storm of modern criticism under the leaky umbrella of “Catholic Truth,” the legend of the divine foundation of the Papacy and the Papal system is quite the boldest and most romantic. No divine force, but a pitifully human series of forgeries and coercions, of pious frauds and truculent ambitions, perpetrated in an age of deep ignorance, built up the Papal power, hierarchy, and creed.

The Christian hierarchy arose in a very simple way. In the primitive community, which met at times to break bread in memory of Christ and meditate on his words, some division of labor was needed. It fell to “the elder” to break the bread and address the little group. It fell to a few of the younger men to carry round the bread to be “ministers” or servants. Then, as scandals grew among the brethren and sisters, it was just as natural to appoint an “overseer” for each group of communities. In Greek, which these early Christians generally spoke (even at Rome), elder is *πρεσβυτερος*; minister or servant is *διακονος*; and overseer is *επισκοπος*.

Certain of these primitive communities were believed to have been founded by the immediate followers of Christ, the apostles, and they were called “apostolic churches,” and entitled to especial respect. Until the fifth or sixth century the Roman Church was just one of these “apostolic” churches. Its bishop was called “Pope” only because every bishop was called “Pope” (as every priest is in the East today) during the first few centuries.

But the Roman Pope had two peculiar advantages, and these formed the foundation of his ambition to rule the whole Church. In the first place, Rome was the metropolis of the Empire, the greatest city of the world. In the second place, it was somehow generally believed by the end of the second century, though there is no other serious evidence of the fact, that the Roman Church had been founded by Peter. . . . [8] The seed began to germinate before the end of the second century. The ecclesiastical historian Eusebius tells us (bk. v, 34) that Bishop Victor, of Rome, heard that the Churches of Asia Minor did not celebrate Easter on the same day as the Romans, and he *commanded* them to change. That was about the year 190. Catholic Truth is very careful to tell of this first assertion of Papal supremacy, and just as careful to suppress the sequel. The bishops of Asia Minor told Victor, in very plain Greek, to mind his own business. Victor, haughtily, threatened to excommunicate them, whereupon even the bishops of the West “bitterly attacked Victor” (Eusebius says) for his arrogance, and declared that they would take no notice of his excommunication.

It was thirty years after this severe snub before a Roman Pope repeated the claim. Tertullian, the famous African writer, speaks disdainfully in one of his works (*On Chastity*, ch. i) of some bishop who calls himself “the supreme pontiff” and “the bishop of bishops.” This seems to refer to Pope Callistus; and if Tertullian had known the personal history of that remarkable adventurer, he

would have used even more violent language. For seventeen centuries Callistus has been honored in the Roman Church as “Saint and Martyr.” But about ninety years ago we discovered the manuscript of a work written by a Roman contemporary of Callistus, and it pitilessly exposes the way in which the Roman Church, by means of deliberate forgeries, glorified its early bishops. Callistus was an astute ex-slave, of dubious character, who died comfortably in his bed after a very brief, but very remarkable, tenure of the Papal office. For Catholic Truth and the Papal officials, of course, this discovery makes no difference. For them Callistus is still “Saint and Martyr”; and, by an exquisite irony, his rival and exposé, the anti-Pope Hippolytus, is also a “Saint and Martyr” in the Roman literature!¹

Thirty years later, in 252, we have another opportunity to test the Papal claim. Those were days when bishops did not mince their words, and the famous Bishop Cyprian of Carthage tells his “dear brother” Cornelius of Rome, in a letter (*Ep.* lv), precisely what he thinks of him for listening amiably to certain schismatical ruffians who have gone to Rome to complain of Cyprian. Naturally it is enough for the Catholic writer that they have appealed to Rome. Even Mgr. Duchesne, one of the ablest of modern Catholic scholars, emphasizes the fact, and he quotes Cyprian describing Rome as “the principal Church — the source of sacerdotal unity.”² The truth is that Cyprian sternly rebukes Pope Cornelius for interfering. “Why did these men come to you?” he asks; and he goes on:

“Since it is acknowledged by all of us, and is right and just, that a case must be heard where a crime has been committed, and that each pastor shall have his own portion of the flock, and render to God an account of his conduct, those whom we rule must not roam about and disturb the good relations of bishops by their lying audacity.”

[9] Quite clearly Bishop Cyprian knew nothing about the divine institution of the Roman supremacy! But Mgr. Duchesne presently finds a clearer proof. In the year 254 the bishops of Gaul wrote to tell Cyprian, the Carthaginian Pope, and Stephen, the Roman Pope, that one of their colleagues had been deposed for evil conduct, and he refused to submit. Cyprian therefore wrote to Stephen, and, says Duchesne (p. 304), “according to Cyprian it was the duty of the Pope to intervene in Gaul.” It is a pity that even the most distinguished Catholic scholars pervert history in the interest of the Papacy. What Cyprian plainly says (*Ep.* lxxvii) is, that it is “our duty” (the equal duty of Stephen and Cyprian), and that makes all the difference in the world. The Gallic bishops had appealed to both. Cyprian had responded at once; and his letter to Stephen, for whom he had no respect, is a caustic injunction to do *his* duty as soon as possible.

Nor was this the last word of these African bishops, whom the Catholic writer represents as admitting Rome's supremacy. A few years later we again find

¹ For details and authorities, on this and many other points here discussed. See the author's *Crises in the History of the Papacy* (1916).

² The Early History of the Christian Church, i, 303.

Cyprian writing to his “dear brother,” who has been pushing his claim. He writes now in the name of all the African bishops, and he closes his letter (*Ep.* lxxii) with this heavy sarcasm:

“*We* use no violence and make laws for none, because each prelate has the right to follow his own judgment in the administration of the Church, and must render an account to the Lord.”

Stephen, in reply, brandished his poor Papal credentials, and told them to submit or be excommunicated. The Africans met in solemn council to frame a reply, and it was one of flat and contemptuous defiance. It opens with these bitterly ironic words:

“*We* judge no man, and we cut off no man from communion for differing from us. None of *us* regards himself as the bishop of bishops, or seeks by tyrannical threats to compel his colleagues to obey him.”

And this letter, Mgr. Duchesne and the Catholic apologists assure their readers, does not call into question the Pope's claim of authority!

The African Church, we must remember, is of peculiar significance in this respect. It was not only more important than any other section of Western Christendom, but it looked to Rome as its “mother-church.” Rome was the very heart of that mighty Empire of which the northern fringe of Africa was but a colony. Hence it is that the African bishops speak of Rome as “the principal church” and “the source of sacerdotal unity.” But to say, in face of these repeated letters, that the African bishops acknowledged the authority of Rome over them is a piece of audacity which Catholic Truth alone could achieve without a blush of modesty. At that time, and until the days when Goth and Vandal shattered the provincial churches, the claims of Rome were a laughing-stock to all. Mere compliments to the Pope are of no more significance than they are to-day in the mouths of many Anglicans.

We have next to see how this Roman ambition was enforced by such violence, fraud, and forgery as have no parallel in the history of civilized religion. I have said that the Roman Church remained until the end of the third century, although it scandalized the Africans by dropping the ancient discipline and admitting large numbers of loose-living Romans (as Bishop Hippolytus tells us), a poor, small, and ignorant body. We know from the semi-official Calendar of the Popes (*Liber Pontificalis*) that they [10] had not a chapel of the humblest description until about 220, and that they could not afford silver vessels for altar use until about 230. We have reason to believe that they did not in the year 250 number more than 20,000 in a city of a million people, although they had suffered scarcely any persecution for seventy years. Their sufferings really began — we will presently set aside their mendacious accounts of earlier persecutions — under the Emperor Decius, and continued under Diocletian. Very few were martyred, the whole 20,000, except a few score, denying their faith, and by the year 310 the Roman Church was a tiny and despised body.

Then there occurred three events which entirely changed the situation. The first was the conversion of the Emperor Constantine. Dazed by the sudden change from fierce hatred to favor, the Roman Christians emerged from the catacombs into a shower of gold, and their church grew rapidly. Constantine used no pressure, but the path of promotion now lay through Christianity, as the Pagans sadly complained The Pope began to live in a palace. His bishopric began at last to share the prestige of the Imperial city.

The second event which favored the Roman ambition was that in the fourth century Eastern Christendom was torn into shreds, and spattered with blood, by the fierce struggle of Arians and Trinitarians. The Roman Church, which was in these early centuries very far from being a seat of learning, did not understand the subtleties of the Greeks, and it remained simply Trinitarian. Naturally the Trinitarian bishops of the East then began to flatter it and appeal to it. They did not at any time grant its claim of supremacy, though in the fourth century they might have found this a useful weapon against the Arians. In the very heat of the struggle they laid it down, in the famous Council of Nicea (Canon VI), that the Bishop of Rome had merely the same authority *in his own region* as had the Patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch in their regions. In fact, when Pope Liberius himself incurred the taint of heresy (as we shall see), when Pope Damasus proved so slow to assist and so arrogant that St. Basil used stronger language about the Roman bishop than even Tertullian and Cyprian had done, the Eastern bishops clustered round Constantinople and left the Popes to pursue their ambition in the West. But for a time the freedom from heresy, the comparative calm, of the Roman Church gave it some prestige, and many of the flattering tributes (often deliberately enhanced by later Roman forgers) which the Catholic writer quotes belong to this diplomatic period.

The third event was the most important of all. We have seen, and shall see further, how the Western bishops were just as disdainful as the Eastern of the Roman Pope's claim to rule them. But very soon after the establishment of Christianity in Europe there occurred the mighty downpour of barbarians from the forests of Germany which destroyed the Roman Empire and prepared Europe for the Middle Ages. This great catastrophe shattered the provincial churches — of Gaul and Spain and Africa — annihilated the Roman school-system, and brought a sudden and dense darkness upon Southern Europe and Africa. There are other points to consider before we examine this closely, but it must be mentioned, in anticipation, here as the third and chief event which enabled the Popes to enforce their fraudulent claim.

[11] During the fourth century, as is known, Christianity became the established religion of the Empire. Only fifty years before it had pathetically pleaded for religious freedom. Now the Roman Church, guiding the consciences of Emperors, lightly adopted persecution in its turn, and fell upon all the other religions with truculent severity. The rival temples were closed, or converted into churches. For thirty years the emperors persecuted all other sects, even sentence of death being decreed against them. The city of Rome became, by what we should call Act of Parliament, entirely Christian. The Roman bishopric gained incalculably in wealth and power.

The writers of the time leave no room for doubt that this material gain was accompanied by a very serious loss of character. But in estimating this we must again be on our guard against "Catholic Truth." The Roman Church did not fall so far as is sometimes believed, because it had not nearly so far to fall. The pretty and touching picture of that Church during the persecutions which is still given in Catholic literature is appallingly untruthful. I have spoken of lies and forgeries, and the reader may feel that this is intemperate language. Not in the least. The story of the condition of the Roman Church before the conversion of Constantine has been grossly and deliberately falsified, and the forgeries by means of which this was done begin about the period we have reached.

According to the Catholic writers, and even the official liturgy of their Church, the Roman community of the first three centuries was so decked and perfumed with saints and martyrs that it must have had a divine spirit in it. Now the far greater part, the overwhelmingly greater part, of the *Acts of the Martyrs* and *Lives of the Saints* on which this claim is based are impudent forgeries, perpetrated by Roman Christians from the fourth to the eighth century in order to give a divine halo to the very humble, and very human, history of their Church.

This is not merely a contention of "heretics and unbelievers." It is not even a new discovery. The legends of the martyrs are so gross that Catholic historians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries frequently denounced them. Cardinal Baronius and Father Pagi repeatedly rejected them. The learned and pious Tillemont, in the fifth volume of his *Mémoires*, slays hundreds of them. Pope Benedict XIV, of the eighteenth century, a scholar who by some mischance was made a Pope, was so ashamed of the extent to which these forgeries permeate the official ritual of his Church that he entered upon a great reform; but the cardinals and monks obstructed his work, and the literature of the Church still teems with legends from these tainted sources. In fact, many of these forgeries were already notorious in the year 494, when Pope Gelasius timidly and haltingly condemned them.

These forgeries are so gross that one needs very little historical knowledge in order to detect them. Large numbers of Roman martyrs are, like the Pope Callistus whom I have mentioned, put in the reign of the friendly Emperor Alexander Severus, who certainly persecuted none. One of these Roman forgers, of the sixth or seventh century, is bold enough to claim five thousand martyrs for Rome alone under the gentle Alexander Severus! Other large numbers of Roman martyrs are put in the reign of the Emperor Maximin; and Dr. Garres has shown that there were hardly any put to death in the whole Empire, least of all at Rome, [12] under Maximin.³ The semi-official catalogue of the Popes makes saints and martyrs of no less than thirteen of the Popes of the third century, when there were scarcely more than three or four.

No one questions that the Roman Church had a certain number of martyrs in the days of the genuine persecutions, but nine-tenths of the pretty stories which are popular in Catholic literature — the stories of St. Agnes and St. Cecilia, of St. Lucia and St. Catherine, of St. Lawrence and St. George and St. Sebastian, and so

³ *Zeitschrift für Wissenschaftliche Theologie*, 1876, p. 539.

on — are pious romances. Even when the martyrdom may be genuine, the Catholic story of it is generally a late and unbridled fiction.

A short account of the havoc which modern scholars have made of the *Acts of the Martyrs* is given by a Catholic professor, Albert Ehrhard, of the Vienna University, and will cause any inquiring Catholic to shudder.⁴ Dr. Ehrhard mentions a French work, *L'Amphithéâtre Flavien*, by Father Delehaye, a Jesuit, and calls it “an important contribution to the criticism of the Roman acts of the martyrs.” It is a “criticism” of such a nature that it dissolves into fiction all the touching pictures (down to Mr. G. B. Shaw's *Androcles and the Lion*) of the “martyrs of the Coliseum.” It proves that no Christians were ever martyred in the Amphitheatre (Coliseum). The English translation of Father Delehaye's *Legends of the Saints* (1907) gives an appalling account of these Roman forgeries. Another scholar has, Professor Ehrhard admits (p. 555), shown that “a whole class” of these saints and martyrs are actually pagan myths which have been converted into Christian martyrs. The whole literature which this Catholic professor surveys is one mighty massacre of saints and martyrs, very few surviving the ordeal. These fictions are often leniently called “pious fancies” and “works of edification.” Modern charity covers too many ancient sins. These things were intended to deceive; they have deceived countless millions for fourteen centuries, and in the hands of priests they deceive millions to-day.

The early Roman Church was a poor little sect, like any other. It had some noble-spirited martyrs during the three or four short persecutions (in two hundred and fifty years) which affected it; but it had a far larger number who either sacrificed to the gods or bought a false certificate that they had done so. It had many men and women of strict life, and still more of lax life. It's first thirty Popes were obscure men of no distinction in the Church, of no learning, who just managed to hold together their ten or twenty thousand followers until the golden days of Constantine began.

Then, with the enlargement and enrichment of the Church, the saints almost disappeared and the sinners multiplied, Pope Liberius was sent into exile for refusing to sign an heretical formula. But when he heard that “the faithful” had set up an anti-Pope he “embraced the heretical perversity” (St. Jerome says), and returned to struggle for his flesh-pots. His followers and those of his rival fought terrible battles, in which many were slain; and it is one of the most piquant outcomes of the early zeal to make martyrs (on paper) that the semi-official *Catalogue of the Popes* includes the anti-Pope Felix, who died in his bed, as “Saint and Martyr”! Felix is, like Saint and Martyr Callistus, one of the jewels in the crown of the early Roman Church.

When Pope Liberius died the bloody battle was renewed. Two [13] Popes, Damasus and Ursicinus, were elected, and we have unchallenged contemporary records of the way in which the supporters of Damasus (“Saint” Damasus, of course — though his Christian opponents called him, significantly, “the tickler of women's ears,” and he was sued in the civil court for adultery) fell with swords and axes and staves upon the other faction. In one church alone they, after a

⁴ *Die altchristliche Literatur* (1900), pp. 539-92.

furious siege, killed no less than one hundred and sixty of their Christian brethren. The deadly conflict spread all over Rome, and lasted for weeks. There were more martyrs at Rome in that one month (October, 366) than in the whole of the “persecutions”; and again a number of the murdered supporters of the anti-Pope found a place in the Roman lists of martyrs!

In face of the letters of St. Jerome, who lived in Rome about that time, it is useless to pretend that these were the isolated skirmishes of “the lower orders.” The community was generally corrupt. Catholic Truth is, of course, quite familiar with the letters of St. Jerome. From them it quotes to an admiring public the edifying life of Fabiola and Paula and other Christian ladies. But it omits to add that Jerome very emphatically describes this little group of his pupils as a small oasis of virtue in a great desert of vice. Priests, nuns, and laity, men and women, he describes as sordid, greedy, unchaste, and utterly irreligious.⁵ He actually forbids his virtuous young ladies ever to remain in a room with a Roman priest; and when the Christian Emperors are compelled to declare all legacies to priests invalid he sadly confesses that it is a just censure of their greed.

This was the real Roman world which Catholic Truth describes as converted to the true faith and the ways of virtue; and Damasus was the Pope who, above all others, pressed the Papal ambition for supremacy. Yet here we touch only the lighter fringe of the dark story of the making of the Papacy.”

Chapter II

Europe Decays and the Popes Thrive

[14] “SIMULTANEOUSLY with this forging of credentials and lowering of character in the Roman Church there was a singular transformation of its originally simple offices. The Pagans were accustomed to highly colored and picturesque ceremonies, and the new Church indulgently met their wishes. Hymns, altars, and statues; incense, holy water, and burning candles; silk vestments and bits of ritual — these things were borrowed freely from the suppressed temples. There must have been a remarkable resemblance between the services in the suppressed temple of Mithra on the Vatican Hill and the services in the new temple dedicated to St. Peter on, or near, the same spot.

Other religions contributed their share. The Pagans had been accustomed to variety, and so the worship of the saints and the Virgin Mother, which was unknown in the Church for three centuries, was encouraged. Then relics had to be invented for the saints, just as saints were sometimes invented for relics. We hear every few years of bishops bring directed “in a vision” to discover the body of some martyr or saint. Palestine also began to do a magnificent trade in relics with Italy; beginning with the “discovery of the true cross,” at which no historian even glances today.

The events I have described bring us to the close of the fourth century, when Pope Innocent I, a strong man, undertook to enforce the Papal claim in the West. In the Eastern Church there was still nothing but contempt for that claim. In the

⁵ See especially Letters xxii and cxxv (in the Migne edition).

year 381 the Greek bishops met at Constantinople, and in the third canon of the Council they expressly laid it down that the Bishop of “new Rome” (Constantinople) was equal in rank to the Bishop of “old Rome.”

The great figure of the African Church — indeed, of the whole Church — at that time was St Augustine. Catholic Truth is very concerned to show that this great leader recognized the Papal claim, and it repeatedly puts into his mouth the famous phrase: “Rome has spoken; the case is settled.” The heretic Pelagius was then active, and the implication is that St. Augustine recognized the condemnation of this man by Rome as the authoritative settlement of the dispute.

Now, not only did neither Augustine nor any other bishop use those words, but they are an entirely false summary of what he did say. His words, in his 131st sermon, are: “Already the decisions of two [African] councils have been sent to the Apostolic See, and a rescript has reached us. The case is settled.” The settlement lies plainly in the joint condemnation of Pelagius by Africa and Rome. Nor did the matter end here. Pope Zosimus at first pronounced in favor of Pelagius, and the African bishops forced him to recant. In order to justify his further interference, the Pope then quoted two canons of the Council of Nicea which astonished the Africans. After inquiry in the East it was proved that *these canons were Roman forgeries*, and the African bishops, maliciously informing the Pope of their discovery, trusted that they would [15] hear “no more of his pompousness.” They did hear more of it, and a few years later they sent to the Pope a letter (happily preserved) in which they scornfully reject his claim to interfere, and advise him not to “introduce the empty pride of the world into the Church of Christ, which offers the light of simplicity and lowliness to those who seek God.” And Catholic Truth has the audacity to tell the faithful that these African bishops admitted the supremacy of the Pope!⁶

Rome fell in the year 410, but the charm of the great city laid its thrall upon the barbarians, and the Roman See suffered comparatively little. The Spanish Church was next overrun, and the Vandals, crossing the Straits of Gibraltar, trod underfoot the African colony and, as they were Arians, ruined its Church. The provincial bishoprics no longer produced prelates of any strength or learning, and the weak new men, quarrelling incessantly amid the ruins of the Empire, began to appeal more frequently to Rome. Dense ignorance succeeded the culture of the great Empire. The Popes did not rise, but the other bishops fell. “In a land of blind men,” says an old French proverb, “the one-eyed man is king.”

That the Roman bishopric did not change for the better in that age of general corruption its official record shows. At the death of Zosimus it became again the bloody prize of contending factions. Two Popes, Eulalius and Boniface, were elected, and on Easter morn, when each strove desperately for the prestige of conducting the great ceremony, a mighty struggle reddened once more the streets and squares of the city. A few years later, however, Rome again obtained a strong and zealous Pope, Leo I, and the claim of supremacy advanced a few steps farther. The Church still resisted the Papal claim. When Leo attempted to overrule Bishop Hilary of Gaul, one of the few strong men remaining in the provinces,

⁶ I have dealt at some length with these important episodes in the *Contemporary Review* (November, 1902, pp. 685-95), and shown how even Catholic historians like Bishop Hefele pervert the truth.

Hilary (Leo says, *Epp.* x, 3) used “language which no layman even should dare to use.”

In the East, Leo was not innocent of trickery. His Legates attempted to impose upon the Greeks the spurious canons which Pope Zosimus had attempted to use in Africa, and they were mercilessly exposed. In the fifteenth session of the Council of Chalcedon the Greek bishops renewed the famous canon which declared the Bishop of Constantinople equal to the Bishop of Rome. In an ironical letter they informed Leo of this, yet we find the Papal clerks sending to Gaul, in Leo's name, shortly afterwards, an alleged (and spurious) copy of the proceedings at Chalcedon, in which the Greek bishops are represented as calling Leo “head of the universal Church”! We shall see that there is hardly one of even the “great” Popes who did not resort to trickery of this kind.

The Greek Church has retained to this day its defiance of Rome. Western Christendom, on the other hand, has submitted to the Papacy, and we have next to see how this submission was secured. This is explained in part by the enfeeblement of the provincial bishoprics, but especially by the dense ignorance which now settled upon Europe. The reader will not have forgotten the forgeries which I described in the last [16] chapter. The products of this pious industry included documents less innocent than the pretty stories about St Agnes and St. Cecilia. Some of these — certain spurious or falsified canons of Greek councils — we have already met. The forgers grew bolder as the shades of the medieval night fell upon Europe, and some romances of very practical value to the Papacy were fabricated

The chief of these, *The Acts of St. Silvester*, is believed by many scholars to have been composed in the East, about the year 430. However that may be, it soon passed to Europe, and it became one of the main foundations of the Papal claim of temporal supremacy. After giving a gloriously fantastic account of the conversion and baptism of the Emperor Constantine, it makes that monarch, when he leaves Rome for the East (after murdering his wife and son), hand over to the Papacy the secular rule of all Europe to the west of Greece! It is a notorious and extravagant forgery, but it was generally accepted, and was used by the Popes.

A similar document, *The Constitution of St. Silvester*, is believed by modern historians to have been fabricated in Rome itself, in the year 498. Two Popes were elected once more, and on this occasion the customary deadly feud existed for three years. The document is supposed to have been invented, in the course of this struggle, by the supporters of the anti-Pope. Rome and Italy were now so densely ignorant that forgers — of relics, legends, canons, pills, or anything else — enjoyed a golden age. The one force on the side of enlightenment was the heretical and anti-clerical King of Italy, Theodoric the Ostrogoth; and the Roman clergy intrigued so busily against his rule that he had to imprison Pope John I. Rome split into Roman and Gothic factions, and terrible fights and bribery assisted “the light of the Holy Ghost” in deciding the Papal elections. In the early part of the sixth century there were six Popes in fifteen years, and there is grave suspicion that some were murdered.

At last Pope Silverius [A.D. 536-537] opened the gates of Rome to the troops of the Greek Emperor, but the change of sovereign only led the Papacy to a

deeper depth of ignominy. The Greek Empress Theodora, the unscrupulous and very pious lady who had begun life in a brothel and ended it on the Byzantine throne, had a little heresy of her own; and a very courtly Roman deacon, named Vigilus, had promised to favour it if she made him Pope. “Trump up a charge against Silverius [the Pope], and send him here,” she wrote to the Greek commander at Rome; and the Pope was promptly deposed for treason and replaced by Vigilus. But Pope Vigilus [A.D. 537-555] found it too dangerous to fulfill his bargain; and, amid the jeers and stones of the Romans, he was shipped to Constantinople to incur the fiendish vengeance of the pious Theodora. The Romans, who openly accused him of murder, heard with joy of his adventures and death, and they vented their wrath upon his friend and successor, Pope Pelagius [A.D. 556-561].

Such had already become the Papacy which Catholic historians describe as distinguished for holiness and orthodoxy, under special protection of the Holy Spirit, from its foundation. But this is merely a mild foretaste of its medieval qualities. . . .”⁷

⁷ McCabe, Joseph, *The Truth About the Catholic Church*, (Girard, Kansas, Haldeman-Julius Company, 1926), 7-16, (Big Blue Book, No. B-27).

St. Augustine and His Age

Joseph McCabe

[431] “The appeal to Rome is an event of great interest, and has been invested with no slight importance. Roman theologians do not fail to notice it in proving the supremacy of the Pope. From what I have said in connection with the Donatist controversy, it is clear that the Africans had no notion whatever of Papal supremacy, [432] and certain episodes which will be described in the next chapter will show that Augustine’s attitude towards the Roman pretensions never changed. But there were special circumstances for the appeal to Rome in 416, as Augustine clearly indicates in his letters; and the flattering terms in which the Pope is addressed are entirely outweighed by the subsequent action of the Council of Carthage, as we shall see. In the third letter Augustine introduces their appeal in these words: “For we have heard that there are many at Rome, where he lived so long, who favour him for one or other cause.” There were, indeed, as we shall see presently; and the Africans felt that the heresy must be crushed out at once in the whole Latin Church. They therefore ask that “the authority of the Apostolic See be added to their own modest statutes,” and that Innocent, whom “the Lord, by a special favour of His grace, has placed in the Apostolic See, and given such a character in our days that we should be guilty of negligence if we failed to suggest [433] to thy Holiness what seems good for the Church,” should “apply his pastoral diligence to the great dangers of the infirm members of Christ.”

Innocent was naturally elated at the honour which this fortunate heresy seemed to have secured for his see. His three replies breathe the dignity of the sovereign pontiff in every line. He takes remarkable pains to point out that they are only following the time-honoured custom of appealing to Rome, whilst his delight at the novelty floods the whole letter. He confirms their decisions with great pomp and severity, pronounces Pelagius's book to be dangerous and blasphemous, and excommunicates the two heresiarchs. This was in January, 417; Augustine’s politic letters had obtained a quick and complete victory. The joint spiritual authority of Rome and Africa fell with a heavy weight on the Pelagians, and Augustine trusted to extinguish the last elements of obstinacy by his rhetorical labours. On the 23rd of September he preached at Carthage the celebrated sermon (No. 131), [434] in which he did *not* say: “Rome has spoken.”⁸ But he spoke with triumph and gladness of the condemnation of the heresy, and trusted soon to hear the last of it.

But alas for the slender threads by which the fortunes of dogmas hang! At that very moment a Roman vessel was speeding across the sea with a letter in which a new bishop of Rome reversed the decision of his predecessor, and gravely

⁸ It is worth while pointing out that the much-quoted *Roma locuta est* is not even a just representation of Augustine’s words. It should at least be *Roma etiam locuta est*, indicating that the force lay in the joint enactment of Africa and Rome. The full text is: “Already the decisions of two councils have been sent to the Apostolic See, and the reply has come to us. The cause is finished.” The phrase, *duo concilia missa sunt*, is curious, and has no parallel in Augustine. However, even admitting it as it stands, it is something very different from *Roma locuta est*.

rebuked the zeal of Augustine. Innocent had died on the 12th of March, and been succeeded by the Greek Zosimus. Whether or no Celestius heard that the new pope had not a keen eye for dogma it is impossible to say, but he soon quitted the East, where he had been less fortunate than Pelagius, came to Rome, and appealed to the Pope. Zosimus assembled his clergy in the basilica of St. Clement for [435] the discussion, but once more the ex-bishops failed to appear in support of their indictment, and Celestius averted condemnation. The Bishop reserved his judgment, with an evident leaning towards acquittal, and wrote at once to chide the African bishops for their uncharitable haste in listening to the accusers. The letter contains some pompous remarks about the dignity of the Apostolic See, and concludes with a delightful and innocent comment on Augustine's zeal in the matter: "I admonished Celestius and all the clergy who were present that these ensnaring questions and foolish strifes, which destroy rather than build up, proceed from an idle curiosity."

Before the African bishops could recover from this shock, Pelagius had also appealed with success to the tolerant Bishop of Rome, and been pronounced "a good Catholic" and of "unquestionable faith." . . . [456] Augustine himself has led us to this digression, and we may now return with him to the question of Apiarius. The charges seem to have been proved, but the priest asked forgiveness, and Urbanus was induced to restore his priestly office, and allow him to exercise it in a small town or village of his *parecia*. At what date this was done we cannot say, but we find Faustinus and the two priests still at Carthage when Zosimus died, on the 26th of December. His successor, Boniface, confirmed the commission to the Italian bishop, and at length, on the 25th of May, 419, a general synod of the African bishops (to the number of two hundred and seventeen) was held at Carthage. The ill-chosen legate somewhat exasperated the bishops [457] by his pompous claims of compliance with the Roman demand and resentment of their scepticism about the canons, but in the end it was decided to procure authentic copies of the Nicene canons from the bishops of Alexandria, Antioch, and Constantinople, and to regard the two Sardican canons as valid in the meantime. In their letter to Boniface they apprise him of the conclusions arrived at "in charity, indeed, but not without laborious altercation." If these canons had been found in their copies, they say, they "would have been spared certain intolerable things they do not care to mention"; but they "trust they will not have to endure that pompousness any longer."⁹

When Atticus, Bishop of Constantinople, and Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria, sent authentic copies of the Nicene canons, and [458] there was still no trace of the two quoted by Zosimus, the feeling of the African bishops must have been strongly aroused against Rome. Augustine is provokingly silent on the whole question and the issues it involved. However, Apiarius once more fell into disgrace a few years later, and the controversy was reopened. Disgraceful conduct was proved against the priest by his new congregation, and he was again

⁹ See this and the subsequent letter to Celestine in Labbe's *Collectio Conciliorum*, ad ann. 419 and 424. Father Hefele does not quite justly translate the letters in his *History of the Councils* (English translation): For instance, he makes them say Urbanus had "complied with the Pope's request" before the Council. The bishops say that "Urbanus had corrected what needed correction," but they do not gratify Boniface with the expression inserted by Hefele.

excommunicated. He fled to Rome, the bishop-now Celestine I.-received him to communion (so indecent was the haste to assert the prerogatives of the Roman See), and the Africans were insulted by the same Faustinus being sent to demand his reinstatement. The African bishops hastened to Carthage, where they held a general synod in 424. The proceedings are not recorded, or the records have not been preserved, but the bishops admit in their letter to Celestine that “there were stormy sittings for three days.” Faustinus demanded compliance with Celestine’s orders more arrogantly than ever, and the African bish-[459] ops, fortified by their new copies of the canons, warmly resented the Italian intervention. At length Apiarius reduced Faustinus to silence by confessing his guilt of all the crimes alleged, and the Roman party retired from the struggle. But the Africans followed up the retreat of the legate with a letter¹⁰ which must have made Celestine weep for the loss of Africa. They complain that Faustinus:

“insulted the whole assembly, pretending to assert certain privileges of the Roman Church,” and in conclusion they “earnestly beg that in future you will not too readily lend your ears to those who come to you from here, nor receive into communion those whom we have excommunicated; for thy Venerableness will easily find that this has already been enjoined by the Council of Nicea. . . . The Fathers did not detract from the dignity of the African Church by any of their enactments. They most prudently and justly provided that all affairs should be disposed of in the places where they arise; nor did they think that any province would be refused that grace of the Holy Spirit whereby the priests of Christ may prudently discern and hold fast to equity; especially as any priest is free to appeal to a provincial, or even a general council, if he be dissatisfied with a judgment. Unless, indeed, there is anyone [460] who can think justice to one it to so many St. Augustine our God will give His inspiration of single person [*unicuilibet*], and deny priests assembled in council.” They go on to remind him that “the judgment of a transmarine see” is hardly likely to be sound, seeing the distance and the difficulty of obtaining witnesses; and they “do not find it laid down in any synod of the Fathers” that the Roman bishop has a right to send legates into their provinces. Cyril and Atticus have confirmed their suspicion that the two canons were not genuine, and they beg he will send no more legates “lest we should seem to introduce the empty pride of the world into the humble Church of Christ.”

As to Faustinus, they could not tolerate him in Africa much longer. So much for the recognition of Roman prestige in Africa in the fifth century.

Augustine is, as I said, singularly silent about the whole episode. We cannot even trace his influence in the great council of 424.”¹¹

¹⁰ See in Labbe (*not* Hefele), *loc. cit.*

¹¹ McCabe, Joseph, *St. Augustine and His Age*, (New York, G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1902). 431-435, 456-460.

St. Augustine and the Roman Claims

Joseph McCabe

“There is, perhaps, no other period of the early Church which affords so reliable a test of the Roman claim of supremacy as the life of the African Church at the beginning of the fifth century. If, indeed, the Roman theologians cannot detect evidence of an acceptance of their pretension by that date, it is confessedly discredited. If in the half century that falls between the death of Julian and the disruption of the Western Empire, when the church-life was so free and so eventful, there is no trace of a submission to the claim of the Roman see, the famous argument from tradition is completely broken. Not to the earlier days, when bishops and churches were so long isolated, nor to the later centuries, when the barbarian invasion had again distorted the course of development, should we look for the most cogent testimony. It is in the peaceful interval between the persecutions and the fall of Rome that we find the most authoritative expressions of the feeling of the early Church. And the African branch of the Church seems to have an especial interest in this regard. More than one Church had only relaxed its fervour and suffered intellectual decadence with the advent of prosperity. The African Church had risen from the humble and not very reputable structure that survived the last persecution to a commanding height in the Roman world. Besides Augustine of Hippo and Aurelius of Carthage, a dozen prelates of great moral, if not intellectual, distinction strengthened its synods and councils. Moreover, the course of its history in the first quarter of the fifth century afforded more than one occasion for an explicit consideration of the pretensions of the Bishop of Rome. There can hardly be a more suitable period in which to test the validity of the Ultramontane argument; and there is certainly no period at which we find the Roman claim rejected with greater vehemence.

St. Augustine of Hippo was at once the creator and the theologian of this most famous Church of the fifth century. When he entered the service of the Church in 391, it had not a single bishop of distinction, [686] and its population was almost lost amidst the multitude of Donatists, Manicheans, and Pagans. Within twenty years Augustine lifted it to the foremost place in the Christian world. Aurelius of Carthage, its chief bishop and statesman, invariably took inspiration from Augustine. From Augustine's seminary ten able and earnest bishops went out to various parts of Africa, and these pupils of his formed the nucleus of every general council. The action of the African Church in its golden age follows the development of Augustine's views with singular fidelity. It is, therefore, to Augustine and his colleagues that we look for the most weighty deliverance on the Roman claim in that age of exceptional freedom of intercommunication.

Augustine has told us very little-though that little is suggestive enough-about his first impression of the Eternal City and its Christian Church. He was never, at any time, the vicious youth the hagiographers have represented him to have been in his pre-Christian days, and the pleasures of the city rather disgusted him. Rome lived from end to end of the year, even whilst the barbarians were gathering thick about its enfeebled frontiers, either in the enjoyment or in the anticipation of its *circenses* and *munera*. Its patricians spent their substance on banquets to trains of

vulgar parasites or entertainments of an idle and contemptible mob. A quarter of a million of its citizens spent the whole year in complete idleness: holding out shameless hands for public rations on the bread steps, and earning only a few coins by the sale of their applause at the Circus, to be spent on dice or wine or the thickly-clustered *fornices* down the Subura. Augustine had long before given up the circus and the amphitheatre, and the Roman theatre had little intellectual attraction. But he must have watched with a cynical interest the struggle of religions in the city during the few months of his stay there. He came at the moment when Christianity was beginning in earnest its attack on the older religion. Praetextatus and Symmachus were in the middle of their historic struggle for the pagan altar in the Senate. Three other religions-those of Mithra, Cybele, and Isis-were hardly less conspicuous and popular. The Manicheans, to whom Augustine was still nominally attached, were fewer and more obscure. Augustine merely says that "the forest of conflicting sects" led him into sceptical thoughts. He turned to the philosophy of Carneades.

When he came back to Rome two years later, converted into an ardent believer, he was necessarily drawn more into the life of the Roman Church. He had not, indeed, intended to visit Rome, but political troubles forced him to wait a few months there. Yet once more Augustine is remarkably silent about Christian life at Rome, and the blank must be filled up from St. Jerome's ruthless descriptions of it. Jerome had by this time been driven from the city. The populace had threatened to pitch him into the Tiber, he says, and the clergy had made Rome impossible even for his ascetic temper. Pope Damasus, [687] also, had ceased to "tickle the ears of matrons," as his clergy put it, and rush about the fora in a gorgeous chariot, and give "banquets equal to those of the emperor," as Ammianus says. But the state of things which Jerome describes must have continued. In Jerome's time there was at least one oasis of piety in the Roman Church-the palace on the Aventine where Jerome gathered together his school of noble ladies. This was now all but broken up, and the Church presented an unattractive appearance. No sober historian would take quite at the letter Jerome's testimony to the morals, or absence of morals, of his fellow clergy; but when all reasonable allowance has been made the fact seems to remain that the Roman Church of the fourth century was conspicuously lacking in both moral and intellectual distinction.

But Augustine had not the type of mind that takes a dogma to be enfeebled because it has little ethical support. He must certainly have borne to Africa an unflattering estimate of the prestige of the Roman Church, but we shall not find this interfering with his judgment when direct occasion arises. In fact, it is almost at the beginning of Augustine's sacerdotal life that we find one of his allusions to Rome which is most fondly quoted by the Ultramontane theologian. In the ballad which he wrote in 391, for good Catholics to fling across the forum at their "separated brethren," he invites the Donatists to return to communion with the See of Rome. The verse has, of course, no bearing on the high personal pretensions of the Roman bishop,¹² but it evinces an absence of prejudice.

¹² It is worth noting that the name "pope" was given to all eminent bishops at that time. Jerome gives it to Augustine, Augustine to Ambrose, and so forth.

Communion with Rome, the oldest Church in the west, was an obvious test of orthodoxy.

It is in connection with this Donatist schism that Augustine and his colleagues first reveal to us their non-acceptance of the Roman claim. This is no place to describe the origin of that famous schism, but a few words will explain the relation of Rome to it. M. de Pressense and other “philosophic” historians have seen in its rise an outgrowth of the democratic spirit, and it is usually taken to have had a serious religious root. The truth is that it arose out of a sordid intrigue of the Carthaginian Church. A spiteful woman allied herself with two disappointed and covetous candidates for the episcopacy, and they called in a group of disreputable bishops who, for a weighty consideration, ordained a rival bishop and launched the great schism. The democratic pleasantries which are found at a later date—such as harnessing the wealthy orthodox to their own chariots, or putting respectable citizens in the place of the miller’s ass, and so on—were no less accidental to its course than the theological contentions with which it was quickly clothed. However, this intrigue was remote, if well-authenticated, history in Augustine’s day, when the two parties were separated by violent dogmatic differences (as to the value of a sacrament administered by an unworthy priest). In that situation [688] even the slenderest notion of there being some peculiar authority in the Roman see would have been eagerly employed. The historical and theological dispute was evidently hopeless. Nearly a century of discussion had brought them no nearer the end. It was only by a recourse to the secular arm and the enforcement of severe secular penalties that Augustine did eventually conquer. In the earlier days, when he yet shrank from the idea of persecution, he would have found a powerful implement in an acceptance of the Roman claim.

In point of historic fact the personal authority of the Bishop of Rome is never mentioned throughout the struggle. Rome was, by the nature of the controversy, on the side of the Caecilianists (orthodox). Its struggle with St. Cyprian about the reiteration of sacraments was fresh in the memory. But this support of the Roman See is never claimed by Augustine to have any peculiar significance. It is uniformly associated with the support of Milan and the other European Sees. Nor may we suppose that Augustine merely refrained from attaching any especial weight to the opinion of the Roman bishop because this was not admitted by the schismatics. The Donatists did not recognize any force even in the collective judgment of the “transmarine” bishops. “This is a concern of the African Church,” they said at the great Conference in 411; let the transmarine “Churches stand aside and communicate with the winner.” Yet Augustine never ceases hurling at them this collective adherence of the European bishops. He would undoubtedly have done the same with the individual decision of the Bishop of Rome if he himself attached any peculiar importance to it. He barely acknowledges the sentimental dignity which clung to it as the one Apostolic See in the west. In 397 the African bishops asked the approval of the Bishops of Rome and Milan (the two being put on a quite equal ground) on a step they had taken in regard to the Donatists; and when the opinion of these prelates was adverse, they quietly disregarded it—though they sent further legates to convince them—and pursued their

own course. In 411, again, the opinion of the Bishop of Rome was only quoted collectively with that of the other transmarine bishops. The one apparent case of deference to the Roman claim throughout the struggle was when the Bishop of Rome was asked to adjudicate on it in its early years. But this invitation came from the emperor, not the African Church, and was only addressed to the Roman bishop as an important and impartial neighbor.

Incidentally, one cannot help noting how strangely fallacious was the attempt, popular amongst the Roman party in the last century, to compare the Church of England to the Donatist schism. In the Donatist controversy both parties repudiated that idea of submission to Rome which is now the essence of the Anglican offence; nor is the Church of England in any sense isolated like the Donatist body. There is this amount of parallel: one Christian party in England [689] denies the validity of its opponents' sacraments and raises "altar "against altar." But it is the Roman party that does this.

If, however, Augustine and his colleagues so strangely forgot the value of the Roman judgment at a time when it would have been peculiarly helpful, the Romanists may claim that they amended this in their dealing with the Pelagians. It is in this second great struggle that Augustine preached the sermon which concludes with his famous reference to Rome. The phrase "Rome has spoken: the cause is "settled" is, of course, one of those artistic improvements on the authentic passage which one is apt to find in controversial works; but even Augustine's real words are totally misleading when taken out of their historical setting. To put the matter briefly, Rome had taken side with the heretic Pelagius, and as the Eastern Church seemed equally incompetent to see the gravity of the new doctrine, Augustine was deeply concerned. An imperial rescript of April 30th, 418, describes the heresy as "rampant in the city." There seemed a danger of Augustinianism becoming the heresy instead of Pelagianism. In 416 Augustine heard that the Greek bishops had refused to condemn Pelagius. He at once summoned the African bishops to synods at Carthage and Mileve, and obtained a condemnation of the heresy. But the African Church could not, with any dignity and effectiveness, stand alone in the matter, and an appeal was made to Pope Innocent to join the censure. Augustine himself wrote the letters which went in the name of the two synods, as well as a third letter to Innocent which was signed by himself and Aurelius, Alypius, Evodius, and Possidius, his most devoted followers. The See of Milan was no longer of importance; Ambrose was long dead, and the court had fallen on evil days. It was essential to Augustine's success that he should win the support of the Romans, and it is not surprising that he at this time puts the prestige of the Roman See as high as conscience will permit him. In these letters occur his strongest expressions in the direction of the Romanist contention-though they are curiously overlooked by Hurter in his *Theologia Dogmatica*. The signatories pray that "the authority of the Apostolic See be added to their own "modest statutes," and that Innocent, whom "the Lord, by a special "favor of His grace, has placed in the Apostolic See, and given such "a character in our days that we should be guilty of negligence if we "failed to suggest to thy holiness what seems good for the Church," should" apply his pastoral diligence to the great dangers that menace "the infirm members of

Christ.” Innocent's reply naturally breathes the dignity of the sovereign pontiff in every line. He takes remarkable pains to point out that they are only following a time-honored custom in appealing to Rome, whilst his delight at the novelty beams from the whole letter. He fully concurred with their censure, and it is on this occasion that the well-known sermon (No. 131) was delivered. Augustine's real words were: “Already the decisions of two councils Vol. LXXXII. 46, [690] “have been sent to the Apostolic See and a rescript has reached us. “The cause is finished: would that the error were similarly ended.” It is convenient for popular controversy to omit Augustine's reference to the two councils and throw the whole credit of the termination on the fact that Rome had spoken.” For Augustine the force lay clearly in the joint enactment, and in the fact that the favorers of the heresy had been repressed at Rome.¹³

But the slighter impropriety of putting into Augustine's mouth the impressive “Roma locuta est” is negligible in comparison with the habit of ignoring the further course of the controversy. At the very moment when Augustine, on the 23rd of September, was assuring his Carthaginian hearers that the cause was finished, a vessel was speeding from Ostia with a reversal of the Papal sentence. Innocent had died in March, and been succeeded by the Greek Zosimus. Coelestius, the companion of Pelagius, flew to Rome, and obtained a hearing before Zosimus and his clergy. The Roman bishop at once wrote to tell the Africans he had failed to discover any justification of their strictures, and to chide them for their uncharitable haste. After some pompous remarks about the dignity of his See he concluded with this comment on Augustine's zeal: “I admonished Coelestius and all the “clergy who were present that these ensnaring questions and foolish “strifes” [considered so grave by his predecessor], which destroy “rather than build up, proceed from an idle curiosity, each one making “perverse use of his talent and immoderate eloquence.” Augustine had hardly time to digest this when he received a yet stronger epistle. Pelagius had next appealed to Zosimus, and been completely absolved. He was pronounced “a good Catholic” and “of unquestionable faith.” Zosimus and his clergy had “scarcely been able to restrain their tears” at the thought that so holy and admirable a man had been condemned.

The subsequent proceedings of the African bishops are “not “recorded.” Mediaeval prudence has spared posterity the pain of reading them at length. One indication has survived, a passage in the *Contra Collatorem* (c.v.) of Prosper. From this we learn that a large synod of 214 African bishops was hastily summoned, and a reply was forwarded to Zosimus. This letter has been “lost,” save for one passage that Prosper has preserved: “We hereby ordain” [*constituimus ... manere*: Hefele weakens this in his translation] “that the sentence which Innocent passed on Pelagius and Coelestius “remains in force until they profess,” etc. So much for their deference to Roman authority. But there is good evidence showing that they also appealed to the Emperor, and obtained a strong Imperial rescript against the Pelagians. Whether he was moved by the language of the Africans or the sentiments of the court, or both, Zosimus immediately wrote a

¹³ The words “Roma locuta; causa finite” are not attributed to Augustine in any version of his sermons. Catholic writers (cf. Cardinal von Rauscher, Dr. Specht. etc.) merely contend they justly epltomise the actual quotation, which I give in the text.

fresh letter to the African Church. The [691] letter opens with a quite humorous reminder of Papal infallibility - recalling the titles of “pious, victorious, and triumphant emperors” which Honorius gives himself and his colleagues within a few weeks of the fall of Rome. “Although,” says Zosimus, “the tradition of our “fathers has conferred such authority on the Apostolic See that no “one would dare contend with its judgment,” and so on. Hurter actually includes this passage, written under such circumstances, amongst his historical proofs of the Roman claim. Coming presently to the point, Zosimus is astonished to hear that the Africans imagine he has declared in favor of Coelestius and Pelagius. He had merely withheld his judgment, in view of the gravity of the case; he is still undecided, but hints that he may condemn. The letter reached the African bishops just as they were assembling for a fresh synod. Its virtual retraction seems to have relieved the strain of the situation, and they were content to formulate their views in a number of canons, which they sent on to Rome. A few weeks later the Imperial spears afforded a fresh argument against the Pelagians, and Bishop Zosimus and the priest Sixtus (the future Pope) realized at length their pernicious errors. Amidst the ringing scorn of some of the ablest of the Italian bishops Zosimus now sent out an unequivocal condemnation of the heresy.

When Dollinger appeals to Augustine against the dogma of papal supremacy, Father Hurter replies that Augustine's conduct during the Pelagian controversy shows he admitted it. He refers chiefly to the famous sermon, and completely ignores its historic sequel. When one considers the whole story, one appreciates the justness of Dollinger's appeal.

But an incident occurred a few years later that puts the attitude of the African bishops beyond all controversy. I have mentioned the African Council of May 1st, 418. In the 17th canon of this Council the African bishops brusquely declare that in future no priest or deacon who appeals to “a transmarine see” against his bishop will be readmitted to communion in Africa. This was the beginning of the supreme and definitive struggle of the Africans with the Roman ambition. Urbanus of Sicca had deposed one of his clergy, the priest Apiarius, for improper conduct. Apiarius appealed to Rome, and Zosimus, flattered by the appeal, acquitted him of the charge and threatened Urbanus with excommunication if he did not reinstate him. Hence the canon. But Zosimus now sent a fussy and pompous Italian bishop, Faustinus, to confer with the Africans and insist on the restoration of Apiarius. The Italian legate arrived at Carthage after most of the bishops had left, and Aurelius, Augustine, and fourteen other bishops were finishing the detail business of the preceding synod. Aurelius quickly summoned the neighbouring bishops to meet the legate. The Africans at once asked on what ground the Roman See based its interference, and Faustinus (quoting Zosimus) appealed to two canons [692] of the Nicene Council. The Africans referred to their authentic copy of the Nicene canons, and were amazed to find no trace of the two quoted by Zosimus. The discussion threatened to take an uncomplimentary turn, but Augustine persuaded his colleagues to admit the canons provisionally and send to the east for other copies of the Nicene records.

The bishops of Alexandria and Constantinople at once confirmed the African version of the canons, but the situation was saved for the time by the submission

of Apiarius.¹⁴ Augustine had been sent down to Sicca to investigate the charge—this is the so-called “commission “from Zosimus” which one reads of in his Catholic biographers—and the priest pleaded guilty and was transferred to another church in Urban's *paraecia*. However, Faustinus lingered at Carthage, and was confirmed in his commission by Boniface, when Zosimus died on the 26th of December, 418. On the 25th of May a general synod of the African bishops met at Carthage. Faustinus was irritated at their independence and their skepticism about the canons, and adopted a more arrogant tone than ever. Once more the shorthand record of the proceedings has been “lost,” but we have the letter which was afterwards written to Boniface by the Council. They tell Boniface of the conclusions arrived at “in charity, indeed, but not without laborious “altercation.” If these canons had been found in their copies, they say, they “would have been spared certain intolerable things they do “not care to mention;” but they “trust they will not have to endure “that pompousness any longer.” This letter must be read in Labbe or Mansi. Hefele contrives greatly to enfeeble its virility in his *Conciliengeschichte*, and his English translator still further advances the process. Thus, where the Africans merely say: *Prior autem coepiscopus noster Siccensis Urbanus, quod in eo [Apiario] corrigendum visum est, sine ulla dubitatione correxit*, Hefele translates: *Zuvor noch habe Bischof Urbanus von Sicca, ohne zu zögern, an sich verbessert, was ihm der Papst angesonnen*, and the English version makes them say Urbanus “had complied with the Pope’s “request.” Thus are the harsher accents of history attuned to pious ears. The letter loses entirely its most important character in Hefele’s translation, or epitome (but with quotation marks). This letter reached Boniface in 419. Three years later we find him writing (ep. xv.) unabashed to an eastern bishop: “No one ever resisted the “dignity of the Apostolic See, for its judgment cannot be called into “question; no one ever rebelled against it without being judged by “his own deed.” And we find Father Hurter including this passage, like the previous one from Zosimus, amongst his “proofs” of the Roman claim.

But the most explicit declaration of all—as explicit a judgment on [693] the Roman claim as one can conceive—was reserved for Boniface's successor. Apiarius fell into disgrace once more a few years later, and was again excommunicated. He fled to Rome, where the bishop Celestine I., admitted him to communion (so indecent was the haste to assert the prerogatives of the Roman See), and the Africans were insulted by having the same Faustinus dispatched to demand his restoration. By this time the canons had arrived from Alexandria and Constantinople, and the Africans hastened to the synod. “There “were stormy sittings for three days,” as they afterwards declare. The records have “not been preserved, but the letter which the bishops afterwards wrote to Celestine has been discovered, and it suffices to repel the last shade of doubt as to the African attitude. It seems that Apiarius silenced the Italians at length by confessing his misdeeds, but the bishops decided to follow up the legate’s retreat to Rome with a letter that should prevent any repetition of the legation. Hefele again weakens the dogmatic force of this letter in his translation. It is a pity that even the first

¹⁴ The two canons were really made at the later Council of Sardica. Hefele would have them to be of equal authority with those of Nicrea, but the Africans clearly thought otherwise.

historians of the Roman Church cannot refrain from the practice. Even in Hefele's epitome-I revert to it so often because it is the only generally accessible version - the letter is, nevertheless, strong; in the original text (in Labbe or Mansi) it is absolutely scornful of the Roman claim. Something is said in the early part of the letter about Faustinus "insulting the whole "assembly by pretending to assert certain privileges of the Roman "See," but the second half of the letter must be quoted in full. I translate it literally.

“After this proper discharge of our duty of saluting you, we earnestly entreat that in future you will not listen too readily to those who come to you from here, nor receive into communion those whom we have excommunicated; for thy Venerableness will easily find that this has already been enjoined by the Council of Nicaea. If it seems to thee that the direction refers to inferior clerics and the laity, how much more urgently must it be meant for the bishops, lest such as have been suspended from communion in their own provinces should seem to be either hastily or improperly restored to communion by thy Holiness. We also trust that thy Holiness will reject (as becomes thee) the improper appeals of priests and other clerics. There is no definition of the fathers that sanctions this encroachment on the African Church; the Nicene decrees very clearly commit, not only the inferior clergy, but the bishops themselves, to the care of their metropolitans. For they most prudently and justly provided that all affairs should be disposed of in the places where they arise; nor did they think that any province would be refused that grace of the Holy Spirit whereby the priests of Christ may prudently discern and hold fast to equity; especially as any priest is free to appeal to a provincial, or even a general, council, if he be dissatisfied with a judgment. Unless, indeed, there is anyone who can think our God will grant his inspiration of just discernment to one single person [unicuilibet] and [694] deny it to so many priests assembled in council. Again, how can the judgment of a transmarine see be sound, seeing that it cannot summon the necessary witnesses, from reasons of sex, or age, or other hindrance? Nor do we find it laid down in any synod of the fathers that legates should be sent by thy Holiness. For the canons thou didst send by Bishop Faustinus, purporting to be of the Nicene Council, are not in accord with the more accurate copies which are accepted by Cyril, bishop of the Alexandrian Church, and Atticus, bishop of Constantinople, and which we sent to thy predecessor, Boniface, of venerable memory, by the same priest Innocent and Subdeacon Marcellinus) by whom we received them; in these we have found nothing of the kind. Do not, then, send clerics to execute thy will to those who are in authority; lest we seem to introduce the empty pride of the world into the Church of Christ, which offers the light of simplicity and humility to those who seek God. As to our brother Faustinus (for the wretched Apiarius has already been expelled from the Church of Christ for his crimes) we have confidence in the good will and moderation of thy Holiness that our fraternal charity will not be taxed with his further presence in Africa.”

The letter is signed by Aurelius and many other bishops and (in general) “the rest of the bishops who are present at the General “Council of Africa.” It has not

been written by Augustine, and the fact that neither Augustine's name nor those of any of his pupils are explicitly given is not without significance. Probably Augustine disapproved of the bitter and contemptuous language. But this in no way invalidates the document as a proof of the African feeling when the Roman claim is explicitly laid before them. Here, in a full Council of the African Church, by far the best organized and most weighty branch of western Christianity, we have the Roman pretension solemnly and vehemently rejected. Beside this it is a waste of time to extort subtle and ingenious meanings from the vague references to Peter and his successors that are found in the early fathers.

Augustine himself is singularly reticent about these weighty incidents in the life of his Church. The year before this final declaration, in 423, he had had a direct correspondence with Pope Celestine, but his letter has no dogmatic force. A bishop appointed by Augustine had gone astray and been deposed. He had appealed to Rome, and it appears that the Roman bishop was trying by the help of the Imperial spears to make the people of Fussala accept him once more. Augustine does not seem to discover any other feature of authority in Celestine beyond this threatened use of the legionaries, and he talks of resigning if Celestine does not "co-operate" with him to bring about a peaceful solution. His last reference to Rome is found in his *Retractations* (I. 21). He here points out that whereas in an early work he had interpreted the text "Thou art Peter," etc., in [695] the Roman sense, he had in his later works uniformly, explained it in a sense quite hostile to the Roman claim. "The reader may choose "which sense he thinks more probable," is his final word. But in all his later writings he contends that no special prerogatives were given to the Apostle Peter, to say nothing of his successors (cf. *Enarratio in psal*, 108; *Tractatus in Joannem*, 50, 118, and 124; and sermon 149, n.6).

Six years after the famous synod of 424 the African Church was extinct. The Vandals made almost a wilderness from the Pillars of Hercules to Carthage. In Spain, Gaul, and Italy, the promising Churches of the early part of the fifth century were only a little less disorganized. The shadow of the Dark Ages stole swiftly over the land. In a few centuries more Rome could make use of the forged Decretals. In comparison with the ages that immediately followed, as well as with the preceding ages of the persecutions, the brilliant African Church of 410 to 430 was in a unique position to voice the feeling of early Christianity. And it gave utterance to that feeling in unmistakable accents when the Roman claim of supremacy was put clearly before it."¹⁵

J. MCCABE.

¹⁵ The Contemporary Review, *St. Augustine and the Roman Claims*, Joseph McCabe, (London, Horace Marshall & Son, Temple House, Temple Avenue, and 125 Fleet Street, E.C; Volume 82. July-December, 1902), 685-695.