

## In Search of Ecclesial Unity and Peace: Augustine's Polemical Use of Metaphors in *In Iohannis euangelium Tractatus*

### RESUMEN

La controversia donatista es uno de los temas que ha recibido atención en las investigaciones teológicas recientes. Este artículo analiza el estudio de Agustín de las metáforas e imágenes en *In Iohannis euangelium Tractatus*. Se argumenta que el uso de las metáforas de la paloma, la túnica de Cristo y el arca de Noé no solo se enmarcan dentro de su exégesis en la controversia donatista, sino que contribuyen a su proyecto de restaurar a paz y la unidad en la Iglesia del Norte de África. Del mismo modo, el obispo de Hipona utiliza las metáforas no solo para llevar a cabo sus obligaciones episcopales de ofrecer alimento espiritual a su rebaño, sino para amonestar a los donatistas y llamarlos a reflexionar sobre la profundidad de la unidad eclesial, atestiguada por la autoridad de la Sagrada Escritura. Agustín conceptualiza su análisis metafórico-bíblico de la paloma, el arca de Noé y la túnica de Cristo, como heuristicas moral y eclesial, dirigida a construir unidad y promover una pacífica convivencia, la tolerancia y la transformación cristianas. Finalmente, el artículo destaca por qué y cómo el uso de Agustín de estas metáforas sigue siendo relevante hoy, especialmente en el área del ecumenismo.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Agustín, *In Iohannis euangelium Tractatus*, unidad, paz, paloma, arca de Noé, túnica de Cristo, controversia donatista

### ABSTRACT

The Donatist controversy is one of the topics that has continued to receive attention in recent scholarship. In this article, I look at Augustine's use of metaphors and imageries in *In Iohannis euangelium Tractatus*. I argue that Augustine's use of the metaphors of a dove, Christ's tunic and Noah's ark not only falls within the larger framework of his biblical exegesis in the Donatist controversy, but contributes to his project of restoring peace and unity to the North African Church. Similarly, the bishop of Hippo uses these metaphors

not just to fulfil his episcopal duties of providing spiritual nourishment for his flock, but to admonish the Donatists to reflect on the profundity of ecclesial unity, attested to by the authority of Holy Scripture. Augustine conceptualizes his metaphorical-biblical analysis of the dove, Noah's ark and Christ's tunic as spiritual, moral and ecclesial heuristics, meant to bridge disunity and foster peaceful Christian coexistence, tolerance and transformation. Finally, I highlight why and how Augustine's use of these metaphors still has contemporary relevance for the Church, especially in the area of ecumenical collaboration.

KEYWORDS: Augustine, *In Iohannis euangelium Tractatus*, Unity, Peace, Dove, Noah's Ark, Christ's Tunic, Donatist controversy

## INTRODUCTION

The Donatist controversy is one of the most studied areas in the history of late antique Christianity. Many scholars have paid attention to the different aspects of the controversy. While some assess the sociological, political, doctrinal and geographical aspects of the conflict, others are attracted by the question of pervasive violence, state intervention and the struggle for peace and unity intervention. All this shows the wide-ranging nature of the controversy, and markedly confirms Maureen A. Tilley's observation that, "Donatism was not monolithic" <sup>1</sup> since it had several twists, turns and diverse theological tipping points. Recently, Rafal Toczeko has revealed another interesting dimension into Donatist studies –he argues that the use of juridical-legal language, which reveals the recurrence of "accusation and defense, praise and blame, exhortation and admonition," characterized the whole controversy <sup>2</sup>.

Augustine was not an abstract thinker. He was always present and involved, as his writings indicate, in the social, political, theological, cultural and religious concerns of his time. <sup>3</sup> His huge writings against

<sup>1</sup> TILLEY, M. A., «Redefining Donatism: Moving Forward», *Augustinian Studies* 42 (2011) 21-32. Tilley contends that since the Donatist controversy took different shapes, we should rather speak of Donatisms and not just Donatism.

<sup>2</sup> Toczeko, R., *Crimen Obicere: Forensic Rhetoric and Augustine's anti-Donatist Correspondence*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2020, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> See GRAY, D., «Saint Augustine and Medieval Literature I-II», in *Saint Augustine and his Influence in the Middle Ages*, Ed. Edward B. King and Jacqueline T. Schaefer, The University of the South, Sewanee 1988, p. 20.

the Donatists have always offered astonishing insights into the Donatist schism in antique Christian North Africa. They, in a certain sense, serve as access points into the history of the Christian religion. His discourse on unity which began right from his first encounter with the Donatists continues to permeate his entire thinking in most of his writings, especially the tractates on the Gospel of John.

Even though Augustine's presentation of the Donatists could sometimes be challenged, he still remains an influential point of reference in shaping the historical narrative of North African Christianity in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>4</sup>. His extensive writings allude to how he constantly employed various literary strategies to paint a portrait of the Donatist conflict<sup>5</sup>. In a stimulating study, Joseph Grabau and Anthony Dupont have demonstrated how Augustine's biblical theology and Johannine exegesis were shaped by his reading of Paul<sup>6</sup>. They maintain that, Augustine's application of Paul's exegetical-methodological principle to his Johannine tractates was instrumental to his censure of Donatist ecclesiology<sup>7</sup>. In addition to this, Anthony Dupont and Matteo Dalvit have highlighted Augustine's use of the expression *tabernaculum pastorum* in his biblical exegesis to argue for ecclesial unity and show what true martyrdom consists in<sup>8</sup>. Just as Jennifer Ebbeler has pointed out that, Augustine's letters served as a vehicle for charitable and fraternal correction of error among Christians<sup>9</sup>, his sermons too, especially, *In Iohannis euangelium Tractatus* portrays him as a multi-dimensional stra-

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4 MILES, R., «The Donatist Controversy: Parallel Histories, Multiple Narratives», in *The Donatist Schism: Controversy and Contexts*, Ed. Liverpool University Press, Liverpool 2016, p. 9.

5 REBILLARD, E., «Augustine in Controversy with the Donatists before 411», in *The Donatist Schism*, p. 298.

6 GRABAU, J., and DUPONT, A., «How Pauline Was Augustine's John Commentary? On the Use of Romans 5:14, in Augustine's Reading of John 19:34», *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 33 (2016) 365-394, esp. 367.

7 GRABAU, J., and DUPONT, A., «How Pauline Was Augustine's John Commentary?», pp. 372-378.

8 DUPONT, A., and DALVIT, M., «From a Martyrological 'tabernacula pastorum' Towards a Geographical 'in meridie', Augustine's Representation and Refutation of the Donatist Exegesis of Sg. 1,6-7», *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 109 (2014) 5- 34, esp. 16.

9 EBBELER, J. V., *Disciplining Christians: Correction and Community in Augustine's Letters*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012, p. 158.

tegist who always employs a number of approaches in order to correct his intractable Donatist opponents. While using his ministry of preaching to nourish the faith of his flock in general, Augustine specifically employed the Scripture as a vehicle for fraternal correction and discipline. Though the Donatist controversy antedates Augustine<sup>10</sup> he succeeded in becoming one of the strong voices that consistently stood up against the Donatists<sup>11</sup>. The brave professor of rhetoric deployed both his classical training and literary skills in his indefatigable plea for a united, peaceful Church. In this enquiry, the traditional nomenclature “Donatist” or “Catholic” is used with caution since the whole intra-Christian feud revolved around competing assertions to orthodoxy.

The present enquiry argues that Augustine’s poetic-metaphorical use of the bible, especially in his *In Iohannis euangelium Tractatus* is an important aspect of the controversy that needs to be considered. Augustine’s *In Iohannis euangelium Tractatus* which falls under the general title of sermons was the fruit of his commitment to the ministry of preaching. In spite of years of constant engagements with the Donatists and application of several approaches to end the religious tension, the Donatists continued to grow more hardened and antagonistic. While not resting on his oars, the bishop of Hippo also expressed his enervation. “Believe me, brothers and sisters, I am so angry, so worked up, so astounded at their deafness and hardness of heart [...]”<sup>12</sup>. Nevertheless, he would resort to using the Gospel of John to refute the position of the Donatists. He saw in the gospel of John the much needed theological resource and standpoint to repudiate the position of the Donatists. Augustine reposes special interest in the fourth gospel because for him, John gives a more theological account of the divinity of Christ, and

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10 AUGUSTINUS, *sermo* 359B, 22.

11 For more on the beginning of Augustine’s contestation with the Donatists, see, FREND, W. H. C., *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1952, pp. 227-240.

12 AUGUSTINUS, *enarratio in Psalmum [en. Ps.]* 21, 2, 29, trans., Maria Boulding, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ROTELLE, J. E. (ed.), New City Press, New York 2000, p. 239; CCL 38, 131: “Credite mihi, fratres mei, ita aestuo, ita uim patior, ut mirer nescio quam surditatem et duritiam cordis ipsorum...”

in his vivid presentation of the Incarnate Word <sup>13</sup>, he punctures and dismisses the position of the Donatists as worthless, groundless and self-defeating.

## METAPHORS SIGNIFYING UNITY AND PEACE IN *IN IOHANNIS EUANGELIUM TRACTATUS*

The bishop of Hippo deploys a lot of literary styles, images and imageries to drive home his message <sup>14</sup>. This is an area that has received little attention, particularly in the light of Augustine's struggle for peace and unity with the Donatists. Against this backdrop, this section analyzes how Augustine uses metaphor as a literary device to corroborate his stance for peace and unity. To evince the extent of his quest for a peaceful Church, Augustine elegantly uses a number of metaphors. He does this especially in his *In Iohannis euangelium Tractatus*. These metaphors not only reveal the symbolic and spiritual acuity of Augustine's biblical exegesis, but also evince the anti-Donatist polemical intent that undergird them. In what follows, we explore how the metaphors of a Dove, Noah's ark and Christ's tunic function in Augustine's argumentation.

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<sup>13</sup> See AUGUSTINUS, *In Iohannis euangelium Tractatus* [Io.eu. tr.] 36,1; CCL 36, 323: "In quatuor euangeliis, uel potius quatuor libris unius euangeli, sanctus Iohannes apostolus, non immerito secundum intellegentiam spiritalem aquilae compatus, altius multoque sublimius aliis tribus erexit praedicationem suam; et in eius erectione etiam corda nostra erigi uoluit. Nam ceteri tres euangelistae, tamquam cum homine domino in terra ambulabant, de diuinitate eius pauca dixerunt; istum autem quasi piguerit in terra ambulare, sicut ipso exordio sui sermonis intonuit, erexit se, non solum super terram et super omnem ambitum aeris et caeli, sed super omnem etiam exercitum angelorum, omnemque constitutionem inuisibilium potestatum, et peruenit ad eum per quem facta sunt omnia..." Here, Augustine speaks much more about John's special interest in Christ's divinity. He strikingly compares John to an eagle because of the excellence of his spiritual understanding. In highlighting these outstanding traits of John, Augustine does not in any way give less attention or importance to the other three evangelists, for they too speak about the divinity of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> For an understanding of how Augustine uses both figurative and symbolic language in his preaching, see, POQUE, S., *Le langage symbolique dans la prédication d'Augustin d'Hippone: Images héroïques*, Études Augustiniennes, Paris 1984.

## THE DOVE

The dove is one of the strong metaphors Augustine uses in his dealings with the Donatists. He uses the image of the dove as a hermeneutical key to underline the Trinitarian nature of the Church, and to argue for its undividedness. In Augustine's thinking, the unity of the Church subsists in the unity of the Trinity<sup>15</sup>. In his tractates on the Gospel of John, he lays elaborate emphasis on the dove which descended at Christ's baptism. The dove, for him, is a symbol of both the Holy Spirit and the unity of the Church<sup>16</sup>. It is this Trinitarian origin of the Church that calls us to cherish and celebrate the gift of Christian unity as a blessing for all ages<sup>17</sup>. In appealing to the Donatists to re-enter the unity of the Church in order that what they have may begin to be useful to them, Augustine uses the imagery of a dove. He says:

“Because you have what belongs to the Dove apart from the Dove. If you have what belongs to the Dove and are in the Dove yourself, then you have it with nothing to worry about. Imagine you are a soldier; if you have your emperor's mark as one in the army, you have it safely; if you have it as someone outside the army, not only is that mark of no benefit to you as a soldier, it will also get you punished as a deserter. Come on, then, come on and do not say, 'I already have it; that is already enough for me.' Come on; the Dove is calling you, calling you by its gentle moaning”<sup>18</sup>.

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15 See PLOYD, A., *Augustine, the Trinity, and the Church: A Reading of the Anti-Donatist Sermons*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2015, p. 18.

16 AUGUSTINUS, *Io. eu. tr.* 6,15.

17 QUICKE, G., «Augustine of Hippo as Promoter of Unity», in DUPONT, A.; EGUARTE BENDÍMEZ, E., and VILLABONA, C. A. (eds.), *Agustín de Hipona como Doctor Pacis: estudios sobre la paz en el mundo contemporáneo*, vol. 2, Editorial Uniagustiniana, Bogotá 2018, pp. 83-112, esp. 106.

18 AUGUSTINUS, *In Iohannis euangelium Tractatus* [*Io. eu. tr.*] 6,15, RAMSEY, B. (ed.), *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, trans. Edmund Hill, New City Press, New York 2009, p. 135; CCL 36, 61: “Quia rem columbae praeter columbam habes. Si rem columbae in columba habeas, secures habes. Puta te esse militarem: si characterem imperatoris tui intus habeas, secures militas; si extra habeas, non solum tibi ad militiam non prodest character ille, sed etiam pro desertore punieris. Ueni ergo, ueni, et noli dicere: iam habeo, iam sufficit mihi. Ueni, Columba te uocat, gemendo te uocat.”

Augustine uses the 'Dove' in the upper case to refer to the Church and the 'dove' in the lower case to refer to the dove that descended upon Christ at his baptism. He admits that the Donatists have what the Dove, that is, the Church has – baptism and the other sacraments, but are not united to the Church. In other words, having what the Church has, without being united to the Church is inefficacious. The Donatists should lament according to Augustine because they do not efficaciously and honorably possess what belongs to the Dove. In other words, their refusal to reunite themselves with the Dove while still having what belongs to the Dove is a contradiction, because it is in and through belonging to the Dove that what the Donatists have can become fruitful. Furthermore, he compares the Donatists to soldiers who possess an emperor's mark outside the army. Such an act, he argues, will not only be unbeneficial but will bring with it dire consequences – punishment from the state. He then cautions the Donatists not to claim that they have what belongs to the Dove. Using the Latin verb *ueni – come* in its imperative form three times, he urges the Donatists to return to Unity – to the Dove, because the Dove is still patiently and gently inviting them into its peaceful unity.

In a recent study, Adam Ployd has pointed out how the bishop of Hippo's exegetical practice in light of his search for a united Church has always had some polemical intent. Ployd states: "Augustine has redefined the scriptural dove as indicative of the sojourning church united in love as opposed to the pure and isolated dove of the Donatists" <sup>19</sup>. Augustine uses *ekphrasis*<sup>20</sup> to show his disapproval of the separation of the Donatists from the Dove.

"So then you can see, my brothers and sisters, that everything is crying out against them, all the divine writings, all the prophets, the whole gospel, all the letters of the apostles, all the groaning of the

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<sup>19</sup> PLOYD, A., «The Unity of the Dove: The Sixth Homily on the Gospel of John and Augustine's Trinitarian Solution to the Donatist Schism», *Augustinian Studies* 42 (2011) 57-77, esp. 65.

<sup>20</sup> Ekphrasis is a literary device that was commonly used by some fathers (both Greek and Latin) of the Church. Origen, Tertullian, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose of Milan, just to mention a few, made extensive use of ekphrasis (long enumerations) in their works, especially in their sermons to highlight and substantiate their argumentations.

Dove, and still they do not wake up, still they do not rouse themselves. But if we are the Dove, let us groan, let us bear with them, let us hope; God's mercy will be at hand so that the fire of the Holy Spirit may flare up in your simplicity; and they will come.”<sup>21</sup>

Augustine continues to express hope that the Donatists would someday return to the Dove, and encourages his listeners to continue to pray in hope and with patience for the homecoming of their separated brethren, the Donatists. Getting the Donatists back into unity was no easy task, Augustine admits. It requires constant, undiluted efforts and attention, efforts which are bolstered by divine mercy and grace. Thus, he calls for patience with reinforced hope for the much cherished reunion between Catholics and Donatists to happen. In addition to this, Augustine points out what the dove above the head of Christ signifies and calls on the Donatists to reflect on its significance.

“You can see one dove above the head of Christ; is it that you cannot see many tongues in the whole wide world? The Spirit being shown in the dove is the same as the Spirit being shown in the tongues. If the Spirit in the dove is the same Spirit as in the tongues, it means the Holy Spirit has been given to the whole world, from which you have cut yourself off, with the result that you clamor with the crow instead of moaning with the dove. Come therefore.”<sup>22</sup>

According to Augustine, the one dove above the head of Christ signifies unity, and that the Holy Spirit which the dove designates is the same as the Spirit that manifests itself in so many tongues all over the world. This Spirit which manifested itself in the form of a dove at the

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21 AUGUSTINUS, *Io. eu. tr. 6,24*, *WSA I/12*, 142; CCL 36, 65-66: “*Omnia ergo, fratres mei, uidetis, quia clamant aduersus illos, omnes paginae diuinae, omnis propria, totum euangelium, omnes apostolicae litterae, omnis gemitus columbae: et nondum euigilant, nondum expurgiscuntur. Sed si columba sumus, gemamus, toleremus, speremus; aderit misericordia dei, ut efferueat ignis spiritus sancti in simplicitate uestra; et uenient.*”

22 AUGUSTINUS, *Io. eu. tr. 6,15*, *WSA I/12*, 135; CCL 36, 62: “*Columbam unam uides super caput Christi, linguas non uides in toto orbe terrarum? Idem spiritus per columbam, idem et per linguas; si per columbam idem spiritus, et per linguas idem spiritus, spiritus sanctus orbi terrarum datus est, a quo te praecidisti, ut clames cum coruo, non ut gemas cum columba.*”

Baptism of Christ is the source of unity and the cradle of charity<sup>23</sup>. For Augustine, the Donatists do not have this Spirit with them because they have torn asunder the universal unity of the Church by going outside the Church. The Spirit does not divide, but unites, he says; and since the Donatists are not in unity, they do not and cannot perform the acts which are directed and governed by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit, as typified by the dove, serves as a unifying and healing force, leading to renewal of the Church and its members<sup>24</sup>. According to Augustine, if the Donatists return to the Dove, the Church, what had initially lay dormant in them will be renewed and reactivated into functionality. Again, he argues,

“Through a dove we learn that he is the one who baptizes; and do you think that you are being baptized according to the authority of the minister who baptizes you? If that is what you think, you are not yet in the body of the Dove; and if you are not in the body of the Dove, it is no surprise that you lack simplicity. Simplicity, after all, is exactly what the dove stands for.”<sup>25</sup>

Speaking on the Jordan episode of the Baptism of Jesus, Augustine addresses one of the contentious issues in the Donatist debate – baptism<sup>26</sup>.

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23 AUGUSTINUS, *Io. eu. tr.* 6,17.

24 DREYER, E. A., *Holy Power, Holy Presence: Rediscovering Medieval Metaphora for the Holy Spirit*, Paulist Press, New York 2007, p. 52.

25 AUGUSTINUS, *Io. eu. tr.* 5,11, *WSA* I/12, 110; CCL 36, 46: “Per columbam discitur quia hic est; et tu eius potestate putas te baptizari, cuius ministerio baptizaris? Si hoc putas, nondum es in corpore columbae; et si non es in corpore columbae, non mirandum quia simplicitatem non habes. Simplicitas enim maxime per columbam designator.” Augustine uses *simplicitas* in a positive sense with *unitas* to indicate that the dove designates simplicity which brings about unity. Thus, in Augustine’s mind, *unitas* is found whenever there is *simplicitas*. In his portrayal of the Donatists, Augustine believes that the Donatists were proud because they obviously lacked both *simplicitas* and *unitas*. In a certain sense also, Augustine apparently sees *simplicitas* as pointing to *humilitas*. We can surmise from Augustine’s use of these words that, if the Donatists were proud, they lacked humility, and if they were not in unity, they also lacked *simplicitas*.

26 The Dove, according to Augustine recognizes Donatists’ baptism, but at the same time, the Dove cries out because the Donatists practice it outside the Dove (the Church). He says it more pointedly in these words: “Do not boast about your baptism just because I say it is true. Yes, I say it is true, the whole Catholic Church says it is

Establishing his arguments on the humble attitude demonstrated by John, Augustine draws the attention of the Donatists to the fact that, it is Jesus, the Head of the Dove, who actually baptizes and confers on the baptized his own indelible character <sup>27</sup>. The minister who administers baptism does not do so by his own power; the authority comes from Christ, Augustine affirms <sup>28</sup>. But, since the Donatists think otherwise <sup>29</sup> and their ministers of baptism parade themselves as sole givers of baptism, Augustine tells them that they have not yet understood what the dove represents and signifies since they were outside the Dove. Consequently, he calls out to the Donatists saying, “Start having humility, charity, peace; start having the good you do not yet have, so that the good you do have may start doing you some good.” <sup>30</sup>

## NOAH'S ARK

Noah's ark is another ancient and significant imagery which Augustine employs in speaking about the unity of the Church <sup>31</sup>. He

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true. The Dove observes it and recognizes it and groans because you have it outside of her; she sees there something to recognize, she also sees there something to correct. It is true – come; you boast about it being true, and you do not want to come?” AUGUSTINUS, *Io. eu. tr. 6,17*, WSA I/12, 136; CCL 36, 62: “Noli de baptismate gloriari, quia dico, ipsum est; ecce dico ipsum est; tota catholica dicit, ipsum est; aduertit columba, et agnoscit, et gemit, quia ipsum foris habes; uidet ibi quod agnoscat, uidet et quod corrigat. Ipsum est, ueni: gloriaris quia ipsum est, et non uis uenire.”

27 AUGUSTINUS, *Io. eu. tr. 5,9.*

28 See also AUGUSTINUS, *Contra litteras Petilianu* [c. litt. Pet.] 1,7; CSEL 52, 7: “Quapropter siue a fidelu siue a perfido dispensatore sacramentum baptismi quisque percipiat, spes ei omnis in Christo sit, ne sit maledictus qui spem suam point in homine [Ier 17,5]. Alioquin si talis quisque in gratia spirituali renascitur, qualis est ille a quo baptizatur, et, cum manifestus est qui baptizat homo bonus, ipse dat fidem, ipse origo et radix caputque nascentis est, cum autem latet perfidus baptizator, tunc quisque a Christo percipit fidem, tunc a Christo ducit originem, tunc in Christo radicatur, tunc Christo capite gloriatur.”

29 See MAC GAW, C. G., *Le Problème du Baptême dans le Schisme Donatiste*, Ausoni, Paris 2008), pp. 199-253.

30 AUGUSTINUS, *Io. eu. tr. 6,17*, WSA I/12, 136; CCL 36, 62: “Habeto humilitatem, caritatem, pacem; habeto bonum quod nondum habes, ut prospicit tibi bonum quod habes.”

31 For a theological-typological interpretation of Noah's ark in the light of its nexus with the Church, see DANIÉLOU, J., *The Bible and the Liturgy*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 1956, pp. 70-85.

first establishes his stance in these words: “The ark, you see, is the Church...”<sup>32</sup> For Augustine, just as Noah sent out the dove from the ark, the ark, that is, the Church, also sends those who are in it on a mission to bring back the Donatists into unity<sup>33</sup>. More so, Augustine speaks about what the olive branch brought by the dove into the ark designates. He shouts out:

“Go out now, Donatus, and shout, “I am a fluent speaker”; go out now and shout, “I am a learned man.” How fluent? How learned? You have never spoken, have you, with the tongues of angels? And yet even if you did speak with the tongues of angels without having charity, all I would hear would be booming bronze and clanging cymbals. I am looking for something solid, I would like to find some fruit among the leaves. Let there not be just words; let them have an olive or two, let them come back to the ark.”<sup>34</sup>

Augustine sounds sarcastic here. He calls Donatus by name and speaks sarcastically about the eloquence and knowledge Donatus claims to have; all these are defective if they are devoid of charity, he says. He speaks allegorically of the Church as the ark of Noah, and its members as the timbers which make up the ark. No matter how much Donatus boasts of or claims to have, Augustine challenges him to show charity, without which nothing is of value. The bishop wants the Donatists to go beyond the rhetoric of using mere words to carrying out concrete works of peace and charity, which demonstrate what they claim to have. Augustine portrays the Donatists as lost children of the Church and urges them to return to the ark where they will experience a profound sense of belongingness<sup>35</sup>. Augustine says, “It is precisely

<sup>32</sup> AUGUSTINUS, *Io. eu. tr.* 6,19, *WSA I/12*, 138; CCL 36, 63: “Arca enim ecclesia est...”

<sup>33</sup> AUGUSTINUS, *Io. eu. tr.* 6,19, *WSA I/12*, 139; CCL 36, 64: “Et misit illam Noe iterum, sicut uos mittit arca, ut loquamini illis.”

<sup>34</sup> AUGUSTINUS, *Io. eu. tr.* 6,20, *WSA I/12*, 140; CCL 36, 64: “I nunc, Donate, et clama: disertus sum; I nunc, et clama: doctus sum. Quantum disertus? Quantum doctus? Numquid linguis angelorum locutus es? Et tamen si linguis angelorum loquereris, caritatem non habens, audirem aera sonantia et cymbal tinnientia. Soliditatem aliquam quaero, fructum in foliis inueniam: non sint sola uerba, habeant oliuam, redeant ad arcum.”

<sup>35</sup> See EGUARTE BENDÍMEZ, E., «*Elogium Pacis*: la exegesis agustiniana del salmo 21,28-29 en el context donatista», in *Agustín de Hipona como Doctor Pacis*, 175-199, esp. 182.

because you are bad that we are looking for you; I mean, if you were not bad, we would have found you, we would not be looking for you. Anyone who is good has already been found; anyone who is bad is still being looked for. That is why we are looking for you. Come back to the ark”<sup>36</sup>. Again, we see how Augustine comes back to his usual demonization of the Donatists here. He presents them as both being lost and bad, hence the need for seeking them out<sup>37</sup>. What Augustine implies here is that, anything or anyone that is lost is bad and anyone or anything that is found is good on the other hand.

Augustine’s position is somewhat flawed here and needs to be critically rethought. Much as one is not unaware of how emotionally charged Augustine was in the Donatist dispute, certain views of his need to be re-analyzed. Thus, it does not necessarily follow that whatever is lost is bad, because there are in fact, some who, in spite of their being lost are good and vice versa. No doubt, there are some who are good but still belong to the camp of the Donatists just as there are others who in spite of being in the Catholic fold could be bad as well. The point is – just as goodness is not an exclusive reserve of any of the parties so also is badness not restricted to a specific group.

Interestingly, Augustine also speaks about the image of the ark in his *De baptismo* (circa 400/401) and also in his *De ciuitate Dei* (410-426). He states that the unity of the Church, which is signified by the ark, is established through baptismal grace<sup>38</sup>. Similarly, in *De ciuitate Dei*, he offers an eschatological interpretation of both the visible and the invisible Church, represented by Noah’s ark. The bishop of Hippo writes: “For the nations have already filled the Church in the same way that the animals filled the ark; and, in just the same way, the clean and the unclean alike are contained within the framework of its unity until it

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36 AUGUSTINUS, *Io. eu. tr.* 6,22, *WSA* I/12, 140-141; CCL 36, 65: “Ideo uos quaerimus, quia mali estis; nam si mali non essetis, inuenissemus uos, non uos quaereremus. Qui bonus est, iam inuentus est; qui malus est, adhuc quaeritur. Ideo uos quaerimus; redite ad arcam.”

37 This is a recurring theme in Augustine’s anti- Donatist writings. For more on Augustine’s unity project in the North African Church, see *c. litt. Pet.* 3,4; *Cresc.* 3,35-37; *c. ep. Parm.* 2,22,42; *ep.* 87,3-4; *en. Ps.* 54,9.

38 See AUGUSTINUS, *bapt.* 5,28,39.

reaches its certain end.”<sup>39</sup> The pilgrim Church, for Augustine, is one body, made up of both the good and the wicked, journeying towards its eschatological goal.<sup>40</sup> Again, Augustine continues to underlie the significance of the ark as the image of the Church in these words: “[...] all the species were included in the ark not so much for the sake of replenishing the animals as for the sake of prefiguring the various nations with reference to the sacrament of the Church.”<sup>41</sup> Clearly, we see how Augustine re-emphasizes the spiritual significance of the ark as a template for fostering ecclesial unity. This, according to James Lee, entails that any exclusionary tendencies must be avoided, for to exclude others from the Church creates the possibility of abandoning Christ.<sup>42</sup>

## CHRIST'S TUNIC

The seamless tunic of Christ holds a special place in Augustine's plea for the unity of the Church. While noting Edmund Hill's observation about the historical-ecclesiological significance of the tunic of Christ,<sup>43</sup> Joseph Grabau argues that, besides being a material evidence at the Passion scene, Christ's seamless tunic, serves as “a metaphorical, metony-

39 AUGUSTINUS, *De ciuitate Dei* [ciu.] 15,27, RAMSEY, B. (ed), *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, trans, William Babcock, New City Press, New York 2013), p. 183; CCL 48, 497: “Iam enim gentes ita ecclesiam repleuerunt, mundique et inmundi, donec certum ueniat ad finem, ita eius unitatis quadam compagine continentur, ut ex hoc uno manifestissimo etiam de ceteris [...]”

40 BERROUARD, M.-F., «L'église d'ici-bas est mêlée de justes et de pécheurs», in *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus CXXIV*, Oeuvres de Saint Augustin 71, Bibliothèque Augustinienne, (Paris 1969, pp. 876-877; STRAW, C., «Augustine as Pastoral Theologian: The Exegesis of the Parables of the Field and Threshing Floor», *Augustinian Studies* 14 (1983) 121-152; OOORT, J. van, *Jerusalem and Babylon: A Study into Augustine's City of God and the Sources of His Doctrine of the Two Cities*, Brill, New York 1991, pp. 118-144.

41 AUGUSTINUS, *ciu.* 16,7, *WSA* I/7, 195; CCL 48, 508: “Multo clarius appetet non tam reparandorum animalium causa quam figurandarum uariarum gentium propter ecclesiae sacramentum in arca fuisse omnia genera, si in insulis, quo transire non possent, multa animalia terra produxit.”

42 LEE, J. K., *Augustine and the Mystery of the Church* Fortress Press, Minneapolis 2017, p. 47.

43 See HILL, E. (trans.), *Sermons (230-272B): On the Liturgical Seasons. The Works of Saint Augustine* III/7, New City Press, New York 1993, p. 245, footnote no. 18.

mical emblem of the spiritual people of God.”<sup>44</sup> Just as he deploys the image of the dove as a hermeneutical key to substantiate the Trinitarian nature of the Church, Augustine equally uses the image of Christ’s tunic to argue for ecclesial unity. He lays abundant emphasis on the indivisibility of Christ’s tunic, and sees it as a representation of the Church. Hugh A.G. Houghton strongly supports this when he notes: “Augustine interpreted the tunic without seam as an image of the Church, and often used this verse [that is, John 19:23] against the Donatists who threatened Christian unity.”<sup>45</sup> Evidently, the bishop of Hippo’s theological interpretation of Christ’s tunic feeds upon his *totus Christus* hermeneutic-polemical framework, where he unequivocally reaffirms the unity and undividedness of Christ.<sup>46</sup> Speaking about the significance of the Passion of Christ, Augustine places special emphasis on the seamless tunic of Christ, which for him principally represents unity. He avidly remarks:

“*There was a tunic there*; let us see what kind of tunic; woven from the top. What can the tunic woven from the top stand for but charity? What can the tunic woven from the top stand for but unity? Pay attention to this tunic, which not even Christ’s persecutors divided.”<sup>47</sup>

44 GRABAU, J., «Defining ‘Ecclesia’: Augustine of Hippo’s Anti-Donatist Use of John 19:23-24 (On Christ’s ‘Seamless Tunic’), *Humanitas Hodie* 1 (2018) 19-36, esp. 22.

45 HOUGHTON, H. A. G., *Augustine’s Text of John: Patristic Citations and Latin Gospel Manuscripts*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2008, p. 345.

46 For more on Augustine’s ecclesiological reflection and the *totus Christus* discourse, see the following, FRANZ, E., *Totus Christus: Studien über Christus und die Kirche bei Augustin*, Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, Bonn 1956); RÉVEILLAUD, M., «Le Christ-Homme, tête de l’Église. Étude d’écclésiologie selon les *Enarrationes in Psalmos d’Augustin*», *Recherches Augustiniennes et Patristiques* 5 (1968) 67-94; BRUNING, B., «Die Einheit des *Totus Christus* bei Augustinus», in MAYER, C. P., and ECKERMAN, W., *Scientia Augustiniana: Studien über Augustinus, den Augustinismus und den Augustinorden*, Augustinus-Verlag, Wurzburg 1975), pp. 43-75; BAVEL, T. J. van, «The ‘Christus Totus’ Idea: A Forgotten Aspect of Augustine’s Spirituality», in FINAN, T., and TWOMEY, V., *Studies in Patristic Christology: Proceedings of the Third Maynooth Patristic Conference*, Four Courts Press, Portland 1998, pp. 84-94; BAKER, K., «Augustine’s Doctrine of the *Totus Christus*: Reflecting on the Church as Sacrament of Unity», *Horizons* 37 (2013) 7-24; WOLYNIEC, W., «Christus Totus – Different Ways of Interpretation», *Roczniki Teologiczne* 2 (2016) 51-64; CAMERON, M., «The Emergence of *Totus Christus* as Hermeneutical Center in Augustine’s *Enarrationes in Psalmos*», in DALEY, B. (ed.), *The Harp of Prophecy: Early Christian Interpretation of the Psalms*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014) 205-226.

47 AUGUSTINUS, *Io. eu. tr.* 13,13, *WSA* I/12, 254; CCL 36, 138: “*Erat ibi tunica [Io 19, 23]; uideamus qualis: desuper texta [Io 19, 23]. Desuper texta tunica quid sig-*

This tunic which even the soldiers, could not divide, for him, stands for both charity and unity<sup>48</sup>. These were attributes which Augustine says, the Donatists evidently lack because they forcibly rent the tunic apart with their separatist movements and acts. Augustine is being paradoxical here – those who nailed Christ to the Cross unsuspectingly recognized and preserved the unity of Christ by keeping his tunic undividedly intact, but those who on the other hand claim to belong to Christ – the Donatists, have denied the unity of Christ by shredding his tunic. Augustine continues, “That tunic, though, which *is woven from the top*, cannot be put in for division. Rejoice that you belong to it, you that are sprigs of the Catholic Church.”<sup>49</sup>

In Augustine's view, those who do not depart from ecclesial unity will continue to rejoice and have peace because they are woven from above<sup>50</sup>. Throughout his episcopal and pastoral ministry in Hippo, and even beyond, Augustine always seizes the opportunity to remind both his Donatist and Catholic hearers about the importance of Christ's seamless tunic as an invitation to love, peace and unity.<sup>51</sup> The seamless tunic shows both the strength of unity and of belonging to a community of love, a Christ-centered community, formed by the sacrificial blood of Christ.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Cyprian of Carthage, Augustine's forebear also speaks about the sacrament of unity and concord, signified in the indivisible tunic of Christ the Lord.<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, Fortunatianus

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nificat nisi caritatem? Desuper texta tunica quid significat nisi unitatem? Hanc tunicam adtende, quam nec persecutores Christi diuiserunt.”

48 CERIOTTI, G., *L'unità in Cristo secondo Sant'Agostino*, Città Nuova, Rome 2009, pp. 29-34.

49 AUGUSTINUS, s. 159B,18, *WSA* III/11, 163; Dolbeau *Vingt-six*, 296: “Tunica uero illa quae desuper texta [*Io 19, 23*] est, in diuisionem non potest uenire. Gaudete uos ad eam pertinere, qui germina catholicae estis.”

50 See AUGUSTINUS, s. *Dolbeau* 21,18.

51 CIPRIANI, N., *Molti e uno solo in Cristo: La spiritualità di Agostino*, Città Nuova, Rome 2009, pp. 71-94.

52 CAMPELO, M. M<sup>a</sup>, «Diálogo y comunidad según san Agustín», *Revista Agustiniana* 38 (1997) 157-184.

53 See CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE, *De catholicae ecclesiae unitate* 7, CCSL 3,254: “Hoc unitatis sacramentum, hoc uinculum concordiae inseparabiliiter cohaerentis ostenditur quando in euangelio tunica Domini Iesu Christi non diuiditur omnino nec

of Aquileia's commentary on John 19:23-24 shows a striking parallel with Augustine's polemical analysis of Christ's tunic. Fortunatianus stunningly comments:

"The heretics and schismatics who gather outside the Church appear to strive for two tunics, although there is only one tunic which is knit together by the faith of the unity of the one Church and sewn from above (meaning heavenly), which the soldiers examined and refused to tear. This is because whoever is serving in the heavenly army does not make a division in the people, but is content with one tunic, meaning the love of the one Church. But the one, who wishes to have another tunic, meaning that they think that gatherings should take place outside the Church, will be condemned to everlasting punishment as a deserter and one guilty of such a crime."<sup>54</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis has clearly shown Augustine's absolute dependence on the authority of the Bible in both chiding the Donatists for their breakaway, and in making a strong plea for the unity of the North African Church. The bishop of Hippo's polemical use of imageries is as stunning as it is revealing. As we have demonstrated, the images of Noah's ark, the dove and Christ's tunic serve not merely as markers of a spiritual reality, but as potent means of brokering and sustaining peace and unity among the members of the Church. We rightly learn that, for Augustine, much as it is the case even today, ecclesiology, pneumatology and Christology are intrinsically bound up together. In the image of Noah's ark, we see, how Augustine continues to jettison the Donatists' *ecclesia sine macula aut ruga* principle by reaffirming his *corpus permixtum* dictum. In the image of the dove, we not only learn about the communion and union of the Godhead, but also about the privilege of being adopted as God's children through the grace of bap-

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scinditur sed, sortientibus de ueste Christi, quis Christum potius indueret, integra uestis accipitur et incorrupta adque indiuisa tunica possidetur."

<sup>54</sup> HOUGHTON, H. A. G. (trans.), *Fortunatianus of Aquileia, Commentary on the Gospels*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2017, p. 49.

tism and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In the image of Christ's tunic, we obviously see how the Church owes its origin, existence and sustenance in Christ her head.

Augustine's *In Iohannis euangelium Tractatus* which reveal, to a large extent, the practical application of his rhetorical and classical training to Christian life and spirituality, was not merely meant to be an exercise in biblical-theological exegesis. It was meant to teach and instruct his fellow North African Christians about their faith, and to also correct the Donatists. His concern for upholding Christian unity and orthodoxy made him couch his *In Iohannis euangelium Tractatus* as an instructional, conversational and correctional device. That Augustine of Hippo remains one of the most influential challengers of the Donatist course is attested to not only by his huge anti-Donatist writings but also in the manner he uses the Bible as a rhetorical-literary weapon to win over his opponents and to emphasize the unity of the Church.

Closely assessed, these imageries can serve as a template for a better understanding of the Donatist controversy not just in terms of the role that Augustine played, but also in the manner in which antique North African Christians used the Bible in ecclesial and doctrinal matters. Perhaps, another interesting area for further research could be – how these images can be applied to foster Christian unity and ecumenical dialogue in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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