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CHRISTIANITY AND LOCAL CULTURE IN LATE ROMAN AFRICA

By PETER BROWN *

I

The task of this paper is, in part, an invidious one : for I shall have to begin by looking a gift-horse in the mouth. I shall have to question a group of opinions that link the rise of Christianity in Africa with a resurgence of the local culture of the area. This resurgence, it is said, explains not only the rapid collapse of Roman rule at the time of the Vandal invasion of 429, but the disappearance of Roman civilisation and of Christianity itself in Africa in the early Middle Ages.¹

Discussion of this suggestion, however, tends to be jeopardised from the start because claims for the honour of being the resurgent local culture of Late Roman Africa have been enthusiastically advanced on behalf of *two* distinct and mutually-exclusive local cultures, associated with the *two* native languages—with Punic, on the one hand, and with ‘Libyan’ (which is often described by a convenient if perilous anachronism as ‘Berber’), on the other. What is more, these claims have been advanced by two equally distinct groups of scholars, handling different evidence. The evidence for the survival of Punic—or, so as not to prejudge the issue, of a *lingua Punica*—is literary : Augustine of Hippo² and Procopius³ are the sole authorities for the period. The evidence for ‘Berber,’ by contrast, is largely confined to the interpretation of Libyan inscriptions⁴ and of traces of unchanging habits of worship and craftsmanship allegedly betrayed in the remains of the Christian Churches of Central Numidia.⁵

The rival claimants, therefore, overlap neither in area nor in subject matter. If Punic survived in Late Roman Africa, it survived in a limited area, in the traditional areas of Carthaginian settlement, in certain Punicised towns of Numidia, and, perhaps, in the countryside, as an ill-defined fringe of ‘Punicised’ Libyan *patois*, for which some evidence had been adduced in Tripolitania.⁶ The area of known Libyan inscriptions does not coincide with this ; still less do the modern islands of Berber speech. These are associated with the High Plains of Numidia and the mountainous hinterland of the coast. So little do these areas overlap, indeed, that Dr. Frend and Dr. Courtois⁷ have argued that the *lingua Punica* to which Augustine refers (when he writes in Thagaste and Hippo) is not even ‘Punic’, but the entirely non-Semitic Libyan dialect of Numidia : an educated Latin, Augustine merely used ‘Punic’ as the undifferentiated, Latin term for *any* native language in Africa, much as the modern European tends to lump together Berber- and Arabic-speakers as ‘Arabs’.

But this difference between ‘Berber’ and ‘Punic’ is not a difference only in location. Different areas of experience are involved, documented by different kinds of evidence. Those who invoke ‘Punic’ are, often, historians of religious ideas. Their argument is almost exclusively linguistic : it turns on the survival of a language and of ideas associated with a language. Such ideas are plainly difficult to delimit : they are not necessarily

* This paper was delivered at a Graduate Class on the Local Cultures of the Roman Empire, organised by Dr. Fergus Millar at The Queen’s College, Oxford. I am grateful to Dr. Millar both for his erudition and good sense, and, particularly, for the enterprise that gathered contributors from an unprecedented range of interests upon a sadly neglected theme of great importance for the Roman historian.

¹ For a discussion of the literature on this problem, see P. R. L. Brown, ‘Religious Dissent in the Later Roman Empire : the case of North Africa’, *History* XLVI, 1961, 83–101. More recently, see S. Mazzarino, ‘La democratizzazione della cultura nel Basso Impero’, *Rapports du XIe congrès international des sciences historiques* II, 1960, 35–54 ; R. MacMullen, ‘Provincial Languages in the Roman Empire’, *American Journal of Philology* LXXXVII, 1966, 1–14 (esp. 12–13, on Africa) and *Enemies of the Roman Order* (1967), 202–241.

² Collected and commented by W. M. Green, ‘Augustine’s Use of Punic’, *Semitic and Oriental*

Studies presented to W. Popper (Univ. of California Publications in Semitic Philology, XI), 1951, 179–90 : see inf. pp. 87–9.

³ Procopius, *de bello Vandalico* II, 10.

⁴ See esp. J. B. Chabot, *Recueil des inscriptions libyques* (1940–1) ; Galand-Février-Vajda, *Inscriptions antiques du Maroc* (1966) : Galand, ‘Inscriptions libyques’, nos. 1–27 ; J. F. Février, ‘Que savons-nous du libyque ?’, *Revue asiatique* C (1956), 263.

⁵ See esp. W. H. C. Frend, ‘The Revival of Berber Art’, *Antiquity* XVI (1942), 342–52.

⁶ G. Levi della Vida, ‘Sulle iscrizioni “Latino-libiche” della Tripolitania’, *Oriens Antiquus* II (1960), 65–94, and ‘Frustuli neo-punici tripolitani’, *Acc. Lincei, Rend. sci. mor. stor. e filol.* ser. 8, XVIII (1966), 463–82.

⁷ W. H. C. Frend, ‘A Note on the Berber background in the life of Augustine’, *Journal of Theological Studies* XLIII, 1942, 188–91 ; Chr. Courtois, ‘S. Augustin et la survivance de la Punique’, *Revue africaine* 94, 1950, 239–82.

peculiar to a region or a class; they are, rather, vehicles for the spread and assimilation of religious propaganda. S. Gsell,⁸ followed by E. F. Gautier,⁹ for instance, fastened on references to Punic as evidence for the survival of the ancient Carthaginian culture of Africa, and, so, as evidence of the vitality of the specifically Semitic bedrock of North African life. With the language, so they argued, went a body of distinctive religious ideas that remained radically different from those of classical Roman paganism, and akin to those of the Jews and the Arabs. Recently, Marcel Simon has ascribed the remarkable success of Judaism in North Africa, and the emergence of the more rigidly Judaistic traits in African popular Christianity, to the survival of Punic as a spoken language, closely related to Hebrew, and its adoption, as a language of culture, by the Berbers of the hinterland.¹⁰ The success of Christianity, in the third century, has been explained by a similar kinship of ideas.¹¹ And, throughout, it has been assumed that Islam trumped Jews and Christians alike, in bringing a Semitic religion and a Semitic language to a Punic population.

Those who look to 'Berber' claim to be more firmly rooted: they have been archaeologists and sociologists. The greatest single impetus to Dr. Frend's *Donatist Church* was the discovery of an extraordinary number of Christian churches in Southern Numidia, marked by distinctive features of native craftsmanship and, apparently, maintaining local traditions of cult-practice that stretch from prehistoric times to the sub-Islamic pieties of the modern Berbers. From the churches recorded by Berthier in his *Vestiges du christianisme antique* of 1943, Dr. Frend moved to the society of S. Numidia as a whole, in the Late Roman period, and the role of religion in this society.¹² His *Donatist Church* is suffused with the same enthusiasm for what is local, for what is continuous, for what is associated with an immemorial ethnic group such as the Berbers, that has inspired many studies of the village-life and the religious eccentricities of the present-day Maghreb. Faced by Dr. Frend's perspective, indeed, the ancient historian and the theologian cannot burk the issue by limiting themselves to sifting the evidence he presents for his interpretation of the rise of Donatism in Numidia: if they wish to challenge him, they must be prepared to take part in a debate on the factors operative in the history of North Africa, in which the pre-historian, the historian of Medieval Islam and the sociologist of modern Algeria have each got something important to contribute.¹³

Where the protagonists of both 'Punic' and 'Berber' seem to agree, however, is in their interpretation of the manner in which a resurgence of local cultures impinged on the social and political life of Roman Africa in the fourth and fifth centuries, and in the crucial rôle of Christianity as providing the vehicle for this resurgence.

Very briefly, the expansion of Christianity in Africa in the third century, and the permanent division of the Christian Church between Catholics and Donatists, after 311, coincided with the weakening of the hold of the Romanized classes of the towns on the under-Romanized countryside. Donatism allied itself with the resurgent culture of the country-districts of Numidia, and of the lower classes of the towns: Catholicism, with the

⁸ S. Gsell, *Histoire ancienne de l'Afrique du Nord* iv, 1918 (1929³), 179 and 496-8; vi, 1928 (1929²), 108-13, vii, 1928 (1930²), 107-8.

⁹ E. F. Gautier, *Le Passé de l'Afrique du Nord. Les siècles obscurs*, 1942, 134-57.

¹⁰ Marcel Simon, 'Le judaïsme berbère dans l'Afrique ancienne,' *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* xxvi, 1946 (= *Recherches d'histoire Judéo-Chrétienne*, 1962, 30-87) and 'Punique ou berbère?', *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves* xiii, 1955 (= *Recherches* . . . 88-100).

¹¹ W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, 1964, esp. p. 332. It is said that this is illustrated, by the choice of 'theophoric' names: see I. Kajanto, *Onomastic Studies in the Early Christian Inscriptions of Rome and Carthage*, (Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae II, 1), 1963, pp. 102 and 115; but not all bearers of such names need be Christians: e.g. J. Moreau, *Das Trierer Kormarkmosaik* (Köln, 1960), plate 1; Farbtafel II, p. 21; also pp. 10-15, where the mosaic shows a Quodvultdeus at a sacrifice in a mystery-cult.

¹² A. Berthier, *Les Vestiges du Christianisme antique dans la Numidie centrale*, 1943, esp. 220-4, and Frend, *Donatist Church*, esp. 52-9.

¹³ Frend, *Donatist Church*, p. xvi: 'Is Donatism part of a continuous native tradition as fundamentally unchanged as the Berbers in the outline of their daily life?' Compare E. Dermenghen, *Le culte des saints dans l'Islam maghrébin*, 1954 and G. Drague, *Esquisse d'histoire religieuse du Maroc*, 1951; but, for a shrewd criticism of this tendency to concentrate on the local, continuous peculiarities of religious life in the Maghreb, to the exclusion of its wider context, namely, the interaction of this life with the orthodox culture of the towns, see J. Berque, 'Cent vingt-cinq ans de sociologie maghrébine,' *Annales* xi, 1956, 296-324. G.-C. Picard, 'Pertinax et les prophètes de Caelestis,' *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 155, 1959, 46-62, at p. 57, n. 1, is highly pertinent: 'D'autre part, il ne nous paraît pas possible de considérer la Numidie comme une sorte de réserve, où la population autochtone se serait maintenue sans subir d'altération depuis l'époque préhistorique jusqu'à nos jours.'

Romanized upper-classes—the great landowners and the civic notables. As the support of the Emperors identified Catholicism with the interests of the central government in Africa, so opposition to the Catholic Church became the focus of social and political grievances. The notorious Circumcellions, the wandering monks of Donatism, were implicated in peasants' revolts that shook the Roman agrarian system of Numidia in the 340's, and threatened to do so throughout the century. The Donatist hierarchy, also, supported the usurpations of Moorish chieftains, such as Firmus and Gildo. Nor was Africa alone in this. With the exception of Gaul, it is said, the resurgence of local cultures in the Late Roman Empire is associated with the rise of Christianity: in Egypt and Syria, possibly (say some) in Africa, it produced a vernacular literature.¹⁴ In all these provinces, the rise of great local churches, often divided from the established church of the Roman Empire by trifling theological differences, provided an expression for an active or passive rejection of Greco-Roman culture, and so paved the way for an alternative to the Roman Empire in the form of Islam.

So compact a summary inevitably fails to do justice to the seminal quality of a book such as Dr. Frend's *Donatist Church*. But it is in this form that Dr. Frend's suggestions have often been repeated by many scholars—and repeated with a certitude and comprehensiveness which noticeably increases with the distance between the retailer and his contact with the evidence for the social and religious life of Late Roman Africa. Even the most learned of us have learnt to tread the straight and narrow path between right and wrong on this issue: when the author of a most valuable article says that 'Cause-and-effect connexions, beyond absolute demonstration, but fairly clear, can be drawn between Coptic and Gnosticism, Punic and Donatism',¹⁵ I feel that this is an academically impeccable way of saying, in the words of the poet:

'O let us never, never doubt,
What nobody is sure about.'

Leaving aside the total lack of epigraphic evidence for the survival of either Punic or Libyan as significant languages in the fourth century,¹⁶ the literary evidence for the rôle of local feeling, still more of social and political motivation, in the Donatist controversy is exceedingly fragile. It has not survived the sober gaze of Professor Jones, in the *Journal of Theological Studies* of 1959;¹⁷ I have often had occasion to dissent;¹⁸ and Dr. Emil Tengström has now meticulously dismantled many vital links in the chain of evidence, assembled by Dr. Frend and others, for the social and political aims of Donatism.¹⁹

The questions posed by Dr. Frend and by other advocates of the role of a resurgence of local culture in the religious life of Late Roman Africa are more important than the highly debatable answers they have given to such questions. It is myopic merely to answer these answers. For the questions raised have wider implications. What is at stake is not only the relation between Christianity and local cultures in North Africa, but the relation between Christianity and classical civilisation as a whole in the Latin West in the Late Roman and early medieval periods.

II

Let us look again at the 21 passages in which Augustine speaks of the *lingua Punica*. Two passages refer to words and constructions that are plainly Semitic;²⁰ but one passage

¹⁴ R. MacMullen, 'Provincial Languages . . .', (above, n. 1) 14.

¹⁵ R. MacMullen, 'A note on *Sermo humilis*', *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. xvii, 1966, 108–12, at p. 109.

¹⁶ Picard, 'Pertinax . . .', 57–8, displays equal scepticism on both Punic and Libyan; MacMullen, 'Provincial Languages . . .', 12–13, dismisses Libyan and retains Punic with some hesitation. As a non-specialist in a highly-specialized domain, dependent on archaeological discoveries, I would only accept these negative results *salva diligentiore quaestione*.

¹⁷ A. H. M. Jones, 'Were the ancient heresies national or social movements in disguise?', *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. x, 2, 1959, 280–295

(published separately 'Were ancient heresies disguised social movements?', *Facet Books, Historical Series* 1, 1966).

¹⁸ Brown, 'Religious Dissent . . .' (above, n. 1) esp. 91–5; see also Brown, 'Religious Coercion in the Later Roman Empire: the case of North Africa,' *History* XLVIII, 1963, 283–305, at 293–7, and *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 1967, at 217 and 227–30.

¹⁹ E. Tengström, *Donatisten und Katholiken: soziale, wirtschaftliche und politische Aspekte einer nordafrikanischen Kirchenspaltung* (Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia XVIII, 1964); see Brown, *Journal of Roman Studies* LV, 1965, 281–3.

²⁰ *Ep. ad Rom. incoh. expos.* 13; *Enarr. in Ps.* 128, 8.

makes it clear that Augustine, by himself, was not able to judge the precise meaning of a word.²¹ Five passages refer to the *lingua Punica* in the dealings of the bishop with the countryside around Hippo.²² It is a language which a bishop, Catholic and Donatist alike, would only make contact with through an interpreter. This *lingua Punica* is featureless: the passages do not reveal a specific language. What they do reveal, however, is a linguistic situation: in and around Hippo, we are dealing with a largely bi-lingual society, where a farmer, for instance, will interpret into Latin a conversation he has just had in Punic.²³ The remaining references occur largely in Augustine's sermons: they are comments on the meaning of untranslated Hebrew words in the Bible, such as mammon, Edom, Messias, through an appeal to Punic.²⁴ These comments are too easily dismissed as merely academic. Yet, I would suggest that they tell us something which the other passages do not: for they cast light on the motives of Augustine in referring to Punic, on what he wished to achieve, and, so, on his views on the position of the *lingua Punica* in the culture of the African church.

First, we must remember Augustine's intellectual equipment. His own schooling in Latin had done little to help him master any language, even his own, from the grammar, the syntax, the accidence, in the manner of modern linguistics. What he had always learnt was to fasten on words: 'One read Vergil, not as one might look out from a vantage point over a vast landscape, but as one might admire a necklace of pearls, passing them through one's fingers, examining one after the other.'²⁵ We are well on the way to the *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville: understanding a language or a culture means grasping the meaning of isolated words. Punic, therefore, usually comes to Augustine like the signposts of a foreign country: single *nomina Punica*, which he invariably handles in isolation.²⁶

To this educational trait, we must add Augustine's distinctive mystique of language. He believed that the common usage of words often reflected a providential design to establish more firmly in men's minds certain profound truths. Frequently applied to Latin in his theological treatises, this habit of the *grammaticus* has led him to be acclaimed as a forerunner of linguistic philosophy.²⁷ Applied to Punic, it takes on a more romantic turn.

In one passage, concerning the spoken language of the countryfolk of Hippo, we come across a clue to the attitude of Augustine and its possible roots. When he was still a priest in Hippo, his bishop, Valerius, had overheard countryfolk using the word 'salus' in conversation: *salus*, he was told, meant 'Three' (compare the Hebrew, *shalosh*). The information intrigued Valerius and Augustine: for every time a Punic speaker said *salus* in Latin, meaning 'Salvation', he was also saying *salus*—Three—in Punic; and so he was being reminded, by the mysterious providence of language, of the relation between Salvation and the Trinity.²⁸

He was also told that these countryfolk called themselves *Chenani*. This, he thought, was a mis-pronunciation for *Cananaei*: they had come, in the distant past, from the Land of Canaan. Marcel Simon has drawn attention to the importance of this idea. The myth that the inhabitants of North Africa were either relatives of the Hebrew people, or near-neighbours, was an old Jewish tradition that appears in the *Book of Jubilees*. It had played a part in conciliating the Jewish communities of North Africa to the local inhabitants;²⁹ one suspects that in this passage, and in his many appeals to the Punic equivalent of Hebrew words, Augustine has stepped into the shoes of the *rabbis*³⁰—he has deliberately placed the population of his diocese in the penumbra of the Chosen People.

It is this perspective that determines Augustine's attitude to the *lingua Punica*. It is a learned perspective: like the Latin origin of the Rumanian nation, even when believed, it casts its pattern upon ethnic realities from a dizzy height. A similar 'imaginative

²¹ *de magistro* XIII, 44.

²² *Ep. ad Rom. incoh. expos.* 13; *Ep.* 66, 2; *Ep.* 108, 14; *Ep.* 209, 3; *de haeres.* 87.

²³ *Ep. ad Rom. incoh. expos.* 13.

²⁴ *Loc. in Hept. I*, ad Gen. I, 24; *Qu. in Hept. VII*, 16; *Tract. in Ioh.* xv, 27; *Enarr. in Ps.* 128, 8 and 136, 18; *Serm.* 113, II, 2; *de serm. Dom. in monte II*, xiv, 47; C. Lambot, 'Nouveaux sermons inédits de S. Augustin,' *Revue bénédictine* XLIX, 1937, p. 265, lines 248–9; *C. litt. Petil.* II, civ, 229.

²⁵ H. I. Marrou, *S. Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*, 1938, p. 25.

²⁶ e.g. *Ep.* 17, 2.

²⁷ Marrou, *op. cit.* (n. 25), p. 16 and 'Retractatio', 1949, p. 676.

²⁸ *Ep. ad Rom. incoh. expos.* 13.

²⁹ Simon, 'Le judaïsme berbère' (= *Recherches...* pp. 39–42) and A. Chouraqui, *Les Juifs de l'Afrique du Nord*, 1952, pp. 14–19.

³⁰ Jerome, *Liber hebraicarum quaestionum in Genesim*, ad Gen. xxxvi, 24 (P.L. 23, 993B–994A) refers to an appeal to Punic *apud Hebraeos*.

nationalism' led Donatists to claim Simon of Cyrene as a fellow-*Afer*,³¹ and American senators to invoke the Emperor Septimius Severus and Saint Augustine in favour of the Negro cause. As with many such 'imaginative nationalisms', it served a good purpose: as with the debate on whether Bulgarian or Serbian was most akin to the Macedonian dialect in the late nineteenth century, philology was a prelude to annexation. The *Chenani* of Hippo are Canaanites precisely because they reminded Augustine of the Canaanite woman of the Gospels: she had come to ask Christ for *Salus*—for health. Though not a member of the Chosen People, the Canaanite woman could claim to be a close relative; and, like the countryfolk of Hippo, the divine providence had prepared her to link the idea of Salvation—*salus*—with her word for Three. But there is no doubt, in this story, as to who would be the source of salvation among the Canaanites of Hippo—the Catholic bishop of the town; and no question whatsoever that, when they came to the point, they would ask for it in good Latin—for the *Salus* of Catholic baptism.³²

This anecdote shows clearly the direction in which Augustine wished the linguistic currents of his diocese to run, at a time when, as a priest and a star-preacher, he was more directly concerned than at any other period of his life with the problems of evangelisation and reform by the spoken word.³³ The *lingua Punica* has a privileged place in his mind: but only as a step towards full Latinity—in this incident, as in his sermons, 'Punic' hovers in the wings of a Latin culture.

For I would suggest that there was only one 'language of culture' in Late Roman Africa—that was Latin; that the particular form of Christianity in the Later Empire, Catholic and Donatist alike, demanded a 'language of culture'; and, so, that the rapid Christianisation of Numidia involved, not a resurgence of any regional culture, but the creation of a Latin—or sub-Latin—religious culture on an unprecedented scale.³⁴ The problems posed by the creation of a popular Latin culture are far more solidly documented in the literature of African Christianity than are the fleeting references to a *lingua Punica*.

First of all, we must envisage a missionary situation. The greatest weakness of any view that sees, in the division between Catholic and Donatist, the opening of a fissure between classes or races, is that it ignores the fluidity of the situation up to the age of Augustine. Numidia was not Christianized suddenly: most leading Donatists of the fourth century were converts direct from paganism.³⁵ At the end of the fourth century, Donatist and Catholic groups still faced each other on either side of a wide, neutral zone of pagans yet to be converted.³⁶ It is a situation which modern experience of Christian missions has shown to be more conducive to zeal than to mutual tolerance.

Now one of the distinctive features of Christianity in the ancient world as a whole, and in Africa in particular, is that it was a Religion of the Book. Like Judaism, the Christianity of the African clergy was a Law—a *lex*.³⁷ The bishop's authority stemmed from his preservation of his Law, and his professional activity consisted in expounding it.³⁸ This Law was, quite concretely, the *codex* of the Holy Scriptures. The fact that some Catholic bishops had handed on these *codices* to be burnt, during the Great Persecution of 304, branded their party, forever, as 'the *traditores*', the 'handers-over' of the Holy Books 'to alter one word of which must be accounted the greatest sacrilege'.³⁹ 'You come with edicts of Emperors', the Donatist primate of Carthage told the Catholics: 'we hold nothing in our hands but volumes of the Scriptures'.⁴⁰ The *panache* of this remark is deeply revealing. It was as a Religion of the Book that the Christians of Africa thought they had been persecuted; it was as a Religion of the Book that the Donatists thought they had

³¹ *Serm.* 46, 41.

³² 'Baptism' was spoken of by such *Punici Christiani* as *Salus*: *de pecc. mer. et rem.* 1, XXIV, 34.

³³ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 138–42; 206–7 and 235–6.

³⁴ The important distinction between a spoken *patois* and a 'language of culture', introduced by Simon, 'Punique ou berbère?' (*Recherches*... 95–6) in favour of Punic, seems to me to favour only Latin: see Picard, 'Pertinax . . .', 58, n. 2, on the meagre quality of Punic inscriptions.

³⁵ Bishop Marculus: *Passio Marculi* (P.L. 8,

760); while Vitellius Afer—Gennadius, *de script. eccles.* 4 (P.L. 58, 1063)—wrote 'against the pagans'.

³⁶ *de catech. rud.* xxv, 48. Simultaneous attacks on rural shrines by Catholics and Donatist Circumcellions: *Serm.* 62, 13.

³⁷ W. H. C. Frend, 'A Note on the Great Persecution in the West', *Studies in Church History* II, 1965, ed. C. J. Cuming, 146–8, and Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* 217.

³⁸ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* 259–63.

³⁹ *Acta Saturnini* 18 (P.L. 8, 701B).

⁴⁰ Augustine, *Ad Don. post Coll.* 1, 31.

been betrayed; and it was as a Religion of the Book that Christianity spread into the countryside of Africa.

For, outside the educated upper-classes, the struggle between Christianity and paganism was not just a conflict of two religions: it was a conflict of two different cultures, associated with two different types of religion. Paganism, in the Roman world, like the religion of any primitive society, was inextricably embedded in the local language: the Lycaonians, in the *Acts of the Apostles*, acclaimed Paul and Barnabas as gods, Λυκαονιστί.⁴¹ The earliest vernaculars in the Roman Empire are *pagan* vernaculars, and the revival of one language, in the third century, that of Phrygian, was a *pagan* revival.⁴² Even the most imposing paganism in the Late Antique world, the Zoroastrianism of Sassanian Persia, remained largely pre-literate. It was enshrined in murmured prayers, passed on by word of mouth. Only in the sixth and seventh centuries were the Zoroastrian holy books written down, to save the traditional faith from the inroads of two literate religions, Christianity and Islam.⁴³

To abandon paganism was to change one's culture: it was to forget the formulae and liturgies of one's ancient tongue, and to expose oneself to the uniformity of a written book. The situation was not very different from what can now be observed, for instance, in the paganism of New Guinea: 'To understand Tangu, to think the way they do, is to think in their language. The axioms and ideas contained within Tangu sorcery beliefs and activities are best expressed in the Tangu language, which itself expresses the way in which Tangu think about themselves and the world outside . . . by teaching pidgin English, and more recently English, the (Christian) mission hopes to draw Tangu out of the confines of their language' (K.O.L.Burridge, *Mambu: a Melanesian Millennium*, 1960, 70-71). Thus to participate fully in Late Roman Christianity, as a clergyman or a monk, inevitably involved suffering the fate which Irish legend ascribed to a convert of St. Patrick: 'He baptised him and handed him the A.B.C. . . .'⁴⁴

This Latin was more than a 'popular' Latin: it was a Latin that invited literacy—it had the simplicity and uniformity of an ideological language. It had emerged, in the towns of the third century, as amazingly homogeneous: far from betraying an 'African temperament', the Christian Latin of Carthage was uniform with that of Rome; that of an educated Christian, uniform with that of a simple deacon.⁴⁵ This 'clerical language, with its solemn dignity, cold-blooded anger and misuse of Biblical words to interpret and criticise contemporary affairs',⁴⁶ remains common to both sides of the Donatist controversy. In the vast correspondence of Augustine, it is possible to recognize at a glance the open-letters which he wrote to his Donatist opponents: they are all in the 'professional' Latin of the African church.⁴⁷

Behind Augustine's vast output in Hippo, we can sense the pressure of the need to extend this religious literacy as widely as possible. The recruitment of the clergy on both sides; the introduction of the monastic life by Augustine and his friends; the consequent growth of a piety based on the *Lectio Divina*—all these changes of the late fourth century placed more and more weight on the Latin language.⁴⁸ The Latin of the Scriptures might disgust the educated pagan: but many members of the Christian clergy first learnt to read

⁴¹ *Acts of the Apostles* 14, 11.

⁴² E.g. W. M. Ramsey, 'The Tekmoreian Guest-Friends', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* xxxii, 1912, 151-70; A. Heubeck, 'Bemerkungen zu den neuphyrgischen Fluchformeln', *Indogermanische Forschungen* LXIV, 1958, 13-25; MacMullen, 'Provincial Languages . . .', p. 13, n. 29; and O. Haas, *Die phrygischen Sprachdenkmäler*, 1966.

⁴³ J. Tavadian, 'Zur Pflege des iranischen Schrifttums', *Zeitschr. deutsch. morgenländ. Gesell.* 98, 1944, 337.

⁴⁴ This has been clearly seen and brilliantly expressed by H. I. Marrou, *Histoire de l'Éducation dans l'Antiquité*, 1955³, 418-21 (the citation appears on p. 439).

⁴⁵ Christine Mohrmann, 'Les origines de la latinité chrétienne à Rome', *Études sur le latin des chrétiens* III, 1965, 67-126.

⁴⁶ A. Harnack, *History of Dogma* (Dover Books, 1961), v, 25.

⁴⁷ Christine Mohrmann, 'S. Augustin écrivain', *Recherches augustiniennes* I, 1958, 43-66, at p. 65.

⁴⁸ See, in general, Marrou, *Histoire de l'Éducation* . . ., 439-40 and the perceptive comments of P. Riché, *Éducation et Culture dans l'Occident barbare*, 1962, 133-4. For Hippo, I would agree with Courtois, 'S. Augustin . . .' (o.c., n. 7) 282, n. 61, and *Les Vandales et l'Afrique*, 1955, 127, n. 8, that the text of *Ep.* 84, 2, should read *cum latina lingua*, not *cum punica lingua*: hence, 'sed cum latina lingua, cuius inopia in nostris regionibus evangelica dispensatio multum laborat . . .'. The situation would be similar to that in which Augustine found himself on becoming a priest in Hippo in 391: his bishop Valerius, as a Greek, was handicapped by lack of a Latin education—Possidius, *Vita Augustini* v, 3.

and write in this Latin,⁴⁹ such as the elderly colleague of Augustine who had 'grown up in a farm and had little book-learning'.⁵⁰ Augustine would adapt his style to such people: they were his *fratres in eloquio latino ineruditi*.⁵¹

The *sermo humilis*—the 'humble style'—of Augustine's sermons was far more than an exercise in inverted snobbery: it is part of an attempt to enable a bilingual society to participate in an exclusively Latin religious culture, gravitating around a Latin holy text.⁵² Augustine's method of allegorical exegesis even betrays this pressure: for his approach to the Scriptures involved moving backwards and forwards throughout the whole length of the Bible in each sermon. By piling half-verse on half-verse, from Genesis to St. Paul and back again, *via* the Psalms, the bishop would create a whole skeleton of verbal echoes, well suited to introducing large areas of the text to an audience used to memorizing by ear. And, like the inspired schoolmaster that he remained, Augustine could hold the whole congregation together, with the hope that those in the back, who had heard the Passion according to St. Matthew for the first time,⁵³ might, one day, join the *cognoscenti* in the front, who knew why the prophets used the past tense to speak of future events, or why there were 13 Apostles and only 12 thrones.⁵⁴

And there is no greater spur to taking an interest in a sacred text than the fact that the experts so patently disagree about it. Ever since the time of Cyprian, controversy had taken the form of bundles of citations—*testimonia*.⁵⁵ When Augustine took over the church of his Donatist opponents, he covered its walls with posters of such *testimonia* in support of his case;⁵⁶ and Donatist pamphlets are no different.⁵⁷ By the end of the fourth century, it would have been as difficult for a Christian citizen of Hippo, Donatist or Catholic, *not* to know why the Ark of Noah was tarred inside and out,⁵⁸ what the navel of the Beloved in the *Song of Songs* stood for,⁵⁹ who was the 'strong woman' of the Book of Proverbs,⁶⁰ and why she spun wool for her husband,⁶¹ as it would be for us *not* to recognize Mr. Wilson or President Johnson in a newspaper cartoon. Where the Bible ended, the popular song took over: Augustine wrote one such—the *Psalmus abecedarius*, 'The A.B.C. against the Donatists', 'to reach the attention of the humblest masses and of the ignorant and obscure, and to fasten in their memories as much as we can'.⁶²

The African church never lacked controversy. The arrival of the Vandals in 429 meant the arrival of yet another group of ecclesiastical opponents—the Vandals being Arian heretics—who, again, were bilingual: speaking Gothic, their language of ecclesiastical culture was almost certainly Latin.⁶³ Once again, the armoury of Latin controversy was trundled out: the *testimonia*,⁶⁴ and the popular song—an 'A.B.C. against the Arians'.⁶⁵

This is true of the third missionary group in Africa. Manichaean propaganda reached all classes:⁶⁶ it was current in the villages of Numidia,⁶⁷ as well as among the intelligentsia of Carthage;⁶⁸ among humble artisans,⁶⁹ as among great landowners.⁷⁰ While in Egypt Manichaean literature passed, almost immediately, into Coptic, in Africa it remained exclusively Latin.⁷¹

⁴⁹ See Rémi Crespín, *Ministère et Sainteté: pastorale du clergé et solution de la crise donatiste dans la vie et la doctrine de S. Augustin*, 1965, 116–17. This shows that the clergy was not recruited from classes that would have been literate.

⁵⁰ Possidius, *Vita* xxvii, 10.

⁵¹ *Retract.* II, 29 on the *de agone christiano*. It is important to note that, though written in simple Latin, the ideas in this book are far from being those of 'popular' African Christianity: see Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* 245.

⁵² See esp. R. MacMullen, 'A note on *Sermo humilis*', *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. xvii, 1966, 108–12.

⁵³ *Sum.* 232, 1.

⁵⁴ *Enarr. in Ps.* 49, 9; *Serm.* 249, 3.

⁵⁵ *Testimoniorum ad Quirinum libri III* (C.S.E.L. III, 35–184).

⁵⁶ *Retract.* II, 27; cf. Possidius, *Indiculus*, 'De testimoniis Scripturarum contra Donatistas et idola'.

⁵⁷ See esp. J.-P. Brisson, *Autonomisme et christianisme dans l'Afrique romaine*, 1958, 145–9.

⁵⁸ *Ep. ad cath.* v, 9.

⁵⁹ Optatus of Milevis, *de schism. Don.* II, 8.

⁶⁰ *Serm.* 37, 2.

⁶¹ *Serm.* 37, 17.

⁶² *Retract.* I, 20.

⁶³ Victor Vitensis, *Historia Persecutionis Vandalicae* II, xviii, 53.

⁶⁴ E.g. *Florilegia Biblica Africana saec. v*, ed. B. Schwank, *Corpus Christianorum*, ser. lat. 90, 1961.

⁶⁵ By Fulgentius of Ruspe; ed. Lambot, *Revue bénédictine* XLVIII, 1936, 231–4.

⁶⁶ On the composition of the Manichaean movement in Africa, see Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* 54–5.

⁶⁷ *Ep.* 64, 3.

⁶⁸ *de util. cred.* xiv, 32.

⁶⁹ The names given in the abjuration of a Manichee: *P.L.* 42, 518.

⁷⁰ E.g. Romanianus, patron of Augustine: *C. Acad.* II, iii, 8.

⁷¹ See, most recently, T. Save-Söderbergh, *Studies in the Coptic Manichaean Psalmbook*, 1949.

The Christian culture of Africa, therefore, was exclusively Latin. How many people did it affect? This problem cannot be solved by quantitative analysis: one cannot place those, for instance, who chose to be buried in Latin as one mass, against the untold millions who, apparently, did not.⁷² We are dealing with a bilingual population. The issue, therefore, is one of direction. Which way did the cat jump? In which way did Christianity alter the balance in this bilingual situation?⁷³

One feature should be stressed. The effect of religious movements is not always to group themselves around the existing contours of class and culture: it is part of their appeal that they do by-pass such divisions. This is particularly true of the fourth century: in Africa, religion became a *carrière ouverte aux talents*. The leader of the Western Manichaean movement, Faustus of Milevis, was one such autodidact: a poor man's son, 'I found at once,' Augustine wrote of him, 'that the man was not learned in any of the liberal sciences save literature, and not especially learned in that. He had read some of Cicero's speeches and a very few books of Seneca, some of the poets and such writings of his own sect as had been written in Latin. . . .'⁷⁴ His religion had gained him an *entrée* into Latin culture.

Christianity, indeed, had joined hands with that other agent of social mobility in Africa—the teaching profession. In 320, a Moor, the grandson of one of the rude cavalrymen of the Emperor's *comitatus*, had settled down in Cirta as a 'professor of Roman letters'.⁷⁵ The process continued throughout the fourth century: looking through the personnel of the Donatist Church⁷⁶ and reading the sermons of African preachers,⁷⁷ one wonders whether, for the one bishop who might have entered the Church, in Gaul or Italy, as a spectacular *avatar* of the local senatorial magnate, there were not a score of minor clergy, in Africa, whose careers and outlook reincarnated the *grammaticus* and the small-town lawyer.

Beyond the few who actually became literate through religion, there were the listeners.⁷⁸ Christian preaching and Christian controversy—religious debates being a star-attraction in African towns of the fourth century⁷⁹—would have had an effect similar to that of the wireless in many multi-lingual societies: its constant broadcasts would have tipped the balance in favour of the uniform language of culture. In Hippo, in the early fifth century, the works of Cicero were not available;⁸⁰ but the Latin of the Psalms had become popular songs,⁸¹ and the Latin of the Bible so familiar that it, and not the Latin of the classics, was considered 'good' Latin.⁸²

III

This, I would suggest, was the cultural function of the rise of Christianity in Late Roman Africa: far from fostering native tradition, it widened the franchise of the Latin language. Nowhere is this more true than in Numidia, where the Donatist Church was strongest. For it is highly questionable to isolate Numidia as being any more 'rural' than the other provinces of Late Roman Africa: and to persist in describing Numidian Donatism as a distinctively 'rural' religion is to misunderstand the role of the towns in the Late Roman period. The vigour of these towns should not be underestimated.⁸³ If there is a conflict of social groups in fourth-century Numidia, it is not between 'town' and 'country' but, perhaps, between two layers of the aristocracies of the towns. The 'traditional' local

⁷² As by Chr. Courtois, *Les Vandales et l'Afrique*, 1955, p. 128; his remarks on the quality of the Latin of the inscriptions are more cogent. On the problem of the development of the Latin cursive script in African inscriptions, see a mysterious recent example: P. A. Février and J. Marcillet-Jaubert, 'La pierre sculptée et écrite de Ksar Sbahi (Algérie)', *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* 78, 1966, 141–85.

⁷³ Cf. C. Jullian, *Histoire de la Gaule* VIII, 310, on the rôle of the Church in finally Latinising the Gallic countryside.

⁷⁴ Augustine, *Conf.* v, vi, 11, and *Contra Faustum* v, 5.

⁷⁵ *Gesta apud Zenophilum*, C.S.E.L. xxvi, 185.

⁷⁶ See esp. P. Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne* vi, 1922.

⁷⁷ J. Leclercq, 'Prédication et rhétorique au temps de S. Augustin', *Revue bénédictine* 67, 1947, 117–31, at pp. 129–30.

⁷⁸ Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps.* 121, 8: 'nos simus codex ipsorum'.

⁷⁹ E.g. Augustine's debate with a Manichee in a packed bath-house: *C. Fort.* 1 and Possidius, *Vita* vi, 2. The crowd gathering in a debate with a Donatist bishop: *Ep.* 44.

⁸⁰ *Ep.* 118, II, 9.

⁸¹ *Enarr. in Ps.* 132, 1.

⁸² *de doct. christ.* II, xiv, 21.

⁸³ P. A. Février, 'Toujours le Donatisme: à quand l'Afrique?', *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* II, 2 (1966), 228–40, esp. 234 f.

aristocracy of *curiales* and *grammatici* tended to be either pagan or Donatist, while the 'new' aristocracy of *honorati*, as dependents on Imperial patronage, followed their masters into Catholicism.⁸⁴ The Donatist Church of Numidia was a church of 'great churches',⁸⁵ that is, of huge, urban basilicas, dedicated, as that of Timgad, to praising the Donatist bishop, in Latin.⁸⁶ The Latin slogans on altars, on the graves of martyrs, the Latin Biblical citations around baptisteries and above the lintels of country-churches are the shadow of this new, confident Latin culture of the Christian Church.⁸⁷ The Donatist bishops, their clergy, and their followers had gained, by their conversion to Christianity, a culture which they shared with the rest of the Latin world, and, having gained it in Latin, they not unnaturally claimed to be right, in Latin. To treat Donatism as a manifestation of 'African separatism' blunts its challenge. It does scant justice to the roots of the Donatist ideology in the common culture of Latin Christianity.⁸⁸ For the historian of the religious divisions of the Christian Church, such a view can be an easy way out: it resembles the judgement of the Yugo-slav court which dismissed *The New Class* of Milovan Djilas as a manifestation of 'Montenegrin separatism'; it is a convenient way of drawing the sting of a challenge couched in terms of a universal body of doctrine, common to both sides, and so guaranteed to hurt—whether this is the 'true' Socialism of Djilas, or the 'true' Church of a Donatist. The atmosphere of Christianized Africa is not that of a region drifting out of the Roman world: it is a doctrinaire and cocksure belief that what was good for Numidia was good for the Roman Empire: 'What has been done in Africa,' wrote one, 'must appear in the whole world.'⁸⁹ Tyconius was more right than he could have dreamed. For his commentary on the *Apocalypse* filtered into the Catholic tradition under the blessing of Augustine: it was vital to early medieval exegesis.⁹⁰ If the Spanish manuscript illuminations, from which the Christ in Majesty of the Romanesque tympanum derives, owe anything to the Tyconian commentary of Beatus of Liebana, then the traveller to Moissac may still see, on the great porch, a distant echo of the ecclesiological rancours of a fourth-century Donatist.⁹¹

There is, indeed, one facet of the rise of Christianity in Roman society, as of the rôle of religious movements in any society, which has not been stressed as strongly as it deserves. It is generally assumed, by most students of Donatism, that the function of Christianity was to provide an ideological expression for pre-existing tensions: that religion can act as the vehicle of social grievances, that it can strengthen the solidarity of submerged groups. What is overlooked is the rôle of religion as a mediator: how a religious movement, such as Christianity, can make the culture of an élite available to a wider audience, how its appeal lies partly in its ability to enable people to participate in something different from their ordinary existence. Yet a look at the sermons which African bishops preached on great occasions should convince us of this—they are glorious displays of rhetoric, the Latin language of the towns parading in its Sunday best.⁹²

Perhaps the debate on the rôle of local culture in Late Roman Africa has been tied too closely to the problem of the rise of the Donatist Church. There is one point which this hypnosis with the superbly-documented age of Augustine tends to miss. The history of African Christianity remains well-known to us, to the mid-seventh century at least. In all this period, from 430 to 698, there is not one mention of the *lingua Punica*.⁹³

⁸⁴ See the evidence ingeniously discussed by T. Kotula, *Zgromadzenia prowincjonalne w rzymskiej Afryce w epoce późnego Cesarstwa* (1965).

⁸⁵ *Enarr. in Ps.* 21, 26.

⁸⁶ Brown, 'Religious Dissent . . .', (above n. 1) 92.

⁸⁷ On the repercussions of establishing a bishop in such villages, see Brown, 'Religious Dissent . . .', 95, to which add the epigraphic evidence for churches built by the local population, notably *Année épigraphique* 1894, nos. 25 and 138, and 1926, no. 60, and Augustine, *Ep.* 44, VI, 14, on the loyalties surrounding such a church.

⁸⁸ An oversight handsomely remedied by W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, 1964. See Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* 212–25.

⁸⁹ T. Hahn, *Tyconius-Studien*, 1900, p. 85.

⁹⁰ Gerald Bonner, *Saint Bede in the tradition of*

Western Apocalyptic Commentary (Jarrow Lecture, 1966).

⁹¹ H. Schlunk, 'Observaciones en torno al problema de la miniatura visigoda', *Archivo Español de Arte* 71, 1945, 241–64, at pp. 262 f.

⁹² See the example in J. Leclercq, 'Prédication et rhétorique au temps de S. Augustin', *Revue bénédictine* 67, 1947, at pp. 121–5.

⁹³ The following recent works provide some indication of the prosperity and Latin civilisation of Africa after 430: H. I. Marrou, 'Építaphe chrétienne d'Hippone à réminiscences virgiliennes', *Libyca* 1, 1953, 215–90; Chr. Courtois, 'Sur un baptistère découvert dans la région de Kelibia', *Karthago* VII, 1955, 98–126 and J. Cintras and N. Duval, 'L'Église du prêtre Félix, Région de Kelibia', *Karthago* IX, 1958, 157–265; R. Braun, ed. *Quodvultdeus: Livre des Promesses et des Prédications* (Sources chrétiennes,

I should like to end by asking why this should be so.

My reason is, briefly, that it was no longer necessary. The late fourth and early fifth centuries was a period of crisis: it marks the peak of missionary activity in Numidia, and the peak of competition between Donatists and Catholics. To save a Donatist from eternal damnation it was necessary to talk to him even in the *lingua Punica*.⁹⁴ But, with the forcible elimination of the Donatist clergy, after 411, the peasantry could settle down to the normal perils of under-evangelization, perils less spectacular than evangelization by the wrong side.

Also, there was no time. In 430, Roman rule collapsed in Numidia; by the end of the century, the Vandals had as good as abandoned the province for the Carthaginian coastline. The Donatist 'holy city' of Timgad had been pillaged by mountain-tribes from the Aures and the Hodna. Throughout the sixth century, Numidia was overshadowed by their 'Moorish' kingdoms.⁹⁵ In the fourth century, these mountaineers had been beneath religion.⁹⁶ They had regarded the Donatist controversy with the same indifference as the Highland clans of the seventeenth century had regarded the literate rancours of the Lowland Scots. We can glimpse what had happened by the end of the sixth century: Gregory the Great found to his surprise that Catholic bishops of Numidia had been collaborating with their Donatist colleagues.⁹⁷ The reason is not difficult to understand: faced by the resurgence of what Dr. Courtois has called *l'Afrique oubliée*, the Forgotten Africa of the mountains and the deserts, these two groups of Latin professionals had decided that the devil they knew was better than the devil they did not know. It is a sign of the future: the Christian has already become isolated as the *Roumi*, the man of Roman faith and Roman culture, in an alien world.

The Christian Latin culture of the West was the culture of men in a hurry: the missionary had to expand, the scholar had to preserve.⁹⁸ Like the Romans of Africa in the fifth and sixth centuries, who had hastily converted the classical monuments of their towns into fortresses, these men used what was to hand—the Latin language. By contrast, vernacular cultures grew up in the East under very different conditions. Far from reflecting any conscious desire to remove the yoke of Rome, these local cultures assumed its continued existence: in the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries, they could grow up peaceably, among the placid subjects of a world well policed by the two great empires of Byzantium and Persia. At exactly the time when, in the Byzantine Empire, Greek philosophy and medicine were passing quietly into Syriac, and Syriac imagery, in turn, was colouring the hymns and liturgy of the Byzantine Church, the Latin civilization of Africa had left no alternative but barbarism. We meet a cultivated African, Donatus, throwing in the towel:

violentias barbararum gentium imminere conspiciens . . . ferme cum septuaginta monachis copiosisque librorum codicibus navali vehiculo in Hispaniam commeavit.⁹⁹

We are left with the old problem, that has exercised historians of the classical tradition and of the growth of the Papacy: there is some connection between Christianity and the

101), 1964; H.-J. Diesner, *Fulgentius von Ruspe als Theologe und Kirchenpolitiker* (Abhandlungen 2, Theologie, I Reihe, Heft 26), 1966, esp. 60–5; on secular culture, see esp. A. Cameron, 'The Date and Identity of Macrobius', *Journal of Roman Studies* LVI, 1966, 25–38 (see Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* 420, n. 13); Riché, *Culture et Éducation* . . ., 76–8; on Luxorius, M. Rosenblum, *Luxorius: a Latin poet among the Vandals*, 1961; on Dracontius, Domenico Romano, *Studi dracontiani*, 1959. Finally, J. Fontaine, *Isidore de Séville et la culture classique de l'Espagne wisigothique* II, 1959, 854–61, draws attention to the importance of Africa in the late sixth century.

⁹⁴ *Epp.* 66, 2 and 209, 3. In the last case, there is no evidence that Augustine's final choice for bishop of Fussala did speak the *lingua Punica*: it was plainly an accomplishment that could be dispensed with.

⁹⁵ Chr. Courtois, *Les Vandales et l'Afrique* 315, n. 7 (on Timgad) and 325–38 (map on p. 334).

⁹⁶ Hence Augustine's accusation that the Donatist bishops had supported the Moorish usurper Firmus: *Ep.* 87, 10. This accusation is made only to a bishop

of Caesarea in Mauretania. Seeing that this town had been sacked by Firmus, and that the Christian bishop had had to appeal to the Emperor to save the town from paying taxes after the disaster (Symmachus, *Ep.* I, 64), Augustine's accusation is in deliberate bad taste. His handling of many incidents in Donatism would repay re-consideration in this light: see Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* 228–30.

⁹⁷ The incident has been admirably studied by R. A. Markus, 'Donatism: the Last Phase', *Studies in Church History* I, ed. C. W. Dugmore and Charles Duggan, 1964, 118–26. This article, and the author's 'Religious Dissent in North Africa in the Byzantine Period', *Studies in Church History* III, ed. C. J. Cuming, 1966, 140–9, show how much of general importance for our understanding of the evolution and fundamental characteristics of African Christianity can be gained from careful study of the events of the late sixth century.

⁹⁸ ' . . . il faut faire vite': Fontaine, *Isidore de Séville* . . . II, 884.

⁹⁹ Ildefonsus of Toledo, *de vir. ill.* 4 (P.L. 96 200 c).

survival of Roman civilization in the west. The possibility that there had existed, in Late Roman Africa, a powerful Christian Church, hostile to the Roman towns, rooted in the native cultural traditions of the countryside, had seemed, for a moment, to offer an alternative to that view. I do not think that there is an alternative. Christianity won, in the West, as elsewhere in the Roman world, because it won the battle for the towns: ¹⁰⁰ it absorbed their culture, it transmitted this culture, on its own terms, to those who had not enjoyed it to such an extent, or, rather, to those who would not have enjoyed it on such easy terms in the social and cultural conditions of the Later Empire. ¹⁰¹ (There may be a direct connection, in the Late Roman period, between the narrowing of Latin culture in its pagan form—its ‘aristocratisation’—and its widening—its ‘democratisation’—in its Christian form. For the Christian Church had the best of both worlds: its urban structure and the recruitment of its bishops would constantly transmit the culture of an élite to large congregations, as Augustine, in Hippo, would spell out the sheltered mysticism of Plotinus in simple Latin.)

There is always a social and cultural history yet to be written, of the terms on which Christianity won this victory in the Roman towns: it would aim, above all, to explain the gradual realisation, throughout the fourth century, of that most breath-taking of all intellectual sleights of hand—the solemn identification, by Christian apologists from Origen and Lactantius onwards, of Christianity with *true* Greco-Roman culture, and the great tradition of Greco-Roman religion with all that was barbaric, un-Roman, not *évolué*.

We have seen how this happened in one area of the Latin culture of Africa. Whether we think it was worth happening, depends on whether we take Roman civilisation, in its Late Roman form, for granted as an unquestioned good thing. One may doubt it: Christianity gained respectability at the high cost of adopting a town-dweller’s assumptions on the passivity of the countryside, and by committing itself, disastrously, to a town-dweller’s contempt of the barbarian. ¹⁰² In Africa, it paid the heavy price of gradual extinction. Elsewhere in Western Europe it survived. Perhaps the price was not paid until later. The failure of so many Western missions, from the inner erosion of the great Jesuit venture in China to the rise of nationalism in the *Tiers Monde* is, perhaps, the delayed payment for the Christian victories of the fourth and fifth centuries.

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¹⁰⁰ This is not to deny the interest of the survey of W. H. C. Frend, ‘The Winning of the Countryside’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* xviii, 1967, 1–14.

¹⁰¹ On the ‘aristocratisation’ of culture see, for instance, R. MacMullen, ‘Roman Bureaucratism’, *Traditio* xviii, 1962, 367 f.

¹⁰² See Brown, ‘The Later Roman Empire’, *Economic History Review* 2 ser., xx, 1967, at pp. 331–3, and ‘Approaches to the Religious Crisis of the Third Century’, *English Historical Review*, lxxxiii (1968), at pp. 542 ff.