



Martyrdom: An Investigation into Issues of Religious Violence in North Africa

Nico P. Swartz^{1*}

¹Department of Law, University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana.

Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: 10.9734/JSRR/2015/14881

Editor(s):

(1) Anonymous.

(2) Narayan Thapa, Department of Mathematics and Computer Science, Minot State University, 58707 Minot, ND, USA.
(3) Grigorios L. Kyriakopoulos, School of Electrical and Computer Engineering, National Technical University of Athens (NTUA), Greece.

(4) Francisco Torrens, Institut Universitari de Ciència Molecular, Universitat de València, Edifici d'Instituts de Paterna, València, Spain.

Reviewers:

(1) Anonymous, Cameroon.

(2) Anonymous, USA.

(3) Anonymous, Nigeria.

Complete Peer review History: <http://www.sciencedomain.org/review-history.php?iid=965&id=22&aid=8381>

Original Research Article

Received 27th October 2014
Accepted 11th February 2015
Published 8th March 2015

ABSTRACT

Aims: The paper aims to clarify the relationship of martyrdom between two religious organizational structures, the Donatists and the Catholic Church. It proposes modeling a social transformation process by stressing a homogeneity of martyrdom between these two realms.

Study Design: It is a theoretical construct based on historical data.

Place and Duration of Study: Although this paper is a modern day text (constructed from December 2012 till November 2014), its literature sources is historical by nature. Religious violence in North Africa dated back to 340 BCE and found its culmination in 429 CE.

Methodology: The research is based on a theoretical (desk top) and exploratory study. The data required are complemented by documentary analysis. This study poses a clear database which the author generated and on which he draws. This article is a serious inquiry based on original data and the writings are universal.

Results: This paper purports to enervate the polemical views of Catholic sentiments against the Donatists. Two prominent Catholic scholars, Optatus and Augustine have divulged that martyrdom status is only to be afforded to Catholics who have suffered and died for their faith. The outcome

*Corresponding author: Email: nico.swartz@mopipi.ub.bw;

and implications of this paper is that there should be no indication of prejudice and enmity in a literary work and that the researcher should not be afraid to transcend cultural boundaries in search for the truth or to present the view of the “other” objectively. These ideas, in the context of North Africa, where almost all of the historical writings on martyrdom accounts have been produced by Catholic writers, have been challenged.

Conclusion: This study stresses the axiomatic notion that to be a martyr one has to suffer and eventually dies for your faith. It is true that both the Donatists and the Catholic Christians were subjected to martyrdom in North Africa and both of them have also conformed to the Gospel requirements for such a status. As such both religious groups can be afforded martyrdom status as per this study. Certain claims, for example by one of these religious sections that they are the “true” Church and the bringing about by the other section the method of exclusion that the other is not Christian, must be regarded as not important. The research wants to dwarf the polemical atmosphere that surrounds these two important groups and wants to elevate the concept of martyrdom they have forged in North Africa.

Keywords: Martyrdom; catholics; donatists; historia ecclesiasticae; de mortibus persecutorum.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 An Assessment or Test for Historical Writing

Accounts of the persecution of Christians in North Africa are fragmentary in nature and are written almost exclusively from an orthodox Catholic perspective. Catholic perspectives appear in various sources, including Victor of Vita's *Historia persecutionis*, Rufinus of Aquileia's translation of Eusebius' *Historia ecclesiastica*, Lactantius' *De Mortibus persecutorum*, Prudentius' *Liber peristephanon*, and Gregory of Tours' *Gloria martyrorum*.

Very little or almost none credible sources are accorded for the martyrdom or persecution of Donatist members. Optatus and Augustine seem to be the most authoritative writers about Donatists, and they do not even regard the latter (Donatists) as martyrs. Swartz asserts that in a historical account the truth take precedence over a literary style, in other words, the objective of the historian must be to find out what actually happened at a particular event or on a particular occasion. It means a historian must not show prejudice or enmity in his work. By showing prejudice, he therefore does not do justice to classical historiography [1]. In this regard, Optatus and Augustine clearly fail the test for historiography.

Other Catholic writers, like Victor of Vita fell into the same trap as Optatus and Augustine. In Victor's work, the *Historia persecutionis*, he alleviated Catholic Christians and painted a dark picture of the Donatists martyrs in North Africa [2]. In the *Historia persecutionis*, for example, the persecution of only Catholic Christians in North

Africa were recorded. No mention is made about the suffering of the Donatists.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Martyr Culture: A Definition

The phenomenon of martyrdom is older than the Christian or Jewish terminology. This paper proposes therefore a functional definition of martyrdom that has its basis in Jewish as well as Christian sources.

This research aims to present Christian martyrdom in the broader cultural North African context.

Martyrdom has been restricted to those who had been suffered and killed for their faith. A martyr's death was considered a “baptism in blood.” Congruent to this notion is the North African Church father, Tertullian's idea that “the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church.” These religious violence-loaded paraphrases indicate that martyrs are willing to sacrifice their lives for their faith.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 Origination of Martyrology / Martyr Culture

3.1.1 The Jewish example

According to Daniel Boyarin, Frend [3] views martyrdom as having originated in Judaism. The latter regards Christian martyrdom as a continuation of that practice. In contrast to Frend's hypothesis, Boyarin posited Bowersock's view which perceived Christian martyrology as

unrelated to the Jewish practice. Bowersock viewed Christian martyrology as a practice that grew up in an entirely Roman cultural environment and then borrowed by Jews. He said: "Martyrdom was [...] solidly anchored in the civil life of the Graeco-Roman world of the Roman Empire.

Boyarin challenges both assumptions and means the martyrdom is part and parcel of both Judaism and Christianity.

3.1.2 The roman period

In its first three centuries, the Catholic Christian Church endured periods of persecution at the hands of Roman authorities. These Christians were the targets of persecution because they refused to worship the Roman gods or to pay homage to the emperor as divine entity [4].

With the persecution-martyr theme prominent in early Christianity literature, Christians have come to view persecution as an integral part of their religious experience. This had far-reaching ramifications. Martyrdom has then been seen as one of the crucial influences on the growth and development of the early Church and Christian beliefs. Among other things, martyrdom sparked the cult of the saints and facilitated the rapid growth and spread of Christianity. Martyrdom becomes a construction of Christian identity. Christians come to believe that to be a Christian was to suffer and die for one's faith.

3.1.3 The pagan tradition

This rendition comes from non-Jewish and non-Christian ancient world. An important tradition in ancient culture valued sacrifice on behalf of others.

Aristotle, for example, characterized a virtuous person as somebody who is prepared to sacrifice himself for one's friends and one's homeland and if necessary to die for it. Apollonius believed that any person should choose to sacrifice himself for freedom, kinsfolk, friends and love. Euripides described in his *Phoenissae* (410 BCE) how Menoeceus saved his home town of Thebes by killing himself. The seer Teiresias, had informed Menoeceus' father Creon, the Theban king, that it was necessary that one from the royal family had to die in order to appease the earth (*Phoen.* 930-59). In Van Henten & Avemarie 2002 Menoeceus accepted his fate and jumped from Thebes' walls and succeeded in saving his home town by his

death. It was generally accepted by the Phoenicians that the self-sacrifice of Menoeceus benefitted the land of Thebes.

In Euripides' lost tragedy, *Erechtheus*, Queen Praxithea agreed to her daughter's sacrifice, because she thought that it is better that one dies instead of all. Such a depiction of the death of an individual as the substitute for the death of many or all can be found in several texts, including Christian ones.

Latin sources reported a specific form of self-sacrifice (*devotio*). This dedication (*devotio*) was done by military persons and was executed in order to attain victory. *Devotio* means the willingness to sacrifice oneself for the well-being of a group or a major cause. It takes on the form of suicide committed out of loyalty to other people or the city. Publius Decius Mus has sacrificed himself to prevent a Roman military defeat against the Latins in 340 BCE in a battle near the volcano at Vesuvius. Livy alleged that Mus's self-sacrifice functioned as a kind of atonement to the gods. According to Van Henten & Avemarie (2002), the *devotio* seemed to have a twofold significance: It was self-sacrifice that brought atonement in the form of compensation to the gods, and a substitute death at the same time, since one died instead of many.

Self-sacrifice was embraced by Donatists. Grig alleges that Augustine refers negatively to Donatists as "cliff-jumpers" [5] and as a result does not regard them as martyrs. Latin sources disregarded Augustinian disapproval and attached an esteem value on this form of sacrifice.

3.1.4 The christian tradition

Clement's *Letter to the Corinthians*, is one of the oldest early Christian writings that refers to martyrs.

Nero's persecution of the Christians after the fire in Rome in 64 forms served as historical background for Christian martyrdom.

Tacitus has established for example that Peter and Paul died a martyr's death during Nero's reign in Rome. Eusebius alleged that Peter was crucified and Paul was decapitated. Prior to their execution, Peter has endured many sufferings. Paul was chained seven times and was banished as well as stoned. Van Henten & Avemarie (2002) assert that Peter and Paul became a

herald in the East and the West. These two men, who have suffered many insulting treatments and tortures, became an example for a great multitude of chosen ones.

Not with standing their weak bodies, they suffered terrible and godless outrages, but finished the race of faith and received a noble reward of martyrdom status.

Ignatius saw execution or his martyrdom as a fast and secure way to attain God. It is if he was longing for his execution and discouraged anyone who wishes to help him in escaping. He wrote to the Romans: “[Be] faithful to me”. Van Henten & Avemarie (2002) explain that this phrase means that being faithful to him means to let him finish his mission in the amphitheatre in the mouth of the wild beasts. Ignatius said this to his flock in Rome, “[It] will be easy to do what you want. But for me it will be hard to attain God, if you do not spare me. For I do not want to please humans, but rather to please God. I will never again have such an opportunity to attain God [...]” [6].

The *Ascension of Isaiah* is a composite Christian work dating from the 2nd century CE. Isaiah was falsely accused to be a false prophet by Belkira. This false accusation and Isaiah’s prophecy of the coming of the Beloved (Jesus Christ) made his executioner so angry, that the latter sawed Isaiah in two with a wooden saw. While Isaiah was being sawed in two, he did not cry out, but his mouth spoke with the Holy Spirit until he was sawn in two [7].

In *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, Christians brought before the Roman governor were required to call the Emperor Lord, to offer a sacrifice, to curse their own group as atheists, to taunt Christ and to swear to the fortune of the Emperor. Polycarp’s refusal to obey the Emperor is punished by a death penalty. Polycarp preferred death as to conceding to the Romans. It is reported that Christians took his burnt bones and put them away in a suitable place with the hope of celebrating his “birthday,” commemorating the ones who had “triumphed” before and preparing those who had to face martyrdom in the future [8].

In *The Martyrdom of Lyon and Vienne* by Eusebius (264-340 CE) in the fifth book of his *History of the Church* (5.1.1-63; 2.1-7), most of the martyrs’ tortures took place in connection with their interrogation by the governor, whose questions aim at the confirmation of their

Christian identity. In this case, the martyrdom is much more interested in the heroic behavior of the martyrs than in a detailed description of the persecution. The martyrdoms are presented as a spectacular show, with the martyrs in the role of gladiators and the “devil” as orchestrator of the mob and the torturers. For the onlookers the battle takes place in the arena, and for the martyrs themselves their bodies seem to be the battlefield. The battered body is evidence of the martyrs’ triumph and their participation in Christ’s suffering. Jesus Christ is believed to have supported the martyrs during their battle (*The Martyrdom of Lyon and Vienne* 5.1.22-4; 27-8. Van Henten & Avemarie (2002) exert, for example, that Blandina communicates with Him (Christ) during her final suffering and does not feel the wounds caused by the horns of the bull. Hanging on a beam in the figure of a cross, Blandina showed the people that martyrdom is the fastest way to salvation. She encouraged fellow martyrs to remain steadfast and die last of all. In so doing, she functioned as a model figure for other martyrs. Her insignificant physical appearance is stressed in order to highlight her heroic behavior as a martyr. With this feature of her and her influence, even the weaker members of the group to be martyred refused to blaspheme God and deny their Christian faith. They finally managed to succeed on the road to martyrdom because of the example of Blandina [9].

Another document that presents martyrdom as a spectacle is the *Passion of the North-African women Perpetua and Felicitas*. The place of trial and execution was Carthage, which served as the capital of Roman province of North Africa. The martyrs’ arrest and execution were connected with the Emperor Septimius Severus’ attempts to strengthen the imperial cult and propagated the cult of the Graeco-Egyptian god Serapis, of which he considered himself to be the incarnation of. Severus set off to forbid conversion to Christianity and subsequently spurred the persecution of Christians in Alexandria and other places in North Africa. By emphasizing their Christian identity Perpetua and her supporters violated Severus’ edict. They were executed in the amphitheatre. This *Passion* can be read as a rendition of conflicting values and identities: of the old Roman versus the new Christian identity. This is an important document about Christian self-identity. Perpetua confirms to the *procurator* Publius Aelius Hilarianus that she was a Christian (*Christiana sum*) as martyrs usually do in Christian martyr texts. This dialogue

revolved around the choice between Perpetua's traditional and her new identity as a Christian.

The dialogue between Perpetua and her father is one of contrasts. The pitiful aristocratic father fought a losing battle for the Roman deities against his Christian daughter. When it was Perpetua's turn to be interrogated, her father appeared with her son, pulled her aside and said: "Pray to the gods, have pity on your baby". The procurator, Hilarianus also said to her: "Spare the grey hairs of your father, spare the early youth of your child." And he said further, "Sacrifice for the well-being of the emperors". The editor passed the writing on to other Christians so that they could participate in the martyr's experiences and enter into fellowship with Christ through them [10].

The early Christians were persecuted by Roman Emperors in Western Europe in order to strengthen the imperial cult. But this trend can as well be transferred to North Africa which was a colony of Rome. It means therefore that both Catholics and Donatists were being persecuted and died as martyrs.

3.2 The North Africa Platform: the Discourse between Donatism and Catholic Views on Martyrdom

No one knows how and when Christianity came to North Africa. Some have suggested Jewish Christians resident in North Africa or missionaries from Asia Minor as the progenitors of the tradition. The oldest literary evidence for Christianity in North Africa indicates that by the year 180 BCE there was at least one community near Carthage [11]. For these people, martyrdom was a most glorious end.

When dealing with North Africa, the specific historical situation is crucial: the cult of the martyrs in North Africa cannot be considered without reference to Donatism and Catholicism. The Donatist schism and its history crucially affected the place of martyrs and their narratives in the African Church. Martyrdom was central in the polemic between the two opposing camps: the Catholics and the Donatists. The history of the schism can be offered as follows: The Donatists claimed to be the true African Church, the Church of the martyrs after their break-away from the Catholics when the latter relinquished or surrender "religious objects" to the Roman authorities [12].

The Donatists also felt that they were a minority of "real" Christians who were trying to preserve their integrity in the face of hostile secular powers. They elevate martyrdom as the highest aspiration of man. Salisbury vented his views as follows: In all these fourth century Donatist writings one finds the theme of actual suffering linked with the theoretical duty of the righteous to renounce contemporary society and suffer persecution at its hands.

The Donatists believed they were following the tradition of Cyprian. The latter believed, liked the Jews and Rabbinical tradition, in the idea of collective salvation, where they would at times perform mass suicides, which were seen as mass martyrdoms that would achieve immediate salvation for the group.

Donatists made use of martyrological rhetoric for sectarian ends. Religious violence runs through the polemical texts of the Donatist/Catholic schism. Both sides (Donatists and Catholic Christians) attacked the violence of the other. According to Grig, there existed highly emotive accounts of Donatist violence against Catholics in the polemical tracts of Optatus and Augustine. Optatus recounted how the Donatists drawn fetuses out of mother's wombs, how they rape of consecrated virgins, and the murder of Catholic clergy. No religious violence by the Catholics against the Donatists is recorded in history by Optatus and Augustine. Although the lethargy of veridical historical writings of possible martyrdom by Donatists, the latter (Donatists) regarded themselves as martyrs when attacked and killed by Catholic Christians.

Optatus regards only Catholic victims of violence to be martyrs. What this means, is that the Donatists could therefore be only false martyrs. It connotes that Catholic martyrs are the true martyrs died for the true cause, killed by the enemy [the Donatists].

Donatist martyrs, it is alleged by Augustine killed themselves. Augustine said that the Donatists are not false Christians, they are not Christians at all, and addresses them as "O insane ones, oh perverse ones" and furthermore "O insane Donatists! O rabid dogs." Augustine argued that it is forbidden to offer oneself up for martyrdom. He mentioned that the Donatists are "cliff-jumpers" and they even use violence to force others to kill them. He therefore stated that the Donatists are not martyrs.

After 320 CE the Catholic religion became increasingly favored in North Africa. Until 392 the Emperor Theodosius ordered that the Catholic Christian faith be raised to state religion. This meant that the Roman Empire (State) fell in better with the (Catholic) Christians against the Donatists. The Empire's partiality aroused the Donatists' antagonism against the Catholics and the Roman state [13].

The Donatists were a Christian sect named after their leader Donatus. They alleged that the Catholics were *traditores*(traitors) because they (the Catholics) handed over "spiritual goods" to the Roman Emperors after they were forced to do so. The Donatists would argue that even under force the Catholics should not have to give in to the demands of the Roman Emperors. On account of this, the Donatists distanced themselves from the Catholic Christians. In 404 CE the Council of North Africa, in Carthage, requested the bishops to enact repressive laws against the Donatists. The next council of Carthage in 411 culminated in an order that all Donatists been banned and their property confiscated. This intensified the Donatists' hate of the Romans and the Catholic Christian faith.

When the Vandals invaded North Africa in 429 CE, the Donatists took the opportunity to attack and plunder villages and farms. The Vandals were Arian Christians who were also previously persecuted by the Catholic Christians in Western Europe. Consequently they harbored feelings of hatred against Rome and threatened the Catholics with the most severe punishments. They mistrusted the Catholic clergy and insulted and treated them most inhumanely. The Catholic bishops were banned, the churches closed and the sacraments such as baptism and confirmation were discontinued. The Catholic clergy were also suspected of owning considerable wealth; the Vandals invaders considered this a serious crime. Liturgical books were destroyed and church property was transferred to the Vandal clergy. The Vandals who now enjoyed the support of the Donatists persecuted the Catholic Christians further.

3.3 Tilley's Exegesis or Vindication of the Donatists' Martyrdom Accounts under Her Work, "The Bible in Christian North Africa"; 1997

Maureen Tilley exerted that in the literature on Donatism there is only a limited number of ancient sources, which included the works of

Optatus and Augustine. This tempted one to deduce that Catholic records seem to be the only source to rely on regarding searches on martyrdom. In an attempt to draw from Donatist texts or literature, one is forced to extract some sense from these anti-Donatist sources. Tilley also deplores the fact that nearly all scholars ignored the official stenographic records of the Conference of Carthage in 411 CE, wherein a genuine attempt by the government was made to resolve Catholic-Donatist issues. Some scholars who have attempted to make an effort had instead of mining their sources, have based their analysis of the conference solely on Augustine's summary of the events. This research is convinced that there might just be more to the story.

In order to furnish the reader with a proper analysis of martyr accounts by Donatism, it is proper to have a look at the Donatists own texts and testimonies.

The methodological problem this research encounter is the fact that it draws its data from non-narrative sources. The approach is to analyze the available material in order to correct the story as it has been told. If the Donatist martyr stories had no credibility, it would hardly have survived. These stories exist and it therefore merits to be told. Catholic sources recorded the martyr stories or accounts whole, but there might have been a probability of partiality as can be seen in the renditions of Optatus and Augustine. The literature of both sides is tendentious and impassioned. Hence, one cannot take either of them entirely on face value.

The history of Donatism covers the beginning of the fourth century to the eclipse of Christianity at the advent of Islam.

Tilley alleged that Roman soldiers arrested a group of Christians worshipping in a private home in the North African village of Abitina in 304. After they had been charged with illegal assembly, the soldiers transported them to the city of Carthage. Literature does not record the fate of the prisoners, but it alluded that these Donatists captives might be the Abitinian martyrs. Tilley asserts that the Donatists' respect of these martyr's account predominated even their respect for the physical text of the Bible. She says that the martyrs were the living exegetes and exegeses of the [martyrdom] text [for the Donatists]. This Abitinian incident gave

rise to the birth of the Donatist Church in North Africa. It provides a religious context for the Donatist to break away from the Catholics.

Another scholar, Eno, as interpreted by Tilley, set off to echo Donatist attitudes toward the use of the Bible and opines that they regard it (the Bible) as lesser than one of their inspirational leader, Cyprian. Eno opined that the Donatists regard Scripture as indifferent. He said Scriptural texts were a minor consideration [for the Donatists]. The cornerstone of [the Donatist] tradition was to be sought in Cyprian. Because of these observations, it can be deduced that a severance between Donatists' theology and their use of the Bible be taken into account. Eno reiterated that Donatists looked only to Cyprian as authority. Tilley alleged that this is not completely correct and that Eno considers only a particular and narrow band in their history for the model of their behavior. Tilley defended Donatism and asserts that scriptural texts in their thought were more than a minor consideration. She further vindicated Donatism by saying nearly every argument is studded with references to the Bible. As for Eno's assertions that Donatism looked only to Cyprian and the heroic age of the martyrs, Tilley meant it is just the contrary. She wrote Donatist authors will claim the authority to interpret Scripture just as well. On the other hand, Donatists believed the Bible was written for the sake of the troubled Christians and their problems do not involve doctrinal issues. The Donatists regarded themselves as the troubled Christians. The Donatists believed that Cyprian's approach was a very practical one and commendable to them, but they do not want to substitute the Bible for Cyprian. Since the Donatists' problems with the Catholics would be largely disciplinary rather than doctrinal, Cyprian's method will suit them perfectly. This rendition might have an indirect bearing on the issue of martyrdom by which faith forms the substratum. The polemical writing between Donatists and Catholics is because of the exclusivity of Donatist theology and the latter's assertion that they are the "true" Church. What could have also caused friction between these two organizations, is that the Donatist regards Cyprian as perfect martyr. It could mean that they did not opt for Christ. Tilley vindicated the Donatists by asserting that the passion of Christ was the model for the suffering of Cyprian.

Tilley holds that Cyprianus of Carthage (ca200-258) is the patron saint and hero for the Donatists. He was bishop of his diocese during

two periods of persecution under Decius (250-51) and Valerian (256-58). Cyprian saw persecution as a God-given test of the members of the Christian community. His martyrdom is recorded in the *Acta proconsularia* and in his *Vita* by Pontius. Cyprian suffered at the hands of the Romans and was finally beheaded. Between the *Vita* and the *Acta proconsularia* we have the description of Cyprian as the perfect martyr. Tilley once again asserted that the passion of Christ was the model for the sufferings of Cyprian. Like his savior, he was tempted to flee, arrested in a garden, led to the *praetorium*, and surrounded by the crowds. Tilley furnished us with the words uttered by Cyprian: "I am a Christian... I know no other gods but the one true God who made heaven and earth and all that is in them."

Tilley maintains that a similar martyr account by Donatists is the *Acta maximiliani*. It tells of a soldier who became a conscientious objector. He was executed for his refusal to conform to contemporary non-Christian society. His words to the tormentors are: "I cannot fight... I am a Christian." The soldier used Biblical language to claim that he cannot take on military insignia because he bears the mark of Christ. This statement could be applied to any Christian.

Using the Bible, Cyprian documented the idea of martyrdom. In his typological reading of Matt 10: 17-20 he put martyrs in a very special position – in direct and close communication with God. Martyr figures from the Bible also functioned as models against which contemporary martyrs were to be measured. Since it was the Gospel that provided the opportunity and the means for martyrdom, martyrs had to conform to the Gospel in order to be true martyrs.

Cyprian tells his flock not to fear martyrdom. Lucius, Montanus and their associates were likened to the three youths in the fiery furnace in the Book of Daniel when they underwent their martyrdom. Their skin shone and their robes sparkled; they were like shining stars. Lucius' friends, like the Good Thief of Jesus' passion, asked that the martyr remember them in the hour of his glory. The messages of the *Passio montanietlucii* were promises of a return to their heavenly home.

The Biblical texts focus on the value of endurance to the end and provided support.

In sum: Tilley furnishes us with the Donatists' beliefs that their own persecution was a mark

of their being the true Church. They felt what differentiated them from Catholics was their refusal to co-operate with a government, which, less than a decade before, had burned the physical texts of the Bible. In 392 CE, at Catholic behest, Donatists were the object of imperial legislation. They were subjected to fines and threatened with deportation for disrupting Catholic ecclesiastical life. Two years later the state struck at their institutional life. They were forbidden to ordain new bishops, to assemble, to ordain lower clergy, or even to teach. The next year, their cult was under attack as the emperors forbade the Donatists to gather for any rituals. Properties of Donatist bishops were being confiscated.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

The paper postulates that a martyr culture implies that no one is to discriminate against a certain religious group. If an individual or group is to suffer and die for the Christian faith, such can be clouded under the mantle of martyrdom. That is the tenor or gist this research wants to project. But this view is challenged by the hostilities meted out by the Catholic Christians against or towards the Donatists and vice versa.

The decision to die violently for one's faith rather than give up one's conviction is a motif elaborated in Donatists as well as Catholic writings. The Donatists believe that the Catholic Christians have failed to uphold a fundamental rule – they (the Catholics) have surrendered religious articles to the Roman authorities, which the Donatists believed they should not have done, even under torture and death. As a result the Donatists dissociated them from the Catholics. The former (the Donatists) believed because of this decision, they have been singled out for persecution by the Catholics. The Donatists also believed such persecution engendered into them being martyrs. This is the reason for the Donatist-Catholic schism.

The reciprocal of this notion is that religious persecutions in North Africa were spurred by loyalties to state and church and Catholic ambitions has confused temporal and spiritual authority. Implicit in this construction is the need to protect and enforce the laws of the state. This is evident when Theodosius engendered the elevation of the Catholic Christian faith to state religion. Subsequently, repressive laws against the Donatists followed coupled with their eventual persecution. But on the other hand, as

the Catholics associated themselves for a time with the Roman authorities under Theodosius, so did the Donatists too, when the Vandals invaded North Africa in 429 CE. The Donatists also took the opportunity to persecute the Catholics. The Vandals, Arian Christians, (who formed an allegiance with the Donatists) also alleged that they were previously persecuted by the Catholic Christians in Western Europe.

5. CONCLUSION

Both Donatists and Catholics made use of martyrological rhetoric for sectarian ends. This research stipulates that to be a martyr, one has to be tortured and eventually die for your faith. Both Donatists and Catholics have suffered and died for their faith and religion and according to this paper they have merited the status of martyrdom.

Since it was the Gospel that provided the opportunity and the means for martyrdom, martyrs had to conform to the Gospel in order to be true martyrs. Donatism and Catholics, have one again, fulfilled these requirements.

The polemical writings between Donatists and Catholics engendered an exclusivity motif by the Donatists and the latter's assertion that they are the "true" Church. What could have also caused friction between these two religious denominations are that the Donatists regard Cyprian as the perfect martyr. In Catholic parlance, it could mean that they did not opt for Christ.

The research implies that the prejudices of writers like Optatus and Augustine be regarded as not of much importance.

CONSENT

It is not applicable.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

It is not applicable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My heartfelt thanks to: Miss Jeanette Rooi, Gregerie Swartz, Henry Swartz, Jan Springbok, Willem Swartz, Bowly Benjamin Swartz for their support in writing this article.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

REFERENCES

1. Swartz NP. Reflections on historical writing: an investigation of the application of Cicero's rules for the historian in Victor's *Historia persecutionis*. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*. 2010;36(2):11-27.
2. Shanzer D. Intentions and audiences: history, hagiography, martyrdom, and confession in Victor of Vita's *Historia Persecutionis*. In: Merrills, AH (ed.), *Vandals, Romans and Berbers: New perspectives on late antique North Africa*. England, Ashgate. First Edition. 2004;272.
3. Frend WH. *The Donatist Church: a movement of protest in Roman North Africa*. Great Britain: Oxford University Press. First edition. 1971;134. 2012/05/16. Available:http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_martyrs
4. Van Henten JW, Avemarie F. *Martyrdom and Noble Death. Selected texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian Antiquity*. London: Routledge; First Edition. 2002;95.
5. Grig L. *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity*. London, Gerald Duckworth and Co. First Edition. 2004;50.
6. Ignatius, *Letter to the Romans 2.2*. Translation based on Bihlmeyer (1956). In: Van Henten JW, Avemarie F. *Martyrdom and Noble Death. Selected texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian Antiquity*. London: Routledge. First Edition. 2002;108.
7. The *Ascension of Isaiah*; 264-340 CE. In: Van Henten JW, Avemarie F. *Martyrdom and Noble Death. Selected texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian Antiquity*. London: Routledge. First Edition. 2002;93:111-112.
8. The *Martyrdom of Polycarp*; 264-340 CE. In: Van Henten JW, Avemarie F. *Martyrdom and Noble Death. Selected texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian Antiquity*. London: Routledge. First Edition. 2002;95-96.
9. Eusebius. *History of the Church. The Martyrdom of Lyon and Vienna 5.1.22-4; 27-8*. In: Van Henten JW, Avemarie F. *Martyrdom and Noble Death. Selected texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian Antiquity*. London: Routledge. First Edition. 2002;99:121.
10. *Passion of the North African Women*. Eusebius. *History of the Church*. 264-340 CE. In: Van Henten JW, Avemarie F. *Martyrdom and Noble Death. Selected texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian Antiquity*. London: Routledge; First Edition. 2002;126.
11. Tilley MA. *The Bible in Christian North Africa. The Donatist World*. USA, Fortress Press, Minneapolis. First Edition. 1997;19.
12. Salisbury JE. *The bond of a common mind. A study of collective salvation from Cyprian to Augustine*. *Journal of Religious History*; 1985;13:235-247.
13. Swartz NP. *Historia persecutionis. The Martyr Accounts of Victor of Vita*. South Africa, Bloemfontein, Sun Media. First Edition. 2009;12.

© 2015 Swartz; This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Peer-review history:

The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:

<http://www.sciencedomain.org/review-history.php?iid=965&id=22&aid=8381>