Crimen Obicere
Forensic Rhetoric and Augustine’s anti-Donatist Correspondence
Rafał Toczko

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Correspondence
# Contents

Acknowledgements ................................................................. 9

Introduction ............................................................................. 11

Part 1. Augustine’s Anti-Donatist letters in context

Chapter 1. Approaching Augustine's Anti-Donatist letters .......... 17
1. Ancient letters, early Christian letters ................................. 17
2. Polemical letters, anti-Donatist letters ................................. 20
3. Classifications of the anti-Donatist letters ......................... 22
    3.1 Classification by addressee ........................................ 22
    3.2 Classification based on letter function .......................... 24
    3.3 Classification by chronology ...................................... 27
4. Staging the dispute through correspondence ...................... 32
5. Creating the audience ....................................................... 40

Chapter 2. The forensic correspondence ................................. 49
1. Rhetorical genres and epistolary polemic .............................. 49
2. Forensic rhetoric and Augustine ......................................... 52
    2.1 Theory of *status* ................................................... 52
        2.1.1 *Status coniecturalis/coniecturae* ......................... 54
        2.1.2 *Status definitionis* ......................................... 55
        2.1.3 *Status qualitatis* ........................................... 56
        2.1.4 *Status translationis* ....................................... 57
        2.1.5 *Status legales* ............................................... 58
    2.2 The ancient theories of argumentation: *argumenta, loci, exempla* ................................. 60
    2.3 Augustine and forensic rhetoric ................................ 64
3. Shaping the discourse in the anti-Donatist letters ............... 68
    3.1 *Genus deliberativum* vs. *genus iudiciale* .................. 68
    3.2 *Accusatio/intentio* vs. *defenso/depulsio* .................. 71
    3.3 *Causa apud Deum*—creating the jury ...................... 74
    3.4 *Unum crimen: quaestio simplex* ............................. 76
    3.5 *Causa honesta/manifesta* vs. *causa obscura* .......... 79
    3.6 *Lex divina* vs. *Lex humana* ................................ 80

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Rafał Toczko: Crimen Obicere
Part 2. Accusation

Chapter 3. The charge of schism .............................................. 85
1. The pros and cons of being a Christian prosecutor ...................... 85
2. The formulation of the charge .............................................. 91
3. Arguments drawn from characters (Loci a persona) suitable for both status .............................................................. 95
  3.1 Pars Donati .......................................................... 95
  3.2 The enemies of community ........................................... 96
  3.3 Pertinacy/persistency and arrogance .................................. 98
4. Status qualitatis ............................................................ 99
  4.1 Wrong motive .......................................................... 100
    4.1.1 Divina testimonia ............................................... 100
      4.1.1.1 Confirmatio ............................................... 102
      4.1.1.2 Refutatio .................................................. 104
    4.1.2 Humana testimonia ............................................. 106
    4.1.3 Exempla ....................................................... 107
  4.2 False motive .......................................................... 110
    4.2.1 Comparisons .................................................... 111
      4.2.1.1 Maximianists ............................................. 111
      4.2.1.2 Optatus ................................................... 117
    4.2.2 Impulsio ....................................................... 120
5. Status definitionis ........................................................ 122
  5.1 Ubi est ecclesia ....................................................... 122
  5.2 Ecclesia catholica .................................................... 126
    5.2.1 Confirmatio ..................................................... 126
    5.2.2 Refutatio ....................................................... 130
  5.3 Ecclesia in meridie ................................................... 132
  5.4 Ecclesia Christi ...................................................... 135
  5.5 Multi aut pauci Christiani ........................................... 136

Chapter 4. The charge of rebaptism ........................................ 139
1. Status definitionis ........................................................ 139
  1.1 Divina testimonia .................................................... 140
  1.2 Humana testimonia .................................................. 144
  1.3 Comparison: Maximianists ......................................... 146
2. Status coniecturalis ....................................................... 149
Part 3. Defence

Chapter 5. The charge of persecution .................................. 157
1. Status qualitatis .................................................. 157
   1.1 Relatio criminis ............................................. 157
       1.1.1 First ratio: violence .................................. 159
       1.1.2 Second ratio: schism ................................... 164
   1.2 Comparatio criminis ........................................ 167
       1.2.1 Testimonia ............................................. 168
           1.2.1.1 Witnesses .......................................... 168
           1.2.1.2 Terence ............................................ 170
       1.2.2 Comparisons ............................................ 171
           1.2.2.1 Biblical exempla .................................. 171
           1.2.2.2 Episcopacy ......................................... 176
           1.2.2.3 Suicides on the cliff ............................. 176
       1.2.3 Suicides ............................................... 176

2. Status definitionis ................................................ 180

3. Status translationis .............................................. 186
   3.1 Donatists as persecutors .................................... 186
   3.2 Donatists as collaborators ................................... 188
       3.2.1 Testimonia ............................................. 188
       3.2.2 Biblical Exempla ...................................... 191

Chapter 6. The charge of traditio .................................... 193
1. Status coniecturae ............................................. 194
   1.1 Iudicatum .................................................. 194
       1.1.1 Loci a persona iudicis ................................ 197
       1.1.2 Loci a persona accusatoris ......................... 202
   2. Status translationis ........................................... 206
       2.1 Sylvanus as a traditor .................................. 206
       2.2 Donatists as traditores ................................ 207

Conclusion ........................................................ 211

Abbreviations ..................................................... 215

Bibliography ....................................................... 217

Sources .......................................................... 217

Secondary literature ............................................. 218
Appendix 1. The List of the Anti-Donatist Letters ............................................ 225
Index of Ancient and Medieval Persons ......................................................... 227
Index of Modern Authors ............................................................................. 229
Index of Augustine’s works .......................................................................... 231
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Introduction

It is generally known that Augustine first studied rhetoric and later taught it before becoming a priest. Most of us are familiar with the fact that he employed rhetoric in his writings and sermons as a presbyter and bishop, but it is not always clear what kind of rhetoric we mean when we use the term. Worse still, we tend to use our own prejudices concerning rhetoric without acknowledging it or asking ourselves whether our understanding of the term is at least close to Augustine’s. Therefore, on the one hand, scholars tend to talk about rhetorical bias or manipulation, about rhetorical claims as opposed to factual claims, and so on. But, even many years after retiring from the post of imperial rhetorician, as a bishop in debate with the Donatist Cresconius, Augustine would not allow rhetoric to be equated with manipulation. On the other hand, there is a vast number of studies on Augustine’s rhetoric (from which I have benefited widely) that narrow the understanding of rhetoric to a question of style. But style is not the only thing that Augustine taught as rhetoric. You could not have won a case in a Roman court by use of the right style alone. You needed to compose a speech in the right way, using the right elements, and presented in the right style. These three ingredients were called *dispositio*, *inventio*, and *elocutio*. As far as forensic rhetoric is concerned it is “invention” – the art of finding the right arguments – that devours most pages in the ancient handbooks. As Quentin Skinner observed in his study on Shakespeare:

> The classical rhetoricians themselves [...] always treat the art of rhetoric essentially as a theory of argument, especially legal argument, and they like to stress its practical usefulness (Skinner: 2014, 4).

In an oft-quoted autobiographical passage, Augustine confesses that for years he used to teach rhetoric.\(^2\) With a considerable amount of self-deprecation he distances himself from this experience by presenting himself as a purveyor of the art he calls “victoriosa loquacitas” – “winning loquaciousness”. He claims to have taught tricks that his good students might have used in courts to defend guilty men, or – in a worse scenario – to accuse an innocent person. The modern translations easily overlook that in this passage Augustine reveals that in fact he used to teach

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\(^1\) I was enabled to carry out the research for this book by grant no. 2015/17/D/HS2/01238 of the Polish National Science Centre.

forensic rhetoric. He uses technical terms for legal defence – “agere pro capite” and prosecution “agere contra caput.” Also, the adjective “victoriosa” is used to hint at the agonistic character of the rhetoric he taught, most vivid in legal cases. Although Augustine stopped teaching forensic rhetoric when he opted to become a Christian, it does not mean that he ever stopped shaping the polemical discourse according to its rules whenever he felt the need.

Therefore I have started with a basic question: How did Augustine shape the discourse or present his arguments in the polemical context? To answer it I decided to proceed by literary analysis of Augustine’s thirty-six surviving anti-Donatist letters. Letters played a vital role in the early Christian controversies on account of their relatively quick propagation. In addition, the epistolary format allowed for less constrained and more variegated forms of persuasion, for the letters resembled a live conversation, which was well recognised in antiquity. At the same time, it has been noticed that Augustine’s anti-Donatist letters played a crucial role in the course of the Donatist controversy. Although a study of all Augustine’s polemical writings would certainly be the best way to answer my question, its scope was too large to fit into my humble project. For this reason I have concentrated on the anti-Donatist letters of Augustine as a case study to provide a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of the rhetorical strategies applied in these polemical texts. To date, this particular topic has not received the attention it deserves.

My precise purpose in this study is to offer an insight into how Augustine used rhetorical tools inherited from classical theory in building and developing polemical strategies in his anti-Donatist letters. Such a study should expand our knowledge on such various topics as history of rhetoric, ancient epistolography, polemical literature and Augustine’s art as a polemicist. In the first part of this book I approach Augustine’s anti-Donatist correspondence as a special genre of polemical literature and as a historical and literary phenomenon. By polemical letters I mean all the letters where the main task of the author is to argue against an individual or a group that is presented as procuring some actions, or voicing some ideas or propositions that in the author’s view are wrong, if not outright dangerous for the community, institution, identity or idea the author stands for. I follow Possidius’ catalogue of Augustine’s works (Indiculum), and count among the anti-Donatist letters all those polemical letters where the deeds or concepts of the Donatists are discussed. The epistolary polemic can be direct when the letters are addressed to a member of the Donatist community, whether lay or clerical, or indirect when otherwise.

The first chapter is dedicated to presenting the analysed selection of letters in the context of up-to-date scholarship. In the second chapter I present a very concise outline of ancient rhetoric with special emphasis on the Hermagorean theory of staseis/status. My central claim is presented there, namely that Augustine’s argumentation is based on the Hermagorean theory. The forensic frame of these letters (recently recognised by Adam Ployd: 2018), is not only what supplied both parties with arguments, but was also readily noticeable to contemporary audiences, who
were familiar with legal procedures and oratory, not only owing to their education but also to their everyday life experience.

I analyse comprehensively and in detail the various rhetorical strategies Augustine employed in his anti-Donatist letters in the second and third part of this book. The second part is dedicated to the charges with which he attacks the Donatists, namely schism (chapter 3) and rebaptism (chapter 4); the third part concentrates on the defensive strategies concerning the charges of persecution (chapter 5) and traditio (chapter 6). The formulations both of the charges and of the arguments are shaped precisely in keeping with the rules governing the different status. To give one example, Augustine defends his party against the charge of persecution, relying mostly on presenting their actions as justified or provoked by the Donatists, that is employing two types of status qualitatis. According to the rules of the first of these, relatio criminis, the persecution is presented as just punishment for schism or acts of violence. The second type, comparatio criminis, is based on the assumption that persecution is a lesser evil than letting the Donatists remain in schism.

A thorough analysis of the use of the strategies and techniques discussed by Cicero, Rhetorica ad Herrenium and Quintilian in the text of Augustine can help us reveal the underlying matrix of the letters in question. For decades the works of Augustine have been of interest mostly to Church historians and theologians, and rightly so. It is worth noticing, however, that the people who read or listened to them at the time of their composition were alumni of rhetorical and law schools, where they had to read Cicero's speeches and learn from rhetorical handbooks (some authored by Cicero himself, others written under his influence). Meanwhile, authors as diverse as Tertullian and Shakespeare have been recognised as weaving their works with an eye fixed on the pattern of forensic rhetoric (Sider: 1971; Skinner: 2014). The aim of my study is to prove that Augustine's polemical correspondence is teeming with examples of rhetorical tricks commonly used in courtroom argumentation. I argue that the backbone of Augustine's anti-Donatist letters, that is, his patterns of argumentation and strategies of persuasion, is largely formed of the techniques of forensic rhetoric.

Two technical remarks are due here. First of all I have decided to use the terms Catholic/Donatist instead of Caecilianist/Donatist. In the study where the arguments of Augustine are followed and analyzed it would be inconvenient and perplexing to do away with this tradition of labeling both parties. The other reason for this choice has already been stated by Brent D. Shaw: “Although both parties were Catholic, I have called the Aurelian–Augustinian church ‘Catholic’ because this was their success-in-power identification of themselves” (2011, 5). The second issue concerns the method of quoting Latin texts. Here my decision was to follow closely the form of every edition. As a result in some quotations, for instance from Cicero “the will” is spelled voluntas, whereas in others, e.g. from Augustine, it would be voluntas.
Part 1. Augustine’s Anti-Donatist letters in context
Chapter 1. Approaching Augustine’s Anti-Donatist letters

1. Ancient letters, early Christian letters

Ancient philosophers, wives, officials, lovers, Roman emperors, salesmen, literary figures, litigants, the apostles, officers and Christian bishops had at least one thing in common: they all wrote letters. Some were official, some private, but most were something in between, for even those most private were always written and sent with the anticipation or fear that something unexpected might happen. Even the most trustworthy and experienced letter carrier might be kidnapped or die, one unreliable or less loyal might open it and sell the information. Letters were thus always written in an atmosphere of “public intimacy” (Allen, Neil: 1997, 17), and many important messages or sensitive pieces of information were trusted only to the ear of a tried-and-tested messenger. A reliable carrier was always sought out, cared for and praised. If the letter was not confidential and came from a famous person, the addressee would more often than not be willing to publicly boast of having received it, read it to his friends, or hand it out to be copied. Letters were mostly written and copied on papyrus, parchment and tablets made of various, sometimes expensive materials, such as ivory (Bagnall: 2009, 72–90; Cavallo: 2010, 10–12; Zielinski Kinney: 2017, 310–317). Finally, it is worth noting that letters were more often dictated and read aloud than written and read in silence (Saenger: 1982, 372).

Some late antique writers went to great lengths to compile and publish their own authorial collections, such as Ambrose of Milan, Quintus Aurelius Symmachus.1

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1 This was a constant fear of Cicero in times of trouble, (cf. Nicholson: 1994, 33–63).
2 In ep. 28.6, 86.1, 89.8.
3 In ep. 166.2 Augustine enumerates three virtues of the perfect letter carrier: fides agendi, alacritas obediendi, exercitatio peregrinandi. In the corpus of Augustine’s correspondence there are 28 letter carriers referred to by name and often praised: http://www.scrinium.umk.pl/search?q=carrier. See also Allen: 2016, 118–119, and Dalmon: 2015, 159–168.
4 Whether Ambrose has in fact himself organised the ten books of his correspondence is the subject of one of those perennial scholarly debates. For the last reasonable attempt to confirm this idea, see Nauroy: 2017, 146–160.
5 It is mostly agreed now that Symmachus composed the first book of the letters independently, and then designed the collection of the next six books, which were published after his death. See Michelle Renee Salzman’s introduction to Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, transl. by M.R. Salzman, M.J. Roberts. The Letters of Symmachus. Book 1, Atlanta 2011, p. liii-lxvi.
and to some extent Jerome of Stridon.\textsuperscript{6} Others did not. Still others kept the letters they wrote and received in their archive, as did Augustine.\textsuperscript{7} It was not unusual to keep certain important correspondence by third parties there.\textsuperscript{8} Thanks to Possidius, Augustine’s friend, fellow bishop and biographer, we have a catalogue of his works preserved in the episcopal library at Hippo at about the time of Augustine’s death.\textsuperscript{9} Jennifer Ebbeler has recently pointed out two facts: around thirty percent of the letters enumerated by Possidius in his \textit{Indiculum} are now lost, but the same percentage of the extant letters is not to be found in the index (Ebbeler: 2017, 241). The former statement illustrates the sorry state of affairs known to anyone dealing with ancient texts: we would like to read much more than we are left with, because so much of the literary heritage of antiquity has been lost to war, fire, flood and human carelessness. The latter observation, however, is indeed striking and carries considerable weight. If so many of Augustine’s letters survived outside of his chancellery, it clearly means that they were cherished and treasured by the recipients (Ibid., 251). It also suggests that people circulated these letters, considering that the more copies existed in antiquity, the more probable it was for them to survive to this day.

The ancients regarded the art of letter-writing as a distinct literary skill\textsuperscript{10} but only two ancient textbooks dedicated solely to that art are extant: \textit{Typoi Epistolikoi} by Pseudo-Demetrius\textsuperscript{11} and \textit{Epistolimaioi Charakteres} by Pseudo-Libanius.\textsuperscript{12} These works date to Late Antiquity and are written in Greek, but we know nothing of their authors. Brief and scarcely influential as they are, they nevertheless shed an interesting light on the perception of letter writing in antiquity. Pseudo-Demetrius focuses on the exemplary models of letters, referring to them as \textit{typoi} and discussing as many as twenty such types.\textsuperscript{13} The approach of Pseudo-Libanius is slightly different, as he presents forty-one styles of letter-writing, which in fact are not “model letters but nuggets of reasoning” (Stowers: 1986, 53). These classifications were organised according to the function of the letter, the most popular types being: con-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{6} That also might have been the plan for an old Augustine, but his death came before he could accomplish the task (De Bruyne: 1931, 284–295). As for Jerome, he listed his two smaller letter collections, each in one book, in \textit{De viris illustribus} 135.
\item \textsuperscript{7} More on the realities of such archives, see Dalmon: 2015, 139–151.
\item \textsuperscript{8} \textit{ep.} 28*.4 is a nice example of Augustine’s efforts to receive letters exchanged by the Catholic bishop and an official in a different province.
\item \textsuperscript{9} We should not think of Possidius as the creator of this catalogue, rather as someone who edited a previous Augustine’s version of it, see Hermanowicz: 2008, 57–60.
\item \textsuperscript{10} As demonstrated by the texts collated in Malherbe: 1988.
\item \textsuperscript{11} In the manuscripts, Demetrius, the author of \textit{De elocutione}, is presented as its author, but the scholars believe this tradition to be false.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Some manuscripts presented the Antiochean rhetor Libanius as its author; in others figures Proclus, a neo-platonic philosopher; scholarship rejects these attributions.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Malherbe: 1988, 30–31: “friendly, commendatory, blaming, reproachful, consoling, censorious, admonishing, threatening, vituperative, praising, advisory, supplicatory, inquiring, responding, allegorical, accounting, accusing, apologetic, congratulatory, ironic, thankful.”
\end{itemize}
gratulatory, consolatory, exhortatory, accusatory and advisory. These handbooks do not seem to distinguish “real” letters from “literary”, as proposed by Adolf Deissmann (1908, 157–160). In antiquity, letters dictated by members of the elite, even in the utmost haste, always bear traces of the rhetorical training of their authors and can be analysed as sophisticated literary works, even if their main function is to provide the addressee with some information. Carol Lanham suggested that epistolary skills were acquired through the standard rhetorical exercises, known as pro-gymnasmata, which were reserved for the later stages of grammar schools (Lanham: 1992, 115–34). One of the most popular of these was ethopoeia, which involved writing a speech by some historical or mythological figure in given circumstances in order to characterise that figure through the style of speech. Although ethopoeia was a very common exercise, we do not have sufficient evidence to link it to the art of letter-writing.

As a literary genre, epistolography had its own stylistic rules and conventional elements of composition: the actual form of a letter depended primarily on the occasion on which it was written. Letters were mostly exchanged between friends or people who wished to make an acquaintance and served as a substitute for conversation. As we learn from Cicero’s letters, amicitia was not reserved for the closest circle of friends. There was private friendship, but there was also another type, namely political or public. No matter how close the real connection between the correspondents was, their epistolary exchanges consisted of some standard formulas, expressions and metaphors pointing at the friendly character of their dialogue. These expressions of friendship, traditional for ancient epistolography, were well documented by Klaus Thraede (1970), who also demonstrated the considerable in-

14 Ps. Demetrius, Typoi Epistolokoi 1, transl. by A. Malherbe, op. cit., p. 31: “According to the theory of epistolary types, Heraclides, [letters] can be composed in a great number of styles, but are written in those that always fit the particular circumstance [to which they are addressed].” See also Stowers: 1986, 51–7.
15 Although this distinction has been influential for decades, in recent years scholars admit that it is of little use and hardly explains the idea of the late antique letter, see e.g. good criticism in J. Divjak: 1996, coll. 897–8.
16 Carol Poster (2002, 112–124) turns our attention to the commonly overlooked fact that there were different classes of letter-writers and letter-readers and that we should not expect the same quality and sophistication from every ancient letter.
17 This thought is further elaborated by Stowers: 1986, 19. Wilfrid Parsons not long after Deissmann published her analysis of lexis and style of Augustine’s letters, many of which would be understood as die Briefe in Deissmann’s categories. Her presentation of its results is full of praises for Augustine’s literary acumen, see Parsons (1923).
18 Björk: 2016, 88: “The challenge for the writer is to capture the words suited to the person speaking.”
19 Apart from Theon, Aphtonios – no other handbooks suggestes to link them. Obviously Ovid practised it in Heroides.
20 Lanham: 1992, 118: “The persistence, over hundreds of years, of epistolary formulas and conventional topics (such as expressions of friendship) in Latin letters implies a powerful, stable tradition and its transmission by teaching.”
fluence of the classical models of letter-writing on Saint Paul and the Church Fathers.

The early Christian writers, however, should also be acknowledged for their innovations in the art of letter-writing. For instance, Saint Paul’s letters circulating among Christian congregations gave rise to episcopal circular letters, which were written especially by the primates of dioceses and ultimately became instrumental in the ascendency of the bishops of Rome and the subsequent emergence of the papacy. One other novelty of most interest to us here, is the polemical letter – a literary genre that developed during the religious controversies of the early Christian era.

2. Polemical letters, anti-Donatist letters

First we have to face the most significant stumbling block: the ancient handbooks on the art of epistolography did not distinguish the polemical letter as an epistolary genre in its own right. Lately, Christian Tornau (2018, 5–8) reflected on the difficulty in explaining the apparent paradox: although we clearly discover various forms of polemical writing in Augustine’s letters, they cannot be classified according to an ancient or contemporary model, for the simple reason that no such model exists. My general approach to this problem is similar to that of Tornau: to discuss the polemical dimension of Augustine’s correspondence we have to turn to the rhetorical framework.\textsuperscript{21} In my discussion, I reserve the label “polemical” to all those letters where the main goal of the author is to argue against an individual or a group, i.e. against an adversary who is presented as responsible for some actions, ideas or propositions that the author regards as inaccurate at the very least, or (more often) outright wrong or dangerous. There is no telling what Possidius, Augustine’s biographer, would have made of this definition, but the fact remains that in his Indiculum, most of Augustine’s works, including the letters, were organised under polemical labels: Contra Paganos, Contra Priscillianistas, Contra Donatistas, etc.

In the polemical letters, Augustine argued that the ideas and actions of the Arians, Donatists, Manicheans, pagans and Pelagians were erroneous and dangerous. This is not to say that in all cases the addressee of the letter and the target of the polemical attack is one and the same person or group. As Tornau rightly observes, we are dealing here with two types of polemical discourse: direct and, less obvious, indirect.\textsuperscript{22} In the case of the latter, the addressees do not necessarily have to be directly involved on either side. Most often, however, there does exist some link between them and the issues under discussion. For instance, Eusebius, the addressee

\textsuperscript{21} Tornau: 2018, 5–8: “Briefliche Polemik […] ist dagegen gerade Polemik gegen den Adressaten womit eine Kommunikationssituation vorliegt, die in der antiken Theorie in der Regel unbeücksichtigt bleibt, ja geradezu deren System zuwiderläuft.”

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 26–27.
of ep. 34 and 35, who belonged to the class of *viri clarissimi* and whom Augustine wanted to be an intermediary between him and Proculeian, the Donatist bishop of Hippo, is considered by some as a Donatist and by others as a Catholic.\(^\text{23}\)

The anti-Donatist letters of Augustine are by far the most numerous among his extant polemical letters and form a large corpus of texts within his correspondence, totalling thirty-six.\(^\text{24}\) Using the term “anti-Donatist letters”, I refer only to those polemical letters where the Donatists’ actions or ideas constitute an important subject matter. Thus, there are letters mentioning the Donatists (for instance, *ep.* 69, 78 or 245) which are not included in my analysis in the second part of this book, because their main interest lies beyond the scope of this study. Possidius did not count these among the *epistulae contra Donatistas*; the same applies to *ep.* 58, 86 or 133, whose contents are directly related to the Donatist controversy, but apart from labelling the schismatics with commonplace formulas offer no polemical arguments. As a result, they are not subject to my inquiry, because in these texts Augustine did not argue against the Donatists. On the other hand, letters 128 and 129 written to Marcellinus shortly before the Conference of Carthage, and so clearly connected to the Donatist controversy, are signed by Aurelius, the primate of Africa Proconsularis, Silvanus, the primate of Numidia, and other Catholic bishops. I see no reason to regard them as having been written by Augustine. It is indeed puzzling that neither *cath. fr.* nor the first book of *c. litt. Pet.* has been analysed by scholars as part of the anti-Donatist correspondence, although Augustine explicitly calls them “letters”. Finally, a word of justification is due for my choice concerning *ep.* 88, signed by the Catholic clergy of Hippo, and *ep.* 141, signed by the bishops gathered at the Conference of Carthage, which I regard as part of Augustine’s epistolary corpus, because Augustine refers to these in his later works as having been authored by himself.\(^\text{25}\)

The earliest of the anti-Donatist letters, *ep.* 23, may be dated to as early as 391, but none was written later than 423: the latest extant letters are *ep.* 185, 204 and, ultimately, *ep.* 208.\(^\text{26}\) These polemical letters differ from one another (sometimes in a fairly evident manner) in a number of aspects, such as length, literary form, occasion and emotional timbre. Perhaps the most convenient method of classification is to divide them according to the addressee and the function of the given letter.


\(^{24}\) Among the letters *contra Donatistas* Possidius’ *Indiculum* includes: first book of *c. litt. Pet.*, *ep.* 93, 185, *cath. fr.*, *ep.* 88, 106, 108, (again 93), 33 (and three other to Proculeian, now lost), 87 (and another one to Emeritus, now lost), 51, 66 (and two other to Proculeian, now lost), 34, 35, 43, 44, 144, 173, 89, 23, 142, 204, one lost to the Donatist bishop Gaudentius – in that order. This makes for 21 one extant and seven lost letters, see PL 46, coll. 7–8. To these I add *ep.* 49, 52, 53, 56, 57, 61, 70, 76, 97, 100, 105, 134, 139, 141, 208.

\(^{25}\) In case of *ep.* 88 the reference is in *ep.* 185.32; *ep.* 141 is referred to as Augustine’s own in Retractationes, 2.40 (67).

\(^{26}\) So for instance my list of the anti-Donatists letters does not comply with that of Matthew Gaumer’s entitled: “*Epistulae Closely Connected with the Donatist Controversy, “* in Gaumer, 2016, XX–XXII. It is somewhat puzzling that Gaumer omits the clearly anti-Donatist *ep.* 204.
Approaching Augustine's Anti-Donatist letters

3. Classifications of the anti-Donatist letters

3.1 Classification by addressee

Individuals: Bishops/Leaders of his opponents: *ep.* 23, 33, 49, 51, 66, 87, 88, 93, 106, 108
Donatist individuals of lesser authority: *ep.* 52, 70, 173
Fellow Catholics: *ep.* 53, 61, 208, (56, 57?)
Officials: *ep.* 34, 35, 89, 97, 100, 134, 139, 185, 204

Groups: *Ad nostros (in toto)* (1 lib. c. litt. Pet., cath. fr.)
*Ad Donatistas (in toto)*: *ep.* 76, 105, 141
To smaller Donatist groups: *ep.* 43, 44
To smaller catholic groups: *ep.* 142, 144

This classification allows us to see that the largest group consists of letters sent to individuals. Among the addressees Augustine was trying to reach were especially the leaders of the Donatists (the Donatist bishops; 10 letters) and men of high rank (9 letters). There are a few remarks in his correspondence that attest that he also wrote other letters addressed to the Donatist bishops that have not been preserved. It is important to note that in writing to the leaders of the Donatists and Roman officials, Augustine adopted a certain strategy and would send his letters with the intention of reaching the largest possible audience. Correspondence between important public figures has always been interesting to the general reader. If Augustine was indeed trying to reach out to the Donatist laity through this medium, he was making a reasonable guess that ordinary Donatists would also be eager to read the exchange of arguments between their leaders and himself.29 It seems that it was somewhat unbecoming and unusual for a Catholic bishop to send letters to a non-Catholic bishop (and *vice versa*), as can be inferred from Augustine’s lengthy explanations on the subject included in his letters to Maximinus (*ep.* 23), Proculeian (*ep.* 33), and Emeritus (*ep.* 87), which I shall analyse below.

27 In case of the recipient of these two letters, *ep.* 56, 57, namely Celer, it is hard to unequivocally call him a Catholic. He seems to be a hesitant individual who is loosening bonds with the Donatism and considering the Catholic brand of Christianity. Morgenstern qualifies him as a Catholic (1993, 16), Mandoze (“Celer 1,” Mandoze: 1982, 202) underlines his Donatist origins.

28 C. Buenacasa Perez: 2013, 439–447, proposed a different classification of the letters *ad Donatistas*, using three categories: to bishops, to aristocrats, to plebeians. This classification is based on a premise that is visible in a remark claiming that “Augustine was completely convinced that the theological speculations would not be understood by most of the Donatist followers” (2013, 443). The author tries to convince us that the letters to plebeian people, by which he understands *ep.* 76, 105, 141 and 185, are less complicated than these directed to aristocrats, such as like *ep.* 34 and 35, which is debatable.

29 Letters in antiquity had this public aspect, so much so that one scholar was inclined to call them the first social medium in history, see Standage: 2013.
In many of his letters to officials, Augustine tries to influence their decisions. Whether they start as congratulatory letters, as *ep.* 97 or 100, or are written in reaction to some illegal actions of the Donatists, as in *ep.* 34 or 35, Augustine's goal seems to be to persuade men of high rank to become involved in the Donatist controversy. In these two letters the eventual positive reaction of the addressee, Eusebius, a local aristocrat, would only have repercussions in Hippo and its vicinity, but as *ep.* 97 to Olympius\(^{30}\) shows, Augustine tries to also exert influence on the most important men in the state, whose decision would be valid for the entire Roman empire.\(^{31}\) On the other hand, among the letters written to men of high rank, we can also find clear examples of episcopal intercession. In *ep.* 134 to proconsul Aprinius, Augustine pleads for mercy for the Donatists, which enables him to present himself and his party as lenient and forgiving. In such letters, the polemical component may have been of lesser importance.\(^{32}\) There were also cases where Augustine replied to a letter of an official who had asked for clarification with regard to some aspects of the controversy, of which *ep.* 185 and *ep.* 204 are the quintessential examples. It is in these letters that the polemical argumentation is fully developed. The famous *ep.* 185, to which Augustine himself later referred as *The book on the correction of the Donatists*, is a showcase of such indirect polemic against Donatists. All in all, the letters to high officials were also meant to be widely distributed and, through the aura of celebrity of the correspondents, to attract the attention of all those who had even a passing interest in the Donatist controversy.

These observations may be corroborated by a quick look at the letters addressed to the groups of Donatists and Catholics. These include especially the letters written in response to the writings of Petilian that later became known as the first book of *c. litt. Pet.*, and *cath. fr.* Augustine does not limit himself to writing to his congregation, but oversteps the boundaries of his episcopal see to write to all Catholics on these two occasions. Augustine, like Petilian before him, directed his letter *ad suos*. In terms of institutional practice, the act of sending a letter to all Catholics is rather unique and transgressive, considering that Augustine did not hold the position of primate of Numidia, which might have legitimised his missives. And, finally, there are *ep.* 76, 105 and 141. The last two are certainly addressed to all Donatists, as we can tell from the *salutatio* and *titulus*. The first lacks these parts in manuscripts, but

\(^{30}\) Olympius, who outmanoeuvred Stilicho in 408, and took over his very high post of *magister officiorum*, had exchanged letters with Augustine even before *ep.* 96 and 97 – the first preserved letters of the two. See Adamiak: 2017, 28–29, with references.

\(^{31}\) Of course Augustine worked together with a team of skilled lobbyists well versed in law, such as Alypius or Possidius. We should never underestimate their input in the course of the Donatists and Pelagian controversies.

\(^{32}\) Two other letters directed to officials and concerning the Donatists (*ep.* 58 and 86) have no polemical edge whatsoever. They were, however, consciously shaped as weapons in the battle with the Donatists, which is especially noticeable in *ep.* 58, where Augustine congratulates Pammachius, a Roman senator, for converting the Donatists living in his estates in Africa. He shares his wish, in this letter, that other senators would follow in the steps of Pammachius.
from its content it might be inferred that it is of the same type as *ep.* 105 and 141. *Ep.* 105 is signed by Augustine exclusively, *ep.* 141 is signed by all the bishops gathered at the council of Cirta and incorporated into the acts of this council,\(^{33}\) whereas *ep.* 76 in its preserved state does not give us this information. The tone and direct remarks of these letters allow us to conclude that they were directed to Donatist laymen, and perhaps lesser clergy, rather than to the bishops. In fact, Augustine uses these letters to persuade the Donatists that they should not rely on their leaders. Such public missives to schismatics should also be considered as elements of the original strategy of Augustine. As we can see, his attitude towards epistolary practice is far from conventional.\(^{34}\) Such an epistolary strategy might have been driven by the expectation that the less customary his epistolary efforts were, the more publicity they might gain.

### 3.2 Classification based on letter function

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Letters</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exhorting to a debate</td>
<td><em>ep.</em> 23, 33, 44, 49, 51, 66, 76, 87, 88, 105, 106, 108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhorting an official to take a position or undertake an institutional action (lobbying)</td>
<td><em>ep.</em> 34, 35, 89, 97, 100, 134, 139, 185, 204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhorting/persuading to conversion</td>
<td><em>ep.</em> 43, 76, 93, 105, 173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhorting men of high standing to convert others</td>
<td><em>ep.</em> 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praising the addressees for conversion (congratulatory)</td>
<td><em>ep.</em> 142, 144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating a debate</td>
<td><em>ep.</em> 44, 141, 142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explaining his attitude towards the Donatists (on the issue of converting them)</td>
<td><em>ep.</em> 61, 89, 105, 185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing others with arguments against the Donatists in answer to a request</td>
<td><em>ep.</em> 53, 57, 185</td>
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The second classification of Augustine’s anti-Donatist letters given above allows us to see the specifics of the polemical letter as a medium for debating controversial

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\(^{33}\) But it was written by Augustine himself.

\(^{34}\) Augustine’s liberal attitude to the epistolary norms is very clearly observed in his correspondence with Jerome. See Ebbeler: 2007, 316–324.
issues. A polemical treatise is usually triggered by a single and simple circumstance: the act of publishing a text by an ideological or institutional opponent, or rather the fact of becoming acquainted with this text, which may have been published earlier. Polemic in sermons is mostly conditioned by either some events crucial to a given community or by the biblical passages present in the liturgy for a given day. Certainly Augustine digresses in his sermons a lot, and associates some biblical passages with issues only very loosely linked to them. The polemical letters are different in this respect, as they were written in all sorts of circumstances with various goals in mind. Perhaps the most significant difference lies in the fact that the letters are always directed to someone with the expectation that this person will reciprocate with a letter.\footnote{I am grateful to all the participants in a very long and fruitful discussion of this feature of the letters that took place during the workshop in ZAF in Würzburg in September 2018.}

None of the anti-Donatist letters can be regarded as having been written with a single, clearly stated purpose, which should make us cautious about the validity of any exclusive classification of Augustine’s polemical letters. For instance, in ep. 44, a letter of average length written to a lay Donatist after a public debate with the Donatist bishop Fortunius, Augustine aims at (1) presenting information about the debate with Fortunius, (2) praising Fortunius, (3) defending his party against the charges of persecution, (4) accusing the Donatists of schism and, finally, (5) exhorting them to debate. Even the very short congratulatory letter to the converts in Cirta (ep. 144) is simultaneously a deliberation on God’s role in conversion and an accusation of the crime of schism. The letters always bear a trace of the circumstances that allowed Augustine to develop a much more varied argumentation based on the three Aristotelian means of persuasion (pisteis) – ethos, pathos, and logos – than is the case with other polemical genres.\footnote{I discuss the theory of three \textit{genera dicendi} in chapter two, on p. 51–52.} Augustine’s polemical treatises are mostly (but not uniquely) concerned with rational, scriptural argumentation (as in \textit{De baptismo}), whereas some sermons in which we find anti-Donatist passages are clearly focused on ethos (e.g. s. 4, 197) and pathos, (e.g. s. 359), although we can find passages in sermons (e.g. s. 88.\footnote{The characterisation of the Donatists in the sermons of Augustine has been studied by Ivonne Tholen. Although we find a lot of source material in this study it falls short of a thorough analysis, especially from the standpoint of the rhetorical strategies, see: Tholen: 2010.}7) that resemble the scriptural argumentation of the treatises or a few letters.

The ancient practice and theory of letter writing and its relation to the art of rhetoric was most comprehensively treated by Stanley K. Stowers in the second part of his book \textit{Letter Writing in Graeco-Roman Antiquity}. He observes that ancient letters quite often consisted of elements characteristic of the three main rhetorical classes: judicial, deliberative and epideictic. Thus, in all the long anti-Donatist letters we find passages that concern, firstly, “decisions about what was just or unjust in the past” (Stowers: 1986, 51) as is fitting for courtroom speeches; secondly, those