

## CHAPTER 6

# The Effect of Persecution on Religious Communities<sup>1</sup>

## An Experiment in Comparative History

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### Abstract

Two early 4th-century Christian communities splintered into mutually hostile factions after the imperial government rescinded Diocletian's edicts against them. Although we often assume that a community that suffers together will bond more tightly together, this did not happen in Carthage, North Africa, which split over the so-called Donatist challenge. Nor did it happen in Alexandria, Egypt, which fractured over Arius' theology. While granting that persecution casts suspicion on people linked to the oppressors, we still assume that all early 4th-century Christian communities were uniformly estranged from imperial power. First, I argue that this assumption is unfounded: some people in Carthage and in Alexandria had demonstrably closer connections than others to the imperial court. These differences make sense if we accept recent arguments that Christians attained full legal status under the emperor Gallienus (260–267). Next, I show that in both Carthage

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and Alexandria, those with closer connections to the imperial court were the first to face charges of heresy or schism. In other words, some members of the broader Christian community perceived those with court connections as people whose allegiances were ambiguous at best and who were therefore not ‘true’ Christians. This situation proved particularly challenging for the emperor Constantine to manage, even though he proclaimed himself a member of the Christian community after 312.

**Keywords:** Constantine, persecution, 4th-century Christianity, Donatism, Arianism, homoian Christianity

### The Elusive Concept of ‘True Christian’

Two early 4th-century Christian communities splintered into mutually hostile factions after the imperial government rescinded Diocletian’s edicts against them. Although we often assume that a community that suffers together will bond more tightly together, this did not happen in Carthage, North Africa, which split over the so-called Donatist challenge. Nor did it happen in Alexandria, Egypt, which fractured over Arius’ theology. While granting that persecution casts suspicion on people linked to the oppressors, we still assume that all early 4th-century Christian communities were uniformly estranged from imperial power. First, I argue that this assumption is unfounded: some people in Carthage and in Alexandria had demonstrably closer connections than others to the imperial court. These differences make sense if we accept recent arguments that Christians attained full legal status under the emperor Gallienus (260–67) (Rebillard 2012; Eus. *HE* 7.13). Next, I show that in both Carthage and Alexandria, those with closer connections to the imperial court were the first to face charges of heresy or schism. In other words, some members of the broader Christian community perceived those with court connections as people whose allegiances were ambiguous at best and so not ‘true’ Christians. This situation proved particularly challenging for the emperor Constantine to manage, even though he proclaimed himself a member of the Christian community after 312.

My study of the Carthaginian and Alexandrian communities proceeds by analysing the various social affiliations of two key members, Caecilian, bishop of Carthage, and Arius, the Alexandrian priest and theologian, which I then compare – as far as is possible – with those

of other participants in those Christian communities. It draws on Eric Rebillard's *Christians and Their Many Identities in Late Antiquity* (2012), which argues that people do not *always* rank their religious identity as primary and we should not expect them to do so. They may perform multiple identities, feeling also the tug of citizenship within a city and the broader polity (or the pull of kinship or a society of friends). Exploring the ramifications of these multiple attachments leads me to the work of the sociologist Marilynn Brewer. Her social identity complexity theory effectively situates people in their contexts by encouraging us to consider the manifold groups to which they might belong at the same time (Brewer and Pierce 2005, esp. 428; Roccas and Brewer 2002, esp. 99).<sup>2</sup> Brewer's work also shows that people's tolerance for people unlike them contracts under stress. Serious social tension can cause people to claim affiliation with only those people who share several different attributes. In other words, in our cases, people see as 'truly Christian' only those who share all of their important group affiliations.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the utility of Rebillard's and Brewer's research, however, I avoid using the language of 'identity' for these 4th-century people. The term has an unhelpfully wide range of usage (Brubaker and Cooper 2000), and Carthaginians and Alexandrians do not use this concept to talk about themselves or others. Instead they refer to 'true' Christians versus heretics and schismatics. They are thus not abstracting something essential about themselves, but using a language of group membership. The many efforts on both sides to encourage conversion to the 'right' way is more evidence that 4th-century Christians did not view their disagreements as involving any kind of essential identity. Although not all modern uses of the term 'identity' involve essentialism, I prefer the term 'affiliation', which allows me to talk about a person's connection with, link to, or relationship with different groups. Affiliation here connotes an engagement, not necessarily a friendly relationship. I also use the term 'Christian community' loosely to include anyone who would have called themselves 'Christian' no matter how they (or others) might have otherwise qualified it.

This study also employs a comparative historical framework organised around four paired case studies. First, I compare the situation involving Caecilian of Carthage with that of Gertrude Van Tijn, whose work organising Jewish refugees through Amsterdam's Jewish Council gradually involved deportations to concentration camps

in the Second World War. I argue that both people gradually found themselves in untenable situations with respect to their governments, towards which they had originally had strong affiliations. After persecution ended, whether in the 4th or the 20th century, some members of their respective religious communities saw them as collaborators and so vehemently objected to their holding any position of authority. In Carthage, the concept of 'true' Christian had contracted for the Donatist party, including only those who had been part of the resistance to the imperial government. Next, I compare the case of Arius of Alexandria with that of Hannah Arendt, the political philosopher who reported on Adolf Eichmann's trial in 1961. Trying to understand totalitarianism, Arendt wondered how Eichmann got Jews (like Van Tijn) to mediate between the Nazis and their victims. I argue that both Arius and Arendt faced condemnation from the survivors of persecution because, in exploring the motivations or intellectual grounding of their oppressors, they seemed to violate the boundaries of their own religious communities, becoming people whose affiliations were ambiguous and therefore suspect. In adopting a comparative approach, I am not suggesting that the experience of Jews or these particular figures during the Second World War is exactly analogous to that of Christians or these two 4th-century Africans. The Holocaust obviously bore few resemblances to Diocletian's persecution: German Nazis targeted Jews for ostensibly ethnic or 'racial' not overtly religious reasons (thus the language of identity as essential is relevant here); nationalism and Fascism are modern ideologies; and the efficacy of the Holocaust relied on a pervasive anti-Semitism, as well as a totalitarian network of railroads and telecommunications, not to mention modern weaponry and systems of execution.

Nevertheless, I use the modern cases for several reasons. First, they provoke questions about the situations in which these late ancient people found themselves. This approach is especially useful for problems in Antiquity which have fed generations of studies, but in a highly compartmentalised way, due to the conventions of modern academic disciplines. For example, the cases of both Van Tijn and Arendt involve social networks, but most scholars of early Christian schism and heresy still consider Donatism and Arianism within a legal or theological framework instead of a context including economic or educational relationships.<sup>4</sup> I also want to move outside the paradigm of traditional philology, which has long dominated the field of ancient history and

cautions us never to look beyond the world of the printed document. The modern cases encourage us to raise questions about the broader Carthaginian and Alexandrian contexts which in turn draw our attention to shadows haunting the whiteness of the page. Such ‘arguments with silence’ (Richlin 2014) may engage more historical imagination than some colleagues find acceptable, but they are no more fictional than a world we imagine delimited by words on a folio, papyrus roll or stone tablet. My third aim in adopting a comparative frame is to invoke a spirit of empathy for the experience of the early 4th-century Christian community as a whole. The fourth century is a polemical period, and we read about the sides that eventually lost, the so-called ‘heretics’ and ‘schismatics’, only through the accounts of the victors, the ‘orthodox’. In setting their stories alongside a more recent human tragedy, the profoundness of which rightly continues to inform our contemporary ethical awareness, I hope to show how the backlash that was Diocletian’s persecution warped the social interactions of entire communities in ways that would reverberate across the Mediterranean for centuries to come. Thus we may better understand the genesis of the two ancient quarrels that loom so large in our written sources. If this study also leads to some general conclusions about persecution’s effect on survivors, so much the better.

### Flexible Alliances

Gertrude Van Tijn was a Dutch-naturalised German who helped Dutch and German Jews emigrate before the Nazi conquest (Wasserstein 2014).<sup>5</sup> Gradually and inadvertently, she mediated the identification, incarceration and deportation of Jews to camps in northern Europe. Rebillard’s multiple affiliations are clear: Van Tijn was a German citizen and a Jew, although not particularly observant. She had lived in London, learning English, and then the Netherlands, becoming a Dutch citizen with marriage. Family contacts with the Christian financial establishment led to employment under a prominent Dutch banker. Through his influence, the director of the American Joint Distribution committee, a New York-based relief group, asked her to coordinate food distribution to Jewish prisoners of war in Eastern Europe during the First World War. Her multilingualism and social work training made her the perfect liaison. In the early 1930s she became secretary for the Committee for Jewish Refugees, a group directed

by David Cohen, who directed Holland's Jewish Council under Nazi occupation. In 1942, Van Tijn became director of 'Help for the Departing', a department of Cohen's Jewish Council charged with equipping deportees.<sup>6</sup> Wasserstein highlights Van Tijn's ability to deploy her various networks and affiliations, first to secure real refugee status for people, next to coordinate deportations of Jews to so-called work camps and finally to defer deportation to the gas chambers for some while sending others instead.

Like Arendt, many people have tried to explain the behaviour of people like Van Tijn; their solutions have ranged from 'Jewish passivity' to 'Dutch conformism' (Croes and Tammes 2004; Hilberg 1985). Her own post-war account states that 'she had been fully aware of the Nazi program of mass murder' as early as 1941.<sup>7</sup> Van Tijn wrote this report to defend herself against former friends and co-workers who saw her as having collaborated with the Nazis and who actively – and successfully – campaigned against her post-war employment in refugee resettlement.<sup>8</sup> For them, her affiliations with the imperial Nazi state and lack of resistance meant they could not consider her either as part of the post-war Jewish or Dutch community. For his part, Cohen, Gertrude's supervisor, maintained that he had acted primarily in the Dutch national interest. Van Tijn's biographer, Wasserstein, says that Van Tijn strove for an ambiguous kind of 'virtue', as she repeatedly tried to find the 'best' solution among a limited range of hideous options. The work of Rebillard and Brewer suggests that Van Tijn's relationship with the Jewish community was only one affiliation among many others that she valued, including ties with Dutch and Christian financiers, mostly female social workers engaged in US–European refugee agencies and personal connections in Great Britain, Germany and the Netherlands. We can also see after the war how little sympathy many Jewish survivors had for her tragic choices, as they ostracised her from the ranks of Jewish victims by delimiting her as a collaborator (that is, someone in league with the Germans who had abandoned the Jewish community) for her connections to the Jewish Council and thus to the Nazi regime.<sup>9</sup>

Van Tijn's story may seem far removed from Roman Carthage. Nevertheless, there are important similarities. First, before persecution, Christians in the Roman empire, like Jews in Europe (Human 1998, 17–18), had relatively recently achieved emancipation. Since 260 CE, emperors had recognised Christianity as a legal, property-holding association (Eus. *HE* 7.13).<sup>10</sup> In Carthage, financial, political and social

networks would therefore have connected the bishops, clergy and congregations with the rest of Carthaginian society and Roman administration. Thus, the case of the so-called Donatist controversy, like Van Tijn's, not only involves people with multiple affiliations; it also shows that after persecution, a stressful situation by any definition, highly exclusive groups may form, splitting the survivors. When this happens, what appears to be religious conflict may be a way of reacting against people perceived as affiliated too closely with a formerly persecuting imperial power.

At the cusp of the 4th century, the emperor Diocletian issued a series of edicts coercing religious conformity (see Eus. *HE* 8.1f). The first sought to exterminate followers of Mani.<sup>11</sup> The next, in 303, called for the destruction of churches and the burning of scripture, effectively forbidding 'collective practice' (Rebillard 2012; de Ste Croix 1954, 75–77). It stripped Christians 'of official position', status and legal standing, requiring ritual sacrifice before official business (Eus. *HE* 8.2.4; Eus. *Mart.* pr.1). Diocletian's three other imperial colleagues in the tetrarchy all appear to have promulgated this edict. The Western tetrarchs, Maximian and Constantius, refrained from further action. Nevertheless, the East saw three more edicts demanding the arrest of clergy and a general order to sacrifice (Frend [1952] 2000; Optatus 1997).<sup>12</sup> Christians who survived without physical harm either performed the ritual or kept their heads down, passing as ordinary Romans. Evidence suggests widespread compliance. After persecution ceased in 306 for the West, 311 for the Balkans and 313 for the East, groups of Christians in North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean drew boundaries delineating themselves from others under their bishops' jurisdiction, with both sides claiming the mantle of true Christianity. In North Africa, one group of Christians believed that others had relinquished sacred texts to the Romans enforcing Diocletian's edicts. They called them *traditores*, literally people who 'handed over' scripture. These 'traitors' or collaborators became the spur against which the Donatist community constructed themselves as the only true Christians, in the process linking an anti-imperial stance with correct belief and practice.

The experience of people in north-west Africa during the persecution is not as well documented as we would like.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, there are examples of bishops holding on to scripture despite official demands to surrender it,<sup>14</sup> and some bishops continued to hold assemblies – also defying the first edict.<sup>15</sup> In other sources, some authorities

ignore the letter of the law, and some Christians keep their heads down (Lepelley 1979–1981; Rebillard 2012). Van Tijn’s case shows that we should expect people to have had multiple allegiances that they might employ at different times, and that Christian leaders knew people willing to help them.

Sources suggest that suspicion toward people with perceived ties to the Roman authorities fractured Christian communities in Carthage and Numidia, especially regarding finances.<sup>16</sup> Gender and regional differences exacerbated the conflict (Duval 1982, 2.481–82; Marone 2011). Optatus’ account blames the schism’s origins on a woman (*Contra Parm.* 16), Lucilla, who, he says, kissed a martyr’s relic during the liturgy. Caecilian, the archdeacon, ‘criticized her, humiliating her’, because the martyr’s standing was ‘not yet confirmed.’<sup>17</sup> Some time later, the emperors issued the first edict of persecution (Barnes 1973; Meinking 2013, 86–87; Rebillard 2012), although they had already been targeting Manichaeans for several years. Summoning the bishop, Mensurius (Shaw 2011), Roman officials accused him of sheltering a person who had written against the emperor (presumably in response to the edicts).<sup>18</sup> Before he left, Mensurius gave the congregation elders the church’s gold, silver and scripture, lest they fall into the wrong hands (Shaw 2011, 818; Optatus, *Contra Parm.* 1.17.1). He never returned (Aug. *Brev.* 3.25).

Two years later, African Christians could openly conduct business again. Diocletian and Maximian had retired, leaving Constantius as senior Western emperor with direct control over Britain and Gaul. He had effectively ignored all four edicts targeting Christians,<sup>19</sup> and Maxentius made repeal official when he usurped power over Italy, Africa and Spain in 306 (Optatus, *Contra Parm.* 18; Barnes 2010; Rebillard 2012).<sup>20</sup> Now the Carthaginians could replace Mensurius. The initial candidates, Botrus and Celestius, wanted to exclude Numidian participation.<sup>21</sup> Optatus says that when the first aspirants failed, ‘the whole populace’ elected Caecilian, Mensurius’ archdeacon. He was ordained, but the Numidians probably did not vote (Birley 1987): they were Caecilian’s staunchest opponents (Frend [1952] 2000). After Caecilian’s election, the elders kept the church treasure,<sup>22</sup> Lucilla refused her support, and together they questioned the investiture’s validity (Optatus, *Contra Parm.* 18–19). They objected that the ordaining bishop, Felix, had given church property to Roman officials. Thus, a collaborator or *trahitor* had appointed Caecilian. Felix was later cleared,<sup>23</sup> but the

elders, Lucilla and her supporters elected Maiorinus, Lucilla's 'domestic', as bishop (Optatus, *Contra Parm.* 19).<sup>24</sup> When Caecilian did not resign, the elders asked Numidian bishops for help, inviting them to a meeting at Carthage (probably in summer 306).<sup>25</sup> This assembly then formally installed Maiorinus in opposition to Caecilian (Barnes 1975, 18; Dearn 2004).

The conflict became more complex after 310 when the emperor Maxentius returned church property that the state had seized (Corcoran 1996, 144–45). Then Constantine, raised to power by the army after the death of his father Constantius, began funding churches in his territory after conquering Maxentius in 312 (Eus. *HE* 10.6.1–5). The Numidians accused Mensurius, Caecilian, Felix and their supporters as *traditores* (Optatus, *Contra Parm.* 1.18 App. 1; Aug. *Contra Cresc.* 3.30). In continued opposition to Caecilian, their rival church installed Donatus as bishop, Maiorinus having died. And they asked the emperor to recognise them as the true church and implicitly the recipient of imperial funds, as money and patronage networks continue to exacerbate the conflict. In 313, Constantine referred the matter to Miltiades, bishop of Rome, then to the Western bishops convened at Arles. All ruled in Caecilians' favour, as we might expect bishops connected to the emperor to do. By 314, the 'Donatists', rejecting the validity of their opponents' baptisms, were re-baptising converts (Optatus, App. 4). The bishops of Rome and more recently of Carthage opposed re-baptism, but it was a north-west African practice aimed at reintegrating *lapsi* and bringing 'heretics' into communion. It became a Donatist trademark.<sup>26</sup>

There were more issues at play than the simple act of handing over scripture in the struggle between the two halves of the North African church: regional differences and local solidarity, the expanding power of the Carthaginian papacy, the role of patronage, money and influence, the authority of women, the question of proper ritual, the recognition of martyrs. Nevertheless, our sources focus on the charge of collaboration, *traditio*. To us, Van Tijn's collaboration may appear more heinous, in that she had handed over people, not texts. Nevertheless, for the Donatists, *traditio* was – as Brent Shaw (2011) observes – like Judas' sin, 'handing over the very Words of God ... to secular authorities'. Even if – like Van Tijn – Caecilian did not intend to 'collaborate', that he was the most senior Carthaginian cleric to survive while others had perished suggested that he had some connection to imperial power. Moreover, once Maxentius restored church property

and Constantine's endowments began, Caecilian stood to benefit from imperial largesse – a possibility reified by bishops ruling on behalf of the emperor on two separate occasions. We assume that all Christians would perceive imperial patronage as an unmitigated good, but for the Donatists, like Van Tijn's critics, true members of their group were identifiably anti-imperial. Moreover Donatists shared other attributes, such as a respect for local traditions, including re-baptism, and perhaps a stronger voice for women, people of lower status and elders in the church. The Donatists thus became an Afro-Numidian community, and their opponents, recognised by two councils and the emperor, came to represent the imperial church. There may have been 'real ambiguities about who precisely had done what', as in the modern example, but these questions meant that the issue was constantly reinforced (Shaw 2011, 67). And those hearing about such acts felt a rage, a sense of opposition against the imagined perpetrators and a sense of solidarity one with another, thus fortifying the boundary between the two groups (Shaw 2011).

Van Tijn's case may not exactly replicate the Donatist schism, but it helps to raise questions about the information we have. For example, it forces us to explore more deeply the political and economic connections – the multiple affiliations – of the Carthaginian and Numidian clergy and other African elites (Brown 2012). Second, it underscores how difficult it would be for any community leader to have clean hands and survive a pogrom: a leader who had merely survived persecution might face a charge of collaboration from those whose networks allow them to look away from the grey zone which included all survivors. Finally, it shows how even a new regime, the post-war Dutch government or the newly Christian Constantine, may never gain the trust of those whose group has formed in opposition. Only *we* know the trajectory of imperial Christianity in the Roman empire; we must remember that the Donatists did not.

### **Condemnable Collaboration or an Attempt to Understand the Enemy?**

The Donatist conflict of North Africa has long been the quintessential example of how persecution might lead to division in an ancient religious community. For the Egyptian church, the Meletian schism, not the Arian controversy, is the example usually considered in this context

(Barkman 2014). Nevertheless, I will argue that Arius' adversaries saw *him* as a collaborator, in this case playing a role similar to that of Hannah Arendt. There are good reasons to look for parallels between the modern post-war tensions and the Arian controversy. Arendt said that she prioritised her identity as a political philosopher over any affiliation with the 'Jewish People' (Ezra 2007). Those who saw her as a collaborator, however, thought her censure of the Jewish Councils came from her intimacy with Martin Heidegger, the philosopher and Nazi party member. I argue that, like Arendt, Arius was trying to understand and respond to the ideologies and arguments associated with the persecution (Frend 1987), many of which derived from the writings of the pagan philosopher Porphyry of Tyre (Digeser 2012). In response, Arius' bishop Alexander – and ultimately the Council of Nicaea in 325 – painted him not just as a 'heretic' but also as a Porphyrian and hence a collaborator. After briefly describing Arendt's experience, I will turn to the case of Arius.

As I said above, Arendt attended Adolf Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem in order to understand his role in the unfolding of Nazi power (Ezra 2007). Having already written on *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), she concluded that such regimes succeeded because ordinary people like Eichmann and some Jewish Council members had abandoned the effort to stop and think about their actions. After trying Eichmann in 1961, the Israelis executed him for crimes against humanity in June 1962. Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (in which, it must be said, only a few pages discussed the Jewish Councils) appeared in the *New Yorker* the following spring and then in a separate volume (Arendt 1963a-e).

The storm that Arendt's book raised in the community of survivors was a 'violent' (Howe 1968), 'bitter', 'public dispute' (Rabinbach 2004). Her critics accused her of being an arrogant intellectual looking down on ordinary Jews and Israelis (Syrkin 1963). They thought she had disavowed her Jewish identity when she said that she had 'never in her life "loved" any people or collective' but only individual people. Even though Arendt had escaped an internment camp, her analysis pushed against an evolving narrative of martyrdom, victimhood and resistance that her detractors had embraced.

As with Van Tijn, Arendt's experience seems far from the Great Persecution in general or Egypt in particular. Although no one, to my knowledge, has seen the 'Arian heresy' as a ripple effect of Diocletian's

persecution,<sup>27</sup> the parallel with Arendt suggests how this might be true. One clue to this possibility is that attacks on Alexandrian theology had helped arouse anti-Christian feeling before the persecution (Digeser 2012). This confrontation came through the writings of the Platonist philosopher Porphyry of Tyre (Digeser 2006). Porphyry made three claims relevant to the Arian controversy. The first was that Christian scripture, properly read according to its genre, did not establish that Jesus was God in human form. In Porphyry's view, Jesus was a spiritual guide, not God incarnate. The second claim was that Origen of Alexandria did not respect standard rules for allegorical exegesis. For example, he was wrong to read allegorically legal texts such as Leviticus. The third claim was that, despite these exegetical mistakes, Origen had discovered truth within scripture when he used methods appropriate for his sources. For Porphyry, the best example of Origen's insight was that he rejected the widely popular belief in bodily resurrection.

Before exploring Alexandria's scholarly communities, two further points are important. First, the persecution in Alexandria was harsher than in Carthage, with all four edicts implemented. The crisis continued until after the deaths of all the early 4th-century tetrarchs save Constantine and Licinius, who unseated and executed Maximin Daia, emperor of Oriens, in 313. Second, like Carthage, the early 4th-century Alexandrian see faced challenges to its authority. Peter, the head of the Alexandrian catechetical school, had become bishop of Alexandria in 300 (Barnard 1970). When persecution began, he fled Egypt, returning in 305 or 306, to deal with the Melitian schism. He paid for his homecoming with his life. After the brief tenure of Achilleas,<sup>28</sup> Alexander became bishop in 312. Alexandria also sustained regional churches. The bishop was first among equals, with priests supervising their own congregations. Starting with his appointment, Alexander was immersed in conflict. Philostorgius (*HE* 1.3) hints that Alexander and Arius had competed for the see, even before their doctrinal differences aired (Parvis 2006, 73). It is also possible that, as in Carthage, the conflict had a regional aspect. Arius was pastor in Alexandria's Baucalis region (Davis 2004; Lyman 2008), which had few inhabitants, many of whom were pastoralists (Haas 1997, 269–70, 272). After Arius' exile, many of his closest allies were Libyan, as was he (Barnes 2009).<sup>29</sup>

The see's close connection to Origen's theology surely complicated matters, as Porphyry had repudiated some of his methods while endorsing at least one of his controversial positions. Since Dionysius'

mid-3rd-century episcopacy, every Alexandrian bishop had been a moderate Origenist (Beeley 2012). Even Peter, appointed bishop at the cusp of persecution, embraced Origen's theological legacy, distancing himself only from the doctrine of the pre-existence of souls. Alexander too partly espoused an Origenist-inspired theology.<sup>30</sup> For Arius' theology in general, or his connection to Alexandrian Origenism in particular, however, the sources present significant problems (Löhr 2006a, b). Little survives from Arius' point of view apart from a confession of faith in a letter to Alexander from Palestine (*Urkunde* 6), another letter (*Urkunde* 1) and two fragments, preserved by Athanasius (*C. Ar.* 1.5; *Syn.* 15). Most historians assume that Arius was not trained as an Origenist (Barnard 1970; Edwards 2012, 489), although Christopher Beeley (2012) argues that his theology, even more than Alexander's, had strong Origenist underpinnings.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, Arius maintained a unique definition of God the Father in a way alien to moderate Origenists such as Alexander or Eusebius of Caesarea.<sup>32</sup>

Countless studies have tried to precisely parse Arius' teaching to learn why Alexander and others opposed him so vehemently. Fortunately, understanding how Arius' opponents characterised him is more useful to us than specifying what he taught. Very early in the controversy, Alexander wrote a letter against Arius. We have long seen that this is not an accurate portrayal but a construction of a heresy. Particularly interesting is the portrait of Christ that Alexander attributes to Arius. An analysis of this letter shows that in Alexander's view, Arius' Son of God more closely resembled Porphyry's spiritual guide than Origen's Christ. For example, only in the view of Arius' theology that Alexander circulated is the Son considered to be a creature like any other human being, mutable and capable of vice (Beeley 2012), except that God foresaw his virtue. Only here is the tenet that the Son was created in time (*Alex. Phil.* 2, 2.3). Alexander also accuses Arius of basing his views on 'those passages in Scripture that speak of Jesus' human vulnerabilities and sufferings' (*Alex. Phil.* 1, 9). Finally, Alexander likens Arius to the Jews and Hellenes, all of whom deny Christ.<sup>33</sup> These charges bear little resemblance to what Arius actually taught, as far as we can tell (Beeley 2012), but they do recall Porphyry's critique against the Christian worship of Jesus. As Porphyry was infamous among Arius' supporters (Eusebius of Caesarea being a prominent example), Alexander's critique served as a dog whistle. This subtext encouraged Arius' supporters to connect the priest's speculations with

those of Christianity's archenemy. Arius was thus a collaborator with those associated with the persecution.

In this vein, a letter from Constantine 'to the bishops and people' is significant.<sup>34</sup> Writing immediately after the Council of Nicaea had rejected Arius' theology (Barnes 2009), Constantine stated that Arius should experience the same humiliation as those whom he had imitated, namely Porphyry. For the emperor, Porphyry was Piety's 'enemy' because he had written 'wicked treatises against religion.' But the philosopher had faced just punishment through well-deserved reproach and the burning of his books. Likewise, Constantine ruled, 'Arius and his followers should be called Porphyrians' and his writings should be burned, so that his corrupt teachings might be destroyed and all memory of him forgotten.<sup>35</sup> Historians usually explain Constantine's pairing of Arius and Porphyry as deriving from their similar punishments. But the emperor equates their *conduct*: what Arius did reminded him of what Porphyry had done. Moreover the emperor links Arius with the man whose ideas in some way supported the ideology of persecution. Indeed possession of either man's writings was a capital crime (Barnes 2009). This reference strengthens the argument that Alexander's construction of Arius painted him as a Porphyrian and thus as a traitor, as a collaborator with the imperial persecutors.

Consider the situation in Alexandria as Porphyry's writings circulated before the persecution: although Platonist and Christian communities had learned and taught side by side, their theology and metaphysics became intensely politicised and the two scholarly communities drew sharply apart (Digeser 2010). Moreover, among Christians, Origen's theology became extremely controversial because Porphyry had praised its strengths and targeted what he saw as its flaws. Suppose Arius – like Arendt with the Jewish Councils – was trying to understand why and how Origen in particular, or Alexandrian theology in general, had erred. The mere effort to assess the validity of Porphyry's critique may have sufficed for Alexander to question Arius' loyalty, *especially* when the bishop's authority was on the line.<sup>36</sup> Alternatively, if Arius was trying to imagine a Christology that stood up to Porphyry's philosophical challenges, then this link to the culture of the persecutors, like Arendt's relationship to Heidegger, was a moral failure and denial of his Christian community in Alexander's eyes. The efforts of Alexander and Constantine to tar Arius as a Porphyrian suggest that in some way the renegade priest had approached the enemy

persecutors' camp, violating the boundaries the bishop and emperor were now imposing around the Christian community.

### Choosing Sides

Upon gaining control of North Africa after defeating Maxentius in October 312, Constantine found himself immediately injected into the controversy over the Carthaginian papacy when the Donatists appealed for his help.<sup>37</sup> It is impossible at this remove to discern the extent to which his decision to fund the churches now under his jurisdiction (Eus. *HE* 10.7) may have exacerbated the contest over the Carthaginian see. Nevertheless, Constantine could have ignored the problem, leaving the parties to try for consensus on their own. This was probably not an attractive option, however, if he wanted to revive and build upon the relationship that emperors had established with Christian bishops before Diocletian's edicts. For Aurelian (270-75) had already set a precedent that the emperor might adjudicate in questions of episcopal succession, resolving (ostensibly as *pontifex maximus*) the dispute over Paul of Samosata's disputed see in Antioch (Eus. *HE* 7.30).<sup>38</sup> Seeing Constantine as performing the *pontifex maximus*' role of adjudicating priesthoods lessens the possibility that he could have supported both sides financially, for this was – above all – a matter of the suitability of priests to perform their functions. He could have supported the Donatists over Caecilian's party, but if he did so, he would have ignored the party with the closer imperial ties – a move that makes little sense, especially after both the bishop of Rome and those assembled at Arles did his bidding and decided against the Donatists. However, the decision that he finally made to support Caecilian's faction would have exacerbated the Donatists' suspicions that the Caecilianists were in the emperor's pocket, along with the bishop of Rome and those who met at Arles.

When we turn to Alexandria, the attributes that distinguish those around Arius from his opponents are several. Arius and his followers valued a theology that stood up to Hellene Platonist scrutiny. They took seriously the issues raised by people linked to the imperial persecution. They valued Origen's philosophy, individual scholarship and free inquiry (which in itself was an Origenist attitude). On Alexander's side were people who associated Hellene philosophy with the persecution and who had an ambivalent relationship with Origen's teaching.

More importantly, perhaps, they valued episcopal authority over free inquiry – even to the extent of asserting and expanding the authority of the Alexandrian bishopric, both regionally and doctrinally. This attitude was part of a broader local trend. As Dionysius of Alexandria in the 3rd century had excommunicated Origen for being ordained without his permission (Digeser 2012), so Arius was ultimately excommunicated for defying his bishop's teaching.

When Alexander wrote to Constantine asking him to intervene in his dispute with Arius, 12 years after the Donatists' petition and the Arian conflict, again the emperor had a range of options. Unlike the Donatist dispute, this was not a matter of ritual purity, correct procedure or a contested office, so the emperor could have declined to intervene – indeed, this was his initial response (Eus. VC 2.64-72). Constantine could have sided with Arius – in fact, he would take this position some years after the Council of Nicaea; he seems to have found something about it compelling. The emperor could have supported both sides, or neither. And again, it is not clear in this case whether the distribution of funds to churches in territories Constantine had newly acquired may have played a role. Carlos Galvão-Sobrinho argues that Ossius of Cordoba pushed Constantine to take the bishop's side in the quarrel against the theologian/priest. As Constantine chose Alexander's side, however, it is important to note that this meant choosing the more restrictive group, the one that privileged the bishop's authority over the theologian's autonomy and the group more uncomfortable about Christian engagement with Hellene philosophy. Privileging this group did not bode well for the long-term possibilities of religious tolerance – as events after the emperor Julian's death (363) would bear out.

In sum, the evidence here supports Marilynn Brewer's finding that serious social tension can cause people to claim affiliation for only those people with whom they share several different attributes. In other words, people see as 'truly Christian' only those who share all of their important group affiliations. The development of these highly exclusive group affiliations may set the stage after persecution for charges of collaboration, corruption, and hence defilement and heresy toward people now seen as other. Although we still cannot explain why people respond this way, both the ancient and the modern cases suggest that the crucible of religious persecution may lead directly to conflict within the targeted group. For some of these communities, at least, their turn toward religious purity derives from what they see as

unmitigated corruption on the part of collaborators formerly among their number (Chayes 2015). When this corruption involves theological issues, the charge of heresy may not be far behind.

## Notes

- 1 This chapter builds on the author's earlier work. Copyright © Taylor and Francis Group 2018: 'Collaboration and Identity in the Aftermath of Persecution: Religious Conflict and Its Legacy' by Elizabeth DePalma Digeser. In *Reconceiving Religious Conflict: New Views from the Formative Centuries of Christianity*, edited by Wendy Mayer and Chris L. de Wet, 261–81. London: Routledge. Reproduced by permission of Taylor and Francis Group, LLC, a division of Informa plc.
- 2 Many thanks to Greg Goalwin for these references, which help to develop the argument I first set out in 'Collaboration and Identity in the Aftermath of Persecution: Conflict and Its Legacy' (2018), for the volume on religious conflict edited by Wendy Mayer and Chris de Wet above.
- 3 '[A]nxious people have diminished cognitive resources ... individuals under stress ... tend to perceive their groups as largely overlapping and largely similar' (Roccas and Brewer 2002).
- 4 Elizabeth Clark's work on Origenism is a noteworthy exception (Clark 1992). More recently, scholars such as Cavan Concannon have developed sophisticated methodologies for this kind of analysis (Concannon 2013, 2014).
- 5 I am indebted to Wasserstein's timely book for all of my information on Gertrude Van Tijn. Where relevant, I have also referenced his sources.
- 6 Report by Gertrude Van Tijn, Oct. 1944, Leo Baeck Institute Archives, New York AR 3477/33.3/51, 48 (Wasserstein 2014).
- 7 Wasserstein (2014), noting the absence of any earlier hint of such knowledge, questions her veracity, suggesting that she backdated her knowledge in order to 'differentiate her position from Cohen's'. See also Herzog (2014).
- 8 Cf. A. de Leeuw to A. de Jong, 4 June 1945. Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem 24/182-163 in Wasserstein (2014).
- 9 And yet Primo Levi saw every Jew liberated from the camps as a collaborator. Claiming that privileged prisoners, a minority in the camps, were 'a ... majority among survivors', Levi (1989, esp. 40) dared to consider the grey zone between victims and persecutors. I consider the implications of Levi's position more fully in 'Collaboration and Identity' (2018).
- 10 The edict of emperor Gallienus 'amounted to a full legalization of Christianity' (Rebillard 2012, 58).
- 11 Seston (1940, 345–54) sets the date at 297; Barnes (1976) (with whom I agree) thinks 302.
- 12 Tellingly, we do not hear about *lapsi* in Africa, which further suggests that Maximian did not enforce the later edict requiring sacrifice (Löhr 2002; Rebillard 2012, 58–59; de Ste Croix 1954, 89).

- 13 For what follows, see Barnes (2010); Rebillard (2012, 58–59). A few sources dating from near the conflict survived, some as part of a collection assembled probably in the 330s. Optatus published them by mid-century with his attack on the Donatists. See Barnes (1975) for Optatus' drawing 'on a single dossier composed late in the reign of Constantine'. Together with Optatus' *Contra Parmenianum Donatistam* in the appendix are *Gesta apud Zenophilum* (1), *Acta purgationis Felicis* (2), six letters of Constantine, a letter from the Council at Arles (314) and a warrant from the praetorian prefect giving the Donatists free transport from Trier to Africa (315). According to Barnes, the authenticity of these documents 'is now completely vindicated' (he cites Brown 1972, 237–338). For an assessment of the sources in Eusebius, see Carotenuto (2002), and for a caution against using the account of the Abitinian martyrs as anything but a product of the milieu after the 411 Council of Carthage, see Dearn (2004).
- 14 E.g., the *Acts of Felix of Thibuica*; cf. Lepelley (1979–81, 1.335, 2.192–93).
- 15 E.g., the *Acts of Gallonius*; cf. Lepelley (1979–81, 1.335–43, 2.58–60, 2.192–93).
- 16 For the best (and most recent at the time of writing) overview of the intricacies of the origins and dating them, see Shaw (2011). The schism began with Caecilian's election, this much is clear.
- 17 Is this an implicit conflict over the acceptability of martyrdom? Meinking (2013, 87): 'Christian communities themselves were divided by the imperial actions taken against them, leading to conflicts over the acceptability of martyrdom and the question over the readmission to the church of those who had renounced their faith or handed over scriptures.'
- 18 The identity of the 'tyrant' whom Optatus mentions has been hotly contested – and obviously it affects the dating of the conflict. The emperor Maximian is the most likely choice (Barnes 1975, 19; Shaw 2011, 812–13); but Frend and Clancy (1977) prefer a later date, identifying the 'tyrant' with Maxentius. Cf. Dearn (2004).
- 19 The attitude of Constantius I toward Manichaeism – or that of his son, Constantine, for that matter—is not a subject that contemporary scholarship has explored.
- 20 These dates conflict with Frend (1965a, 502–03, 1965b) but are upheld in de Ste Croix (2006) and Shaw (2011).
- 21 Carthage was in Proconsular Africa, but the see directed churches in the province of Numidia to the east. Since the time of Cyprian, the *provincia* of the bishop of Carthage had been 'unusually widespread, including the adjoining areas of Numidia and Mauretania'; Rives (1995, 290), citing Cyprian, *Epistula* 48.3.2.
- 22 As Shaw (2011, 818) emphasises, however, 'the main problem was not really with' Caecilian's ordination, but rather with 'the ensuing battle between Caecilian and the *seniores* over the latter's possession of the church's wealth that had been left in the hands of the Elders by Mensurius before his departure.' 'The Elders,' Shaw continues, 'were more supportive of factions hostile to Caecilian than those in support of him, although they might well have had other grounds on which they did not wish to transfer the church's wealth into his hands.'
- 23 *Contra Parm.* App. 2: 'The Acquittal Proceedings of Felix Bishop of Abthugni'.
- 24 Bribed by her wealth, says Optatus.

- 25 The date for this appeal is contingent on the date for the conference at Circa, which Shaw (2011, 816–18) dates to May 306: some of the bishops who went to the meeting at Circa then attended the meeting at Carthage afterwards.
- 26 Pollmann (2014, 163 and n. 31): ‘Already in AD 200, a provincial council in Carthage had denied the validity of baptism by heretics, following Tertullian’s notion of baptism’ (Tertullian, *De baptismo* 1–9). See also Wilhite (2007). The councils of 255 and 256 confirmed this outcome. More customarily applied to those who had sacrificed, re-baptism was advocated in the 3rd century by the theologian/scholar Tertullian and – for a time – by the Carthaginian bishop Cyprian, despite the opposition of the bishop of Rome (Brent 2010, 7). According to Pollmann, ‘Stephen I was strictly against this North African decision and in 256 prohibited the repetition of the baptism.’
- 27 Galvão-Sobrinho (2013) sees nothing significant about the persecution or its trauma in exacerbating intragroup conflict and polarisation. He attributes this development to the nature of complicated theological speculation. Scholarship on the so-called Arian heresy is vast and overwhelmingly complicated. There is an enormous literature dedicated to piecing out how exactly it began, what precisely Arius taught, why he garnered the support that he did, and why his theology and the ‘school’ that it launched became so popular and long-lasting even after the emperor Constantine’s efforts to settle the matter at the Council of Nicaea in 325. A sample of those most relevant to this study includes Barnard (1970); Barnes (2009); Böhm (1992); Grant (1975); Gregg and Groh (1981); Haas (1993); Heil (2002); Löhr (2006a, b); Lyman (2008); Martin (1989a, b); Williams (1986, 2001). If Arius’ story is situated at all within the context of imperial politics, historians usually remark that it became a *cause célèbre* because it came to the emperor’s attention just after his conquest of the Eastern empire from Licinius and in the midst of his efforts to unify his new domain. To my knowledge, the Alexandrian conflict has never seriously been considered within the ripple effects of the Great Persecution.
- 28 Much of the following discussion draws on Beeley (2012, 105–11).
- 29 E.g., Secundus of Ptolemais (Epiph. *Pan.* 69.1.2, 3.2; *Urkunde* 6 = *Dokument* 1.5; Beeley (2012, 332, n. 9).
- 30 Alexander, however, abandoned Origen’s idea that the Son was generated by the Father’s will; he changed the language of eternity with respect to the Son’s generation (he was generated always [*aei*], not eternally [*aidios*]); and he mapped the ontology of being versus non-being onto this newly formed distinction between time and absolute eternity (Beeley 2012). The reaction of erstwhile Origenists outside of Alexandria, however, looks like furious back-peddalling. For example, writing a defence of Origen during the persecution, Eusebius and Pamphilus concluded that Origen had taught a too-exalted status for Christ. Pamphilus’ *Apology* hints that other charges against Origen were that he divided the godhead by positing a Valentinian emission; he supported psilanthropism or adoptionism; he taught Docetism and an overly strong allegorisation; he taught two Christs; he denied literal Biblical history; he denied the resurrection of the dead; he denied the punishment of the wicked; he taught the pre-existence of the soul; and he taught the transmigration of souls. Beeley (2012, 54) observes, however, that the only tenet Origen actually held was the pre-existence of souls.
- 31 Cf. *Urkunde* 1.2; 1.5; 6.4.

- 32 Cf. *Thalia* frags 5–6, 12, 213, 7, 11, 4, 14–15, 9, 22, 10. For Arius, one of God the Father's unique qualities is precisely his 'singularity: God is supremely unique (*monōtatos*), yet the son does not share this quality' (Beeley 2012). This aspect of Arius' thinking is worth comparing with Porphyry's theology as Aaron Johnson (2013) understands it.
- 33 He links him with Paul of Samosata as well (*Phil.* 2, 9).
- 34 See Edwards (2013).
- 35 Socr. 1.9.30 (NPNF transl.) Τοὺς πονηροὺς καὶ ἀσεβεῖς μιμησάμενος Ἄρειος δίκαιός ἐστιν τὴν αὐτὴν ἐκείνοις ὑπέχειν ἀτιμίαν. Ὡσπερ τοίνυν Πορφύριος ὁ τῆς θεοσεβείας ἐχθρὸς συντάγματα ἅττα παράνομα κατὰ τῆς θρησκείας συστησάμενος ἄξιον εὐρατο μισθόν, καὶ τοιοῦτον, ὥστε ἐπονείδιστον μὲν αὐτὸν πρὸς τὸν ἐξῆς γενέσθαι χρόνον καὶ πλείστης ἀναπλησθῆναι κακοδοξίας, ἀφανισθῆναι δὲ τὰ ἀσεβῆ αὐτοῦ συγγράμματα, οὕτως καὶ νῦν ἔδοξεν Ἄρειόν τε καὶ τοὺς αὐτῶ ὁμογνώμονας Πορφυριανοὺς μὲν καλεῖσθαι, ἴν' ὧν τοὺς τρόπους μεμίμηται, τούτων ἔχῃσι καὶ τὴν προσηγορίαν, πρὸς δὲ τούτοις καὶ εἴ τι σύγγραμμα ὑπὸ Ἀρείου συντεταγμένον εὐρίσκοιτο, τοῦτο πυρὶ παραδίδοσθαι, ἵνα μὴ μόνον τὰ φαῦλα αὐτοῦ τῆς διδασκαλίας ἀφανισθῆι, ἀλλὰ μηδὲ ὑπόμνημα αὐτοῦ ὅλως ὑπολείποιτο.
- 36 Here the argument in Galvão-Sobrinho (2013) applies: parsing theology was done, in part at least, as a way to augment episcopal power.
- 37 For the most current discussion of Constantine's involvement, see Ubiña (2013).
- 38 Millar (1977, 447–56) notes the prominence of petitions regarding temples, priesthoods and festivals among petitions to the emperor, addressed ostensibly because of his role as *pontifex maximus*. Nevertheless, Cameron (2016, 156–57) cautions against too strictly trying to classify an emperor's decisions as stemming from specific titles and roles.

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