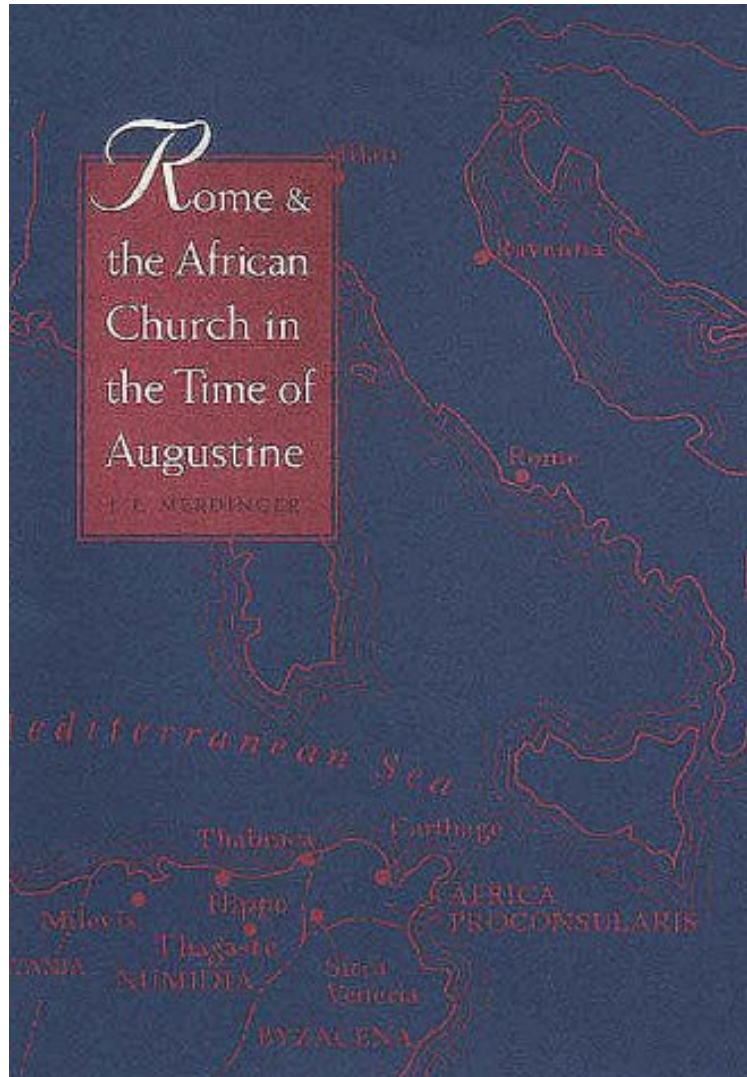


(Free read ebook) Rome and the African Church in the Time of Augustine

Rome and the African Church in the Time of Augustine

J. E. Merdinger

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J. E. Merdinger : Rome and the African Church in the Time of Augustine before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Rome and the African Church in the Time of Augustine:

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Rome and AfricaBy A CustomerFor those of us who read Augustine mainly for his philosophical and theological thought, it is easy to forget that he was a busy bishop and that as bishop he was involved as judge in many--and in some instances messy--cases of canon law as it was emerging in the African church in the late fourth and fifth centuries. For those of us who were coerced into some formal study of canon law, it is easy to forget that the various canons were often developed as the result of quite interesting concrete cases. Jane Merdinger focuses upon several examples of cases before ecclesiastical courts in Augustine's Africa as a means of

illustrating the evolving relationship of the African church and the Apostolic See, not in doctrinal matters on which they generally agreed, but in practical matters of law on which there was often enough conflict. The book is very well written and provides a fascinating insight into the development of canon law in the African Church and into the relations between the African Church and the Apostolic See in those years in which the authority of the papacy was just beginning to emerge. In this area which has been the grounds of dispute between Catholic and Protestant scholars, Merdinger moves with skill and even-handedness without, as far as I can tell, any partisan agenda. The discovery in the mid-1970's by Johannes Divjak of seventy-seven new letters of Augustine, which were first published in 1981 in CSEL and were re-edited in 1987 in BA, provides new evidence for the topic of Merdinger's research. Her book is divided into two parts. The first part begins with a sketch of the history of early Christianity and then focuses upon the relations between Rome and Africa as seen from the writings of Tertullian, Cyprian, and Optatus as historical background for the second part in which the author examines the emergence of African appellate law and a series of ecclesiastical court cases. I had not expected to find this sort of topic so interesting, but Merdinger says of her work, "I take canon law down from the shelf, blow off the dust, and try to demonstrate just how lively the background for any particular issue could be" (xiii). And she does that most successfully! The second part of the volume begins with the Council of Hippo in 393 at which Aurelius of Carthage, the primate of Africa, and his brilliant young colleague, Augustine of Hippo, established a program of reform for the African Church which entailed annual councils of bishops from the six provinces of Africa. In chapters six and seven Merdinger sketches the legislation regarding ecclesiastical appeals within Africa and that regarding overseas appeals. Chapters eight through eleven take up the particular cases of Apiarius, of Honorius, of Anthony of Fussala, and of Apiarius once again. In 418 Apiarius, a priest of the town of Sicca Veneria, committed certain unspecified offenses, and when his bishop took action against him, he appealed to the bishop of Rome. Pope Zosimus sent to Africa Faustinus, an Italian bishop, along with two presbyters, to deal with the case, and they did so in such a high-handed way that the African bishops balked--mainly because Faustinus rested his case upon canons supposedly from Nicaea, but actually from Sardica, as the records of the Africans showed. The case of Honorius is known only through three of the Divjak letters. When the bishop of Caesarea in Mauretania died, the lower clergy and the people wanted to elect Honorius who was bishop of a nearby town, but the bishops of Mauretania refused to go against the canons of Nicaea which forbade the transfer of a bishop from one see to another. In this case the African bishops appealed to Rome, and Pope Zosimus appointed three African bishops as his envoys, namely, Augustine, Alypius, and Possidius. Anthony was a young man from Augustine's own monastery whom Augustine ordained as bishop of Fussala; the young bishop proceeded to plunder his flock in a most outrageous manner. When Anthony was tried by a council of bishops, he appealed to Rome. The case which had previously been known only by Letter 209 is now much better known through Letter 20* of the newly discovered correspondence in which Augustine pleaded with the Roman matron, Fabiola, to use her influence with Pope Boniface to make the pope realize what a scoundrel Anthony was. The case shows that Augustine and Aurelius felt that they could turn to Rome for help and that they kept the Apostolic See informed about all the details of a serious case. After being removed from his position at Sicca Veneria in 419, Apiarius became a priest in Thabraca, to the west of Carthage on the coast, where he committed various (...) crimes, and after being excommunicated by his bishop, he appealed to Rome. Pope Celestine championed Apiarius' case and appointed the same Faustinus as his legate, but during his trial Apiarius confessed under cross-examination to a veritable pigsty of vices. Since Canon 5 of Nicaea had forbidden any bishop to readmit to communion one excommunicated by another, the African bishops reminded Celestine of this provision in their letter to him and insisted that they never wanted to see Faustinus again. Each of the cases which Merdinger has so carefully described illustrates the respect of the African Church for the Council of Nicaea as well as the African bishops' deference toward the Church of Rome along with an insistence upon their independence from Rome, especially when there was question of adjudicating an African case. On the other hand, the African bishops kept the Apostolic See informed and did not hesitate to ask it for help, when they needed it. The book closes with an epilogue on the Council of Hippo in 427, Augustine's last council, at the end of which he and Aurelius parted for the last time. All told, a very interesting, solid, and balanced study!

Roland J. Teske, S.J. of 0 people found the following review helpful. When North Africa was Christian, and Augustine an overworked bishop By Jeri Merdinger's book is crisply written, and always interesting. Although her viewpoint is Protestant, I found her quite evenhanded. With the arrival of Constantine, it appeared the persecutions had finally stopped. But that certainly didn't mean Christianity could expect five minutes of peace. Oh no. Instead, heresies, schisms and problem clergy spouted up like weeds. Theological questions vexed bishops, who in turn vexed Rome with solving them. In North Africa the most pressing question at first was what should be done with the traditors (those who had handed over sacred scripture under the threat of persecution). Augustine spent 40 years fighting unceasingly against an unending flood of heresies - Manicheans, Novatians, Donatists, Arians, and Pelagians. Above all, like Cyprian, Augustine strove for unity in the church, but never by accepting or pasting over differences. He attended synod after synod, ruled on ecclesiastical conundrums, visited Rome time and again to discuss problem clergy and theological matters, and, let us not forget, led a monastery. Oh, and did I forget to mention his writing? Augustine lived in one of the most vital parts of the empire, with Hippo a flourishing seaport. "Africa was the breadbasket of the West; if the flow of grain and oil were impeded because of

civil tumult, famine would stalk the streets of Rome" (p 18). After 410, when Rome was sacked, refugees streamed into the area, hoping for sanctuary from the chaos that was Rome. I especially enjoyed Merdinger's description of the problems Augustine had with clergy. In an area that was once firmly in the Donatist clutches, it was difficult to find well versed, solidly trained Catholic priests to oversee areas. That is the explanation for Apiarius, who turned out to be a disaster as clergy, a man who defrauded his flock shamelessly.

In the fourth and fifth centuries, North Africa stood second only to Rome as a center of power for the Christian church in the western Roman Empire. Historical tradition holds that this vibrant ecclesiastical community, under the leadership of such forceful personalities as St. Augustine of Hippo and Aurelius of Carthage, maintained a spirited independence from papal control. Recently discovered letters of Augustine and a closer reading of the African canons show, however, that the African fathers willingly sought advice from the pope and often approached Rome for a final verdict in cases of canon law. In this groundbreaking book, J. E. Merdinger contends that the African church of late antiquity gradually became dependent on the papacy for the enforcement of church discipline.