

## THE UN-OFFICIAL START OF THE DARK AGES

Most secular historians say the Dark ages began in 476 A.D. with the fall of the Roman Empire and with Popery being officially established under Leo I. The Dark ages was the Devil's Millennium as Satan's masterpiece, the Catholic Church ruled the world for 1,000 years. Europe's population wallowed in filth, ignorance, famine, despair, pestilence and barbarism. In 313 A.D. Constantine was accepted as the authority for the general Christian populace and the Bible was no longer the complete final authority. The Dark ages were the result of the "Light of the World – Jesus, the Word of God," being put out and true believers forced underground.

During the Dark ages true believers were killed by Catholics claiming to be Christians. This fulfilled Jesus' prophesy of John 16:2-3 "*They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, **the time cometh**, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.*" During the first 300 years of the Church age it was pagan Rome that was killing Christians. The first time a Christian was killed in the name of Jesus by the order of another "Christian" was in 347 A.D. To understand when the Great Whore began her drinking binge' to be drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs, you need to first acquaint yourself with the ancient Baptist group called the Donatists.

At the dawn of the fourth century, the churches of Christ had not only survived grievous torture and mayhem, but had succeeded in dumbfounding the pagan legions of Rome. The martyrs of Christ's churches had won the admiration, and in many cases, the souls of those that observed their steadfastness in the face of the demonic debauchery of pagan Rome.

The body of Christians was by no means perfect, and the local churches had decisions to make concerning the *lapsed* or the backslidden and the *traditores* or those who had denied Christ under persecution. The *lapsed*, and the *traditores* turned their backs on God while others were faithful unto death. What to do about these *lapsed* church members, and more importantly, what to do about the preachers who turned *traditore* continued to draw lines and break the invisible unity of the so-called universal church.

The Gospel had spread to the East as far as India, and into the Middle East. It was in Africa, Europe and the British Isles. The churches were fairly united in belief: the Trinity, Deity of Christ, salvation by grace through faith and baptism for believers only. The universal beliefs were known as catholic and this *catholic* group of churches was **Baptist** in its practices.

Synods or religious church councils began to control the churches, so much so that an independent group sprang up in the Novatians, named after Novatian who was the first pastor of the Novationist church in Rome. Baptism was beginning to be corrupted and the seeds of baptismal regeneration were growing into a killer weed. Because the emperor Constantine had married the state to the church, Christianity was the official state church and the Catholic belief system could be enforced as law.

Another group was about to break from the Catholics, and when it did it brought the Catholic church its first theologian, who virtually sealed the fate of the churches called Catholic, by teaching them what to believe, most of it corrupt. This theologian would fulfill an awful prophecy and plunge the world into the **dark ages**.

### **The Donatists**

The majority of the Catholic bishops believed it acceptable to receive the *traditores* into full fellowship. In 311, a *traditore* named Felix consecrated a new bishop in Carthage, Africa, Caecilian. A number of bishops in Africa (called the Numidians) did not want Caecilian because Felix was thought to be an unworthy consecrator. The Numidians consecrated their own bishop, Majorinus. An intense battle ensued over the

church at Carthage. Majorinus died in 315 and the Numidians installed Donatus to be the new pastor at Carthage.

Donatus was the heart and soul of the Donatist movement. Donatus was the successor to Mensurius in the fight for the Carthage church. The Donatist (independent) church was the result. In every way a Bible-believing Baptist church, the church pastored by Donatus brought into question the nature and credibility of the emerging Roman Catholic hierarchy and system.

Two organizations were now in existence: The Catholic institution was pastored by Caecilian and the true New Testament church by Donatus. The independent church did not want to be ruled by the Catholic bishops. Thus, a pattern began: *a pattern of believers separating from apostate churches*. This pattern has continued to this day. God never calls a church member to straighten out a church. It is the Pastor's job and calling to keep a church straight doctrinally. A church is the way it is and believes what it believes because the pastor of that church is the way he is and believes what he believes. When a church begins to depart from the old paths, you are not supposed to stick around to make things better. If you "hang-in-there" you're going to get "hung." Every time a church apostasizes, the believers are to separate from that church and form a church that holds to the Word of God and the old-paths.

William Cathcart wrote of the Donatists:

"In North Africa, during the fierce persecution of Dioclesian, many Christians courted a violent death, 'these persons, without the accusation, would confess to the possession of the Holy Scriptures, and on their refusal to surrender them, they were immediately imprisoned and frequently executed. While they were in confinement they were visited by throngs of disciples, who bestowed upon them valuable gifts and showed them the highest honor.

Mensurius, Bishop of Carthage, disapproved of all voluntary martyrdoms, and took steps to hinder bloodshed. And if he had gone no farther in this direction he would have deserved the commendation of all good men. But by zealous Christians in North Africa he was regarded as unfriendly to compulsory martyrdom, and to the manifestations of tender regard shown to the victims of tyranny. And by some he was supposed to be capable of a gross deception to preserve his own life, or to secure the safety of his friends. When a church at Carthage was about to be searched for copies of the Bible, he had them concealed in a safe place, and the writings of heretics substituted for them. This removal was an act of Christian faithfulness, but the works which he put in the church in their stead were apparently intended to deceive the heathen officers. Mensurius seems to us to have been too prudent a man for a Christian Bishop in the harsh times in which he lived. In his own day his conduct created a most unfavorable opinion of his religious courage and faithfulness among multitudes of the Saviour's servants in his country. Secundus, primate of Numidia, wrote to Mensurius, giving utterance to censures about his conduct, and glorifying the men who perished rather than surrender their Bibles. Caecilian was the Arch-deacon of the Bishop of Carthage, and was known to enjoy his confidence and share his opinions.

Mensurius, returning from a visit to Rome, became ill, and died in the year 311. Caecilian was appointed his successor, and immediately the whole opposition of the enemies of his predecessor was directed to him. In his own city a rich widow of great influence, and her numerous friends, assailed him; a synod seventy Numidian bishops excommunicated him for receiving ordination from a traitor (one who had delivered up the Bible to be burned to save his life); and another bishop was elected to take charge of the church of Carthage. The Donatist community was then launched upon the sea of its stormy life.

Bishop Donatus, after whom the new denomination was named, was a man of great eloquence, as unbending as Martin Luther, as fiery as the great Scotch Reformer, whose principles were dearer to him than life, and who was governed by unwearied energy. Under his guidance the Donatists spread all over the Roman dominions on the African coast, and for a time threatened the supremacy of the older Christian community. But persecution laid its heavy hand upon their personal liberty, their church property, and their lives. Again and again this old and crushing argument was applied to the Donatists, and still they survived for centuries. Their hardships secured the sympathy of numerous hands of armed marauders called Circumcelliones, men who suffered severely from the authorities sustained by the persecuting church, "free lance" warriors who cared nothing for religion, but had a wholesome hatred of tyrants. These men fought desperately for the oppressed Donatists. Julian the Apostate took their side when he ascended the throne of the Caesars, and showed much interest in their welfare, as unbelievers in modern times have frequently shown sympathy with persecuted communities in Christian lands. There were a few Donatist churches outside of Africa, but the denomination was almost confined at that continent."

Donatus argued that not only should the members of the church be trustworthy (as did the Novatianists), but the bishops should be without spot. **The ordinances administered by bishops who were either traitors**

**or in sin were not valid.** A good number (but not the majority of bishops) agreed. Those that sided with Donatus were called *Donatists*. The Catholic bishops maintained that the church needed to maintain order and doctrine through the hierarchy that had been forming. The Donatists didn't think so. To them, the Scriptures gave no ground for a so-called universal church governed by a hierarchy of Bishops and bureaucracy. The only way for Christ's body to remain pure was for them to remain independent of each other. The bishop was to rule one church alone.

David Benedict wrote:

In the year 340, the emperor (Constans) directed his two commissioners, Ursacius and Leontius, to endeavor by the distribution of money under the name of alms to win over the Donatist churches; and the said Emperor at the same time issued an edict whereby he called upon the North African Christians to return back to the unity of the church.

Of the failure of this convert scheme for gaining the Donatists, forcible measures were the next resort. The Donatist now were to be deprived of their churches, and they were actually fallen upon by armed troops while assembled in them for the worship of God. **Hence followed the *effusion of blood*,** [starting in 347] and the martyrdoms of which the Donatists so often complained of their adversaries. Those who fell victims in these persecutions, says Neander, were honored by their party as martyrs, and the annual celebration of the days of their death furnished new means of enkindling the enthusiasm of the Donatist party. (David Benedict, *History of the Donatists*, p. 32.)

We maintain that the ***effusion of blood***, described by Benedict, was a catastrophic event, predicted by Jesus "*the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.*" We mark the year 347 as the unofficial beginning of the dark ages, lasting 1,000 years. Before this time only pagan Rome had killed Christians. For the next thousand years the Catholic church would be killing believers who differed in opinion and did not accept their infant baptism.

To understand how someone could murder a Christian in the name of Jesus Christ and actually think they were serving God you must first meet the Donatists as we have just done. The next step in understanding how this could happen is meeting the man Augustine of Hippo and looking at his theology. We will meet him in the next lesson.