

# Investigating the Donatists and the True I John 5:7

## Introduction

Basically the Dissenters were one and the same people with different names in different localities. Classifying them by names and locations rather than common doctrines and practices is a trademark of the establishment historians and writers, but has no real value.

The Origins of the Donatists;  
The Tertullian-Cyprian Influence and citations;  
The Textus Receptus and other Texts;  
The Optatus Corruptions to the Textus Receptus;  
The Augustine-Optatus texts against the Donatists;  
The Donatists and the Priscillians.

### *The Origins of the Donatists*

The **Donatists** were an early group of dissenters in Northern Africa named after one of their leading ministers, Donatius the Great. This group became a dissenting and separated group of churches and saints during Diocletian's persecutions in the early 300s. They occupied the original position of the pure Christians in North Africa and used the pure Bibles coming from the Old Textus Receptus Latin, the Old Latin translated from the original Greek Scriptures. They believed in the total and complete separation between Church and State and considered Constantine as a part of the antichrist system. They refused to yield to the demands of Pagan Rome in any way and many suffered the loss of all things for their faithfulness to Christ and the original Scriptures.

At first the Romans persecuted them and then after Constantine the Great united apostate Christianity with the Roman state, the Roman Catholic Church persecuted them. These persecutions would continue against the Donatists until the Saracens overran Northern Africa and exterminated all forms of Christianity in the early 600s. The Donatists received persecution from the Pagan Romans, the newly established Catholic Church of Constantine, and then finally the followers of Islam.

. . . in the seventh century, the Saracens occupied the country, (Northern Africa-REP) and destroyed the African Church.

<http://www.earlychurch.org.uk/donatism.php>

They remained faithful to the original and sacred Scriptures during these persecutions and like many of their brothers and sisters through the Roman Empire, later they refused to receive and use the New Bibles of the Constantine-Eusebius line, Augustine and Jerome used these, until their extinction in the early seventh century. By that time many relocated in the great Paulician migrations to the West.

The basic and primary reason for their separate existence is because *they would not surrender their true Bibles to the Pagan Romans to be burned*. We are better acquainted with other issues such as separation from the Catholics, and Rebaptism. These are results that arose from this first reason. Most church historians have either not known of this primary reason or have chosen to ignore it if they knew about. The Donatists used what we call the Textus Receptus of Tertullian and Cyprian and refused to surrender it over for burning as the traitors did.

From this site:

<http://philtar.ucsm.ac.uk/encyclopedia/christ/early/donat.html>

The Donatist schism has its origins in the Diocletian persecution of the church at the beginning of the 4th century. The emperor Diocletian sought to rid the Roman empire of Christianity by forcing Christians to offer sacrifices to pagan deities or suffer imprisonment or martyrdom. With the end of the persecution the church was confronted with the question whether to readmit those who had abandoned their faith during the Diocletian persecutions. This issue came to a head in Carthage in the province of Africa. It was alleged that Bishop Caecilian of Carthage had been consecrated by a bishop who had renounced his faith and, therefore, Caecilian's ordination was invalid. A schismatic movement broke away from the Catholic church under the leadership of Donatus, who was elected a rival to Caecilian.

During the 4th century the Donatist church strengthened, becoming the largest group among North African Christians. But during the 5th century the Donatists were treated as heretics and subjected to severely repressive laws. On 30 January 412 an edict was passed which called for the confiscation of Donatist property and the exile of Donatist leaders.

When Diocletian issued his edicts against the Christians in northern Africa and elsewhere the Donatists and Catholics were not yet divided. The Catholics had not yet evolved into such an apostate state that true believers could not be among them. The Diocletian persecutions would end this, as many of the *professed* persecuted Christians forsook Christ and His written Scriptures and conformed to the Roman demands. Those who forsook Christ and conformed would be called *traitors* and the dissenting churches, the Donatists, would not recognize these ministers as valid and true ministers nor their churches and baptism as valid.

Here is an account of those times: <http://phoenicia.org/cyprian.html>

## The Decian Persecution

The prosperity of the Church during a peace of thirty-eight years had produced great disorders. Many even of the bishops were given up to worldliness and gain, and we hear of worse scandals. In October, 249, Decius became emperor with the ambition of restoring the ancient virtue of Rome. In January, 250, he published an edict against

Christians. Bishops were to be put to death, other persons to be punished and tortured till they recanted. On 20 January Pope Fabian was martyred, and about the same time St. Cyprian retired to a safe place of hiding. His enemies continually reproached him with this. But to remain at Carthage was to court death, to cause greater danger to others, and to leave the Church without government; for to elect a new bishop would have been as impossible as it was at Rome. He made over much property to a confessor priest, Rogatian, for the needy. Some of the clergy lapsed, others fled; Cyprian suspended their pay, for their ministrations were needed and they were in less danger than the bishop. From his retreat he encouraged the confessors and wrote eloquent panegyrics on the martyrs. Fifteen soon died in prison and one in the mines. On the arrival of the proconsul in April the severity of the persecution increased. St. Mappalicus died gloriously on the 17th. Children were tortured, women dishonoured. Numidicus, who had encouraged many, saw his wife burnt to alive, and was himself half burnt, then stoned and left for dead; his daughter found him yet living; he recovered and Cyprian made him a priest. Some, after being twice tortured, were dismissed or banished, often beggared.

But there was another side to the picture. At Rome terrified Christians rushed to the temples to sacrifice. At Carthage the majority apostatized. Some would not sacrifice, but purchased *libelli*, or certificates, that they had done so. Some bought the exemption of their family at the price of their own sin. Of these *libellatici* there were several thousands in Carthage. Of the fallen some did not repent, others joined the heretics, but most of them clamoured for forgiveness and restoration. Some, who had sacrificed under torture, returned to be tortured afresh. Castus and Æmilius were burnt for recanting, others were exiled; but such cases were necessarily rare. A few began to perform canonical penance. The first to suffer at Rome had been a young Carthaginian, Celerinus. He recovered, and Cyprian made him a lector. His grandmother and two uncles had been martyrs, but his two sisters apostatized under fear of torture, and in their repentance gave themselves to the service of those in prison. Their brother was very urgent for their restoration. His letter from Rome to Lucian, a confessor at Carthage, is extant, with the reply of the latter. Lucian obtained from a martyr named Paul before his passion a commission to grant peace to any who asked for it, and he distributed these "indulgences" with a vague formula: "Let such a one with his family communicate". Tertullian speaks in 197 of the "custom" for those who were not at peace with the Church to beg this peace from the martyrs. Much later, in his Montanist days (c. 220) he urges that the adulterers whom Pope Callistus was ready to forgive after due penance, would now get restored by merely imploring the

confessors and those in the mines. Correspondingly we find Lucian issuing pardons in the name of confessors who were still alive, a manifest abuse. The heroic Mappalicus had only interceded for his own sister and mother. It seemed now as if no penance was to be enforced upon the lapsed, and Cyprian wrote to remonstrate.

This will give further insight to those times:

<http://www.earlychurch.org.uk/donatism.php>

**DONATISTS.** As a direct result of the [persecution](#) of Diocletian, there arose among the Christians a great enthusiasm for sufferings, and even for death, for the sake of the faith. *They were demanded to surrender their sacred books; but not only did many refuse to comply with this demand, but some even stepped forward purposely, and boasted that they had the books, and could by no means be forced to give them up.* The name of a *traditor*, that is, one who has surrendered his Bible, became extremely odious. Mensurius, Bishop of Carthage, openly opposed the fanaticism of the voluntary martyrs and the extravagant reverence shown to confessors. He sent his archdeacon, Cæcilianus, into the prisons where the confessors sat, and had the crowds which gathered there in enthusiastic devotion dispersed by force. But thereby the fanatics became only so much the more excited, and it was to be expected that they would seize upon the first opportunity to avenge themselves. In 305 a synod was convened at Cirta; but, before the synod was opened, the primate of Numidia, Bishop Secundus of Tigisis, proposed that an investigation should be made, whether there were any *traditores* among the assembled. *The result of the investigation was, that nearly every one of the bishops present was proved guilty of the crime, in some form or other.* Suspicion fell even upon Secundus himself. He was consequently compelled to drop the investigation; but he, nevertheless, saw fit to assume the attitude of a guardian of the discipline of the Church, and, when he heard of the troubles which had occurred in Carthage, he sent a warning to Mensurius and Cæcilianus.

Another site says: <http://www.earlychurch.org.uk/donatism.php>

Thus the schism originated in the Church of Carthage. There were two bishops and two congregations. From the capital it spread through the whole province. A majority of the country people, and a considerable number of bishops, declared in favor of Donatus. Outside of Africa, however, Cæcilianus was generally recognized as the legitimate bishop; and the

[p.660]

opposite party (the *pars Majorini*, afterwards the *pars Donati*, the *Donatiani*, or *Donatistæ*) were considered as schismatics who had separated from the true Catholic Church. In an edict of 313 Constantine the Great promised the Church of Africa his protection; but the Donatists were expressly excluded from the imperial favor. They immediately addressed themselves to the emperor, and begged him to examine their complaints against Cæcilianus.

Again from the same site:

The conflict was. very bitter; and, when he ventured to excommunicate Maximianus, the extremists convened a synod (393), deposed him, and elected Maximianus bishop in his stead. Thus there were three bishops in Carthage; and, just as the sect in this. way was gliding down into a state of dissolution, it encountered its most decided and most powerful adversary, [Augustine](#). After writing several books against the sect, as it would seem, without any great effect, Augustine himself consented to an appeal to force, referring to Luke xiv. 23. A synod of Carthage (405) petitioned the Emperor Honorius to issue penal laws against the Donatists. The petition was granted: laymen should be fined, clergymen banished, and the churches. closed. But Honorius could not afford to make any more enemies than those he already had, and in 409 he issued an edict of toleration; but this. edict raised such a storm in the Catholic Church,, that it had to be immediately repealed. A disputation was then arranged in Carthage (411), *Collatio cum Donatistis*. Two hundred and eighty six Catholic and two hundred and seventy-nine Donatist bishops were present: Augustine and Aurelius were the speakers of the former; Primianus and Patilianus, those of the latter. For three days the debate lasted, but no result was arrived at. Finally the imperial commissioner declared the Donatists vanquished, and very severe measures were decided upon against them. In 414 they lost all civil rights; in 415 they were forbidden to assemble for worshipping, under penalty of death. Nevertheless, they had not become extinct, when, in the seventh century, the Saracens occupied the country, and destroyed the African Church.

### The Early Bibles of the Donatists

From what we can determine at this state of historical investigations the Gentile Church at Antioch translated the Greek Scriptures, the Textus Receptus, into the Old Syrian and Old Latin languages by at least 150AD.

This would include the entire New Testament Text Canon as we know it. Additional works would accompany the Canon as helps and commentaries. But, the additional works, such as the Shepard of Hermas and the Epistle of Barnabas in the New Testament and the Apocrypha in the Old Testament, would not be recognized on the same plane as the Inspired Text even though they were held in high esteem.

From this site please note:

[http://www.ovrInd.com/GeneralInformation/CanonFormation\\_chart.html](http://www.ovrInd.com/GeneralInformation/CanonFormation_chart.html)

[All the] different parts of our New Testament were written by this time, but not collected and defined as "Scripture." Early Christian Writers (for example Polycarp and Ignatius) quote from the Gospels and Paul's letters, as well as from other Christian writing and oral sources.

**New Testament used in the church at Rome  
(the "Muratorian Canon")**

**Four Gospels**

**Acts**

**Paul's letters:**

- Romans
- 1 & 2 Corinthians
- Galatians
- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Colossians
- 1 & 2 Thessalonians
- 1 & 2 Timothy
- Titus
- Philemon

**James**

**1 & 2 John**

**Jude**

**Revelation of John**

**Revelation of Peter**

**Wisdom of Solomon**

**To be used in private, but not public, worship**

**The Shepherd of Hermas**

For more on the Muratorian Canon please see:

<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/muratorian.html>

### Three Types of Early Texts

The early Bibles of the True Christians in Northern Africa were in the Old Italic Text. These were what we call the Textus Receptus. Of these there were at least three major texts by the time of Tertullian. There were about as many minor texts as leading heretics. There would also be a mixed or combination of these texts in what I call the *all inclusive texts*. Here is an example from John 1:18:

The Textus Receptus said the Only Begotten Son;

The Constantine-Eusebius Text said the Only Begotten God;

The Inclusive Text said the Only Begotten Son, God,

The inclusive texts would include many of the textual variants but the dissenters did not seem to use these texts, but rather a standard text that we call the Textus Receptus. We know this by comparing the Scripture citations from Justin Martyr in Greek with Tertullian and Cyprian and other later writers who used the old Latin. This is discussed in this following article at the rosetta site.

The Old Italic or the Latin equivalent to our Textus Receptus would continue as the true and proper text until the era of Optatus and his contests against the Donatists. He would begin the corruptions of the Old Latin text in Northern Africa.

The Old Latin Text remained uncorrupted until the time of Optatus. From this site, <http://rosetta.reltech.org/TC/vol13/Marone2008.pdf> I note:

13. The biblical quotations of Optatus generally are not found in the writings of Cyprian and of the Donatists. However the quotations of *John* (Jo. 13,10; 13,35; 14,27), reported by Augustine, during the controversy, according to the version of Optatus and according to the version of the Donatists, show that the bishop of Milevis effectively revised the African Old Latin.

14. Thus, we can conclude that the revision of the *Afra* occurred between the publications of the first and second edition of the *Adversus donatistas*, that is between 365 and 385. The coincidences between the biblical vocabulary of the Donatists and the biblical vocabulary of the *Adversus donatistas* allow us to say that Optatus in the first edition used the same *Vetus* as Parmenian. About twenty years after the composition of his work, the bishop of Milevis decided to create a second edition, because his adversaries had not still realized the error of their schism. At that time the situation of the African Church had not changed, and the Donatist party, in spite of the aggressiveness of imperial politics, was still flourishing. So Optatus himself said in his seventh book against the Donatists: "The provocations offered by you or your party continue to

burgeon – your argument, as I hear, being that we ought not to have sought unity of communion when you were agreed to be children of collaborators – I shall briefly reply to this"<sup>47</sup>.

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Please consider this entire article at the site given to validate what I have said.

Many scholars now admit that both Tertullian and Cyprian cited the true and proper I John 5:7, the *Three Heavenly Witnesses*. The Donatists followed the theology and practices of Tertullian almost totally and Cyprian, though going further than Cyprian. I will explain this more in just a bit.

Not only did these two cite I John 5:7, *but the Gnostic versions of the Trinity in the late second century also contain references almost word for word to the true and proper I John 5:7*. See Forrester's *New Plea*, pages 7 and 8. citing the Valentinus-Irenaeus discussion on the Trinity. Forrester said:

The first occurrence of *τρία* I find in St. Irenæus, in a quotation from the arch-heretic Valentinus ;<sup>6</sup> a

circumstance which carries back its use to A.D. 140, or to within fifty years of the received date of St. John's First Epistle, and of the disputed verse. This quotation is in this light most remarkable, that Valentinus is here treating specially of St. John. He derives his corruption of the doctrine of the Trinity from the first verse of St. John's Gospel; and in this connection so introduces *τρία*, as to justify the belief that he derived the term from the *οἱ τρεῖς* of 1 John v. 7. As he takes his gnostic Trinity from St. John's Gospel, it is only natural that he should take his title for it from the Epistle. We come now to the passage itself.

### The Tertullian-Cyprian Influence on the Donatists

We find Tertullian reading, using and quoting from the Old Latin Text Canon. He wrote a work on the Trinity and another against Praxeas, the Patripassionist, and many other works. Many scholars now acknowledge that Tertullian cited, not quoted directly, the true 1 John 5:7.

From the site: [http://www.tertullian.org/works/adversus\\_praxean.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/works/adversus_praxean.htm)

13. Ch. 25 contains what some have seen as a reference to the disputed verse 1 John 5:7 (possible quote underlined):

... Qui tres unum sunt, non unus, quomodo dictum est, Ego et Pater unum sumus, ....

("Thus the connection of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Paraclete, produces three coherent Persons, who are yet distinct One from Another. These three are one [thing], not one [Person], as it is said, 'I and my Father are One,' in respect of unity of substance not singularity of number.")

The verse of scripture is not normally thought to be part of the original text, and is found in no Greek MS, except one which may have been copied from the Latin. But *some have seen in this chapter a reference to an ancient version of scripture that did contain it*. See Elucidation III in the online translation for some more details.

Here is a more detailed account:

**Tertullian on These Three are One**

**Volume 3 of The Ante-Nicene Fathers**

**1128**

**CHAPTER 25**

**THE PARACLETE, OR HOLY GHOST. HE IS  
DISTINCT FROM THE FATHER AND THE SON AS TO  
THEIR PERSONAL EXISTENCE. ONE AND INSEPARABLE  
FROM THEM AS TO THEIR DIVINE NATURE.  
OTHER QUOTATIONS OUT OF ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL**

What follows Philip's question, and the Lord's whole treatment of it, to the end of John's Gospel, continues to furnish us with statements of the same kind, distinguishing the Father and the Son, with the properties of each. Then there is the Paraclete or Comforter, also, which He promises to pray for to the Father, and to send from heaven after He had ascended to the Father. He is called "another Comforter," indeed; but in what way He is another we have already shown, "He shall receive of mine," says Christ, just as Christ Himself received of the Father's. Thus the connection of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Paraclete, produces three coherent Persons, who are yet distinct One from Another. *These Three are one essence*, not one Person, as it is said, "I and my Father are One," in respect of unity of substance not singularity of number.

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**(THESE THREE ARE ONE, CHAP. 25.)**

Porson having spoken Pontifically upon the matter of the text of "the Three Witnesses," cadit quaestio, locutus est Augur Apollo. It is of more importance that Bishop Kaye in his calm wisdom, remarks as follows; "In my opinion, the passage in Tertullian, far from containing an allusion to 1 John 5:7, furnishes most decisive proof that he knew nothing of the verse." After this, and the acquiescence of scholars generally, it would be presumption to say a word on the question of quoting it as Scripture. In Textual Criticism it seems to be an established canon that it has no place in the Greek Testament. I submit, however, that, something remains to be said for it, on the ground of the old African Version used and quoted by Tertullian and Cyprian; and I dare to say, that, while there would be no ground whatever for inserting it in our English Version, the question of striking it out is a widely different one. It would be sacrilege, in my humble opinion, for reasons which will appear, in the following remarks, upon our author.

It appears to me very clear that Tertullian is quoting 1 John 5:7. in the passage now under consideration: “Qui tres unum sunt, non unus, quomodo dictum est, Ego et Pater unum sumus, etc.” Let me refer to a work containing a sufficient answer to Porson, on this point of Tertullian’s quotation, which it is easier to pass sub-silentio, than to refute. I mean Forster’s New Plea, of which the full title is placed in the margin.

(This work may be downloaded from the following site:

[http://books.google.com/books?id=yXIsAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Forster %E2%80%99s+New+Plea&lr=&ei=Y6ZWS-i7DJyEzATfxpiSCg&output=html&rview=1&cd=1](http://books.google.com/books?id=yXIsAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Forster+%E2%80%99s+New+Plea&lr=&ei=Y6ZWS-i7DJyEzATfxpiSCg&output=html&rview=1&cd=1) REP)

The whole work is worth thoughtful study, but, I name it with reference to this important passage of our author, exclusively. In connection with other considerations on which I have no right to enlarge in this place, it satisfies me as to the primitive origin of the text in the Vulgate, and hence of its right to stand in our English Vulgate until it can be shewn that the Septuagint Version, quoted and honored by our Lord, is free from similar readings, and divergences from the Hebrew MSS.

1147

Stated as a mere question *as to the early African Church*, the various versions known as the Itala, and the right of the Latin and English Vulgates to remain as they are, the whole question is a fresh one. Let me be pardoned for saying: that I am not pleading for it as a proof-text of the Trinity, having never once quoted it as such in a long ministry, during which I have preached nearly a hundred Trinity-Sunday Sermons; that I consider it as practically Apocryphal, and hence as coming under St. Jerome’s law, and being useless to establish doctrine; and that I feel no need of it, owing to the wealth of Scripture on the same subject. Tertullian, himself says that he cites “*only a few out of many texts* — not pretending to bring up all the passages of Scripture.... having produced an accumulation of witnesses in the fullness of their dignity and authority.”

To those interested in the question let me commend the learned dissertation of Grabe on the textual case, as it stood in his day. I value it chiefly because it proves that the Greek Testament elsewhere says, disjointedly, what is collected into 1 John 5:7. It is, therefore, Holy Scripture in substance, if not in the letter. What seems to me

important, however, is the balance it gives to the whole context, and the defective character of the grammar and logic, if it be stricken out. In the Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate of the Old Testament we have a precisely similar case. Refer to Psalm 13, alike in the Latin and the Greek, as compared with our English Version. Between the third and fourth verses, three whole verses are interpolated: Shall we strike them out? Of course, if certain critics are to prevail over St. Paul, for he quotes them (Romans 3:10) with the formula: "As it is written." Now, then, till we expurgate the English Version of the Epistle to the Romans, — or rather the original of St. Paul himself, I employ Grabe's argument only to prove my point, which is this, viz., that 1 John 5:7 being Scripture, ought to be left untouched in the Versions where it stands, although it be no part of the Greek Testament. (That is, of Westcott and Hort origins- REP)

In Tertullian's work against the Patripassionists he followed their main scriptures and did not discuss the Montanists and later Sabellians concerning the Unity of God.

Tertullian left the evolving corrupt Catholic churches and became what I would call a *moderate Montanist*. During his times already most churches would not fellowship with nor receive the baptism of the extreme Montanists because they were what would be later called Sabellians.

Please notice this site: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0317.htm>

## Chapter 20. The Scriptures Relied on by Praxeas to Support His Heresy But Few. They are Mentioned by Tertullian

But I must take some further pains to rebut their arguments, when they make selections from the Scriptures in support of their opinion, and refuse to consider the other points, which obviously maintain the rule of faith without any infraction of the unity of the Godhead, and with the full admission of the Monarchy. For as in the Old Testament Scriptures they lay hold of nothing else than, I am God, and beside me there is no God; Isaiah 45:5 so in the Gospel they simply keep in view the Lord's answer to Philip, I and my Father are one; John 10:30 and, He that has seen me has seen the Father; and I am in the Father, and the Father in me. John 14:9-10 They would have the entire revelation of both Testaments yield to these three passages, whereas the only proper course is to understand the few statements in the light of the many. But in their contention they only act on the principle of all heretics. For, inasmuch as only a few testimonies are to be found (making for them) in the general mass, they pertinaciously set off the few against the many, and assume the later against the earlier. The rule, however, which has been from the beginning established for

every case, gives its prescription against the later *assumptions*, as indeed it also does against the fewer.

### The Patripassionist-Sabellian Distinctions

Praxeas was a Patripassionist and while they were similar to the Sabellians they were not the same. I have stated elsewhere that they were basically the same, but can now understand that they were distinct after reading Tertullian against Praxeas again.

The Patripassionist people seemed to hold that God the Father was Jesus Christ on this earth. This is much like the Sabellians but yet distinct. The Patripassionists relied on the scriptures that Tertullian quoted. There is no citing of the true and proper I John 5:7. Tertullian did not quote this passage because the Patripassionists did not rely upon it. The Patripassionists were not what we would properly call *Trinitarians but Binitarians*. Therefore they would have no regard for any Trinitarian verses teaching Three in One.

The discussions between *Irenaeus and Valentinus* show us the earliest known citing of the true and proper I John 5:7. The Valentinists were *Gnostics*, not Patripassionists or Sabellians.

### The Beginning of the Persecutions

From the site: <http://www.bible.ca/b-canon-diocletians-destruction-constantines-production-scripture.htm>

#### Introduction:

1. 303 AD the Roman Emperor, Diocletian calls for the destruction of all the scriptures of the Christians. Obviously there must have been a set of books (a canon) so well defined and universally accepted, that even outsiders knew which books the Christians considered as scripture.
2. The edict of Diocletian, therefore shows that long before the first extant "canon lists" came along, a canon already existed. It also forced the Christians to meditate on the subject of which books were most sacred and inspired.
3. So with the soldiers knocking at the door and the Christian inside, as Everet puts it: "**for the most part they knew what books the soldiers were looking for**". (Lee Martin McDonald, James A. Sanders, Editors: *The Canon Debate*; Everett Ferguson, *Factors Leading to the Selection and Closure of the New Testament Canon*, p 317, 2002)
4. There must have been a well defined canon at this time.
5. In a most providential twist of events, Roman Emperor Constantine a few years later, enlisted the help of Eusebius, to

create 50 copies in codex form, of the entire Bible. Although no one knows for sure what was in this Bible and no definite copies have been located, it proves a definite canon existed in the time period of 275 - 315 AD.

### Discussion:

1. Two major attempts to establish conformity in the empire in the early fourth century C.E. probably also affected the scope of the New Testament canon by causing the church to make conscious decisions about what literature it considered sacred. **The first of these was an edict of Diocletian on February 23, 303**, to promote religious uniformity. This edict, which remained in effect until 313, led to the persecution of the church and called for the burning of its sacred writings. Diocletian also compelled Christians to turn over their sacred books to the authorities to be burned. The Christians tried to salvage as much of their sacred literature as possible by turning over to them less important texts that were not considered sacred. Those who gave in to pressure and handed sacred scripture over to the authorities were called "traitors" (traditores). On the other hand, those who refused and consequently were imprisoned or killed were called confessors and martyrs (homologetai and martyres). Such distinctions presume, of course, that by this time individual congregations had determined which literature was sacred and which was not, what was worth dying for and what was not. **Second**, and just as compelling, was Constantine's push for religious unity and conformity within the Christian communities, threatening banishment for those who did not conform. This call to unity is the context in which discussions of biblical canons begin to appear, first in the writings of Eusebius and subsequently in other lists, discussions, and church councils. What may well have triggered Eusebius's interest in defining or delimiting the scope of the Christian scriptures was Constantine's request that he produce fifty copies of the Christian scriptures for use in the churches in the new capital of the Roman empire Constantinople. These two historical factors provide the social context that led to the closing of the biblical canon. (Lee Martin McDonald, James A. Sanders, Editors: *The Canon Debate*; Lee Martin McDonald, *Identifying Scripture and Canon in the Early Church: The Criteria Question*, p 417, 2002)
2. ***By the time of the Diocletianic persecution in 303 Roman authorities, in their campaign to confiscate Christian property, included the requirement that Christian books be handed in and burned.*** In the words of Eusebius, "We saw with our very eyes ...

**the inspired and sacred scriptures committed to the flames in the marketplaces" in response to the imperial letter "ordering the destruction by fire of the scriptures" (Hist. eccl. 8.2.1 and 4). The requirement showed that the authorities knew Christians had an identifiable set of holy writings and knew their importance to the Christian communities. Hierocles, governor of Bithynia and the chief promoter of the persecution, knew the Christian Bible, and had already attempted in two books against the Christians "to prove the falsehood of sacred scripture," by which was meant Christian sacred writings, as the reference to Paul and Peter makes clear. Christians themselves thought they had an identifiable set of scriptures, for they immediately experienced a moral dilemma over giving up documents to the authorities, an issue that became the occasion for the Donatist schism. Christians might hide writings, try to pass off apocryphal and heretical texts, or in some cases debate what to hand over and what not to, but for the most part they knew what books the soldiers were looking for. (Lee Martin McDonald, James A. Sanders, Editors: The Canon Debate; Everett Ferguson, Factors Leading to the Selection and Closure of the New Testament Canon, p 317, 2002)**

### The Sabellian Theology of the Radical Montanists

I will mention this briefly as I cover it more in the chapter on the Montanists. From this site,

<http://www.theandros.com/montanists.html>

I quote:

**Montanists were also condemned along with Sabellius for denying the Trinity, and teaching that Jesus is the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Hippolytus (A.D. 170-236) wrote about the Montanists, saying, "And some of these assent to the heresy of the Noetians, and affirm that the Father Himself is the Son, and that this one came under generation, and suffering and death." [42] Contemporary language refers to this doctrine as *Oneness*, which found in such groups as the United Pentecostals. The Church Fathers refer to this heresy as *Monarchianism*. It is unclear if all Montanists were part of the Monarchian heresy. Hippolytus was judicious in writing that "*some*," rather than "all" Montanists, held to this doctrine. Tertullian was a strong Trinitarian who eventually followed Montanus. None the less, we have several sources which record that the Montanists held to the heretical doctrine that there was only one Person who manifested as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. [43]**

## Tertullian's Influence Upon the Donatists

The Donatists followed Tertullian's theology and practices. They maintained the same type of separation that he did. They believed in the same Trinity. They used the same Latin Bible that he used. The Catholics highly reverence Tertullian and yet they condemn his followers.

## The Montanist-Novation-Donatist Connection

I am referring to the moderate or Trinitarian Montanists.

The Novations also followed this same type of separation and used the same old Latin Text. Please note again this statement:

Meanwhile the inner decay of the sect had begun. One of its most prominent members, Tychonius, distinguished for his great learning, and appreciated as the author of the *Regulas septem ad investigandion intelligentiam Sacrarum Scripturarion*, rejected the [Novatian](#) views held by most Donatists, and objected to the ostentatious exclusiveness of the party.

<http://www.earlychurch.org.uk/novatian.php>

NOVATIAN. The whole Latin tradition, with the exception of those theologians of the fourth century who stood under Greek influence (Damasus, Prudentius, the *Decr. Gelas.*, etc.), calls the great schismatic *Novatianus*; while by Greek authors his name is generally written *Νοβάτιος*. Only Dionysius of Alexandria calls him *Νοουατιανός*. The party he formed is generally designated as *Novatiani*: only once [Cyprian](#) writes *Novatiamenses* (*Ep.*, 73,2). When Epiphanius (*Ancorat.*, 13) calls the Novatians of Rome *Montenses*, he probably confounds them with the Donatists.

Novatian was a native of Phrygia. Probably, however, this notice rose from the circumstance that he afterwards found many adherents in Phrygia; or perhaps it was purposely manufactured in order to insinuate a connection between him and the [Montanists](#).

<http://orthodoxwiki.org/Montanism>

Jerome and other church leaders claimed that the Montanists of their own day held the belief that the [Trinity](#) consisted of only a single person, similar to [Sabellianism](#), as opposed to the Orthodox view that the Trinity is one God of three persons which Tertullian also had held. There were some who were indeed modalistic [monarchians](#) (Sabellians) and some that were closer to the Trinitarian doctrine. It is reported that these [modalists](#) [baptized](#)

mentioning the name of Jesus Christ as opposed to mentioning the Trinity. Most of the later Montanists *were of the modalistic camp*.

### Cyprian's Influence Upon the Donatists

Cyprian was one of the strongest writers in Africa favoring the pure church. His weakness is that he did not withdraw from the corrupt church as Tertullian, Novation and the Donatists did, but remained within it and tried to reform it from within.

From this site, <http://phoenicia.org/cyprian.html> note:

Cyprian seems to consider the laying on of hands in penance to be a giving of the Holy Ghost. In the East the custom of rebaptizing heretics had perhaps arisen from the fact that so many heretics disbelieved in the Holy Trinity, and possibly did not even use the right form and matter. For centuries the practice persisted, at least in the case of some of the heresies. But in the West to rebaptize was regarded as heretical, and Africa came into line soon after St. Cyprian. St. Augustine, St. Jerome, and St. Vincent of Lérins are full of praise for the firmness of Stephen as befitting his place. *But Cyprian's unfortunate letters became the chief support of the puritanism of the Donatists*. St. Augustine in his "De Baptismo" goes through them one by one. He will not dwell on the violent words *quae in Stephanum irritatus effudit*, and expresses his confidence that Cyprian's glorious martyrdom will have atoned for his excess.

### Cyprian on These Three Are One

From the Ante-Nicene Fathers

Volume 5

p. 859

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(IN THE NAME OF, ETC. SINCE  
THREE ARE ONE, EP 72, SEC 5 & SEC 13)

Having elsewhere touched upon the quotation attributed to Tertullian, I need not repeat what has been said of this once very painfully agitated matter. But, as to the quotations of the African Fathers generally, it ought to be understood that there *was a vetus Itala before Jerome*, — more than one, no doubt, — to which that Father was largely indebted for the text now called the Vulgate. Vercellone assured Dean Burgon that there was indeed one established Latin text, an old Itala.

Scrivener says candidly, "It is hard to believe that 1 John 5:7 was not cited by Cyprian;" and again, "The African writers Vigilius of Thapsus (at the end of the fifth century) and Fulgentius (circa 520) in two places expressly appeal to the

three heavenly Witnesses.” So, too, Victor Vitensis, in the notable case of the African king of the Vandals. The admission of Tischendorf is also cited by Scrivener. Tischendorf says, “Gravissimus est Cyprianus (in Tract. de Eccles. Unitate), Dicit Dominus, Ego et Pater unum sumus (Joann. x. 30); et, iterum, de Patre, Filio, et Spiritu Sancto, scripture est, Et tres unum sunt.” Tischendorf adds the testimony of this

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epistle to Jubaianus. And Scrivener decides that “it is surely safer and more candid to admit that Cyprian read it in his copies, than to resort to,” etc., the usual explainings away. To this note of this same erudite scholar the reader may also turn for satisfaction as to the reasons against authenticity. But primarily, to meet questions as to versions used by Cyprian, let him consult the same invaluable work on the Old Latin before Jerome. I have added an important consideration in a note to the Anonymous Treatise on Baptism, which follows (*infra*), with other documents, in our Appendix.

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stranger; he is profane; he is an enemy. He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother. If any one could escape who was outside the ark of Noah, then he also may escape who shall be outside of the Church. The Lord warns, saying, “He who is not with me is against me, and he who gathereth not with me scattereth.” He who breaks the peace and the concord of Christ, does so in opposition to Christ; he who gathereth elsewhere than in the Church, scatters the Church of Christ. The Lord says, “I and the Father are one;” and again it is written of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, “And these three are one.”

**I Jn. 5:6 This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.**

**7 For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and *these three are one.***

**8 And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.**

(Note the differences between these three are one v. 7 and these three agree in one v. 8.. Cyprian did cite the verse several times, but did not quote from it directly. That was common among the early writers, more so from the Latin than the Greek writers.

The expression these three are one, belongs to verse 7, presenting the Three Beings of the Godhead. It does not come from verse 6 or from verse 8. -REP)

And does any one believe that this unity which thus comes from the divine strength and coheres in celestial sacraments, can be divided in the Church, and can be separated by the parting asunder of opposing wills? He who does not hold this unity does not hold God’s law, does not hold the faith of the Father and the Son, does not hold life and salvation.

15. And since we seem to have divided all spiritual baptism in a threefold manner, let us come also to the proof of the statement proposed, that we may not appear to have done this of our own judgment, and with rashness. For John says of our Lord in his epistle, teaching us: "This is He who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood: and it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. For three bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three are one;" — that we may gather from these words both that water is wont to confer the Spirit, and that men's own blood is wont to confer the Spirit, and that the Spirit Himself also is wont to confer the Spirit.

(Here is the text again from the T R:

**I Jn. 5:6 This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.**

**7 For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.**

**8 And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one. REP)**

also that we have not unsuitably set in order the teaching of the Apostle John, who says that "three bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood; *and these three are one.*" And, unless I am mistaken, we have also explained what our Lord says: "John indeed baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost." Moreover, I think that we have given no weak reason as the cause of the custom. Let us have a care, although we do that in a subsequent place, that none may think that we are stirring up the present debate on a single article; although this custom even alone ought, among men who have the fear of God, and are lowly, to maintain a chief place.

From this site: <http://www.anabaptistnetwork.com/donatists>

(1) The nature of the church. The Donatist church regarded itself as the legitimate church in Africa, 'the church of Peter', rather than 'the church of Judas.' Catholics had allowed the church to be corrupted and had lost any claim to legitimacy, whatever imperial officials or bishops of Rome might decree. Schism had taken place, but from a Donatist perspective it was not their fault - they remained faithful to the tradition of the African church as represented by Cyprian and Tertullian. As far as they were concerned catholicity flowed out of purity, rather than legitimacy out of catholicity. The Donatist vision of the church included the following features: the church was a 'mystical

union of the righteous inspired by the Holy Spirit and instructed by the Bible’;

### Donatist Beliefs

The writings of Donatist theologians were largely destroyed by their opponents: very little has survived, except as quotations in works of their adversaries. Catholics and Donatists were not divided by the doctrinal issues which exercised fourth- and fifth-century theologians. Although anti-heresy laws were eventually used against them, **their adversaries generally recognised that the Donatists were orthodox Trinitarian Christians.** But they disagreed profoundly about some issues of ecclesiology.

The Donatists were orthodox Trinitarians. They followed the teachings of both Tertullian and Cyprian. Both of these men used the true and proper I John 5:7.

**I conclude that the Donatists did also.**

We know that the same people in Spain during those times, used the true I John 5:7 and had Latin Bibles that contained it, the Priscillians. The evolving Catholics murdered the Priscillians and tried to destroy their Bibles in Spain just as in Northern Africa.

**It is becoming very obvious that those in the Catholic Church hated the true and proper I John 5:7 and murdered those who used Bibles that contained it, and those outside of the evolving Catholic Church believed in and used the true I John 5:7 and their Bibles contained it.**

### Augustine the Verses the Donatists

[http://books.google.ca/books?id=GcVhAGpvTQ0C&pg=PA36&lpg=PA36&dq=The+Donatists+and+the+Bible&source=bl&ots=j5urJ81FfE&sig=0215NAF7fO3MKrybDqn8rlp7nko&hl=en&ei=pFdSS76llpGENTys3YoJ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=8&ved=0CCMQ6AEwBzge#v=onepage&q=The%20Donatists%20and%20the%20Bible&f=false](http://books.google.ca/books?id=GcVhAGpvTQ0C&pg=PA36&lpg=PA36&dq=The+Donatists+and+the+Bible&source=bl&ots=j5urJ81FfE&sig=0215NAF7fO3MKrybDqn8rlp7nko&hl=en&ei=pFdSS76llpGENTys3YoJ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=8&ved=0CCMQ6AEwBzge#v=onepage&q=The%20Donatists%20and%20the%20Bible&f=false)

This is a very good source, and it shows that the Donatists were disciples and followers of Cyprian, a must read through this very carefully. *Start with page 35.* Good on why rebaptism started and that the Montanists did not believe in the same sort of the Trinity as other Christians did. On page 36 there are very good statements dealing with the way the Donatists saved the Scriptures, pulling them out of the fires. Page 37 deals with Cyprian and rebaptism, very good.

<https://lirias.kuleuven.be/bitstream/123456789/247392/2/AHI+Presenation+June+09.2.docx>.

**As mentioned earlier, Augustine attempted to pull the figure of Cyprian away from the Donatists by emphasizing that they had wrongly understood Cyprian on rebaptism and that they stood apart from the Bishop of Carthage because they had so willingly remained in schism. Indeed, these would become central elements in Augustine's efforts to lay claim to Cyprian. An effort that would only eventually be vindicated later in Augustine's episcopacy and legacy.**

When Augustine became Bishop of Hippo the two communities lived next to each other in relative peace but mutual distrust of each other. This was an unacceptable position to Augustine. He believed that there could only be one visible community of believers.

During this time the government used coercion to get people to do what it wanted. Cults and heresies were suppressed. Augustine was initially opposed to such measures primarily because he didn't want an onslaught of false converts trying to escape persecution. This would fill up the church with more people than the bishops could handle. But he softened over time to them since they seemed to work and he couldn't argue against their effectiveness.

In January 412, the emperor Honorius formally banned Donatism, exiled Donatist clergy, and confiscated Donatist property. This was the beginning of the church using muscle to convince people of the error of their ways. Augustine would not have much time to deal with this controversy as the Vandals had started coming down into the Roman Empire and sacking towns.

**Augustine proved the existence of a Donatist Bible in distinction from the corrupted Catholic Bible, Please note the following again:**

10. While the biblical vocabulary of Cyprian regularly diverges from Optatus<sup>25</sup>, the biblical vocabulary of Augustine often agrees with Optatus. It is significant that Augustine, in refuting the most illustrious schismatics, proposed some of the changes that the bishop of Milevis had introduced into the African Old Latin. For example, these two authors, differently from their predecessors, quote *Isa. 66,5* with the phrase *fratres nostri estis*<sup>26</sup>. But it is important to note that the bishop of Hippo, in answering to the ecclesiastics of the dissident Church, sometime gave up the *Afra*<sup>27</sup>. In particular with respect to three biblical quotations, he introduced two versions and connected these versions respectively with the Donatists and with the Catholics. Thus Augustine reported the Donatist and Catholic versions of:

- *Jo. 13,10: not habet causam nisi pedes lavandi*<sup>28</sup> (Donatist)  
*qui lotus est not habet necessitatem iterum lavandi*<sup>29</sup> (Catholic);
- *Jo. 13,35: in hoc scient omnes quia mei discipuli estis, dilectionem habueritis in invicem*<sup>30</sup> (Donatist)  
*in hoc scient omnes quia discipuli mei estis, vos invicem dilexeritis*<sup>31</sup> (Catholic);
- *Jo. 14,27: pacem meam do vobis, pacem meam dimitto vobis*<sup>32</sup> (Donatist)  
*pacem meam do vobis, pacem meam relinquo vobis*<sup>33</sup> (Catholic).

The Catholic versions of these quotations of *John* agree with the *Adversus donatistas*<sup>34</sup>. Therefore we can say that Optatus, after examining the religious tradition of the Donatists, decided to modify the African Old Latin. In particular, when a biblical passage seemed to be delineating an aspect of ecclesiological or sacramental theology in accordance with the thought of Cyprian, the bishop of Milevis modified the African Old Latin.

**We can also say that Augustine presented these two disagreeing Texts and introduced yet another, making three Latin Texts in existence during Augustine's era.**

**Optatus opposed both Cyprian and the Donatists.**

**The Donatist text was the same as the Priscillian text, and we know it contained the true I John 5:7. We can conclude that the Donatist text did also. The same is true of the Novationists and the extreme and moderate Montanists. We have showed evidence favoring our conclusion that all the early dissenters used a different text from the evolving and murdering Catholics. This text, either in Greek or Latin, contained the true and proper I John 5:7.**