

Stephen (254-257). Cornelius was seemingly ready to readmit the lapsed on simple confession of error but Novatian, a presbyter, strongly objected. He favored a very hard line and his obstinacy resulted in the calling of a "presbytery" (local synod) and Cornelius secured his condemnation and demotion. Novatian had a large corps of followers and these followed him into spiritual exile and a new church. Thus the Novatian body became a schism within the body. While the lapsed seemed to be the real heart of the issue, a major factor was the authority of the bishop's office. Novatian was not willing to yield to this and the dispute continued into the period of Stephen's authority. In fine analysis it was the refusal to accept the authority of the bishop, more than the matter of the lapsed, that produced the schism.

In an interesting connexion, Novatian was joined in time by Novatus of Carthage. In Carthage the bishop was Cyprian and he took a hard stand, similar to Novatian of Rome. He also required that the bishopric find a full submission in all who served under him and his see. His presbyter (one of them!), Novatus, favored a softer approach, much like that of Cornelius/Stephen. Unwilling to accept Cyprian's firm edicts, Novatus was disciplined and left Carthage for Rome where he joined the Novatian party...to whose views he was in opposition although the real item was the authority question. Polity was greater than doctrine in this early church schism and that will be the case more often than not in the matter of division.

The Novatian schism remained a relatively strong force until after the legalization of Christianity when, with no more lapsed to readmit, it gradually died out or merged with the Donatists. Single issue churches have trouble with continuity..an important lesson for our age as for others.

Donatism

The second "lapse schism" was a dispute in the African churches in the first quarter of the fourth century.

Following the persecution of Diocletian, the bishop of Carthage, Mansurius (d. 311) had executed no firm policy concerning the lapsed and the problems mentioned earlier. On his death, the majority of