

 Patience with the Erring: “Tolerance” as a Strategy of Conversion in Late Antique Christianity¹

Abstract: The article examines *patientia* towards heretics as a pastoral strategy in late antique Christianity through two case studies: Irenaeus of Lyons and Augustine of Hippo. The analysis begins by distinguishing the modern concept of tolerance from the ancient vocabulary of patient endurance (*makrothymia*, *anochē*, *patientia*). Irenaeus presents patience towards the erring as a pastoral method oriented toward conversion, paradigmatically instantiated in the practice of Polycarp of Smyrna. Augustine, a former Manichaean hearer [MOU1], initially frames *patientia* as a moral obligation rooted in the memory of his own conversion; in his later writings on the Donatist controversy he evolves towards the concept of *moderata coercitio*, justified by a theology of grace. The comparison of the two models reveals a shared goal of conversion alongside fundamentally divergent understandings of permissible means, and exposes the risk of instrumentalisation inherent in the pastoral argument and evident in its subsequent reception.

Keywords: *patientia*, heresy, Irenaeus of Lyons, Augustine of Hippo, conversion

Cierpliwość wobec błędzących: „tolerancja” jako strategia nawracania w chrześcijaństwie późnoantycznym

Streszczenie: Autor artykułu analizuje *patientia* wobec herezyków jako strategię duszpasterską w chrześcijaństwie późnoantycznym na dwóch studiach przypadku: Ireneusza z Lyonu i Augustyna z Hippony. Punkt wyjścia stanowi rozróżnienie między nowożytnym pojęciem tolerancji a antycznym słownictwem cierpliwego znoszenia (*makrothymia*, *anochē*, *patientia*). Ireneusz prezentuje cierpliwość wobec błędzących jako metodę pastoralną zorientowaną na nawrócenie: jej paradygmatem jest praktyka Polikarpa ze Smyrny. Augustyn, były słuchacz manichejski, w pierwszej fazie ujmując *patientia* jako moralne zobowiązanie wynikające z pamięci własnego nawrócenia; w późniejszych pismach dotyczących kontrowersji donatystycznej ewoluuje ku koncepcji *moderata coercitio*, uzasadnionej teologią łaski. Zestawienie obu modeli ujawnia

¹ This is a revised version of a text “Tolerancja wobec herezji jako strategia nawracania – case studies późnoantycznego chrześcijaństwa”, originally composed as a conference presentation and delivered at *Colloquia Gedanensia* 17 (20-22/11/2025): *Tolerance - Of What and How Far? (Tolerancja - czego i jak daleka?)*.

wspólny cel nawrócenia przy zasadniczo odmiennym rozumieniu dopuszczalnych środków oraz ryzyko instrumentalizacji argumentu pastoralnego w późniejszej recepcji.

Słowa kluczowe: *patientia*, herezja, Ireneusz z Lyonu, Augustyn z Hippony, nawrócenie

1. Introduction

“Labouring by every means in my power to furnish thee with large assistance against the contradictions of the heretics, as also to reclaim the wanderers and convert them to the church of God” – with these words Irenaeus of Lyons formulates, in the preface to the fifth book of his *Adversus haereses*, the purpose of his entire five-volume refutation of gnosticism (AH V, praef.). The formulation is telling: heresy is an error to be contradicted, but the heretic is a wanderer to be reclaimed. It is precisely this asymmetry, stringency toward doctrine and patience toward the person, that is the subject of the present study.

The term “tolerance” in the article’s title requires an immediate qualification. In its modern sense, as a philosophical or legal recognition of the right to hold differing views, the concept is an anachronism when applied to antiquity (Garnsey 1984). Patristic authors did not embrace doctrinal pluralism. What interests us here is something different: whether, within a programmatic campaign against heresy, there emerge attitudes that may be described as deliberate restraint, patient endurance of the opponent, or pastoral deferral of confrontation – and whether such restraint had a strategic character, that is, whether it was oriented toward a specific goal: conversion. This understanding of patience and tolerance as pastoral rather than doctrinal categories is historically defensible and analytically productive. The term “tolerance” is therefore retained in the title as a heuristic designation, whereas the analysis itself will focus primarily on the late antique vocabulary of *patientia* and its Greek analogues, since these terms more precisely name the pastoral endurance at stake.

The article examines two case studies: Irenaeus of Lyons and Augustine of Hippo. The choice is not arbitrary. Both figures represent decisive moments in the history of Christian heresiological thought: Irenaeus as the architect of its foundational categories in the second century, Augustine as the thinker who, in the fifth century, bound heresiological practice to political theology. Both left textual evidence that permits us to trace not only theory but practice. Their juxtaposition is historically instructive: changed ecclesial circumstances generated new theological questions about the means, not the end, of conversion.

The article opens by establishing a conceptual framework: surveying the Greek and Latin vocabulary of patient endurance, while distinguishing the heuristic function of “tolerance” from the more precise patristic language of *patientia*. It then analyses the case of Irenaeus of Lyons before tracing Augustine’s evolving thought from an empathetic *patientia* toward Manichaeans through to the concept of *moderata coercitio* in the Donatist controversy.

2. Conceptual Framework: The Vocabulary of Patient Endurance

The conceptual framework has two components: the semantic field of patient endurance in Greek and Latin, and the ecclesiological logic that made heresy a problem requiring a pastoral as well as a doctrinal response.

2.1. Greek and Latin terms

The Greek biblical and philosophical tradition developed several concepts expressing patient endurance of evil or error. Two are of particular relevance for the patristic texts under discussion. *Makrothymia* (μακροθυμία), literally “long-spiritedness” or “long-suffering,” denotes the capacity to defer one’s response to injury or fault. In the Septuagint it is applied both to God (2 Macc 6:14) and to exemplary moral figures. *Anexikakia* (ἀνεξικακία) from *anechomai* (to bear) and *kakos* (evil), denotes gentleness in the face of inflicted wrong; Philo of Alexandria treats it as a philosophical virtue. A third term, *anochē* (ἀνοχή), appears in a context central to this analysis: Paul’s Letter to the Romans (2:4) connects it with God’s withholding of punishment as an invitation to repentance, establishing the most direct biblical precedent for a strategic understanding of patience (Trench 1976, § LIII; Danker and Bauer 2000, s.v. ἀνοχή, 82).

In the Latin tradition, two terms organise the semantic field. *Tolerantia* – from *tolerare*, to bear, to sustain – carries in Cicero a distinctly Stoic register: it denotes the bearing of toil and pain *aequo animo*, with equanimity of spirit. *Patientia*, from *patior*, to suffer, to undergo – is in Tertullian a properly Christological virtue: demonstrating through the example of the Passion that patience belongs to the very nature of God (*patientia Dei est natura*; Tertullian, *De patientia* III.11; Kaster 2002). Both concepts presuppose that restraint is not inaction but an active, purposive stance toward evil. For the purposes of the present argument, however, the decisive term is *patientia* rather than *tolerantia*. *Tolerantia* helps to mark the broader semantic horizon of endurance, but *patientia* more adequately names the specifically Christian and pastoral logic that links restraint to the hope of conversion. This purposiveness – patience subordinated to a specific outcome, namely conversion – is what we find operative in the texts examined below.

2.2. Heresy and the Logic of Unity

The shape of Christian heresiological practice is a product of a specific historical logic. In the Roman world, religious tolerance was above all a political instrument: the empire

permitted a plurality of cults provided they fulfilled a social function and did not undermine public order grounded in the principle of *pax deorum* (Garnsey and Humfress 2001, 136). Christianity, refusing imperial cult, entered into conflict with this logic. When, after the Edict of Milan (313 AD), it became the public religion, it inherited and applied to its own internal disputes an analogous schema: doctrinal error became a threat to ecclesial unity (Le Boulluec 1985, 12-19).

For this reason, the struggle against heresy in late antiquity was never exclusively a doctrinal dispute. It had ecclesiological dimensions (who belongs to the community?), epistemological ones (who holds interpretive authority over Scripture?), and political ones (what instruments may the Church employ in cooperation with the state?). The pastoral function of heresiological writing – the question of what to do with a concrete human being who errs – is an aspect frequently overlooked in historiography focused on doctrinal polemic. The present article places that pastoral function at the center of attention.

3. Irenaeus of Lyons: Patience as Pastoral Methodology

Three aspects of Irenaeus's approach merit attention: the stated purpose of the *Adversus haereses*, the methodological implications of that purpose, and the paradigmatic example of Polycarp as its practical instantiation.

3.1. The programme of the *Adversus haereses*

Irenaeus of Lyons, formed in the Asian tradition through his connection with Polycarp of Smyrna, served as bishop of Lyons during a period when the Valentinian school exercised a powerful attraction on educated Christians in Gaul. The *Adversus haereses* is the first comprehensive attempt to describe and refute the gnostic theological systems (Thomassen 2006, 9-23; Marksches 1997). It is most frequently read as a polemical manifesto: sharp, at times ironic, ruthless in exposing the internal contradictions of its targets. This reading is justified, but one-sided: it obscures the pastoral dimension of Irenaeus's project, which he himself articulates clearly in the prefaces to successive books (Behr 2013, 45-68; Osborn 2001, 27-39).

3.2. The aim: conversion, not refutation

The preface to the fifth book states the purpose of the entire enterprise with unusual precision:

(...) I shall endeavour, in this the fifth book of the entire work which treats of the exposure and refutation of knowledge falsely so called (...); and, labouring by every means in my power to furnish thee with large assistance against the contradictions of the heretics, as also to reclaim the wanderers and convert them to the church of God (AH V, praef.).

The formulation repays close attention. Irenaeus distinguishes two operations: to furnish “large assistance against the contradictions of the heretics”, an intellectual operation directed at doctrine, and “to reclaim the wanderers and convert them to the church of God”, a pastoral one directed at the human being. The verbal choice is telling: not to *refute* the wanderers, nor to *condemn* them, but to *reclaim* them: a term that implies recovery of something that properly belongs, a return rather than a defeat. The ultimate goal is not victory in debate but the restoration of concrete persons to the community of faith. Such a structure of purpose presupposes that patience toward the erring is built into the very project itself: one cannot reclaim anyone without giving them time and space to return (Behr 2013, 131-150; Osborn 2001, 85-101).

3.3. *The method: engagement at the source*

The prologue to the first book discloses the methodology underlying this pastoral project:

after chancing upon the commentaries of the disciples of Valentinus - as they style themselves - and after conversing with some of them and becoming acquainted with their doctrine, we thought it necessary to inform you, our dear friend, about these portentous and profound ‘mysteries’ which not all grasp (...). Thus, having learned of these mysteries yourself, you can make them clear to all your people and warn them to be on guard against this profundity of nonsense and of blasphemy against God (AH I, praef. 2).

The passage reveals two dimensions of what we may call methodological patience in Irenaeus’s understanding of anti-heretical practice. The first is source-fidelity: Irenaeus reads the Valentinians’ own texts rather than contenting himself with secondary accounts. The second is more significant still: personal meetings with heretics: “conversing with some of them and becoming acquainted with their doctrine.” This means Irenaeus listened to their arguments, engaged in dialogue, and attempted to understand their system from within (Dunderberg 2008, 197-202; Behr 2013, 90-105). Such an approach is far removed from simple contempt; it presupposes that the opponent is a person capable of rational conversation, not merely a subject for condemnation.

The primary motive for this methodological patience is pastoral concern for ordinary believers who are led astray. In the very opening of Book I, Irenaeus describes the faithful whom the heretics target: people whose minds are drawn away and “taken captive,” “simple ones” who are “unable to distinguish falsehood from truth” (AH I, praef. 1). The primary

addressee of his project is therefore not the heretic himself but the community endangered by heresy – and this perspective reinforces patience as a method: a rash or excessively aggressive response might harm precisely those Irenaeus seeks to protect.

3.4. The effectiveness of the model: the example of Polycarp

Irenaeus’s most powerful argument for pastoral patience is his appeal to the authority and practice of his own teacher. In the third book he writes:

But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna (...) having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true. (...) He it was who, coming to Rome in the time of Anicetus, caused many to turn away from the aforesaid heretics to the Church of God, proclaiming that he had received this one and sole truth from the apostles - that, namely, which is handed down by the Church (AH III,4,3).

The passage is significant on several counts. Irenaeus does not say that Polycarp “refuted” or “condemned” the heretics – the operative verb is “caused many to turn away,” directed at persons, not doctrines. Moreover, Polycarp is presented as a model of effectiveness: he travelled, he proclaimed, he engaged, and, according to Irenaeus, he produced real results. The exemplary case combines unambiguous rejection of error with patient pastoral action directed at concrete persons. The success of the model arises precisely from this combination (Lieu 2004, 186-190). In this way, the semantic distinction noted above – between refuting doctrines and reclaiming persons – finds its concrete realisation in pastoral practice.

4. Augustine of Hippo: From *patientia* to *moderata coercitio*

Augustine’s position is not static. Four moments mark the trajectory from empathetic *patientia* to *moderata coercitio*: his own experience of conversion, his early writing against the Manichaeans, and two successive interventions in the Donatist controversy separated by nearly two decades of practical experience.

4.1. Augustine’s journey: Manichaeism and conversion

Augustine of Hippo occupies an exceptional position in the history of patristics: a heresiologist who had himself spent ten years as a Manichaean hearer (Brown 2000, 46-60). That experience of erring, of the patient waiting of those close to him, and of gradual

return: shaped his attitude toward heretics in ways that cannot be overstated. His theology of conversion is not a theory elaborated in the abstract but a reflection on his own history. This biographical experience provides the concrete matrix in which the notion of *patientia*, introduced above as a conceptual category, acquires its existential and theological density.

The *Confessions* describe Augustine's arrival in Milan in 384 and his encounter with bishop Ambrose. The mechanism of conversion he narrates is pastorally instructive in the highest degree:

That 'man of God' received me like a father and expressed pleasure at my coming with a kindness most fitting in a bishop. I began to like him, at first indeed not as a teacher of the truth, for I had absolutely no confidence in your Church, but as a human being who was kind to me. I used enthusiastically to listen to him preaching to the people, not with the intention which I ought to have had, but as if testing out his oratorical skill (Aug., Conf. V,13,23).

Augustine adds: "I was not interested in learning what he was talking about. My ears were only for his rhetorical technique (...). Nevertheless together with the words which I was enjoying, the subject matter, in which I was unconcerned, came to make an entry into my mind (...) there also entered no less the truth which he affirmed, though only gradually" (Aug., Conf. V,14,24). In this account the strategy Irenaeus attributed to Polycarp appears in inverted autobiographical form. The basis of the relationship is unconstrained benevolence rather than doctrinal confrontation. Ambrose does not force a confrontation with Augustine's wrong intention, his rhetorical cynicism, his absence of faith, or his attendance from curiosity; it is precisely this patient restraint that creates the space in which truth can arrive, as it were, smuggled inside an aesthetic and intellectual experience (McLynn 2014, 240-241).

The further stage recorded in *Confessions* VI,3 shows Augustine returning regularly to Ambrose's sermons, still from a distance, yet with a growing conviction: "more and more my conviction grew that all the knotty problems and clever calumnies which those deceivers of ours had devised against the divine books could be dissolved" (Aug., Conf. VI,3,4). The gradualness of the process – years of listening, of sustained distance, followed by slow opening – is consciously underscored in the *Confessions* as a constitutive feature of the mechanism of conversion itself.

4.2. Patientia as a debt: the *Contra epistolam Manichaei*

Immediately after his conversion and return to Africa, Augustine composed a series of anti-Manichaean writings, among them the *Contra epistolam Manichaei quam vocant fundamenti* (c. 397). In this text, the memory of his own conversion is reworked into a normative account of how one ought to relate to those who err:

I, who so late submitted myself, for the clearing of the darkness of my mind, to that most gentle Physician as he called and coaxed me (tam tarde clementissimo medico vocanti blandientique subieci), cannot rage against you (saevire in vos omnino non possum). Rather, I must (debeo)

bear with you (sustinere) and act toward you with such patience (tanta patientia vobiscum agere), as my companions showed toward me, when I was raving and blindly wandering in your doctrine (cum ... rabiosus et caecus errarem) (Aug., Contra ep. Man. 3).

The passage is structured around a sequence of verbs that articulate not merely an ethical recommendation but a form of necessity grounded in experience. The use of *debeo* introduces the language of obligation, yet this obligation does not arise from an external norm; it emerges from a remembered asymmetry between past error and received forbearance. The patience Augustine now enacts is measured against the patience once extended to him. In this sense, *patientia* is not simply a virtue to be cultivated but a response that is internally compelled by the history of one's own conversion (BeDuhn 2010, 6-7). The verb *sustinere* further sharpens this stance. It does not denote passive tolerance, but an active bearing-with: a sustained willingness to endure the other's error without collapsing into hostility (*saevire*). What is excluded is not correction, but violent correction; what is required is a mode of engagement that preserves the possibility of transformation.

Accordingly, Augustine's *patientia* is not ordered toward coexistence but toward conversion. It arises from the recognition of one's own former blindness, imitates the divine pedagogy of the “most gentle Physician,” and seeks the recovery of the other rather than mere peaceful separation. In this configuration, patience is inseparable from *caritas*: it is the form that love takes when directed toward one who errs.

4.3. Medicina vindictae: the Contra epistulam Parmeniani

The confrontation with Donatism introduces the first significant transformation in Augustine's thinking about patience. The Donatists – a North African Christian movement that from the early fourth century maintained that the Church is exclusively a community of the pure, and that sacraments administered by unworthy clergy are invalid – posed a problem different in kind from Manichaeism (Tilley 1997). At stake was not an error in the understanding of God and creation but an ecclesiological error that ruptured the unity of the community.

In *Contra epistulam Parmeniani* (c. 400/401), Augustine formulates an early version of a theology of correction structured explicitly through a medical analogy. He states programmatically that *medicina vindictae* (“the remedy of chastisement”) *debet salvare unitatem* (“ought to preserve unity”): even where “chastisement” is involved, it must take the form of a *medicina*, and its proper end is not division but the preservation of *unitas*. The conceptual shift is precise: discipline is not framed primarily as *poena* (“punishment”), but as *remedium* (“remedy”).

Within this framework, the decisive distinction is not between punishment and its absence, but between chastisement understood as retribution and *vindicta* understood as correction. Augustine rejects any form of action driven by *ultio* (“revenge”); instead, correction

must be governed by *caritas* and directed toward *salus*, “salvation”. The one who errs is not treated as an enemy to be excluded, but as someone to be restored. Hence the recurrent logic of *revocare*: discipline is ordered toward calling back into unity, not confirming separation.

This determines the internal hierarchy of means. *Patientia*, together with *docere* (“to teach”), *monere* (“to admonish”), and *corripere* (“to correct”), retains a methodological priority. These are not merely preliminary stages, but constitutive modes of ecclesial action. Only when such forms of *correctio* prove ineffective does Augustine admit stronger measures – though not as a simple second stage, but as a concurrent mode of discipline within the same therapeutic logic (Markus 1988, 92-122; Debusschere 2024). The legitimacy of any act of *vindicta* depends on whether it can still be read as *curatio* (“healing”) rather than *persecutio* (“persecution”) (Catapano 2014, 472-474). In this way, the entire argument is organized by a single criterion: correction must operate as *remedium peccati* (“a remedy for sin”), ordered to *sanare* (“to heal”) rather than to destroy. What is preserved in and through this process is not simply doctrinal integrity, but the very *unitas Ecclesiae*, which both grounds and limits the exercise of discipline (Ployd 2023, 196-197).

4.4. Compelluntur intrare: the Epistula 93

The pivotal text in Augustine’s developing thought is *Letter 93*, addressed to Vincen-tius, a Donatist bishop from Cartenna (c. 407/408). It is composed in the context of the edicts of Honorius (405), which imposed financial and administrative penalties on the Donatists. Augustine, who had initially opposed coercion, changes his position under the pressure of experience: observing that some Donatists were in fact converting as a result of state intervention (Markus 1988, 133-153; Dodaro 2004, 111-139).

The argument of *Letter 93* operates on multiple levels. Theologically, Augustine draws on Rom 13:1 and the parable of the banquet (Luke 14:23), interpreting the biblical *compelle intrare* as a moral right of the Church to apply pressure in the service of unity. Empirically, he adduces the testimonies of converted Donatists who *post factum* acknowledge that coercion was for their good. But the underlying principle remains constant: “We must not hate the people but the errors” (*Non homines odisse debemus, sed errores*; Aug., *Ep.* 93). The goal is continuous – the conversion of the person – while the range of permissible means has been expanded.

4.5. Moderata coercitio: the Epistula 185

The mature systematic synthesis of this development is *Letter 185*, addressed to the tribune Boniface (c. 417). It represents Augustine’s most fully developed account of *moderata coercitio*, gentle or measured coercion: written nearly a decade after *Letter 93*, with extensive

practical experience of the effects of the imperial edicts (Wetzel 1992, 201-225; Russell 1999; Dodaro 2004, 140-168).

Augustine states plainly that “salutary were the laws” (*salubres vero fuisse leges*) issued against the Donatists (Aug., *Ep.* 185). The adjective *salubris* – salvific, healing – extends the therapeutic logic already articulated in the *Contra ep. Parmeniani* to the level of imperial legislation. The empirical argument is repeated and intensified: converted Donatists “give thanks that they have been corrected and freed from that frenzied destruction” (*furiosa pernicie*). Their gratitude carries probative weight for Augustine: it confirms that the “healing” character of coercion is not merely theoretical.

The political logic Augustine articulates is equally significant: “some [are to be won] by the words of Catholic preachers, if they can; others by the laws of Catholic rulers.” Pastoral word and salvific law operate in parallel, complementarily, in service of the same end. This sentence condenses the entire trajectory: from empathetic *patientia* toward Manichaeans, through the medical theology of correction in the Donatist controversy, to the theopolitical synthesis of *moderata coercitio*.

5. Two Models of Pastoral Patience: A Comparative Analysis

Juxtaposing the two cases allows us to identify both the common core and the fundamental divergences between the models of Irenaeus and Augustine.

What is shared is, above all, the teleology: in both cases patience is subordinated to conversion rather than to peaceful coexistence. Neither Irenaeus nor Augustine treats pastoral endurance as an end in itself: whether expressed through *patientia*, dialogue, or corrective discipline, it remains a strategy ordered to the reintegration of the erring person into the community of faith. Shared too is the separation of person from error: doctrines are rejected without remainder; the human being is granted time and space for return. And shared is the pastoral primacy of conversion over polemical victory: success consists not in silencing the opponent but in his return to the Church.

The fundamental divergences concern means, the theology of grace, and the role of the state. Irenaeus operates exclusively within the pastoral sphere: his instruments are study, dialogue, proclamation, and the witness of life – the paradigm of Polycarp. The state plays no part in his project of conversion, not because he rejects it but because in the second century it is still an external persecutor rather than a potential ally. Augustine in his first phase (patience toward Manichaeans) operates with comparable instruments, but in his later phase (measured coercion against Donatists) draws the apparatus of the state into the project of conversion. This transformation is made possible by Augustine’s theology of grace, which Irenaeus had not developed in this direction: if conversion is always God’s gift rather than merely the result of free choice, then any means that creates conditions for grace to operate – including

coercion – can be theologically legitimised, provided the goal is pastoral rather than punitive (Markus 1988, 133-153; Wetzel 1992, 201-225).

The paradox this comparison discloses has far-reaching implications. The more the Church institutionalises itself and enters into alliance with the state, the more elaborate becomes the arsenal of means available in the struggle against heresy, but the more complicated becomes the task of maintaining the pastoral orientation of the entire project. Irenaeus can sustain coherence between goal and means without friction. Augustine, by accepting coercion, must continually argue that coercion serves love rather than revenge, and that the difference between medicine and violence lies in intention, not in external form. This argument is intellectually sophisticated but historically fragile: detached from the pastoral grounding Augustine regards as its condition of validity, it proved susceptible to appropriation in support of religious compulsion he would, one may reasonably suppose, have rejected.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of texts by Irenaeus of Lyons and Augustine of Hippo permits several conclusions about the structure of pastoral patience in late antique Christianity.

First, patience toward heretics in this tradition is not a posture of doctrinal leniency or philosophical pluralism. It is a deliberately constructed soteriological strategy whose goal is always the conversion of a concrete person and their reintegration into the community of faith. Doctrine is rejected without compromise; the person is treated with patience.

Second, the shape of that patience depends on the theological understanding of error and salvation. For Irenaeus, the heretic is above all a person who has been deceived and is capable of return through word and example; pastoral instruments suffice. For Augustine, the theology of grace complicates the picture: since conversion is always God's gift, any means that creates conditions for its operation – including coercion – can be pastorally justified.

Third, the comparison of the two models reveals an internal tension between the pastoral orientation of the project and the risk of its instrumentalisation. Augustine's concept of *moderata coercitio* rests on the claim that intention: love, the salvific end, determines the moral character of the means. This is a theologically coherent position, but historically a precarious one: its reception in medieval political theology demonstrates that the pastoral grounding Augustine treated as constitutive could be detached from the concept without the concept's apparent formal structure being disturbed (Markus 1988, 92-122).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly for the history of pastoral theology: both authors converge on a single principle. The effectiveness of anti-heretical practice does not depend on the intensity of polemic but on the capacity to distinguish error from the one who errs, and to create a space in which that person may return. Irenaeus expressed this most simply: Polycarp did not refute – he converted. And it was precisely for this reason, Irenaeus tells us, that he “caused many to turn away.”

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