

[375] The Scriptural episodes of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5' 1-11), of Hymeneus and Alexander (1 Tim. 1' 20), and of the incestuous Corinthian (1 Cor. 5' 5)—do not sanction the revolting abuse of coercing anyone, be he infidel or heretic or Jew or schismatic, into the fold. They simply prove that the Sovereign Lord of life and death alone may, at will and miraculously, inflict death and other dire punishments upon sacrilegious sinners through *the mere word* of His ministers—not through their coercing hand, God forbid!

S. Peter and S. Paul laid no violent hand upon heretical or schismatic offenders, nor did they ever urge the Church to fight these with the glaive of violence. Their sole weapon was the word, not the sword. They who would fain Christianise men, or recall them to Catholic unity, by means of coercion torture and death—dishonor Jesus Christ and degrade Him to the level of an important Mahomet whose power lies, not in his own moral ascendancy, but in terror and brute force and oppression.

[376] The partisans of religious coercion inscribe on the banner of their "execrable heresy," as S. Athanasius justly brands it, the greatest name in all Church history after the Apostles, the name of St. Augustin. They forge his signature to their own base and odious theory, and strangle the historic truth that Augustin's Christ-like soul embraced in its boundless love not only all mankind not only all the oppressed, all the fallen, all apostates and heretics and schismatics—but even heretics and schismatics guilty of dreadful crimes against the laws of God, of nature and of society. To such a Christ-like sublimity of perfection did S. Augustin carry the love he bore even to persecuting heretics, that he actually saved the life of his would-be assassins by refusing to make them known to the civil authority, whilst these monsters and heretics, "furious at never being able to resist the victorious arguments of Augustin, preached publicly that to kill him would be a real service rendered to religion, and even went so far as to hire assassins to attempt his life" (S. Augustine by Hatzfeld Eng. tr. by E. Holt, A.D. 1903).

[377] Nay, rather than see even murderous heretics and schismatics put to death, Augustin openly declared his readiness to die by their hands. He wrote to Donatus, proconsul of Africa, about the Donatists—the most inhuman and ferocious heretics that ever lived: "If you take away the lives of these men for their crimes you will put us in the necessity of preferring to die by their hands rather than accuse them before your judgment seat" (Letter 127; *ibid.* p. 107).

The question submitted by certain bishops to S. Augustin was not, Whether it was allowed to coerce into the Church a heretic or a schismatic otherwise guilty of no crime. We defy any one to adduce one single word, from the immortal Doctor, in favor of such a coercive course, which, for the rest, he never tires of repudiating.