

CHAPTER TWO

The Man and his Times

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THE PAGAN BACKGROUND

Quintus Florens Septimius Tertullianus, the man we call Tertullian, was born at Carthage (near the modern Tunis) sometime in the third quarter of the second century AD.. The city had had a long and distinguished history of nearly a thousand years at the time of his birth, and every Roman schoolboy knew by heart the epic struggle which Rome had waged with Carthage for control of the Western Mediterranean. The first foundation of the city under the beautiful queen Dido, herself a refugee from distant Phoenicia, had long been wrapped in legend and immortalised by the genius of Virgil. In historical times Carthage had once been mistress of the seas, and her traders, like those of metropolitan Tyre, had explored the limits of the known world. In the second century B.C, Punic, the Carthaginian language (closely related to Hebrew and Arabic), was widely understood at Rome, as we know from the comic poet Plautus, who felt able to use it in the dialogue of one of his plays.¹ By then, however, the great days were already over, and Rome was in the ascendant.

For over a century there was intermittent warfare between the two cities, and the great Carthaginian Hannibal very nearly captured Rome after destroying the legions at Cannae (216 BC). In the event he missed his opportunity and Rome dramatically recovered. The theatre of war shifted to Africa, where at the great battle of Zama (202 BC) the military might of Carthage was shattered for ever. The city survived, in greatly reduced circumstances, until its final destruction at the end of the Third Punic War (149-146 BC). The memory of Rome's peril lingered on, however, and Cato the Elder's famous words, *Carthago delenda est* ('Carthage must be destroyed'), etched themselves deep in the national consciousness. For a century the site lay desolate, to be refounded by Julius Caesar as a

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Roman colony (46 BC). As such Carthage became a centre of the purest Latinity, and gradually extended its cultural sway to the still largely Semitic interior.

By Tertullian's time, the wealth and prosperity of Carthage had made it the second city of the West. Its schools were famous all over the Empire, and its trade was perhaps even more important than it had been in Phoenician times. The irrigation of the fertile plains up-country had given the city a prosperous base which it was not to lose until the devastations of civil strife in AD 238. Even then its importance hardly diminished and some of the greatest names in late antiquity lived and worked there. In the second century these included the great novelist Apuleius, whose satirical comedies give a brilliant picture of high society in Tertullian's youth. It was a carefree, enlightened age, though not without a darker side, as Tertullian and his fellow Christians discovered to their cost.

Tertullian's family background is obscure, and all attempts to enlighten us on it have proved unsatisfactory. We know that he was born into a well-to-do pagan household, but we do not

¹ *Poenulus*, 1.930 ff.

know the source of its prosperity. According to Jerome, Tertullian's father had been a centurion in the imperial army. This may contain an element of truth, but as Jerome calls him a *centurio proconsularis*, rank which to our knowledge did not exist in the Roman army, his statement must be treated with some caution.²

Tertullian's writings indicate that he had received a sound training in philosophy, classical literature and the law, though there is little sign that he was particularly erudite in any of these disciplines. Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* ii. 2-4) claimed that he was a brilliant jurist, but this cannot be proved. Many people have identified him with an obscure lawyer called Tertullianus, who apparently lived about the same time, but this is now thought to be improbable. His legal training was doubtless sufficient to impress a Greek historian with little knowledge of the subject, but there are curious gaps which do not convince modern scholars. In particular, his understanding of the legal basis for the persecution of Christians is sketchy at best, and is nowadays generally thought to be wrong (see below).

The nature and extent of Tertullian's legal education has been a matter for controversy ever since Schlossmann denied

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Harnack's assertion that it was his professional juristic training which led Tertullian to define the doctrine of the Trinity in legal terms. Supporting Harnack were James Morgan and Alexander Beck, who undertook a lengthy refutation of Harnack's critics.³ Beck's views, however, have not convinced more recent scholars, and the general weight of opinion now favours Schlossmann. This is substantially the position held by Sider, Fredouille and Barnes, although there are still some scholars who tend more towards Harnack's view.⁴ On balance there seems little doubt that Schlossmann was right to insist that Tertullian was not a professional lawyer, although his formal education certainly gave him substantial legal knowledge. Tertullian frequently used legal terminology and cast his arguments in a forensic mould, but there is little sign of the detailed knowledge one would expect from a professional jurist.⁵

On the broader question Tertullian's familiarity with classical literature, no comprehensive study of the evidence has as yet been attempted. Given the scantiness of the sources and the limitations of the work which has been done, perhaps this is just as well. Shortly before the last war, Adhémar d'Alès wrote an article outlining Tertullian's knowledge of the Greek poets, and Braun has found traces of Virgil, Lucretius and Juvenal in his works.⁶ The difficulty, of course, is that Tertullian seldom mentions classical writers by name, so that there is a good deal of speculation involved in assigning the alleged 'quotations'. Furthermore, investigations of this sort are inevitably superficial and usually miss the point. This is the case with Timothy Barnes, for instance, who has maintained that because Tertullian was familiar with Tacitus and Juvenal, we may consider him to have been more

² On this subject, see Barnes, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-21.

³ J. Morgan, *The Importance of Tertullian in the Development of Christian Dogma*, London, 1928; A. Beck, *Römisches Recht bei Tertullian und Cyprian*, reprint, Aalen, 1967 (orig. ed. 1930).

⁴ E.g. D. Michaelides, *Foi, écriture et tradition, ou les Praescriptiones chez Tertullien*, Paris, 1969.

⁵ J. Stirnimann, *Die Praescriptio Tertullians im Lichte des römischen Rechtes and der Theologie*, Freiburg in der Schweiz, 1949.

⁶ A. d'Alès, 'Tertullien, helléniste', *Revue d'études grecques* 50, 1937, pp. 329-62; R. Braun, 'Tertullien et les poètes latins', *Annales de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines de Nice* 2, 1967, pp. 21-33.

erudite than Jerome.⁷ Barnes, of course, has ignored the influence of the third-century Ciceronian revival which led to the virtual eclipse of Silver Age writing in the late Empire. Jerome did not quote Tacitus at least partly because at that time he was an unfashionable and little-read author. At a more serious level, however, Barnes' statement begs the question as to whether it is breadth or depth of learning which is the true hallmark of erudition. Not casual allusions but substance is what really counts in estimating the extent of Tertullian's classicism. When viewed

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in this light, it may be said that research into Tertullian's literary background has scarcely begun.

More extensive than the search for literary allusions, if not necessarily more fruitful, have been the attempts to connect him with various strands of ancient philosophy. Neander raised the problem, but 'solved' it by saying that Tertullian was basically an anti-philosophical writer. A more positive note was struck by Gerhard Esser⁸ who traced Tertullian's teaching on the soul to the influence of Stoicism, a view which was to gain wide support later on. After Harnack there appeared a definite shift in scholarly opinion which was reflected in the work of Schelowsky,⁹ who maintained that Tertullian was unwittingly seduced by the philosophical ideas he was trying to combat, so that in the end he became a supporter of the philosophical speculation he so vehemently opposed. Schelowsky also claimed, in opposition to the orthodox Protestant views put forward by Hauschild,¹⁰ that Tertullian accepted 'nature' as a source of Divine Revelation equal to Scripture. This idea was later seized upon by the Catholic Fuetscher¹¹ who also rejected Hauschild's views.

Fuetscher's work, in the best Thomist tradition, simply assumed that Tertullian employed philosophy as the handmaid of theology. This attitude has prevailed in Catholic circles to this day, and the main question has been which philosophy it was that Tertullian was most attached to. Various attempts have been made to find allusions to Aristotle in his writings but these have not been particularly convincing¹² and the general opinion now favours Stoicism as the main impetus behind Tertullian's philosophical speculations. This view was most forcefully set out by Jan Waszink in his monumental edition of the *De anima*. But although Waszink may fairly be said to represent the mainstream in modern research, his view does not completely dominate the field. Andre Festugière, for example, has maintained that Tertullian lacked a coherent philosophical system, and that in so far as he indulged in philosophical speculation at all, it was based on a nebulous framework of 'platonic gnosticism'.¹³ Following

⁷ Op. cit., pp. 199-201.

⁸ G. Esser, *Die Seelenlehre Tertullians*, Paderborn, 1893.

⁹ G. Schelowsky, *Der Apologet Tertullianus in seinem Verhältnis zu der griechisch-römischen Philosophie*, Leipzig, 1901.

¹⁰ G. Hauschild, *Die rationale Psychologie and Erkenntnistheorie Tertullians*, Leipzig, 1880, p. 17.

¹¹ L. Fuetscher, 'Die natürliche Gotteserkenntnis bei Tertullian', *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 51, 1927, pp. 1-34, 217-51.

¹² See J. Moffatt, 'Aristotle and Tertullian', *Journal of Theological Studies* 17, 1916, pp. 170-1; J. H. Waszink, 'Traces of Aristotle's Lost Dialogues in Tertullian', *Vigiliae Christianae* 1, 1947, pp. 137-49; P. Keseling, 'Aristotelisches bei Tertullian?', *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 57, 1947, pp. 256-7.

¹³ A. Festugière, 'La composition et l'esprit du *De anima* de Tertullien', *Revue des sciences philologiques* 33, 1949, pp. 129-61.

the Stoic line, however, have been Heinrich Karpp and Michel Spanneut¹⁴ who have both traced Tertullian's views to the influence of Soranus. On the other hand, Lazzati's attempt to demonstrate

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his dependence on Cicero has been effectively discounted by Ilona Opelt¹⁵ and future research in this area is unlikely to produce more positive results.

The debate over the philosophers, however, is only one side of the picture. At the same time that all this has been going on, a vigorous tradition has grown up asserting that Tertullian was basically an anti-philosophical writer. J. Lebreton,¹⁶ for instance, thought that Tertullian's uncompromising stand was to be explained by his desire to attack the 'evil' of Christian speculation. G. J. de Vries¹⁷ has denied that Tertullian was in any sense a philosopher and has insisted that his famous *credo quia absurdum*¹⁸ be taken literally. In this he was followed by Gustave Bardy,¹⁹ though not by André Labhardt, who claimed that the *absurdum* referred not to Tertullian's disquiet at pagan rationalism, but to the 'foolish things of God' he mentions in the preceding lines.²⁰ Labhardt nevertheless maintained that Tertullian was opposed to philosophy on principle, and not just because the philosophies he knew were of pagan origin. The Jesuit scholar R. F. Refoulé²¹ has since attempted to modify Labhardt's *position pure* by saying that Tertullian put great stress on baptism as the means for removing the barrier of man's understanding. It may be doubted, however, whether Refoule will have much influence on this school of thought, since his concept of sin as mere deprivation, without necessarily including an element of guilt and responsibility, is unsatisfactory.

In view of the conflicting opinions regarding Tertullian's attitude to philosophy, can any positive conclusions be drawn? One of the fairest judgments is that of Claude Tresmontant, who states that Tertullian habitually adopted his opponent's standpoint and proceeded from there to demonstrate its inconsistencies. According to Tresmontant, he neither had a philosophical system nor chose one eclectically from among the many available. When compared with biblical teaching, his writings betray the lingering influence of pagan thought-patterns, especially on the subject of the relationship between the body and the soul. In Tresmontant's own words:

Tertullian, like all the Fathers, understands by 'the flesh' a substance distinct from 'the soul', which is contrary to

¹⁴ H. Karpp, *Schrift and Geist bei Tertullian*, Gütersloh, 1955; M. Spanneut, *Le stoïcisme des Pères de l'Église*, Paris, 1957.

¹⁵ G. Lazzati, 'Il *De natura deorum*, fonte del *De testimonio animae* di Tertulliano', in *Atene e Roma* 7, 1939, pp. 153-66; I. Opelt, 'Ciceros Schrift *De natura deorum* bei den lateinischen Kirchenvatern', *Antike and Abendland* 12, 1966, pp. 141-55.

¹⁶ J. Lebreton, 'Le désaccord de la foi populaire et de la théologie savante dans l'Église chrétienne du troisième siècle', *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 19, 1923, pp. 481-506; 20, 1924, pp. 5-37.

¹⁷ G. De Vries, *Bijdrage tot de Psychologie van Tertullianus*, Utrecht, 1929.

¹⁸ In fact Tertullian never used the expression; see *De carn. Chr.* 5.4; *credibile est, quia ineptum est*. On the origin of the phrase, see A. Vaccari, 'Credo quia absurdum. Chi l'ha detto?', *Scritti di erudizione e di filologia* 2, 1958, p. 17, who is inconclusive.

¹⁹ G. Bardy, *La conversion au christianisme durant les premiers siècles*, Paris, 1949.

²⁰ A. Labhardt, 'Tertullien et la philosophie, ou la recherche d'une position pure', *Museum Helveticum* 7, 1950, pp. 159-80.

²¹ R. F. Refoulé, 'Tertullien et la philosophie', *Revue des sciences religieuses* 30, 1956, pp. 42-5.

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Biblical usage. By defending 'the flesh' against its Gnostic detractors, Tertullian recovers a necessity which is in effect genuinely inherent in Christian anthropology, which is based on Biblical anthropology. But, like most of the Fathers, Tertullian is the prisoner of an anthropological dualism at the same time as he is attacking this very thing, in the name of the metaphysical principles of Christianity. Like most of the Fathers, Tertullian takes the resurrection of the flesh, or the body, to be the resurrection of *something other than the soul*. There are thus two things, two substances, connected yet distinct from each other, which, according to Tertullian, must rise again.²²

In focussing his attention on the relationship between the body and the soul, Tresmontant has gone beyond the superficial question of sources and hit upon one of the central problems of his whole outlook. It is not a problem which can be traced with certainty to a particular philosophical school; rather it is a more general phenomenon which exerted a powerful influence over all branches of ancient thought.

Tertullian's political views have also come under scrutiny in recent years. The traditional opinion has always been that Tertullian advocated total separation from the world and all its works, and this view has not been completely abandoned.²³ But recent studies have shown a marked tendency to reverse the separatist position common a generation ago, and Tertullian has now been made to appear as the great defender of the Empire, who insisted only that Christians be treated fairly within it.²⁴ No doubt the more recent picture reflects growing concern for social and political involvement in the modern Church, though it is probably true to say that even when allowance is made for this, the new emphasis does greater justice to Tertullian's source of practicality and his awareness of the importance of the material world in God's plan of salvation, than older theories which concentrated too exclusively on his exhortations to follow the example of the martyrs.

From the foregoing it will be apparent that there is much to be said about Tertullian's social and cultural background, even in spite of our lack of specific information. On the other hand, it is equally clear that it must all be seen in the light of

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²² C. Tresmontant, *La métaphysique du christianisme et la naissance de la philosophie chrétienne*, Paris, 1961, p. 626:

Tertullien, comme l'ensemble des Pères, entend par 'la chair' une substance autre que 'l'âme', contrairement à la terminologie biblique. En défendant 'la chair' contre ses detracteurs gnostiques, Tertullien retrouve une exigence en effet authentiquement inhérente à l'anthropologie chrétienne, laquelle est fondée sur l'anthropologie biblique. Mais, comme la plupart des Pères, Tertullien est prisonnier du schème anthropologique dualiste, au moment même où, au nom des principes métaphysiques du Christianisme, il le combat. Tertullien, comme la plupart des Pères, entend par résurrection de la chair, et résurrection des corps, la résurrection de *quelque chose d'autre que l'âme*. Ce sont *deux* choses, *deux* substances, associées certes, mais distinctes, qui selon Tertullien, doivent ressusciter.

²³ See J.-M. Hornus, 'Etude sur la pensée politique de Tertullien', *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 38, 1958, pp. 1-38.

²⁴ E. Isichei, *Political Thinking and Social Experience. Some Christian Interpretations of the Roman Empire from Tertullian to Salvian*, Christchurch, 1964.

his subsequent Christian commitment, without which it would have little coherence or meaning. Tertullian's conversion was without a doubt the single most important event in his life, as indeed it is in the life of any Christian, though here again we can say virtually nothing about it. Like so many others, he surrendered to Christ in early manhood, but we cannot date this with any confidence, except that it must have been sometime before AD 197. The usual conjecture is that he was converted about AD 193, the year in which Septimius Severus laid claim to the Empire; but this is only a guess. The most important occurrence in Tertullian's life is shrouded in darkness and, as with so much else, can be known only from its effects in later years.

THE SECOND-CENTURY CHURCH

Our first glimpse of Tertullian the Christian finds him securely within the fold of the Church at Carthage. Whether his contact with this congregation antedated his conversion to any significant degree is of course impossible to say, and we know hardly anything about the depth or nature of his commitment to the assembly of believers in its institutional form. On the other hand, we do know, both from his own testimony and from that of his contemporaries, a good deal of what the Church of his time was like, and what it expected of its members.

Beginning as a breakaway sect from Judaism about AD 30 (the date most usually agreed for the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, followed by the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost), the Christian Church quickly spread across the Mediterranean world. Within fifty years congregations of believers had been established in all the main cities and towns of the East, as well as at Rome. An originally Jewish leadership was giving way to Greek, and the new religion soon gained a firm foothold wherever traders and other travellers congregated. In contrast with its competitors, Christianity claimed no land as its home, no antiquity as its pedigree. Christians of every race and tongue were a new nation, called out from the world and set aside as the heralds and first-fruits of the coming Kingdom of God.

When Christianity first came to North Africa is impossible

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to say. A great city like Carthage can hardly have been without a church for very long, but its earliest history is unknown. Analogy with two other Western cities, Rome and Lyons, suggests that the first congregation was Greek-speaking and thus consisted mainly of transients and expatriates. More controversial is the suggestion that this Greek element was largely Jewish. This thesis has been strongly defended in recent years by the late Cardinal Jean Daniélou²⁵ but his hypotheses remain unconvincing. It is certainly true that Tertullian frequently attacked Judaism and the Jews, but it remains doubtful to what extent he was referring to contemporaries, jealous of the success of the Christians, as opposed to the Jews of the Bible. Until this question can be resolved in Daniélou's favour, the theory that North African Christianity sprang directly from Jewish roots must be regarded as unproved, at least from Tertullian's writings.

²⁵ Cf. J. Daniélou, *The Origins of Latin Christianity*, London, 1977.

What we do know, however, is that Carthage was the cradle of Latin Christianity, for it was here that the Church first abandoned Greek and adopted the local language in its worship and instruction. Indigenisation was undoubtedly a gradual process and may not have been fully completed when Tertullian began his career, since he wrote at least some of his works in Greek as well as in Latin. Nevertheless, by AD 190 the Carthaginian church was ready and eager to receive Christian teaching in the native tongue. Whatever dissensions this literature might later provoke, it was at least certain that Tertullian's genius would not be sweetness wasted on the desert air.

The inner life of this church, its worship and organisation, is not known to us in detail. About all we know for sure is that regular meetings were held, at which prayer was offered to God, hymns were sung, and the Word was preached, perhaps by someone who was charismatically gifted. We do not know whether every service centred around the eucharist; this is frequently assumed, but it cannot be proved. It is somewhat remarkable, for instance, that although Tertullian seems to tell us a great deal about the life and piety of ordinary Christians (if only to criticise them) he says almost nothing about the communion service. Clearly the order of priorities, or at least the focus of interest, at Carthage was not eucharistic, as it was

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to become later on. In Tertullian's day the Lord's supper was an act of worship within the community, but it did not attract the same interest as baptism, or the many expressions of personal piety on which he attempts to legislate.

The ministry of the Church is equally obscure. The New Testament records three names given to Church officers—bishop (*episkopos*), elder (*presbyteros*) and deacon (*diakonos*). Real authority, however, resided in the apostles (*apostoloi*), who exercised an itinerant ministry and did not hesitate to advise congregations from a distance. By the end of the first century the apostles were all dead, and they were not replaced. Instead the three orders mentioned above were left to divide the work of the ministry among them.

How was this done? Most scholars today agree that the duties and functions of a bishop are reasonably clear. He governed the church as the Apostle's representative, and was responsible for ensuring that their teaching was maintained in its fullness and in its purity. It is uncertain whether bishops were appointed to a congregation or to a place, though in the first two centuries this would not have mattered, since there was seldom more than one congregation in any one locality. The role of the deacon is likewise fairly clear: he was charged with pastoral and administrative duties so that the bishop could be free to preach the Gospel.

But what are we to make of the elder? It seems entirely possible, as even Jerome believed,²⁶ that initially at least, bishops and elders were one and the same. The author of 2 and 3 John would seem to come into this category, since he describes himself as an elder yet advises the Church like a bishop. If he was the Apostle John, then such a conclusion necessarily imposes itself. At the same time, however, there was never more than one bishop in a congregation (as far as we know), but elders were numerous. It seems likely, therefore, that from a very early stage, the bishop was at least first among equals. As the chief presbyter, the conduct of worship, especially the celebration of the eucharist, would normally be his responsibility, though in his absence another presbyter would stand in his stead.

²⁶ *Comm. ad Titum* 1.5 (PL 26: 194ff.)

As the Church grew in size, delegation of episcopal responsibilities to the presbyters became common, and they were eventually assigned congregations and parishes of their

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own. What we do not know, however, is how far this process had advanced by Tertullian's time. The matter is of some importance, since Jerome claimed that Tertullian was an elder (presbyter) at Carthage. Now Tertullian cannot have been a bishop, so the system of Church government must have evolved somewhat from what Jerome supposed had been its most primitive stage. Some scholars have maintained that Jerome was merely guessing at Tertullian's status, on the assumption that such a distinguished person would never have been a layman. These scholars point out that there is no evidence that Tertullian ever exercised the functions of a presbyter—particularly in respect of the eucharist.

This, however, depends entirely on what we understand those functions to have been at that time. Unfortunately the whole issue has been complicated by subsequent developments in eucharistic theology, which introduced an element of sacrifice into the celebrant's action. Parallels were drawn with the Old Testament sacrifices, and before long the words presbyter and *sacerdos* (used of a man who offered a sacrifice) became confused. The result is that modern languages, including English, have only the one word *priest* (derived from *presbyter*) to cover both meanings. Thus it has been argued that Tertullian cannot have been a *presbyter* because he was not, so it seems, a priest in the sacerdotal sense. Yet it is quite possible that he was an elder as outlined above, in the days before eucharistic sacrifice became an accepted doctrine. Far from being wrong, Jerome may have preserved the memory of an earlier time, in which a Calvinist would have been more at home than a modern Catholic.

What is certain is that worship and liturgy were not aspects of church life which greatly preoccupied Tertullian. His own interests were determined much more by the pressures which Christianity was facing from without. These were of two kinds. The first and more blatant was physical persecution, the danger of which exercised a powerful formative influence on the young Church's mind. The second, and more subtle, was the intellectual challenge of pagan philosophies and religions, which in the second century threatened to overwhelm the nascent theology of the Christians. It was against this background of a double threat to the Church's very existence that

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Tertullian was forced to work out his own understanding of the Faith.

THE NOBLE ARMY OF MARTYRS

There is probably no aspect of the Early Church which has been more widely discussed, or celebrated over as long a period, as the phenomenon of martyrdom. Almost from the very beginning persecution was a fact of life in the early community, and this could not fail to create a deep and lasting impression. Our sources generally agree that in the earliest period the greatest danger came from the Jews. This was inevitable, not only because the first Christians were almost all converts from Judaism, but also because they taught a faith which profoundly scandalised Jewish theological opinion, in whose eyes it was deeply subversive. St

Paul concentrated his initial evangelistic efforts on Jewish communities in the Diaspora, where more often than not his teaching aroused the ire of the elders, who were not above appealing for redress to the Roman magistrate (Acts 17.6; 18. 12, etc.).

The fact that it was the Jews who had the most to lose from the spread of the new faith explains both the depth and the persistence of their hostility towards it. The Roman reaction to their agitation was initially restrained, as the New Testament evidence indicates. Tertullian even thought that Tiberius had shown favour to the Christians (*Apol.* 5.2), and this is by no means impossible. It would have been a perfectly natural reaction for a pagan ruler, on hearing of a new religion, to tolerate it in the expectation that it would soon be integrated into a wider syncretistic whole. Again, there is evidence from the New Testament to indicate that some pagans at least may have welcomed the new faith with precisely these intentions (Acts 14.11-18).

It was not until the reign of Nero that the Roman authorities began to persecute Christians as a separate sect. Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.44) tells us that this was because Nero needed a scapegoat on which to lay the blame for the great fire of Rome in AD 64. Tertullian refers to this institutum *Neronianum* (*Ad nat.* i.7.9; *Apol.* 5.3 ff.) and claims that it was the basis of the legalised persecutions in later times. This has been hotly

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contested by modern scholars, and the vagueness of the word *institutum* is not much help, but even if Nero's order had no permanent legal effect, it undoubtedly did set a precedent for persecution which no subsequent emperor, until Constantine, repudiated. For two centuries public denunciation (*delatio*) continued to provoke the execution of convinced Christians.

But who denounced them, and why? Tertullian tells us that in his day Christians had become the universal bogeymen, prime targets for mob violence (*Apol.* 40.1-2). The impression he gives is that this violence was quite irrational and had no basis whatever in fact. If this is true, then who incited the mobs? W. H. C. Frend has consistently argued that the chief culprits were the Jews.²⁷ In a series of articles he has argued that Tertullian's statement about the Jewish synagogues as founts of persecution (*Scorp.* 10.10) is not to be understood merely in a historical sense, but also as a living reality. When we consider that in addition to the reasons mentioned above, the Jews at this time were concerned to deflect prejudice away from themselves, this is quite possible. On the other hand, it does not accord well with the famous description of the mob in *Apologeticum*, where there is no mention of Jews. Probably they were responsible for some of the agitation, but in times of crisis pagan nerves must have flared up easily, and the Christians, once under suspicion, would have remained favourite scapegoats.

From the purely historical point of view, Tertullian's accounts of martyrdom are surprisingly weak, and rely on anachronism more than Frend might allow. Despite his approval of martyrdom, for instance, Tertullian says virtually nothing about the actual martyrs themselves. The only ones he mentions by name are Perpetua, Justin and Rutilius, and even

²⁷ W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, Oxford, 1965, p. 334; 'Tertulliano e gli Ebrei', *Rivista di Storia, Lettere, Religione* 4, 1968, pp. 3-10; 'A Note on Tertullian and the Jews', *Studia Patristica* 10, 1970, pp. 291-6.

then it is only in passing.²⁸ This is all the more surprising when we remember that Perpetua was his contemporary, and that he may conceivably have witnessed her death.²⁹ How can this lack of detail be explained, if martyrdom was of such obvious importance?

The main reason seems to be that Tertullian lived in a period of relative calm in which very few Christians were put to death.³⁰ The African Church in particular, although it was later to become famous for its martyrs, suffered very little persecution before the death of Septimius Severus in AD 211. It so

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happens that we have two accounts of incidents in which Christians were put to death, but these tend to confirm rather than dispel this impression. The first is the well-known *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*, according to which a number of villagers were sentenced to death at Carthage in AD 180. Tertullian does not mention this incident at all, though he almost certainly knew of it. It is hard to see why this should be so, except that for some reason he did not think it important enough. The account of the Scillitans dovetails remarkably well with the famous letter of Pliny the Younger to Trajan (*Ep.* 10.97), in which he describes to the emperor how he handled this sort of thing in Bithynia during his governorship there (AD 112-13). Pliny's account seems to imply that cases of this kind were fairly routine, and the martyrs at Scilli may be exceptional only in that an account of their ordeal has been preserved. In the case of Perpetua and Felicity, martyred in AD 203, there is strong evidence that they were somehow connected with Tertullian, and it has even been conjectured, though somewhat less than convincingly, that he was the author of the account of their martyrdom.³¹

The striking fact about all this, however, is that nobody of any standing in the Church was affected—in marked contrast to the situation a generation earlier, when both Justin and Polycarp had suffered death from persecution. The conclusion that Tertullian's concentration on martyrdom as a phenomenon was out of all proportion to the reality, at least as it was experienced by him, seems inescapable. But, fortunately, there is a ready explanation for this apparently curious phenomenon. By the late second century martyrdom was already a stock theme of Christian literature, and hagiography was starting to appear as a genre in its own right. It seems that there were already the beginnings of a cult of Polycarp at Smyrna, although the main developments along this line were still in the future.³² The chief elements of this literature were simple enough. The example of Christ and the Apostles, and the

²⁸ Perpetua is mentioned in the *De anima* 55.4 and Justin Martyr twice, *Adv. Val.* 5.1; *Adv. omn. haer.* 7.1. The latter, however, is unlikely to be genuine. Rutilius, otherwise unknown, is mentioned in *De fuga* 5.3.

²⁹ She died in AD 203 and it has been suggested that Tertullian wrote the account of her martyrdom. This, however, is unlikely since, as Barnes has pointed out (*op. cit.*, p. 265), Tertullian misrepresents the *Passio Perpetuae* in the *De anima*. Also he says nothing about Felicity, Perpetua's companion in death.

³⁰ Friend, *Martyrdom*, *op. cit.*, pp. 304-321, seems to think that Africa was exceptional during this period, in that Christianity was more severely persecuted there than elsewhere. The evidence he adduces for this, however, is vague and insufficient. Tertullian himself records numerous contemporary instances of Roman clemency, cf., e.g., *Ad Scapulam* 3.1; 4-3.

³¹ The view of C. J. M. J. van Beek, *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 1936, p. 162. As we have already mentioned, (cf. n. 29), this attribution rests on hypotheses which go beyond what the facts warrant.

³² Cf. H. Delehaye, *Les origines du culte des martyrs*, Bruxelles, 1912, p. 41; but it remained a local, and probably rather unusual phenomenon for some decades. There is no evidence that an active cult of martyrs was in existence anywhere in North Africa during Tertullian's lifetime.

rewards of the heavenly kingdom, were stressed as incentives to persevere against all odds.³³ Faithfulness to the end was the hallmark of the true Christian.³⁴ Moreover, it was the only sure guarantee of salvation, since the blood of martyrs was sufficient to wipe away sin.³⁵ Some, like Clement of Alexandria,

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took a milder view of the whole question, but they were exceptional.³⁶ Tertullian threw himself into the mainstream with gusto, and even hinted that heaven was a place reserved exclusively for martyrs.

But although Tertullian certainly borrowed his main theme from Eastern sources, his attitude towards martyrdom reflects concerns which were peculiarly his own. This may be seen from *Ad martyras*. This work says virtually nothing about following the example set by Christ, although there are references to his teaching. Heavenly rewards are hardly mentioned. The 'martyrs' whom he celebrates are not even Christians—a highly revealing fact. All of them without exception are figures drawn from pagan history and mythology. Obviously, fidelity to Christ was not the most important element in Tertullian's definition of a martyr!

Indeed, of all the aspects of martyrdom which the Early Church celebrated, it was the notion that the victims should display a worthiness (*dignitas*) to meet their fate which most impressed Tertullian. As far as he was concerned, the greatest danger to a prospective martyr was that he would succumb, not so much to the fear of death, as to the temptations of the world. He therefore concentrated his attention on the martyrs' need for stringent spiritual exercises in prison in order that they might subdue the flesh in advance. If martyrdom could be compared to a battle, then spiritual discipline was the necessary training for success at the moment of crisis. And whereas no one could know when he might be called to sacrifice his life, everyone could prepare himself against the eventuality by a life of strict and consistent discipline.

The most striking thing about *Ad martyras* is not what it says about martyrdom, which is rather little, but what it recalls in the ascetic literature of the East. For instance, we are told that prison in the life of a Christian was the equivalent of the desert for the prophets of old. Immediately our thoughts turn to the subsequent history of eremitic spirituality, with its strong ascetic emphasis. Likewise the military imagery associated with spiritual warfare,

³³ This, however, was more apparent in theological and hortatory works on martyrdom than in the hagiographies, which stress the conviction the martyrs had concerning the True God, and say little or nothing about Christ's suffering on earth. Cf. P. Nagel, *Die Motivierung der Askese in der alten Kirche and der Ursprung des Monchtums, Texte and Unlersuchungen* 95, pp. 5-19; W. Volker, *Das Vollkommenheitsideal des Origenes*, Tübingen, 1931, pp. 215-28, etc.

³⁴ *De fuga* 1.3: *quis est enim exitus persecutionis, quis effectus alius nisi probatio et reprobatio fidei qua suos utique Dominus examinavit?*

³⁵ It was no accident that St John and Perpetua saw only martyrs in their visions of heaven, *De anima* 55.4. The theme is a constant one in secondcentury literature; see, e.g., Ignatius, *Ad Rom.* 4, quoted by Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 5.3, etc. As an example of the power of martyrs' blood, there is a revealing account, preserved by John Chrysostom, *Homil. xl in Ep. ad Ephes.* 4 P.G. 52, p. 85, where an old man is quoted as saying that a particular sin, probably a schism of some kind, was so bad that not even the blood of martyrdom could wipe it out.

³⁶ Clement stressed the importance of Christian obedience whether or not it led to martyrdom, *Strom.* 7.66ff.; but such balance was rare in the emotionally charged atmosphere of persecution.

though indisputably Roman in tone, reminds us of the 'holy war' which the Syrian Fathers found so important.³⁷

Was Tertullian then influenced by a primitive form of this

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asceticism? Great caution is required here. On the one hand, we know that he was well acquainted with Eastern heresies like Marcionism and Valentinianism, and many of his reactions to their proposals bear an astonishing similarity to what was taught by the orthodox party among the Syrians, at least at a later date. On the other hand, there is no hint in Tertullian's extant works that he had any positive dealings with them. The comparison between prison and the desert was quite possibly his own invention; in any case he says only that the Old Testament prophets went there, and does not mention contemporary Christians. The language of spiritual warfare could easily have been derived from St Paul (cf. Eph. 6. 10-19; 2 Tim. 4.7) and need not be of Syrian provenance. If Robert Murray is right in thinking that the early Syrians derived their idea of the 'holy war' from Qumran, where the ascetic interest far outweighed the martyrological, then it is unlikely that Tertullian (for whom martyrdom was the stated goal of the ascetic life), got his ideas from them.

Ad martyros provides us with an interesting example of how martyrdom, in theory the focus of interest, gave way in practice to a more immediate emphasis on asceticism. This impression is confirmed by *De fuga in persecutione* where Tertullian gives a detailed explanation of the cosmic forces at work behind the phenomenon of persecution. Asked to decide whether persecution came from God or from the devil, he replied with a detailed argument in which he maintained that ultimately it came from God, who used the devil as his instrument. But how could such an evil thing be in the mind of God? The answer was that persecution was not really an evil but a test of faith. For those who walked in the Spirit there was nothing to fear; rather they rejoiced that the judgment of God had vindicated their faith (*De fuga* 4).

The concept of persecution as a judgment is brought out more specifically in *Scorpiace*. In this treatise Tertullian claims that persecution had arisen as a punishment for heresy and idolatry. It may be compared with the plague of serpents brought on by Israel's apostasy in the desert (*Scorp.* 2-3). *Scorpiace* is less polished than *De fuga*, and Tertullian shows himself to be less inclined to reasoned argument. There is none of the latter's detailed apologetic; instead *Scorpiace* consists almost entirely of

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lengthy quotations from Scripture, interspersed with an appropriate commentary to reinforce the message.

Thus we find in Tertullian's works on martyrdom, a shift away from the punishment itself and a new emphasis on the ascetic life of preparation. The concept of martyrdom as a judgment is emphasised, and the saving power of martyrdom alone played down. Tertullian never denied that a martyr was certain of his heavenly reward, but that was not the main focus of his attention. After all, what was there to distinguish a martyr from any ordinary person who was

³⁷ R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, Cambridge, 1975, pp. 14-17.

put to death? Augustine was later to remark that it was the cause, not the punishment, which validated a man's claim to martyrdom (cf. *Epp.* 61; 167: *martyros veros non facit eoena, sed causa*), implying that it was the Christian's glory to suffer for the precious Name of Christ. But although Tertullian would hardly have disagreed with such a statement, his own emphasis was more subjective. For him the distinguishing mark of a martyr was the victim's worthiness to face the supreme challenge. For that reason, a man who expected to crown his earthly life with the blood of martyrdom must make sanctification his chief pursuit in the interval.

THE WAY OF FAITH

The idea that persecution was a punishment inflicted on the Church as a scourge for its failure to wipe out heresy will not seem strange to anyone acquainted with early Christian apocalyptic literature. Its importance as a theme in Tertullian's writings should not be underestimated, since it gives us a good idea of the weight which he attached to right belief in the life of the Church. It scarcely matters if the word orthodoxy itself is an anachronism here, since the existence of a standard of correct doctrine is clearly assumed in his writings. Quite apart from the numerous and length refutations of different heresies, which in bulk comprise more than a third of the extant corpus, there is Tertullian's steady insistence that Christian faith and discipline must be governed by an authoritative rule (*regula*). Whether this means that there was a formal Rule of Faith (*regula fidei*) to which Christians were expected to subscribe is a matter of dispute, and must be considered uncertain,

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but it is beyond question that Tertullian appealed to an objective standard of belief of some sort, which he claimed as normative for the Church.

This standard may well have varied somewhat in its formulation, if it can be said to have been consciously formulated at all, but the general outline of its contents is fairly clear. In essence it consisted of a profession of belief in the Triune God, with a particular emphasis on the Person and Work of the Son, Jesus Christ. In this connection it is a matter of some interest that Tertullian gives a résumé of the faith in forms which are remarkably similar to the so-called Apostles' Creed, a later confession which was probably modelled to some extent on them. This similarity, and especially the claim made by later generations that even the very form of words in the creed could be traced back to the Apostles, is of more than merely passing interest, for it reminds us of a fundamental conviction, which all the orthodox party shared, that the propositions of the creed represented the authentic teaching of the Apostles, and that this teaching had been handed on in the Church in an unbroken line of succession. This belief constituted the main line of defence against the heretics, who were accused of teaching novelties which departed from the true faith (cf., e.g. *De praescr. haer.* 29).

But was Tertullian right to believe this? The traditional view that heresy is an aberrant novelty *vis-à-vis* an orthodoxy of apostolic origin has been seriously challenged in modern times and today it is probably true to say that most scholars, even the more conservative, believe that the polarisation between orthodoxy and heresy was a late second-century development in what had previously been a broadly based Church, where differing insights into the person and teaching of Jesus had been allowed to co-exist.

Unfortunately for those who hold this view, attempts to remake the Early Church in the image of a typical modern denomination suffer from a number of drawbacks which make the total picture seem rather less than convincing. First among these is the notorious dearth of reliable evidence for the origin and development of the first heresies. Our information is invariably filtered through later eyes, much of it is scanty, and no one can say for certain how far imponderable factors, like factional jealousy within a particular congregation, may have

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influenced the course of events. Undoubtedly the surviving accounts have been distorted by the winning side, though it must be remembered that they are unlikely to be completely fictitious. Beyond that bare minimum, however, we are very largely reduced to speculation.

The difficulty is especially evident in Walter Bauer's major study of the period, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity (Rechtgläubigkeit and Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum)*. Bauer claims that orthodoxy imposed itself gradually on a Church whose more conservative elements, particularly in the non-Hellenic East, strongly resisted it. Unfortunately much of his case rests on evidence culled from the Syriac Church, whose early history is virtually unknown. Bauer makes extensive use of arguments from silence to support his theory, and the result is no more than a possible—and unlikely—reconstruction. Uncomfortable alternatives to his hypothesis are simply brushed aside, and this makes much of his work of questionable value.³⁸

Even more serious than this, however, is Bauer's failure to analyse the nature of orthodoxy itself, its coherence as a system, and its obvious appeal to a wide spectrum within the Church. In particular, he cannot explain the extraordinary confidence of the orthodox, not only that their faith was of apostolic origin, but that, if challenged, it would be upheld as such by the broad mass of the Church, especially in the great sees of Antioch, Alexandria and Rome. It can hardly be claimed that the bishops of these sees were in collusion to force their particular policy on the Church; apart from anything else, such an arrangement would rapidly have come unstuck. It is clear that the orthodox were appealing to something deeper and more permanent, to a bedrock of essential truths which the apostolic sees (at least) held in common. In the light of this, Bauer's thesis that orthodoxy was a revolutionary new movement bent on the destruction of primitive pluralism must be regarded as both historically and psychologically improbable.

The question of the apostolic origin of orthodoxy was not tackled by Bauer in any detail, but this lacuna has recently been filled by a young British theologian, James Dunn, in a lengthy and wide-ranging study (*Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, London, 1977). Dunn's approach is considerably more cautious than Bauer's, but his general outlook is similar. Dunn has

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clearly been impressed by Bauer's thesis, which he accepts as established fact, though it must be said to his credit that his own study concentrates on the mainstream of evidence represented by the New Testament, and avoids Bauer's dependence on material of dubious value or importance.

³⁸ For a detailed criticism, see H. E. W. Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth*, London, 1954.

But neither Bauer nor Dunn can explain how, if the doctrinal confessions adopted by the Church were mainly philosophical statements, they could appeal to the masses of Alexandria, Antioch and Constantinople, who had never managed to demonstrate a comparable enthusiasm for pagan philosophy. The fact is that, if we are to understand the doctrinal development of the Early Church, we must go beyond the purely intellectual and consider in greater depth the spiritual motives at work.

This task has been greatly facilitated by the Jesuit philosopher and theologian, Bernard Lonergan, whose contribution to religious thought is still not fully appreciated in the English-speaking world. In one of his earliest works, *De Deo trino* (of which the first part has been translated into English, and published as *The Way to Nicea* (London, 1976)), Lonergan describes the development of dogma as the progress from a state of undifferentiated consciousness to a state of differentiated consciousness. At first sight it might seem that as a process of intellectual abstraction, the rise of dogma was indeed a decline, or at least a narrowing, of the primitive faith, and therefore inadmissible. But Lonergan rejects this conclusion by saying that since religion must embrace the whole of human life and experience, it cannot escape the process of differentiation which leads inevitably to the formulation of dogmata.

Lonergan vigorously rejects any suggestion that this process involved the Church in any change in the substance of its belief, or even that it brought about an increase in the clarity of its expression. For him, all that was involved was a movement from one mode of discourse to another, during which the content of scriptural revelation was adapted to the new demands of human consciousness. This development, however, Lonergan distinguishes carefully from any idea of Hellenisation. The Greek philosophers, he insists, were concerned with essences, whereas Christian theologians were preoccupied with what is. For them, revealed truth did not merely correspond

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to reality, as a blueprint corresponds to a building; it was reality. This conviction introduced so novel a conception of the relationship between subject and object, thought and thing, God and creation, that it was eventually able to overthrow classical philosophy almost entirely.

Lonergan's analysis is a most interesting and valuable corrective to the usual emphasis in modern studies on the origin of dogma, but there are at least two points at which we must beg leave to dissent from him. Firstly, as Lonergan himself insists,³⁹ the ante-Nicene writers were unconscious of the development they were furthering, and had they been aware of it, they would have been resolutely opposed. But if this is true, it must make us very cautious of accepting such an interpretation too readily. If we are expected to believe that the early Fathers spent their lives hammering out doctrines in a manner whose implications escaped not only them but all succeeding generations down to the present century, is it not more reasonable to question this modern theory in the light of the ancients' self-understanding? We must be wary of a view which makes so many great thinkers unconscious participants in an historical process beyond their comprehension and contrary to their wishes.

³⁹ B. Lonergan, *The Way to Nicea*, London, 1976, pp. 15-16.

Secondly, it would appear that Lonergan has failed to do justice to the religious character of the Bible as *Scriptura (graphē)*. In Lonergan's scheme, the Bible is a work of undifferentiated consciousness from which dogmata were extracted according to the evolutionary process we have already described. But Lonergan's claim that the Gospels appeal to the 'whole man' is surely mistaken. A book, by its very nature, speaks primarily to the intellect, and therefore belongs to the sphere of differentiated consciousness. In both Jewish and Christian thought, it was the book which gave impetus to the religion by defining its nature and circumscribing its limits. The disorganised and divided understanding of the pagans was replaced by an integrated world-view in which the intellect (seated in the heart) played the central role. Jewish and Christian religion has always been distinguished by the belief that the Spirit of God speaks through the mind of man to touch and renew the whole of his being.

The power and authority of the written Word bear witness in

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themselves to the existence of what Lonergan calls differentiated consciousness, so that the subsequent development of dogmatism is not, properly speaking, the result of a particular mental evolution. The long line of theologians who formulated Christian doctrine were doing no more than setting out the teaching of Scripture in a systematic way. It is certainly true that some were tempted to close the circle, as it were, and offer a fully coherent and logical understanding of God, but in so far as philosophical neatness detracted from some aspect of revelation, it was always repudiated. The mystery of the Godhead could never be fully unveiled to mortal minds, and the orthodox party was always on the alert for any clever addition to the apostolic deposit of truth.

Ancient exegesis has a bad name today because of the way it frequently lapsed into allegory, but this tendency must be understood in its context. The patristic exegetes believed that the clearer passages of Scripture could be used to interpret the more obscure ones, a principle which led them to discover types of Christian doctrine in parables and Old Testament stories. The results were often highly amusing, but as long as this method of interpretation was reserved for tales and legends, it was quite harmless. Allegory became a danger only when it was elevated into a principle by which the whole of Scripture could be interpreted.

The rise of allegory to the key position in biblical exegesis lies outside the scope of this book, but the Early Church's quest for a comprehensive hermeneutical method does not. In many ways it was this problem, and not the more refined questions of trinitarian dogma or christology, which lay at the root of most second-century heresies. The unity of the biblical revelation was challenged by Marcion, who drove a wedge between the creator God (or demiurge) and the redeeming Christ. Marcion interpreted the Pauline antithesis between law and Gospel as licence to dispense with the Old Testament altogether, but Tertullian pointed out, in five long treatises, just how fundamental were the Jewish Scriptures and the Hebraic concept of an omnipotent creator for a proper understanding of Christianity. On a different track, the Valentinians regarded the Bible as a mythical dramatisation of philosophical realities, which they then proceeded to extract from it. The result was

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that the historicity of the Bible was played down in favour of a cosmic hierarchy of personified abstractions like Pleroma (fullness), Sophia (wisdom) and Nous (mind).

Tertullian attacked these systems by pointing out their internal weaknesses and inconsistencies, but he was not content to restrict his denunciations to the level of piecemeal analyses of individual aberrations. He realised that if heresy was to be combated effectively, it was necessary to expose its roots in a way of thinking fundamentally alien to the gospel. H. E. W. Turner has pointed out that Tertullian regarded heresy as a vicious principle which made use of Scripture texts to lead men astray, and he contrasts this attitude with the milder judgment of Origen, according to whom heresy was more usually a right principle wrongly applied. Stated baldly like this, it would seem that there is something to be said for each of these views, though there can be little doubt that it was Tertullian who showed the deeper insight on this point. Marcion used an essentially alien conception of what a perfect redeemer should be like in order to extract him from the Scriptures; as Tertullian pointed out, an honest reading of the text itself would have led to very different conclusions. In the same way, the followers of Valentinus regarded their philosophy as the basic reality, and allegorised the Bible to make it fit.

Against all this, Tertullian argued that Scripture presented its own world-view which was both consistent within itself (as opposed to Marcion) and independent of pagan philosophies. The purpose of Christian doctrinal statements was to elucidate the teaching of Scripture and safeguard its holiness. The development of dogma and dogmatism must therefore be seen as the foundation-stone of the Church's sanctification, since its purpose was to cleanse the mind from sin. Tertullian was himself fully aware of the dire consequences which would follow on the abandonment of orthodoxy, and never ceased to dwell on the intimate connection between mental and moral purity. In chapter six of his *De praescriptione haereticorum* he reminds his readers that St Paul himself classed heresy among the *carnalia crimina* (Gal. 5.20) and he lost no time in pointing out the ethical deficiencies of Hermogenes (*Adv. Herm.* 1.2) and Marcion (*Adv. Marc.* i. 1.3-5). He also makes it clear that immorality is the natural consequence of heresy. A heretic, by

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preaching the counsel of an evil spirit, distorts the rule of faith first, and then corrupts moral discipline as well (*De mono.* 2.3).

There can be no minimising the strength and importance of Tertullian's attacks on heresy. To his mind wrong belief was the root cause of wrong behaviour. There can be no more eloquent testimony than this to his belief in the fundamental unity of man in every aspect of his being and existence.

THE SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH

There was one heresy, however, which Tertullian regarded in quite a different light. It may of course be disputed whether or not Montanism was in fact a heresy, since it taught no false doctrines, but the distinction between heresy and schism is hardly more than pedantic in this case. The crisis which the Montanists provoked in the Church had more far-reaching theological implications than that of the Donatists a century and a half later, so that it is misleading to call it a schism. Yet at the same time it did not touch on fundamental trinitarian

or christological doctrines as did the clearly defined heresies like Marcionism. But the niceties of these distinctions made little difference in practice. By Tertullian's day the Montanists had been condemned, whether as heretics or as schismatics, and their teaching repudiated both at Rome and in Asia Minor.

Why then did Tertullian approve of the Montanists when he was so disparaging of the other sectarian movements current in his day? The simplest answer, and the one most frequently put forward, is that he was a convert to the sect. This view may be traced back to Jerome and Augustine, and both Neander and Harnack made it a point of central importance. To men of pietistic leanings, the Montanists seemed to be the last of the true, charismatic Christians found in the New Testament, who by this time were being stamped out by an increasingly rigid, ritualistic Catholicism. This was the view of John Wesley, for instance, and it may also be found among modern Pentecostals.⁴⁰

That the pietistic view of Montanism was wide of the mark is now too well established to need refutation. But if Montanism was not the last survival of primitive Christianity, what was it, and why did it attract Tertullian? The facts are not altogether

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clear, but it seems that somewhere about the year 171 (dates, as usual, being unreliable), three obscure Phrygians began having apocalyptic visions. According to the accounts given by Montanus, Priscilla and Maximilla, the New Jerusalem promised by the Apostle John in his Apocalypse was about to descend at a village by the name of Pepuza. To prepare for this great event, Christians were to sell their belongings, leave their families and congregate near Pepuza to await the promised advent, scheduled for the year 177. Of course nothing materialised, the sect dispersed, and the Church of Asia retaliated with a counter-offensive so sharp at times, that some of its writers apparently even denied the canonicity of the Johannine writings.⁴¹

But although the sect's *raison d'être* was soon gone, and the Church was able by and large to restore order in the congregations; the spirit of Montanism did not die so easily. Closely linked with the eschatological visions of the original prophets was a strong emphasis on holiness of life, renunciation of the world and a glorification of martyrdom, for which the Montanists later became famous.⁴² They were heavily indebted to the writings of St John, but their real authority came from the sayings of their own prophets. We cannot say whether these were written down by the authors themselves, or copied out by disciples, but it soon became a key element in their teaching that God had inspired the prophet-founders of the sect to carry on the work of revelation accomplished by the Apostles. Even when the initial enthusiasm

⁴⁰ *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, T. Jackson, ed. London, 1856-7, ii, p. 204; vi, pp. 261, 328; x, p. 47, 50; xi, pp. 485-6. Of these, the last is the most detailed reference. Montanism is also claimed as an ancestor of the modern Pentecostal, or Charismatic, Movement. F. D. Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, Grand Rapids, 1973, pp. 36-7, claims that both movements believed that a new and final age of revelation had come and that doctrinal errors have been due more to careless formulation than to intentional heterodoxy!

⁴¹ These were the *Alogoi*, condemned by Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* iii.11.9.

⁴² Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* v.16.18-20. But not everybody agreed, and there were some who queried the fact that Montanus himself was not martyred; *ibid.*, v.16.12.

had died down, these ideas retained their influence, in some places for as much as two centuries and more.⁴³

By the time Tertullian encountered it, the movement had already passed through its initial stages and had begun to settle down. It is extremely doubtful whether Tertullian ever met a Phrygian Montanist in the flesh; his first contact with them was most probably through their writings. It is at this point that questions arise. What exactly was Tertullian's relationship to the sect? According to the generally received opinion, Tertullian became a Christian in early manhood, and wrote a number of treatises, including his *Apologeticum* and the first four books of his *Adversus Marcionem* as a loyal if somewhat awkward member of the Great Church at Carthage. As time went on, however,

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he grew increasingly dissatisfied and adopted an even more radical outlook. Finally about the year 207 he left the Church to embrace Montanism,⁴⁴ and under the influence of this movement, wrote the latter part of his work. This general viewpoint has been so widely accepted for such a long time now that even specialist scholars like Frend and Bauer take it for granted.

Unfortunately, however, there is little evidence to support the commonly received account, and it is interesting to note that those who have examined the issue most carefully have usually also been most guarded in their assertion of the traditional theory.⁴⁵ As a first point, it seems most unlikely that Tertullian's involvement with Montanism amounted to anything which could properly be called a conversion. For one thing, there is nothing in his writings of the sense of new illumination which conversion brings. The Montanists merely appear in the course of argument where their testimony is used, and that is all. There is no argued apology for the sect, and no attempt to win others to it. In a word, Tertullian *defended* the Montanists; he did not *propagate* their beliefs. This is an important difference, and provides a useful indication of the true nature of his relationship to the Phrygian prophets.

To many, of course, this argument will appear to be mere quibbling over words. Even if the signs of a conversion are lacking, they will argue, Tertullian nevertheless adhered to Montanism as the most congenial expression of his Christian beliefs. This argument rests on a number of considerations, which may be conveniently divided into three main categories: thematic similarities in his work, lexical borrowings, and explicit references. Of the three, only the last is beyond dispute. Yet the astonishing fact is that even here clear, unequivocal references to Montanus, Priscilla and Maximilla are few and far between. There are two

⁴³ Jerome, *Ep.* 41; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 48, and Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 2.32 all refer to it. Frend, *op. cit.*, p. 294, claims that it was still in existence in the reign of Leo III the Isaurian (717-40) and quotes as proof John of Damascus, *Haer.* 49. John may have been right, but his accuracy in such matters is not above reproach. For the epigraphical evidence, which peters out in the fourth century, see W. M. Calder, 'The New Jerusalem of the Montanists', *Byzantion* 6, 1931, pp. 421-5; 'Early Christian Epitaphs from Phrygia', *Anatolian Studies* 5, 1955, pp. 25-38; H. Grégoire, 'Inscriptions montanistes et novatiennes', *Byzantion* 8, 1933, pp. 58-65; 'Épigraphie hérétique et hérésie épigraphique', *Byzantion* 10, 1935, pp. 247-50.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of this date, see Barnes, *op. cit.*, pp. 46ff.

⁴⁵ See, e.g., de Labriolle, *op. cit.*, *La crise montaniste*, pp. 298 ff. He says that Tertullian received 'un Montanisme d'exportation, systématiquement édulcoré'.

instances where all three are mentioned together.⁴⁶ Beyond that, Montanus appears once on his own in *De ieiunio* 12.4 and also in *Adversus omnes haereses* 7.2, a work of doubtful authenticity. Prisca, as she was also known, is cited once in *De exhortations castitatis* 10.5 and again in *De resurrectiones mortuorum* 11.2. In sum, therefore, there are four or possibly five treatises out of a total of thirty-one (or thirty-two) in which Montanists are explicitly mentioned. Considering the

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great weight attached by scholars to Tertullian's connection with them, this is flimsy evidence indeed.

The lexical borrowings of which so much is made are equally unconvincing. The chief examples usually cited are Tertullian's use of the terms *psychicus* (=non-Montanist Christian) and *Paracletus* (=the Holy Spirit). Since both these terms were in common use, in a quasi-technical sense, among the Montanists, it is assumed that Tertullian's use of the terms must reflect a Montanist influence. But does the evidence really stand up? Both words were of course used in the New Testament, and there is no doubt whatever that Tertullian would have expected his readers to hark back mentally to the apostolic teaching quite apart from Montanism. He may well have used them with a note of defiance, to show his sympathies with the sect, but there is no reason to suppose that either he or his readers would necessarily have connected the two. His use of the word *psychicus* in particular demands careful scrutiny. The evidence has been carefully assembled by de Labriolle, who followed Harnack in maintaining that Tertullian had here taken over a typically 'gnostic' term and applied it to the 'catholics'.⁴⁷

De Labriolle saw clearly that *psychicus* in Tertullian could not be divorced from its opposite, *spiritalis*, and that this division had been common in Christian thought from New Testament times. Indeed, St Paul himself distinguished between the *psychikoi* and the *pneumatikoi* at Corinth, and the terms were never in the exclusive possession of off-centre groups on the fringes of the Church. We have already stated our opinion that Harnack (following Neander) made far too much of 'gnosticism' as a phenomenon, and this is a prime example of the kind of distortion which has resulted. As far as Tertullian himself is concerned, there are a great many instances in which *spiritalis* is used without any suspicion of Montanism, and the same is true of *psychicus* in at least three instances.⁴⁸ What is interesting, however, and what de Labriolle fails to discuss, is why Tertullian should have used a Greek word for the group he disapproved of, but not for the side he associated himself with. (*Pneumaticus* never appears at all in his work, although there are some instances of *animalis* as the equivalent of *psychicus*.)

The argument that *psychicus* was a technical, gnosticising word sounds plausible enough, until we reflect that it does not

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⁴⁶ *De ieiun.* 1.3; *Adv. Prax.* 1.5. Maximilla is the most shadowy of the three as she appears only in conjunction with the others.

⁴⁷ De Labriolle, op. cit., p. 359.

⁴⁸ *De mono.* 16.2 (twice); *De ieiun.* 3.2. It is worth noting that both these treatises have been reckoned to be Montanist.

really account for Tertullian's preference for *spiritalis* over *pneumatikos* (which on this theory must have been equally technical) or for his occasional use of *animalis*. It seems likely that *psychicus* was indeed meant to convey a special flavour, but not of this kind. In all probability Tertullian originally intended to translate *psychicus* and *pneumatikos* into Latin as part of the common word-stock of early Christian discourse, but ran into difficulty with *psychicus*. *Animalis* is of course the Latin equivalent in so far as *psychē=anima*, but in common usage the Latin word had a rather different meaning from *psychicus*. As everyone knows, *animalis* was usually applied to the lower creation, something which was never true of *psychikos*.⁴⁹ The Greek word also had philosophical overtones which could not easily be conveyed by *animalis*. In particular, *psychicus* was used by pagan Greeks of pleasures and pursuits to which the philosophically minded would devote themselves. It was apparently seldom if ever applied to human beings directly, but if it had been, it would scarcely have had a pejorative ring. On the contrary, it would undoubtedly have been almost a pagan equivalent of *pneumatikos*. And this may well have been Tertullian's point. The *psychici* were not bad Christians because they had failed to rise to the higher gnosis of the *spiritales*, but because they had allowed their thinking, and consequently also their actions, to be influenced by non-Christian forms of thought. Add to this the note of contempt which the use of a Greek word often conveyed in Silver Age Latin, and we have the perfect description of these people, whose intellectual idolatry was undermining the faith. The use of *psychicus* in this context may thus be adequately accounted for without recourse to Montanist or 'gnostic' influences.

Closely related to this is the way in which Tertullian uses *nos* and *nostri* when making out his case against the *psychici*. Who is included in this pronoun? Leaving aside the many instances of a purely rhetorical plural, when it is clear that Tertullian really means only himself, we are faced with a number of examples where it would seem that he has drawn a firm line between himself and his like-minded associates on the one hand, and the mass of 'catholic' Christians on the other. But on closer inspection, these examples turn out to be less convincing. As far as *nos* is concerned, we can hardly do better than to quote de

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Labriolle himself, who was forced to admit the weakness of his case in many places. As he says:⁵⁰

To tell the truth, *nostri* (*nos, nobis*, etc.) does not always have a 'sectarian' meaning, even in the most definitely Montanist works, and great care is required. Thus, in *De vir. vel.* 17.2, when Tertullian says: *nobis Dominus etiam revelationibus velaminis spatia metatus est*, he makes no attempt to distinguish his own group from the Catholics, but rather the Catholics—among whom he places himself—from the pagans whose practices he has just

⁴⁹ Except in the meaning 'butterfly', where the analogy probably lies in the flimsiness of the creature.

⁵⁰ Op. cit., p. 356: A dire vrai, même dans ses ouvrages les plus ouvertement montanistes, *nostri* (*nos, nobis*, etc.) n'a pas toujours le sens 'sectaire' et il faut y regarder d'assez près. Ainsi *de vir. vel.* 17.2, par les mots: *nobis Dominus etiam revelationibus velaminis spatia metatus est*. Tertullien ne prétend point distinguer les siens des Catholiques, mais les Catholiques—parmi lesquels il se range—des païens dont il vient d'alléguer les pratiques; *de monog. g.* le *nobis* s'applique aux chrétiens en général, par contraste avec les *Romani*; *adv. Prax.* 5.5: *in usu est nostrorum per simplicitatem interpretationis 'sermonem' dicere, nostrorum* désigne soit 'nos traducteurs' or 'les nôtres' en général (=nos frères chrétiens), ou encore 'les Latins' par opposition aux *Graeci* que Tertullien vient de nommer; *de pud.* 19.5, on n'ose trop décider si *apud nos* signifie 'chez nous catholiques' ou 'chez nous, montanistes': plutôt cela que ceci, car 1° déjà dans le *de bapt.* 15.6, traité catholique, Tertullien se déclare hostile à la validité du baptême des hérétiques; 2° la même solution devait être adoptée par l'Eglise d'Afrique dans le concile tenu à Carthage, sous Agrippinus, vers 225.

cited. In *De mono.* 9, the *nobis* applies to Christians in general, in contrast to the *Romani*; in *Adv. Prax.* 5.5, *in usu est nostrorum per simplicitatem interpretationis* ‘sermonem’ *dicere, nostrorum* means either ‘our translators’ or ‘our people’ in general (=our brother Christians), or possibly ‘the Latins’ as against the *Graeci* whom he has just named. In *De pud.* 19.5 it is difficult to decide whether *apud nos* means ‘among us Catholics’ or ‘among us Montanists’ though the former is more likely, first because Tertullian had already declared himself to be against heretical baptism in *De bapt.* 15.6, a Catholic treatise, and second, because the same solution was adopted by the Church of Africa in the council held at Carthage around 225.

The last statement in particular makes one question the validity of the traditional interpretation. If *De pudicitia* was a Montanist treatise written (as most authorities hold) around the year 212, and if Tertullian’s rigid policy of rejecting heretical baptism was strengthened by Montanist influence, is it likely that a council of the Great Church barely a decade later would have endorsed the well-known views of a notorious schismatic on a matter of such delicacy, without any sort of comment? It is possible of course, but hardly very probable.

De Labriolle further adduces two instances (p. 358) where Tertullian speaks of *vos* and *ecclesiarum vestrarum*, supposedly referring to the members of the Great Church. The first of these is more plausible than the second, but both rest on conjecture. In each case it may be that Tertullian is merely referring to his addressees, and since elsewhere in these same treatises he refers to the *psychici* in the third person (cf., e.g., *De pud.* 10.8), it would seem that they were not intended as a diatribe against

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them. It is much more likely that Tertullian lived in a situation in which each community had its *spiritales* and its *psychici* without any formal division. Douglas Powell, in a recent article, has defended this view with cogency, maintaining that Tertullian never separated himself from the fellowship of the *ecclesia* at Carthage.⁵¹ On purely lexical and linguistic grounds, therefore, the pro-Montanist case falls flat.

The third and most important line of defence, however, is that Tertullian’s later treatises show a strong thematic resemblance to Montanist writings, which indicates that he had been strongly influenced by them. Here we move from questions of form to matters of substance. In particular, three main elements are held to exhibit this continuity of thought. Broadly speaking, they are martyrdom, matrimony and prophecy.

On the first of these, de Labriolle maintains that in *De fuga* Tertullian repents of his earlier leniency towards those who tried to escape death, and invoking the Paraclete, offers a revised and much more stringent interpretation of the duty of martyrdom. But the question immediately arises—where is this more lenient attitude to be found? It is not in *Ad martyras*, a treatise which allows only the strictest course, and praises the fortitude of the condemned in tones which make emulation mandatory. It is not in *Scorpiace* either, which, as we have already mentioned, is if anything even more rigid than *De fuga*. There is a rather backhanded allowance made for it in *Ad uxorem* (i.3.4), though in the context this can hardly be taken as evidence of leniency. The only passage which really supports de Labriolle’s argument is *De*

⁵¹ D. Powell, ‘Tertullianists and Cataphrygians’, *Vigiliae Christianae* 29, 1975, pp. 33-54.

patientia 13.6; but even this is not conclusive, since flight in persecution is merely cited as a circumstance, not recommended as a policy.

As far as matrimony is concerned, there is likewise no evidence that Montanism had any effect on Tertullian's views. A comparison of *Ad uxorem* with *De exhortatione castitatis* or with *De monogamia* will readily demonstrate how impossible it is to detect any great shift in Tertullian's attitude. Furthermore, if he did change his mind, it may not have been in the direction of greater intolerance, which the Montanist theory assumes. For example, in *Ad uxorem* i.1.5 he denies that earthly marriage will exist in heaven, whereas in *De monogamia* 10.5-6 he says that married couples will be reunited in a spiritual union

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beyond the grave, with the result that a second marriage on earth would be revealed as adultery. This does not really indicate a shift in attitude on Tertullian's part, since the spiritual transformation of marriage rules out any continuation of the earthly institution, but it is remarkable nevertheless that the different emphasis in *De monogamia* has produced a more positive attitude towards matrimony—the very opposite to what one would normally expect from a Montanist.

The subject of prophecy is the most promising of the three topics for those who insist on Tertullian's Montanism, but even here the evidence is rather disappointing. It is true that he does quote Montanist prophecies in a way which seems to give them equality with Scripture, but great caution is required in evaluating his use of them. Tertullian says nothing and quotes nothing which is *distinctively* Montanist; in particular, the descent of the New Jerusalem at Pepuza is never mentioned. What he says about eschatology may have affinities with Montanism, but it is also paralleled in other Christian writers of undoubted orthodoxy, and Tertullian's chiliasm is rather moderate when compared with that of Irenaeus, for example.⁵² The ecstatic elements of prophecy were dealt with in *De extasi*, which is now lost, but there is no indication in the surviving literature that Tertullian's interest in them made any difference to his theology. As for the status of the New Prophecy in the Church, von Campenhausen is at pains to point out that the crux of the Montanist heresy was that it accepted the absolute authority of the Montanist revelation, while Tertullian never really agreed to this supersession of the biblical canon.⁵³ In any case since it was still not clear what the limits of canonical Scripture were, some uncertainty at this point is only to be expected. Tertullian's high view of the prophecies may well have been motivated by a desire to prove that the power of the Holy Spirit had in no way diminished since the time of the Apostles. In any event, this seems to be the thought which lies behind *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, a contemporary document, also from Carthage.

But the really clinching argument which effectively destroys the notion of thematic continuity, comes when we consider the context of the Montanist quotations. The main interests of the latter were ecstatic, prophetic and eschatological. Tertullian,

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⁵² Cf. *Adv. haer.* v.32 ff.

⁵³ H. von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible*, Eng. trans. London, 1971, pp. 221-6.

however, quotes them only when writing on the resurrection of the dead (*De resurr. mort.* 11.2) and on chastity (*De exhort. cast.* 10-5). That there should be several treatises on continence and none recommending prophecy or glossolalia is surely evidence enough of where Tertullian's real interests lay. Even de Labriolle is forced to admit (pp. egg-304) that many aspects of Montanism, in particular the prominent role played by women in the sect, must have been distasteful to Tertullian, whose rigid views on the subject make an obvious contrast. The conclusion is inevitable—Montanism, though it was defended by Tertullian, neither conquered his allegiance nor influenced the development of his thought to any great degree.⁵⁴

But if this is the case, how can we explain Tertullian's positive attitude to the sect? A look at the quotations will quickly tell us the answer, which in any case is obvious. Tertullian backed the Montanists because he saw in them fellow *spiritalis*, whose thirst for holiness and concern for discipline equalled his own. Thus we find him quoting Prisca: *sanctus minister sanctimoniam noverit ministrare* (*De exhort. cast.* 10.5) and again: *carnes sunt et carnem oderunt* (*De resurr. mort.* 11.2). In *De pudicitia* 21.8 he uses a Montanist saying to back up his own strict views on church discipline, while at the same time leaving some room, interestingly enough, for the possibility that it may not have been a genuinely prophetic utterance.⁵⁵ It is clear, though, that Tertullian's real interest was not in prophecy or eschatology, but in sanctification and discipline. To the extent that the Montanists shared this overriding concern, Tertullian was prepared to welcome them and defend them from attack. Apart from that, he was not interested.

To the weight of internal evidence we may add external considerations as well. Montanus and his disciples were disowned by the Church and their writings burned, whereas Tertullian's survived intact, and he was later regarded as a Father of the Latin Church. It is true that some of his writings, particularly *De extasi*, were not copied in later centuries, but this may have been as much the result of chance as of deliberate policy on the part of the ecclesiastical authorities. After all, if the latter were really trying to destroy all trace of his Montanism, why did they not expurgate treatises like *Adversus Praxean*? And what about the continued survival of *De mono-*

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gamia or *De pudicitia*? Clearly nobody felt that these writings were heretical enough to be suppressed, which can only mean that later generations did not take the references to Montanism all that seriously. We suggest that their attitude has much to commend it to us also, and that it is unwarranted to attribute Tertullian's views to the influence of Montanism. Even those aspects of his teaching which strike us as slightly off-beat, e.g. his opposition to digamy, can be supported by numerous parallels in other writers of undoubted orthodoxy.⁵⁶ The most reasonable explanation for Tertullian's seemingly eccentric rigorism is also the simplest—above all else he was concerned to do the Will of God in the light of Scripture, and as he says elsewhere, the Will of God is our sanctification (*De exhort. cast.* 1-3).

⁵⁴ This has already been substantially claimed by H. Karpp, *Schrift and Geist bei Tertullian*, Gutersloh, 1955, p. 15, and even de Labriolle, op. cit., p. 315, has to admit: ...quelle allégresse pour Tertullien de voir reflourir au sein du Montanisme tous les phénomènes religieux dont l'Écriture, surtout les Épîtres de S. Paul, lui avait révélé la signification ...?

⁵⁵ His actual words are: 'quid, si pseudopropheticus spiritus pronuntiavit?'

⁵⁶ His opposition to digamy in particular was widespread, shared as it was by Athenagoras, *Supplicatio* 33, Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* iii. 12.82.4 and Origen, *Hom. in Luc.* 17.

CONCLUSION

We have now seen that in the main themes which run through Tertullian's writing, the underlying concern, and the one which gives unity to the whole, is the preoccupation with sanctification. For Tertullian, sanctification was the path by which a man might attain to a more perfect knowledge of God. The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost opened up a new dispensation, since it was now possible for the Christian to attain sanctification by the operation of the Paraclete Who dwelt within him (*De mono.* 3.7).

In Tertullian's mind, the work of sanctification was essentially one of restoration, which led eventually to a renewal of life as it was before the Fall (*ibid.*, 17.5). Christ had come, the second Adam, to restore the creation to its primitive state of innocence. Since his ascension, the task had been entrusted to the Holy Spirit who had come to the Church, in accordance with Christ's promise, at Pentecost. This Paraclete—the title served to emphasise the continuity and essential oneness of the Spirit's work with that of Christ—was entrusted with the final perfecting of the restoration, a process whose beginnings could be traced back to Moses and the covenant of Sinai. Through Moses God had revealed the Divine Law which explained the nature and extent of the holiness he required. In its pure form, however, the Law could not be kept without the aid of the Holy Spirit,

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and so, to ease the burden on the people, God left open certain loopholes. The principles of the Law were of course retained intact; only their application was modified by God's special indulgence (*ibid.*, 14.1, *et passim*). This period of toleration came to an end, however, with Christ. By fulfilling the Law in his life and perfect sacrifice on the Cross, Christ had set the example of holiness in keeping the Law without recourse to God's indulgence. When he had sent the Spirit as Paraclete to empower all men to follow this example, the way was open for the restoration of mankind to its antelapsarian state of innocence.⁵⁷

Tertullian's theological scheme, unlike Marcion's, allowed for successive dispensations in the unfolding of the revelation. But in saying this we must be wary of suggesting that he taught a theory of 'progressive' revelation. 'Progression', in so far as it can be used at all of Tertullian's thought, means only the gradual unveiling of the eternal plan of God, in which the end is a return to the beginning. As with most of the Ancients, he was obsessed with the fear of change. Always his aim was to be more, rather than less, traditional, and any notion of novelty, either in the Paraclete's revelations or in his own arguments, was specifically rejected (*Adv. Prax.* 2.2; *De mono.* 3.2). It would be wrong to regard this protest against novelty as a mere sop to the 'catholics'. On the contrary, it was a basic element in his whole outlook, and one which the world of his day shared. For this reason, his appeals for Christian holiness were justified, not as an advance to a new and higher state, but as a return to the original innocence of man, after which there would be no more falling away (*De pud.* 6.13-18).

It is the purpose of the remainder of this book to examine in detail Tertullian's concept of holiness and how it affected, or ought to have affected, Christian life and discipline. In the

⁵⁷ This point is made most forcefully in relation to marriage, *De exhort. cast.* 5.2-4.

next chapter we consider what Tertullian meant by holiness and how he conceived of sanctification. The fourth chapter deals with the acquisition of holiness, in particular, the role of discipline in the light of faith and the authority of Scripture and nature. Finally, we conclude with an examination of how these principles were applied in the test case of matrimony. In the interest of clarity and brevity, we have confined ourselves to the most important feature of Tertullian's asceticism, which

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was his emphasis on chastity. It should be borne in mind, however, that the principles enunciated here applied also to other forms of abstention, especially fasting, with which he also deals. Throughout, we have endeavoured to emphasise his links with the mainstream of ancient thought and culture and to show how closely he depended on them in working out his own contribution to the ongoing tradition.

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