

CHAPTER THREE

The Nature of Holiness

[p.66]

We have now explained why we believe that it was Tertullian's concern for sanctification which determined his approach to theology and which formed the main theme of his writings. Now we must examine more closely the precise nature of the holiness which he was so intent on securing. At one level, of course, the answer is plain enough. Holiness was the quality peculiar to the very essence of God, and to become holy meant nothing less than to become like God himself. This does not mean that Tertullian was a moralist, at least in the sense in which the word is generally used of philosophers. Surprising though it may seem, ethical behaviour as such held little interest for him, and there are large areas—the whole realm of social ethics, for example—which he more or less ignored. For him the moral imperative was strictly defined in terms of God's character and was dominated by the problem of individual purity. Tertullian's aim was not morality but holiness. But how was this to be worked out in practice? Tertullian believed that man was created in the Divine Image, but how could this be reconciled with the Christian understanding of sin and redemption? Where did sanctification fit in, and how was it to be applied?

These questions cannot be answered without a thorough analysis of Tertullian's anthropology. This is particularly important today when the soundness of his teaching has been widely attacked on the ground that it is both inconsistent with the Bible and irreconcilable with modern thought. With respect to the latter, it may be said at once that Tertullian never considered basing his doctrine of man on what we would call scientific research. This was not simply because many of the tools for such research were not available to him, but also because he regarded biological phenomena as irrelevant to the main issue. His understanding of human physiology was by no means rudi-

[p.67]

mentary, as can be seen from his detailed description of pregnancy (cf. *De anima* 25), but at the same time it was ancillary to his main purpose. Modern theologians who like to claim that the scientific discoveries of recent years have invalidated ancient Christian conceptions of man have not understood the philosophical basis and theological outlook of the Fathers. For them biology was of passing interest only, and of no importance in a discussion of human nature. The uniqueness of man lay not in what united him to the animal creation but in what distinguished him from it. It was this distinction, however it may have been defined, which gave to man his special character as a being created in the image and likeness of God.

This belief is the central fact of Tertullian's anthropology. As a concept it can be found in Scripture, but the Greek Apologists of the second century, from whom Tertullian drew much of his inspiration, had already begun to develop it as a counterpart—if not quite as a counterweight—to the Platonic conception of a semi-divine, immortal human soul. In theory the Christian doctrine of the image and likeness of God embraced the whole man, but in practice this wider sense was seldom maintained in the early period, and it would appear that the image was increasingly identified with the soul (cf., e.g., *Adv. Marc.* ii.5.6). Unlike Plato, Christian thinkers rooted their exposition of the divine nature of the soul in the fact that man

was a distinct creation of God, not an emanation from him. The soul's participation in the Divine was therefore at one remove, and inferior to the Divine Essence which it reflected. In the Christian view man's perfection was never autonomous, but only a faithful copy of the character of God. The most important feature of this was undoubtedly his moral nature, and it was thus that moral considerations came to play a central part in Tertullian's teaching about sanctification.

The Christian doctrine of the image and the likeness of God suffered from a curious semantic difficulty which led the Apologists to distinguish the image (*eikōn, imago*) from the likeness (*homoiosis, similitudo*). This was a distinction unknown in Hebrew thought, and even Philo, for instance, used the two words interchangeably.¹ The Greek mind, however, with its long tradition of philosophical analysis, found it difficult to accept that the two words could be synonymous. The Greek

[p.68]

Fathers insisted on differentiating the terms and in the process produced a series of inconsistent interpretations which still embarrass Eastern Orthodox theologians.² Tertullian inherited something of this confusion, although he apparently worked out one particular understanding of the issue which then served him as his only point of reference.

The variety of possibilities which the Greeks developed provides interesting evidence of how agile they could be in these matters. The Pseudo-Clementine Homilies, for instance, state that while all men are created in the image of God, only the virtuous possess his likeness as well.³ Irenaeus says much the same thing, although his writings are full of inconsistencies. In one place we read that man was created after both the image and likeness of God (*Adv. haer.* v. 28.4) and—elsewhere—that both were lost at the fall (*ibid.*, iii-18.1). But Irenaeus also says that originally man had neither God's image nor his likeness (*ibid.*, iv.38.3-4). In still another context, he divides these from each other saying that man was created after the image only, and received the likeness by a subsequent operation of the Spirit. At the fall man lost the likeness but not the image (*ibid.*, v. 16. 1).

Can these inconsistencies in Irenaeus' thought be reconciled? Some have argued that they can, on the ground that the difficulty is purely lexical and does not affect the substance of what Irenaeus believed, which was that fallen man had lost his aboriginal communion with God.⁴ This is no doubt correct as far as it goes, but it is hardly a very satisfactory solution. A conclusion as general and obvious as this one may be applied to almost any statement, and it is not sufficient to explain the apparent contradictions. Harnack suggested that Irenaeus was conflating two separate traditions, one of which said that man had been created imperfect, without image or likeness, while the other held that originally human nature must have been perfect. Harnack traced the first of these views to Theophilus of Antioch, the second to St Paul.⁵ Such a solution is perhaps possible, but it seems unnecessary to develop a theory of

¹ *De opif. mund.* 69.71.71; *De conf. ling.* 169. Philo much preferred *eikōn* to *homoiosis*; the latter word occurs no more than six times in his work.

² On this see esp. T. Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, London, 1963, pp. 224-8. For a more detailed exposition see V. Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, London, 1975.

³ *Hom.* 10.4. The dating of the Homilies is uncertain, and it may be better to put them in the third or even in the fourth century, though it is always possible that they reflect genuine Clementine teaching.

⁴ This was the view put forward by E. Klebba, *Die Anthropologie des heiligen Irenäus*, Münster, 1894.

⁵ *History of Dogma* II, p. 268.

divergent traditions when there is a much simpler solution available. Good Hellene that he was, Irenaeus simply assumed that the image and likeness were different things, but he ran into difficulties when confronted with the ambiguous evidence

[p.69]

of Scripture. Since he was not concerned to harmonise his findings, apparent inconsistencies co-exist in his writings but do not affect his basic understanding of the fall. In general, therefore, the traditional commentators are to be preferred to Harnack, but with reservations as to how far the difficulties involved are 'purely lexical'.

Tertullian derived his conception of the image and likeness from Irenaeus, but did not follow any one strand in his thought. Tertullian believed that man was created after both the image and the likeness of God, and that he had lost only the latter at the fall. He therefore accepted the common notion that image was a more general term than *likeness*, although the distinction he drew between them is more precise than anything in Irenaeus or Clement of Alexandria (cf. *Strom.* 5.11-12). According to Tertullian, Adam's soul had been created by the breath of the Spirit, and it was this breath which formed the soul's substance (*De anima* 10.1). The soul was therefore of divine origin, but in order to avoid the idea that it was of the same essence as the Divine Nature, Tertullian drew a firm distinction between the Spirit of God as an hypostasis and his breath as a function of this hypostasis. After its procession the breath (*flatus, pnoē*) was external to its source and therefore inferior to it (ibid. 11.1). This soul-breath was created in both the image and the likeness of God, and the two had functioned together in harmony before the fall.⁶ In so far as it was possible to differentiate between them, the image belonged to the basic nature of man, while the likeness reflected his eternal destiny (*De bapt.* 5.7). Thus when Adam fell he lost the likeness but not the image, which was intrinsic to his nature.

By choosing this interpretation, Tertullian managed to avoid the confusion found in Irenaeus, although there were still potential difficulties in his approach. It is not clear, for example, precisely how the image and the likeness were related to one another. It would seem that the likeness was qualitatively superior to the image in some sense, though apparently it lacked the latter's personal characteristics. Loss of the likeness did not destroy a man's identity as a human being, but loss of the image would have reduced him to animal status. The likeness could only overlay the image and had no truly independent existence. Significantly Tertullian also employed the doctrine of the

[p.70]

image to explain the existence of sin. As he understood it, an image, however faithful it might be to its original, was nevertheless still inferior to it, so that the prelapsarian Adam could not claim to be equal with God, although he enjoyed a unique relationship with him. God's moral perfection was part of his immutable nature, but Adam's owed its existence to divine gift (*Adv. Marc.* ii.9.3). In this Tertullian was following Irenaeus as closely as he could; but there was a subtle difference in the way they understood creaturely perfection. For Irenaeus any move away from the essence of God meant a decline in quality, so that human finitude was by definition imperfect and bound to lead eventually to sin. Tertullian, on the other hand, did not

⁶ This is implied, e.g. *Adv. Marc.* ii.6.3, where Tertullian insists on coupling *imago* and *similitudo* no fewer than three times in a single paragraph describing man before the fall. It also ties in well with *De bapt.* 5.7.

adopt this view of necessary evil. For him created perfection had its own real existence and sin was the result of Adam's active disobedience.

This second concept is undoubtedly more in line with St Paul's teaching, but in fact it is very difficult to determine to what extent Tertullian's doctrine genuinely follows the Apostle at this point. One problem is that their interests were somewhat different, so that the degree of overlap between them is surprisingly small, even when it would be most expected. St Paul, for instance, used the doctrine of the creation of man in the image of God to justify the priority of the male over the female, since it was Adam alone who had been created in the image (1 Cor. 11.7). His immediate concern was to justify the veiling of women, and it was in this context that Tertullian used the passage, though he did not go into an explanation of the meaning of the image (*De vir. vel.* 7.2; 8.1). No doubt this was fair enough, but it shows either that Tertullian saw no necessary connection between St Paul's disciplinary advice, in which he was chiefly interested, and the ontological issue on which it was based, or that if he did, he did not think it important enough to discuss. In the same way, although he said a good deal about Christ as the Second Adam, he did not stress the image of God motif in his christology to anything like the extent to which St Paul did.

It seems quite clear that there is a considerable difference of emphasis here between Tertullian and St Paul, but it is much harder to say just how significant this difference is in practice. It is in fact precisely because the Second Adam motif was basic

[p.71]

to Tertullian's Christology that he said little or nothing specifically about the image of God in Christ. For if Christ was the Second Adam, it followed logically that he must conform in every respect to the first Adam. Thus whatever might be said about the first Adam would apply automatically to Christ as well. It was therefore more important to determine the nature of the first Adam and let the Second fit in accordingly. This was the logic which enabled Tertullian to link the incarnation with the creation of the world, and so present Christ as the key to *anakephalaiōsis*, or recapitulation, which was the essence of his eschatology as it was also of the Apologists. It will be seen at once that this idea is akin to the Stoic belief in the renewal of the cosmos, and there is little doubt that Stoicism was an influential factor in determining the development of the early Fathers' eschatology. This does not mean, however, that either they or Tertullian were Christian Stoics, or that the ontological motifs inherent in a doctrine of recapitulation cannot be found in St Paul's thought as well.

In fact, as Herman Ridderbos has recently reminded us, there is much to indicate that St Paul too regarded Adam and the creation order as fundamental to any discussion of the image of God in Christ. It is true that some scholars have denied any such connection, but as Ridderbos has convincingly shown, St Paul not only regarded Adam's humanity as the prototype of Christ's, he also spoke of the image of God in Christ in the context of creation.⁷ The close similarity between the Apostle and Tertullian is even clearer if we compare their views with Philo's, for example. Philo held that in the Genesis account there was a parallel creation of a heavenly man alongside the earthly Adam, and various attempts have been made to connect this opinion with some of St Paul's teaching. But while there may be superficial resemblances

⁷ H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of his Theology*, Grand Rapids, 1975, pp. 57-86. Ridderbos expresses Tertullian's point of view exactly when he says: '...Christ's divine power and glory, already in His pre-existence, are defined in categories that have been derived from His significance as the Second Adam' (p. 73).

between the 'heavenly man' of Philo and the 'heavenly man' of St Paul, it is obvious that the Apostle could never have adopted Philo's concept wholesale. To have done so would have meant denying the humanity of Christ in the descent of Adam. It would also have implied that ordinary men were sinful in virtue of their earthly nature and not by a free exercise of the will. On both these points, the views of St Paul and of Tertullian are so close as to be virtually identical, and there is no reason to suppose

[p.72]

that Tertullian was not copying his mentor faithfully on this point.

An even more important similarity between the Pauline doctrine of the image and Tertullian's teaching is the strong emphasis both place on its moral significance. St Paul's position is made quite clear in a passage like Colossians 3. 10, which in the words of Gerhard Kittel '...show us once more how slight is Paul's interest in mythical speculation and how strong is his concern for the supremely concrete ethical consequences of this restoration of the *eikōn*, namely, that we should put off fornication, blasphemy and lying'.⁸ Apart from Kittel's use of the word *eikōn* (instead of *homoiōsis*), Tertullian could not have agreed more.

At the same time, however, there were important differences between Tertullian and St Paul and these had far-reaching consequences. We have already traced the development in post-biblical thought of an artificial separation between the image and the likeness of God. The practical effect of this was that it blurred the sharp contrast which St Paul had made between the fallen Adam and Christ. For him the restoration of the image of God in man entailed a radical transformation which could appropriately be described in terms of a new birth and a new nature. But Tertullian held that fallen man retained the image. Therefore restoration, because it involved a restoration of the likeness only, was no longer primarily a transformation but a completion or perfection of what was already there in essence (cf. *De exhort. cast.* 1.3).

The difficulty was compounded by an inevitable tendency to hypostatise the image of God, in practice if not specifically in theory. Had Tertullian been content to interpret the image of God in spiritual and moral terms only, he might have avoided some of the more serious problems. But this was hardly a viable option, since it would have given the impression that the image of God was purely fictitious. To men trained in Stoicism, it seemed obvious that existence required hypostatisation for it to have any meaning at all. This idea is not found in St Paul's teaching, but would not necessarily have contradicted it, provided that the hypostatized image were no longer present in fallen man. But this is precisely what Tertullian refused to admit, with the result that for all practical purposes the

[p.73]

image of God in man was assimilated to the soul in its fallen state.

Against those who would dispute this conclusion we would urge the following points. The image possessed all the characteristics of the *animal rationale*, including the essential element of free will (*Adv. Marc.* ii.6.3). Like the soul, which needed the Spirit to establish its communion with God, the image too was incomplete without the addition of the likeness.

⁸ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, II. p, 397.

Furthermore, both the soul and the image were of divine origin, and both had lost their faculty for communion with God at the fall. Now Tertullian was concerned, as we know, with the restoration of the likeness to the image of God in man (*De exhort. cast.* 1.3). But if this likeness bore the same relationship to the image as the Spirit to the soul, if indeed the two things were identical, then we should expect the restoration of the likeness to occur by an outpouring of the Spirit on the soul. And of course this is precisely what we find. Tertullian's pneumatocentric theology was not the product of a diluted Montanism, but the logical consequence of his whole approach.

In Tertullian's thought, therefore, the image of God may be identified with the soul for all practical purposes. This conjunction played an important role in his theology, a point of even greater significance when we remember that it was here that he differed most seriously from the thought of St Paul. The result was that although both men emphasised many of the same things, particularly the moral imperative bound up with sanctification, Tertullian's application necessarily proceeded along different lines. Whether in the end this produced a form of Christianity incompatible with the New Testament, or whether the common aim of sanctification was able to override the differences of approach, is the question we must seek to answer in the following pages.

THE SOUL

The best place to begin a discussion of Tertullian's anthropology is undoubtedly with the soul. Tertullian wrote at least three treatises on it, of which two survive,⁹ and the subject frequently recurs in his writings. Furthermore, his doctrine of the soul has been the subject of intensive research, although

[p.74]

on the whole this has been done by a few dedicated individuals who have devoted themselves exclusively to the subject, and it has not become a matter for general speculation.¹⁰ It is probably fair to add that most of the work which has been done in the field, though in many ways exhaustive, has concentrated heavily on philosophical questions and ignored the implications of the doctrine for Tertullian's theology.

The main outline of Tertullian's doctrine can be stated briefly. He believed, in common with most schools of thought at the time, that the soul was of divine origin (*De anima* 11.1; *Apol.* 17.6), although not in the Platonic sense, since it was not impassible (*De anima* 24.1; cf. *De resurr. mort.* 17.2). Like Philo and many others, he taught that the soul had originated when the Spirit of God breathed his *flatus* (*pnoē*) into the clay corpse of Adam. As we have already seen, however, this *flatus* was only a product of the Spirit and therefore inferior to him in essence. The soul was endowed with both a mind and emotions, and it is significant that Tertullian believed that these were both equally subordinate to it (*De anima* 18). The seat of the soul (a question much discussed in antiquity) was the heart, a belief which Tertullian could support without difficulty from Scripture (*ibid.*, 15).

⁹ Unless, of course, the lost treatise, *De censu animae*, can be identified with the *De testimonio animae*, though that is unlikely.

¹⁰ The two major works have been G. Esser, *Die Seelenlehre Tertullians*, Paderborn, 1893, and more recently J. H. Waszink's monumental commentary on the *De anima*, Amsterdam, 1947.

The soul was by nature simple, indivisible, and entirely rational (ibid., 16.1). It was also corporeal (*De resurr. mort.* 17.2), an idea which has caused much scandal. In fairness, however, it must be said that much of this reaction, as Augustine pointed out, has been due to a misunderstanding of Tertullian's terminology, so that it is not altogether illuminating to call him a 'materialist' as some have unfortunately done.¹¹ It would be better to say that for him the soul was a solid substance which consequently retained its shape outside the body. This was Tertullian's main interest, which is not at all the same as saying that the soul would have been visible by mechanical means, like a superfine microscope. Tertullian may have believed something of the kind, and he certainly did think that the soul was in some sense visible, but we must be careful not to press this into a crude chemical analysis of his teaching. The soul's visibility was not of the ordinary kind (*De anima* 8-9) and there is no mention of the soul-substance as a fifth element, as was sometimes taught in Middle Platonism.¹²

[p.75]

The creation of the individual soul was coincident with the moment of conception, and Tertullian explains that it was not a special gift from God but part of the natural process of birth (ibid., 19). Likewise, soul and flesh matured together through adolescence, each substance developing the elements peculiar to its nature. At death the soul left the body, not in stages but at a particular moment, and it would be reunited with the flesh at the final resurrection (*De resurr. mort.* 28.6).

The most important part of Tertullian's teaching on the soul, however, concerned the nature of its fall into sin. He could not accept the Platonic idea that the soul was imprisoned in a mortal (sinful) body of flesh, and argued that the true cause of the fall was the disobedience of the will which was a part of the soul itself (*Adv. Marc.* ii-5.5). In other words sin was not ontologically bound up with the nature of flesh, but accidental, and ultimately more the fault of the soul.

Stated simply like this, Tertullian's doctrine of the soul seems straightforward and logical enough. Its affinities with the New Testament teaching, however, and even more, its possible relationship to modern thought, are much more difficult questions, complicated by the fact that Tertullian was forced to work out his ideas against a background of philosophical speculation, most of which is now discredited. By no means all scholars would agree that Tertullian was attached to a particular philosophical system; indeed, the majority would probably incline to the view that he was at least eclectic and often fiercely anti-philosophical, however much philosophy in general may have influenced his way of thinking. But we believe that this view, while certainly not without merit, approaches the issue in the wrong way and leads to unnecessary confusion. Tertullian regarded philosophy as an accessory to theology and used it accordingly. But although many of his words were borrowed from the philosophers, the spirit in which he wrote was quite different, and it was this which in the end was more important.

To measure the impact which pagan philosophy had on Tertullian's thought, we must take a brief look at the main currents with which he had to deal. The first of these was Platonism. It was Plato more than any other philosopher who fixed the doctrine of the soul at the centre of philosophical speculation. By Tertullian's time primitive Platonism had

¹¹ E.g. A. H. Armstrong, *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy*, London, 1947, p. 168.

¹² On this see J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, London, 1977, p. 82, *et passim*.

[p.76]

evolved and diversified itself, but the main outlines remained recognisably the same (cf. *De anima* 23-4). In Platonic thought the soul was at once both antithetical to the forms and of the same order. The soul was the knower, the forms were the objects known. Individual souls were divine, immaterial, pre-existent and immortal. They were parts of one soul-substance and in absolute terms were infinitely more real than the bodies through which they passed in successive incarnations. Because the soul was divine, it was aware of everything that existed. Plato could not believe that the incarnated soul acquired any genuine knowledge through the bodily senses, so he was obliged to develop a doctrine of anamnesis, or recollection, which meant that the soul learned by recalling truths which it had temporarily forgotten. This idea, like that of transmigration, was not popular with everything, but it remained generally characteristic of Platonism as a school of thought.

The soul was the link between form and matter. A world-soul existed which ordered the *kosmos* in the same way that the individual soul ordered the microcosmic human being. Plato occasionally spoke of the soul as a unity (cf. *Phaedo*. 64ff.), but in his more developed thought, especially in the *Republic*, he analysed it into three parts which he called to *logistikon* (rational), to *thymoeides* (passionate) and to *epithymētikon* (concupiscent) (*Resp.* 439e). Later systematisations of his thought modified these to *to logikon* (apparently first used by the Stoic Zeno, Stoic. 1.1.15), to *thymikon* (a word used, by Plato elsewhere) and to *epithymētikon*. Following their master Platonists regarded the *logikon* (sometimes identified with the *nous*) as the ruling element in the soul (*to hēgemonikon* in Stoic parlance) and said that it was supported in its efforts by the *thymikon*. Working together these two could subdue the *epithymētikon*, which Plato thought was the seat of evil in the soul. But it was not altogether clear precisely how the *thymikon* differed from the *epithymētikon*. As their names suggest, both were connected with *thymos* (passion) and as such shared a common opposition to the *logikon* within the soul. Plato did his best to distinguish them, but it cannot be said that his efforts were very successful.

Very different from the Platonic conception was Aristotle's definition of the soul. As a system of thought Aristotelianism never really got off the ground in antiquity, but Aristotle him-

[p.77]

self was too important to be ignored. It has not been possible to prove that Tertullian was directly influenced by him,¹³ but indirect influences abound, mediated for the most part through Stoicism. For Aristotle, the relationship between the soul and the body was the same as that between form and matter. The soul was not a separate substance united with the body as in Plato's thought, but the shape in which the bodily matter was structured in the living organism. To him the human soul was the apex of a hierarchical structure of life which embraced animals and plants as well. In this respect it seems that he was prepared to connect *psychē* with the more general *pneuma*, particularly the symphyton *pneuma* which he regarded as especially characteristic of animals.¹⁴ The distinction which Aristotle drew between them

¹³ Tertullian certainly knew of Aristotle's philosophy and argued against it, but that is another question; cf. *De anima* 19.

¹⁴ Aristotle, i.659b.17-9; 669a. 1; 743b-37 ff., etc. In the *De univ.* i.394b, he says: *legetai de kai heterōs pneuma hē to en phytois kai zōois kai dia pantōn diēkousa empsychos to kai gonimos ousia*. According to Diogenes

was that *pneuma* was always a general term, whereas *psychē* was individualised. There is no instance in which man is said to possess *pneuma* (still less a *pneuma*). The soul of man is always distinguished as psyche, occasionally with the addition of a qualifying adjective like *noētikē*, to indicate that it alone had the divine quality of *nous* or *logos*.¹⁵ Tertullian, however, rejected the idea that the human soul was essentially the same as animal or plant life. He regarded man as a separate creation and repudiated the suggestion that he could be reduced to animal (or vegetable) status by the removal of certain distinguishing characteristics (*De anima* 19).

The third important school of thought for our purposes was the Stoic. There is no doubt that Tertullian sympathised with the Stoics more than with Plato or Aristotle, so much so that some have thought that he was a Stoic himself. That, however, is going too far. Tertullian undoubtedly found Stoicism congenial in many respects, but he always kept his distance from it and never tried to make St Paul over into a Stoic in the way that Philo, for instance, endeavoured to show that Moses had really been a Middle Platonist.¹⁶

Stoic psychology combined Platonic and Aristotelian elements and grafted them on to a view of the universe which was essentially pre-Socratic. From Plato there came the idea of the soul's immortality, though in a modified form. The Stoics attributed immortality (like pre-existence) not to the individual soul but to the soul-substance, the divine fire or *pneuma* out of which the individual soul sprang. Also Platonic

[p.78]

was the idea that the soul was rational, although again the Stoics saw this in a different light. For them the soul had no element of irrationality whatever, except in so far as it had been corrupted. The *thymikon* and the *epithymētikon*, therefore, had no right to exist and the wise man, in his quest for perfect Apathy, was expected not merely to control but to erase these alien elements in his soul.

From Aristotle the Stoics borrowed the concept of the soul and body subsisting in the relationship of form to matter, but their cosmology prevented them from adopting this idea in pure form. Since the Stoics, unlike Plato or Aristotle, were complete materialists, they could not accept that the soul was anything other than a body. To insist on two separate substances could only weaken the concept of unity held by Aristotle, but the Stoics did their best to overcome this problem. They replaced the form and matter analogy with active and passive principles, which combined to form objects discernible to the senses. The active principle in man was his soul, the passive principle was his flesh. Both were corporeal substances and therefore separable, but in a living man the soul was perfectly diffused through the body and the two formed a harmonious working unity.

By Tertullian's time the great age of Stoic philosophy was already past, although this was not yet generally apparent to contemporaries. Platonism, on the other hand, was in a continuing ferment which in the next century would flower in the work of Plotinus and his disciples.

Laetius, this idea comes originally from Xenophanes (cf. ix.2.3) and Plutarch (*Plac. Phil.* 1.3) ascribes a similar idea to Xenophanes' contemporary Anaximenes.

¹⁵ See, e.g., E. De Witt Burton, *Spirit, Soul, Flesh*, Chicago, 1918, pp. 41-8.

¹⁶ Thus Dillon, *op. cit.*, p. 143. Of course Philo himself did not look at it this way. As far as he was concerned the Greek philosophers had derived all their best ideas from Moses and were therefore in a sense crypto-Jews.

Tertullian sensed this new movement and it is no accident that so much of his *De anima* is taken up with a detailed refutation of Plato. His Stoic leanings are apparent, and at one point he was even able to claim Seneca as *saepe noster*, so close had he been to Christianity at many points (*De anima* 20.1). But interesting as this is, its importance should not be exaggerated. When we inspect their respective teachings more closely, we shall discover that Tertullian in fact completely inverted Stoic doctrine and created from it a new synthesis based not on pagan speculation, but on the revelation of God in Scripture.

It would be simplistic and misleading to suggest that Tertullian used the Scriptures as his textbook in a way similar to that in which pagans used their favourite philosopher's writings. For him the Bible was important not just because he

[p.79]

was a Christian, but because its words had been given by God himself and were therefore solid and objective truth, whereas the pagan writings, however noble and exalted, were only human opinion. This difference was decisive. A man like Seneca might share Christian ideas and attitudes to some extent, but this was due to his extraordinary ability to understand general revelation, which was not enough to be saved. Only the Bible contained final truth, because it alone was the direct revelation of God to men. It is interesting that Tertullian says little or nothing about critical problems in Scripture; the matter seems not to have disturbed him at all. Probably the main reason is that attacks on the truth of Scripture, when they came, were from pagans and sceptics outside the Church, intellectuals who in Tertullian's day ignored the Word altogether (*De test. an.* 1.4).

Tertullian believed that Scripture, and the Person of Jesus Christ whom Scripture revealed as the Son of God, were the determining factors in all philosophical and theological construction. We may think it somewhat surprising that he should have used the story of Dives and Lazarus to prove that the soul was corporeal (*De resurr. mort.* 17), but on reflection this is not to be wondered at. After all, the parable does presuppose that there is such a thing as a sensible post-mortal existence, which is what Tertullian was trying to assert. It is true of course that the issue of the soul's corporality arose in the first instance out of philosophical speculation, not scriptural exegesis, but this does not necessarily mean that Tertullian's mistake led him into error. His main point was to establish the reality of post-mortal existence, and there is no doubt that the parable lends support to this idea. What is important to notice here is that it was the scriptural testimony which decided the issue in favour of the Stoics, not the other way round. On its own merits the doctrine would not have gained such a ready hearing, and had any passage of Scripture contradicted it, Tertullian would certainly have repudiated it.

It will be noted here that Tertullian's method was to take an already existing idea, compare it with Scripture, and then modify or abandon it according to the biblical evidence. He knew of course that the Bible had an inner logic of its own, but in his apologetic technique he seldom bothered to develop this

[p.80]

beyond the universally accepted *regula fidei* (see the next chapter). In general, when faced with a philosophical problem, he preferred to adapt already existing concepts to accord with

Christian teaching. This was all right so long as Scripture made it clear why and how a given concept had to be modified. When no such guidance was forthcoming, however, or when the evidence was ambiguous, Tertullian would often keep to the pagan notion, especially if some superficial support could be found for it. It was for this reason that he never abandoned his concept of the soul and flesh as two distinct, though cooperating substances. Both terms occurred in Scripture, but their precise relationship depended on the inner logic of Hebraic anthropological thought and was never clearly spelled out. Tertullian therefore retained the notion of two substances, fully persuaded that nothing in the Bible contradicted this understanding, even though he frequently modified the precise nature of this distinction when the Scriptures evidently made this necessary.

Tertullian's use of Scripture to judge philosophy is well illustrated by his treatment of the rational and irrational elements in the human soul. Like the Stoics Tertullian believed that the soul was simple and entirely rational, though his reasons for saying this were different from theirs. Tertullian's model was not a theoretical wise man but the real incarnate God. The Stoics were wrong to say that the passions were irrational (and therefore evil) because Jesus, who was both entirely rational and sinless, had passions like those of other men (*De anima* 16.3-5). Tertullian's refusal to analyse the soul in the Stoic manner was a revolution of fundamental importance, because it transcended the dualism latent in Hellenistic culture and made it untenable. Even the preservation of the distinction between the soul and the flesh, which many would say was the essence of dualism (at least in the thought of this period), cannot overrule this basic fact. The flesh after all was only disapproved of because, like the passions of the soul, it was irrational (sinful). Jesus, however, as perfect God and perfect man, had human flesh as well as a complete soul, which automatically removed the theoretical basis of an ontological dualism in human nature such as the Stoics and the Platonists held.

[p.81]

Against the ontological (and therefore necessarily fatalistic) conception of evil implied in Stoic psychology, Tertullian argued that the presence of evil in the soul was accidental and voluntary. Man had turned from good to evil by the exercise of his free will, and as a result the devil had corrupted the entire soul, irrespective of its various 'parts'. The Stoics sought purification in a state of Apathy, which meant the suppression of the 'lower' parts of the soul (not to speak of the flesh) by the 'higher' part. But for Tertullian such a procedure was illusory. For the soul to achieve purification it had to be completely transformed.

It is essential that we keep this doctrine of the soul's corruption in the proper tension with the teaching on recapitulation which we outlined earlier. Tertullian did not believe that sin was a mere deprivation, the removal of the likeness. Inherent in his doctrine was the notion of human guilt, which stemmed from the disobedience of the will as the First Cause of original sin. The foundations of the later Augustinian doctrine were already laid by Tertullian in this way. It is he who deserves the credit for seeing the importance of the will for Christian faith, and it is his insight here as much as anything which rescued Western Christianity from the ontological conception of evil which has exerted such a powerful influence in the Eastern tradition.¹⁷

When we attempt to compare Tertullian's doctrine of the soul with New Testament teaching, however, we encounter serious difficulties. For in the strict philosophical sense, the New

¹⁷ On this see Ware, *op. cit.*, pp. 224ff.

Testament, and the Pauline corpus in particular, contains no doctrine of the 'soul' at all. In keeping with Hebrew tradition, St Paul used both 'soul' and 'flesh' as metaphors for man in his earthly existence, so that far from being antitheses they appear to overlap in meaning, particularly when used adjectivally. Here St Paul was genuinely conservative, reflecting the Old Testament pattern even in preference to ideas current in contemporary Judaism. This point was emphasised by Robert Jewett, who after a major study of the Apostle's anthropological terms, concluded as follows:

Psychē [sc. in St Paul] is used for the most part with one of three basic connotations, all of which stem from Old

[p.82]

Testament usage. It can bear the sense of one's earthly life as it is publically [*sic*] observable in behaviour; the sense of the individual's earthly life which can be lost in death; or the sense of the individual person. The particular sense of the word depends upon the context in which it is used rather than upon a development within Paul's thought. From the first to the last letter, Paul remains basically within the Judaic tradition at this point. There are, however, several connotations of *psychē* within popular Judaic usage which Paul appears to avoid. He never uses it in the strict sense of the 'soul', i.e. the God-related portion of man which survives after death. Furthermore, Paul avoids the interchangeability between *pneuma* and *psychē* which was the mark of Rabbinic usage, related as it was to the question of the soul after death.¹⁸

Jewett goes on to point out that the adjectives *psychikos* and *sarkikos* (or *sarkinos*) are both predicated of fallen man in the New Testament, and their virtual synonymy at this point is now widely accepted. How far Tertullian understood this is hard to say. Oddly enough, it is his use of *carnalis*, rather than that of *animalis* or *psychicus*, which is the chief cause of our uncertainty. The latter term frequently bears its Pauline sense in Tertullian, but the former is conspicuous by its relative absence. The only instance in which *carnalis* undoubtedly bears its biblical meaning is in a direct quotation from 1 Corinthians 3.1 (*De praescr. haer.* 27.4). Otherwise it seems that Tertullian avoided applying the word to people, except in its adverbial form (cf., e.g., *De resurr. mart.* 11.1).

The reasons why Tertullian was apparently reluctant to use *carnalis* in what to us is its most familiar meaning, remain somewhat mysterious. The possibility of a Montanist influence may be discounted straightaway (cf., *ibid.*, 11.2). It is much more likely that Tertullian realised that the two words overlapped in meaning, but that he avoided *carnalis* as much as possible for tactical reasons. Since he lived in a philosophical climate which tended to exalt the soul and despise the flesh, he was concerned to ensure that the latter would be given its due honour in Christian teaching. We can therefore understand why he chose to avoid a term which might so easily have detracted

[p.83]

from this aim. As for the apparent synonymy between *carnalis* and *psychicus*, Tertullian would not have found this at all unusual. The soul and the flesh worked together in perfect harmony and shared responsibility for moral failure. It was not inconceivable that the two

¹⁸ R. Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms*, Leiden, 1971, pp. 448-9.

words should appear to overlap in meaning at this point, and Tertullian had no difficulty integrating this apparently curious phenomenon into the broader pattern of his thought.

SOUL AND FLESH

There would appear to be little doubt that the close cooperation which Tertullian envisaged between the soul and the flesh was the direct result of his understanding of the New Testament. It is true that his conceptual framework, in which soul and flesh were two distinct substances had more in common with ancient philosophy than with St Paul, but it would be a mistake to regard it as dualistic. Physically, logically and ethically the two substances co-operated so closely that the theoretical distinction between them became largely irrelevant in practice. The theoretical basis for this understanding was of course the incarnation of Christ.¹⁹ In the Old Testament there were recorded numerous instances of prophets and others whose soul had been captured by the Spirit of God, but none of these examples was in any way the equivalent of a divine enfleshing. It was this factor which made all the difference, for it proved that the flesh as well as the soul partook of God's redemptive activity.

The earthly life of Jesus, moreover, was the perfect prototype of the life to which the Christian should aspire. Tertullian interpreted the *imitatio Christi* in terms of complete obedience to the Will of God in a way which naturally included the flesh as well as the soul. In practice this meant a moral imitation of Jesus' earthly life—Tertullian was never so crude as to suggest that every Christian should become an itinerant healer and preacher. In fact he based his interpretation of the *imitatio* on the example set by St Paul. It is true that he never quoted the Apostle's famous dictum, 'Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ' (1 Cor. 4.16), but he did insist that Christians owed their spiritual birth to the Apostle (*De mono.* 6.1; *Adv. Marc.* v.7.2;

[p.84]

8.5) and the practical effect was the same. If St Paul was the Christian's father-in-God, then it was only right that his precepts and example should be followed by the children. This line of reasoning was especially applicable to the controversial subjects of matrimony and sexual relations, as we shall see.

The inclusion of the flesh in redemption raised a whole series of problems concerning the means by which the desired end would be achieved. In particular Tertullian had to show how an earthly substance, however much it might be purified, could participate in a heavenly salvation. He perceived that this could be done only by forging a link between the soul and the flesh so strong that it would be impossible even to contemplate the salvation of the one without the other. For the sake of convenience it is probably easiest to analyse his understanding of the union of the two substances according to the categories of ancient philosophy (physics, ethics, logic), though it must be remembered that he himself used these categories very loosely, if at all, in his thinking, and there is certainly no exposition of the union along such rigid lines in his writings.

The physical unity of the soul and the flesh was expressed in terms of a shared life-cycle. Both substances came into being at conception and both grew to maturity together. The soul

¹⁹ Tertullian never tired of quoting John 1.14, *sermo caro factus est*. There are at least seven instances of it in his writings, *De carn. Chr.* 19.2; 20.3; *Adv. Prax.* 16.6; 21.4; 26.4; *De pud.* 6.16; 16.7.

had no independent pre-existence, nor was it infused into the flesh at birth (cf. *De anima* 25). These factors, especially when they are considered in the light of Tertullian's concern to establish a complete equality between soul and flesh, make it probable that he believed that both substances were transmitted by natural procreation. This would also explain how Adam's sin was imputed to his descendants, something which would have been impossible on the theory that each soul came directly from God. There was also the further consideration that soul and flesh would overcome the separation of death and be reunited at the resurrection. There was thus no possibility of transmigration or metempsychosis, ideas which Tertullian rejected with scorn (ibid., 28-33). At the same time, of course, he agreed that the reconstitution of the human body at the resurrection would not simply mean a return to the mortal state. In the new creation flesh and soul would both be changed into the likeness of Christ's glorified body, which meant that they would be perfected without a change of substance (*De resurr. mort.* 55-6).

[p.85]

When pressed to explain this doctrine in the light of St Paul's teaching that flesh and blood would not inherit the Kingdom of God (ibid., 50), Tertullian retorted with a twofold answer. On the one hand, it was a mistake to identify the resurrection with the Kingdom, which was spiritual in nature,²⁰ and on the other hand, the passage referred not to the substance of the flesh but to its works (*De carn. Chr.* 16; *De resurr. mort.* 49). This in fact was the standard line Tertullian used to explain every instance in the New Testament where 'flesh' implied a principle which was in active opposition to the Spirit (cf. *De resurr. mort.* 45-6). The works of the flesh were not dependent on its nature but on the activity of the (fallen) soul from which they originated. Thus he came close to using 'flesh' in these passages as a metaphor for man's earthly being, so that in practice there was little difference between him and St Paul on this particular point.

The logical union of the soul and the flesh is less obviously central to Tertullian's doctrine; indeed, it was this aspect which subsequently gave rise to the greatest difficulties; but it is not hard to see why Tertullian felt it necessary to insist on it along with the rest. Formal logic was a powerful ingredient in all ancient thought, and he could not leave such an obvious loophole for those who wished to downgrade the flesh. But in this instance it was the soul, not the flesh, which was forced downwards, at least from the standpoint of Platonism. Tertullian's argument was that if the flesh was a body (*corpus*) in full union with the soul, then the soul must likewise be a body, coterminous with that of the flesh. Here it was Stoic doctrine which came to his aid, as we have already seen. It is important to emphasise that the corporality of the soul was a logical concept, not a physical one. Tertullian was fully aware that the properties of the soul-body were quite different from those of the flesh-body, and he wished to insist only that their organisational structure as substances was identical (*De anima* 5-8). We cannot therefore interpret his belief in the corporality of the soul as 'materialism' in any of the usual senses of that word.

Tertullian doctrine of the unity between soul and flesh reached its highest peak of development on the ethical plane. Physics and logic prepared the ground for ethics by ensuring that

²⁰ *De resurr. mort.* 50. The argument was that all flesh and blood would be resurrected, but that not all would inherit the kingdom of God, since there was to be a resurrection of judgment also. The flesh of Christians, however, would put on incorruption (1 Cor. 15.53) and in that state would inherit the kingdom.

[p.86]

neither substance could act independently of the other. It is true that Tertullian had to modify this idea slightly to accommodate the behaviour of the disembodied soul, but this did not destroy the principle that the soul could only suffer or act effectively by means of the flesh (*De resurr. mort.* 17). Without it the soul's sin could never have come to realisation. Likewise, without the soul to inform it, the flesh would have had no conscious knowledge of sin at all. The guilt for sin was borne by both substances in equal measure according to their respective natures. It was through the weakness of the flesh that sin gained access to the soul, therefore it was the flesh which bore the responsibility for putting the soul into mortal danger. But it was the will of the soul which had chosen to sin and had used the flesh to carry out its purpose. Responsibility was therefore shared, but since ultimately sin was an act of the will and not the inevitable result of fleshly weakness, the weight of the burden fell on the soul. Redemption could thus hardly be confined to the soul since it was because of it that the flesh had been led into sin in the first place (*De anima* 40). If the soul, as the greater culprit, could be redeemed, it followed that the flesh also must enjoy the possibility of salvation. It is entirely wrong to suppose that Tertullian's view of redemption was superficial or legalistic, a matter of suppressing the sins of the flesh only. He fully understood that salvation was a work of divine grace which purified both soul and flesh together.

By raising the flesh to the level of the soul (or perhaps more accurately, by lowering the soul to the level of the flesh), Tertullian virtually abolished the antithetical relationship between them which was such a common feature of classical philosophy, and thus laid the foundation for its eventual overthrow. It is important to remember, however, that this radical restructuring of the link between soul and flesh was not the result of extended reflection but rather the product of intense theological controversy. At stake was the whole nature of the Christian revelation, as opposed to the pagan philosophies of his time. The first half of the second century was a period of rapid intellectual development within the Greek-speaking Church, and many efforts were made to construct a *modus vivendi* between the Christian faith and Hellenistic philosophies. Not all of these attempts were heretical but the fledgling theo-

[p.87]

logical structure of the Christians found it difficult to cope with the advanced subtleties of philosophical speculation, and it was not long before prominent intellectuals in the Church were adopting the latter as a basis on which to restructure what to them was still a fundamentally alien theology.

It is now customary to lump these tendencies together under the catch-all heading 'gnosticism', but this title is misleading for several reasons. It suggests an inner unity of thought between the various systems which did not exist, and it tends to overlook the fact that there was a perfectly orthodox form of gnosis which was never condemned by the Church. There is no indication that the early Christians regarded rational thought as intrinsically heretical, and Harnack's well-known theory that dogmatic development was a deviation from the original faith has no foundation in fact.²¹ What opposition there was to philosophy was not

²¹ For a systematic refutation of Harnack, see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, London, 1952. See also E. W. Kohls' critique of modern hermeneutics in *Theologische Zeitschrift* 26, 1970, pp. 321-37; *ibid.*, 27, 1971, pp. 20-39.

directed against logical definitions of what was (supposedly) incomprehensible, but against attempts to construct a system of thought in which Christian elements were either subordinated to alien presuppositions or reinterpreted in the light of them.

The first Christian writer to undertake a systematic refutation of these heresies was Irenaeus, and his work remains a primary source of information about them. Irenaeus endeavoured to prove that heresy was a phenomenon as old as the Church itself, and that it had been combated by the Apostles from the beginning (*Adv. haer.* i.23.1). He was quite certain that heresies were due to a refusal to accept the Apostolic teaching which had been handed on in the churches of Apostolic origin and was contained in their authentic writings (*ibid.*, iii.1-5). This refusal had led to many deviations, of which the most serious were those which attacked the biblical doctrine of creation. Irenaeus firmly rejected dualistic systems which tried to explain the existence of evil by postulating another creator or source of being apart from the infinite Good. According to him all created things, good or bad, had their origin in the one Creator, who was himself entirely good.

This of course left Irenaeus with the problem of the origin' of evil. If God could not engender something contrary to his nature, where had evil come from? As we have already seen, Irenaeus answered that the root of evil was contained in the

[p.88]

nature of creation itself. A created substance was of necessity inferior to its creator, and was therefore inherently imperfect in relation to him. But no imperfect being could successfully imitate a perfection which was beyond it; hence man as a creature was virtually bound to sin from the start (*ibid.*, iv.38.1). The glory of the Christian revelation was that God himself, by becoming incarnate in a human body, divinised human nature and enabled it to conquer death. The life of Christ was extended by baptism in the Holy Spirit to all men who would receive it, and this baptism was the initiation into the life of grace which communicated the firstfruits of divinity to the soul (*ibid.*, v.6.1; 9.1). In this way the image of God in man was progressively restored into that perfect likeness of the Father which was Christ.

Tertullian adopted the basic outline of Irenaeus' teaching, but developed it in a different direction. He agreed that the possibility of man's sinning derived from his inferior status as a creature, but he did not connect this with a Platonic doctrine of perfection. Adam was not only good by nature at his creation, but he was also perfect and under no compulsion, however indirect, to commit sin. His disobedience in the garden was entirely an act of free will, which brought guilt and death on him and on his descendants. The incarnation of Christ broke this entail of sin not merely in ontological terms (i.e. Jesus was the Second Adam, the perfect man), but in juridical ones as well. By his sacrifice on the cross the Son of God paid the penalty of sin and purchased our redemption by his blood (cf., e.g., *De fuga* 12-3).

It is sometimes said that Tertullian had no real doctrine of the atonement and that the significance of this act escaped his notice.²² This opinion, however, seems to rest on a misunderstanding of the context in which he wrote. Modern theories of the atonement have been developed in order to accommodate ethical objections to penal substitution, and most discussion of the subject since the fifth century has been within the liturgical context of the

²² Cf., e.g., R. E. Roberts, *The Theology of Tertullian*, London, 1924, p. 180.

eucharist.²³ Tertullian, however, saw no objection to penal substitution²⁴ and had little interest in eucharistic doctrine. The atonement was Christ's great work of justification by which the possibility of restored communion between God and man was opened up. This communion was not primarily

[p.89]

a participation in the divine life after the manner of Irenaeus, however.²⁵ It is difficult to explain the subtle difference between the two men without doing one or the other an injustice, but in general terms, Irenaeus envisaged an essentially mystical communion with God, whereas Tertullian was more concerned with the practical everyday implications of Christian obedience. For this reason his concept of sanctification laid much greater stress on moral activity in the present life and said little which might suggest the beatific vision.

The difference of approach between Irenaeus and Tertullian cannot be explained by temperamental or cultural factors only. However much Tertullian may have been influenced by a Roman sense of legalism, it remains true that the fundamental cause of the divergence between them lay in their different conceptions of sin and evil. Irenaeus thought that ultimately human sin was due to finitude, whereas Tertullian, though he accepted the logical consequences of finitude, attributed responsibility for actual sin to the disobedience of the will. It was this difference which in the long term led to the development of separate theological traditions in East and West. Their mutual incompatibility did not become apparent until the debate over the procession of the Holy Spirit, when the inability to find a common formula led to schism.²⁶

This may seem to be an extravagant claim to make for the effects of the difference between Irenaeus and Tertullian over the nature of sin, but in fact later developments were the logical outworking of these two divergent principles. If the cause of sin was different, it was only to be expected that redemption and sanctification would also be understood differently. Irenaeus, with his understanding of sin as the natural result of man's creaturehood, was obviously preoccupied with the need to overcome this ontological disability. As a result he placed much greater emphasis on the incarnation as the prototype of the transcendent life in which the creaturely finitude of man was transformed by grace into the perfection of the divine life. This was the vision of man's destiny which was later to be termed *theōsis* (deification), by which man was able to transcend the present limitations of his finitude and participate directly in the life of God.²⁷

In this scheme it was only natural that a trinitarian doctrine

²³ This idea is first found in Cyprian, *Ep.* 63.14. Tertullian, however, thought of the atonement primarily in relation to baptism, and virtually ignored the eucharist.

²⁴ Though he did not accept that it was a complete satisfaction, cf. *De paen.* 2.4, *et passim*.

²⁵ A point well made by R. A. Norris, *God and World in Early Christian Thought*, London, 1966, pp. 96-103.

²⁶ This point seems to have been missed in recent discussions of the subject; cf., e.g., V. Lossky, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-98, and G. S. Hendry, 'From the Father and the Son: the *Filioque* after Nine Hundred Years', *Theology Today* III, 1954-5, pp. 449-59.

²⁷ On *theōsis*, cf. V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, Cambridge, 1957, pp. 7-43. Lossky and other apologists of Eastern Orthodoxy make much of the development of the Eastern tradition from these primitive roots, but they seldom offer an adequate critique of the Platonic concept of sin underlying it. If that is rejected, however, it is hard to see how the result of the mystical tradition can retain its validity, and its rejection by the Western Church (on the whole) should occasion no surprise.

[p.90]

should insist that the Father alone was the fountainhead of Deity. Christ as mediator had come to reveal the Father to man, so that he might participate in the Father's life even as the Son did. It was the work of the Holy Spirit to apply the life and example of Christ to the individual, to form Christ, the perfect image and likeness of God, in every believer. This was not an end in itself, but the means of access to the Father in whose life the Christian was called to participate. It was therefore necessary to insist that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father alone and that the Son had manifested him from all eternity, without himself being a source of his divinity.²⁸

Tertullian, however, had no room in his theology for Irenaeus' latent concept of deification. He too was concerned with the ontological significance of evil, but unlike Irenaeus he perceived clearly that this could not be attributed, even indirectly, to the mere fact of human finitude. A good creator could only bring forth a good creation in which each substance, though certainly inferior, was nevertheless perfect in its own nature. The existence of evil was therefore rooted exclusively in the act of rebellion of the creature against the will of the Creator. For this reason it was impossible to excuse the sinfulness of man by an appeal to the inherent deficiency of his finitude. Man was not obliged to rebel but had chosen to do so of his own free will and was therefore responsible for his action. Tertullian certainly agreed with Irenaeus that Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, was the perfect manifestation of divine humanity, but he interpreted this in terms of obedience rather than essence, at least as far as its wider application to mankind as a whole was concerned. Ontologically speaking Tertullian believed that the divinity of Jesus was unique in kind as well as in degree, and that his incarnation had a definite purpose, which was the atonement.

The barrier of sin between God and man was broken down in Christ not by the fact of his transcendent being in which no man could truly share, but by his perfect sacrifice in *the flesh*, by which he paid the price of human sin (*Adv. Marc.* iii.8.4-6). It was the work of the Holy Spirit to make this act of redemption effective in the life of the Christian, so that he might live the life of the incarnate Son of God *as an end in*

[p.91]

itself. The goal of the regenerate believer was not the transcendence of human finitude but the fulfilment of it along the lines of the incarnation of Jesus Christ the Second Adam. To put it another way, where Irenaeus and the later Eastern tradition emphasised participation in the life of the Father through the Son by the Holy Spirit, Tertullian, and after him the West, spoke of obedience to the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit. The goal of the Christian life was not a mystical participation in the ineffable essence of God the Father, but rather the imitation of the Son who had made him known to men. It was the work of the Holy Spirit, therefore, to reveal the will of the Father in the obedience of the Son and to emphasise the complete harmony and equality between them. Western theologians could not admit that the imitation of the Son was a lesser grace than participation in the life of the Father, which in any case they regarded as the same thing. It was for this reason that as time went on they felt increasingly bound to uphold a double procession of the Spirit, to avoid compromising the full ontological deity of the Son.

²⁸ The modern view, defended by Lossky, op. cit., *In the Image...*, pp. 71-98.

We may be grateful to Tertullian for having discovered a more biblical view of the nature of sin than Irenaeus' thinly disguised Platonism, and for having developed in the light of his appreciation of the original goodness of finite creatures, a concept of immanent holiness (sanctification) as opposed to the transcendent holiness (deification) of the Eastern tradition. But although we can accept Tertullian's basic principle without demur, we must also recognise that its subsequent application in his theology followed other principles which were less biblical, and which eventually compromised the value of this particular insight. The fundamental difficulty lay in Tertullian's definition of immanence. For him the work of Christ on the cross was archetypal, but it had a purely objective character. The individual who wished to appropriate Christ's redemptive work to himself had first to confess Christ as his saviour and repent of his sins. Bare faith was not enough, however. As an act of the mind and will, faith was the response of the soul only. True salvation required the participation of the flesh as well, a fact which Christ himself had provided for in the physical rite of baptism.

Baptism was the sacrament in which the Holy Spirit acted

[p.92]

through an earthly substance to reverse the effects of human sin. It was both the mirror of the incarnation and the exact counterpart in reverse of the process by which human sinfulness had manifested itself. Like the human body, the sacrament of baptism was a union of two substances, one divine and one earthly, and it was this exact correspondence to the body which made it efficacious in the removal of sin. In his *De baptismo* Tertullian put as much emphasis on the need for water in administration as he did on the inclusion of the flesh in redemption, and many commentators have interpreted this as the refutation of a spiritualising 'gnosticism', which viewed the use of water in baptism as superfluous and unworthy of God. Tertullian certainly did encounter objections of this kind, though their supposedly 'gnostic' origins remain mysterious, but it seems likely that the main factor in his mind was the logical connection between water and the flesh, both of which were earthly substances.

The special correspondence between water and the flesh gave it another great importance as well. As a symbol of cleansing water was obviously extremely familiar, and Tertullian found no difficulty in appealing to Scripture in support of its use. But because sin had first penetrated to the soul by way of the flesh, it was logically necessary, in a recaptulative scheme of redemption, for it to be purified in preparation for the Spirit's entry into the soul. An earthly substance could be purified only by one of a like nature, and it was this which gave water its special significance. Tertullian was at great pains to explain the importance of the visible sign and the completeness of its correspondence to the work of the Spirit in the soul (*De resurr, mort.* 8).

The intimacy of the connection must not obscure the fact that the descent of the Spirit on the soul was not identical with the administration of water (*De bapt.* 6.1). John had baptised with water, but although his baptism 'unto repentance' was valid as far as it went, it lacked the fullness of true Christian baptism (*ibid.*, 12). Christian converts who had received John's baptism were consecrated by the laying on of hands, which symbolised the descent of the Spirit. Later, candidates for baptism were anointed with oil for the same reason (*ibid.*, 7). It thus appears that the baptism of John was

[p.93]

incomplete but not heretical; indeed it was fully acceptable in so far as the administration of water was concerned. There was no magical or quasi-magical importance attached to the rite itself, but only the assurance of grace to accompany its right reception by faith (*ibid.*, 18.6).

The most difficult problem which Tertullian faced over the administration of baptism was undoubtedly the danger of unworthy reception. Although he believed that faith was an essential part of the sacrament's efficacy, it did not follow that where faith was lacking the rite of baptism was no more than an empty ritual. On the contrary, a baptised person who continued in sin was guilty of spurning the grace of God—so much so that his apostasy could be atoned for only by the shedding of his own blood in imitation of Christ (*ibid.*, 16). It is in the light of this that we must understand his reluctance to baptise infants. A child with no knowledge of the importance of the sacrament could easily sin in later life, thereby cancelling the effects of his baptism without ever having been given a fair chance to make a serious commitment to a life of holiness (*ibid.*, 18.4-5). In this instance it was the fear of post-baptismal sin, rather than any question of infant faith or lack of it, which determined Tertullian's attitude.

Yet in the final analysis it was not baptism but the subsequent perseverance of the saints which was the subject closest to Tertullian's heart. It was after baptism in fact, not before it, that the real struggle between the Spirit and the lusts of the flesh set in (*De mono.* 1.3; *De resurr. mort.* 10.3). For baptism was a rite of purification which did no more than restore the flesh and the soul to their natural state. As far as the soul was concerned that was enough; its divine origin was sufficient to ensure its ultimate redemption. But the flesh was still an earthly substance with all the weakness which had caused Adam to sin in the first place. The presence of so fragile a perfection in a fallen world created a tension, the strain of which can only be imagined. For not only was it possible to lose for ever the redeeming virtue of Christ's passion; without constant vigilance and discipline such an eventuality was only too probable. To prevent this from happening, Tertullian was obliged to develop an increasingly rigid asceticism, which in spirit departed more and more from New Testament principles. He continued to

[p.94]

search the Scriptures of course, but as time went on he used them increasingly for support rather than for illumination. How this happened is the theme of the last two chapters of this book, and it is to this that we now turn.