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### Tertullian--His Life and Theology

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TERTULLIAN--  
HIS LIFE AND THEOLOGY

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Historical Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Divinity

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by  
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## CHAPTER I

### PRIMARY CONSIDERATIONS

Tertullian, the Carthaginian Church Father, is a little-known personage as far as his life and activity are concerned. The largest source of information available to us is his own writings. Even this does not supply us with an overabundance of information and so much of our knowledge is based upon conjecture--sound historical conjecture. The longest account that we have about him is by St. Jerome, which we shall consider in the second chapter. Tertullian is mentioned by a few other writers, but usually in order to support their claims or statements.

This being the case, it is evident that he is difficult to date with certainty. Even his writings contain very few historical references which provide this information. Scholars differ widely about the dates of his life. Some place his birth at 150, others at 160. The greatest variation comes in the date of his death for which some assume 220, others 250 or 260. But these dates are mere conjectures as are most of the rest connected with the life of this eminent theologian. Since it is useless to spend much time on an effort to determine exact dates in Tertullian's life, this paper will present only two examples in order to acquaint the reader with the problem. One thing is certain: his writings show that he flourished during the reigns of

Severus and Antonius Caracalla, between 193 and 216; but this is as far as the information goes.<sup>1</sup>

In Tertullian's book, De Pallio, he makes a reference-- at the end of the second chapter--to the fact that there was a plurality of caesars at the time. "While God favours so many Augusti unitedly. . . ." <sup>2</sup> This shows that there were three emperors, but which three--Severus, Antonius Caracalla, and Albinus; or Severus, Antonius Caracalla, and Geta? The first group ruled around 196, the second around 208. The great peace referred to may have been the one at the end of the reign of Severus.

In the first book against Marcion "the fifteenth year of Severus" is mentioned. Most scholars put this around 207 or 208, but the difficulty is determining which year is the fifteenth in the mind of Tertullian. The other writings present little or no reference to the time in which they were written. Because of this difficulty, and because of the impossibility of arriving at certainty, I am going to put aside the problem of dates to a large extent and shall use the dates which appear to be the most commonly accepted.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John, Bishop of Bristol, The Ecclesiastical History of the Second and Third Centuries (London: Griffith Farran & Co., n.d.), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>All translations are from The Ante-Nicene Fathers, edited by A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1951).

<sup>3</sup>John, Bishop of Bristol, op. cit., p. 21.

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In spite of the fact that there is not a great deal known about Tertullian, he was a great man and a member of the North African Church in Carthage. Tertullian and Cyprian are the first two great Fathers produced by this church. [Augustine received the theology and tradition which had its beginning in Tertullian and Cyprian.]

The circumstances which surround the founding of the North African Church are shrouded in mystery; in fact, we know nothing about who founded it and when it was founded. We know that from the second to the fifth centuries this church body was active and creative; perhaps, even before this, it showed a vital interest in the Christian religion.

[This North African Church made some contributions to theology. First, it is believed that its theologians translated the Bible into Latin, which up to this time was in Greek, so that the people could read it in their own language. It is believed that Tertullian used the Itala translation of Scriptures. [Secondly, they reorganized the ecclesiastical structure. Being dissatisfied, to a large extent, with the fluid system then in vogue, they initiated a somewhat firmer structure. Thirdly, they are credited with the formation of a Latin Theology, which, up to this time, was Greek dominated.<sup>4</sup>]

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<sup>4</sup>J. A. F. Hort, Six Lectures on the Ante-Nicene Fathers (New York: MacMillan & Co., 1895), p. 94.

One of the characteristics of early Greek Christianity is that it was philosophical and speculative. The more materially-minded Africans were not interested in speculations, but in the practical application of theology to life so the practical came to the fore in Latin Theology. [Tertullian and Cyprian were instrumental, no doubt, in bringing about this change. In fact, many scholars call Tertullian "The Father of Latin Theology." He is the founder of the great African school of Apologetics.<sup>5</sup>]

Just what are the contributions of Tertullian to the science of theology? A few of them will be listed here, and later in the paper they will take on more significance as the various aspects of his system are considered.<sup>10</sup> Tertullian is the earliest Latin Father to formulate a technical theological language in Latin.<sup>6</sup>] He employed Roman Law from which he borrowed both principles and terminology to unfold his concepts of dogma. At times this principle brought about a misconception of the Biblical truth.<sup>7</sup>

[We are indebted to Tertullian for many of the theological terms still current in our present-day language. A few of these terms are: Trinitas, Trinity; satisfactio,

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<sup>5</sup>J. Morgan, The Importance of Tertullian in the Development of Christian Dogma (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1926), p. x.

① <sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

② <sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

satisfaction; sacramentum, sacrament; substantia, substance; persona, person; liberum arbitrium, free will; and many others. This will give the reader an idea of Tertullian's contribution to the development of Christian theology, the forward movement of theology. Many of his doctrines became the standard in the Western Church.

With these considerations in mind, we are ready to embark upon our study of his life and theology. First, this paper will consider his life and work as it affected the people of his day, his dealings with the heresies of his day, and his own heretical views. Then this paper will consider his theology, which will be done by a survey of the various loci in systematic theology.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

## CHAPTER II

### TERTULLIAN'S LIFE

Tertullian a presbyter, the first Latin writer after Victor and Apollonius, was a native of the province of Africa and city of Carthage, the son of a proconsular centurion: he was a man of a sharp and vehement temper, flourished under Severus and Antonius Caracalla, and wrote numerous works, which, as they are generally known, I think it unnecessary to particularize. . . . Jerome now tells how highly Cyprian thought of Tertullian. . . . [After remaining a presbyter of the Church until he had attained the middle age of life, Tertullian was, by the envy and contumelious treatment of the Roman clergy, driven to embrace the opinions of Montanus, which he has mentioned in several of his works under the title of the New Prophecy; but he composed, expressly against the Church, the treatises De Pudicitia, De Persecutione, De Jejuniis, De Monogamia, and six books De Ecstasi, to which he added a seventh Against Apollonius. He is reported to have lived to a very advanced age, and to have composed many other works which are not extant.<sup>1</sup>

[This account of Jerome is the fullest that we have from a period immediately following Tertullian's life.]

[Tertullian was born around 150 A.D. His father was a centurion in Carthage. It is assumed that his parents were well-to-do and could afford to give their son the best money could buy. Tertullian's parents were pagan; so

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<sup>1</sup>Jerome, Catalogus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum, translated and quoted by John, Bishop of Bristol in The Ecclesiastical History of the Second and Third Centuries (London: Griffith Farran & Co., n.d.), p. 2.

naturally Tertullian, in his youth, followed their footsteps. It is assumed that he gave himself over to the usual vices which were rampant at his time so that his early life may have been quite loose morally. The following passages seem to bear out this contention: "For myself, I am quite sure that it is in no other flesh than my own that I have committed adultery, nor in any other flesh am I striving after continence" (De Resurrectione Carnis, chap. 59); also, "For, sinner as I am of every dye, and born for nothing save repentance." (De Poenitentia, chap. 12)

Tertullian has an excellent education. He was, no doubt, well acquainted with the philosophy of his day, for his writings abound with references to current philosophical thought. He is thought to have been a lawyer. Tertullian tells us that he studied medicine and philosophy. No mention is made of his study of the Law; however, his writings betray a remarkable knowledge of Roman Law. Many of his concepts of salvation and many of his theological terms are Roman legal terms into which he infused a Biblical meaning. In Rome, about this time, we hear of a lawyer by the name of Tertullian; whether this is the same man or just a coincidence in name is impossible to determine.

Tertullian's knowledge of Greek is evident as one reads his writings which contain numerous references to both Greek and Latin literature. It is evident that he used the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. Whenever the

Septuagint translation disagrees with the Hebrew original, Tertullian follows the Septuagint reading. Some scholars think that Tertullian spent some time in Athens and Rome. If this is true, it tends to substantiate the claim that Tertullian was a lawyer in Rome for a number of years.<sup>2</sup>

The circumstances under which Tertullian became a Christian are unknown. Tertullian was of a sensitive nature. The immorality of his day hurt him even though he was a part of it; so the clean moral living of the Christians impressed him. In chapter 50 of the Apology he recounts how a Christian woman would prefer to be sentenced to leo instead of leno, to be debauched. Perhaps instances like these invaded the sensitive soul of Tertullian--more willing to die, than give up chastity--how different!

Tertullian, as a lawyer, may have presided, or at least seen, the trials of Christians. He reports how the trials of Christians differed from the trials of criminals. The Christians' firmness under persecution may have impressed him. It is thought that the martyrdom of seven men and five women in Scilla in 180 A.D. may have made a deep impression upon him because he mentions it in three of his writings--Apology, Nations, Martyrs. Tertullian's conversion is believed to have taken place around 185 A.D. which would have

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<sup>2</sup>J. A. F. Hort, Six Lectures on the Ante-Nicene Fathers (New York: MacMillan & Co., 1895), p. 95.

given him time to consider the matter; nevertheless he quickly switched to Christianity and immediately gave himself to its defense.<sup>3</sup>

Tertullian, as all other men, was influenced by his surroundings and his predecessors. There are two main streams of influence discernible in Tertullian. The Stoics, who were very important at the time, influenced Tertullian very greatly. The reason for this, I think, is obvious for it was, no doubt, part of his educational curriculum. One large element which Tertullian took from the Stoics and made part of his theology is the nature of God and the soul.<sup>4</sup>

Irenaeus was also very influential in the formation of Tertullian's theology. The theology of Tertullian is the theology of Irenaeus for the most part, but Latinized, which means that the theology became more legalistic, and it was somewhat coarsened. Some of the elements which Tertullian received from Irenaeus are: the mystical conception of the redemption, his Christocentric theology, some of his soteriological teachings.<sup>5</sup> Much of this has been derived from the

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 96 f. See also E. DePressense, "The Martyrs and Apologists," The Early Years of Christianity, translated by Annie Harwood (New York: Nelson & Philips, 1879), p. 360.

<sup>4</sup>J. Morgan, The Importance of Tertullian in the Development of Christian Dogma (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1928), p. 15.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

legal profession. From here, many of these dogmatical formulae were put into the general dogmatic system of the church by Cyprian, Novatian, Hosius, Ambrosius, and Leo I.<sup>6</sup> [Much of Tertullian's system of theology became standard for the Western Church.]

In these influences the seeds of the defects in his theology are found. [These defects show some of the characteristics of his theology and form some bases for his influence upon future generations. Tertullian was very materialistic; in fact, practically everything had to have a material side. This accounts for his strange materialization of God and soul, his cabalistic conception of baptismal regeneration, and his fanatic doctrine of the final issue of history.<sup>7</sup>

These are some of the characteristics of Tertullian's theology, but what was his concept of religion? [The central factor in his religion has already been mentioned. The law is this central factor, for in Tertullian's mind religion is a corpus legum given to mankind by God. It is a discipline ordained by God through Christ; therefore, it is the duty of every Christian to uphold and obey the Law, just

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. ix.

<sup>7</sup>E. DePressense, "Heresy and Christian Doctrine," The Early Years of Christianity, translated by Annie Harwood (New York: Nelson & Phillips, n.d.), p. 420.

like obeying the civil law. Tertullian regards all relations between God and man as having the character of legal transactions.<sup>8</sup> The Christian has found the divine law, and he must obey it. Tertullian is quite legalistic when it comes to obeying the precepts of the Bible, or what he considers the principles set down in the Bible.

It is believed that Tertullian was a presbyter in the Carthaginian Church, but this is doubted by some. Tertullian was married because he wrote two tracts to his wife--Ad Uxorem. The date of his marriage is usually given as 186 A.D.; that of his entrance into the priesthood as 192.

Tertullian's priesthood is denied by some on the basis of two passages where Tertullian speaks in the first person as a layman (De Exhortatione Castitatis, chap. 7; De Monogamia, chap. 12). These passages are not conclusive because he states, in other passages, that he remained in the church after services for the purpose of investigating the claim of a woman who saw a vision (De Anima, chap. 9). This would only be done by a presbyter. The priesthood is accepted by most scholars--both Roman Catholic and Protestant--on the basis of Jerome's statement.

Now we come to the most remarkable incident in Tertullian's life--his adoption of Montanism about 199. The reasons for Tertullian's fall are unknown. Perhaps his

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<sup>8</sup>Morgan, op. cit., p. 9.

sensitive nature can account for it. He saw that the church members were not living their Christianity, and that the Montanists were living their Christianity. Therefore, he decided to become one of them. Many believe that this was a slow process. Tertullian may have secretly adopted some of their teachings. A little later he openly taught some of their teachings. Finally there was nothing left to do, but break with the church. Another version has it that Tertullian fought a certain heresy in Africa and, then, went to Rome. In the course of his visit he found that the church did not agree with him; so he had to break. Whatever the cause may have been, Tertullian became a Montanist. Some think that he returned to the Catholic Church a few years before his death, which may, or may not, be true. We know that up to the fourth century there was an heretical sect which called themselves Tertullianists in Africa.

### CHAPTER III

#### TERTULLIAN AND MONTANISM

Before we consider Tertullian as a Montanist, let us consider Montanism in general. Montanism, founded by Montanus, arose in Phrygia, with centers at Pepuza and Tymium, where it first attracted attention around 165, or perhaps as early as 155. It spread rapidly and had numerous influential people counted as adherents. Montanism was condemned by several Asiatic Synods before 193, and it came to Rome about 193, at which time it began to organize a separate church. Perhaps Tertullian was in Rome in 193 and, in this way, came into contact with it. He was converted to Montanism about 199<sup>1</sup>.

Montanus claimed that the Paraclete promised by Jesus was working through him as a prophet to usher in the reign of the Holy Ghost and prepare the Second Coming of Jesus which was soon to be revealed. Jesus would set up His Millennial Kingdom in Pepuza; therefore, all believers were to take up residence in this Phrygian town. Two prophetesses, Priscilla and Maximilla, helped the spread of Montanism which persisted for a long time. There were many off-shoots of it, but the true successors are the Novatianists of the

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<sup>1</sup>C. Biggs, The Origins of Christianity, edited by T. B. Strong (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), pp. 185, 188, 190.

third century and the Donatists of the fourth century.

Montanism had a very rigorous discipline. In fact its moral rigor is a remarkable feature (De Poenitentia, chap. 5). They were the answer of the zealots to the persecution of Marcus Aurelius. Through their much-required fasting and other moral requirements a person was to acquire the stamina to withstand the severest persecution and be an athlete for the Lord. They were working for a church which contained only spiritual men who had completely submitted themselves to the rule of Christ<sup>2</sup>.

Other characteristics of Montanism are the belief in the Holy Ghost as God, the first to call Him that<sup>3</sup>. The Holy Ghost was the Paraclete and manifested Himself through the prophets who were responsible for bringing the continued revelation of God to man. Here is one point of difference; revelation is not complete, but ongoing<sup>4</sup>. The Montanist also wanted to replace the old system of bishops which was wrong. They did not want to throw out the hierarchy altogether, just lower it. The bishops were to be replaced by the prophets who were now to assume leadership in the church. This is a logical deduction because the prophets were the

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 186, 191.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 187.

spokesmen of the Holy Ghost who was soon to announce the setting up of the Millennial Kingdom of Christ.<sup>5</sup>

Montanism was not primarily interested in theology. It was interested in the practical side of Christianity, and they wanted to show their Christianity, that they had dedicated their life to Christ. Their theology was fairly orthodox, but they were overascetic, a little too eager to stamp out evil by crucifying the flesh.<sup>6</sup>

Wherein does the error of Montanism consist? It consists not in its protest against the enervation of holiness and Christian liberty in the church, but in the exaggeration of the reaction, and in the refusal to recognize any other type of Christianity than the upper chamber of Jerusalem.<sup>7</sup> They were the New Prophets, the spiritual, the real body of Christ on earth. They had the more complete revelation of the Paraclete who was now ruling the world. The Gospel was just a prologue to the reign of the Paraclete. Now one had to submit himself to the rule of the Holy Ghost.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>J. A. F. Hort, Six Lectures on the Ante-Nicene Fathers (New York: MacMillan & Co., 1898), p. 100.

<sup>6</sup>A. C. McGiffert, "Early and Eastern," A History of Christian Thought (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, c.1932), p. 168.

<sup>7</sup>E. DePressense, "Heresy and Christian Doctrine," The Early Years of Christianity, translated by Annie Harwood (New York: Nelson & Philips, 1879), p. 107.

<sup>8</sup>Biggs, op. cit., p. 168.

Although Montanism left recognized Christianity the church owes them a great debt. Many of the things which are believed today were first advocated by them. They were the first to advocate the infallibility of church councils. The church owes them the counsels of perfection through which we can gain perfection. The distinction between venial and mortal sins was first made in Montanist circles. Ecclesiastical liberalism--no bishops necessary--is their doctrine. One of the chief doctrines of Protestantism found among the Montanists is the priesthood of all Christians. In spite of the fact that they went astray, they still contributed to today's dogmatic structure.<sup>9</sup>

The greatest convert to Montanism was Tertullian. His conversion was not a sudden change, but a gradual development.<sup>10</sup> The thing which probably attracted the sensitive soul of Tertullian to Montanism was its ascetism. This was coupled with a primitive enthusiasm for the things Christian and an emphasis on the presence of the Spirit. Tertullian thought that this would prove to be the barrier against the growing worldliness and laxity of the church. This is somewhat of a modern idea.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>DePressense, op. cit., p. 124.

<sup>10</sup>DePressense, "Heresy and Apologists," p. 399f.

<sup>11</sup>McCiffert, op. cit., p. 101.

Because his change to Montanism was a gradual one, it is difficult to say definitely that a book was written while Tertullian was a Montanist. He looked to Montanism with an ever-growing conviction that it contained the power to save the church from its laxity. At first, he espoused the discipline which he thought would make the church more virile, but remained within the church. In time he accepted the prophets of Montanism, but still desired to remain within the catholic church. Finally he saw that it was no use trying to reform the church; so he joined the Montanists and became a spiritual man.<sup>12</sup> During all of this time he was writing books. Some believe that he became the presbyter of the Montanist congregation in Carthage.<sup>13</sup>

The morality of Montanism, no doubt, attracted him and a fight with Rome helped him to sever his ties with the church. The cause for the breach given by some scholars is the treatise, De Virginibus Velandis. In this tract Tertullian claims that all unmarried women, for the sake of decency and morality, must be veiled in church. This was no longer the practice in the Western Church. In the Eastern Church they still practiced the veiling of virgins. Some say that this tract proves that Tertullian had visited Athens. Tertullian

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<sup>12</sup>Hort, op. cit., p. 101.

<sup>13</sup>A. Neander, Antignostikus, Geist des Tertullianus (Berlin: Ferd. Duesmeller's Buchhandlung, 1849), p. 10.

wanted to reinstate this custom in Rome, but they would not have it, so he broke with the church<sup>14</sup>

When Tertullian became a Montanist, this became the guiding factor in his life; a complete reformation took place.<sup>15</sup> Montanism gave full scope to his literary gifts, allowing him to develop more fully, developing more freely his stern temperament.<sup>16</sup> Many of his great literary works were produced during this period, such as Adversus Marcionem, De Carne Christi, De Resurrectione Carnis, De Pallio, De Anima, De Corona Militis. Many others could be added, but their time of origin is disputed by scholars. It is often very difficult to ascertain with certainty whether a work is Montanistic or not.

On the whole Tertullian's Montanism did not effect his theological system too much. Most of these views were centered upon secondary points, points of practical application, and not formal theology; so even though Tertullian was a Montanist the general tendency of his system was in perfect harmony with the spirit of his age.<sup>17</sup>

The real reason for the distrust of Tertullian and his teaching is to be found in his defiance of the Bishop of Rome and the claim to spiritual

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<sup>14</sup>J. Morgan, The Importance of Tertullian in the Development of Christian Dogma (London: Regan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1928), p. 224.

<sup>15</sup>Hort, op. cit., p. 99.

<sup>16</sup>Morgan, op. cit., p. xviii.

<sup>17</sup>DePressense, "Heresy and Christian Doctrine," p. 420.

insight which, naturally, conflicted with the theory of the finality of the church.<sup>16</sup>

It is Tertullian's lack of conformity with established ecclesiastical authority which caused his semi-rejection. This is, no doubt, particularly true in the Roman Catholic Church. In some respects we can call Tertullian a forerunner of Protestantism.

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<sup>16</sup>Morgan, op. cit., p. 224.

## CHAPTER IV

### TERTULLIAN AND THE GnostICS

In Tertullian's time Gnosticism was running rampant, and it constituted a formidable feature of the second century church. Gnosticism was not an organic whole, a unified structure, but it contained many different varieties of belief and doctrine, which makes it impossible to classify them according to a definite pattern. In this respect Gnosticism is somewhat like the various radical groups of the Reformation Era.<sup>1</sup>

Gnosticism dates back to New Testament times. Cerdon brought it to Rome between 130 and 140 A.D. Tertullian attacked two great leaders of the Gnostics--Valentinus and Marcion. Valentinus may be considered the great system-maker. Marcion elaborated and rejected parts of this system as he saw fit. Both Valentinus and Marcion were condemned by law in 428 A.D.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of the fact that there was no unity among the Gnostics, it is possible to distinguish certain characteristics of the system as a whole. The real root of Gnosticism is the problem of evil with its central doctrine, the creation

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Biggs, The Origins of Christianity, edited by T. B. Strong (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), p. 129.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

of the world by an evil spirit or demiurge. Most Gnostic systems have an elaborate genealogy which shows the development of the various deities and their relationship to the good god. Their system is one of mysticism and dualism.

God, to the Gnostics, is an absolute, unknown and unknowable, being. He is completely good; therefore, he could not have created the world, which contains so much evil. This good god has revealed himself through, or in, Christ. The Gnostics received most of the Gospel into their system; however, they do not accept the crucifixion. Their doctrine of god was secretly revealed to them by an apostle. This is another notable characteristic of all Gnosticism, for they always have a special, immediate revelation from God or a representative.

The Gnostics do not take sin seriously because god is good and loving. It is just like dirt on the face which can easily be removed. He cannot punish or become angered at the sinner because he takes no offense at sin (Adversus Marcionem, Book 1, chap. 26). If such is the case, sin is of little consequence.<sup>3</sup>

Tertullian wrote many polemical works against the various heresies of his day. It is of importance to consider his tract De Praescriptione Haereticorum before considering

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 133-141.

the various tracts written against the Gnostics. In this tract Tertullian states that the New Testament warns us that heresies will come and that the Christian is to avoid them (chaps. 4-5). Heresy condemns a person because it is self-will, instead of submission to the divine will (chap. 1). In chapter 7 he places the source of all heresy at the foot of philosophy; "Indeed heresies are themselves instigated by philosophy." People are to search for truth; but, once it is found, a person must be content with it, must believe it (chap. 9). Our curiosity cannot go beyond the Rule of Faith (chap. 14) because the apostles have given the whole truth to the Church, and anything contrary to it is ipso facto false (chap. 31). Therefore, one is not permitted to use Scripture in refuting heretics, for it belongs to the Church, not the heretics which only abuse it (chap. 15-16). These are the principles which Tertullian sets down for the handling of heresies, but he did not always follow these principles. In the books against Marcion he quotes Scripture; in fact, the fourth and fifth books are a defense of the catholic canon in opposition to the Marcion canon.

Marcion, a Gnostic, against whom five books are extant, is the first and foremost heretic treated by the Carthaginian. In fact Tertullian is an important source of information both on the Gnostics and Marcion whose Antitheses can be

partially reconstructed from this refutation<sup>4</sup>

Marcion was a native of Pontus who flourished during the reign of Antonius Pius. Because of his restless temper, and fondness of novelties, he left the church. He, like all heretics, wanted to reconcile the good and evil in the world (Adversus Marcionem, Book I, chap. 2). Marcion, the most intelligent of the Gnostic teachers, rejected the vast system of genealogies purposed by other Gnostics. However, he did agree in the dualism, docetism and rejection of the Old Testament. He accepted the Gospel of St. Luke, and that only in part, as Adversus Marcionem, Book IV, shows; and some of the Pauline corpus, as Adversus Marcionem, Book V, shows. Marcion's theology is strongly Pauline.<sup>5</sup>

In Adversus Marcionem, Book I, the first chapter, Tertullian states that he is writing this treatise because a former hastily written, uncorrected one was published by a former friend of his, and this is to supplement and correct the other. Tertullian, in this book, describes the god of Marcion, showing that this god is entirely wanting of all the attributes of God.

God must be a unity, contrary to the dualism of Marcion,

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<sup>4</sup>A. C. McGiffert, "Early and Eastern," A History of Christian Thought (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, c.1932), pp. 49, 60.

<sup>5</sup>Biggs, op. cit., p. 135. See also John, Bishop of Bristol, The Ecclesiastical History of the Second and Third Centuries (London: Griffith Farran & Co., n.d.), p. 236.

the one and only supreme being. It is impossible to deduce from the many heads of government that there can be more than one God (chaps. 3-7). There must be external evidence for people to acknowledge God (chap. 12). The lateness of the revelation of Marcion's god proves him false (chaps. 15-17). Marcion's god is utterly without feeling and emotion which is a complete impossibility according to Tertullian (chaps. 25-26).

In the second book, Tertullian shows that the creator or demiurge whom Marcion slandered is the true and good God. Marcion's arguments are absurd and contrary to Scriptures, for God's nature is beyond human discovery (chaps. 1-2). God created the world by the Word, Jesus Christ (chap. 3).

There is a system of rewards and punishments in the world which would be useless if men were good or evil by necessity, as Marcion proposes, and not by choice, freewill (chaps. 6-7). Man can overcome the angel that lured him to fall by repentance (chap. 8). God's will is good in spite of the fact that He created the devil who fell away from Him, which is an antithesis to the Marcion idea that only a good god could will good, for the evil in the world proves a demiurge (chap. 5). The purpose of God's law is to show man's complete dependence upon Him.

In Adversus Marcionem, Book III, he shows that Christ is the Son of God whom the prophets predicted, who had human flesh through a real incarnation, and who performed

miracles (chaps. 2-3). Marcion's christ had no prophecy, so was false (chap. 4). In chapters 5 to 7 Tertullian points out the Messianic prophecies, and chapters 8 and 9 defend the incarnation of Christ; to Marcion Christ's flesh was a mere figment of the imagination. Then he goes on to show from Isaiah the name of Christ, the prediction of his death, the Millennial Kingdom of Christ. This is continued in the fourth book, only this time, he gives a chapter by chapter account of Luke's Gospel, the only one accepted by Marcion. In the fifth book he does the same thing using, this time, the Pauline epistles which, also, agree with the Old Testament predictions.

This is Tertullian's treatment of Marcion, and the other heresies prevalent in his day underwent similar treatment. He used the same general plan of attack, but, naturally, he directed his attack to the chief point of dissension. Some of these heresies he merely mentions in passing; others he treats in longer works.

Tatian is mentioned in De Jejuniis, chapter 15, as one who opposed the use of food because it was sinful. Food was created by the Creator, Tertullian retorted, not the supreme good god. This is another case of dualism. Basilides is mentioned in De Resurrectione Carnis (chap. 2) as denying the reality of Christ's flesh along with Marcion. The Carpocrates are mentioned twice in De Anima. In chapter 23 Tertullian says that they claim that their souls are

on the same level as Christ, for they are of a higher nature. In chapter 35 their doctrine of metempsychosis is described. They believed that nothing is evil of itself; good and evil is a matter of opinion.

Tertullian wrote a tract against the Valentinians (Adversus Valentinianos) in which he ascribes their success to the fables in their theology (chap. 5). Valentinus, the founder, flourished during the reign of Antoninus Pius (chap. 4). Tertullian's account of the system is based upon Justin, Miltiades, Irenaeus, Proculus (chaps. 5-6), and it is little more than a translation of the first book of Irenaeus against the Gnostics.<sup>6</sup> Valentinianism is a weird and absurd system of emendations--into which I shall not go. The office of Christ is to instruct the Aeons in the nature of the union in the Pleroma, and how to arrive at the comprehension of the father (chap. 4). There are three types of substances in the Pleroma; so there are three types of men; the carnal or material, the animal, and the spiritual (chap. 26). The spiritual people are assured of salvation; the animal must work out his own salvation very carefully (chaps. 29-30). This shows, says Tertullian, that no credit can be given to the senses because they are an animal part of man which is derived from Plato (chap. 28). Christ is a hollow shell. The animal christ was foretold by the prophets

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<sup>6</sup>John, Bishop of Bristol, op. cit., p. 254.

and used the virgin as a canal upon whom the spiritual Christ, of most excellent qualities, descended at Baptism, but left him when he appeared before Pilate (chap. 27). There is not much Biblical Christology here. Tertullian inserts caustic criticism throughout this tract. Some of the followers of Valentinus mentioned in chapter four are: Colarbasus, Heracleon, Secundus, Marcus, Theotimus.

Another heretic against whom Tertullian wrote a tract is Praxeas (Adversus Praxeam). Praxeas was recognized by false accusations as a Montanist by the Bishop of Rome (chap. 1). When the tenets of Praxeas arrived in Carthage, Tertullian killed them. Praxeas wanted to insure the unity of God; therefore he made the Father descend into the Virgin and suffer (chap. 29); thus denying the personality of Christ. He, in some respects, can be compared to the Swedenborgians.<sup>7</sup> Tertullian refuted this doctrine by setting forth his own creed. The tract is valuable for Tertullian's doctrine of the Trinity and the incarnation of Jesus, which will be taken up under the topics of theology and Christology.

The next and final heretic treated extensively by Tertullian is Hermogenes (Adversus Hermogenem). Hermogenes, who apostatized from Christianity, was a painter by profession, a contemporary of Tertullian (chap. 1-30). This may

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 261.

mean that he only took over pagan philosophy, especially Stoicism, that matter is self-evident. God made all things out of matter (chap. 2); He could not have created ex nihilo because a good god cannot make evil whose source is matter (chap. 3). Tertullian says that Hermogenes' doctrine of matter introduces two gods--a good and an evil (chaps. 4-7, 11-12). True doctrine either denies the omnipotence of God or makes God the author of evil. Tertullian, then, raises the question: can the reasons for imputing evil to matter be applied to God Himself (chaps. 11-13, 37)? By making matter self-existent and eternal, Tertullian says, you are placing it above the Word and wisdom of God (chaps. 17-18). He then goes on to support his claim by using Scripture, especially Genesis, to prove that the universe was not created out of pre-existent matter (chap. 35). He then takes up some inconsistencies of Hermogenes. In chapters 41, 44, and 45, he treats the notion that God only used a part of existent matter and its consequences. Hermogenes said that the human soul was made out of matter (De Anima, chaps. 1, 3, 11; De Monogamia, chaps. 16-17). Tertullian's zeal against him may have been caused by his assertion that a second marriage is lawful, which Tertullian denied.<sup>d</sup>

This is the treatment of heretics by Tertullian. He mentions a few more, such as Simon Magus, Menander, etc., in

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<sup>d</sup>Ibid., p. 285.

Adversus Omnes Haereticos. This tract, which is considered spurious by some scholars, is merely a handbook of heresy and quick overview of them, both past and present.

Tertullian, of course, wrote many other books--thirty-two in all. It would be beyond the scope of this paper to examine each work, for many of them contain no direct bearing on the subject. However, the general characteristics of his writings are important, for his style of writing betrays his character. The establishment of the characteristics of this style is the goal of this section.

Tertullian was a man who had a strong character, who stood up for what he believed to be correct. This is the source of the first characteristic. He is intolerant and vigorously opposes all who disagree with him. Antagonism runs throughout his writings. Constantly the battle between <sup>he</sup> him and his opponents is being waged with vigorous polemics and apologetics.<sup>9</sup> This unusual strength of character makes Tertullian a religious genius who is sui generis, standing out like a beacon, and it is revealed in all of his works.<sup>10</sup>

His vigorous forceful writings led him into obscurity. ?

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<sup>9</sup>J. A. F. Hort, Six Lectures on the Ante-Nicene Fathers (New York: MacMillan & Co., 1895), p. 105.

<sup>10</sup>H. B. Swete, "Patristic Study," Handbooks for the Clergy Series, edited by A. W. Robinson (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1902), p. 62.

Tertullian's works are not always logically clear and orderly, leaping often from one point to the next without showing the connection. He has a sharp penetrating mind, but it is not revealed in the logical sequence and clarity of his works because he does not always put his complete argument upon the page, just part of it, for much is taken for granted. Because of this, the average reader often has difficulty in following the argument.<sup>11</sup>

However, in doctrine and language Tertullian is the great pioneer of Western Christianity. Much of our current ecclesiastical Latin was coined in the African mint and is the result of Tertullian's work. Much of this language was adapted from the language of Roman Law which influenced his writings greatly and, to a large extent, gave his works their general tone and color. This, in part, explains why we have so many theological terms which can be traced back to Roman Law.<sup>12</sup>

This also makes of Tertullian, not a speculative theologian, but a cosmologist, moralist, jurist, defender of tradition.<sup>13</sup> Tertullian directs himself to the more mundane,

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<sup>11</sup>A. Neander, Antignostikus, Geist des Tertullianus (Berlin: Ferd. Duemmler's Buchhandlung, 1849), p. 12.

<sup>12</sup>J. Morgan, The Importance of Tertullian in the Development of Christian Dogma (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1926), pp. ix, 2, 3.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. xiii.

practical, details of life.<sup>14</sup> He is interested in whether it is sin for a servant to hand the libation cup to his master, or not. (De Idololatria.) Can a soldier wear the laurel crown presented him by the emperor? (De Corona Militis.) The veiling of unmarried women and the common dress of women come into consideration in De Virginibus Velandis and De Cultu Foeminarum. These are vital questions to Tertullian. When one reads these treatises, one is struck by the puritanical qualities of Tertullian's ethic. Meander says:

Er ist ein Repraesentant einer solchen ethischen Betrachtungsweise, wie wir sie nachher bei Puritanern und Quackern wiederfinden.<sup>15</sup>

Tertullian advocates the living of Christianity and the showing of Christianity by being different from the world in outward appearance as well as by inward conviction.

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<sup>14</sup>Swete, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>15</sup>Meander, op. cit., p. 215.

## CHAPTER V

### THEOLOGY

Up to this point various aspects of Tertullian's life have been considered. Now the spotlight will be focused upon the various areas of theology in order to consider Tertullian's theological system point by point. There is no better place to start this study than at the doctrine of God.

In most dogmatical treatises on the doctrine of God, the existence of God and the natural knowledge of God are treated at least briefly which, of course, provides an excellent starting point. Most patristic arguments for the existence of God rest mainly upon the innate consciousness of the human mind<sup>1</sup>. The mind, the soul, proves the existence of God and that by nature we know that there is a God. Tertullian does not depart from this line of reasoning, for in De Testimonio Animae he calls upon the soul to witness to the fact that there is a god. It is not Christian, but it realizes the fact of divine existence, for Christianity needs the Scriptures to support its claim--"Man becomes a Christian, he is not born one." (Chap. 1.)

This natural knowledge of God produces a certain concept

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<sup>1</sup>William Shedd, A History of Christian Doctrine (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1877), I, 229.

of God in one's mind. In chapter 6 of De Corona Militis we read: "We first of all indeed know God Himself by the teaching of Nature, calling Him God of gods, taking for granted that he is good, and invoking Him as judge." This is a self-evident fact, for people say, "If God will," which shows that there is a god whom people expect to reward and punish them. All of the various acts of worship toward the gods have this idea of receiving something for it.

This can, and has, produced many gods. Books have been written in order to bring some kind of organization, or set up categories, in this welter of gods. A description of Varro's work, Concerning Divine Things, is found in the second book of Ad Nationes. But Tertullian proposes in De Testimonio Animae, chapter 2, that merely to say "If God so will" is to proclaim one God, instead of many:

By expressions such as these thou declarest that there is one who is distinctively God, and thou confessest that all power belongs to him to whose will, as Sovereign, thou dost look.

Tertullian continues his argument by saying that the other gods you call by name--Jupiter, Minerva, etc.; therefore, they are not God. He alone is God who is called God. If you call the others God, you are calling them by something that is not really theirs. One of the reasons for the persecutions, according to Tertullian, is that the Christians insisted that there is only one true God.

What does Tertullian tell us concerning this one God?

He has a somewhat strange idea that God is both body and spirit which is a Stoic influence upon him. In the seventh chapter of Adversus Praxeam Tertullian argues that a nothing cannot produce something, an incorporeal being cannot produce a corporeal being. Then he goes on: "For who will deny that God is a body, although 'God is a Spirit?' For Spirit has a bodily substance of its own kind, in its own form." Then, Tertullian proposed that the begetting of the Son proves that God has a body, for He produced things and, above all, He produced the Son--a corporeal being. The body of God is peculiar to Him, sui generis. In many places Tertullian speaks of God as a spirit, an immaterial being. This is a strange twist in his thinking brought about by the philosophical thought of his day<sup>2</sup>.

Tertullian ascribes the usual attributes to God. As has been noted in the previous chapter, he maintains very strongly that God is the creator of the world, which was necessitated by the fundamental error of the Gnostics. Therefore the chief section, as noted, for the defense of this doctrine is the first two books against Marcion. However, this idea also appears in other books (Apology, chaps. 17 and 24).

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<sup>2</sup>J. Morgan, The Importance of Tertullian in the Development of Christian Dogma (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1928), p. 99.

Tertullian holds that God is a judge. "At the end of all to adjudge His worshippers to everlasting life, and the wicked to the doom of fire at once without ending and without break." (Apology, chap. 16) The Lord will judge us according to our deeds--a very necessary part of God's personality as is pointed out in the second book of Adversus Marcionem. This judging will take place at the resurrection; ". . . raising up again all the dead from the beginning, reforming and reviewing them with the object of awarding either recompense." (Apology, chap. 18) The fact that God will raise the dead and judge the world shows, also, that He is all-powerful which is borne out by Apology, chapter 30: "His is God alone, on whose power alone they [government] are entirely dependent." He claims that all government is derived from God and is sustained, to a certain extent, by the prayers of Christians.

The other attributes of God are maintained by Tertullian, God is good (Adversus Marcionem, book 1, chap. 10). As one reads his writings, one finds that God is all-knowing. His will governs our life (Apology, chap. 41). His truth is immutable (De Spectaculis, chap. 20). God is gracious; in fact, the salvation of man is entirely worthy of God (Adversus Marcionem, book 2, chap. 27; De Poenitentia, chap. 3).

Any Christian treatment of the doctrine of God must come to grips with the doctrine of the Trinity. Tertullian is the first theologian to present this doctrine clearly to

the western mind; in fact, Adversus Praxean, in which Tertullian presents the Trinity, is the most important dogmatic work to appear before the time of Augustine.<sup>3</sup> Tertullian devoted much time to distinguishing the personality of the Son and the Spirit, emphasizing a distinctive doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Herein lies Tertullian's real contribution to the Trinitarian dogmatic formulation.<sup>4</sup>

In Tertullian's day there was much disagreement upon this doctrine, some were confounding the persons. They said that the various names are just different names for the same person; others almost held that there were three gods. All of these heretical views can be placed into two categories. One group wanted to preserve the unity of essence, making very sure that there was only one God. They brought about the emphasis on the deity of Christ. This teaching was not contested because it was one of the fundamental beliefs of the ancient church, contained in its Rule of Faith. In the process of preserving these points, men neglected the other Trinitarian persons, or they merged them into one; after all, there can only be one God, who cannot be divided. This would mean that the Father suffered. This Patripassian

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<sup>3</sup> Reinhold Seeberg, "History of Doctrine in the Ancient Church," Textbook of the History of Doctrines, translated by Charles M. Hay (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1952), p. 122.

<sup>4</sup> Morgan, op. cit., p. 198. See also Shedd, op. cit., I, 278.

theory called out Tertullian's Trinitarian position, and it has chief reference to it<sup>5</sup>

Tertullian states that the monarchy of God does not exclude the fact that He may have a Son helping Him rule, as and earthly ruler may have his son assist him. In fact, we know that the divine monarchy is administered by legions of angels for which he adduced Daniel 7:10 as proof. This in no way affects the unity of God because all are of the same substance; i. e., they are of the same property or estate. (Adversus Praxeam, chap. 3)

Tertullian's best statement on the doctrine of the Trinity is found in Adversus Praxeam, chapter 2, which reads as follows:

We, however, as we indeed always have done (and more especially since we have been better instructed by the Paraclete, who leads men indeed into all truth), believe that there is one only God, but under the following dispensation, or *οικονομία*, as it is called, that this one only God has also a Son, His Word, who proceeded from Himself, by whom all things were made, and without whom nothing was made. Him we believe to have been sent by the Father into the Virgin, and to have been born of her--being both Man and God, the Son of Man and the Son of God, and to have been called by the name of Jesus Christ; we believe Him to have suffered, died, and been buried, according to the Scriptures, and, after He had been raised again by the Father and taken back to heaven, to be sitting at the right hand of the Father, and that He will come to judge the quick and the dead; who sent also from heaven from the Father, according to His own promise, the Holy Ghost, the Paraclete, the sanctifier of the faith of those who believe in the

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<sup>5</sup>Shedd, op. cit., p. 277.

Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Ghost. . . . As if in this way also one were not All, in that All are of One, by unity (that is) of substance; while the mystery of the dispensation is still guarded, placing in order the three Persons--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: three, however, not in condition, but in degree; not in substance, but in form; not in power, but in aspect; yet of one substance, and of one condition, and of one power, inasmuch as He is one God, from whom these degrees and forms and aspects are reckoned, under the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. How they are susceptible of number without division, will be shown as our treatise proceeds.

From these words we see that Tertullian maintained a real Trinity, believing what we believe, and what we subscribe to in the first article of the Augsburg Confession. There are some who hold that Tertullian, according to chapters 4-6 of Adversus Praxeam, is in one respect a Sabellian.<sup>6</sup> I think that when all of the evidence is considered that this is false. Tertullian is more orthodox than Sabellian. He does, however, get somewhat careless in his speech at times which produces some seeming contradictions. But the evidences presented in this tract, his chief work on the subject, show him to be in agreement with the doctrine of the catholic church.

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<sup>6</sup>Charles Biggs, The Origins of Christianity, edited by T. B. Strong (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), p. 216.

## CHAPTER VI

### ANTHROPOLOGY

Man is an important creature in the universe and was specially created by God. God endowed man with many attributes no other creature possesses; chief among these is the soul which was breathed into man by God. The soul is a most important feature of humanity, for it is the bride of Christ. This, of course, does not exclude human flesh from this role, but one may conclude that the soul is the more important. Tertullian is the first theologian to recognize this fact<sup>1</sup>. He says:

Now, if any should insist on making the soul the bride, then the flesh will follow the soul as her dowry. The soul shall never be an outcast, to be had home by the bridegroom bare and naked. (De Resurrectione Carnis, chap. 63; cf. De Virginibus Velandis, chap. 16.)

This soul is, also, a natural witness to God in mankind as was discovered in the previous chapter.

What is the soul to Tertullian? How did he define it? What is its make-up? Tertullian's definition of the soul is found in the twenty-second chapter of De Anima where we read:

The soul, then, we define to be sprung from the breath of God, immortal, possessing body, having

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<sup>1</sup>J. Morgan, The Importance of Tertullian in the Development of Christian Dogma (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1928), p. 63.

form, simple in its substance, intelligent in its own nature, developing its power in various ways, free in its determinations, subject to the changes of accident, in its faculties mutable, rational, supreme, endued with an instinct of presentiment, evolved out of one (archetypal soul).

Much of this definition we can subscribe to; however, the conception of the soul possessing a body, which the Gospels affirm, is rather strange to modern ears. And yet, Tertullian believed that everything real must be corporeal.<sup>2</sup> As stated in the previous chapter, God is real; therefore, He must be corporeal. In De Testimonio Animae, chapter 7, Tertullian states:

In the Gospel itself they will be found to have the clearest evidence for the corporeal nature of the soul. In hell the soul of a certain man is in torment, punished in the flames, suffering excruciating thirst. . . . [Tertullian goes on to explain this and comes to the following conclusion] . . . for whatever is incorporeal is incapable of being kept and guarded in any way; it is also exempt from either punishment or refreshment. . . . For an incorporeal thing suffers nothing, not having that which makes it capable of suffering; else, if it has such capacity, it must be a bodily substance.

The development of man's soul grows along with his body. This development is effected by many accidental things; such as means, arts, manners, influences which aid the soul in its decisions. (De Testimonio Animae, chap. 36.) The soul has a knowledge of right and wrong. The source of evil

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<sup>2</sup>Reinhold Seeberg, "History of Doctrine in the Ancient Church," Textbook of the History of Doctrines, translated by Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1952), p. 120.

and of good are inherent in it.

The soul contains the source of sin. It is depraved with original sin, but not entirely, for there is always a spark of good in man. Tertullian did not hold the total depravity of mankind. In chapter 41 of De Anima, he states:

Still there is a portion of good in the soul, of that original, divine, and genuine good, which is its proper nature. For that is like a light under a bushel. It is temporarily extinguished.

Our good is like a light under a bushel. It is temporarily hidden; but when faith comes the evil nature is snuffed out, and humanity shines in its full splendor once again. Humanity is sinful, not corrupt.

Tertullian's doctrine on the subject of the corruption of human nature was adopted and reasserted with varying degrees of clearness and emphasis by Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Macarius of Egypt, Hilary of Poitiers<sup>3</sup>, and Ambrose, in addition to Augustine.

From Tertullian's doctrine of the soul and his definition of the soul, it follows that he should teach the freedom of the will. Seeberg states that Tertullian puts a strong emphasis upon the Freedom of the Will and cites as evidences De Exhortatione Castitatis, chap. 2; Adversus

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<sup>3</sup>The quotation is from Morgan, op. cit., p. 184. See also William Shedd, A History of Christian Doctrine (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1877), II, 48.

Marcionem, book 2, chap. 6.<sup>4</sup> In both of these passages Tertullian states definitely that man is endowed with liberty of the will which is a gift of God derived from His goodness. Man who is good by creation, not nature, can choose the good, that which is good in the eyes of God, or yield to the evil of the devil. It must be admitted that Tertullian has the freedom of the will; but, in order to be fair, it must be noted that Tertullian is speaking of the original state of Adam. He is pointing out that Adam sinned voluntarily and, in this way, he is vindicating God's action, both in regard to Adam and mankind. By his doctrine of the Freedom of the Will, he is not trying to deny or detract from the efficacy of divine grace. God's grace and love (is) still the sole factor in the salvation of mankind.<sup>5</sup>

In Tertullian, we have the beginnings of the doctrine of original sin. Naturally he does not speak as precisely and accurately on the subject as Augustine and others who refuted the Pelagian heresy a few centuries later. But even without this exact terminology Tertullian definitely teaches that man is born with sin inherited from Adam which has been propagated down through the centuries by natural means.

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<sup>4</sup>Seeberg, op. cit., p. 123.

<sup>5</sup>John, Bishop of Bristol, The Ecclesiastical History of the Second and Third Centuries (London: Griffith Farran & Co., n.d.), p. 156.

Tertullian says De Anima, chap. 40:

Every soul, then, by reason of its birth has its nature in Adam until it is born again in Christ; moreover, it is unclean all the while it remains without this regeneration; and because unclean, it is actively sinful, and suffuses even the flesh (by reason of their conjunction) with its own shame. Now although the flesh is sinful, and we are forbidden to walk in accordance with it, and its works are condemned as lusting against the spirit, and men on its account are censured as carnal, yet the flesh has not such ignominy on its own account. . . . [Tertullian explains that the flesh is merely a ministering agency as a cup aids a thirsty man. It is an "instrument for the offices of life."] Accordingly the flesh is blamed in the Scriptures, because nothing is done by the soul without the flesh in operations of concupiscence, appetite, drunkenness, cruelty, idolatry, and other works of the flesh,--operations, I mean, which are not confined to sensations, but result in effects. [He further states that the soul is usually accused in the Scriptures.]

Sin is intimately connected with the human being because of his birth. Tertullian believed that this is passed on through the process of propagation. Traducianism is his central thought, for as we receive our bodies, so we receive sin: Tradux animae, tradux peccati--the propagation of the soul implies the propagation of sin. Tertullian is the first advocate of traducianism, and this has become a highly favored view in the Western Church: in fact, it is implied in the first article of the Formula of Concord.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Shedd, op. cit., II, 14, 44.

The doctrine of Tertullian became the received psychology of the Latin Church. It paved the way for the doctrine of innate sin which came into its own under Augustine and the Pelagian heresy two centuries later. Traducianism also paved the way for the theory of Monergism in regeneration. If we are born in sin, we cannot help regenerate ourselves. Tertullian is an important figure in the development of these doctrines which are held by the church today. He was the beginning; Augustine, Luther, Calvin carried on; today the Church continues to teach these Scriptural truths?<sup>7</sup>

There is yet one point which remains to be considered. Tertullian distinguished between carnal or corporeal and spiritual sins. A corporeal sin is an actual deed. When a person actually goes out and commits adultery, this is a carnal sin. If a man merely has the inward desire to do this, it is a spiritual sin. This may not break out into an open offense; yet it is, nevertheless, a sin. The will of men is also the origin of the carnal sins. All deeds are, after all, the result of men's wills or desires.

This distinction is not to be considered two sins, but one, for they are of equal gravity before God. Actually one cannot distinguish between sins as Tertullian says:

But it is not the fact that body and spirit are two things that constitute the sins mutually different--otherwise they are on this

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., II, 44.

account rather equal, because the two make up one--lest any make the distinction between their sins proportionate to the difference between their substances, so as to esteem one lighter, or else heavier, than the other; if it be true, (as it is), that both flesh and spirit are creatures of God; one wrought by His hand, one consummated by His afflatus. Since, then, they equally pertain to the Lord, whichever of them sins equally offends the Lord. (De Pœnitentia, chap. 3)

Tertullian shows that this distinction is merely one between the actual deed and the thought or desire. Tertullian also distinguishes between venial and mortal sins; however, all that has been said concerning carnal and spiritual sins is likewise true of venial and mortal sins.

## CHAPTER VII

### CHRISTOLOGY

Christian theology stands or falls upon the doctrine of Christ because it is the fundamental teaching of the Church. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that this dogma be in accord with the pronouncements of the Holy Scriptures. A teacher separating himself from these dictums is, of necessity, separating himself from the Christian Church. Upon Christ stands the Church; without Christ there is no church.

Tertullian's Christological system is, therefore, of vital importance. It not only shows Tertullian's position regarding the Master but also presents to the Church an advance in the codification of this dogma in the Western Church to which he is a heavy contributor. In fact Tertullian established the Christology of the Western Church.<sup>1</sup>

In the establishment of this Christology Tertullian advanced two important ideas. The first is the expansion of the idea of sonship. The theologians prior to this time emphasized the Logos idea so prominently that they excluded, to a certain extent, the sonship of Christ. Tertullian brought about a change. To be sure, he still delineated the doctrine of the Logos, but he pushes to prominence the

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<sup>1</sup>Reinhold Seeberg, "History of Doctrine in the Ancient Church," Textbook of The History of Doctrines, translated by Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1952), p. 127.

sonship of Christ. The second is his emphasis upon the death of Christ which is extremely important because of our salvation. In this emphasis Tertullian is striking a note characteristic to Latin theology, one that is still clinging to the present-day church.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps of more importance to the dogmatical formulation of Christology is Tertullian's contribution of the communicatio idiomatum, the first expression of it. Tertullian may not express this doctrine in the exact terms of the Church following the Christological controversies, but he definitely propounds it.<sup>3</sup> In De Carne Christi, chapter 5, Tertullian states:

Thus the nature of the two substances displayed Him as man and God,--in one respect born, in the other unborn; in one respect fleshly, in the other spiritual; in one sense weak, in the other exceeding strong; in one sense dying, in the other living. This property of the two states--the divine and the human--is distinctly asserted with equal truth in respect of the Spirit (Often used by Tertullian to denote the divine nature of Christ) and of the flesh. The powers of the Spirit, proved Him to be God, His sufferings attested the flesh of man.

In this passage Tertullian ascribes divinity to the entire being of Christ who is true God and true man.

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<sup>2</sup>J. Morgan, The Importance of Tertullian in the Development of Christian Dogma (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1928), pp. 111, 137.

<sup>3</sup>J. M. Bethune-Baker, An Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine to the Time of the Council of Chalcedon (London: Methuen & Co., 1903), p. 144.

In spite of this fact Tertullian suggests the subordination of Christ. As was noted during the consideration of the Trinity, Tertullian sets up a Monarchia or kingship of God. The Father is the chief ruler with the Son acting as administrator of the Father's rule, placing the Son one step below the Father as the co-regent of a country is beneath the king. In Tertullian's mind Christ's deity is not in the least diminished by this fact, for He is still at one with the Father (Adversus Praxeam, chap. 12). Morgan derives this from Tertullian's juristic view of Monarchia. It is, no doubt, true that his legal mind would have to place one person, in this case the Father, in supreme command, so to speak. This is, I believe, the only erroneous concept in Tertullian's Christology.<sup>4</sup>

The question arises: what did Tertullian teach concerning Christ? In the first place, Christ's coming was predicted by the Old Testament prophets. In the third book against Marcion Tertullian goes to great lengths to show that the prophecies concerning Christ's coming are true and that the Son of God had a real incarnation, actually assumed human flesh. This is summarized in Apology, chapter 21:

Accordingly He appeared among us, whose coming to renovate and illuminate man's nature was preannounced by God--I mean Christ, that Son

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<sup>4</sup>Morgan, op. cit., p. 111.

Seeberg, op. cit., p. 125.

of God. . . . God's own Son was announced among us, born . . . .

How was Christ born? Immediately following the quotation above, Tertullian says that Christ was not ashamed of His origin. He was not born through an incestuous relation, by the violation of a daughter, or a god in the shape of an animal as is ascribed to many of the pagan deities,

but the Son of God has no mother in any sense which involves impurity; she, whom men suppose to be His mother in the ordinary way, had never entered into the marriage bond.

This statement shows that Tertullian believed in the virgin birth of Christ.

This birth, this assuming of human flesh, which is described at length in De Carne Christi, does not force Christ out of his relationship with the Father. He is still at one with the Father, still of the same substance of the Father as Tertullian writes (Apology, chap. 21):

. . . so that He is the Son of God, and is called God from the unity of substance with God . . . and the two are one. . . . This ray of God . . . descending into a certain virgin, and made flesh in her womb, is in His birth God and man united.

Tertullian goes on to prove this by examples of miracles taken from the Scriptures; also the two comings of Christ certify His claim. An interesting sidelight is that in this chapter Tertullian ascribes the fundamental point of difference between Judaism and Christianity to the divinity of Christ.

An important aspect of life is death. This is especially

true in the case of Jesus because His death forms the basis of our salvation. He Himself predicted His death as did the prophets of old, and His death upon Calvary's Cross under order of Pontius Pilate was not like that of the other prisoners, but very unusual. Nothing ever, before or after, happened like this, as our author states (Apology, chap. 21):

And yet, nailed upon the cross, He exhibited many notable signs, by which His death was distinguished from all others. At His own free-will, He with a word dismissed from Him His spirit, anticipating the executioner's work.

He continues by describing the earthquake and darkness at Christ's departure from life.

In order to complete the visible life of Christ--He was taken from the cross and buried. Jesus had predicted His resurrection on the third day.

On the third day there was a sudden shock of earthquake, and the stone which sealed the sepulchre was rolled away, and the guard fled off in terror: without a single disciple near, the grave was found empty of all but the clothes of the buried one.

During the next forty days Jesus instructed His disciples.

Thereafter, having given them commission to preach the gospel through the world, He was encompassed with a cloud and taken up to heaven.....

All of this is attested to by Pilate, who is now a Christian by conviction. Such is Tertullian's life of Christ as recorded in the twenty-first chapter of the Apology.

Christ's death is the basis of our redemption. It

Christ had not died, the entire plan of God and our faith would be vain and the Apostles, then, would have proposed a false basis of faith, of salvation. We would also have no assurance of the resurrection of the dead. Jesus could not have arisen if He had not died. In other words, our faith would be based upon mere hearsay and human tradition, instead of the firm foundation of Jesus Christ, our dying and arisen Lord. (Cf. Adversus Marcionem, book 3, chap. 8; Adversus Judaeos, chap. 12; Scorpiace, chap. 7; De Baptismo, chap. 11.)

Why did God go through all of this trouble? God became incarnate in order to have intercourse with man. If He would not have done this, He would have been unable to limit His majesty to the limited capacity of man. It was necessary for Him to degrade Himself in order to earn our salvation and "nothing is so worthy of God as the salvation of mankind."

Another reason propounded is to show mankind how to live like God; by living on earth Jesus instructed us in God-like living.

God held converse with men, that man might learn to act as God. God dealt on equal terms with man, that man might be able to deal on equal terms with God. God was found little, that man might become very great.

God wanted to lead the way to heaven. In order to do this He marked the trail through His incarnate life, death, and

resurrection, the road which man must now follow. (Adversus Marcionem, book 2, chap. 27; De Praescriptione Haereticorum, chap. 13; De Oratione, chap. 4.)

This is the Christology set forth by Tertullian. On the whole it is a Biblical presentation and is in accord with the present-day dogmaticians. The one point of deviation is the subordination of Jesus. It is easy to show why Tertullian's Christology became normative in the Western Church. Most of his formulations are presented in the most modern dogmatical treatises.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SOTERIOLOGY

As Tertullian's Trinity and Christology became normative in the Western Church, his soteriology also holds this high position.<sup>1</sup> The Law forms the basis for Tertullian's teaching and his entire conception of man's relation to God. This is another first for Tertullian, for Morgan says, "He was the first to express this truth in this legal form."<sup>2</sup>

To Tertullian, God is a lawgiver. Our whole life and the principles by which we live are determined by God's will; He prescribes the course that we are to follow. The law becomes a peculiar Christian possession because God has designed it for us. We are a priesthood which must constantly be ready to praise God and administer the sacraments; therefore, we must follow the discipline ordained by God as the Levitical priesthood of old (De Monogamia, chaps. 7-8: De Praescriptione Haereticorum, chap. 13). It is, therefore, sin whenever we attempt to go against the will of God because

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<sup>1</sup>Reinhold Seeberg, "History of Doctrine in the Ancient Church," Textbook of the History of Doctrine, translated by Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1952), p. 132.

<sup>2</sup>J. Morgan, The Importance of Tertullian in the Development of Christian Dogma (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1928), p. ix.

His will is law. / An example for this appearing in De Exhortatione Castitatis, Chapter two, is: When a marriage is broken by death, another marriage cannot be contracted because it is God's will that we live outside of the marital state, or He would have permitted the marriage to continue. Therefore, God's will is to determine our actions in life.

If this is the case, what is the fundamental relationship of man to God? According to Tertullian, it is fear; for he says: "Man's fear is an honor to God" (De Poenitentia, chap. 7). This is not a religious, reverential fear, but a fear of awe, horror. It is the fear that Luther knew before he learned of the justitia Dei in Christo, when God was merely a hard, cruel, judge to him. (cf. De Poenitentia, chaps. 2, 4-7.) / In Ad Uxorem, Book II, Chapter 7, he states that a man with a Christian wife who has changed her way of life will be overcome with fear, and this will, more easily, make him "a candidate for God." Tertullian makes this fear, at least partially, the basis of conversion and repentance.

Repentance is the means by which we come to faith.

As soon as you know the Lord, you should fear Him; as soon as you have gazed on Him, you should reverence Him. (De Poenitentia, chap. 6.)

The "knowing" changes life. The former sins which were practiced are put aside; no longer is the person willing to defile himself with the evil pollutions of this world. God's will has been made known to him, fear comes over him, his

sinful life is stopped, and now the newly-born Christian is ready for Baptism.

That baptismal washing is a sealing of faith, which faith is begun and is commended by the faith of repentance. We are not washed in order that we may cease sinning, but because we have ceased, since in heart we have been bathed already. (De Poenitentia, chap. 6)

Now the Christian is in the grace of God, a child of God.

And yet, even in the state of grace the Christian sins. In order to rid himself of these sins, he must make satisfaction. Tertullian is the first to introduce this term. It is possible that a Christian will sin, but this must be avoided. If a person keeps on sinning, God may not provide a way of escape (De Poenitentia, chap. 7). The Christian must once again come to repentance, make confession, and then make satisfaction which is to have an outward manifestation (De Poenitentia, chap. 9). He states:

. . . whereby we confess our sins to the Lord, not indeed as if He were ignorant of them, but inasmuch as by confession satisfaction is settled, of confession repentance is born; by repentance God is appeased. And thus exomologesis is a discipline for man's prostration and humiliation, enjoining a demeanor calculated to move mercy. With regard also to the very dress and food, it commands (the penitent) to lie in sackcloth and ashes, to cover his body in mourning, to lay his spirit low in sorrows, to exchange for severe treatment the sins which he had committed; moreover, to know no food and drink but such as is plain,--not for the stomach's sake, to wit, but the soul's; for the most part, however, to feed prayers on fastings, to groan, to weep and make outcries unto the Lord your God; to bow before the feet of the presbyters, and kneel to God's dear ones; to enjoin on all the brethren to be ambassadors to bear his deprecatory supplication

(before God). All this exomologesis (does), that it may enhance repentance; may honour God by its fear of the (incurred) danger; may, by itself pronouncing against the sinner, stand in the stead of God's indignation, and by temporal mortification (I will not say frustrate, but) expunge eternal punishments. Therefore, while it abases the man, it raises him: while it covers him with squalor, it renders him more clean: while it accuses, it excuses: while it condemns, it absolves. The less quarter you give yourself, the more (believe me) will God give you.

Therefore, man can fulfill the Law in precepts and counsels, live according to the Decalogue (Adversus Marcionem, book 2, chap. 17; Ad Uxorem, book 2, chap. 1). By doing this he becomes holy and repays Christ for His work (De Resurrectione Carnis, chap. 8; De Patientia, chap. 16; De Exhortatione Castitatis, chap. 10). Tertullian states in De Resurrectione Carnis, chap. 8:

Most blessed, truly and most glorious, must be the flesh which can repay its Master Christ so vast a debt, and so completely, that the only obligation remaining due to Him is, that it should cease by death to owe Him more--all the more bound even then in gratitude, because (forever) set free.

Therefore, man can earn merit before God, which is done through the works that we do. In connection with fasting he says: "And, first of all, has proceeded the rationale itself of earning the favor of God in this way." (De Jeuniis, chap. 3: cf. De Poenitentia, chap. 6.) The authority for this goes back to Adam according to Tertullian.

What is "satisfaction" in his mind? Satisfaction is the amends which those who have sinned made for themselves

by confession, and repentance, and good works. Man can take the punishment of sin upon himself, fulfill the Law, and in this way make satisfaction for his evil. This is an act of self-humiliation before God; Tertullian, also, goes as far as saying that it is the endurance of temporal punishment instead of eternal. The motive behind this is a hope of eternal and temporal reward.<sup>3</sup>

If there are rewards, it is self-evident that man can do meritorious works by which he can earn them. What is Tertullian's conception of merit? This concept is based upon his doctrine of the Free Will because it is possible for man to choose the right thing; i.e., the thing proper or pleasing to God. He also proposes that in some spheres of life and conduct God has not imposed a law upon man. God wills certain things, but He, at the same time, permits others; therefore, man has a choice. When man chooses the God-pleasing things, he has merited God's favor.<sup>4</sup>

The most noteworthy contribution of Tertullian in this area is the system of penance. He claims, as shown above, that a penitent must manifest this through outward acts and humiliations.<sup>5</sup> If a man is truly sorry for committing

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 92. See also J. E. Bethune-Baker, An Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine to the Council of Chalcedon (London: Methuen & Co., 1903), p. 333, 354.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 353.

<sup>5</sup>Morgan, op. cit., p. 40.

adultery, he will want to manifest this fact by appearing at the public worship in sackcloth and ashes and be performing other deeds of penance. Through this means the entire congregation will know that he is penitent and seeking absolution.

From the foregoing it may be concluded the Tertullian believed that man, to a large extent, could save himself. Possibly this is looseness of language on the part of our author because this was not being contested in his day; no one questioned the grounds of salvation. It may, also, be due to the fact that he thought that the church was growing lax in its discipline as has been pointed out in the chapter on Monatanism. However, in the chapter on Christology it was pointed out that Tertullian made the death of Christ the sole basis of salvation, as did the apostles. In view of Tertullian's emphasis on repentance and satisfaction it is necessary to repeat some of these references. Tertullian says:

Christ's death, wherein lies the whole weight and fruit of the Christian name, is denied, although the apostle asserts it expressly as undoubtedly real, making it the very foundation of the gospel, of our salvation, and of his own preaching. "I have delivered unto you before all things," says he, "how that Christ died for our sins." . . . [If Christ had not died and risen from the dead] . . . we remain in our sins still. (Adversus Marcionem, book III, chap. 8; Adversus Judaeos, chap. 13; Scorpice, chap. 7; De Baptismo, chap. 2.)

The death of Christ becomes the basis of faith and

forgiveness even though he puts a strong emphasis upon works. He wanted man to show his faith in Christ to his fellowmen by works and outward appearance. In this respect he is somewhat like the Pentecostal groups. The fundamentals of the Catholic doctrine of penance are also found here.

... the same... as the... and the... they have the same purpose... of... even though they are different forms.

... of primary importance is... of the... and... considered to its... Fort... also... of... in the... of the... to...

... their high... it is a kind of religion... all the... ancient... of... in five hundred years...

... in the following... because the... suffer the... as we... the doctrine... of faith...

## CHAPTER IX

### THE MEANS OF GRACE

The Means of Grace--both the Word and the Sacraments--are important for salvation because they announce God's grace unto sinful mankind. In this chapter Tertullian's thought on the Means of Grace is under consideration. Both the Word and the Sacraments will be considered because ultimately they have the same purpose: that of proclaiming forgiveness to mortal man, even though they use different forms.

Of primary importance is Tertullian's concept of the Scriptures. One patristic, and modern, argument for the Scriptures is its antiquity. Tertullian also used this mode of reasoning; in the nineteenth chapter of the Apology he says:

Their high antiquity, first of all, claims authority for these writings. With you, too, it is a kind of religion to demand belief on this very ground. Well, all the substances, all the materials, the contents of your most ancient writings . . . are less thesaurus of the entire Jewish religion, and therefore too of ours . . . Moses . . . is five hundred years earlier than Homer. . . .

In the following chapter he holds the verity of Scriptures because the predictions in them have come true:

"While we suffer the calamities, we read of them in the Scriptures; as we examine, they are proved." If this is true, the doctrines contained in them are also reliable. The Rule of Faith, beyond which man cannot go, contained in the Bible

was set down by the Apostles. (Cf. Apology, chap. 39; De Praescriptione Haereticorum, chap. 13-14.) In this respect Tertullian, because of Marcion's opposition, agrees with Irenaeus who also based the canon upon the apostolicity of the books<sup>1</sup>

Tertullian presents the purpose of the Bible in the eighteenth chapter of the Apology, saying:

But, that we might attain an ampler and more authoritative knowledge at once of Himself and of His counsels and will, God had added a written revelation for the behoof of every one whose heart is set on seeking Him, that seeking he may find, and finding believe, and believing obey.

In the brief consideration of De Praescriptione Haereticorum in the chapter on Gnosticism, it will be remembered that Tertullian forbids the use of the Scriptures in the refutation of heresy. In these cases one uses tradition and antiquity; by the way, it is because of Gnosticism that these have such an exalted position in Tertullian's system.<sup>2</sup> The reason for this, as will be remembered, is that the heretics reject and abuse Scripture as they see fit; therefore, it is useless as an argument against them. (De Praescriptione Haereticorum, chaps. 26 & 14.) Tradition will have

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<sup>1</sup>A. C. McGiffert, "Early and Eastern," A History of Christian Thought (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, c.1932), p. 154.

<sup>2</sup>E. DePressense, "Heresy and Christian Doctrine," The Early Years of Christianity, translated by A. Harwood (New York: Nelson & Phillips, n.d.), p. 421.

some weight because of its antiquity and, in those days, this meant a great deal. This appeal to tradition is, according to Neander, "der Keim des Gegensatzes zwischen dem Protestantischen und Katholischen"<sup>3</sup>. This is true; even today this is one of the main points of difference between these two church bodies. The appeal to tradition elevated the hierarchy to its present-day high position. These men are the only people qualified to judge whether a tradition is correct or false; they alone can interpret a tradition.<sup>4</sup>

Tertullian uses the term "sacrament" very loosely as do the other Latin Fathers. He applies it to an oath, and also to any symbolic action of sacred import; "any external rite having an internal or sacred meaning." A sacrament, then, becomes a covenanted channel of divine grace<sup>5</sup>.

The first sacrament is Baptism. Tertullian is the earliest writer on Baptism; in fact, his book, De Baptismo, is the only Ante-Nicene work on the subject.<sup>6</sup> Much of this tract is devoted to the ritual. There are also references to Baptism in many of the other writings of Tertullian.

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<sup>3</sup>A. Neander, Antignostikus, Geist des Tertullianus (Berlin: Ferd. Duemmler's Buchhandlung, 1849), p. 42.

<sup>4</sup>DePressense, op. cit., p. 426.

<sup>5</sup>J. Morgan, The Importance of Tertullian in the Development of Christian Dogma (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1928), p. 127.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 164.

Baptism is preceded by repentance, and it is necessary for salvation. In De Baptismo, chap. 12, he states: "Without Baptism, salvation is attainable by none." Tertullian continues by refuting the argument raised against the necessity of Baptism. He states that the only thing capable of supplanting Baptism is martyrdom. (De Baptismo, chap. 16)

What is the effect of Baptism? Through Baptism a person receives the forgiveness of sins, receives once again the image of God, and is regenerated. He states: After speaking of the unction applied after Baptism

In the same way as the act of Baptism itself too is carnal, in that we are plunged in water, but the effect spiritual, in that we are freed from sin. (De Baptismo, chaps. 7,1; De Poenitentia, chap. 6)

Thus man will be restored for God to His "likeness," who in days bygone had been conformed to the image of God; (the "image" is counted (to be) in his form: the "likeness" is his eternity;) for he receives again that Spirit of God which he had then first received from His afflatus, but had afterward lost through sin. (De Baptismo, chap. 5; De Poenitentia, chap. 36)

Tertullian ascribes the power of Baptism to the water which an angel has influenced. Today we too ascribe the reception of forgiveness and regeneration to Baptism.

The form for administering Baptism is set forth in Adversus Praxeam, chapter 26. The baptized was immersed three times as the Baptismal formula was pronounced. The Baptized were not to bathe for a week. There were many other customs; such as vigils, fasting, laying on of hands,

anointing with oil, etc., which will not be considered here.

The administrant of Baptism was usually a bishop, or priest, or deacon; if none were available it could be administered by anyone (De Baptismo, chap. 17). The favorite time for Baptism was Easter or Pentecost (De Corona Militis, chap. 3). This is just a brief sketch of some of the Baptismal customs of Tertullian's day. Tertullian, in De Baptismo, chap. 15, absolutely refuses to accept heretical Baptism.

A question which is still causing much discussion today is Infant Baptism. Tertullian did not exactly reject infant Baptism, but deferred it until the child came to a personal knowledge of Christ. He, also, advocated the deferment of Baptism for people until after marriage so that if they fell into unchastity the sin could be forgiven in Baptism. In De Baptismo, chapter 18, he states:

And so, according to the circumstances and disposition, and even age, of each individual, the delay of Baptism is preferable; principally, however, in the case of all children.

Even sponsors are in danger of losing salvation if the child leaves Christianity; why is this necessary? In reply to the command of Jesus, "Forbid them not," he states:

Let them "come", then, while they are growing up; let them "come" while they are learning, while they are learning whither to come; let them become Christians when they have become able to know Christ.

The children will not exercise caution over worldly matters;

therefore, we should not rush them into the remission of sins.

Tertullian does not provide us with a wealth of information on the Eucharist. In most instances he only presents a few customs, and there is very little concerning doctrine. The Sacrament was administered very early in the morning from the hands of the priest. The people were very careful not to allow any portion of the bread to fall to the ground and received it standing at the Lord's Altar (De Orations, chap. 14; De Corona Militis, chap. 3). The kiss of peace usually accompanied the Sacrament. The people would often take the Sacrament home and use it at a later time or just before meals. (De Oratione, chap. 14; Ad Uxorem, chap. 5, book 2)

Tertullian says very little concerning the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, especially the benefits. He apparently does not connect much benefit to it. Usually he speaks of it in order to defend this rite in the eyes of the pagans, for at this time it was still the prevailing custom that only Christians witnessed the Celebration. He tells us that the Sacrament was instituted by the Lord in De Corona Militis, chapter 3, saying: ". . .the sacrament of the Eucharist, which the Lord both commanded to be eaten at meal-times, and enjoined to be eaten by all alike."

Apparently Tertullian had Calvinistic tendencies because he speaks of a figurative Christ being present in the Sacrament. This is propounded in Adversus Marcionem, book 4,

chapter 40, saying:

Then, having taken the bread and given it to His disciples, He made it His own body, by saying, "This is my body," that is, the figure of my body . . . and wine is an ancient symbol for blood. (cf. Adversus Marcionem, book 1, chap. 14; book 3, chap. 19.)

Tertullian also speaks in terms of a Real Presence in the Sacrament. He speaks of "feeding on the fatness of the Lord's body, that is, on the Eucharist." (De Pudicitia, chap. 9): and in De Resurrectione Carnis, chap. 7: "of our flesh feeding on the body and blood of Christ, in order that our soul may be fattened of God." (Cf. Adversus Marcionem, book 3, chap. 7; Adversus Judaeos, chap. 14.)

In these two sets of passages there is seeming contradiction in Tertullian's thought, which is difficult to resolve. Scholars are divided along the lines of their church affiliations. Roman Catholics find transubstantiation. Lutherans find the Real Presence. Calvinists find the figurative body. The same arguments are used on both sides. I think that a person can make a case both for the Real Presence and for the figurative body.

## CHAPTER X

### THE CHURCH

In Chapter 13 of De Praescriptione Haereticorum, Tertullian sets forth the Rule of Faith, which is essentially the Creed with a few added remarks. This Rule of Faith has been taught by Christ, and it has been transmitted to us through the apostles and the churches which they have founded; therefore, it is impossible for man to go beyond this statement of faith. The test for a church, then, is whether it teaches the apostolic doctrines and derives its origin from them. If there are teachings which are contrary to apostolic teaching, there is no church. In Tertullian's mind the church is the sole repository of the faith and has derived its divine origin and authority from Christ and the apostles. The function of the church is to preserve the faith and the first or original traditions<sup>1</sup>.

In De Praescriptione Haereticorum, chapter 21, he says:

. . . that no others ought to be received as preachers than those whom Christ appointed.  
. . . Nor does the Son seem to have revealed Him (the Father) to any other than the apostles, whom He sent forth to preach--that, of course, which He revealed to them. Now, what that was which they preached--in other words, what it was which Christ revealed to them--can, as I must here likewise

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<sup>1</sup>J. B. Bethune-Baker, An Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine to the Time of the Council of Chalcedon (London: Methuen & Co., 1903), p. 360.

prescribe, properly be proved in no other way than by those very churches which the apostles, both viva voce, as the phrase is, and subsequently by their epistles. If, then, these things are so, it is in the same degree manifest that all doctrine which agrees with the apostolic churches--those moulds and original sources of the faith must be reckoned for truth, as undoubtedly containing that which the (said) churches received from the apostles, the apostles from Christ, Christ from God.

Because of this the many churches "comprise but one primitive church (founded) by the Apostles, from which they all (spring)." (Chap. 20.)

The authority given to the church is then delegated to the pastors. According to Morgan, Tertullian is the first who expressly advances sacerdotal claims on behalf of the Christian ministry, but he at the same time emphatically affirms the universal priesthood of believers.<sup>2</sup> At this point Tertullian's writings are somewhat mixed up and contradictory, for there is both a distinction, and no distinction, made between clergy and laity.

In the Apology, chapter 39, it appeared that the president or presiding officer of the church was chosen because of old age. That Tertullian believed in a sacerdotal class is derived from the fact that he denounces the heretics because they bestowed orders on anyone without regard to their qualifications, and they even allowed a layman to function

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<sup>2</sup>J. Morgan, The Importance of Tertullian in the Development of Christian Dogma (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1928), p. 122.

as a priest, and permitted artificers of idols to enter the ministry (De Praescriptione Haereticorum, chap. 40; De Idolatria, chap. 7). It is not permissible for a clergyman to contract a second marriage; but do not think a layman can. This also implies a distinction. In De Fuga In Persecutione, chapter 11, Tertullian distinguishes between major and minor Christians which may be a distinction between clergy and laity.

He also bears witness to the distinction between clergy. He <sup>challenged?</sup> changed the heretics with neglect of this distinction. (De Praescriptione Haereticorum, chap. 41). In De Baptismo, chapter 11, he enumerates bishops, priests, and deacons; of which the bishop is superior because this office is of apostolic institution (De Praescriptione Haereticorum, chap. 32). Just what the difference in office was, Tertullian does not expressly say.

From what has just been said, the conclusion can be drawn that Tertullian had a high regard for the clergy, but after he left the church this regard left him. He then began to emphasize the universal priesthood, as was noted in the chapter on Montanism this is one of its contributions to theology. The spiritual man, the one possessing the Holy Ghost, constitutes the church, not a number of bishops, for the Spirit works through the spiritual man. These people possess the Office of the Keys and can fulfill all functions of the ministry. They have the Spirit; they are the church.

For the very Church itself is, properly and principally, the Spirit Himself, in whom is the Trinity of the One Divinity--Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (The Spirit) combines that Church which the Lord has made to consist in "three." And thus, from that time forward every number (of persons) who may have combined together into this faith is accounted "a Church," from the Author and Consecrator (of the Church). And accordingly "the Church," it is true, will forgive sins: but (it will be) the Church of the Spirit, by means of a spiritual man; not the Church which consists of a number of bishops. For the right and arbitrament is the Lord's, not the servant's; God's Himself, not the priest's. (De Pudicitia, chap. 21; cf. De Poenitentia, chap. 10; De Fuga In Persecutione, chap. 14)

It can be seen from this that Tertullian holds both the Roman Catholic principles and the Protestant principles in his conception of the Church. The first is prominent in his early writings; the second in his later writings; therefore, either side can use him in support of its doctrine.

## CHAPTER XI

### ESCHATOLOGY

But the operation of death is plain and obvious: it is the separation of body and soul. (De Anima, chap. 51.)

Where does the soul abide until it is reunited with the body? This is an important question to Tertullian because of the views propounded by the prevalent philosophies of his day. Tertullian's answer is that the soul goes to Hades or Paradise. Paradise is apparently merely an aspect of Hades which is the abode of the soul until the general resurrection. A believer receives a foretaste of the glorious heavenly abode; an unbeliever receives a foretaste of the misery of his future abode. Therefore, heaven and hell are merely a continuation of this intermediate state.<sup>1</sup>

Every person must first go to this intermediate place. The one exception to this rule is the martyrs who are immediately received into the blessed abode. Because they have sealed their faith with their own blood, this special privilege is extended, and they become the first to really experience the blest of the heavenly home. (De Anima, chap. 55; De Resurrectione Carnis, chap. 43.)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John, Bishop of Bristol, The Ecclesiastical History of the Second and Third Centuries (London: Griffith Farrer & Co., n.d.), p. 172.

<sup>2</sup>W. G. T. Shedd, A History of Christian Doctrine (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1877), II, 401.

Tertullian believed that the body would rise from the dead; in fact, he wrote De Resurrectione Carnis in defense of this fact. Because Christ rose from the dead we, too, must come forth from the grave. The same body which is in the world will be restored; however, many of the members of the body will have different functions, and it will be perfect in every respect. (Chapters 38, 57, 60.)

Tertullian, also, postulates another reason for the resurrection. Because of the coming judgment there must be a resurrection of the body; for only the body can be judged, because it has incurred the wrath of God, it has committed the evil. Therefore, it would be an act of injustice for God to judge people without the flesh. Tertullian states:

For it will be impossible to pass sentence except on the body, for what has been done in the body. God would be unjust, if any one were not punished or else rewarded in that very condition, wherein the merit was itself achieved. (Adversus Marcionem, book V, chap. 12.)

After judgment the person is permanently consigned to his reward. All men will not be saved. (Adversus Marcionem, book I, chap. 24.) Punishment or bliss will be eternal. (De Anima, chap. 33.)

The blooming period of Millenarianism was between 150 and 250; however, this never became part of the catholic creed.<sup>3</sup> Tertullian's description of the Millennial Kingdom

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., II, 392.

is found in Adversus Marcionem, book 3, chapter 24. The prophecies which the Jews apply to the restoration of their nation actually refer to the thousand-year reign of the Church on earth. The "divinely-built city of Jerusalem" will descend because Christians have citizenship in heaven, according to prophecy this will be manifested before the rule begins. The Kingdom, in Tertullian's day, was very near because in Judea people saw a city suspended from the sky for forty days. The resurrection of the saints will precede the establishment of the Kingdom; however, this will be a progressive resurrection according to the deserts of the person. The most saintly will be first; then the more saintly; last of all the saintly.

At the close of the thousand year period the general resurrection will take place which will be followed by the "destruction of the world and the conflagration of all things at the judgment." After all vestiges of this world are removed the Christians will be removed to the Kingdom in heaven--there to remain forever in the presence of their Lord.

It is interesting to note that the early church connected the end of the world with the destruction of the Roman Empire. Tertullian believes this and states that the obstacles mentioned by St. Paul to the revelation of the man of sin is the Empire. (De Resurrectione Carnis, chap. 24)

The Christian is, therefore, to pray for the Empire, and not to pray for it; Tertullian is inconsistent here.<sup>4</sup>

(Apology, chap. 32; De Oratione, chap. 5)

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<sup>4</sup>John, op. cit., p. 161.

## CHAPTER XII

### REFLECTION

The chief points of Tertullian's theology are:

1. Tertullian teaches the Trinity, but he subordinates Jesus. His doctrine of the Trinity is, therefore, not completely in accord with Lutheran theology.]
2. [Tertullian teaches a Free Will which makes man capable of choosing the God-pleasing thing. Also, man is, at least partially, able to earn his own salvation through the works which he performs.] Man is able to make satisfaction for his sins and, in this way, can earn God's favor. Tertullian's emphasis on outward penance is not wholly in accord with Lutheran theology.
3. [The fundamental principle in Tertullian's theology is fear of God, and it is based upon obedience to the law. Man's relation to God is a legal matter.]
4. [We are, however, saved through the death of Christ who assumed flesh in order to show mankind the way to heaven and in order to make it possible for God to deal with man.]
5. [The Bible is God speaking to man. All doctrine must be based upon it; in fact, this is the test-stone of whether a church is true or not.]
6. [The doctrine of Baptism is not in accord with Lutheran theology because of the deferment of Infant Baptism.]

He has a Calvinistic tendency in his doctrine of the Lord's Supper.

7. [The doctrine of the church is orthodox, but he places much emphasis upon the hierarchy especially in his pre-montanistic period.]

8. [His eschatology is in accord with Lutheran theology except in respect to the Millennium and the abode of the dead.]

9. Tertullian's theological system is fine and it contains many good points, but it is not wholly in accord with Lutheran theology.] *Concl.*

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