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DEFENDING TERTULLIAN'S ORTHODOXY:

A STUDY ON THIRD CENTURY CHRISTIANITY

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# ABSTRACT

Scholars have attempted to place Tertullian into two or three distinct schools of thought. Some, such as Pope Benedict XVI, state that Tertullian turned his back on the church. Others, like Andrew McGowan, posit a more complex timeline.  McGowan claims Tertullian left the church only to return at a later date.   The reason for such speculation was Tertullian's interest in the Montanist, a second to third century heretical group.  The goal of this study is to provide sufficient evidence that Tertullian never made the complete move to Montanism and never separated form the church of Carthage.  A careful analysis of Tertullian's rule of faith, theology and the variances between Asia Minor and North African Montanism will provide the proof to support this claim.  It will become apparent that Tertullian's interest in the Holy Spirit and a rigorous faith life were not enough for him to abandon the church he dearly loved.

# INTRODUCTION

## Statement of Problem

The question arises in the mind, why another study on Tertullian? After all, hasn't the second century theologian been studied enough? The short answer is no; the long answer requires more explanation. Tertullian (c. 160-c. 225) stands as a man who has been researched extensively, yet the academic opinion of Tertullian remains at a crossroads. Does this proponent of early Trinitarian thought deserve to be honored for his orthodoxy, or should he be tried and condemned as heretic for his involvement in Montanism? Depending on the theological, and to a certain point, the denominational faith background of the researcher, the outcome will result in either condemnation or praise. Pope Benedict XVI has made his opinions known in a Wednesday homily, which was part of a larger study of the church fathers. In this message, he honors Tertullian for his great impact on the universal church, but chides him for his inability to maintain his faith within the confines of the Catholic Church.

> This great moral and intellectual personality, this man who made such a great contribution to Christian thought, makes me think deeply. One sees that in the end he lacked the simplicity, the humility to integrate himself with the Church, to accept his weaknesses, to be forbearing with others and himself. When one only sees his thought in all its greatness, in the end, it is precisely this greatness that is lost. The essential characteristic of a great theologian is the humility to remain with the Church, to accept his own and others' weaknesses, because actually only God is all holy. We, instead, always need forgiveness.[1]

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[1] Pope Benedict XVI, *Church Fathers: From Clement of Rome to Augustine,* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 46.

These words by the current Pope demonstrate sufficient evidence to warrant further investigation. Men for centuries have been at odds with the church; none more justified then Tertullian. This is evident through a careful examination of his writings.

In studying Tertullian, there is a danger of reading him outside of his time period. Tertullian does not stand as a precursor to the protestant reformation, nor as a forbearer of the fundamentalist movement. Two reasons mark this understanding as impossible. The Catholic Church as an organization was in its fledgling years during Tertullian's period. The church universal at the time of Tertullian's writing was still the persecuted church. This persecution becomes evident in a large majority of Tertullian's writings, as many are apologetic in nature. The second issue arises from the supremacy of the North African church in the time of Tertullian. While Rome has often been regarded as the birthplace of the Catholic Church, it can be argued that North Africa provided some of the foremost scholars of the Patristic period. Tertullian heads a list that is quickly followed by Cyprian (c. 195-258) and ended with Augustine (354-430). Readers must often be reminded that "catholic" simply means universal.[2]

Those who argue for Tertullian's orthodoxy often do so at the point of providing conditions. McGowan writes, "At times there seem to have been two Tertullians. In at least one sense there really were; although historians have sometimes tried to understand the complex figure of the first major author in Latin Christianity by conflation with a near-contemporary jurist of the same name, this Tertullian was not the same person as

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[2] There are two understandings of the word "catholic". The first refers to the church universal and is often designated by a lower case "c"; the second refers to the Roman Catholic Church and is designated by a upper case "C". A majority of the "catholic" reference in this paper will be about the universal church as I argue that Tertullian lived and wrote in a pre-Catholic time.

that ancient legal authority cited in the Digest."[3]  If one were to parse Tertullian's

writings it would become evident that there were at least three distinct periods.  First, it is

obvious by the way most of his contemporaries and others have portrayed him, that he

truly had an orthodox period.  Cyprian, as recorded by a biographer, asked his assistant

daily to read the Master, by which he affectionately referred to Tertullian.[4]  Augustine

mentions him during his study *On Heresies*, a great representation of heretics during the

early stages of the church.  When assessing Tertullian, Augustine does not lump him into

the same category as the Montanist, or the Cataphrygians as he referred to them.

Tertullian's second stage is marked by an adherence and interest in the Montanist

movement, which often seems to be how he is solely remembered.  This period of his life

is puzzling as it poses questions about Montanism as a whole, and specifically on

Tertullian's faith.  Finally, there seems to be a stage at the end of Tertullian's life where

he splits with the Montanist, which is often overlooked.  This final period is shrouded in

mystery as the researcher is left to ponder whether Tertullian returned to the church or

spearheaded his own movement which history has labeled the Tertullianist.  The

strongest reference for the Tertullianist is found in Augustine's writings:

> The Tertullianists are named after Tertullian, whose many eloquently written
> works are still read.  These people were gradually dying out toward our time, but
> were able to survive in their remaining numbers in Carthage.  When I was present
> there a few years ago, as I think you too remember, they were completely gone.
> The remaining few entered the Catholic Church and handed over their basilica,
> which is now quite famous, to the Catholic Church.[5]

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[3] Andrew McGowan, "Tertullian and the 'Heretical' Origins of the 'Orthodox' Trinity," *Journal of Early Christianity* 14 (Fall, 2006), 437.

[4] Jerome, *On Illustrious Men*, 53.

[5] Augustine, *On Heresies*, 76.2.

Tertullian's impact on the early church is amazing, as Tertullian represents one of the original lay-writers of the church. As one focuses on the first few centuries of the Christian church, the writings are masterpieces of clergy, monks, bishops and other ordained men of the church. Historically, this is a position that Tertullian never held. It has been speculated that he was a man of higher education. There is also a possibility that his family was of the higher class in Roman society. Many of these speculations seem plausible as Tertullian was afforded the ability to die of old age without ever facing martyrdom.

The early church father Jerome (c. 347-420), an extensive writer, seems to be the only one who questions Tertullian's position as laity.

> Tertullian the presbyter, now regarded as chief of the Latin writers after Victor and Apollonius, was from the city of Carthage, in the province of Africa, and was the son of a proconsul or Centurion, a man of keen and vigorous character, he flourished chiefly in the reign of the emperor Severus and Antoninus Caracalla and wrote many volumes which we pass by because they are well known to most. I myself have seen a certain Paul an old man of Concordia, a town of Italy, who, while he himself was a very young man had been secretary to the blessed Cyprian who was already advanced in age. He said that he himself had seen how Cyprian was accustomed never to pass a day without reading Tertullian, and that he frequently said to him, *"Give me the master,"* meaning by this, Tertullian. He was presbyter of the church until middle life, afterwards driven by the envy and abuse of the clergy of the Roman church, he lapsed to the doctrine of Montanus, and mentions the new prophecy in many of his books.[6]

However, research has shown that Jerome had a habit of embellishing the facts, and was quite creative in inventing them if he lacked the proper facts. An argument against Jerome is the lack of evidence in other writings. Once again in Augustine's work *On Heresies* there is no mention of Tertullian as a presbyter. In addition, Cyprian does not mention Tertullian holding any office in Carthage. Finally, the strongest argument comes from Tertullian's own writings. If Tertullian were in fact a presbyter, it would have

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[6] Jerome, *On the Lives of Illustrious Men*, 53.1.

increased the validity and strength of his arguments; however Tertullian never states this in his writings.

This study sets out to examine the facts as they present themselves and to offer a verdict regarding Tertullian's place in church history. The axiom: "there are no brute facts, just interpretations regarding church history", is hard to accept as dates represent brute facts. However, it does become acceptable when one considers that the development of historical theology is based upon the early writers interpretations of scripture. The "facts" presented through this study will hopefully provide significant evidence to demonstrate Tertullian's orthodoxy. Through study of Tertullian's writings, alongside his contemporaries and those who shortly followed him, perhaps it will be possible to provide the lens through which the modern scholar should regard him. Often it is from the perspective of the historical Catholic Church that the early church fathers are examined. This is dangerous as it relies on theology that was not yet firmly developed. There is also the danger of reading reformation theology into the third century. Church history did not happen in a bubble, nor did doctrine immediately appear. This paper then becomes, not only a study on Tertullian, but also a study on the development of historical theology as a whole.[7] Tertullian's own writings weigh heavily on the establishment of theology as the corpus of his writings is only surpassed by the writings of Augustine. Tertullian stands alongside Ireneaus in developing the rule of faith, a statement found in his writings that became the standard against which Tertullian weighed all aspects of faith. It would be safe to say that the rule of faith stood for

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[7] To clarify the "lens" in which I view church history. I do not go to agree with Ehrman's assessment that states winners write history (this will be addressed further in the chapter on the rule of faith). I do believe that the best way to interpret church history is by reading what was written closest to the time frame. In regards to Tertullian, this is why I would consider interpretations by Cyprian, before considering one by Jerome or one by the current Pope.

centuries as the criterion of how all aspects of faith were measured. This rule of faith continued to provide guidance for Tertullian even during his darker years of Montanist leanings, if a Montanist time period can be established, and perhaps may have provided the last and final blow that led to Tertullian parting from that movement.

## Statement of Purpose

In this research, I will assert that Tertullian's Montanism was not a move toward heresy. Tertullian's writings never deviated from an orthodox understanding of Scripture; there was no divergence from his theology. In fact, Tertullian's rule of faith provided the test for all other aspects of his faith. This doctrinal statement is the standard against which all other Tertullian writings should be weighed. Tertullian viewed the Triune God in the same way throughout his writing. His desire was for a more rigid praxis of his faith, something he felt was lacking in other geographical areas, especially Rome.

To establish this view of Tertullian, a few questions will need to be answered through research. First, what did orthodoxy look like in the late second and early third century? This will lead to a brief analysis of the history of Christian orthodoxy. Tertullian's writings were to Christians in North Africa. Tertullian had a well-documented history of disagreement with the church in Rome, and it could be possible that Tertullian also had a difference of opinion with the church in Alexandria and Asia Minor. The question of orthodox beliefs will provide a background to Tertullian's writings and provide a picture of how far from center (if at all), in regards to theology, he actually moved.

Second, what are Tertullian's own theological positions?  There will be a need to examine his writings, which were accepted by the church, those that provide much of the information about his theology and understanding of Christian doctrine.[8]  Once Tertullian's theology can be established, a distinction must be made between the time period of Tertullian's orthodox writings and his supposed Montanist writings.  I believe a pattern will be revealed that establishes orthodoxy as theological and apologetic in scope, while his Montanist writings will relate primarily to the praxis of faith.

The final question is what is Montanism?  As stated above, it is hard to do a quality study of Montanism due to the lack of primary source historical information from the movement.  However, there has been increasing new information available due to recent and ongoing archeological studies at places like Phrygia, the accepted birthplace of the movement.  This will also require a determination if there was a difference between North African Montanism under Tertullian's influence and Asia Minor Montanism.

### Statement of Importance of Problem

Tertullian, while not being the first, provides strong arguments for both orthodox faith and the development of theology.  He protected the faith from such heretics as Marcion, the Gnostics, Praxeas and others.  Tertullian's early goal was to establish an orthodox understanding of faith and defend it from attacks, both within and outside of the church.  Defending the church against outside force is evident in his apologetic writings such as his *Apology*, in which Tertullian shows the example of Christians as law abiding citizens and questions Rome's desire to persecute and kill Christians.

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[8] This criterion will be based on both an immediate acceptance, and what current scholarship believes represents the division in his writings.

Defining how one looks at Tertullian heavily influences how one views early Christianity as a whole. Is the label "schismatic" more appropriate than "heretic", or is it a mere concession on the part of academics in recent times to give credence to views that diverged from Catholic dogma? Recent studies in historical theology have begun to portray heretical views in a positive light, almost pining romantically for the heretical view to be accepted as correct. This can be found in Eric Osborn's study on Tertullian where he seems at times to present the case that Tertullian's argument is less eloquent then Marcion's. Osborn points out that many of Tertullian's argument seem to be hurried and lacking cohesion in places. "Yet Marcion wins on the interval between creation and cross because Tertullian's jealous God who smites and heals, kills and makes alive, humbles and exalts and creates evil and makes peace, does not reflect the love of the cross which is, for Tertullian, the world's sole hope."[9] While this is demonstrated in Osborn there is evidence of the similar leanings in Bart Ehrman and even in popular fiction like *The Di Vinci Code*. Tertullian frequently argues for orthodoxy of both his time and the future. Osborn points out that Marcion's arguments seem to be more academic and would perhaps gain more support in today's time. Marcion's primary argument is that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament obviously could not be the same person. His manner of getting to such an ideology is based on goodness of Christ in conflict with divine judgment in the Old Testament. Osborn concludes by stating that Tertullian's writings are a testament to early Christian writings, not solely based on the conclusion, but rather by following the argument leading

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[9] Eric Osborn, *Tertullian: The First Theologian of the West* (London: Cambridge, 1997), 102.

up to it.[10]  Osborn views many of Tertullian's other writings in the same manner by pointing to the fallacies and strengths in his arguments.

While current academic writings seek to present fact, they have also developed a knack to interject their own theories in an attempt to label the early church as a suppressive organism.  A study on Tertullian casts an interesting light on this, as one can point to his involvement in the earliest establishment with negativity and likewise proclaim triumphantly his move toward heretical Montanism.

The importance of a study like this is to provide a better understanding of not only Tertullian, but also the world in which he wrote.  One must be willing to look at the culture and geography of Tertullian's day to understand North Africa and Tertullian.  It can be argued that North Africa, especially in Tertullian's time, has always been an open and receptive landscape to prophecy and spiritual gifts, which are key elements to Montanist thought.  With this understanding it may be plausible to establish how one should regard Tertullian's contribution to the church universal.

### Statement of Position on the Problem

There are two views that are accepted by academics on the nature of Tertullian today.  One is that Tertullian was, if not a heretic, at least a schismatic and should be viewed outside the walls of the orthodox church.  The other view holds that Tertullian never truly left the catholic church.  I agree with the view that Tertullian never truly left the catholic church. In fact there is evidence that his views continued to develop and strengthen the North African church in the third century.

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[10] Ibid, 115.

The largest problem that arises in a study on Tertullian is to recognize one's own

bias. A paper written by Tertullian prior to the Protestant Reformation would show the

picture of a heretic at odds with the bishop of Rome and therefore the Catholic Church as

a whole. However, the development of the Reformation leaves a reader with a different

view of Tertullian. Perhaps even the title pre-reformer could be used to describe

Tertullian. While the goal is to present facts and careful interpretations I must

acknowledge my own evangelical theological perspective.[11]

## Limitations

When researching Tertullian it is easy to become overwhelmed with many

different theological questions. Due to the space and time allotted for this study, I will be

focusing primarily on the areas of theology that directly reflect Tertullian's supposed

Montanist leanings and those that significantly establish his theological orthodoxy. For

this reasoning, I will not be spending much time on Tertullian's polemical works.

## Research Method

The primary scope of this research will focus on Tertullian's own writings and

key secondary sources that address this topic. The research for this thesis will be

conducted by the literature review method. This will require the review of books, articles

and other media elements to arrive at a proper conclusion. Tertullian's writings will be

researched through *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* volumes III and IV. The bulk of research

will lead to a careful analysis of Tertullian's own writings prior to engaging

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[11] I agree with Paul Hartog use of evangelical in *The Contemporary and the Early Church*, when he states: "Throughout my essay, I use 'evangelical' broadly of those historical movements rooted in the Reformation that have emphasized personal conversion through faith in Christ as proclaimed in the gospel (the 'evangel')."

contemporary volumes on the topic at hand.  In addition, there will be an emphasis placed

on the development of historical theology, of which Tertullian was a key developer.  The

key to understanding historical theology is to understand that the church did not develop

in a vacuum.  To better understand Tertullian's writings one must be aware of the

external and internal influences that affected his works.  This will be limited to the first

three centuries of the church, and the development and growth of the Montanist

movement.


**Outline for Thesis**


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V. CONCLUSION


**Divisions of Chapters**


Chapter one will provide a background to the question of orthodoxy in regard to the time during which Tertullian wrote. It will provide details on the rule of faith as established by both Tertullian and Ireneaus, and will focus on any known Creeds and Canons of this period.

Chapter two will examine Tertullian's Theology. There will be an emphasis placed on developing an understanding of Tertullian's theology. This chapter will question whether a unified theology can be established by Tertullian's writings. There will be significant time spent on Tertullian's involvement in establishing the orthodox understanding of the Trinity.

Chapter three will consider the development of Montanism in North Africa during Tertullian's day. This chapter will lay the groundwork for establishing the extent of heresy in the Montanist movement. Differences between Montanism in North Africa and the beginnings of Montanism in Phrygia will be examined.

The conclusion will provide the answer to the question whether Tertullian should be considered orthodox, schismatic, or heretic.

# CHAPTER ONE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RULE OF FAITH

## Introduction

An examination of Tertullian demonstrates a great divide between current orthodoxy and orthodoxy of the late second and early third century. In this chapter, I will argue for Tertullian's orthodoxy, as he is credited with added much to the development of historic Christian thought. Tertullian and Irenaeus both contributed to development of the *regula fidei*, or the rule of faith. This quasi-creedal formula was utilized by the early church as the measure for all statements of faith, especially in the first to third century.

Several aspects of the early church must be considered. First, tradition will need to be considered as a viable source of transmission. Second, the accepted writings of Scripture, which existed during Tertullian's time, must be established. This does not allude to a set canon, but it is possible to determine which New Testament books were accepted and which were not as early as Tertullian's time. Modern readers must not take for granted that, unlike Tertullian, they had a complete corpus of Scripture available to them. This is a dangerous assumption. The full twenty-seven books accepted as the current New Testament were not recognized until the late fourth century. Finally and most extensively, the rules of Tertullian and Irenaeus will need to be reviewed to determine exactly what orthodox faith meant to both of them. Hartog asserts, "One must certainly consider the historical distance between the contemporary church and the early church. We cannot, we ought not, and we must not seek a direct transfer from the early

church to today without due regard for the differing historical context."[1] A succession of the rule of faith from Irenaeus to Tertullian and to the other church fathers must be obvious to prove the validity of their rule of faith as universal.

## Tradition

In addition to Scripture, tradition is a valuable tool for helping us understand the patristic period. It provides the theological background to the religious world which included the early church fathers. Contemporary evangelicals often overlook tradition as an idea practiced only by Catholics and Episcopalians. D.H. Williams stands out as a voice in the wilderness amongst evangelicals as a whole and specifically Baptists. In his desire to clarify the need to study tradition by describing an experience at his first church:

> … I once was informed with kindly intentions by a deacon of the first church I pastored that the study of the early creeds and councils is something Catholics and Episcopalians do, but true Christians need only uphold the complete authority of the Bible and the empowering of the Holy Spirit in a personal way.[2]

The application of Williams' point is that the church cannot overlook its tradition.

A disconnect is formed between the early church and the church of the Reformation. Williams states that the church as suffering from amnesia. He writes, "Too many within church leadership today seem to have forgotten that the building of foundational Christian identity is based upon that which the church received, preserved, and carefully transmitted to each generation of believers."[3] The importance of tradition

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[1] Paul Hartog, "The 'Rule of Faith' and Patristic Biblical Exegesis," *Trinity Journal* 28 (Spring 2007): 82.

[2] D.H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: a Primer for Suspicious Protestants* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 1.

[3] Ibid, 9.

was not lost on the writers of the New Testament.  For instance, Paul writes, "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you…"[4]  J.N.D. Kelly promotes a verbal transmission form of tradition: "In present-day idiom 'tradition' denotes the body of unwritten doctrine handed down in the Church, or the handing down of such doctrine, and so tends to be contrasted with Scripture.  In the language of the fathers, as indeed of the New Testament, the term conveyed this idea of transmission, and eventually the modern usage became regular."[5]

Peter Toon provides a tying together of tradition and scripture that he feels is often overlooked by modern church historians.  "... but most modern church historians, including Pelikan, would see it as rather too simple, since there never has been the Bible without the church – or, to put it another way, the Bible has always accompanied by some context and tradition of understanding."[6]  The tradition that Williams discusses is not the current tradition that states, "that is how it has always been done."  Rather this tradition provides the doctrinal foundation of the church and therefore should not be overlooked.  Tradition to Williams is what unites all Christians.  "It is clear from the early Fathers that 'catholic' meant much more than 'universal' or 'general.'  The word is a Latinized version of the Greek *katholicos,* which can be translated as 'whole' (or as an adverb, *katholou,* 'entirely,' 'completely')."[7]  Protestant churches often overlook this element of tradition.

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[4] 1 Cor. 11:23, ESV.  (All verses quoted are from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise stated.)

[5] J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper One, 1978), 30.

[6] Peter Toon, "The Development of Doctrine: An Evangelical Perspective", *Reformed Journal* 3(March, 1973), 8.

[7] Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition,* 225.

Clement of Rome (d. c. 100) provides the groundwork for tradition:

> The apostles have preached the Gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ;
> Jesus Christ has done so from God. Christ therefore sent forth by God,
> and the apostles by Christ. Both these appointments, then, were made in
> an orderly way, according to the will of God. Having therefore received
> their orders, and being fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus
> Christ, and established in the word of God, with full assurance of the Holy
> Ghost, they went forth proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand.
> And thus preaching through countries and cities, they appointed the first-
> fruit of their labours, having first proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops
> and deacons of those who should afterwards believe. Nor was this any
> new thing, since indeed many ages before it was written concerning
> bishops and deacons.[8]

The rule of faith became a way for this tradition to be verbalized in a concise way,
especially in a period that suffered from illiteracy and a lack of resources for widespread
distribution of Scripture.

**Scripture**

While this study pertains to the rule of faith, which was spread primarily through
oral means, there is an element where the rule, tradition and Scripture intersect to provide
the basis of faith for the early church. Hippolytus (c. 170-c. 236) states it in this manner:

> The oars of the ship are the churches. The sea is the universe (*kosmos*), in which
> the church, like a boat on the open sea, is shaken but does not sink, because she
> has Christ on board as an experienced navigator. At the center she has the prize
> of the passion of Christ, carrying with her his cross. Her prow points towards the
> east, and her stern to the west. The two steering oars are the two Testaments. The
> sheets are tight, like the love of Christ, which sustains the church. She carries
> water on board, like the washing of regeneration. Her white sail receives the
> breath of the Spirit, by which believers are sealed. The sailors stand to port and to
> starboard, just like our holy guardian angel.[9]

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[8] Clement, *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, 42. (All references to early church fathers
are from Roberts, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* vol. I-V, unless otherwise stated.)

[9] Alister E. McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007),
80-81.

Hippolytus provides evidence that as early as the third century there was, despite not being complete, an accepted New Testament that provided direction for the church.

Tertullian was the first to pen the name *Novum Testamentum* in regards to the new covenant. He writes:

> Now the Apostle John in the Apocalypse, describes a sword which proceeded from the mouth of God as "a doubly sharp, two-edged one." This may be understood to be the Divine Word, who is doubly edged with the two testaments of the law and the gospel – sharpened with wisdom, hostile to the devil, arming us against the spiritual enemies of all wickedness and concupiscence, and cutting us off from the dearest objects for the sake of God's holy name.[10]

While Tertullian does not utilize all twenty-seven books of the New Testament, the books he does use are also listed in the finalized canon. Geoffrey Dunn points to Tertullian's extensive use of Scripture and also provides a list of books not mentioned by Tertullian:

> Most books of both the Old and New Testament, including the Apocrypha or deutero-canonical books, were cited by Tertullian. The exceptions are Ruth, Obadiah (only Melito of Sardis among first- and second-century Christian writers made use of these two, 1 Chronicles, Esther, 2 Maccabees, 2 John and 3 John. He was aware that *Enoch* was not accepted as belonging to the Hebrew Bible by some because something written supposedly before the flood could not have survived.[11]

Dunn also notes that the only writings of Tertullian to not make extensive use of Scripture were his apologetic writings. Tertullian's audience was composed of pagans and Roman authorities, so he did not appeal to Scripture in these works.[12]

The rule of faith and tradition were used in support of Scripture, not in place of it. This does not verify that complete sets of Scripture were circulating in the second or even

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[10] Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 3.14.

[11] Geoffrey D. Dunn, *Tertullian* (New York: Rutledge, 2004), 19.

[12] Ibid.

third century.  It does show that there were writings considered authoritative at an early

point in the development of the church.

**The Need for a Rule**

Use of the term "rule" reflects the measure against which orthodoxy must be

weighed.  Many creedal formulas were developed in the early church.  They were echoes

of Scripture and further formulated by the earliest church fathers.  Many church fathers

from Ignatius of Antioch (d. 110) to the fourth century church leaders articulated that the

official creeds provided quasi-creedal statements, which served as the example for

accepted creeds.  Köstenberger and Kruger assert:

> The Rule appeared as early as *1 Clement* 7.2 in an undeveloped form and
> is found in virtually all the orthodox writings of the Patristic era from
> varied geographical locales including Irenaeus (c. 130-200), Tertullian (c.
> 160-225), Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215), Origen (c. 185-254),
> Hippolytus (c. 170-236), Novation (c. 200-258), Dionysius of Alexandria
> (c. 200-265), Athanasius (c. 296-373), and Augustine (c. 354-430).[13]

Rules were necessary to Paul and Peter in the Biblical corpus as they defended the

orthodoxy of Jesus Christ against several heretical groups and schismatics that were

challenging the original understanding of Christ during the first several decades of the

Church.

The Gnostics were chief amongst the heretics in the first two centuries.

Gnosticism, which will be discussed more shortly, has developed an almost cultic

following in recent years as several pseudo-gospels have been found and attributed back

to the movement.  Gospels such as those of Judas, Mary, Thomas and others offer what

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[13] Andreas Köstenberger and Michael J. J Kruger, *The Hersey of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture's Fascination with Diversity has Reshaped our Understanding of Early Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 56.

some would have the contemporary church believe as orthodox but suppressed by the Catholic Church.

The rules that were developed to combat heresy were not full doctrinal treatises; rather they provided a simple way of showing orthodox understanding against the primary points established by each heretical group. Köstenberger and Kruger assert, "Although the church fathers never explicitly spelled out for posterity the rule's specific theological content, there is relative consensus among scholars that it served as a minimal statement concerning the church's common faith."[14] There was a need for unity in the early church. It can be well established through the writings of the early church that there was a battle brewing from outside which they had to be conscious of, that of the Roman persecution. At the same time, there was a battle waging within the confines of Christianity from groups attempting to change Christianity central tenants.

The early church fathers believed Scripture and tradition should be accessible to all people. The Gnostics believed the true understanding of the Gospel was hidden from most and only made available to the truly enlightened. The earliest rules were formed in response to this belief. Mitros adds, "Against the contemporary Gnostics, who claimed to possess access to a secret extra scriptural tradition, Irenaeus insisted on the importance of public oral tradition preached and transmitted in the churches founded by the apostles and commissioned by them to preach the gospel."[15] The rule of faith became the litmus test for the early church against most, if not all, heretical leanings.

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[14] Ibid, 57.

[15] Joseph F. Mitros, "The Norm of Faith in the Patristic Age," *Theological Studies* 29 (Summer 1968), 454.

**Early Rules of Faith**

While Irenaeus and Tertullian provided the earliest and most developed forms of the rule of faith, it should be noted that this rule did not suddenly appear at the end of the second century. The rule of faith began as far back as the Apostles' writings in the New Testament. These "rules" are often overlooked as they are simply read as part of Scripture, but once identified the form and function of these passages become evident in the writings.

The apostolic tradition has been held by Catholics, but neglected by Protestants. Bryan Litfin states, "The interpretive value of *tradition* has for too long been associated only with Roman Catholicism. It is time for Protestant evangelicals to reclaim their own proper understanding of Tradition."[16] From this understanding, it can be established the rule of faith was important to the early church and paramount to the Apostolic Succession doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. Authors through the ages record the ebb and flow of Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy is defined as: "right belief, as opposed to heresy or heterodoxy."[17] Litfin continues on to define the rule of faith, "... *a confessional formula (fixed neither in wording nor in context, yet following the same general pattern) that summarized orthodox beliefs about the actions of God and Christ in the world.*"[18] Tertullian did not create, nor did he duplicate orthodoxy. Tertullian's gift to Christianity,

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[16] Bryan Litfin, "Learning from the Patristic Use of the Rule of Faith" in *The Contemporary Church and the Early Church: Case Studies in Resourcement,* ed. Paul Hartog (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 79.

[17] J.I. Packer, "Orthodoxy" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 875.

[18] Litfin, 79.

in addition to that of Ireneaus, was a sound doctrinal statement that was both easy to

memorize and addressed the key points of Scripture in a written form.

By establishing what the rule of faith represented, it is also possible to determine

what the rule of faith was not: a detailed theological statement.  The concern of the rule

of faith was to establish an orthodox understanding of the personage of Jesus Christ,

primarily on key doctrinal points.  The early church fathers did not elaborate upon the

key theological understandings of soteriology and ecclesiology.  Instead, a majority of

works can be identified as adding to and establishing the rule of faith and were concerned

primarily with proper Christology.  It was often an argument about Christ that led to

heretical offshoots.

In recent years, the skeptical stance of scholars, such as Bart Ehrman, has led to a

resurgence of emphasis on the Gnostic writings and other marginalized heretical sects of

the early church.  Their thesis is relatively simple: the "winners" in the early church

period decided on the canon of Scripture.

> One of the reasons these views now seem obvious, however, is that only one set
> of early Christian beliefs emerged as victorious in the heated disputes over what
> to believe and how to lie that were raging in the early centuries of the Christian
> movement.  These beliefs, and the group who promoted them, came to be thought
> of as  "orthodox" (literally meaning,  "the right belief"), and alternative views –
> such as the view that there are two gods, or that the true God did not create the
> world, or that Jesus was not actually human or not actually divine, etc. – came to
> be labeled 'heresy' (= false belief) and were then ruled out of court.  Moreover,
> the victors in the struggles to establish Christian orthodoxy not only won their
> theological battles, they also rewrote the history of the conflict; later readers, then,
> naturally assumed that the victorious views had been embraced by the vast
> majority of Christians from the very beginning, all the way back to Jesus and his
> closest followers, the apostles.[19]

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[19] Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make it Into the New Testament,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1-2.

The crux of their argument is that orthodoxy was not established until the creedal

developments of the late fourth century. Köstenberger provides this summary of

Ehrman's thoughts:

> Its worth is entirely independent of the fact that its compiler was in some respects
> a radical critic who claimed on the basis of his researches into second-century
> Christianity that there was no common set of "orthodox" beliefs in the various
> Christian centers but rather a set of disparate theologies, out of which the
> strongest (associated with Rome) assumed the dominant position and portrayed
> itself as true, or "orthodox."[20]

These assertions often provide an incomplete conclusion. The fact is orthodox faith can

be demonstrated through Scripture and a series of incomplete thoughts passed down

through the ages.[21]

This form of apostolic tradition can be seen in the words of Paul as he gives

directions for the Lord's Supper. "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to

you…"[22] Paul as an eyewitness to the risen Jesus Christ, but not a follower prior to the

crucifixion, must have received his teaching on the communion from another source.

Paul utilizes a creedal formula in his writing to present important doctrinal statements

about Jesus:

> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he
> was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but
> made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of
> men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming
> obedient to the point of the death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has
> highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so

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[20] Köstenberger, 14.

[21] While a succession of Apostolic belief can be established through the first few centuries of the church, it does not mean that one should readily accept the theory of Papal succession as established through a lineage of Peter. As the research is conducted on the rule of faith, and the passing of Apostolic tradition is established, it is interesting and important to point out that much of what is passed down is established through the writings of Paul and John.

[22] 1st Corinthians 11:23.

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.[23]

These creedal formulas represent ideas that were passed down in an oral tradition, often sung or memorized.

The establishment of an overarching theme of the Bible and the rule of faith shows that they were not meant to be viewed as separate and equal entities, but bound together within the early church.

> There are those who see the difficulties inherent in the idea of an "inner canon" and try to avoid them using such an expressions as 'material centre'… What they usually have in mind, however, is some passage or group of passages which 'really' express and grasp this central matter; so that indirectly we are back again with a sort of inner canon. Such a 'material centre' might be compared to the 'rule of faith' to which the early church appealed; but the rule of faith was not a kind of inner canon, it was rather a summary of the essence of Scripture, properly interpreted.[24]

The rule of faith made Scripture more readily available by providing a summarization that was easily memorized and could be recited where copies of Scripture were unavailable. This can also be seen with the Apostles Creed, which provides evidence of the earliest creedal formula outside of Scripture. "The best summary of early Christian beliefs is what we call The Apostles Creed, to this day repeated every Sunday in most churches. It was not written by the Apostles – in spite of its title – but appeared first as a baptismal confession in second-century Rome."[25] The earliest form is often referred to as the "Old Roman Creed". The exact date of this Creed is not established and the form that is utilized in many churches today is a later variant from the fifth century.

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[23] Philippians 2:6-11.

[24] F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture,* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1988), 260.

[25] Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 54.

Clement provides an early picture of a rule that reads similar to the writing of

Paul in Scripture:

> Let us attend to what is good, pleasing, and acceptable in the sight of Him who formed us. Let us look steadfastly to the blood of Christ, and see how precious that blood is to God, which having been shed for our salvation, has set the grace of repentance before the whole world. Let us turn to every age that has passed, and learn that, from generation to generation, the Lord granted a place of repentance to all such as would be converted to Him. Noah preached repentance, and as many as listened to him were saved. Jonah proclaimed destruction to the Ninevites; but they repenting of their sins, propitiated by God by prayer, and obtained salvation, although they were aliens to the covenant of God.[26]

Through Clement's writing it becomes evident that these rules, while developing a

concise statement of belief, were also beneficial in spreading a correct understanding of

the Scriptures. Clement utilizes two Old Testament figures to outline the importance of

repentance, but by choosing Noah and Jonah he provided an example of what happens

when repentance is ignored. The utilization of these two key figures also provides the

reader with an understanding of Clement's audience who would have been familiar with

the Old Testament and other Jewish writings.

Ignatius of Antioch wrote another rule, although it appears in an incomplete form.

While it is not stated that Ignatius is presenting a rule of faith, it can be ascertained that

he is establishing core beliefs of the church in the context of a pastoral letter. These pre-

rules provide a developmental stage of the rule.

> Stop your ears, therefore, when any one speaks to you at variance with Jesus Christ, who was descended from David, and was also of Mary; who was truly born, and did eat and drink. He was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate; He was truly crucified, and (truly) died, in the sight of beings in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth. He was also truly raised from the dead, His Father quickening Him, even as after the same manner His Father will so raise up us who believe in Him by Christ Jesus, apart from whom we do not possess the true life.[27]

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[26] Clement, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* 7.

[27] Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Trallians,* 9.

By observing Ignatius' work and the other church fathers it is evident that some form of creedal understanding of Jesus' life was being circulated as early as the beginning of the second century.

This creedal understanding becomes evident in Justin's (103-165) *First Apology* where he outlines his understanding of Jesus Christ and it reads very similar to a creed.

> Our teacher of these things is Jesus Christ, who also was born for this purpose and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judaea, in the time of Tiberius Caesar; and that we reasonably worship Him, having learned that He is the Son of the true God Himself, and holding him in the second place, and the prophetic Spirit in the third, we will prove. For they proclaim our madness to consist in this, that we give to a crucified man a place second to the unchangeable and eternal God, the Creator of all; for they do not discern the mystery that is herein, to which, as we make it plain to you, we pray you to give heed.[28]

Justin provides a defense for Christianity on the basis of the crucifixion while including important historical information. He also introduces a Trinitarian model in his statement by referencing Christ as second and the Spirit as third to God as primary.

The earliest forms of the rule of faith create the background for Irenaeus and Tertullian who take the earliest models and mold them into a substantial statement of faith. This statement in turn defines and reiterates what orthodoxy should look like. Holding to the famous words of G.K. Chesterson, "I will not call it my philosophy; for I did not make it. God and Humanity made it; and it made me."[29] Orthodoxy was not the establishment of one or two people, nor did its development happen in a "think tank" of great intellectuals. A careful reading and hermeneutical study of Scripture will establish

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[28] Justin, *First Apology,* 13.

[29] G.K. Chesterson, *Orthodoxy*, (New York: Simon and Brown, 2010), 15.

orthodoxy.  It was the *kerygma*[30] of the early church fathers, one that can be shown

through an early tradition of the church.

**Irenaeus**

Irenaeus (c. 130-c. 200) was bishop of Lyon in the mid to late second century.  He

offered the first foray into the establishment of a holistic rule by which faith is

understood.  Irenaeus utilized the doctrine stated in Scripture and passed down by the

apostles.  Irenaeus' work was referred to as the "rule of truth."  This rule held to the

importance of tradition in the understanding of Scripture.  It is important to point out that

Irenaeus and Tertullian both established their rules to directly combat the growing heresy

of Gnosticism.

Gnosticism was one of the earliest heresies of the church.  It sought to establish a

hidden truth of Scripture that was equivalent to true knowledge (*gnosis*).  This

knowledge, much like modern Eastern Religions (i.e. Buddhism, Confucianism and

elements of Hinduism), was only obtained by the enlightened.  Irenaeus steadily fought

against Gnosticism, referring to the fact that the teachings of Christ were not hidden, but

accessible to all.  Mitros stated, "Against the Gnostic appeal to a secret tradition, Irenaeus

and Tertullian emphasized the importance of this public oral tradition, whose authenticity

and apostolicity were guaranteed by the apostolic succession of bishops, to whose care

the gospel was entrusted, and by the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church."[31]

The establishment of tradition was essential for the early church.  "First, it is

important to note from the outset that the literacy rate in the broader Greco-Roman world

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[30] The proclamation or teaching of Christian truths.

[31] Mitros, 453.

during the first century was only about 10-15 percent of the population."[32]  The literacy

rate was not confined to one class but reached across all classes.  This should not cause

concern on the accuracy of faith that was established by the church.  Instead it points to a

different method of sharing the Gospel, one that relied on oral tradition and

memorization.  "Thus the fact that most Christians were illiterate is not at all unusual and

certainly not grounds for being suspicious of whether they really placed a high value on

texts.  Contrary to the assumptions of our modern Western mindset, it was possible for

groups, such as early Christians, to be largely illiterate and yet still have quite a

sophisticated textual culture."[33]

Irenaeus' ministerial lineage was impressive.  Irenaeus was a student of Polycarp,

who in turn was a student of the apostle John.  A distinct line of apostolic tradition was

established and honored in the early church.  This placed Irenaeus in a prominent place

among his peers.  "Irenaeus bequeathed to later generations two very significant works

which make him one of the most important theologians of the early church."[34]  The

greater of the two books, entitled *Against Heresy*, presents his rule of truth.  The

establishment of the "rule of truth" is seen in two locations.  One reads as follows:

> The Church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the
> earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith: [She believes]
> in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all
> things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became
> incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the
> prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin,
> and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven
> in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and His [future] manifestation

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[32] Köstenberger, 193.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Bryan Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 83.

from heaven in the glory of the Father "to gather all things in one," and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race, in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Saviour, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, "every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess" to Him, and that He should execute just judgment towards all; that He may send "spiritual wickednesses," and the angels who transgressed and became apostates, together with the ungodly, and unrighteous, and wicked, and profane among men, into everlasting fire; but may, in the exercise of His grace, confer immortality on the righteous, and holy, and those who have kept His commandments, and have persevered in His love, some from the beginning [of their Christian course], and others from [the date of] their repentance, and may surround them with everlasting glory.[35]

While Irenaeus does not set this apart as an identifiable rule it is obvious from the wording that this was meant to establish the fundamentals of the faith for the early church.  Irenaeus lack of an identifiable rule shows that this formula was already accepted and utilized by the church as a whole.  This demonstrates evidence of apostolic tradition early on in the church.  It became the standard by which all other statements were weighed against.  In a practical sense, this countered the gnostic statements that Irenaeus outlined earlier in his writing:

> They maintain, then, that in the invisible and ineffable heights above there exists a certain perfect, pre-existent Aeon, whom they call Proarche, Propator, and Bythus, and describe as being invisible and incomprehensible. Eternal and unbegotten, he remained throughout innumerable cycles of ages in profound serenity and quiescence. There existed along with him Ennoea, whom they also call Charis and Sige.[36]

While the purpose of this writing was to directly combat heresy, it is easy to see that his rule became applicable to all aspects of faith.

Irenaeus' rule sheds light on some key elements of doctrine.  First, he makes it abundantly clear that, there was already an understanding of the Triune God, though the

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[35] Irenaeus, *Against Heresy,* 1.10.1.

[36] Ibid, 1.1.1.

doctrine itself would continue to be developed and articulated. Second, Irenaeus presented God as the creator of all things. Third, Irenaeus established that Jesus was born for the salvation of mankind, died, was resurrected and ascended. Irenaeus also developed the way in which man and God interact.

The "rule of truth" made the doctrine plain to all how to directly combat Gnosticism, which claimed that a secret truth was only available to those enlightened by God. Gnosticism was counter to Irenaeus' understanding of how truth worked. "Against the Gnostics appeal to a secret tradition, Irenaeus and Tertullian emphasized the importance of this public oral tradition, whose authenticity and apostolicity were guaranteed by the apostolic succession of Bishops, to whose care the gospel was entrusted, and by the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church."[37]

There are key points of distinction between Tertullian's "rule of faith" and Irenaeus' "rule of truth". Irenaeus' writings, which predate Tertullian's, provide the a beginning for understanding the development of orthodoxy. Irenaeus' establishment of the rule was to be utilized in conjunction with Scripture. "Against the contemporary Gnostics, who claimed to possess access to secret extra scriptural tradition, Irenaeus insisted on the importance of public oral tradition preached and transmitted in the churches founded by the apostles and commissioned by them to preach the gospel."[38] For something to be orthodox in the eyes of Irenaeus, it was important to prove that it was not a new idea. Due to illiteracy in the early church, the idea of an oral tradition was of greater importance to the establishment of orthodoxy.

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[37] Mitros, 453.

[38] Ibid, 454.

**Tertullian**

Tertullian was surely an innovator in early Christian theology. It can be further stated that Tertullian saw it as his responsibility to be a corrector of faith. Tertullian's method is not as developed as Jesus' equation in the Gospels, but as it is argued further Tertullian's chief arguments were reactionary in nature. Tertullian was the first to utilize the word *Trinitas* in regards to the Trinity. However, his largest contribution to the church is his expansive rule of faith. Tertullian's verbalization of the chief points of Christianity are preserved in three of his writings, *Prescription Against Heretics, Veiling of Virgins,* and *Against Praxeas*. Tertullian's use of the rule of faith was twofold. First, he utilized it as his defense for the faith. Tertullian pointed out the major conflicts with heretical groups and utilized the rule to show the true nature of Christianity. Second, the rule became the measure of faith against which Tertullian would weigh his own orthodoxy. This is important as one follows Tertullian's interest in Montanism. Each of Tertullian's rules must be weighed against each other to see where the correlations lie and if any diversity is seen. It is helpful that Tertullian's writings represent at least two distinct periods.

Tertullian was very clever in his writings and pointed out many fallacies of other thinkers. Perhaps one of his best-known quotes, "What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem,"[39] demonstrates his ingenuity. Tertullian firmly believed the Bible was to be utilized only by the church, specifically only those who adhere to the rule. This becomes evident in his early writings against Marcion and other Gnostic heretics. Bryan Litfin states, "Their words may have been borrowed from the Bible, but when they were

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[39] Tertullian, *The Prescription Against Heretics,* 7.

compared to the handy summary provided by the Rule, it became obvious that the heretics' story was not the biblical one."[40]

Tertullian's first declaration of the rule of faith is in *The Prescription Against Heretics*, where he makes a case against heretics and states that this rule was known about and taught for years:

> Now with regard to this rule of faith – that we may from this point acknowledge what it is which we defend – it is, you must know, that which prescribes the belief that there is one only God, and that He is none other than the Creator of the world, who produced all things out of nothing through His own Word, first of all sent forth; that this Word is called His Son, and, under the name of God, was seen 'in diverse manners' by the patriarchs, heard at all times in the prophets, at last brought down by the Spirit and Power of the Father into the Virgin Mary, was made flesh in her womb, and, being born of her, went forth as Jesus Christ; thenceforth He preached the new law and the new promise of the kingdom of heaven, worked miracles; having been crucified, He rose again [on] the third day; (then) having ascended into the heavens, He sat at the right hand of the Father; sent instead of Himself the Power of the Holy Ghost to lead such as believe; will come with glory to take the saints to the enjoyment of everlasting life and of the heavenly promises, and to condemn the wicked to everlasting fire, after the resurrection of both these classes shall have happened, together with the restoration of their flesh. This rule, as it will be proved, was taught by Christ, and raises amongst ourselves no other questions than those which heresies introduce, and which make men heretics.[41]

In this writing, Tertullian provided not only the established understanding of orthodoxy, but also gave pointed responses to a particular heresy.

Tertullian's second articulation of the rule of faith occurs in *Against Praxeas*. Praxeas (d. 217) was a bishop in Rome who Tertullian had charged with being a Monarchian. Tertullian's rule in this writing was more specific than the rule utilized in *Against Heretics*. Here Tertullian attempts to defend the equal importance of God the Son and God the Spirit to the Monarchian understanding of God the Father.

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[40] Hartog, 85.

[41] Tertullian, *The Prescription Against Heretics,* 13.

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 οικονομια, 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 Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Ghost. That this rule of faith has come down to us from the beginning of the gospel, even before any of the older heretics…[42]

This argument against Sabellianism or Monarchianism is outlined in a strong manner. It is also within this context that Tertullian states, "Praxeas did a twofold service for the devil at Rome: he drove away prophecy, and he brought in heresy; he put to flight the Paraclete, and he crucified the Father."[43] Tertullian utilizes the rule of faith to combat heresy showing God the Father and God the Son while the same are still separate.

Tertullian's final utterance of the rule is the most intriguing of the three. *On the Veiling of Virgins* can easily be established as one of Tertullian's Montanist[44] writings. This writing raises the principle question regarding Tertullian's orthodoxy. If this particular rule diverges from the first two in doctrinal content and emphasis; at that point it could be shown that Tertullian did in fact move away from the church, and likewise orthodoxy.

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[42] Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 2.

[43] Ibid, 1.

[44] The level to which Tertullian adhered to Montanism is the overall scope of this study. This is covered in a later chapter in which the evidence leads to a distinction between Asia Minor Montanism and North Africa Montanism.

The rule of faith, indeed, is altogether one, alone immoveable and irreformable; the rule, to wit, of believing in one only God omnipotent, the Creator of the universe, and His Son Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate, raised again the third day from the dead, received in the heavens, sitting now at the right (hand) of the Father, destined to come to judge the quick and dead through the resurrection of the flesh as well (as of the spirit).[45]

Tertullian perhaps provides the best argument for consistency across his rules of faith in *On the Veiling of Virgins* when he states, "This law of faith being constant, the other succeeding points of discipline and conversation admit the 'novelty' of correction; the grace of God, to wit, operating and advancing even to the end."[46]  This example shows the delineating stream from Tertullian's early arguments for an orthodox faith to his latter concerns of orthodox praxis.  It was not merely enough to know the correct doctrines and to understand faith; one must also practice a holy life.  A transition takes place in Tertullian's writings that is reminiscent of James 1:22, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."  It echoes the call of holy living from Leviticus 11:44, "For I am the Lord your God.  Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy."[47]

Throughout Tertullian's three proclamations of the rule of faith it is obvious that Tertullian does not stray from the key components of faith.  His statements provide a picture of a creedal model that would have been easy for the early church to memorize and utilize in daily life.  This would have made Tertullian's writings profitable for weeding out heresy in the early church.

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[45] Tertulian, *On the Veiling of Virgins*, 1.

[46] Ibid.

[47] This thought of orthodoxy and orthopraxy will be developed in further detail in subsequent chapters.

**Later Rules of Faith**

While it is not the purpose of this discussion to provide every aspect of the rule of faith, it is important to document that these writings were in large supply. This should provide the reader with understanding and relief; what has been passed down through the ages does in fact establish a paper trail of orthodoxy. It was not simply one person who provided a rule that was accepted by everyone. Several writers reached an agreement over a period of 300 years until the creation of the first church wide creeds and councils.[48] This chapter verifies that there was in fact a succession of the rule that started with Scripture and was passed down through the years. "The 'rule of faith' was a summary of the tenets held in common by the churches of apostolic foundation: it is closely related to what is called 'apostolic tradition.'"[49] This 'apostolic tradition' differs from the Catholic dogma of 'apostolic succession'; tradition points to a belief held by the church at different stages of existence.

**Conclusion**

The *regula fidei,* which is derived from Scripture, provided the groundwork of orthodox belief in the first four centuries of the Christian church. The rule of faith appears in its earliest existence as part of *1 Clement* and maintains a trail throughout patristic writings until at least Augustine.

> Of course references to the Rule did not disappear overnight. J.N.D. Kelly speaks of a "movement toward fixity," culminating in the establishment of the authoritative Old Roman Creed and its daughter creeds in the fourth and fifth centuries. Nevertheless, the earlier, more fluid concept of the *regula fidei*

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[48] In fact, it could be equally argued that the Nicene and Chalcedon Creed are re-utterances of these rules of faith.

[49] Bruce, 150.

continued to be found among the patristic writers.  For example, Augustine mentioned the Rule approximately fifty times in his writings, and he used it theologically much like his forerunners.[50]

With Tertullian and Irenaeus providing the groundwork, and the most complete example of the rule, one must consider how to view each rule throughout the course of history. Irenaeus' legacy is secure.  Tertullian's is not.  Tertullian became entrenched in the "new prophecy" (Montanism) and so historians debate his legacy.  With a firm understanding of the rule of faith, the next element of Tertullian to consider will be his contribution to historical theology as a whole.

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[50] Hartog, 94.

# CHAPTER TWO: TERTULLIAN'S THEOLOGY

## Introduction

Tertullian provides a detailed study in church doctrine unrivaled by many of the early church fathers.  Establishment of a detailed theology from Tertullian's writings is a truly daunting prospect.  One was aptly developed through Eric Osborn's work *Tertullian: First Theologian of the West*.  However, Osborn's work focuses more on the philosophical development of Tertullian's theology rather than the theology itself.  Osborn states: "As first theologian of the West, he is one of those second-century writers who both absorb elements of philosophy into theology and also illuminate the relation between the New Testament and later creeds."[1]  This is a good starting point but does not provide a large enough scope to cover a proper study of Tertullian's theology.

Tertullian's theology is better understood when one fully comprehends his philosophical background.  His statement, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem," should also be examined to determine how Tertullian's philosophical background shapes his understanding of God and his overall theology.  A theology can be developed through Tertullian's writings.  However, it must be stated that developing Tertullian's theology is not the primary objective of this study.  The purpose is to provide a framework of Tertullian's orthodoxy.  Therefore, the goal of this chapter will be to develop a theological line to determine whether Tertullian's theology moved from what could be considered the orthodox center.  The use of the term center is to clarify that there was in fact an accepted, at least minimal, elements of the faith.  In a modern sense C.S. Lewis

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[1] Eric Osborn, *Tertullian: First Theologian of the West* (New York: Cambridge, 1997), xv.

terms this *Mere Christianity,* the brute facts that establish an orthodox understanding of

faith.  The stream that develops and flows through history is seen through Scripture,

generalized through the rule of faith and eventually clarified through the creeds.  Thomas

Oden points to the supremacy of North Africa in this development and provides a clear

understanding of what apostolic tradition truly means.  "Orthodoxy in a classic Christian

sense is right remembering in accord with the apostle's teaching.  Orthodoxy understands

itself as enlivened by the ongoing work of the Spirit that helps believers remember the

New Testament witness reliably in the light of ecumenical consensual exegesis."[2]  This

tradition was the basis of the rule and as stated in the previous chapter, the rule of faith

provides the guidelines for all of Tertullian's work.


**Athens and Jerusalem**

When Tertullian makes the famous statement, "What indeed has Athens to do

with Jerusalem?"[3], it is often interpreted to mean that philosophy and theology do not

mix.  The backdrop of the early church fathers is bathed in a strong adherence to a

particular philosophical school, whether it is Aristotle, Socrates or in the case of

Tertullian, Stoicism.  Tertullian does not divorce his theology from philosophy, but does

point out the severe limitations to philosophy:

> These are "the doctrines" of men and "of demons" produced for itching ears of
> the spirit of this world's wisdom: this the Lord called "foolishness," and "chose
> the foolish things of the world" to confound even philosophy itself.  For
> (philosophy) it is which is the material of the world's wisdom, the rash interpreter
> of the nature and the dispensation of God.  Indeed heresies are themselves
> instigated by philosophy.  From this source came the aeons, and I known not what
> infinite forms, and the trinity of man in the system of Valentius, who was of

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[2] Thomas Oden, *How North Africa Shaped Christianity,* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 127.

[3] Tertullian, *The Prescription Against Heretics*, 7.

Plato's school. From the same source came Marcion's better god, with all his tranquility; he came of the Stoics. Then, again, the opinion that the soul dies is held by the Epicureans; while the denial of the restoration of the body is taken from the aggregate school of all the philosophers; also, when matter is made equal to God, then you have the teaching of Zeno; and when any doctrine is alleged touching a god of fire, then Heraclitus comes in.[4]

A careful reading of Tertullian's writing shows the development of further statements that are intended specifically for an argument against heretics. Tertullian does not come across as being strongly opposed to philosophy, but perhaps a qualifier is needed here. Tertullian's words elicit a feeling that he is against those that attempt to make their theology fit their philosophy instead of allowing their understanding of God to shape their philosophy. There is a deeper meaning that can be seen here, which must be considered in light of Tertullian's desire for purity. The philosophers that Tertullian mentions by name were driven by the pagan gods of Rome. In Tertullian's Christianity there was no room for darkness to hide the light.

Tertullian continues his debate:

What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? What between heretics and Christians? Our instruction comes from "the porch of Solomon,' who had himself taught that 'the Lord should be sought in simplicity of heart.' Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition! We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ Jesus, no inquisition after enjoying the gospel! With our faith, we desire no further belief. For this is our palmary faith, that there is nothing which we ought to believe besides.[5]

The truth of Tertullian's argument becomes clear. This is not a statement intended to be anti-philosophical. The problem lies in one being told that it is not enough to have faith; one must also defend their belief by utilizing philosophy. Tertullian's concerns were certainly founded as Gnosticism utilized philosophy as the primary idea behind their

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[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

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understanding of Christ.  The early church was heavily guarded against allowing false doctrine to develop.  This can be seen even in the development of the canon of Scripture. When Marcion developed his canon, it led the early church fathers to debate whether Paul's writings should be included in the canon.  "He (Marcion) totally rejected the Old Testament for its portrayal of God.  He likewise repudiated major segments of the New Testament, accepting only portion's of Luke's Gospel and only ten Epistles of Paul."[6] Tertullian's most polemical works were written in reaction to heresy, not to develop doctrine.  Tertullian's theology is developed out of his apologetics.

Osborn states,  "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?  Everything, provided you travel (economy class) by way of Ephesus and disembark at Jerusalem."[7]  That is to say that Tertullian did not reject philosophy, rather the place of philosophy in the understanding of Scripture.  "For Tertullian there are three stages in the development towards the Christian gospel: natural religion, philosophy and Judaism."[8]  This may have been a reaction to heresy being created through the use of philosophy.  Gerald Bray states that a large element of confusion is driven by Tertullian's writing style.  "His style is caustic and highly memorable though unfortunately his words have often been distorted or taken out of context by readers unable to appreciate his deep sense of irony.  For example, he never said, 'I believe because it is absurd,' and his famous 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?' was not meant to be read as an anti-philosophical remark."[9]  The

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[6] James Eckman, *Exploring Church History* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), 22-23.

[7] Osborn, 47.

[8] Ibid, 45.

[9] Gerald Bray, "Tertullian", *Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy,* ed. Bradley Green (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010), 65.

reader is required at times to weed through Tertullian's sarcastic nature in order to

understand his theology.

## Scripture

Tertullian's adherence to Scripture is seen though most of his writings and

provides the basis for his theology. The only place where it is evident that Tertullian did

not utilize Scripture was in his writings to secular audiences. Although Scripture was

helpful in presenting his argument, he found it difficult to utilize Scripture when it came

to arguing with heretics. Heikki Råisånen states:

> The problem remained that the writings that eventually gained canonical status
> were heterogeneous in themselves and open to different interpretations.
> Tertullian admitted that exegesis of Scripture was of little help in the battle with
> heretics, as the latter was very clever in their use of Scripture itself seemed to
> offer material that lent itself to exploitation by them. He ended up by trying to
> deny heretics the right of arguing from Scripture.[10]

Tertullian believed that it was the responsibility of those who were orthodox to protect

Scripture from heretics. His reasoning seems to stem from the warnings found in the

New Testament. He writes:

> But let us rather be mindful of the sayings of the Lord, and of the letters of the
> apostles; for they have both told us beforehand that there shall be heresies, and
> have given us, in anticipation, warnings to avoid them; and inasmuch as we are
> not alarmed because they exist, so we ought not to wonder that they are capable of
> doing that, on account of which they must be shunned.[11]

In modern terms, Tertullian was warning against arguing with idiots. That is to say, the

hermeneutics that the heretic would utilize would result in Scripture being used out of

context to further a heretical notion. Likewise, Tertullian utilizes the rule of faith

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[10] Heikki Råisånen, *The Rise of Christian Beliefs: The Thought World of Early Christians* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 304.

[11] Tertullian, *The Prescription Against Heretics*, 4.

alongside Scripture in these arguments to show the tradition maintained throughout the church.

Tertullian equally argued that the notion of Scripture was something that was to be understood through tradition.  In addition, tradition was to be protected.  While the idea of a complete canon was to come after Tertullian and as a response to Marcion's canon, it becomes evident in Tertullian's writings that there was indeed a "traditional canon"[12] as early as his writings.

> We are therefore come to (the gist of) our position; for at this point we were aiming, and for this we were preparing in the preamble of our address (which we have just completed), - so that we may now join issue on the contention to which our adversaries challenge us.  They put forward the Scriptures, and by this insolence of theirs they at once influence some.  In the encounter itself, however, they weary the strong, they catch the weak, and dismiss waverers with a doubt.  Accordingly, we oppose to them this step above, all others, of not admitting them to any discussion of the Scriptures.  If in these lie their resources, before they can use them, it ought to be clearly seen to whom belongs the possession of the Scriptures, that none may be admitted to the use thereof who has no title at all to the privilege.[13]

While there may not have been a fully developed doctrine of Scripture as compared to today, it is evident that Scripture was deemed worthy of protection.  Also from Tertullian's writing it becomes evident that Scripture was to be considered the property of the orthodox church.

Scripture in the early church was simply accepted as authoritative.  There was no particular need for a grand statement of inerrancy or infallibility.  They were simply accepted as authoritative based on authorship and apostolic tradition.  The first establishment of a canon, as stated above, was Marcion's canon.  Marcion's canon was

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[12] By traditional canon, I contend that there were an accepted group of books utilized as Scripture by the early church.  These books were not an official canon but operated in a similar sense.

[13] Tertullian, *The Prescription Against Heretics,* 15.

regarded as a mutilation of Scripture and thus heretical, which led to a quick response for a more orthodox position resulting in the Muraturion canon around AD 170.  J.N.D. Kelly points to the use of Marcion's canon as an example of the initiative to develop a canon.  "The significance of Marcion's action should not be misunderstood.  He has sometimes been acclaimed (e.g. by the great German scholar Harnack) as the originator of the Catholic canon, but his is an extravagant point of view."[14]  Kelly goes on to explain that as early as AD 150, the church fathers were already beginning to use Scripture in their writings.  "The Lord's sayings, as the use of them by St. Paul and the early fathers testifies, had been treasured from the beginning, and about 150 we find Justin familiar with all four gospels (the 'memoirs of the apostles', as he calls them), and mentioning their use in the weekly service."[15]  There is even a distinction given between accepted Scripture and other books that were more devotional in nature, i.e. Didache and Shepherd of Hermes.  "A fragment giving the New Testament canon probably of Rome about 200 (the 'Muratorian canon') explains that the Shepherd is good private reading, but as its author was neither apostle nor prophet but a recent writer it is disqualified for admission to the lectionary."[16]  Tertullian seemed to agree with these evaluations.

Tertullian made greater use of the New Testament in his writings.  Gerald Bray states, "It is interesting to note that although he referred to every New Testament book except two (2 and 3 John) as Scripture, he never wrote a commentary on any of them, nor has he left us any sermons."[17]  A comment on this is relatively easy: most historians

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[14] J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1978), 57.

[15] Ibid, 58.

[16] Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 43-44.

[17] Bray, 66.

assert that Tertullian was not a member of the clergy. While it is impossible to determine

Tertullian's "day job", it is noted that he was trained as a lawyer and operated as a

layman. There would be several good reasons for labeling Tertullian as the C.S. Lewis of

his day. However, even this example falls short, as Lewis was not actively involved in

establishing doctrine.

Tertullian's understanding of doctrine was driven by two elements: Scripture and

tradition. Faith could not be understood apart from Scripture. Also, tradition, as argued

in the previous chapter, played a large part in establishing the rule of faith and, in turn,

doctrine. The fifth century father Vincent of Lerins defines orthodoxy as "what has been

believed by everyone, everywhere at all times."[18] This definition also seems to

characterize Tertullian's understanding of orthodoxy. While for other church fathers

there was no distinction between tradition and Scripture, for Tertullian there was an

obvious divide between the two. Turner asserts, "while St. Irenaeus normally links

Scripture and tradition closely together, Tertullian displays a tendency to treat the

argument from tradition as a separate entity."[19] Indeed, Tertullian's own words show this

tendency as at times he appeals to Scripture, while at other times he looks to tradition and

the rule. He writes, "Come now, you who would indulge a better curiosity, if you would

apply it to the business of your salvation, run over the apostolic churches, in which the

very thrones of the apostles are still pre-eminent in their places, in which their own

authentic writings are read, uttering the voice and representing the face of each of them

severally."[20] The "authentic writings" here refers to unedited writings of the Apostles,

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[18] Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitory*.

[19] H.E.W. Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth* (London: A.R. Mowbray & Co., 1978), 313.

showing that Tertullian was willing to accept the source of Scripture as a whole, not the forms that were molded to fit the popular heresy of the day.

Within Tertullian's understanding of Scripture, there is at least one potential problem area. At times, he seems to argue against the reality of a closed canon. This mindset can be attributed to various reasons. Marcion's canon had been established to be a key reason for the slow development of the complete canon in the early church. While Tertullian, Ireneaus and the Muratorian fragment represent an initial response, the full establishment of a recognized canon would develop later. Tertullian's argument against Marcion is extensive and Marcion becomes a key opponent in Tertullian's *The Prescription Against Heretics* and in the five volumes entitled *Against Marcion*. "For since Marcion separated the New Testament from the Old, he is (necessarily) subsequent to that which he separated, inasmuch as it was only in his power to separate what was (previously) united."[21] Tertullian's argument was that the Old Testament and New Testament were unified in the understanding of the church well before the creation of Marcion's canon.

The early church fathers' view of Scripture does not differ from the view of many current evangelical theologians.[22] While not explicitly stated, it becomes evident from the writings of the early church that most held Scripture as authoritative. Geoffrey Dunn states, "Scripture was authoritative for Tertullian. Although he did not write commentaries on biblical books, he used Scripture as his primary source material in

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[20] Tertullian, *Prescrip.,* 37.

[21] Tertullian, *Prescrip.* 30.

[22] One professor teaching on fundamentalism used this as an excuse to use Tertullian's rigid praxis as an example of an early fundamentalist. However, this is a dangerous path to go down, as the establishment of the church is not parallel to the development of fundamentalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

almost every chapter of every work (the only exception being his apologetic works that were designed for pagan readers). In this, he was no different from most other early Christian writers."[23] Tertullian affirms:

> To make up for our delay in this, we bring under your notice something of even greater importance; we point to the majesty of our Scriptures, if not to their antiquity. If you doubt that they are as ancient as we say, we offer proof that they are divine. And you may convince yourself of this at once, and without going very far… While we suffer the calamities, we read of them in Scriptures; as we examine, they are proved.[24]

The term that Tertullian uses is "antiquity". While this is not blatant, it does show that the idea of Scripture for Tertullian and much of the early church also included the Old Testament. The age of Scripture affirms their reliability for Tertullian and shapes his argument against heretics.

Tertullian's use of Scripture also suggest the fact that most books of Scripture were circulating and were available to the second and third century fathers. He also makes the first expansive use of a Latin text, over one hundred years prior to Jerome's *Latin Vulgate*. This raises the question of whether Tertullian translated the Bible into Latin himself or if there was another source available to him.

Tertullian had to face ever-present questions concerning the difference between traditional practices and Scripture. Worship demonstrates the conflict between the two. Bray states, "Tertullian was well aware of the problem created by the use of traditions in worship that had no express Scriptural authority. Tertullian defended these traditions as long as they were customary and could be defended on rational grounds."[25]

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[23] Dunn, 19.

[24] Tertullian, *The Apology*, 20.

[25] Bray, 76.

His use of Scripture can be labeled as orthodox.  His orthodoxy is consistent with his contemporaries and those of the modern age.  He does not diverge from Scripture and where Scripture and tradition disagree, Scripture is superior. Tertullian is explicit in his description that tradition and Scripture are different, while at other times his argument seems to compare them as two sides of the same coin.  Scripture was in a sense a greater, more inspired form of tradition.

## Trinitas

Tertullian's greatest gift to the church was coining the term *Trinitas*, the Trinity. This does not mean the idea of the Trinity had not developed prior to Tertullian's time. Tertullian developed the Latin term *Trinitas* to describe the Trinity, along with developing the theological underpinnings of the Trinity.

Tertullian's development of the Trinity is best seen through his writing *Against Praxeas*.  This polemical work was written against the bishop of Rome and intended to show the irrationality of patripassianism.  Patripassianism was a form of modalism that stated God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit were merely different forms, or modes of the same being.  In fact, this particular heresy was birthed out of a reaction of another heresy. Schaff writes:

> The Roman church, during the episcopate of Eleutherus (177–190), or of Victor (190–202), after some vacillation, set itself likewise against the new prophets at the instigation of the presbyter Caius and the confessor Praxeas from Asia, who, as Tertullian sarcastically says, did a two-fold service to the devil at Rome by driving away prophecy and bringing in heresy (patripassianism), or by putting to flight the Holy Spirit and crucifying God the Father. [26]

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[26] Philip Schaff and David Schley Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

The heresy that Praxeas and others were fighting was the heresy to which Tertullian was historically linked.[27]

The primary debate was over how the aspects of the Trinity functioned. The Montanists or "New Prophecy" as they preferred to be called, argued for a distinct personage of the Holy Spirit. The church in Rome saw the Trinity in a more modalistic nature. This led to one of Tertullian's more famous quotes. "By this Praxeas did a twofold service for the devil at Rome: he drove away prophecy, and he brought in heresy; he put to flight the Paraclete, and he crucified the Father."[28] Stated differently, "He drove out the Paraclete and nailed up the father." This statement shows that the church in Rome could not be looked to for all of the answers in the early church. It also demonstrates that Tertullian was once again engaging in a cause and effect debate. It develops a dichotomy in the understanding of Tertullian's writings: one that focuses on doctrine and one that focuses on discipline.

The treatment of the debate against modalism in *Against Praxeas* gives birth to the belief that Montanist influences helped Tertullian develop his ideas on the Trinity. The strongest argument has been that by this time, Tertullian had already parted with the orthodox church. However, this point is difficult to establish. William Tabernee states, "However, despite the traditional view to the contrary, there is no evidence that Tertullian, or anyone else for that matter, left the official church in Carthage to join a Montanist in that city. In fact there is nothing to suggest that such a separate Montanist

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[27] The establishment and debate for or against heresy is covered in a subsequent chapter.

[28] Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 1.

congregation existed in Carthage."[29]  Respected scholars on both sides hotly contest this

view.[30]

Andrew McGowan argues that Montanist thinking heavily influenced Tertullian.

At the same time, McGowan does recognize that Tertullian's writing is to be highly

regarded for its Trinitarian influence.

> Tertullian's most influential piece of writing on the Trinitarian God, the treatise
> *Against Praxeas*, dates from well into the period of his clear influence from the
> New Prophecy.  Despite its influential place in history of orthodox dogma,
> *Against Praxeas* is characteristically "Montanist," peppered with references to the
> Holy Spirit as "Paraclete," and naming the New Prophets, Prisca, Maximilla, and
> Montanus.[31]

This view of Tertullian's writing is hard to qualify.  First, the use of the word "Paraclete",

while considered Montanist, would have been accepted as it is the term rendered "helper"

in John 16:7-11:

> Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do
> not go away, the Helper will not come to you.  But if I go, I will send him to you.
> And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness
> and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning
> righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer;
> concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

Second, the Montanist influence on Tertullian is seen largely through his praxis of faith.

While it is possible that Tertullian's theology simply developed over time, McGowan

uses this as an argument to defend Montanist influence.  "Many commentators, pursuing

the distinctions already mentioned, have tended to regard the Trinitarian formulations of

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[29] William Tabernee, *Montanist Inscriptions and Testimonia: Epigraphic Sources Illustrating the History of Montanism* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 54-55.

[30] David Rankin provides a convincing argument for Tertullian never leaving the catholic church in *Tertullian and the Church*.  Pope Benedict the XVI argues against this viewpoint, holding to a more traditional view of church history in *Church Fathers: From Clement of Rome to Augustine*.

[31] Andrew McGowan, "Tertullian and the 'Heretical' Origins of the 'Orthodox' Trinity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14 (2006), 440.

*Against Praxeas* as effectively free of such influence. Such conclusions assert more

continuity than change between Tertullian's earlier, non-'Montanist' forays into

Trinitarian discourse and this work."[32] He continues his argument by stating that the

commentators are merely isolating one part of Tertullian's life from another. However, it

would be incorrect to deny the possibility of change in Tertullian's view. It is not

uncommon to see a writer change their view over the corpus of their work, especially

regarding the extent of Tertullian's writings.

  While the influence of Montanism on Tertullian's writing will be further

examined, the views of Modalism need to be properly established before Tertullian's

doctrine of the Trinity can be better understood. This becomes tricky as Modalism is

understood as three different heresies in the early church, all being part of the same

overarching theme: patripassianism, monarchian and the better known Sabellianism.

Some believe that *Against Praxeas* is a thinly veiled response to Sabellius himself.

> This was the view propagated early in the third century at Rome by a certain
> Sabellius, of whose biography and thought so little is actually known that it is
> paradoxical to find the name of this obscure figure as a constant label attached to
> this type of theology, at least in the Greek east. In the west the polemical label
> for it was usually 'Patripassianism', i.e. the doctrine that the Father suffers.[33]

While Tertullian begins the debate against patripassianism, the true debate against

Sabellianism is not concluded until the time of the Cappadocians in the fourth century.

The Cappadocians battled a new heresy in the form of Arianism, which was certainly

related to Sabellianism.

> The answer is that *homoousios* (the sameness of Father and Son in essence) is the
> way Sabellians would justify their claim that the Father was incarnate and
> suffered in the *role* of Christ, therefore this sameness (*homoousios*) had to be

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Chadwick, 87.

denied in 269 when the church was distinguishing the gospel from Sabellianism. However, in 325, when the Arians claimed that Jesus Christ was a different deity from the Father, and thereby denied their substantial identity, this sameness had to be asserted against the Arians' three deites. All of the Trinitarian heresies can be divided between Sabellianism and Arianism, between modalistic unity and tritheistic pluralism, between the "solutions" of the one or of the many.[34]

This view understood God as one person with three modes. One God with three separate masks, duties or modes, represented all that is God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. While this view was highly debated in the early church, it still remains as one explanation of the Trinity by modern pastors. Any time a pastor proclaims the example of the Trinity by using the illustration of himself as father, son, uncle or some other familiar duty, this falls under the heresy of modalism.[35] The difficulty is finding the proper analogy that demonstrates the three in one nature of the trinity.

The initial argument Tertullian provides against Praxeas is that God the Father could not have died on the cross. The words of Scripture are surely changed if God the Father died on the cross. It also equally changes the story of how redemption works. Tertullian argues from Scripture that the Son proceeded from the Father and provides an outline of Scripture that is reminiscent of the rule of faith:

> In the course of time, then, the Father forsooth was born, and the Father suffered, God Himself, the Lord Almighty, whom in their preaching they declare to be Jesus Christ. We, however, as we indeed always have done and more especially since we have been instructed by the Paraclete, who leads men indeed into all truth, believe that there is one only God, but under the following dispensation, or οικονομια as it is called, that this one only God has also a Son, His word, who proceeded from Himself, by who 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

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[34] C. Fitzsimmons Allison, *The Cruelty of Heresy* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1994), 96.

[35] As a commentary on contemporary understanding of the Trinity, the current theological understanding is significantly weaker than the early church as established through Tertullian and the Cappadocian fathers.

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 Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Ghost.[36]

This provides a detailed example of how each member of the Trinity precedes from the former, except the Father who was preexistent. This does not mean that the originating element ceases to exist, but that each has their specific ministry. Hence, the Father sends the Son and likewise the Son sends the Holy Spirit.

The common argument that was raised against the divine "economy" was that Tertullian was developing a tritheism that was contrary to the monotheism to which the early church subscribed. However, if someone were to read his writings closely, they would find that he addresses this misconception.

But keeping this prescriptive rule inviolate, still some opportunity must be given for reviewing (the statements of heretics), with a view to the instruction and protection of diverse persons; were it only that it may not seem that each perversion *of the truth* is condemned without examination, and simply prejudged; especially in the case of heresy, which supposes itself to possess the pure truth, in thinking that one cannot believe in One Only God in any other way than by saying that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are the very selfsame Person. 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, which distributes the Unity into a Trinity, placing in their 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 who these degrees and forms and aspects are reckoned, under the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.[37]

Tertullian begins by establishing this divine economy that can be stated as three persons, one substance. This understanding of the Trinity, established by Tertullian, has

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[36]Tertullian, *Against Praxeas,* 2.

[37] Ibid.

withstood the test of time.  While others have provided better ways to explain it, the overall understanding is this: three equal persons, struck from one substance.

While reading Tertullian's argument against Praxeas, one can begin to develop an understanding of why the Monarchist developed their understanding of modalism.  After all, the concept of the Trinity is difficult to rationalize in regards to monotheism.  "They are constantly throwing out against us that we are preachers of two gods and three gods, while they take to themselves preeminently the credit of being worshippers of the One God; just as if the Unity itself with irrational deductions did not produce heresy, and the Trinity rationally considered constitute the truth."[38]  The problem for Tertullian develops out of the fact that for God the Son (Christ) to be a proper sacrifice for sin, it could not have been God the Father who died on the cross.

Both Protestants and Catholics affirm Tertullian's general Trinitarian formula.  Pope Benedict writes:

> Furthermore, Tertullian takes an enormous step in the development of Trinitarian dogma.  He has given us an appropriate way to express this great mystery in Latin by introducing the terms 'one substance' and 'three Persons'.  In a similar way, he also greatly developed the correct language to express the mystery of Christ, Son of God and true Man.[39]

The general agreement should provide guidance as to how Tertullian should be viewed in light of the historical understanding of the church.

In one sense, Tertullian was not creating a new formula because it already existed in Scripture.  Matthew records Jesus saying, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the **Father** and of the **Son** and of the **Holy Spirit**,

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[38] Ibid, 3.

[39] Pope Benedict XVI, *Church Fathers: From Clement of Rome to Augustine* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 45.

teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.  And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."[40]  Scripture can also be used to present the argument against patripassianism.  "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"[41]  How could God forsake himself on the cross, if in fact it was He who died on the cross?

Tertullian's doctrine always required a strict adherence to the rule of faith.  The rule provides wording that clearly defines each part of the Trinity.  This demonstrates a movement that each persona of the Trinity is preceded from the former.

While the influence of Montanism on Tertullian is not necessary to understand his view on the Trinity, it would be foolish to ignore it.  Pelikan states, "Montanism would therefore seem to be a profitable field to investigate for its possible trinitarian significance, besides providing useful clues to the solution of the question, how the church established creed, canon, and episcopate."[42]  The development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, whose significance can be attributed to the Montanist primacy of the Paraclete, provides the footing for a movement from a binitarian view to that of a trinitarian view.  "This so-called binitarianism, Macholz maintains, is readily discernible in Tertullian's earlier writings, until in the treatise against Praxeas, thanks to the influence of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in Montanism, he moved in the direction of a trinitarian rather than a binitarian view of God."[43]  As stated in the beginning of this

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[40] Mt. 28:19-20, bold face provided for emphasis.

[41] Mt 27:46.

[42] Jaroslav Pelikan, "Montanism and its Trinitarian significance," *Church History* 25 (June 1956), 100.

section, the establishment of Tertullian's *Trinitas* was due in part to Praxeas' response to Montanism. This is evidence of the theory that heresy begets heresy. Tertullian viewed his job as a corrector of the faith. Tertullian argued that if Montanus was a heretic, Praxeas was a far greater heretic. He strengthens his argument by summarizing scripture: "But since they will have the Two to be but One, so that the Father shall be deemed to be the same as the Son, it is only right that the whole question respecting the Son should be examined, as to whether He exists, and who He is and the mode of His existence. Thus shall the truth itself secure its own sanction from the Scriptures, and the interpretations which guard them."[44] It becomes clear through Tertullian's writing that there was a fear of divorcing the nature of God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son from the overarching theme of Scripture.

Tertullian looked at the entire heretical misstep of modalism as a full-blown war against Montanus who was originally accepted by the church.

> However, he is himself a liar from the beginning, and whatever man he instigates in his own way; as, for instance, Praxeas. For *he* was the first to import Rome from Asia this king of heretical pravity, a man in other respects of restless disposition, and above all inflated with the pride of confessorship simply and solely because he had to bear for a short time the annoyance of a prison; on which occasion, even "if he had given his to be burned, it would have profiled him nothing," not having the love of God, whose very gifts he has resisted and destroyed. For the Bishop of Rome had acknowledged the prophetic gifts of Montanus, Prisca, and Maximilla, and, in consequence of the acknowledgment, had bestowed his peace on the church of Asia and Phrygia, *he*, by importunately urging false accusation against the prophets themselves and their churches, and insisting on the authority of the bishop's predecessors in the see, compelled him to recall the specific letter which he had issued, as well as to desist from the purpose of acknowledging the said gifts.[45]

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Tertullian, *Against Praxeas,* 5.

[45] Ibid, 1.

Tertullian provides evidence that Montanism was once accepted by the church and supported by the then bishop of Rome. He does not provide specifics regarding who held the role of bishop at that time, but it was evident that Montanus, Prisca, and Maximilla were accepted by the general church. This probably was not the first time the church changed its position on a group, nor was it the last as the Arian controversy reveals many swaying positions in the church. It does show that the development of the church was not a simple clear-cut process, but developed in regard to external and internal stress. During Tertullian's time the external stress would have been represented by the Roman Empire's persecution, while the internal stress is evidenced by the rise and fall of heretical and schismatic groups.

## Practical Theology in Regards to Baptism and Soteriology

It has been argued that Christian orthodoxy can be supported from Tertullian's writings. However, where Tertullian's motives and methods are most questioned is in the area of practical theology where his leanings toward the rigid praxis of Montanism become most evident. Alister McGrath defines practical theology as: "a strongly pastoral and practical dimension to Christianity, which is generally inadequately reflected in the academic discussion of theology."[46] McGrath asserts there is a general bias among academics towards practical theology, but adds "This academic bias is, however, a recent development. The linking of theological reflection and pastoral care is characteristic of many early Christian writers…"[47] While Tertullian's polemical writings earned him the greatest level of notoriety, a large majority of his writings are considered practical

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[46] Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 108.

[47] Ibid.

theology.  One could easily assert that much of the writings by early church fathers were

of a practical nature.  The division between theology in general and the field of practical

theology is also seen in the writings of Paul.

Practical theology for Tertullian sought to answer the question of how one

practices their faith.  Tertullian was the original opponent to the idea of taking God for

granted, because it was not simply enough to seek salvation from Christ; there was a strict

regimen to be maintained by the Christian.  Tertullian allowed his freedom as a layperson

to further develop his view.  He did not feel it was important to make others comfortable.

Bray asserts, "The fact that Tertullian was a prominent member of the church without

being one of its official leaders is an additional plus in this respect.  He was clearly not

bound to follow the party line and felt entirely free to criticize the church and its leaders

whenever he wished to."[48]  His true desire was for the church to remain pure and

untainted by the world.  This practical nature of Tertullian's writings would have also

influenced how he saw the church as a whole.  David Rankin developed this thought

further; "Our discussion of Tertullian's ecclesial images has shown conclusively how an

exclusivist-perfectionist (holiness) view of the church dominates Tertullian's thought in

both major periods of his career."[49]  Rankin's statement, "both major periods" is a

reference to a fundament shift in Tertullian's writings that can be regarded as pre- and

post- Montanist.  Depending on the source, as few as seven of Tertullian's writings are

characterized as Montanist in nature.  This complexity is due to dating Tertullian's work;

rarely is there agreement among historians.  Geoffrey Dunn states, "The question of

dating Tertullian's literary output, at least in relative terms, is important even if it is

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[48] Bray, 65.

[49] David Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church* (New York: Cambridge, 1995), 92.

complex and open to much disagreement.  He was a writer whose thinking about issues

changed or intensified over years, particularly with his increasingly Montanist

perspective."[50]  Tertullian's timeline is further disrupted by the way his writings have

been grouped over the years.  Evaluating his writing is made even more difficult because

of the way his books have been preserved in historic Catholic documents.  Otto

Bardenhewer writes in the beginning of the twentieth century, "About midway in his life

(ca. 202) he openly joined the sect of Montanists, and begins to attack the Catholic

Church with a violence scarcely inferior that which he had manifested against

heathenism."[51]

Evidence of Tertullian's practical theology can be seen in his early writings.  *De*

*Spectacluis* or "The Shows" provides a warning for Christians to avoid Roman theater.

Due to the nature of the content of this writing, many wish to place it in the corpus of

Tertullian's montanist writings.  The general feeling in Robert's *Ante Nicene Fathers* is

that it should be dated AD 197, prior to the accepted 202 date for Tertullian's affiliation

with the Montanists.[52]

Tertullian, as evidenced through many of his writings, once again makes the

decree for Christians to not compromise in the face of the world's temptations.  He

writes, "Ye Servants of God, about to draw near to God, that you may make solemn

consecration of yourselves to Him, seek well to understand the condition of faith, the

reasons of the Truth, the laws of Christian Discipline, which forbid among the sins of the

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[50] Dunn, 8.

[51] Otto Bardenhewer, *Patrology: The Lives and Works of the Fathers of the* Church (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1908), 179.

[52] This conversion should be noted as tongue in cheek, as nothing truly shows that Tertullian converted to anything outside of Christianity.  Perhaps a philosophical diversion is more appropriate.

world, the pleasures of the public shows."[53]  Tertullian provides a strict admonishment to

"be in the world, but not of the world."  The argument that he provides reads as a modern

fundamentalist treaty against dancing and other frivolity.  He even counters the argument

of permissibility based on God's creativity.  "Then again, every one is ready with the

argument that all things, as we teach, were created by God, and given to man for his use,

and that they must be good, as coming all form so good a source; but that among them

are found the various constituent elements of the public shows, such as the horse, the

lion, bodily strength, and musical voice."[54]  Once again it becomes evident that

Tertullian's call was to holy living, echoing John's writings in Revelation.[55]  The

historical precedent for holy living was well established prior to Tertullian's writings

through biblical text and early Christian documents.  If the date of AD 197 can be

accepted for this writing, it provides a serious argument against Tertullian being heavily

influenced by the Montanist, at least in the practice of his beliefs.[56]

Tertullian provides the modern believer with a more difficult rendering when it

comes to his work *On Baptism*.  The rigidness of Tertullian's beliefs is seen in his

explanation of the doctrine of baptism against other heresies that have been developed.

> The consequence is, that a viper of the Cainite heresy, lately conversant in this quarter, has carried away a great number with her most venomous doctrine, making it her first aim to destroy baptism.  Which is quite in accordance with nature; for vipers and asps and basilisks themselves generally do affect arid and waterless places.  But we, little fishes, after the example of our *Icthus* Jesus Christ, are born in water, nor have we safety in any other way than by permanently abiding in water; so that most monstrous creature, who had no right

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[53] Tertullian, *The Shows*, 1.

[54] Ibid, 2.

[55] See Rev. 2:1-3:22.

[56] This will be further addressed in the next chapter.

to teach even sound doctrine, knew full well how to kill the little fishes, by taking them away from water![57]

Tertullian provides the picture that someone was attempting to remove baptism from its place of distinction within Christianity.[58]  While this is important to the overall understanding of this writing, it is Tertullian's view of post-baptismal sin that proves most difficult.

Prior to Tertullian's post-baptismal view, it is important to review several elements of *On Baptism* that maintain an orthodox view.  Tertullian argues for the idea that baptism is an outward sign of an inward grace.  He viewed baptism as a cleansing from a previous sinful life.

> All waters, therefore, in virtue of pristine privilege of their origin, do, after invocation of God, attain the sacramental power of sanctification; for the Spirit immediately supervenes from the heavens, and rests over the waters, sanctifying them from Himself; and being thus sanctified, they imbibe at the same time the power of sanctifying.  Albeit the similitude may be admitted to be suitable to the simple act; that, since we are defiled by sins, as it were by dirt, we should be washed from those stains in waters.  But as sins do not show themselves in our *flesh* (inasmuch as no one carries on his skin the spot of idolatry, or fornication, or fraud), so persons of that kind are foul in the *spirit*, which is the author of the sin; for the spirit is lord, the flesh servant.  Yet they each mutually share the guilt: the spirit, on the ground of the command; the flesh, of subservience.  Therefore, after the waters have been in a manner endued with medicinal virtue through the intervention of the angel, the spirit is corporeally washed in the waters, and the flesh is in the same spiritually cleansed. [59]

While there is a cleansing effect to baptism, it does not seem apparent that Tertullian believed there was any saving effect of baptism.  He does argue at a later point that baptism was a necessary outpouring of salvation.

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[57] Tertullian, *On Baptism,* 1.

[58] It is important to note here that baptism at this point was believer's baptism.  The institution of infant baptism was not completely established until the time of Augustine and was directly tied to a concern of infants and children who died prior to confession of Christ.

[59] Ibid, 4.

When, however, the prescript is laid down that "without Baptism, salvation is attainable by none" (chiefly on the ground of that declaration of the Lord, who says, "Unless one be born of water, he hath not life"), there arise immediately scrupulous, nay rather audacious, doubts on the part of some, "how, in accordance with that prescript, salvation is attainable by the apostles, whom – Paul excepted – we do not find baptized in the Lord?  Nay, since Paul is the only one of them who has put on *the garment of* Christ's baptism, either the peril of all others who lack the water of Christ is prejudged, that the prescript may be maintained, or else the prescript is rescinded if salvation has been ordained even for the unbaptized."  I have heard – the Lord is my witness – doubts of that kind: that none may imagine me so abandoned as to ex-cogitate, unprovoked, in the license of my pen, ideas which would inspire others with scruple.[60]

Tertullian continues to argue against those who stated the disciples were unbaptized and that John's baptism of repentance was still valid for the disciples, emphasizing that baptism was an aspect of the new law.[61]  Tertullian does not diverge from any understanding of baptism that was present in the early church.  He even recommends baptism should happen during Passover, a tradition that is seen through much of the early church and is the experience of Augustine.[62]

If there is a divergence, it comes toward the end of his writing.  The argument waged against Tertullian is that he held to a type of perfectionism: once someone was baptized, they would not and should not sin.  However, this is not evident from the passage.  It does seem clear that Tertullian viewed particular sins as more troublesome than others.  He is quick to reprimand fornication and even argues there is no repentance for it, using the argument from Paul that it is a sin against the flesh and very temple of the

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[60] Ibid, 12.

[61] Ibid, 13.

[62] Ibid, 19.

Holy Spirit. Tertullian ends his writing in a Pauline manner, "Only, I pray that, when you

are asking, you be mindful likewise of Tertullian the sinner."[63]

Other elements in Tertullian's writings adhere to this rigid praxis, including his

views on marriage, modesty and martyrdom. Tertullian encourages Christians to not seek

out persecution, but to be willing to faithfully submit to martyrdom when it is presented.

> Blessed Martyrs Designate, - Along with the provision which our lady mother the
> Church from her bountiful breasts, and each brother out of his private means,
> makes for your bodily wants in the prison, accept also from me some contribution
> to your spiritual sustenance; for it is not good that the flesh be feasted and the
> spirit starve: nay, if that which is weak be carefully looked to, it is but right that
> that which is still weaker should not be neglected.[64]

This writing gives further meaning to Tertullian's most famous quote, "The oftener we

are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; *the blood of Christians is seed*."[65]

For Tertullian, and many of the early church fathers, martyrdom was a crown and

privilege to die for their faith. Tertullian also views martyrdom as the ultimate penance

for post-baptismal sins.

Tertullian again alludes to a strict praxis in *On the Apparel of Women* and *The

Veiling of Virgins* where he shares his understanding of original sin and provides an

argument of the weakness of men.

> If there dwelt upon earth a faith as great as is the reward of faith which is
> expected in the heavens, no one of you at all, best beloved sisters, from the time
> that she had first "known the Lord," and learned (the truth) concerning her own
> (that is, woman's) condition, would have desired too gladsome (not to say too
> ostentatious) a style of dress; so as not rather to go about in humble garb, and
> rather to affect meanness of appearance, walking about as Eve mourning and
> repentant, in order that by every garb of penitence she might fully expiate that

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[63] Ibid, 20.

[64] Tertullian, *Ad Martyras*, 1.

[65] Tertullian, *The Apology,* 50.

which she derived from Eve, - the ignominy, I mean, of the first sin, and the odium (attaching to her as the cause) of human perdition.[66]

He also uses this argument in the Montanist writing *On the Veiling of Virgins*. The Montanist influence is evident through the many references to the Paraclete, especially in the first chapter.

> Throughout Greece, and certain of its barbaric provinces, the majority of Churches that keep their virgins covered. There are places, too, beneath this (African) sky, where this practice obtains; lest any ascribe the custom to Greek or barbarian Gentilehood. But I have proposed (as models) those Churches, which were founded by apostles or apostolic men; and antecedently, I think, to certain (founders, who shall be nameless). Those Churches therefore, as well (as others), have the self-same authority of custom (to appeal to); in opposing phalanx they range "times" and "teachers," more than these later (Churches do). What shall we observe? What shall we choose? We cannot contemptuously reject a custom which we cannot condemn, inasmuch as it is not "strange," since it is not among "strangers" that we find it, but among those, to wit, with whom we share the law of peace and the name of brotherhood. They and we have one faith, one God, the same Christ, the same hope, the same baptismal sacraments; let me say it once for all, we are one Church. Thus, whatever belongs to our brethren is ours: only, the body divides us.[67]

Tertullian's desire in this statement was to unite the church and not divide it.

Finally Tertullian writes a letter to his wife entitled *To His Wife*, his greatest call to a strict legalism. Tertullian points out several ideals that were held by the early church, many leading to the development of the monastic movement. He argues that marriage is a good thing, but that celibacy is preferable.

> But let it not be though that my reason for premising thus much concern the liberty granted to the old, and the restraint imposed on the later time, is that I may lay a foundation for teaching that Christ's advent was intended to dissolve wedlock, (and) to abolish marriage talons; as if from this period onward I were prescribing an end to marrying. Let them see to that, who, among the rest of their perversities, teach that disjoining of the "one flesh in twain;" denying Him who, after borrowing the female from the male, recombined between themselves, in the matrimonial computation, the two bodies take out of the consortship of the self-

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[66] Tertullian, *On the Apparel of Women*, 1.1.

[67] Tertullian, *On the Veiling of Virgins,* 2.

same material substance.  In short, there is no place at all where we read that nuptials are prohibited; of course on the ground that they are "a good thing."[68]

Tertullian also argues against polygamy and the importance of remaining single after being widowed.[69]

### Conclusion

Tertullian's theology incorporates many topics.  While he does not provide a full doctrinal statement, he does provide tidbits essential to the development of orthodox theology.  While some look to his Montanist writing to claim heresy, it becomes evident that Tertullian's understanding of rigid faith was no different then those who came after him.  Some further developed his understanding of fornication and other carnal sin as the need for Monasticism.

A careful reading of Tertullian's writings, once again, show that Tertullian was not divergent in his theology.  The rule of faith remained the tool against which he measured orthodoxy and challenged heresy.  Tertullian's crime is one of guilt by association.  Tertullian was sympathetic to the Montanist plight without leaving the confines of the church which, at different times; he called to a stronger unity.

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[68] Tertullian, *To His Wife*, 1.3.

[69] Ibid, 2 and 7.

# CHAPTER THREE: NORTH AFRICAN MONTANISM

## Introduction

Shaping the Christian landscape of Asia Minor and North Africa during the mid to late second century was a schismatic group referred to as the New Prophecy, or later known as the Montanist.  While the effect of Montanism on Asia Minor and North Africa was in fact major, differences arise that ask the question, how faithful to the original were the North African Montanist?  The goal of this study will be to provide a picture of Montanism as a whole and then to carefully analyze the difference between the Asia Minor and North African brethren.  Asia Minor serves as the birthplace of the movement. Trevett defines Montanism as "a religious movement emerging from within Christianity of the second century.  It was not a simple and single phenomenon but was long-lived."[1] However, it was not until Montanism reached North Africa that it received its greatest and most enduring following.

## Origins of Montanism

The origins of Montanism provide for a difficult study.  While most orthodox movements in church history have been well documented, those lying on the fringes are often neglected or portrayed in a negative light.  "Like many other early Christian 'heretic' movements, Montanism is mainly known through heresiological sources."[2]  This is seen in the treatment of the New Prophecy by many historians.  Eusebius records, "In a

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[1] Christine Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy* (London: Cambridge, 1996), 1.

[2] Antti Marjanen, "Montanism: Egalitarian Ecstatic 'New Prophecy'", *A Companion to Second-Century Christian 'Heretics'* ed. Antti Marjanen and Petri Loumanen (Boston: Brill, 2005), 185.

certain village in that part of Mysia over against Phrygia, Montanus, they say, first

exposed himself to the assaults of the adversary through his unbounded lust for

leadership."[3] Eusebius portrays Montanus as a power hungry disciple of Satan and

blames his novice status for leading him astray. "He was one of the recent converts, and

he became possessed of a spirit, and suddenly began to rave in a kind of ecstatic trance,

and to babble in a jargon, prophesying in a manner contrary to the custom of the church

which had been handed down by tradition from the earliest times."[4] Eusebius continues

his negative diatribe on Montanus, neglecting the movement while primarily focusing on

its leader. Likewise, Montanism was denounced by local bishops of Asia Minor in

addition to Didymus, Epiphanias, and Augustine.

Montanism started in Asia Minor in the province of Phrygia. One prophet,

Montanus and two prophetesses, Maximilla and Prisca, founded the movement.

Apparently, the prophet and prophetesses were converts of the cult of Cybele. This

ancient mystery cult was a local cult which had its largest influence in ancient Phrygia.

Research on the cult of Cybele (also spelled Kybele) quickly allows the reader to

recognize several similarities with Montanism, as one worldview was adapted to accept

another. It is important to point out that this was not uncommon during the early church.

Bogh writes, "Kybele, Meter Oreia, Meter Theon, Mater Deum Magna Idaea; these are

some of the most commonly used Greek and Latin names for the goddess with the

Phrygian name of Matar – *Mother*."[5] The extremes to which adherents of Cybele found

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[3] Eusebius, *Hist. Ecc.,* 5.16.7.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Birgitte Bogh, "The Phrygian Background of Kybele," *Numen* 54 (2007): 304.

themselves involved provide a better understanding of Montanus, Priscilla and

Maximilla.

> A goddess forming a divine couple with her lover, Attis, she was the centre of a worship characterized by raging orgies, bloody self castration, loud music including ecstasy and madness, taurobolia, and effeminate priest in colorful clothes. This roughly drawn picture is found in much literature; it is, however, a description of the cult mainly in Roman times, and it differs greatly from the knowledge that we now possess of the goddess in her homeland, Phrygia.[6]

The strong emphasis on Cybele as mother, and the effeminate nature of the priest allows

for a better understanding of women within the context of Montanism.

There is a recent study that suggests Montanism is an insufficient name as

Montanus may have been a secondary character to the lead prophetess. "All modern

scholars are aware of the fact that the famous prophetic movement of the 2nd century was

never called in early Christianity the 'Montanist' sect as other schools or movements

named after their leaders, but either the 'New Prophecy' or the 'Phrygian' heresy."[7] The

designation of the 'New Prophecy' or the 'Phrygian heresy' provides a more accurate

characterization of the movement.

The key element, as can be deduced from its name, was prophecy. However,

there were other elements, which the movement encompassed. "Their emphasis was on

the Paraclete's continuing gift of prophecy, severe asceticism, a gradual restriction of the

term *church* to a charismatic group of "spiritual" persons, and vibrant millennialism."[8]

One element in particular was likely to have a stronger draw on many of the adherents

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[6] Ibid, 304-305.

[7] Anne Jensen, "Prisca - Maximilla - Montanus: Who was the Founder of 'Montanism'" http://www.womenpriests.org/related/jensen3.asp retrieved December 14, 2010.

[8] J. D. Douglas, Philip Wesley Comfort and Donald Mitchell, *Who's Who in Christian History* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992), 482.

than the prophetic nature of the New Prophecy.  It was the rigorous view of their faith that attracted at least one adherent, and probably the most recognized beyond the founders, Tertullian of Carthage.

Also included in the fundamentals of the movement was a recasting of women in the role of leadership in ministry.  As it has already been stated, two of the founders of the movement were indeed female.  "Women were prominent as leaders and the Prophets clashed with catholic representatives on matters such as the nature of prophecy, the exercise of authority, the interpretation of Christian writings and the significance of the phenomenon for salvation-history."[9]  Historically, Montanus has been viewed as the major mover in the New Prophecy, however time has revealed new information. Montanus began to take a lesser role than the leading prophetesses.  "So Montanus was a supporter or helper, the advocate of Priscilla and Maximilla and not their Paraclete or inscription at all, and they were not his spiritual dependents."[10]  The function of women in ministry has not even been addressed as one of the primary concerns against Montanism.  "Yet all such things considered, the early anti-montanist writers had been relatively mute in their criticisms of the women."[11]  Maximilla's role in Montanism was large enough that she considered herself the end of all prophecy.[12]  If this were accepted as true then the actual duration of the New Prophecy would be rather short due to her short time in leadership.

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[9] Trevett, 3.

[10] Ibid, 159.

[11] Ibid, 155.

[12] Laura S. Nasrallah, "Prophecy, the Periodization of History, and Early Christian Identity: A Case from the So-Called Montanist Controversy," in *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity,* ed. Robert M. Frakes, and Elizabeth DePalma Digeser (Toronto: Edgar Kent Publishers, 2006), 26-27.

The New Prophecy was based on the ecstatic manner in which the adherents

received messages from God.  The prophets also believed in the supremacy of their own

giftedness through the Holy Spirit.  "The Montanists did not expect all the Lord's people

to be prophets, but rather required their fellow Christians to 'acknowledge' the

supernatural nature of the utterances of the Paraclete's chosen three: to reject them was

blasphemy against the Holy Spirit."[13]  The prophets would be caught up in an ecstatic

manner in which they delivered their prophecies.  For a better understanding of the

manner of ecstatic prophecy, the morphology of the word should be considered.  "The

largest percentage of LXX usages involving *ecstasy* is in the phrase 'fear of the Lord'.

In no case does it ever refer to a prophet or to the activity of prophesying.  In the LXX as

well as secular literature, εκστασις normally has a meaning associated with physical and

mental displacement and shock."[14]  The method of ecstatic prophecy led many to believe

that the adherents were possessed by an evil spirit.  Kelly notes, "But it was the

Montanists... to whom this theory particularly appealed, and their leaders, Montanus,

Priscilla and Maximilla, supplied illustrations of it, falling unconscious when they

prophesied."[15]  When these events were witnessed by outsiders, they would appear to be

caught up in a spirit similar to the Oracle of Delphi described in the book of Acts.

The debate that presents itself is how divergent Montanism was from that of the

orthodox church in the mid to late second century.  Philip Schaff states that Montanism

was always intended to remain within the mainstream catholic church.  "For Montanism

was not, originally, a departure from the faith, but a morbid overstraining of the practical

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[13] Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 52.

[14] Cecil Robeck Jr., *Prophecy in Carthage* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1992), 101.

[15] J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper One, 1978), 62.

morality and discipline of the early church."[16] The issue that arose regarding the New

Prophecy could be narrowed down into two categories. The first would be that of

Montanus speaking as the Paraclete. The second would be failed prophecy. "But these

new prophets, in contrast to prophets in biblical time, spoke in a state of ecstasy, as

though their personalities were suspended while the Paraclete spoke in them."[17] When

overtaken with ecstasy, Montanus was known to speak in the first person as if he were

the Paraclete. "When Montanus delivered his messages in the self-proclaimed role of

'the Paraclete's prophet,' he believed that the Holy Spirit spoke directly through the

prophecy and provided guidance for the 'spiritual ones.'"[18] Montanus' view of the

Paraclete may have been the dividing line for Tertullian's full acceptance of Montanist

thought.

The failed prophecy was also the beginning of Montanism when it was

prophesized that the New Jerusalem would appear in Papuza along with the imminent

second coming of Jesus Christ. While this seems to be historically accurate, there are

some that state that Papuza was an invention by Tertullian or later authors. "It is

therefore most likely that the idea of Papuza as the location of the millenarian kingdom or

the New Jerusalem only developed after Tertullian."[19] Many look for historical

reconciliation because, among other problems, the location of Papuza remains a mystery.

"Despite the significance of Pepouza and Tymion for the history of Montanism and of

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[16] Philip Schaff and David Schley Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

[17] Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Nashville: Nelson, 1995), 65.

[18] Francois Decret, *Early Christianity in North Africa,* trans. Edward L. Smither (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), 38.

[19] Marjanen, 205.

early Christianity in Asia Minor, until now, neither the location of Pepouza nor that of Tymion has been identified."[20] The prophecy was intended as one of great hope during the persecution of mid second century. "During the bloody persecutions under the Antonines, which raged in Asia Minor, and caused the death of Polycarp (155), all three went forth as prophets and reformers of the Christian life, and proclaimed the near approach of the age of the Holy Spirit and of the millennial reign in Papuza, a small village of Phrygia, upon which the new Jerusalem was to come down."[21] It was this imminent view of eschatology that was the cause of the greatest divergence between Catholic and Montanist beliefs. "Recently it has been advocated that the greatest divergences of opinion between the Montanist and Catholic Christians had to do with the central position of the prophetic proclamation and the enthusiastic expectation of an imminent end in Montanism."[22]

The Montanist view of Scripture must also be taken into consideration. While the Montanist held Scripture in high esteem, it is obvious that they did not believe in a closed canon. "It has been suggested that the expression 'the New Covenant (or Testament)' is first used to denote a collection of books in AD 192, in an anti-Montanist work in Greek by an unknown writer, addressed to the Phrygian bishop Avircius Marcellinus, from which Eusebius quotes some extracts."[23] The Montanist view of prophecy would have greatly influenced their view of Scripture. In fact, they believed that they were stronger

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[20] William Tabbernee, "Portals of the Montanist New Jerusalem: The Discovery of Pepouza and Tymion", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11 (Spring, 2003), 87.

[21] Philip Schaff and David Schley Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

[22] Marjanen, 195.

[23] F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1988), 22.

adherents to Scripture. "The original Montanists - and Tertullian himself - saw themselves here as even more faithful to the sacred texts of the Apostles than the Catholics; these for their part seem prepared, in Tertullian's view, willfully to expose them to these dangers unprotected."[24]

While the origins of Montanism place it in Asia Minor sometime between AD 156-172 "towards the close of the Second century the Montanist movement had thus been widely disseminated throughout the Roman Empire."[25] It can be argued that Montanism did not reach the height of its popularity until it made its entry into Carthage in North Africa and finds a popular proponent in Tertullian.

### Montanism in North Africa

By the time Montanism reached the shores of North Africa it should be mentioned that the original prophet and prophetesses were no longer living. "Around C.E. 180 Montanism entered a new era. The founding prophets (Montanus, Maximilla and Priscilla) were dead; their memory kept alive by the circulation of copies of their oracles and by the veneration of their tomb at Pepouza - the Montanist headquarters in Phrygia."[26] However, it enters into a land that is already intrigued by the prophetic. "The 'Montanism' which came to North Africa in about AD 200 was probably…only a movement of 'modified enthusiasm' – as with many reform movements the Phrygians had lost their initial burst of vigour."[27] While the ecstatic version of Montanism was not

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[24] David Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church* (London: Cambridge, 1995), 48.

[25] Marjanen, 192.

[26] William Tabbernee, "Montanist Regional Bishops: New Evidence from Ancient Inscriptions," *Journal of Early Christian Studies,* 1 (Fall, 1993): 249.

as evident, the rigorous moral code was attractive to many who were attempting to maintain a purified sense of Christianity. North Africa was driven by a sense of extremes when it came to ecclesiastical fervor. "Given that the African religious style tended to the severe, it is probably that Montanism found a congenial 'home' among sections of the population there. For some Montanism was a protest against the laxity which had begun to creep into the church everywhere; for others a protest against an ecclesiastical organization which was itself a response to the heresy of Gnosticism."[28]

The timing of Montanism's entry into North Africa's ecclesiastical culture is seen through the hagiography *The Passion of the Holy Martyrs Perpetua and Felicitas*, historically linked to Tertullian. The story recounts the tale of five catechumens and their catechist as they are presented martyrs. "On March 7, 203 C.E., a twenty-two year old upper class married woman named Vibia Perpetua was martyred along with four catechumens and their catechist in the amphitheater at Carthage in Roman Africa Proconsularis."[29] It is traditionally accepted that Perpetua and her friends were Montanist. However, Cecil Robeck states that Perpetua and her friends may not have been true adherents to Montanism, but rather forbearers to the movement.

> From A.D. 200-207, during which time the martyrdom of Perpetua and her friends took place and *The Passion* was recorded in its final Latin form, it was a period when a proto-Montanism was present in Carthage. This was probably no more than an enthusiastic form of the Christian faith whose adherents were cognizant of the role of the Holy Spirit in daily life and who expected miraculous charismata to be present among them as a matter of course.[30]

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[27] Rankin, 43-44.

[28] Ibid.

[29] William Tabbernee, "Perpetua, Montanism and Christian Ministry in Carthage c.203 C.E." *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 32 (Winter, 2005), 421.

[30] Robeck, 14.

This understanding of Perpetua and her friends' martyrdom would seem correct as their feast day has been and continues to be celebrated by the Catholic Church. It fuels the debate over whether this writing should be attributed to the Catholic Church or the Montanist movement. "It is certainly possible but not certain that they were. While a number of features contained in the original version of the *passio* (and edited out of the Greek edition and the later still Latin *acta*) are consistent with aspects of the New Prophecy, many of these same features are also an integral part of early North African Christianity in general."[31] Their martyrdom provides for another tenant of Montanism: the willingness to accept martyrdom.

North Africa was not devoid of the persecution that was affecting other regions of the Roman Empire. Therefore, willing acts of martyrdom were not unique to Montanism. Much of Tertullian's writings, even those ascribed as Montanist, addressed the treatment of Christians in Carthage and North Africa as a whole. "We lay this before you as the first ground on which we urge that your hatred to the name of Christian is unjust… Hatred is only merited when it is *known* to be merited."[32] Tertullian also states the futility in attempting to quench the spread of Christianity. "The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; *the blood of Christians is seed*."[33] Tertullian concludes, "As the divine and human are ever opposed to each other, when we are condemned by you, we are acquitted by the Highest."[34]

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[31] Tabbernee, "Perpetua, Montanism and Christian Ministry in Carthage c. 203 C.E.", 430.

[32] Tertullian, *The Apology*, 1.

[33] Tertullian, *The Apology,* 50.

[34] Ibid.

Montanism entered into Africa quickly and without much grandeur. "The Montanist movement was constituted in Carthage in a chapel that resembled the Catholic churches in the city, its meetings were characterized by a religious enthusiasm, a quest for prophecies, and ecstatic experiences that would confirm the members 'favored status'."[35] It was into the region of Carthage that Montanism saw its greatest growth. Tertullian was particularly impressed by the praxis of faith inherent in Montanism. His most easily recognized Montanist writings deal primarily with praxis over doctrinal adherence. Tertullian's view of charismata should also be taken into account. "In the words that Tertullian wrote prior to his association with the so-called new Prophecy, he argued that charismata had been given by God to believers… In his tract *On Baptism,* for instance, he wrote a section addressed specifically to those who would shortly be baptized. Tertullian enjoined these catechumens to ask God for charismata."[36]

North Africa provided a fertile ground for Montanism to grow as most Africans were already accepting of divine prophecy. Cyprian, the third century bishop of Carthage, utilized prophecy in his own worship services. "Cyprian wrote that visions were ecstatic experiences whereby messages were conveyed from God to Human beings. The Spirit was the source of these revelations since they took place when the subject was 'filled with the Spirit'; the thoughts the prophetic figure had while 'filled with the Spirit,' however, were said to be given by the Lord."[37] This view of prophecy within Cyprian's own writings points to acceptance of the use of prophecy within the church. Cyprian also

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[35] Decret, 37-38.

[36] Robeck, 97.

[37] Robeck, 149.

held Tertullian in high regard. Jerome refers to this relationship between Cyprian and Tertullian by stating, "I myself have seen a certain Paul, an old man of Concordia, a town in Italy, who, while he himself was a very young man had been secretary to the blessed Cyprian who was already advanced in age. He said that he himself had seen how Cyprian was accustomed never to pass a day without reading Tertullian, and that he frequently said to him, 'Give me the master,' meaning by this, Tertullian."[38] While Cyprian and Tertullian had similar views regarding Scripture and prophecy, one was considered completely orthodox, the other schismatic. The issue that arose between them revolved around an accepted canon of Scripture. By this time in history, all of the New Testament books were written and readily available, but the canon had yet to be set and accepted by the church. "The fact that a fixed canon of Scripture had not been completely settled by this time *may* have played a part in the understanding and value Cyprian placed on such experiences."[39] The lack of an accepted canon of Scripture leads to the question to be addressed in the next section.

## Was Montanism Heretical?

The question of whether a movement is a heresy or not is partly subjective. If a modern evangelical were to consider the tenants of Catholicism, they may come to the conclusion due to Mariology and works salvation that the Catholic Church is actually a heresy. The research would be gathered and weighed against Scripture, which the evangelical would consider the measure for orthodoxy. The Catholic would look at the

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[38] Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men,* 53.

[39] Robeck, 150.

use of Scripture alone as inadequate to determine such a classification, as tradition is also held to an equal level.  While they would disagree, they would find common ground in regard to false religions.

While there was an attraction on many levels to Montanism it is hard to identify Montanism as a heresy, especially within the context of North Africa.  This is where the term schismatic should be introduced.  There have been many schisms throughout the history of the church.  These schisms helped to shape the direction of the church and provided a beginning point in the development of orthodoxy.[40]  The attraction to Montanism among North Africans revolved around the supremacy of Scripture.  There was a concern, especially voiced through Tertullian's writing, of corruption already occurring in the bishopric of Rome.   Tertullian's influence among the North Africans is seen in his Trinitarian formula and his rule of faith that he shared with Ireaneus.  Tertullian's rule of faith should be recognized as his own measure against heresy and confirmation of orthodoxy:

> Now, with regard to this rule of faith – that we may from this point acknowledge what it is which we defend – it is, you must know, that which prescribes the belief that there is one only God, and that He is none other than the Creator of the world, who produced all things out of nothing through His own Word, first of all sent forth; that this Word is called His Son, and, under the name of God, was seen 'in diverse manners' by the patriarchs, heard at all times in the prophets, at last brought down by the Spirit and Power of the Father into the Virgin Mary, was made flesh in her womb, and being born of her, went forth as Jesus Christ; thenceforth He preached new law and the new promise of the kingdom of heaven, worked miracles; having been crucified, He rose again the third day; (then) having ascended into the heavens, He sat at the right hand of the Father; sent instead of Himself the Power of the Holy Ghost to lead such as believe; will come with glory to take the saints to the enjoyment of everlasting life and of the heavenly promises and to condemn the wicked to everlasting fire, after the

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[40] There seems to be a draw regarding schism in contemporary literature on the early church. Many current authors tend to side with the losing side of the schism, arguing several centuries later that the losing view should be the view held today by the contemporary church.

resurrection of both these classes shall have happened, together with the restoration of their faith.[41]

The rule of faith provided certain guidelines by which all statements were to be tested regarding orthodoxy. According to Decret, "Tertullian's personal feelings and perhaps subjective view of ecclesiology should not be given priority over his view of the rule of faith (*disciplina fidei*), a guide for insuring orthodoxy that was greatly employed by Tertullian in his writings against heretics."[42] Irenaeus, writing prior to Tertullian, provides his rule of faith within the context in which he ministered. Thus he does not state outwardly that he is defining the rule of faith; he is simply providing an apologetic within his own context. Irenaeus writes, "They maintain, then, that in the invisible and ineffable heights above there exists a certain perfect, pre-existent Aeon, who they call Proarche, Propator, and Bythus, and describe as being invisible and incomprehensible. Eternal and unbegotten, he remained throughout innumerable cycles of ages in profound serenity and quiescence."[43] Irenaeus has simply restated the prologue of the Gospel of John[44] in words that the region of Lyon, where he ministered, would be able to understand. Irenaeus continues in his work *Against Heresies* to provide context to his orthodox belief. "But, again, when we refer them to that tradition that originates from the apostles, (and) which is preserved by means of the succession of presbyters in the Churches, they object to tradition, saying that they themselves are wiser not merely than the presbyters, but even than the apostles, because they have discovered the unadulterated

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[41] Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heretics,* 13.1.

[42] Decret, 39.

[43] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies,* 1.1.1.

[44] John 1:1.

truth."[45]  Irenaeus is providing a guideline of apostolic tradition, which had not yet been corrupted.  Bryan Liftin summarizes, "The way to determine orthodoxy, according to Irenaeus, was to go back to what the apostles had proclaimed as Christ's own word."[46] This provided Irenaeus with the conviction and authority by which he spoke; he was a disciple of Polycarp, who in turn was a disciple of the apostle John.  The end result of the rule of faith as stated by Tertullian and Irenaeus is an interesting dichotomy.  Based on Irenaeus' view of Scripture, he would quickly label Montanism as a heresy.  Chadwick adds, "The chief effect of Montanism on the Catholic Church was greatly to reinforce the conviction that revelation had come to an end with the apostolic age, and so to foster the creation of a closed canon of the New Testament.  Irenaeus is the last writer who can still think of himself as belonging to the eschatological age of miracle and revelation."[47]  On the other side, Montanism initially passed the test of Tertullian's orthodoxy.

To provide a clear picture, North African Montanism needs to be divorced from Montanism in Asia Minor.  This occured as another subgroup seemed to develop that were referred to as the 'Tertullianist.'  "At the beginning of the fifth century, they possessed one basilica in Carthage and their worship assemblies greatly resembled those of the Catholic church: including readings from Scripture, singing Psalms, sermons, and prayers.  The major difference in worship was that time was allowed for visions and expressions of charismatic gifts."[48]  The reflection seen in North African Montanism is almost uniquely a reflection on Tertullian.  Augustine, along with Cyprian, held

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[45] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies,* 3.2.2.

[46] Bryan M. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007), 79.

[47] Chadwick, 53.

[48] Decret, 41.

Tertullian in a high regard and while he included Tertullian in his work *On Heresies* there seems to be a distinction between Tertullian and the New Prophecy. This distinction is seen as time passes and their understanding of the Paraclete soured Tertullian's view of the Montanist.

> Tertullian became opposed to the Montanist view of the Paraclete, which for him did not conform to the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity in which the Holy Spirit shared indivisible unity with the Father and the Son. As a result, he initiated a schism within the Montanists. As Tertullian had broken with the Catholic church over the 'new prophecy' and 'Spirit church' issues, his break with the Montanist was just as significant.[49]

Tertullian has been historically viewed as a schismatic and an opponent to the Catholic church. As previously noted, "One sees that in the end he (Tertullian) lacked the simplicity, the humility to integrate himself with the Church, to accept his weaknesses, to be forbearing with others and himself. When one only sees his thought in all its greatness, in the end, it is precisely this greatness that is lost."[50] This view of Tertullian does not seem lost from the history books. However, contrary to the traditional view that Tertullian left the church and was, of course, not canonized, there is a growing view in scholarship that Tertullian in fact never left the catholic church. "Tertullian probably never broke away from the Catholic church, but carried on his campaign against what he saw as the decreasing rigour in its life from within its bounds (if only on the disaffected periphery)."[51] Tertullian's concern was for a purified church, and it is clear that he saw something he liked within the Montanist movement.

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[49] Ibid, 40-41.

[50] Pope Benedict XVI, *Church Fathers: From Clement of Rome to Augustine* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 46.

[51] Rankin, 41.

The question of Tertullian's orthodoxy is an interesting one, and provides a picture of North African Montanism as closer to orthodoxy then the movement that was started in Asia Minor. The use of prophecy by the adherents to Montanism was not enough to label them heretical. The increasing scope of reflection on Montanism, points to the manner in which they prophesied was the source of heretical concern. "In doctrine, Montanism agreed in all essential points with the Catholic Church, and held very firmly to the traditional rule of faith."[52] This statement is hard to qualify; the Holy Spirit seems to lack its proper place of understanding until Tertullian develops the Latin understanding of the *Trinitas*. The development of the Trinity by Tertullian is highly documented as the result of Montanism influences on his writings. Perhaps the following statement has credence here, "If someone establishes a distinction between theology and practice, it was not a heresy but an exaggeration of Christian ideas."[53] However, there is still a distinction that needs to be made regarding regionalization of Montanism. Is it possible for a movement to start out heretical and move into orthodoxy? While Tertullian had writings that were truly Montanist in nature, these writings rely on the praxis of faith and not on the nature of ecstatic prophecy. The time frame in which Montanism had it greatest success in North Africa corresponds directly to Tertullian's interest in the movement.

Montanism as a whole had been tried in a court of popular opinion. Unlike the heresies that plagued the church in later years, Montanism was not condemned by a council, but by individuals. "The most significant reasons for denouncing Montanism as

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[52] Philip Schaff and David Schley Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

[53] Erich Nestler, "Was Montanism a Heresy?", *Pneuma* (Spring, 1984), 75.

heretical were: the ecstatic nature of its prophecy, the claim of the Montanist prophecy

for greater authority then that of previous apostolic traditions, the visible role women had

in the movement, and the salaries that Montanist paid to their spiritual leaders and

teachers in Asia Minor, thus shaking the prevailing church-political power structures."[54]

The primary reasons for condemning Montanism as a heresy are compelling. Montanism

could be established as a movement ahead of its time. The issue is further blurred due to

the nature of the significant place Montanism played in establishing the orthodox view of

the Trinity. Prior to Tertullian's establishment of *Trinitas* there was a binarian view of

God seen only as God the Father and God the Son. Perhaps the greatest evidence of the

heretical nature of Montanism may be seen in how the church originally viewed the

movement. Cyril of Jerusalem, while developing his catechesis on the Holy Spirit,

provides the negative view:

> Let the Cataphrygians also be thy abhorrence, and Montanus, their ringleader in
> evil, and his two so called prophetesses, Maximilla and Priscilla. For this
> Montanus, who was out of his mind and really mad (for he would not have said
> such things, had he not been mad), dared to say that he was himself the Holy
> Ghost, - he, miserable man, and filled with all uncleanness and lasciviousness; for
> it suffices but to hint at this, out of respect of the women who are present.[55]

This illustrates how Montanus was viewed by those who opposed him. It was a ploy to

show that Montanus was establishing himself as the Paraclete promised in the Gospel of

John. However many would, and have, argued that Montanus was merely providing the

Oracle in the first person based on the authority of the Holy Spirit. This would have been

the earliest view, or Montanism would not have had such success within the catholic

church. Pelikan adds, "If this were so, primitive Montanism would indeed have

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[54] Marjanen, 210.

[55] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures,* 14.8.

threatened a basic tenet of the church, and it would have been as dangerous a heresy in the doctrine of God as was Gnosticism or as Arianism became a century and a half later."[56] The silence that proceeds from the beginning of the Montanist movement until the fourth century, when Cyril wrote, seems to show that Montanism was viewed in a positive light, at least among its contemporaries.

## Conclusion

The differences between Asia Minor and North African Montanism are great. As Montanism moved west from Phrygia, it adapted to the culture where it became established. While Carthage especially, and North Africa as a whole, provided a non-threatening home for Montanism, it becomes evident that North Africa began to shape Montanism more than Montanism shaped North Africa. The ecstatic prophecy, while not completely abandoned, became second to the rigors of faith. Tertullian utilized the good he saw in Montanism to establish a strong praxis of faith. Montanism provided the groundwork for the Trinitarian view established in North Africa at the beginning of the third century. It is impossible to simply state that Montanism was doctrinally compliant with orthodoxy; this would overlook their view of authority in regard to Scripture and prophecy. However, it does seem the greatest divergence was in the manner by which the Montanist practiced their faith.

Weeding through the history of Montanism only serves to muddy the water when it comes to developing a proper understanding of just how complex a person Tertullian

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[56] Jaroslav Pelikan, "Montanism and its Trinitarian Significance", *Church History* 2 (June, 1956), 101.

truly was.  Montanism provides a picture of a schismatic movement in its grandest nature.

Tertullian further blurs the lines between heterodoxy and orthodoxy.

# CONCLUSION

Tertullian's influence on third century Christianity and beyond, cannot be overstated.  He was the originator of the term Trinity and helped to develop the understanding of orthodoxy.  A large testament to Tertullian is the sustainability of his work through the years.  While a few of Tertullian's writings are thought to be lost, what is available to the church and academics is a significant body of work.  These writings range from polemical to instructive in style and purpose.

The question that was addressed in the beginning of this work was whether or not Tertullian maintains orthodoxy throughout his works.  The overwhelming evidence would show that he did.  While a sympathetic element towards Montanism can be seen, it would be hard to provide evidence that he severed ties with the church universal.  It has also been argued that in Tertullian's time the "Catholic" church had not been established in all of its grandeur making it difficult to assess which church Tertullian left, if he had in fact left a church.

The strongest evidence used to shed light on what Tertullian did and did not do is his own writings.  If Tertullian in fact drove that dividing wedge between himself and the church, there would be evidence in his writings.  Tertullian, after all, was never short on words or opinions.  There is evidence that Tertullian failed to agree with the universal church on several elements, in particular the Roman church.  This does not change over the course of his writings.  Likewise, Tertullian's strong argument for unity of the church is voiced in his more definitive Montanist writings.

There were indeed heretics in the early church.  Tertullian provided some of the most damning evidence against them in the third century.  It is for this reason alone that it

is hard to lump him into a category as heretical.  Those who look for a way to only slightly exclude him from the church fathers refer to him as a schismatic.  This term would be one that Tertullian would probably accept as a badge of honor.  However, this does not seem to fit an individual who was so driven by the purity and the unity of the church.  What Tertullian does provide is evidence of an incubator of faith outside the confines of Rome and the priesthood.

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