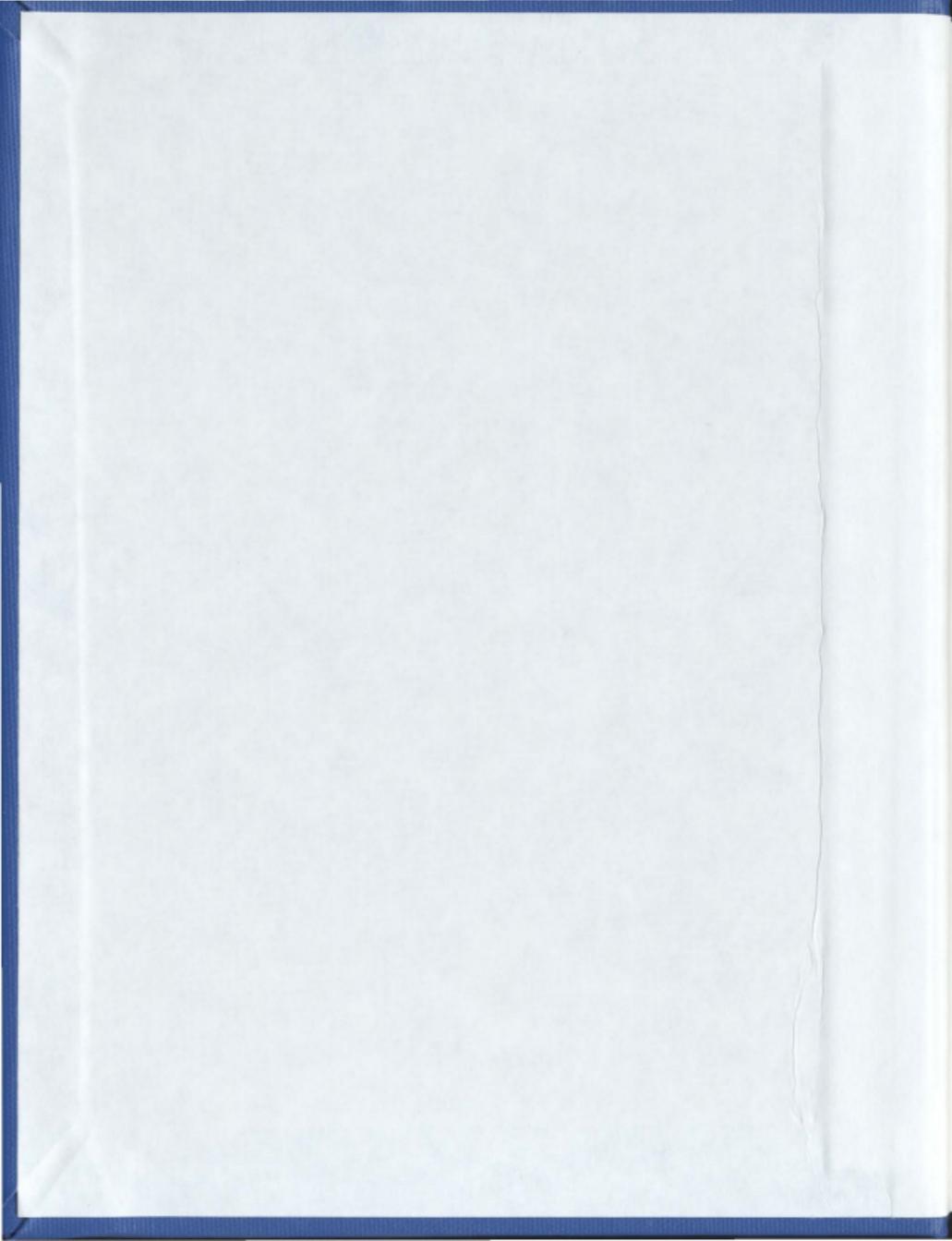


RECIPROCAL JUSTICE:  
MORALITY AND GOD IN THE WORK OF  
TERTULLIAN OF CARTHAGE

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Reciprocal Justice:  
Morality and God in the Work of Tertullian of Carthage

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the theology of Tertullian of Carthage as it relates to the concept of 'Reciprocal Justice,' a system of all pervading justice that influences how Tertullian views the relationship between human beings and God, and influences what Tertullian believes to be the very nature of a God worthy of worship.

The first chapter is an introduction, dealing with basic data concerning Tertullian's life. I speak of the controversy surrounding the identity of his father, believed by many to have been a centurion, the accuracy of the name traditionally given to Tertullian, and whether or not he was a jurist. I also define reciprocal justice and give some examples of it from Tertullian's writings.

The second chapter discusses the Apology, Tertullian's defense of Christians against the Roman persecutions. Here, I consider the way in which Tertullian sees Christians as the personification of the true justice of the universe, making their persecution unjust by definition.

Chapter Three begins by looking more closely at the working relationship between human beings and God, starting on God's side. Using Adversus Praxean and Adversus Valentinianos I show that Tertullian believes that only a perfectly moral Creator who is an active and positive force in his followers' lives deserves to be worshiped.

The final chapter then deals with several of Tertullian's disciplinary works, which illustrate the human side of the relationship with God. Basically, for Tertullian, since Christians have a perfect God, they are expected to emulate him in all they do, which, by definition, demands perfect morals. Nothing else is acceptable.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to take this time to thank all the professors of the Religious Studies, Classics and English Departments of Memorial University who have cultivated my mind from my time as an undergraduate student up to today. Without their prowess and skill at making learning an enjoyable experience, I would most likely have not taken this path of higher learning. More specifically, I wish to thank Dr. David Bell for his unwavering patience and support during the writing process, his continued guidance was invaluable and will always be appreciated. Thanks also goes to Mary Walsh, the secretary of the Religious Studies Department, for helping me out in whatever way I needed. I would also like to thank Dr. Craig Maynes of the Classics Department for suggesting the books on Roman Law and Tiberius that were used in this thesis.

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## List of Abbreviations

*Adv. Prax.* = *Adversus Praxean*/Against Praxeas

*Adv. Val.* = *Adversus Valentinianos*/Against the Valentinians

*Apo.* = *Apologeticum*/The Apology

*App.* = *De Cultu Feminarum*/On the Apparel of Women

*Chas.* = *De Exhortatione Castitatis*/Exhortation to Chastity

*Her.* = *De Praescriptione Haeticorum*/On the Prescription of Heretics

*Mod.* = *De Pudicitia*/On Modesty

*Rep.* = *De Paenitentia*/On Repentance

*Scap.* = *Ad Scapulam*/To Scapula

*Scorp.* = *Scorpiace*/Antidote for the Scorpion's Sting

*Veil.* = *De Virginibus Velandis*/On the Veiling of Virgins

*Wife* = *Ad Uxorem*/To his Wife

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## Chapter 1

Of the fathers of the early Church, few had the same flair as Tertullian. Skilled in rhetoric, Tertullian was extremely combative, adding his voice to many issues that were facing the Church in his time. His contributions were immense, his attacks on heretics such as Valentinus and Marcion were invaluable to the Church's ability to defeat these heresies. Most importantly, however, was his contribution to Trinitarian theology, for he was the one who coined the terms that would be used for centuries afterwards when speaking of the three persons of the Trinity and their relationship to one another, which will be discussed later in this work. Because of his undeniable contribution, it was impossible to condemn the man or burn his works when, in later life, he possibly fell into heresy himself, namely the heresy of Montanism, though recently it has been suggested that Tertullian's faith in Montanism may have been exaggerated.<sup>1</sup> Though he was never canonised, he will always hold a place in the history of the Church. As Eric Osborn puts it:

(Tertullian) is able to do theology, that laminated fusion of argument and Scripture in a way which breaks new ground. Strikingly, he wrote his own kind of Latin. He liberated Christian thought from its Greek beginning by analysing and developing biblical concepts.<sup>2</sup>

Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus was born to pagan parents in the North African city of Carthage around 155 AD. He was an expert in law and may have been a jurist,<sup>3</sup> though to say he definitely was is presumptuous. He flourished during the reigns of the emperors

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1 Gerald Lewis Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God. Perspectives on the Theology of Tertullian* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), 36.

2 Eric Osborn, *Tertullian, First Theologian of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), xii.

3 Johannes Quasten, *Patrology, Volume 2* (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics Inc., 1984), 246.

Septimius Severus and Caracalla.<sup>4</sup> The formerly widespread and accepted belief that he was the son of a centurion as well as a priest can be traced to a passage found in Jerome's De Viris Illustribus, in which Jerome states them as fact.<sup>5</sup> However, these notions, as well as the claim that he was a professional jurist, have come under fire recently with the biography written by Timothy Barnes. Tertullian's status as a priest is dismissed by Barnes, stating that at no point does Tertullian claim to be ordained, instead he actually counts himself among the laity on two separate occasions (Exhortation to Chastity, 7:3 and On Monogamy, 12:2). Jerome may have simply wished that someone he admired so much would have been a priest as he was, possibly to add more authority to his writings.<sup>6</sup> Barnes' refutation of Tertullian being the son of a centurion, however, is more complicated, as Barnes blames it on Jerome's misreading of a passage of the Apology, in which Tertullian speaks about human sacrifice being prevalent in the pagan world, from which Jerome made his interpretation. The first problem with using this interpretation as authoritative is the fact that he bestows upon Tertullian's father the title of '*centurio proconsularis*', which, as Barnes states, is a title that did not exist amongst the Roman military. This already raises questions as to the accuracy of Jerome's claims.<sup>7</sup> Barnes suggests that the discrepancy may have been the result of Jerome's text being corrupt, or that he read it incorrectly. Another major problem with Jerome's version of this particular section of the Apology is that his version may have substituted '*Patris Nostris*' for '*Patriae Nostrae*,' which changes the reading significantly. With '*Patris Nostris*', Tertullian is dating the time of the suppression of infant sacrifice in Carthage to the time of his father, whereas the reading '*Patriae*

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4 Geoffrey D. Dunn, *Tertullian* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 3.

5 Timothy Barnes, *Tertullian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 3.

6 *Ibid.*, 11.

7 *Ibid.*, 11-12.

*Nostrae*,' which means 'fatherland,' would date it to the time of Tiberius some hundred years earlier.<sup>8</sup> Tertullian, therefore, is not speaking of his father in this passage, but the father of Rome, the emperor. Jerome's reading would also lead one to believe Tertullian is accrediting his father with the suppression of the infant sacrifices, since '*Patris Nostrae*' combined with '*centurio proconsularis*' would suggest he is speaking of his father, the proconsular centurion, who brought an end to the child sacrifices of the pagan Carthaginians. However, when using the uncorrected reading, one can see that Tertullian is really stating the sacrifices came to an end during the proconsulate of Tiberius, the father of Rome.<sup>9</sup> Barnes concludes his chapter on Tertullian's father by stating that there is simply no evidence to support the theory that Tertullian's father had any sort of military career.<sup>10</sup>

Barnes also challenges the accuracy of the name traditionally given to Tertullian: Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus.<sup>11</sup> Tertullian himself gives his name at the end of On the Veiling of Virgins simply as Septimius Tertullianus.<sup>12</sup> Barnes states that the other parts of his name are from medieval manuscripts and that there is no evidence to support their authenticity. He goes on to state that no real information concerning Tertullian's social status can be gleaned from this name as Septimii can be found throughout all social classes of Roman Society.<sup>13</sup> Also, Barnes does not accept that Tertullian and the jurist Tertullianus, with whom he is often equated, were one in the same, citing such evidence as, first, the fact that the jurist seems to be a few

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>12</sup> *Veil.*, XVII; Thelwall, 25.

<sup>13</sup> Barnes, *Tertullian*, 242-243.

years older than the apologist, secondly, the fact that the earliest extant mention of Tertullian refutes the claim he was a jurist to begin with, and, thirdly, that the level of knowledge of legal terminology that Tertullian exhibits was not necessarily exclusive to professionals.<sup>14</sup>

Just as little is known of Tertullian's life (other than what he tells us in his writings), not a great deal is known of his death. He probably did not live for very long after the completion of his final treatise and he may have been martyred,<sup>15</sup> though this is little more than speculation. What is certain is that nothing can really be reliably deciphered of Tertullian's life outside his own writings, and those paint a hazy picture at best, for Tertullian was not concerned with writing about himself, but with defending his faith and exploring its mysteries, making a detailed biography of Tertullian impossible. He was a Christian, he was from Carthage, he was probably from a modestly wealthy family in order to have obtained the level of education he had,<sup>16</sup> and he was married, but apart from these things, everything else is just guesswork.

Tertullian was certainly an avid and avowed Christian who spoke from the heart. He had a fiery temper and sharp wit with which he attacked his opponents mercilessly, while at the same time exhibiting a jovial mirth at their inconsistencies, just as the prophet Elijah mocked the impotence of the prophets of Baal atop Mount Carmel.<sup>17</sup> He attacked all his opponents with everything he had, never relenting against anything that could threaten his faith.<sup>18</sup> As mentioned above, he was born to pagan parents and converted at an unknown time after an unknown event

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-27.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>16</sup> Dunn, *Tertullian*, 5.

<sup>17</sup> 1Kings 18: 25-29.

<sup>18</sup> Quasten, *Patrology, Volume 2*, 247.

that caused him to reject his paganism and embrace the religion of Christ. Though it is impossible to know what it was that caused this, as he does not tell us, it may be that it had something to do with the courage demonstrated by Christians in the face of the persecutions of the antagonistic Roman Empire.<sup>19</sup> The respect he shows towards the martyrs possibly points to this, as does the special attention he pays to the sufferings of Christians in such works as the Apology. Whatever the reason for his conversion, it is clear that Tertullian believed that Christianity, above all others, was the one true religion.

Despite the fact that Tertullian may not have been a professional jurist, it is undeniable that he did indeed have a working understanding of the legal system of his time as can be seen in the Apology. Legal sentiment and terminology can be found in many of his works, and there is definitely a preoccupation with justice residing in his mind. For Tertullian, it seems, there was an all-pervading system of justice that permeates all that exists. Much of Tertullian's life was spent in conflict, be it against pagan Romans, heretics, or, in some cases, fellow Christians whom he felt may have fallen away from the true path of God through misunderstanding or amoral choices. An overarching justice brings a balance to this conflict, helping to encourage good and destroy evil.<sup>20</sup> In the same way, justice also governs the conflicts of Tertullian's life: the side of good will always be victorious as it is supported by justice. This justice becomes manifest in the relationship between the human and the divine: how they act in relation to one another and the things they do for each other. For Tertullian, God is God because of the moral example he sets for his followers, how he created the world, and how he actively looks after and protects his creations in the role of a loving parent. Because he provides these services, he is rewarded with

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Osborn, *Tertullian, First Theologian of the West*, 65.

worship, praise and love. Any god that does not meet these criteria does not deserve to be worshipped since they do nothing to justify demanding it. So, for Tertullian, being God does not automatically warrant praise, 'being' is not as important as 'doing,' and a god must act like a god to deserve being worshipped. Consequently, humanity has its part to play in this relationship as well: God provides a moral example and people are expected to follow it. Many of Tertullian's works focus on how a person is supposed to act based upon the laws given to them by God and the example set through the teaching of Christ. Doing so 'completes the equation', and failure to live up to God's example breaks the contract, at which point God is perfectly justified in withdrawing his support from the human race if he sees fit. The concept is very similar to the Old Testament notion of covenant, in which the people of Israel entered into a contract with their God: if they followed his rules he would forever protect them. When the Israelites broke the covenant, God withdrew his protection and they were removed from the Promised Land. This applies to the New Covenant of Christianity as well, as fear of being punished by God is an effective way of keeping his followers acting in the way he has decreed to be right.<sup>21</sup> Tertullian spends much time in many of his treatises mocking the pagan gods, as well as heretical versions of the Christian God, for being criminals and morally bankrupt. Such accusations derive from his belief in this justice and that gods do not deserve to be worshipped if they are in any way immoral. This view of justice will be referred to in this thesis as Reciprocal Justice: the justice that balances good and evil and is essentially a contract between two parties that requires the reciprocal actions of both in order to work. Failure to comply with the terms of the contract can only lead to a disastrous imbalance. The perfect illustration of this relationship and its reciprocal nature can be found in Tertullian's work On Repentance:

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

Well since, God as Judge presides over the exacting and maintaining of justice, which to Him is most dear; and since it is with an eye to justice that He appoints all the sum of His discipline, is there room for doubting that, just as in all our acts universally, so also in the case of repentance, justice must be rendered to God?----which duty can indeed only be fulfilled on the condition that repentance be brought to bear only on sins.<sup>22</sup>

God loves justice and he tells his people what he expects of them through his laws. God also renders justice to his people and they are expected to reciprocate this justice, and in this passage Tertullian tells us that it is through the act of repentance that they reciprocate. Repentance was indeed the subject that Tertullian was writing about in this work, but it was certainly not the only way in which humans are to reciprocate; nevertheless this passage establishes his belief that if God does something for us, we are required to do as he asks in return since that is the nature of our relationship with him. Certainly, as has been stated already and will be examined in greater detail later, this is the only relationship between the divine and the mundane that can possibly work, since it is the only one in which both parties are working for the betterment of humanity, instead of other systems in which the gods are petty, do-nothing types, and their followers are morally ambiguous. In those latter cases, the actions of both parties can only be detrimental to the cosmos.

This reciprocal relationship has a special meaning for Christians as it becomes quite clear through Tertullian's writing that because Christians are the true people of the just God, they are to be held to a far higher moral standard than anyone else. They are, in essence, the personification of this justice since they are the only ones who know and understand God completely, showing this by accepting his Son as Saviour. In comparison to other groups, especially the pagan majority in Rome at the time of Tertullian's writing, Christians already exhibited a very high morality, placing great value upon charity and chastity, and having higher value for all human life. Christians were even encouraged to love their enemies, the only people

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22 *Rep.* II.12; Thelwall, 658.

who were encouraged to do so.<sup>23</sup> Tertullian insisted on the moral superiority of Christians, often pointing to the chastity and integrity of the followers of Christ as well as the courage of the martyrs to illustrate his views, and not even the Church itself could be allowed to throw this into question, as may be seen in his treatise On Modesty.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the moral righteousness of Christianity exceeded that of all other religions,<sup>25</sup> and Tertullian expresses his understanding of this higher Christian morality and its special brand of kindness, generosity and empathy in the opening chapter of his letter To Scapula:

We are not in any great perturbation or alarm about the persecutions we suffer from the ignorance of men; for we have attached ourselves to this sect, fully accepting the terms of its covenant, so that, as men whose very lives are not their own, we engage in these conflicts, our desire being to obtain God's promised rewards, and our dread lest the woes with which He threatens an unchristian life should overtake us. Hence we shrink not from the grapple with your utmost rage, coming even forth of our own accord to the contest; and condemnation gives us more pleasure than acquittal. We have sent, therefore, this tract to you in no alarm about ourselves, but in much concern for you and for all our enemies, to say nothing of our friends. For our religion commands us to love even our enemies, and to pray for those who persecute us, aiming at a perfection all its own, and seeking in its disciples something of a higher type than the commonplace goodness of the world. For all love those who love them; it is peculiar to Christians alone to love those that hate them. Therefore mourning over your ignorance, and compassionating human error, and looking on to that future of which every day shows threatening signs, necessity is laid on us to come forth in this way also, that we may set before you the truths you will not listen to openly.<sup>26</sup>

Also, in the opening chapter of the Antidote for the Scorpion's Sting we are given a clear illustration as to how far Tertullian believes the reciprocal nature of our relationship with God should extend:

Once for all Christ died for us, once for all He was slain that we might not be slain. If He demands the like from me in return, does He also look for salvation from my

<sup>23</sup> Mt. 5:44 and Lk; 6:27.

<sup>24</sup> Osborn, *Tertullian, First Theologian of the West*, 23.

<sup>25</sup> Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God*, 99.

<sup>26</sup> *Scap*, I. 1-5; Thelwell, 105.

death by violence? Or does God importune for the blood of men, especially if He refuses that of bulls and he-goats?<sup>27</sup>

This morality that Tertullian so advocates is very similar to the old concept of *imitatio Christi*, the goal of all Christians to live their lives in imitation of Christ's, in moral perfection and completely devoted to God. Tertullian believed firmly in this, and the standard set by Christ is the only acceptable standard by which a Christian can live, that is, in accordance with Reciprocal Justice. Because of this, Tertullian will always allude to the moral superiority of Christians, as he does countless times in the Apology. This is because they try to emulate a more morally aware deity as opposed to the pagans who worship the killers and rapists that occupy the Greco-Roman pantheon. Failure to adhere to the high morality demanded by God is not only detrimental to the individual sinner, but to the entire Christian community as well. This is especially true as it pertains to fornication, which seemed to be the greatest of all sins in Tertullian's eyes. So much so, in fact, that he writes several treatises, such as On Modesty and On the Veiling of Virgins, that address the issues of Christians committing acts of adultery and arousing lust within each other through the way that they are dressed. This also relates to the idea of remarriage, to which Tertullian was steadfastly opposed.<sup>28</sup> In his view, remarriage, for a Christian, was essentially the same as adultery.

As stated above, Reciprocal Justice is very similar to the concept of covenant, which is a central theme in the Old Testament, and, in the Old Testament, the cost of breaking the covenant with God is destruction.<sup>29</sup> Tertullian, being fearful of what might occur if the demands of Reciprocal Justice are not met, writes extensively against what he perceives to be moral decay in

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27 *Scorp.*, I; Thelwall, 634.

28 Dunn, *Tertullian*, 5.

29 Ezekiel 15: 5-8.

the Christian Church. But, unlike his attacks on pagans and heretics, these treatises are softer in tone, with Tertullian simply reaching out to his brothers and sisters in faith, trying to help them see where they were wrong, allowing them to repent of their wrongs, and going back to living in the way they were expected to live.

In many ways, Tertullian was a simple man. His view of religion reflected this simplicity, and he did not wish for philosophical questioning to have any part in theological discussion. This was a conservative view when compared to some of his contemporaries, such as Clement of Alexandria, who believed that philosophy was needed for the Greeks to be righteous and was therefore a stepping stone to prepare the world for Christ's arrival.<sup>30</sup> Despite this, Tertullian received many of his Christian beliefs, such as his concept of God, the soul and even his high moral principles through a Stoic filter. But he was always quick to defend himself by stating that any similarities between his thought and that of the pagan philosophers were the results of the latter stealing their ideas from the Old Testament, and distorting God-given truth into something lacking.<sup>31</sup> Ironically, it was Tertullian who developed the terminology that would be used in the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, one of Christianity's greatest philosophical mysteries. But his aversion to allowing philosophical thought into religious dialogue is eminently clear in this famous passage from his treatise On the Prescription of Heretics:

What then hath Athens in common with Jerusalem? What hath the Academy in common with the Church? What have heretics in common with Christians? Our principles are from the "Porch" of Solomon, who himself handed down that the Lord must be sought in simplicity of heart. Away with those who bring forward a Stoic or Platonic or dialectic Christianity. We have no need of speculative enquiry after we have known Christ Jesus; nor of search for the Truth after we have received the Gospel. When

30 Ed. L Miller, ed., *Classical Statements on Faith and Reason* (Random House: New York, 170), 13.

31 Quasten, *Patrology*, Volume 2, 321.

we become believers, we have no desire to believe anything besides; for the first article of our belief is that there is nothing besides which we ought to believe.<sup>32</sup>

This dismissal of philosophy stems from his detestation of heresy. Tertullian believed that sophistry was the gateway to heresy, and that adding dialectic to discussions on faith led to the formation of the dubious ideas on which many heretics based their groundless faiths. In his view, questions would simply beget more questions, which would lead people into dangerous areas that would give rise to heretical teachings. Examples of this include Valentinus, who once questioned God's origin, and Zeno, who thought it was right to equate God with matter.<sup>33</sup> Beliefs such as these were dangerous to the Christian faith, the first, because if God has an origin, then he is not eternal, and if he was created, then who created him? This raises the inevitable question as to whether or not a being exists that transcends God. In the second case, if (as Zeno maintained) God is composed of matter, then that means he cannot be said to transcend matter, and if he is indeed composed of matter, what is the origin of this matter. This once more leads to the concept of someone or something creating God, which is blasphemy. The point here is that in Tertullian's view, philosophy leads people into dangerous places and puts their faith in peril. This is the hallmark of a heretical mind and Tertullian believed philosophical religious thought had to be tempered to prevent others from falling away from the path of righteousness.

The simplicity of faith alluded to earlier, which runs counter to the dialectic ponderings of other Church fathers and pagan philosophers, manifests itself chiefly in Tertullian's utter dedication to Scripture as absolute truth. Tertullian cites Scripture as a primary source innumerable times in his writing, and, like almost all Christians at the time, attributed to it complete authority. He defends most of his arguments against heretics and other Christians by

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32 *Her.* VII; Bindley, 45-46.

33 Miller, *Classical Statements on Faith and Reason*, 5.

using passages from the Bible, and he will usually argue against any opponents using Scripture against him by proving that their understanding of the verses they quote is flawed, and that the true meaning will always support his position because his is the correct one. Tertullian, in other words, believed the Scripture had to be completely truthful. As the only thing given to humanity by God to instruct them in their daily lives, the Bible outlined what was expected of people in order to participate in reciprocal justice. Human beings cannot perform at the level expected of them if the instructions given them are false or lacking, and, in any case, a just God would not lie to his people as that would be breaking one of his own laws. So in order for reciprocal justice to work as it is supposed to, and the equation to be completed, every word of the Bible must be true, though people's understanding of these words may sometimes be flawed. For Tertullian, Scripture had given people the power to fulfil the demands of God's laws, once again in imitation of Christ who had come to fulfil the Law.<sup>34</sup> We will examine this more closely in the section on Against Praxeas. For Tertullian, the most important ingredients of religion are its simplicity and perfection: simplicity of faith that will hold fast and adhere to the authority of Scripture, and the perfection of the believer, forged through living the life of holiness through the imitation of Christ and observing the will of God.<sup>35</sup>

As stated above, legal terminology played an important role in Tertullian's rhetoric, so much so that it led many scholars to conclude that he was a jurist, a suggestion which Barnes has taken pains to refute. One of the most prominent examples of this is Tertullian's use of the term *Regula fidei* (Rule of faith).<sup>36</sup> The word *Regula* could be found in Roman law practice, which had been developed by Roman jurists in the first and second centuries. It was basically a

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<sup>34</sup> Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God*, 98.

<sup>35</sup> Barnes, *Tertullian*, 1.

<sup>36</sup> Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God*, 99.

normative summarising of the law, and it was consulted if a particular law or statute was unclear; by doing this, a judge or lawyer could interpret it in the way that it was intended. In this way the *Regula* had no authority on its own, but was simply a tool used to discern the appropriate meaning of the law in order to try cases fairly. In Tertullian's writing, the *Regula fidei* fits in well with the legal definition of *Regula*: it was the summary of the law of God which was then used in the act of interpreting the Scriptures.<sup>37</sup> Tertullian was adamant about the fact that Christians were still bound by the law, and he did not believe the argument that the Apostles allowed for a relaxation of the authority of the Old Testament law:

When first the Gospel thundered and shook the old system to its base, when dispute was being held on the question of retaining or not the Law; this is the first rule which the apostles, on the authority of the Holy Spirit, send out to those who were already beginning to be gathered to their side out of the nations: "It has seemed (good)," say they, "to the Holy Spirit and to us to cast upon you no ampler weight than (that) of those (things) from which it is necessary that abstinence be observed; from sacrifices, and from fornications, and from blood: by abstaining from which ye act rightly, the Holy Spirit carrying you."<sup>38</sup>

As is evident from this passage, the law of the Old Testament and, by extension, the Gospel, is eternal, and we are forever to try to live up to the example it sets. As stated above, the Bible for Tertullian was of absolute authority, and gave its followers a complete blueprint as to how to live and how to act.

Roman law in the time of Tertullian had grown out of the Republican law system of the Roman Republic prior to the sweeping changes brought about by the creation of the Principate under Augustus Caesar. Most of the power of legislature belonged to the Senate, which would propose laws to the appropriate magistrates for their approval. These laws were said to often follow a common unwritten law known as the *Ius*, as well as a set of important rules that were

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 102-103

<sup>38</sup> *Mod.*, XII. 3-4; Thelwall, 85.

written on what was called the 'Twelve Tables,' which dealt with legal family matters, property, succession, and the rules for legal process.<sup>39</sup> These Twelve Tables may have been the basis for the *Regula*.

The most important source of private law was the praetor, the magistrate in charge of justice, who would publish an edict in the Roman Forum at the beginning of his year-long term in office. This edict would outline solutions for legal problems as well as the formulae for administering these solutions. This edict was a flexible and dynamic way of administering justice (something which may well have appalled the staunch Tertullian), and the praetor did not make earth-shattering changes every year: it was mostly just small adjustments. The praetor did not officially create new laws, but rather created solutions to legal matters and amended solutions that were becoming obsolete. The creation of new laws was not a power granted to any one magistrate, for during the Republic, Rome took great care not to place too much power in the hands of any one individual. But the praetor did still wield considerable power, since he could create new solutions when needed, and these, in turn, could result in the creation of new rights for citizens, just as the denial of an old solution would indirectly cause the loss of the right on which it was based. In truth, though, because the magistracies of the Republic were interchangeable, and because one person would often hold many of them in a lifetime, the praetor often had little or no legal training and would often seek advice from the jurists, who were the real minds behind the drafting of the praetorian edicts.<sup>40</sup>

With the advent of the Principate, the source of law in the Roman Empire became centralised in the person of the emperor. Though the Senate and the magistracies still existed,

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<sup>39</sup> David Johnston, *Roman Law in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

the Senate eventually became a hollow shell of its former self, mostly taking an advisory role in the day-to-day governance of Rome. This was because the emperor held the tribunician power of veto, allowing him to reject any new legislation presented by the Senate, thus stripping it of any real independent power it could wield. The power of the praetor was also reduced by the time of the Principate, though it seems to have been steadily declining over previous decades to the point that Hadrian commissioned the jurist Julian to draft a finalised version of the praetorian edict<sup>41</sup> some time after the first century.<sup>42</sup> The general term used for laws made by the emperor was 'constitution' and, if the said law was made in a court setting, it was called a 'decree'.<sup>43</sup> The emperor, however, like the praetors before him, was often a man of little legal knowledge. He was usually either a general who had seized power, or a blood heir of the previous emperor who was simply handed his magistracies, for, just as in the Republic, the magistracies were simply stepping stones to acquiring the rank of consul, and in the case of the emperor, becoming consul would justify his selection to the position of emperor, which maintained the facade the Principate tried to perpetuate: that the Republic still existed. Because of this, the emperor had assistance from the jurists, who retained their standing in the empire because of their legal expertise, thus creating a new role of civil servant jurist, who often held high positions in the empire.<sup>44</sup>

The jurists were a professional class of legal experts, to whom the judges and lawyers of the empire turned for advice, and they produced a great deal of legal literature during the high classical period, which ran from the late Republic until the end of the third century AD<sup>45</sup>.

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41 *Ibid.*

42 Fritz Schulz, *History of Roman Legal Science* (Oxford University Press: London, 1953), 127.

43 Johnston, *Roman Law in Context*, 8.

44 *Ibid.*, 9.

45 *Ibid.*, 5.

Coincidentally, this covers the entirety of Tertullian's life. Roman jurists in the late republic were deeply influenced by Greek culture, such as rhetoric and philosophy, but their concerns were not philosophical. In fact, they applied what they learned in decidedly unphilosophical ways,<sup>46</sup> and eminent jurists were known to teach law.<sup>47</sup>

The question, then, is whether Tertullian was a jurist, as some have claimed. He does share some similarities with the jurists, including both a knowledge and love of Roman law, and an ability to use rhetoric to attack his opponents. However, Tertullian's utter contempt for dialectic thought, which the jurists had incorporated into their way of thinking since the days of the Republic, seems to present a counter argument to this, and, as we have seen, Barnes gives a number of simple and practical reasons as to why it would be an error to label him a jurist. On the other hand, those who support the earlier view point out that the name Tertullianus is not a common one, that Tertullian frequently takes a legal approach to questions presented to him in his writings, and that Eusebius calls him one of the most skilled practitioners of law in Rome.<sup>48</sup> Both sides in this debate can make a sound case, and, given the lack of authoritative biographical information available for Tertullian, it is essentially impossible to tell which is correct. Roger Pearse, for example, cites strengths and weaknesses and says that neither side can make a particularly convincing argument.<sup>49</sup> It is therefore possible for anyone to draw his or her own conclusions based upon the information available. My own opinion is that Tertullian was, most likely, not a jurist, simply because he does not take any credit for being one in his writings. Such works as the Apology might have had more influence on the Roman magistrates to whom it was

46 *Ibid.*, 7-8.

47 J.A Crook, *Law and Life of Rome* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1984), 90.

48 Roger Pearse. "Tertullian the Jurist?" The Tertullian Project, accessed February 5<sup>th</sup> 2011, <http://ter tullian.org/jurist.htm>

49 *Ibid.*

addressed had it borne the authority of a jurist, especially considering the legal tone of the work. Tertullian certainly received education in rhetoric and law, but having the training for a profession does not necessarily mean one is going to follow that profession. It is also possible that Tertullian may have held the office of jurist at one time, but abandoned it upon his conversion to Christianity as a sort of protest against the Roman persecutions.

I will now begin my examination of those works of Tertullian that most clearly illustrate the concept of Reciprocal Justice. These works will include the Apology, as it illustrates the difference between Christian morality and pagan morality; Against the Valentinians and Against Praxeas, which are perfect examples of what Tertullian expects of God; and finally On the Veiling of Virgins, On Chastity, On the Apparel of Women, and On Modesty, since they detail what Tertullian deems to be appropriate and inappropriate behaviour in the life of believing Christians, as they try to live up to the lofty expectations God has for them.

## Chapter 2

The Apology: Christian vs. Pagan Morality

The Apology is considered by many to be Tertullian's greatest as well as his most important work. At its core it is a passionate plea against the evils witnessed by Tertullian as a result of the Roman persecutions of the fledgling religion of Christianity. Composed around 197 AD, possibly after To the Pagans and Against the Jews,<sup>50</sup> it was addressed to Roman provincial governors, those who had the influence to either continue or cease the persecutions. Though the tone of this work is not quite as biting in its sarcasm as some of his other writings, such as Against the Valentinians, there is certainly no shortage of ridicule against what Tertullian sees as unfair and perhaps even criminal behaviour against the followers of his faith orchestrated by the rulers of the Roman Provinces.

The entirety of the Apology is an appeal to the Roman legal system simply to allow Christians who are brought to trial to have the same rights as were afforded to other accused criminals by the legal practices of the Roman Empire. The work is also a lamentation, a cry of outrage and sadness over the fact that Christians, who, as the representatives of what is good in the world, and therefore the embodiment of the reciprocal justice that keeps the universe in check, are being targeted by the Romans for the simple act of being Christian.

Chapter I of the Apology begins with an appeal to the Roman magistrates to allow Truth, here personified as female, to enter into the court of law and state her case:

She knows that her part is that of a foreigner upon earth, that amongst aliens she easily finds enemies, while she has her race, her home, hope, welcome and honour in heaven. One thing only does she eagerly desire in the meantime, namely that she be not condemned without being known. What loss is herein inflicted on the laws, which are absolute masters in their own realm, if she should be heard?<sup>51</sup>

50 Roger Pearse. "Apologeticum" The Tertullian Project. Roger Pearse, accessed, September 25, 2010, <http://www.tertullian.org/works/apologeticum.htm>.

51 Apo., Souter I; 3.

We are not even a chapter into this work and Tertullian has already thrown down the gauntlet to those he is accusing of injustice: they are denying the truth itself by treating the Christian world as they do. They are manipulating their own system of justice so that they can execute and persecute Christians simply because they bear the name of 'Christian', and by so doing, they are, in fact, denying the word of the truth and, as a consequence, justice itself. The justice of Rome as it concerns Christians is no justice at all, for there is no real charge that can be levied against them, and the trials of Christians in the Roman Empire do not follow the normal proceedings of a Roman court. Instead Rome chooses to attack Christians for simply being who they are: a charge that should not have born any weight in a society such as Rome that was relatively liberal in its policies on religious freedom. Moreover, in this chapter Tertullian provides what he considers to be irrefutable proof that the Romans are in fact merely displaying their ignorance when it comes to their presentation of Christianity:

It is an evidence of the ignorance, which, while it is made the excuse, is really the condemnation of injustice, when all who hated in the past, because they did not know the character of that which they hated, cease to hate as soon as they cease to be ignorant. It is from this class that Christians are produced, of course from conviction, and begin to hate what they had been, and to profess what they hated, and are indeed as numerous as we who are branded with that name.<sup>52</sup>

The Christians are blameless, says Tertullian, even though they are being condemned and persecuted *en masse*; the trial that they are facing is in fact the result of an ignorance and fear on the part of the Roman people. Those who came to know what the Christian message was, their abhorrence of violence and high moral standing, instantly fell on their knees and proclaimed Christ to be God, and the real issue Romans have with Christians is that Christianity is taking over the Empire, making its way into every aspect of Roman society, and taking its foothold in every aspect of Roman life.

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, I; Souter, 5.

This argument, however, does not hold a lot of weight. His account of pagan Romans dropping to their knees and immediately exclaiming “Christ is Lord” might have been representative of his own conversion story, or perhaps it reflected the climate of his native area of North Africa, but we may doubt that it often happened in Rome. It also seems that Tertullian may have been a little optimistic in his assessment of how many Christians there were in the city. Fifty years after he wrote the Apology, there were a mere 50,000 in Rome proper, amounting to a paltry 5-10 percent of the total population.<sup>53</sup> One would expect the numbers to have been even lower at the time of writing. But Tertullian was fighting a war, and this inflation of Christian numbers was perhaps used as a scare tactic against the Roman governors to whom the Apology was addressed.

So what, then, was this ignorance of which Tertullian speaks? There were several factors that contributed to the persecution of Christianity, one of which was the slanderous rumours spoken against Christians as to the nature of their worship. They were accused of many licentious activities such as incest (attending the Eucharist, known as an *Agape* or love feast, with people they referred to as brother and father), as well as the accusation of child devouring which Tertullian addresses in Chapter 2 of the Apology. Ironically, such ghastly accusations of sexual debauchery and cannibalism would later be levied against other religious groups by Christians. Even though these charges were groundless, they arose out of fear of the unknown, that element of human nature which was one of the major reasons for the divisive and combative relationship between Christian and Pagan in Roman society. The Christians were, to their fault, somewhat secretive, and the Romans were suspicious of any group that acted under cover of darkness. Indeed, they were even suspicious of their own fire brigades,<sup>54</sup> a fact that can be seen

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53 Ermantinger, *Daily Life of Christians in Ancient Rome*, 36.

54 Gillian Clark. *Christianity and Roman Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 36.

in a correspondence between Pliny the Younger and Emperor Trajan wherein Pliny suggests the formation of a fire brigade in the city of Nicomedia. The emperor responds that it sounds like a good idea, but one needs to be careful, because such organisations have been the source of disturbances in the past.<sup>55</sup> Christians would meet at daybreak and had no visual representation of their God, marking them as a secret society in the eyes of Rome. Another factor against them was that in their rejection of the gods of Rome, whom the people credited as leading them to their vaunted position of ruling the classical world, the Christians were in a way undermining the social order,<sup>56</sup> and rejection of the Imperial Cult would also have certainly led to suspicion. The Imperial Cult was more a unifying mechanism to bring everyone in Rome beneath the shadow of the emperor, rather than an actual religious institution; but by doing these things, the Christians were involuntarily making it seem that they were rejecting several important factors on which Roman society was based, causing some to speculate that they were intentionally trying to subvert the normalcy of Roman culture. Christianity also had much in common with several of the 'mystery religions' that were appearing in Rome at that time, religions that were trying to supplant the pre-existing Olympian religion to which the Roman people felt they owed their prosperity. That is, it answered the question of what happens when we die and gave hope for life after death, instead of just ascribing eternal fate in Hades for all, no matter what their actions had been in life.<sup>57</sup> These mystery religions were problematic for Rome, and any association Christianity had with them did not work in its favour. So when these factors are brought together, one can understand why the Romans may have seen the Christians as a shadowy and threatening group.

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55 Ermantinger, *Daily Life of Christians in Ancient Rome*, 39.

56 Clark, *Christianity and Roman Society*, 9-20.

57 Ermantinger, *Daily Life of Christians in Ancient Rome*, 18.

It would not be too great a stretch of the imagination to say that Rome, which had been ravaged by civil war during the period of the late Republic, would indeed be wary of anything it might consider a threat, aggravated by the fact that Christianity had its origins in Judea, which had historically been a hotbed of political unrest within the bounds of the empire. In fact, in Rome suspicion against organisations that were not controlled by the state was so prevalent that even political assemblies had to be monitored by a magistrate to make sure no one was trying to raise up a mob in order to seize power.<sup>58</sup> This is understandable considering the mockery that was made of such political assemblies during the reign of the First Triumvirate. Truly the *Populus Romanus* had suffered much during the times of the late Republic, when anyone who had control of a sizable army could seize control from the senate at any time.

As we have mentioned, the region of Judea was one of political strife during the time of the early empire, and one must also remember the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth himself and the Messianic tradition of the Jews of Judea. Jesus himself had said "Think not that I am come to bring peace on earth: I came not to bring peace, but a sword."<sup>59</sup> And if Jesus was indeed the Messiah, he whose coming was prophesied in the Old Testament, then he was indeed a revolutionary, as the prophecy spoke of the King of the Davidic house being sent by God to free the people of Israel from their captors who, in this case, were the Romans. If the prophecy was widely known to the Romans, it is understandable that they would be wary of the followers of Christ, a Messianic claimant, and might well see them as a dangerous group looking to subvert Roman rule in the province of Judea and possibly start a more violent revolution using the prophesy as a rallying point.

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<sup>58</sup> Crook, *Law and Life in Rome*, 265.

<sup>59</sup> Mt. 10:34.

The Christians also had the misfortune of being used as scapegoats in the Roman world. A series of weak rulers and new civil wars, sparked by the desire of powerful generals grasping at power in their attempts to become Caesars, were weakening the stability of Rome. External forces were also beginning to wear chinks in its once invincible armour: such forces as the Germanic Barbarian tribes, who were starting to attack from the North and West and a rejuvenated group of Persians from the East. This onset of problems caused the once proud, fearless, and quite open-minded Romans to become fearful, and when they began to look for a cause of their problems, their eyes eventually fell on the Christians, and thus the persecutions started, targeting the beliefs of the fringe group as grounds for their destruction. As early as Nero, Christians were being blamed for a multitude of calamities befalling the people of Rome, such as the great fire that nearly destroyed the city in 64 AD. Nero publicly blamed Christianity and had sought them out for their role in the fire, more or less accusing them of grand arson, despite the fact that any role they could have played in the fire was no more than that of any other citizen and would not have had anything to do with their faith.<sup>60</sup> Most persecutions, however, were locally inspired, and the first really organized one came about under the emperor Decius. The latter, feeling that Rome's problems were the result of the people of Rome being rejected by the Olympian gods that had made Rome great because the Christian population had rejected them, proclaimed a universal sacrifice to the pagan gods in hopes of catching Christians, who would refuse to make such a sacrifice on religious grounds.<sup>61</sup>

Tertullian makes the statement that the only charge Roman courts are capable of levying against Christians is the name of Christian, and this name keeps coming up in the Apology as the sole reason for the persecutions. This claim, however, is not completely accurate, for although

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<sup>60</sup> Ermantinger, *Daily Life of Christians in Ancient Rome*, 19-20.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

they were indeed persecuted for the simple fact of being Christian, the reasons as to why being a Christian would be viewed as a crime are not given in the Apology. Nor would one expect them to be, for once again, Tertullian is fighting a propaganda war here. Also, there is no real evidence to support any accusation that the Christian populace was guilty of the acts of moral depravity of which they were accused, or the presence of anything in their practices of which Roman rulers might be suspicious.

Pliny the Younger found in the religious services (of Christians) nothing but meetings at early morning, the singing of hymns to Christ and God, and the promise to be true to their life of holiness by joining in a pledge to be faithful to their religion, forbidding murder, adultery, dishonesty and other crimes.<sup>62</sup>

This really shows how Tertullian sees the Christians: that they do indeed exemplify what is good in this world. It also shows his mode of thinking. In his view there is nothing unjust in what the Christians are doing, even if Christian worship and religious structure does have traits that Rome might find untrustworthy. Christians are ruled by a greater justice, the justice of God, and they abhor things like murder and adultery, which had become rampant in Rome, murder taking place daily in the coliseums and adultery in nearly every household, a testament to the rapidly decaying morality of pagan Rome.

Tertullian then goes on to speak of the legal anomaly that is 'justice' as it pertains to the Christians. For a start, in that same correspondence between Pliny and Trajan he mentioned, he states that the emperor tells Pliny that the Christians were not to be sought out, but to be punished if they were brought before him. Tertullian finds this extraordinary, that a people could be considered evil, but at the same time are not guilty of anything that would warrant them being actively pursued by the Roman authorities. Stating that criminals who are guilty of real crimes, such as robbery, are tracked throughout the entire empire, Tertullian wonders why Christians are

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62 *Apo.*, II; Souter, 9.

not. If they are such abhorrent criminals that their mere existence threatens the stability of the empire, why is there no empire-wide warrant issued to round them all up? It is easy to tell what he is getting at here, that in their heart of hearts, the pagan Romans must know that Christians are not a threat to public safety, that the population at large has nothing to fear from them because they are not going to murder or steal, or harm any other person in any way. Herein lies the absurdity of classifying Christians as criminals in the first place: if they are not doing anything damaging enough to be sought out, how then can they be criminals? Once again it is simply the matter of the name of Christian, though no other group is hunted for such flimsy reasons. How, then, is it just to punish a group that, by the letter of the law, is faultless? They are being punished for the name they bear, not for any of their actions.

Another oddity in the prosecution of Christians in the Roman legal system as presented by Tertullian is the fact that Christians are being tortured to get them to confess to their belief in Christ. Though the use of torture in itself is not peculiar, *summa supplicia*, the most extreme form of torturous punishment, was used upon Christians during the persecutions and included burning, beast fighting, and, of course, crucifixion.<sup>63</sup> If it was just the use of *summa supplicia* it would make sense, since treason, a crime of which the Romans could perceivably accuse the Christians for reasons given above, would have certainly been met with the *summa supplicia*. The problem, however, is the result the officials wished to get from the Christians as they were being tortured. Instead of torturing them to confess, the Christians are tortured until they deny. Tertullian says that torture is normally used by Romans in order to make a criminal confess what he or she has done, but, when a Christian confesses Christ, it is only the beginning of his or her tortures. Tertullian sees this as contradicting the whole reason for the use of torture, namely to

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63 Crook, *Law and Life in Rome*, 273.

make a criminal admit to his wrongdoing. If what they want is a suspect's admission to being a Christian, then why do they need to continue torture after getting what they wish? He says that by acting in this way, it appears that what they truly want is a denial of the facts, that they torture suspects to make them deny their 'crime' instead of admitting to it. This can be seen once more in the advice Trajan gives Pliny, telling him to release any man who, upon being brought before him, denies that he is a Christian. If he invokes the pagan gods, he is to be released.<sup>64</sup> One can see how nonsensical this entire thing is:

But a Christian man you believe to be guilty of all crimes, an enemy of gods, emperors, laws, morals, the whole teaching of nature, and yet you compel him to deny, in order that you may acquit one whom you will not be able to acquit unless from his denial. You are guilty of unfair dealing against the laws. You wish him therefore to deny his guilt, that you may make him out to be innocent, and that too unwilling as he now is, and no longer arraigned for the past.<sup>65</sup>

This practice turns the entire legal system upside down: it is not justice. The whole purpose of the trial is to establish a confession, but here a denial will allow a person to be acquitted. It undermines the justice system if a person can be acquitted so easily, for as it stands, a Christian need simply lie and invoke Jupiter or any other member of the Roman pantheon and thereby escape punishment. It may just be a symptom of how high pagan Romans held themselves if they trusted a simple denial by one of their own, or, more likely, this shows that the pagan Romans actually believed that Christians exhibited a superior morality as they do not seem to account for the possibility that a Christian would simply lie to save him or herself.

One has to wonder how the Romans could have thought this could have really worked, especially when one considers Trajan's advice to Pliny: that he should not look for Christians, but only put them on trial when they were brought before him. One would think that there would be

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<sup>64</sup> Ermantinger, *The Daily Life of Christians in the Roman Empire*, 72.

<sup>65</sup> *Apo.*, II; Souter, 11.

sufficient evidence for a strong case against someone by the time they reached the provincial governor, but at the same time, a simple denial is enough to get the accused acquitted. Thus through a simple denial the Romans would be willing to allow these base, traitorous enemies of the state to go free. It just further proves that the Romans were only using the Christians as scapegoats instead of fearing them as a real threat to Roman society. As Tertullian says at the end of chapter 2: "If a Christian is guilty of no specific crime, it is a very guilty sort of crime, if one of the name only!"<sup>66</sup>

By the end of chapter 4 Tertullian brings up another point: if he, as a Christian, is being accused of these horrible, traitorous things, then why is he, as a Roman citizen, not allowed to answer these charges freely in order to clear his own name?

I am guilty of incest: why do they not inquire into it? of infanticide, why do they not extort a confession? I commit some offence against the gods or the Caesars; why am I not heard, when I am able to clear myself?<sup>67</sup>

He also adds in chapter 3 that, in Rome, a person can be considered good aside from the fact they are a Christian, as in "he is a good man, other than he is a Christian;" once again, it is the name here, the word Christian being associated with a person that automatically adds a negative connotation to a person's identity, whether or not they had actually done anything to merit it. In fact, the person in question could very well be a model citizen, but simply being a Christian is enough to make others suspicious of them.

In this chapter, too, Tertullian ridicules the Romans on the grounds that they really do not know who it is that they are persecuting, since they are targeting the *Chrestiani*, not the *Christiani*. The mispronunciation was actually quite common, for whereas *christos* "anointed" was by no means an everyday term among pagans, *chrestos*, meaning good, kind, gracious, or

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, IV; Souter, 19.

useful, was a word in general circulation. The pronunciation of both words was very similar. It is understandable, therefore, that non-Christians would tend to hear “Jesus Chrest” rather than “Jesus Christ”. Tertullian, however, points out that even though either derivation ought to produce admiration rather than hatred,<sup>68</sup> the fact remains that the term *chrestiani* is wrong, and that if the Romans are going to persecute Christians they should at least know the correct name of those they are persecuting. In any case, says Tertullian, the Christians are wholly blameless.

Chapter 4 is interesting, and starts out mockingly by saying that the persecutors of Christians are guilty of the very crimes of which they accuse Christians, but it soon turns to something else. As we have seen, some scholars who have studied Tertullian have come to the conclusion that he was a jurist, or at least had some official training in law. In this chapter, however, Tertullian calls for the rejection of some earthly laws in favour of a greater justice that exceeds them. Tertullian says that by carrying out these persecutions, the Romans are in fact acting with single-minded tyranny, something Rome has, throughout its history, deliberately tried to eliminate, even if they had fallen into it once again upon the establishment of the Principate. The idea, in fact, goes against the very values on which Rome was built. The issue here, however, is that Tertullian is calling for legal reform as it concerns his people. He is saying that the laws are inefficient, and that since they are targeting a blameless people, they should be repealed or at least amended. Here he is appealing to a higher form of justice, a justice greater than even the laws of the land. Even though they are thought to be just, they do not adhere to the higher justice of Tertullian, and for this reason they are not just at all. The Christians, unlike the Romans, answer to this higher justice, they lead their lives by following a high moral code, they

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68 William Smith, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature, Sects and Doctrines; being a Continuation of "The Dictionary of the Bible"* (London: J Murray, 1887; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1967), 550-551.

abhor violence and adultery and live as Tertullian believes every person should, making them blameless before the divine justice that Tertullian sees as the guiding force of existence. Therefore, if the laws of Rome see any fault in the way the Christians live their daily lives, then the law is what is at fault, which means it should be changed. Therefore, not only does Tertullian's call for legal reform illustrate his faith in Christianity, it also shows that if he was indeed a jurist (which seems unlikely), he is a Christian first and a jurist second, his faith coming before his own occupation. It might be expected that a person who made a life out of the law would try to reconcile the law with Christianity instead of trying to change it, but in the case of Tertullian, his faith comes before his supposed occupation. True, he does indeed show that the Romans are not following their own legal practices in their persecution of the Christians, but he does not try to defend the laws themselves. Instead he makes an appeal to the common link of human decency and open-mindedness that was brought about with the institution of the *Pax Romana*, which was what allowed Christianity to flourish in the first place.<sup>69</sup> He is not appealing to Roman legalism or trying to make them feel as if they are being unjust as they themselves define justice, he is appealing to a greater sense of justice that transcends the human creature. He states clearly that people have, in the past, realised that some of their laws are unjust, and have changed them:

Did not even the improvements made by the Spartans in the laws of Lycurgus himself cause him such pain that he determined to resign office and starve himself to death?<sup>70</sup> and,

Did not Severus, that most determined of emperors, as it were but yesterday, abrogate the ridiculous Papian laws, which enforced the bringing up of children before the Julian laws enforced the contracting of marriage.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ermantinger, *Daily Life of Christians in Rome*, 7.

<sup>70</sup> *Apo.*, IV; Souter, 17.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

It is clear, therefore, that for Tertullian, justice was something other than merely law. Justice means something more; it is something higher than the court system. This justice is universal, and trumps the laws of any land. Justice transcends law, and if a law runs counter to justice then it should be removed. It is justice that determines if a law is indeed lawful, not the other way around:

The law is not only bound to satisfy itself as to its own intrinsic justice; it must also satisfy those from whom it looks for obedience. A law excites suspicion if it is not willing to be tested, and it is wicked if, after being disapproved, it claims despotic power.<sup>72</sup>

There is no doubt here that Tertullian sees the law as needing to stand up to scrutiny by the goodness that resides in the human heart, a goodness that was placed there by God through the divine justice that permeates all of existence. Any law that does not comply with this is a detriment to mankind and may well lead to its destruction. Human laws are flawed; the justice of God is not.

Moving on to Chapter V, Tertullian begins to wonder about the divinity (or lack thereof) of the Olympian gods that are worshipped by his Roman persecutors: "among you divinity is weighed out by human caprice."<sup>73</sup>

This is an interesting point, for the Romans would not regard a being as divine unless their divinisation had been approved by the senate, but this is also a reflection of the differences between the laws of the Roman people and the justice that governs Christianity. These laws were composed by mortals, great minds though they may have been, whereas the justice of God was created by God, the ultimate being with an omnipotent mind. The Romans choose whether to recognise their gods as gods, but the Christian God needs no human intervention to be divine,

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, IV; Souter, 19.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

just as the justice of God does not need the approval of human laws, since God makes the laws that represent the true justice of existence. The pagan gods were different; they were not seen as law makers by those who worshipped them. On the contrary, the ancient Hellenistic sources yield stories of rape, infidelity, incest, murder, and other examples of generally crass behaviour that were commonplace among the gods of Olympus. These beings certainly could not be considered as touchstones for morality or civic duty by those who paid them homage. Thus, because the members of the Greco-Roman pantheon cannot be considered law makers, since they do not follow any set laws themselves, the laws of the pagans who follow them must be wholly man-made. This then adds credence to Tertullian's earlier claim that the pagan laws could and should be changed if and when a time comes that they are no longer protecting the people. The God of the Christians, on the other hand, and the God of the Jews for that matter, is a law maker, and since he is the beginning and end of all, the laws he hands down are eternal and are representations of his divine justice.

Rationally, the divinity of the pagan gods is cast into serious doubt when one takes into account that they were required to receive a stamp of approval from the senate before the Romans even saw fit to offer them reverence. And one can see why they would not be eager to confer divinity on some of them. Many of the Olympians were not only morally bankrupt, but some, says Tertullian, were opposed to the entire Roman way of life. Austerity and modesty had been ideals of Roman society since the days of the Republic, and Romans were expected to strive to achieve and live their lives according to the attainment of these values. Though this was not completely adhered to by most of the more important figures in Roman history, and really began to crumble by the time the Principate of Augustus was established, it remained a traditional aspect of Roman life. The sobriety and reason of the god Apollo made him an

exemplar of this and possibly the most 'Roman' of the Greek gods. Augustus used Apollo as his patron while he was waging his war for power against Marcus Antonius, who foolishly used Dionysus as his patron. Dionysus was the antithesis of Apollo, a god who embodied drunken revelry to the point where worship of the god involved drunken orgies that would have repulsed even the most open-minded thinkers of today. Augustus' propaganda worked and Rome began to see Antony as a foreign threat, negating the people's fears that Augustus was essentially instituting a civil war. Dionysus being worshipped in Rome was a strange thing, and Tertullian comments on the fact that the Romans were by and large uncomfortable with his presence in Rome, as the consuls saw fit to banish the god and his worshippers from the entirety of Italy.<sup>74</sup> The worship of such a god was counter-productive to the traditional Roman identity of self, so how could there be any good in his being worshipped by a people whose values flew in the face of his own? The God of the Christians is different, says Tertullian, above such carnal inadequacies that the Olympians displayed, and no lusts of any kind dwell within his being. In fact, the laws of God laid down in the Hebrew Bible condemn many of the actions performed by the Olympians, which they did simply because they could. Because of this, and because he did not require senatorial approval to be a God, the laws and morality of the God of the Christians carry far more authority than that of the lustful, jealous gods of the Hellenistic world.

Traces of reciprocal justice can be seen in all of this. Tertullian himself says that the Roman criterion for deifying a being, be it god, emperor, or man, is that the being must give satisfaction to humanity.<sup>75</sup> Here is clear evidence that a god that does not help human beings is no god whatsoever and unworthy of praise, and the pagan gods gave nothing of value to the people who worshipped them and instead used their positions and power to satisfy their own petty

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, VI: Souter, 23.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, V; Souter, 19.

squabbles and lusts. For Tertullian, the worship of a god requires the god to do something to justify this praise and it seems that the Romans agreed. This could explain the aberration of Dionysian worship in Rome, since Dionysus did indeed give his worshippers something: an excuse for drunken debauchery, ecstatic visions and secret knowledge to which others were not privy. But then again, this secrecy could also explain why the god was driven from the city in the first place, given Rome's mistrust for secret organisations outlined above.

Returning to Chapter V for a moment, Tertullian makes an interesting claim. He says that the Emperor Tiberius, upon receiving intelligence from Palestine, approached the senate with the proposal of introducing Jesus into the pantheon of Roman gods. Such an action is not completely absurd, as one of Rome's great policies when it came to conquered peoples was to integrate their gods into its own belief system. It would also be in line with the policies of Augustus, who knew he had to treat the province of Judea, with its monotheism, differently from other conquered polytheistic lands. The problem, however, lies in the fact that Tertullian claims the proposal was rejected by the senate for the simple fact that it was not their idea. Given the powers that Augustus concentrated into the person of the emperor, including the veto power of the tribune of the plebeians, which allowed the emperor to strike down any legislation that did not suit his tastes, it is rather odd to think that Tiberius would have allowed the senate to reject his proposal. This leads me to believe that Tiberius was not as committed to the cause as Tertullian's language would suggest, or, more likely, that such a thing did not even happen.

Though it may seem that it is not of immediate importance, I believe it is necessary in order to understand the true intention of the Apology. As stated above, using his *magnum imperium* to have Jesus divinised as a Roman god is certainly something that Augustus himself may have done. It would follow the Roman tradition in handling subjugated peoples as well as

Augustus' own policies concerning the special treatment of the people of Judea. This being said, Tiberius, despite his personal relationship with the original imperator, was known to deviate from the actions of his predecessor only on very rare occasions. In a speech in the year 25, Tiberius stated of Augustus, "I regard all his actions and utterances as law."<sup>76</sup> Tiberius was said to have a 'slavish adherence' to Augustus's policies.<sup>77</sup> So it would certainly not have been outside of the realm of possibility that he would indeed go to the Senate with such a proposal. The problem with this, however, is again the tribunician power of veto, which was one of the 'keys' to the unofficial office of Princeps. If Tiberius truly wanted to have Jesus divinised he simply needed to veto the decision and have him introduced into the canon of Roman gods anyway, much like Augustus had done with his 'father' Julius Caesar, who was much maligned by the senate.

Friction existed between Tiberius and the senate anyway. From the moment that Augustus' will proclaimed him to be the new Princeps, the senate seemed to want to test what they could and could not do with Tiberius, including an attempt by one Messala Messalinus to make it seem as if Tiberius wished for the loyalty oath that was to be sworn to him be renewed annually, as a boost to his own ego. Tiberius was angered by this action and rightfully so; but the incident illustrates that the senate was puzzled by the new Princeps, and was concerned over what part he wished them to play during his Principate.<sup>78</sup> With such distrust on each side, it would not be unthinkable for the senate to shoot down Tiberius' proposal to deify Christ simply out of spite, especially if they had reason to believe he would not pull rank on them and use his tribunician powers to get his way: powers which he most assuredly possessed at this point. If the senate was uncertain about its continued role in Tiberius' Principate, it stands to reason that

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<sup>76</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 4.37; Yardley, 156.

<sup>77</sup> Robin Seagar. *Tiberius* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), 175.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

Tiberius had these powers, which in essence, made the senate obsolete, as any new legislation had to meet with the Princeps' approval and therefore did not need to go through the senate, leaving it bereft of its traditional role in Roman society.

Bearing this in mind, it is certainly possible that Tiberius did indeed propose the deification of Jesus, but I do not believe that it happened. There are two main reasons why, the first being the nature of Jesus' execution. Crucifixion was not a method of execution inflicted on run of the mill criminals; it was *summa supplicia*, an extreme form of punishment reserved for the most dangerous offenders against Roman justice. In the eyes of Rome, Jesus was a dangerous force who could possibly start a revolution were he able to convince enough of the people of Judea that he was the prophesied Messiah who would lead the Jews out of Roman bondage. Deification of humans in Rome was reserved for people who had done immense good for Rome as a political entity, even if what was 'good' for Rome was determined by the governing political body at the time of the deification. It would not make sense for the Roman Princeps to try to deify a man who, as far as Rome was concerned, was a failed revolutionary who was executed in the most grievous way for the crime of treason. The second reason is apparent when one realises what the Apology actually is: a letter addressed to Roman governors, appealing to their sense of human charity to end the persecutions of the Christians. What better way to do this than to appeal to their sense of duty to the emperors of the past? Tiberius was considered by the people of Rome to have been a good emperor, and he is seen here supporting Christianity through his endorsement of making Jesus a Roman god. Tertullian also claims that he threatened those who threatened Christians with the full extent of his powers as emperor.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *Apo.*, V; Souter, 19.

Tertullian continues this trend through the rest of Chapter V, trying to create a case against the persecutions by showing that those that were the driving force behind them were those emperors that did not have Rome's best interest at heart. On the other hand, those who were opposed to the persecutions were the ones universally lauded by the people of Rome as 'just' emperors. Tertullian takes note of the fact that it was Nero, an emperor notorious for his corpulence and ineptitude as an emperor, who began the persecutions. He also rather sarcastically says that his people revel in the fact that they were hated by someone so despised as Nero. Tertullian goes on to show that Domitian, an equally despised emperor, also persecuted the Christians and that both these emperors were hated and reviled throughout Rome. Nero famously, and fraudulently, was accused of playing his lyre while Rome burned, as well as allocating public funds away from public works so that he could build a golden house for himself (which happens to be true). Domitian's main affront was the fact that he insisted he be referred to as *dominus* (lord), which flew in the face of the tongue-in-cheek attempts made by other emperors to insist that the Princeps was 'first among equals' and not a king, as kings had no place in Rome. If the exploits of the emperor Commodus had taken place by the time the Apology was composed, he, too, would surely have found his way into this fifth chapter. Conversely, Tertullian then makes mention of a number of 'good' emperors, claiming that they were protectors of the Christians, going as far as claiming that Marcus Aurelius, 'the gravest of emperors, ' praised the prayers of the Christians who were fighting under him against the barbarians, crediting them for bringing about the end to the drought that was hindering his army's progress. Tertullian mentions others amongst the ranks of emperors who opposed the persecutions, such as the Flavians, who were all considered among these 'good' emperors. The anomaly, however, is Trajan, whom we mentioned earlier. Considered a good emperor, Trajan expanded the borders of the empire far

further than they had ever been before, and was lauded as a just emperor during his reign. Yet, as can clearly be seen in earlier chapters, Tertullian squarely accused him and Pliny of attacking Christians simply because of the name of Christian. Strangely, Trajan is not mentioned here in Chapter V in any capacity at all, and Tertullian is clearly being very selective in his choices of which emperors he introduces: he is trying to paint the good emperors as pro-Christian, and the bad emperors as persecutors. Trajan, a good emperor who was also active in persecutions, would not help the main argument of this chapter, so he was omitted. In those previous chapters where Trajan was mentioned, he served to prove Tertullian's point about 'the name,' but since he would not help prove the point Tertullian is trying to make in Chapter V, Tertullian passed by him in silence.

Though this fifth chapter seems as if it is merely a political tool to make his audience come to the conclusion that since the good emperors praised rather than persecuted Christians, therefore persecuting them must be wrong, it also illustrates Tertullian's idea of justice. Tertullian agrees that these emperors were good, and by being good themselves they can therefore recognise goodness in Christians, because unlike the corrupt, inefficient emperors, they do not see any reason why they should be persecuted. It was this ability that allowed them to govern Rome in a way that was pleasing to the Roman people, whereas the evil emperors did not have this connection to the true justice of the universe and were therefore incapable of ruling justly. One might even say that the good emperors were a sort of microcosm of this all-pervading justice. The emperor embodies the law of Rome, the highest office in the land, and when the emperor is 'good' and just, all of Rome flourishes, and everything is as it should be. But when the emperor is incompetent or corrupt, the empire falls into chaos. Bad emperors, who are out of

tune with justice, create bad times for Rome, and everyone suffers for it, including the exemplars of divine justice, the Christians.

Chapter VI begins another overarching theme of the work: the moral decay of Rome versus the moral superiority of the Christians. Tertullian asks what has happened to Roman morality, for everything seems to have fallen by the wayside. The laws that curb over-spending and lavish lifestyles have evaporated and the empire is now marred in debauchery and sin, and the entire chapter is an attack on the loss of the old ways and old morality of Rome, which Tertullian sees as a reason for the current state of affairs:

What has become of those laws which checked extravagance and ostentation? those which ordered that not more than a hundred pence should be allowed for a dinner, that not more than one fowl and that not specially fattened should be served, which removed a patrician from the senate, because he had ten pounds weight of wrought silver, on the ground that this was a notable proof of ostentation.<sup>80</sup>

Here Tertullian is calling upon the old values of Rome, and mockingly illustrating how the Romans have given up on the traditions of their fathers. Rome had once revered austerity and, to a certain extent, humility, which was the cornerstone of the teachings of Christ. Here Tertullian accuses his attackers of losing sight of the very things that made Rome great and one can easily see the point he is trying to make. He would have the Romans see for themselves that they have betrayed the traditions of Rome with their ostentatious displays of wealth and power, something of which those who came before them would not have approved, at least in principle. In fact, the call to austerity had been abandoned in practice by most of the Roman elite since the days of the late Republic, with the grand triumphs, the large households, and the flattering statuary made to commemorate certain generals' victories, yet for all this, the principle remained intact. The fact that Tertullian brings this up is important, for it shows an irony in the fact that

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, VI; Souter, 21.

Rome persecutes Christianity. Humility, and forsaking worldly pleasures and wealth, are Christian values, which means that Christianity appeals to the traditional, ideal values of old Rome, which the Roman people wished so badly to maintain.<sup>81</sup> Christian values such as chastity and purity were also traditional values of old Rome, and this theme is taken up again later when, in Chapter XXXIX, Tertullian defends the *Agape*, saying that the feasts of Rome have become garish, extravagant displays, but it is the small humble love-feasts of the Christians that are attacked. The Christians again represent the true values of Rome, those on which it was built and which made it great. Therefore, by persecuting the Christians, the Romans are in actuality persecuting that which they claim they believe in, making the Romans hypocrites at the worst and ignorant at the best. But the Romans did have their reasons for disliking the Christians, for as we have seen, there were several scurrilous rumours in circulation concerning the followers of Christ, and how they worshipped. These accusations Tertullian will answer in the following chapters.

Of the several monstrous activities that were attributed to Christians in the times of the persecutions, the one that seems to really stand out for Tertullian is the pagan view that Christians sacrifice and eat children. He refutes this several times in the following chapters, and turns it back on the pagans themselves in Chapter IX. Here he states that children were indeed sacrificed by pagans in the name of Saturn, and points out that this practice happened as late as the consulship of the same Tiberius whom (he claims) tried to have Christ divinised. This seems to be a preemptive answer to any attempt by the pagans to claim that this practice occurred during a more savage time in Roman history, and he goes on to speak of human sacrifices that were common in certain parts of the pagan Roman Empire. He says in a rather mocking tone:

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81 Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God*, 135.

I leave the fables about the Taurians to the theatres to which they belong. Lo, in that deeply religious city of the pious descendants of Aeneas there is a certain Jupiter whom at his own games they drench with human blood. 'But,' say you, 'only that of a criminal condemned to the beasts.' This, I suppose, is of less value than that of a human being.<sup>82</sup>

Tertullian's language here is amusing, and the biting sarcasm apparent. He continues by stating that if Christians are indeed guilty of sacrificing humans for their religious purposes, then that means the pagan gods must actually be Christians. The followers of Christ are persecuted by the pagans, who claim they are performing human sacrifices, but the pagan world accepts such acts and the pagan gods have given it their approval. It would then be logical to conclude that since these gods accept human sacrifices, and, according to the persecutors, the Christians are the only ones performing them, then the gods themselves must be Christians: "What a Christian is Jupiter."<sup>83</sup>

It is a valid argument, for if the pagan gods, and the pagans themselves, are indeed guilty of the same things of which the Christians are accused, how then can the pagans persecute the Christians? If they do so, they are claiming that such things are intolerable to their religion and cannot be part of it. Thus, if Christians perform them religiously, it follows that such rites must be a part of Christianity, and that would logically mean that the pagans and their gods are following Christian prescripts. This in turn would mean that instead of being morally superior pagans, the gods are all actually morally bankrupt Christians. This is a skilled rhetorical argument, basically rendering the pagan side of the debate null and void.

But, as Tertullian says several times in the course of the Apology, the Christians were not guilty of that of which they were being accused. As Christians and the personifications of

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82 *Apo.*, IX; Souter, 31.

83 *Ibid.*

Tertullian's all-encompassing justice, a Christian would not be able to commit such actions and still be Christian, and the argument therefore becomes like an ouroborous snake, devouring its own head. But, although Tertullian can indeed counter the pagan argument with what he says here in Chapter IX, it is ultimately unnecessary, since the Christians were not guilty of the things of which they were accused. What is important are the attacks that Tertullian has made on the pagan gods.

At the end of Chapter X and the beginning of Chapter XI, Tertullian makes the claim that the pagan gods are indeed human. He states quite plainly: "Even Jupiter was himself as much man as he was sprung from man"<sup>84</sup>

This is to answer the accusation that Christians do not worship the gods that made Rome great and are therefore atheists. Tertullian's answer is simply that the pagan gods are not objects of worship, since they did not do anything that warrants their praise by mortals. It is certainly easy to see where Tertullian is coming from with this, for as we saw earlier, Greek myth is rife with stories of the pettiness of the Olympians. Zeus/Jupiter was so filled with lust that he took the form of a bull to rape Io, Apollo was so jealous of his sister's relationship with a man that he played on her pride as an archer to kill him with her bow, and three of the Greek pantheon's principal goddesses were so proud and jealous of one another that they performed a beauty pageant for a mortal man all for a golden apple, the effect of this being the Trojan War. Simply put, the gods of the pagan world exhibit very human behaviour. This is where Tertullian's view of God and his justice truly comes into play in the Apology. The pagan gods do not fulfill their end of the bargain when it comes to reciprocal justice, for unlike the Christian God, they do not take care of their people, nor do they actually set any kind of example for them. The pagan gods, much like Bythos of the Valentinians, are gods who do nothing to deserve worship, and they do

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84 *Ibid.*, X; Souter, 39.

not have the same kind of working relationship with their followers that real gods would have. Instead of giving something to their followers to repay them for their faith, the gods of Rome just take until there is nothing left, often committing egregious sins in the process. The pagan gods did nothing, they did not create the universe, and they are only gods because people made them so.<sup>85</sup> Tertullian then asks why Christians should be punished for realising this truth before anyone else.<sup>86</sup>

But this lack of justice is not just one sided, and Tertullian continues to show that the pagans do not give the gods the proper worship which, if they were truly gods at all, they would deserve. Chapter XV starts out by speaking about the mockeries that the pagans have made of their gods:

Such subjects as an adulterous Anubis, a masculine Moon, Diana scourged, the will of the deceased Jupiter read aloud, and three starving Herculeses held up to ridicule.<sup>87</sup>

It has already been mentioned how the pagans drove out certain gods and accepted others as fashion dictated. In this respect, the pagans are also devoid of that reciprocal justice that Tertullian believes is essential when it comes to the interaction between the divine and the human: they do not give their gods the appropriate respect, and their gods do nothing for them. As such, paganism is a religion devoid of the most essential aspects of religion, namely, the simple interaction between god and human beings, where each side performs certain tasks for the other that makes the relationship work. The God of the Christians, however, is the creator of the universe and he sent his Son to earth to save humankind from its sins. He is the cause of all things and he continues to maintain all things, with everything following along its intended path,

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, XII; Souter, 43 and 45.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*; 45.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, XV; Souter, 51.

and his followers, the Christians, pay him humble tribute and show him the respect that he has always deserved. Tertullian confirms the power of God in Chapter XVII:

The object of our worship is one God, who through the word by which he commanded (that they should exist), the reason by which he arranged them, the power by which he could (carry out his will), fashioned out of nothing all this mass with all its apparatus of elements, bodies and spirits, for an ornament to his own greatness, whence it is that the Greeks also have applied the name *kosmos* (ornament) to the universe.<sup>88</sup>

Thus, Christianity is a religion that works, whereas the pagan religion is one that does not.

I will conclude my examination of the Apology by saying a few words about the Imperial Cult. Christians were persecuted for not participating in the Cult of the Emperor, which, in the eyes of Rome, made them traitors to the state. The Cult of the Emperor was required by Roman citizens simply as a show of loyalty to the empire. Jews had always been exempt from participating in the cult, but since Christians were now considered a separate religion and they refused, it was simply more ammunition for those who wished to charge them with treason. Tertullian answers this quite simply, pointing out that Christians are actually treating the emperor better than the pagans who claim to be loyal to him. He says that Christians show loyalty and respect to the emperor and that the emperor himself was appointed by God<sup>89</sup>; thus, by asserting that the emperor is not a god himself, Christians are sparing him from God's anger. The emperor only has his power because God wills it, so if the emperor falls out of favour, then the emperor will no longer be emperor. This shows that, in Tertullian's mind, it is the Christians who are keeping the empire together, both through their prayers for the emperor and by the fact that they recognise him as human. If the emperor loses favour with God and is removed, it means political upheaval for Rome and possible civil war; Christians keep the peace by keeping out of

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, XVII; Souter, 57.

<sup>89</sup> Romans 13:6.

the Imperial Cult. Therefore, by persecuting the Christians, Romans are in fact doing damage to their own nation. As Tertullian puts in Chapter XXX:

“This is your duty, ye excellent governors, wrench out a soul that is praying to God for the emperor.”<sup>90</sup>

Such are Tertullian's arguments in the Apology as they relate to reciprocal justice and the Christians as a force that holds the empire together. If he is not always wholly fair to his opponents, that should not surprise us: he never was. Whether his work did anything to sway the opinions of those to whom it was targeted is unimportant for our present purposes. What is important is how it mirrors his beliefs on reciprocal justice and the cosmos.

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, XXX; Souter, 99.

## Chapter 3

Against the Valentinians & Against Praxeas: What God should be like

In Tertullian's work, the idea of justice and the give-and-take nature of the relationship between humankind and what is truly divine is an often recurring theme. Reciprocal justice is, after all, the interaction between God and humanity in a mutually beneficial arrangement: God provides for humans who, in turn, are to lead their lives in the pursuit of holiness as well as pay him the appropriate amount of respect he deserves. For Tertullian, this is the only system that is adequate, as no other interaction between the divine and the human satisfies the needs of mortals as well as the expectations and morality of the being that controls the universe. As we saw in the chapter on the Apology, Tertullian regarded pagan worship, or at least the interaction with the pagan gods and their followers, with contempt, generally asserting that the gods of old were no more than men who were at best morally ambiguous and at worst criminals. Thus, because gods normally act as a touchstones for the morality of the people who praise them, the moral ambivalence that was rampant in ancient Rome at the time could be explained as a symptom of the lack of nobility of the old gods. In the same vein, the pagans of Rome were lacking in their worship of the gods whom they always credited with giving them their prosperity and dominion over the Mediterranean world, picking and choosing which ones were worthy of their admiration, and often selecting which deities exhibited the characteristics they wished to have for themselves. Like their gods, they oftentimes exhibit the inability to abstain from the physical lusts for food, wine, and sex. This sort of behaviour is a complete contradiction of the values that already existed inside the fledgling Christian world, which abhorred gluttonous behaviour of any kind and valued chastity and charity above all else.<sup>91</sup> It also runs counter to Tertullian's own

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91 Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God*, 132.

beliefs as he exalted the virtues of abstinence from, worldly pleasures.<sup>92</sup> In short, as Tertullian understands it, the relationship between the pagans and their gods was not a working relationship in the same vein as the relationship between God and his people, the Christians. This point of view, however, does not only apply to the pagan persecutors, but also to many of the heretical groups with which Tertullian came in contact during his career as a Christian apologist. Traces of it can be found in his treatises against them, proving that for Tertullian, not only were other religious systems unacceptable, but so were Christian systems that did not adhere to his high moral code or relate properly to reciprocal justice. I will now turn my attention to two defences he wrote against such heresies, Adversus Praxeas and Adversus Valentinianos, works in which Tertullian uses his characteristic sarcasm and rhetoric to defend his faith against the threats of two heresies that he felt were great dangers to the faith of God's true followers.

Adversus Praxeas like the Apology is one of Tertullian's most important works. It is a refutation of the teachings of one Praxeas, who was a member of the monarchian heresy, which stressed the oneness of God to the detriment of the distinct natures of the three different persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Monarchianism claimed that the Son is a direct manifestation, or mode, of the Father instead of being his own separate entity, in which case it was the Father who was born of the Virgin and was crucified upon the cross in the person of Jesus of Nazareth:

He says that the Father himself came down into the virgin, himself was born of her, himself suffered, in short himself is Jesus Christ.<sup>93</sup>

Through the course of Tertullian's refutation of this dangerous teaching, almost as a consequence, he introduces such terms as person (*persona*), economy (*oconomia*), and

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>93</sup> *Adv. Prax.*, I; Evans, 130.

substance (*substantia*)<sup>94</sup>, terms that would become standard in Latin theology in relation to the Trinity.<sup>95</sup> Along with these terms, Tertullian's contribution also involves a discussion of what is distinct among the persons of the Trinity, and what they share in common. His treatise, however, is not without its problems, as Tertullian falls into rather dubious territory. He is, for example, clearly subordinationist, though to say he was subordinationist at this time is much the same as calling him 'Christian'. He also makes a rather odd assertion that it was the Son who spoke as God in the Old Testament.<sup>96</sup> This appears early in the work when Tertullian is discussing the essential differences between the Father and the Son. He makes the claim, based on scriptural evidence, that the Father is invisible, while the Son, because he appeared in the form of Jesus of Nazareth, is visible. He bases this on the fact that there are several instances in the Old Testament in which God is 'seen' by someone, such as Moses, in Exodus 33:11, when Moses is said to have spoken to God face to face. There are several other passages in which God is said to 'appear' to his followers, such as Genesis 12:7 and 32:30, in which God appeared to Abram and Jacob, and Habakkuk 3:3-5, which gives an account of what God looks like. However, such statements are in direct contradiction with other Scripture, such as Exodus 33:20, which clearly states that no one can see God and live, and 1 John 4:12 'No man has seen God at any time.' If then, God was seen by human eyes and the person who saw them remained alive, it must have been the Son that had been seen and not the Father. In this way Tertullian brilliantly solves one of the major problems of the Bible, though this solution engenders a host of other problems. In due course, subordinationism would be condemned, and the suggestion that the God of the Old

94 Harold Carl, "Against Praxeas- How far did Tertullian advance the doctrine of the Trinity?" *Global Journal* 7-1: 2-3. <http://www.phc.edu/UserFiles/File/Other%20Projects/Global%20Journal/7-1/HaroldCarl.pdf> (accessed June 14<sup>th</sup> 2011).

95 Osborn, *First Theologian of the West*, 131.

96 *Adv. Prax.*, XV; Evans, 153.

Testament is not the same deity as the Father of the New would be a feature of a number of future heresies. Yet despite its problems, Adversus Praxecas would go on to be considered one of Tertullian's more important works, as the terminology and ideas he introduced were to prove to be of fundamental importance in the development of the doctrine of the Trinity in the Latin West.

Reciprocal justice makes its appearance in this work in the form of Tertullian's very innocent- some may even say naive- trust in God. Many of Tertullian's arguments revolve around one thing and one thing only: Scripture as the true word of God, which Tertullian fully trusts. For Tertullian, Scripture is infallible, not only because it was divinely inspired and the word of an omnipotent Creator, but also because it is the word of the God of the Christians, who has established a give-and-take relationship with this people and has led them through the ages with power and compassion. This God, unlike other gods who do not have the same stellar reputation, would never lie to his people. This is the fundamental reason as to why Scripture plays such a large role in Tertullian's work, and why he places so much trust in its absolute infallibility in his attack on Praxeas.

Unlike Tertullian's disciplinary works, the focus in Adversus Praxecas is not the life of holiness that a Christian needs to lead as the true representation of God's justice on earth. Instead it is fixed firmly on God's side of the relationship. As early as the first chapter, Tertullian sets the tone for the later chapters of the work:

The serpent has forgotten himself: for when he tempted Jesus Christ after the baptism of John it was as Son of God that he attacked him, being assured that God has a son at least from those very scriptures out of which he was then constructing the temptation: if thou art the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread: again, If thou art the Son of God cast thyself down from hence, for it is written that he – the Father, of course hath given his angels charge concerning thee, that in their hands they should bear thee up, lest in any place thou dash thy foot against a stone.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> *Adv. Prax.*, I; Evans, 130.

The use of Scripture is vitally important to Tertullian's attack on Praxeas; in fact, it is the lack of scriptural evidence supporting Praxeas' claims which form the main focus of Tertullian's opposition. This, in turn, clearly reveals Tertullian's complete faith in God. The word of God was given to us as absolute truth, as indeed it has to be if God was to live up to his end of the bargain. As humanity's caretaker and moral exemplar, he himself would have to be completely trustworthy and honest, once more setting him apart from those other gods who do not exhibit the same level of morality. This reveals yet again how Tertullian views the only real working relationship between God and humankind, and it can come as no surprise that Tertullian exhibits a complete trust in the word of this God, the only God who, in his opinion, provides for humanity in a way that warrants praise. God, for his part, will never present false information to his people, nor will he ever mislead them, for to do so would be to go against the very nature of what it is to be God. Tertullian sums it up eloquently while dismissing Praxeas' claims of the Son and the Father's total oneness:

Before whose disapproval was God, the Lord of the universe, afraid of so stating it, if so the fact was? Or was he afraid of not being believed if he plainly stated that he was both the Father and the Son? One thing however he was afraid of, to belie himself the author of truth, and to belie his own truth.<sup>98</sup>

God, the omnipotent Father, the Creator of all, is here said by Tertullian to be afraid of lying. To say that Tertullian believes that his God could, in fact, lie is clearly nonsense, yet this passage is very telling. Tertullian cannot accept a God who would lie to his people. So in order to live up to this moral example provided by God, humans are also meant to be honest as a part of living the life of holiness, thus reciprocating the example God has set through his own honesty.

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, XI; Evans, 143.

Tertullian's argument in Chapter XI is therefore quite simple: if the Father and Son are one and the same as Praxeas maintains, it means God was not being truthful when he spoke thus: "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee."<sup>99</sup>

Thus, Praxeas' theory runs counter to what is found in Scripture, and if Praxeas' system is the truth, it follows that the Scriptures are being untruthful, which, as we have seen, is an impossibility in Tertullian's mind. The Word of God cannot be false because God does not lie. God is a loving parent to his people and he treats them as such, being only truthful in the instruction he gives them on how to lead their lives. Even the words of the Devil, the Great Deceiver, when presented in the context of Scripture, can be taken as truth, since God would not allow deception within the pages of his word. To present lies about his Son, or any other topic for that matter, in Holy Scripture would be wholly misleading to humankind, not only with regard to the path to salvation, but also to the understanding of the faith. It would render the word, the divine revelation given to humankind so it may understand its Creator, without merit. It would also throw into question the very nature of Christ as the Word of God. It follows therefore, that Scripture must be infallible, as that is how a good and loving God would have it, and that is the only kind of God Tertullian believes is worthy of worship. For Tertullian, Scripture was given by God and was irrefutable truth.<sup>100</sup> God's truthfulness is paramount in his argument against Praxeas; in fact, it is impossible for his attack to work if one doubts the absolute truth of Scripture. And Tertullian's absolute trust in the word of God clearly reveals his belief in reciprocal justice: the God of the Christians is a God of undeniable ethical perfection and thus Christians, as his chosen people, must also be ethically perfect. God must lead by

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<sup>99</sup> Ps. 2:7.

<sup>100</sup> Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God*, 79.

example; he must be truthful and pure in order to expect the same from his people. This is why Tertullian demanded such high morality from the followers of God.

There are many other instances of what God does for human beings in this treatise, one such motif being the use of Isaiah 66:1, which, when applied to Christ, illustrates that in order to grant salvation to his creation, God lowered his Son's stature from that of creator to that of 'less than the angels' when he became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>101</sup> Also, there are numerous references to the creation of the world, which can easily be seen as the greatest gift God has given his creatures, namely, the gift of existence. It can also be inferred from Adversus Valentinianos, which we will discuss in a moment, that the act of creation is the principal determining factor as to which deities Tertullian feels are worthy of praise as well as being the greatest demonstration of a god's willingness to participate in reciprocal justice.

It has been suggested that the claim that Tertullian was a legally trained jurist can be proven using Adversus Praxeas, specifically as it pertains to his terminology in describing various aspects of the Trinity. Adolf von Harnack, for example, made the claim that Tertullian's Trinitarian terminology, such as *persona* and *substantia*, is indicative of his supposed legal training.<sup>102</sup> These claims have, however, been rejected. The words themselves do indeed have legal uses. *Persona* is often used to identify a party of individuals as one legal entity, such as a government body bound to a contract,<sup>103</sup> and to regard someone as a 'person of substance' legally is to be referring to them as a person of wealth. In this case, the three persons of the Trinity are three distinct individuals (*personae*), but they shared the same amount of wealth, which is

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101 *Adv. Prax.*, XXIII; Evans, 165.

102 Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God*, 19.

103 Robert Lowry Calhoun, *Lectures on the History of Christian Doctrine* (New Haven: Yale Divinity School, 1949; repr. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2008), 128.

substance or *substantia*.<sup>104</sup> However, Tertullian's definition of the word substance is not the legal one, but the Stoic, meaning that it is the 'stuff' that makes up the three persons of the Trinity.<sup>105</sup> The common substance found within Tertullian's Trinity, then, is simply the material that composes their being, their essence. This substance is shared through economy (*oeconomia*), which can be understood as the order of the three Persons of the Trinity and the way in which the *substantia* is shared amongst them.<sup>106</sup> Thus, the Son and the Holy Spirit are joined with the Father through his substance, which is, essentially, Godhood.<sup>107</sup> *Persona* also has a different meaning, used by Tertullian to differentiate between the three members of the Trinity, which is essential for his attack on the monarchianism of Praxeas. Thus, Harnack's hypothesis is unpersuasive and does not take into account other definitions of the words Tertullian uses, nor does it take into account Tertullian's simplicity in religion, in that it is the simpler definitions of the words that Tertullian uses.

The second treatise that will be discussed here is *Adversus Valentinianos*. This work was directed solely at a certain group of Gnostics that followed the teachings of one Valentinus. He was a teacher who, according to Tertullian, had been passed over for a bishopric he felt was rightfully his, and then, out of spite, sought to corrupt the teachings of the one true religion with tales of aeons and powers that had no place in Christian faith.<sup>108</sup> However, this characterisation of Valentinus is often rejected by scholars today, and is most likely part of an attack strategy early

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104 Osborn, *Tertullian, First Theologian of the West*, 131.

105 *Ibid.*

106 Carl, "Against Praxeas- How Far did Tertullian advance the Doctrine of the Trinity?" *Global Journal*: 2.

107 *Adv. Prax.*; IV; Evans, 134.

108 *Adv. Val.*; IV; Riley, 78.

Christian apologists used against their opponents to cast doubt on the legitimacy of their teachings.<sup>109</sup>

In his defence of the Roman Church against this particular Gnostic sect, Tertullian uses that characteristic sarcasm that makes his work such a joy to read. He attacks them mercilessly, claiming that their entire hierarchy of gods and goddesses are simply 'do nothing gods' that are completely ineffective in their roles as governors of the universe. He does this by painstakingly evaluating their entire mythos, starting with the creation implemented by the god Bythos (who, consequently, was the god that was equated with the God of the New Testament by the Valentinians),<sup>110</sup> the creation of the world by the incompetent Demiurge, and the fate of all humanity and the gods of the Pleroma at the end of the world.<sup>111</sup> Adversus Valentinianos is no theological masterpiece: it does not formulate new dogma or theological terminology as does Adversus Praxeas, nor does it need to. Tertullian needs only to simply point out what is wrong with the Valentinian mythos and his job is essentially complete. It does, however, illustrate some of the clearest instances of the concept of reciprocal justice in Tertullian's work, as he makes it clear on several occasions throughout the treatise that gods such as those of Valentinus simply do not deserve to be worshipped.

Tertullian despised Gnostics, this much is clear. The inconsistencies of their mythos, for one thing, were a source of much of Tertullian's sarcasm throughout the work. Almost every sect had its own hierarchies and differing viewpoints on core subjects such as which of the Pleromaic deities corresponded to Christ, the nature of the Demiurge, and even which of the gods it was that truly created the world. In short, there was not much that was uniformly believed in

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<sup>109</sup> Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 39.

<sup>110</sup> *Adv. Val.*, VII; Riley, 82.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, XXXI; Riley, 12.

'Gnosticism', since each group differed on so many issues. There was also the fact that the Valentinian myth had been greatly altered since the days of Valentinus, such as the revisions made to the core myth by Ptolemy; so much so, in fact, that Tertullian suggests that Valentinus would scarcely be able to recognise his own story.<sup>112</sup> In addition, the Gnostic emphasis on secret knowledge and hatred of the world also ran counter to two of Tertullian's most beloved values. One of these values is his exaltation of martyrs, whom he believed were the greatest examples of Christian faith on earth, as well as the noblest exemplars of what it is to be a Christian.<sup>113</sup> For Tertullian, the act of sacrificing oneself in the name of Christ was the ultimate act of selfless devotion, the one true way a mortal could reciprocate God's justice. The Gnostic dismissal of this world, which can be found throughout Gnostic literature, is, however, utterly antagonistic to what the martyrs were trying to accomplish by giving up their lives in the name of Christ. Instead of placing emphasis upon good works and one's actions, Gnostic sects tended instead to recognise esoteric knowledge as the one true path to salvation. If such is the case, then one must ask what purpose is served by the sacrifices made by the martyrs? If this world is in itself nothing but a prison for the human soul, and if redemption lies only in an incorporeal land of gods, goddesses and aeons, for what, then, did the martyrs die? Absolutely nothing. They did not die so that others could see the courage and strength of the Christians and be saved themselves, for the only true means to salvation lies in the esoteric knowledge belonging solely to the Valentinians. To this knowledge, the martyrs, as orthodox Christians, had no access. It follows then, that they died for people like themselves, the uninitiated, the regular everyday people who did not understand the 'truth' of the Pleroma, the true world where the gods make their dwelling. They therefore died as fools, who, despite courageously facing execution and

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112 *Ibid.*, IV; Riley, 78.

113 Quasten, *Patrology*, Volume 2, 290.

laying down their lives for what they believed, would not receive the true gift of 'Heaven' because they were ignorant of the esoteric knowledge required to get there.

Though Gnostic sects did not express open antagonism towards the Christian martyrs, from what we have said above it is reasonable to suggest that they did not hold them in very high esteem. This would be utterly unacceptable to Tertullian, not only because it makes a mockery of the sacrifices made by the martyrs, but it also compromises the concept of reciprocal justice. For Tertullian, it is clear that one cannot fulfil one's Christian duty as an exemplar of justice any more fully than by martyring oneself in the name of God. However, in the Gnostic framework, a person who martyrs him or herself without the required amount of esoteric knowledge is doomed to have to spend eternity cut off from the presence of God. Such a pattern of thought is not compatible with reciprocal justice, since there is only one just reward for such an extreme example of faith and obedience to God for Tertullian, and that is the immediate ascent of the soul to Heaven. Nothing else is an acceptable reward for laying down one's life in the name of God. The martyr has faced torment, mockery and death, and a just God, the only kind of God Tertullian believes is entitled to human praise, would recognize such an act as the greatest display of faith and would reciprocate the martyr's ultimate faith with the ultimate reward. The secret knowledge of the Gnostic sects was, however, just that: knowledge. Though the exact nature of this knowledge was not known to Tertullian or anyone outside the initiated, it was clear, given the nature of their mythos and the sophistry Gnostics used when trying to defend their faith,<sup>114</sup> that it was replete with esoteric cosmology and philosophy, something Tertullian adamantly believed had no place in religion. For Tertullian, the matter was simple: God is good, so to be worthy of God's mercy and protection, one must conduct one's daily life in accordance

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<sup>114</sup> *Adv. Val.*, I: Riley, 74-75.

with holiness. God, reciprocally, will attend to his people's needs and reward them for their efforts because he is a just God. No great deal of thought is required. After all, it is actions that are far more important than knowledge in the relationship of the human and the divine, since it is actions that determine whether the relationship is working in the way it is intended. In the second chapter of Against the Valentinians, Tertullian provided a sound answer to what he sees to be an attitude of mental superiority among Gnostic sects when it comes to their religious system, as opposed to the 'simpler' orthodoxy:

As for me, I would prefer to be convicted of the better fault if I have to make a choice; it is better to have a lesser intelligence than an evil one; better to err than to deceive. Furthermore, the face of God is seen by those seeking in innocence as the Wisdom of Solomon, not of Valentinus, teaches.<sup>115</sup>

This solidifies Tertullian's stance on 'over-thinking' when it comes to religion. The fact that Tertullian, the man who devised the terminology used to discuss Christianity's greatest and most complex philosophical mystery, the Trinity, holds such a view illustrates what it is that he expects from humanity in its dealings with the divine: simple quiet devotion. He expects people to live their lives in holiness, not to waste their time seeking knowledge of God; what God truly wants is for those who wish to know him to live in the way that he has set forth for us in the Scriptures and exemplified in the life of Christ. Philosophy and dialectic beget dangerous ideas and doctrines, which in turn breed heretical movements that condemn those who fall victim to them to an existence outside the justice of the just God. This can be seen with the cavalcade of Gnostic sects, which developed many different Pleromaic hierarchies during the time of the early Church. Some of these developed such odd systems and doctrines on God and Christ that they could barely be said to be Christian anymore. Simple devotion, therefore, is a superior kind of

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, II; Riley, 75.

faith: not only is it truer to what God expects from his people, but it will never lead people into heresy. Devotion, therefore, is perfectly in line with Scripture and the Church.

Most of Adversus Valentinianos is a detailed examination of the Valentinian myth as developed by Ptolemy. In accordance with his usual style, Tertullian attacks the mythos with sarcasm, lampooning the entire thing as utterly fanciful and absurd. He goes as far as to give a warning to his reader that they may start laughing aloud when they delve into the silliness that is the Valentinian myth.

Much of this should be refuted with laughter so that it will not be awarded serious consideration. Silly ideas often meet with ridicule. It is suitable even for truth to laugh because it is happy, to mock its enemies because it is safe. Be careful, however, not to laugh where it is inappropriate to do so.<sup>116</sup>

This is where our interest lies in this work, as Tertullian's treatment of the gods of the Valentinians is characteristic of his overall view of religion as it pertains to reciprocal justice. During the course of the treatise he outlines how very little the gods of Valentinus actually do: the primal Bythos is of hardly any consequence in the grand machinations of the universe, as are the rest of the hierarchy. Tertullian's approach is very similar to his treatment of the gods of the pagans in the Apology, and it is the cornerstone of his argument as to why the Gnostic religion, just as that of the pagans, is unsatisfactory to him and his concept of reciprocal justice.

The narrative of Valentinian creation begins with the original god, whose name was Bythos. Almost immediately we get a glimpse of the tone that will appear throughout Tertullian's examination when he addresses the most high god residing in an "insensate godhead."<sup>117</sup> Bythos, simply put, is the epitome of the do-nothing god that Tertullian believes has no place in the human heart. Bythos simply exists and reproduces with his consort Sige (even

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, VI; Riley, 81.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, VI; Riley, 83.

though he is supposed to be alone in his existence) to create Nus, who in turn produces Vita, who is life, and Sermo, who is word. With that the first 'emanations' were born, basically as a result of Bythos satisfying his lust. The other gods that follow, such as Achamoth, Sophia and the rest, share the same desires as their progenitor. The act of procreation amongst the gods is absurd to someone like Tertullian, who openly mocks the conception of the first emanation:

Like semen he places this beginning in his Sige just as in a womb. Sige accepts it right away, becomes pregnant, and bears (in silence, of course) whom? Nus (Mind), resembling the Father and equal in all respects.<sup>118</sup>

With this in mind, the reading of the first chapter of the work, in which Tertullian compares the followers of Valentinus with the old Eleusinian rites of Greece, who, like the Eleusinian Valentinians, claimed to offer a better understanding of the world through secret knowledge, certainly takes on a different characteristic:

In just this manner the heretics against whom we are now opening fire fashion useless and disgraceful tales out of the sacred names, titles, and contents of the true faith. They can do this because of the openhanded charity of the divine scriptures; from such a large work, many interpretations can be drawn. These people make the Eleusinian rites into Valentinian lures, sacred only because of their great silence, heavenly only because of their concealment.<sup>119</sup>

It appears here that Tertullian is accusing the Valentinians of having something in common with the orgiastic cults of ancient Greece. If this is so, he is claiming they are engaged in a number of vile acts that would be considered reprehensible by his early Christian readers as the members of such cults were often so caught up in their pleasure that they would lose control of their very bodies. It also implies that the Valentinians were ruled by their passions, much as the Greeks were said to be, which would have been unappealing to Romans. The comparison is

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<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, VI; Riley, 83.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, I; Riley, 74.

probably unjustified, as there is no real proof to suggest that the Valentinians themselves were engaged in the kind of licentious activities that were credited to the mystery religions of ancient Greece; but it does appear to be apt when it comes to discussing the gods of the Valentinians, as they were truly subject to all sorts of passions that in many cases clouded what should have been their better judgement. All the gods are essentially paired off, each having his or her consort with whom they are involved in a divine marriage. This suggests that the gods are subject to physical lusts just as the old pagan gods of Greece were. Even though the marriages seem to be completely monogamist and the aeons involved are faithful to their partners, divine marriages are at odds with fundamental Christianity, since the one and only God of Christianity is eternally, and somewhat famously, completely without a consort and has no need to have one. Also, to have the personifications of God's characteristics engaged in romantic and, indeed, sexual relationships does not fit in with the Christian values of chastity and virtue, of which the members of this Christian pantheon should be exemplars. These gods simply do not meet Tertullian's own high moral compass; they themselves do not live the life of holiness that a Christian is expected to live, so why should a Christian be expected to emulate them? These gods, with all their passions and lusts, are, in actuality, far more Greek than Christian. In that regard, it could be said that the Valentinian gods are a step backward, a pantheon reverting back to a more primal religion that humanity no longer needs. In short, if these gods were truly the emanations of characteristics of the Christian God, then it would be expected they would behave in ways that would illustrate this, but they do not. They do not adhere to those Christian values which are based on the actions and teachings of Christ, and they do not live in his image. They cannot therefore function as gods to a Christian populace.

Tertullian continues this theme, bringing forth other examples of the desires of the Valentinian gods. Achamoth, the daughter of Sophia and the creator of the mortal world in Valentinian myth, is said to have obtained a lustful desire for the angels, to the point of overt sexual arousal: Warmed by her joy at escaping from her unhappiness, and by her gazing at the angelic luminaries, she starts to stew inside.<sup>120</sup>

Tertullian immediately apologises for using such scandalous language in a treatise meant for Christian readers, but he also says that it is necessary to get his point across. The conclusion he wants his reader to come to is that the gods of Valentinus are indeed flawed and imperfect beings, susceptible to sin and passion, and therefore spiritually vulnerable. The perfect example of this is Sophia herself, who is described as not just having a passion to know the Father (Bythos), but is also envious of other luminaries who transcend her in the Pleromaic hierarchy:

So, while they burn with silent longing to know the Father, a crime of sorts is committed specifically, the youngest aeon (ignore the solecism; her name is Sophia) of the twelve aeons which Man and Church produced, unrestrainedly rushes off without her mate, Theletus, to seek the Father. In doing so she contracts a sort of disease which was epidemic among Nus' associates and which had spread to this aeon, i.e., Sophia, just as diseases contracted somewhere in the body usually do damage in another part. In this case, under the pretext of love for the Father a feeling of rivalry toward Nus, who alone rejoiced in his knowledge of the Father, overcame her. Since, however, she was attempting the impossible, Sophia accomplished nothing and was crushed by the difficulty of the task and was racked by her emotion.<sup>121</sup>

The desires of Sophia in this part of the myth are in direct contradiction to Christian morality. Not only does she leave her husband in order to seek out her lofty goal of knowing the Father, but Tertullian also implies in the language he uses that she is guilty of lusting after him, which, since all the aeons are direct descendants of Bythos, constitutes incest, which is

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<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, XVII; Riley, 98.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, IX; Riley, 86-87.

specifically forbidden in the book of Leviticus. This passage also shows that the Valentinian gods were also subject to the type of jealousy that was found in both humans and pagan deities. The passage states that all of them were capable of this jealousy, for Sophia was not the only one feeling a "silent longing to know the father": she was simply the only one willing to act upon her desires. Clearly, the assertion made by Tertullian in the Apology, that the gods of the pagans were merely men that had been exalted to the station of gods, could easily be applied to the gods of the Valentinians, since Sophia, Achamoth, and to a lesser extent Bythos are all guilty of wholly immoral and decidedly ungodly actions. This is not true of the God of the Christians, who is above all lusts and desires, and to equate Bythos with God is undeserved praise for the former and an insult to the latter. The God of the Christians had no need for a consort to create; he needed only his own omnipotence.

The best example found in Adversus Valentinianos of Tertullian's attitude towards godhood and religion, however, is his treatment of the Demiurge. In nearly all Gnostic sects, the Demiurge is a lesser deity, one of the lowest gods in the pantheon. He is normally the creator of the world and equated with the more violent God who appears in the Hebrew Bible, who is viewed by Gnostics as jealous, ignorant and dangerous. In many forms of the myth, it was because of his fear of knowledge that he forbade Adam and Eve from eating of the tree of knowledge, thus trying to keep them forever ignorant of the truth that he was not the true ruler of all that exists, and that he and his archons are still trying to keep people from finding the secret knowledge they require to join the true God in the Pleroma in order to keep them subservient to him. This Demiurge is malevolent and vicious. In this light, the world of the Demiurge exists simply as a trap for the human soul whose true dwelling place is in the Pleroma with the aeons. The claim, then, is that Christ (and whichever luminary he really is depends on which Gnostic

sect one happens to be dealing with) was sent to earth in order to transmit the esoteric knowledge necessary for salvation and to teach the truth to the imperfect people on whom the gods of the Pleroma took pity.

However, this is not true for the Valentinians who see the Demiurge in a completely different light. The Demiurge, for them, is a benevolent, though still incompetent, god, who wishes to save the creation he has made, but simply lacks the knowledge and power to do so. This attitude has its origins in the Valentinian view of the Old Testament. Instead of it being the flawed word of a power mad and imperfect creator, it is instead the three-fold law that was given to mortals, a moral code given to the world by the Demiurge, whom the Valentinians recognised as the god of justice, so that the people he created may know how they were meant to live their lives.<sup>122</sup>

This Demiurge also played an active role in the incarnation of the Christ. He was, in fact, the being mentioned as the 'Most High' when the Archangel Gabriel informed Mary she would be bearing Christ,<sup>123</sup> and it is he who would provide for the Christ the psychic or animal quality of his body.<sup>124</sup> Thus, the Demiurge is actively trying to provide his people with the help they need, but which he cannot provide himself. Here we can see a stark difference between the Demiurge and the god of gods, Bythos. Bythos is an inactive part of the narrative, and the only thing Tertullian has him doing in his account of the myth is procreating with Sige. He does nothing proactive at all in the entire story; he simply is. When Sophia sins, Bythos does nothing, and it falls to his subordinate aeons both to rescue her and punish her for her actions. He does not play any kind of role in the creation of the human world either, nor does he have anything to do with

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<sup>122</sup> Giovanni Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism* (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 118.

<sup>123</sup> Lk. 1:35

<sup>124</sup> Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism*, 121.

any attempt to save the imperfect creatures that dwell within it. The Demiurge, however, is a god that Tertullian seem to believe deserves the title. The Demiurge created human life, he is active in the lives of his people, and he is the one that delivered justice and morality to them. In this way, the Demiurge is a being far more worthy of worship than any other member of the Valentinian pantheon, a sentiment Tertullian outwardly expresses in the thirty-second chapter of Adversus Valentinianos.

When discussing the reward Valentinians expect upon their ascent into the Pleroma with the esoteric knowledge they have acquired, Tertullian tells us that the Valentinian Gnostic will be freed from his physical body and become a bride of Christ, whereas the souls of the uninitiated will be returned to the Demiurge, by whom they were produced. However, instead of seeing this as the condemnation his Gnostic opponents believed it to be, Tertullian thinks of it as the preferable fate:

The souls of righteous men, namely ours, will be carried to the Demiurge in the shelter of his middle region we are thankful; we will be happy to be counted with our god from whom we received our soul-like origin.<sup>125</sup>

It is clear from this that Tertullian classifies the Demiurge as 'our god': *the* god, the god of our origins, our creator. The benevolent Demiurge is, as far as Tertullian is concerned, the only real god of the Valentinian myth, and he blatantly says in the same chapter that, if Gnosticism were the truth, he would indeed follow the Demiurge, as he is the only one deserving of praise. For Tertullian, then, godhood is not something that is a being's right, but something that must be earned through moral superiority and the ability to care for humanity. The Demiurge is the father of mankind. It does not matter if he is the least powerful of all the Valentinian deities, nor does it matter that he did not create the Pleroma. What does matter is that he is indeed the one who created mankind, that he is our father, and that he is the one who deserves our praise.

<sup>125</sup> *Adv Val.*, XXXI; Riley, 113.

In these two works, Tertullian, through his defenses of Christianity against heresy, illustrates the qualities he expects of a God worthy of worship. Gods who do not actively participate in the world and the affairs of humans are not true gods in his eyes, and religions that follow them are not true religions. Do-nothing gods are fine for immoral pagans and heretics, but a Christian, as someone in tune with the reciprocal justice that holds the universe together, is deserving of something much better. The Christian God is the God they deserve, and they are the followers that he deserves.

## Chapter 4

### Appropriate and Inappropriate Behaviour of Christians

This chapter will focus primarily on some of Tertullian's disciplinary works. Given what we have already said about Tertullian's concept of the nature of the relationship between the Divine and the human in a true religion, it is not surprising that Tertullian had strong opinions on the way humans were meant to behave in their role as the only people on earth with a true understanding of the real ruler of the universe. Tertullian expects nothing less than the highest moral virtue from Christians, believing that their God has set such high standards through his actions in creating the world, and offering the salvific death of his son, together with the strict morality demanded through the Old Testament Law and the words of Christ. His belief that all Christians are subject to a higher moral code than non-Christians can be found throughout many of his works, and it was one of his main arguments in the Apology against the pagan misconceptions that gave rise to the persecutions. As we have said, Tertullian's belief in this regard is similar to the Old Testament concept of covenant. Christianity is involved in an agreement with its God. God provides love, care and salvation to his people, and Christians are then expected to spend their lives living a moral life in accordance with what God judges to be correct. In this way, Christians act as illustrations of the moral superiority of their God over all other deities. It follows, therefore, that Tertullian was adamantly opposed to Christians engaging in what he would classify as behaviour that does not express this covenantal relationship, and he gives detailed instruction as to how he feels Christians living the life of holiness should conduct themselves. Tertullian produced a number of works on the subject of discipline and what he feels to be the only truly Christian way of acting in certain situations, and in these treatises he lays down in no uncertain terms what the Christian way of life should be. He is unapologetic in

his stance, stating many times that, because one is a Christian, one should be above things that are pleasurable for pagans since one is on a higher plain of existence and has a higher morality. In these works he spends much time dealing with the nature and demands of Christian modesty, as well as the problems of sexual misconduct and material extravagances, which he feels have no place in the Christian life.

On the Apparel of Women is one of these works. Here, Tertullian is writing to recent converts to Christianity, admonishing them for adhering to the extravagant conventions that society had imposed upon them.<sup>126</sup> It is in works such as these, in which he is addressing his own people, that we can see his belief in the moral superiority of Christianity over other faiths. Though he focuses on women, his call for a greater morality applies to both genders as he does not exclude men from his instruction:

Of course, I am now merely talking as a man and, jealous of women, I try to deprive them of what is their own! But there are certain things that are forbidden to us, too, out of regard for the sobriety, we should maintain out of fear we owe to God? Now since, by a defect of nature, there is inborn in men because of women (just as in women because of men) the desire to please, the male sex also has its own peculiar trickeries for enhancing their appearance: for instance, cutting the beard a bit too sharply, trimming it too neatly, shaving around the mouth, arranging and dyeing our hair, darkening the first signs of gray hair, disguising the down on the whole body with some female ointments, smoothing off the rest of the body by means of some gritty powder, then always taking occasion to look in a mirror, to gazing anxiously into it. Are not these things quite idle and hostile to modesty once we have known God, have put aside the desire to please others and forsworn all lasciviousness?<sup>127</sup>

Tertullian seems here to be at pains to express that he does not want his words to be seen as a condemnation of women. This chapter shows that he expects Christian men to have the same level of dignity as Christian women. In short, Tertullian believes that acting in the ways he condemns is truly an affront to being a Christian, and it is no better for a man to do so than it is

<sup>126</sup> Roy Joseph Deferrari, ed., *The Fathers of the Church. Tertullian: Disciplinary, Moral and Ascetical Works* (New York: Fathers of The Church Inc., 1959), 111.

<sup>127</sup> *App.*, II. VII. 1-3; Quain, 139-140.

for a woman. This being said, he does seem to be harder on women than men, as this chapter is the only one in both books of On the Apparel of Women that mentions men as having the same duties of modesty as do women. On these grounds many modern scholars, feminist or otherwise, often point to Tertullian as being a classic example of early Christian misogyny.<sup>128</sup> To say Tertullian had negative feelings towards women is, once again, just saying that he was a man of his times; in his day sexism was just part of everyday life. But to say he was particularly virulent against women is an error, and Daniel Hoffman claims that he is actually relatively positive in his views on women given the time in which he lived. In Hoffman's view, Tertullian differed from many of his contemporaries by commending or supporting women in roles that were traditionally downplayed.<sup>129</sup> In fact, overtly misogynistic views would run counter to the idea of reciprocal justice, as it is the Christian, the follower of God, whether male or female, who is the representative of the goodness of God on earth. This would suggest equality in this regard among those who profess the faith, and it should not matter whether a Christian is a man or a woman. What is important is living the life of holiness. In fact, nowhere does Tertullian say that Christian men hold a higher place in God's eyes than Christian women. Tertullian's possible misogyny will be examined in due course, but for the moment, I will turn to the text of the work itself.

Tertullian's main appeal here is to the Christian virtue of modesty that was one of the hallmarks of Christ's ministry, and to a lesser extent a call to chastity, the merits of which he explores in more depth in On Modesty and An Exhortation to Chastity. As stated above, the targets of this work were newly converted Christian women, who had not yet cast off the

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128 Daniel L. Hoffman, *The Status of Women and Gnosticism in Irenaeus and Tertullian* (Queenston, Ontario: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), 1.

129 *Ibid.*, 148.

ostentatious dress of pagan society to fully embrace the humble life of a handmaid of Christ. The main goal of the treatise is to lay out clearly and concisely what is expected of these new Christians, and to explain why it is that these actions are unacceptable for a person who is now in a very deep and special relationship with the God who rules the world.

On the Apparel of Women begins with an appeal to Tertullian's target audience to discard the ostentatious garb that is characteristic of heathen women and take up the mantle of a true handmaid of God, making reference to the special relationship between these women's newly acquired faith and the reward that followers of this faith can expect in Heaven:

If there existed upon earth a faith in proportion to the reward that faith will receive in heaven, no one of you, my beloved sisters, from the time when you came to know the living God and recognized your own state, that is, the condition of being a woman, would have desired a too attractive garb, and much less anything that seemed too ostentatious.<sup>130</sup>

Tertullian places much emphasis in this work on the uselessness of female ornamentation, stating that the metals commonly used in the creation of most jewelry, namely gold and silver, are in reality no more valuable than other, less precious materials. Instead, it is only the value placed on them because of their rarity that gives them any value at all. In fact, Tertullian says that if we were to estimate value on practicality, gold and silver would be considered metals of lower rank, and brass and iron would be exalted.

Certainly you will never plow a field with a golden plow nor will any shop be held together with silver bolts; you would never drive a golden mattock into the earth nor would you drive a silver nail into a plank.<sup>131</sup>

Here, Tertullian is illustrating the vanity of the ornaments that he is attacking. Hanging such objects from one's body is an attempt at vainglory and nothing else, for the metals from which they are made pose no practical purpose. Also, because of the great value given to these

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<sup>130</sup> *App.*, I. I. 1; Quain, 117.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, I.V. 3; Quain. 124.

metals and stones, it is possible for someone to wear what amounts to a small fortune upon their bodies, as Tertullian says at the end of Book 1:

A large fortune can be lifted out of a little box; a million sesterces can hang from a single thread; one slender neck can be surrounded by jewels worth many forests and islands; two slender lobes of the ears can cost a fortune; and each finger on the left hand puts to shame any money-bag. Such is the power of ambition that one damsel carries the whole income from a large fortune on her small body<sup>132</sup>

The use of jewelry, therefore, is nothing more than an immodest display of wealth which is incompatible with the Christian life of holiness. Also, Tertullian mentions the way in which these metals are removed from the earth:

To be sure, they are earth of a nobler sort, For, wet with tears of those condemned to penal labor in the deadly foundries of the accursed mines, those 'precious' metals leave the name of the earth in the fire behind them and, as fugitives from the mines, they change from objects of torture into articles of ornament, from instruments of punishment into tools of allurements, from symbols of ignominy into signs of honor.<sup>133</sup>

With that sarcasm for which he is known, Tertullian is here attacking the very means by which gold and silver are mined as being expressly non-Christian. Back-breaking labour as being forced upon people to acquire these metals, and even if these people are criminals condemned to hard labour as punishment for their crimes, the language being utilized by Tertullian here is meant to evoke the Christian values of charity, mercy and compassion, as well as the call to common human charity found in his appeals to the Roman governors in the Apology. Clearly, Tertullian's opinion of jewelry is that it is simply something that does not belong on a Christian woman, nor is it something in which a Christian woman should have any interest. He mentions that adorning practical items with jewels for the sake of beautification is something characteristic of pagans, making it beneath a Christian to even consider, and putting it

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, I. IX, 3; Quain, 128.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, I.V. 1; Quain, 123.

in the same category as the gladiatorial games and the theatre which he also condemns.<sup>134</sup> So, not only are moral codes of modesty being broken by the donning of ostentatious jewels, but their means of extraction also runs counter to many core Christian values. This is a point he brings up again in Book 2, when he alludes to the fact that gold is used by some pagan nations as chains.<sup>135</sup> Tertullian also attacks female ornamentation in The Antidote for the Scorpion's Sting, mentioning that it was the earrings of the women of Israel that were used in the creation of the Golden Calf,<sup>136</sup> and that the true ornamentation of the ears was the word of God.<sup>137</sup>

In Chapter 8 of the first book, Tertullian offers a theological explanation as to why all ostentatious decoration, not just jewelry, is in itself blasphemous. He says that using dyes and the like to change the colour of natural material into something else is against the will of God:

We cannot suppose that God was unable to produce sheep with purple or sky blue fleeces. If he was able, then He chose not to do it, and what God refused to do certainly cannot be lawful for man to make.<sup>138</sup>

He goes on to state that since such perversions of nature were not created by God, the only other possible source of their existence would have to be the Devil. It follows, therefore, that since what is not of God is by default the domain of Lucifer, the act of dyeing is a form of idolatry.<sup>139</sup> He will go on in Book Two to claim that make-up and other cosmetic alterations to the appearance are also blasphemous for the same reasons.<sup>140</sup> The rest of the chapter is spent explaining that even if something is made by God, that does not mean that every way in which it

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, I. VII. 2; Quain, 126.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, II. X. 2.; Quain, 143.

<sup>136</sup> Exodus 32:2.

<sup>137</sup> *Scorp.*, III; Thelwall, 636.

<sup>138</sup> *App.*, I. VIII. 2; Quain, 126.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.* I.VIII. 2-3; Quain, 126-127.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.* II.V. 2-3; Quain, 135-137.

is used is permitted by God. Just because God created horses and other animals, for example, as well as acting and the human voice, it does not mean that it is lawful for a Christian to participate in the spectacles of the arena or theatre, both of which use God's creations for perverse entertainment.<sup>141</sup> It is worth noting, however, that he condemns these pagan forms of pleasure in a purely Christian context, rather than saying they should be avoided by everyone, once again emphasizing the moral superiority expected of Christians because of their particular relationship with God.

Book 2 of On the Apparel of Women is not so much a continuation of the themes of Book 1, as it is a rewriting of the first book. It examines many of the same topics, but expands upon them and presents them in greater detail. Tertullian writes to his audience with a softer tone in this second book. The admonition of men who are guilty of dressing in flagrantly ostentatious ways is found in this book, and in the first chapter he affectionately refers to the Christian women he is addressing as handmaidens of the Lord, fellow servants and his sisters. He also appears to be quite humbled, addressing himself as the lowest of all Christians.<sup>142</sup> It is possible that Tertullian realised that his tone was too harsh or that, by targeting only women in the original draft, he could be perceived as targeting them for their gender instead of their actions, and that some rewriting was necessary in order to correct these issues. Regardless of his motives for writing a second book of the treatise, Tertullian wastes no time getting to the heart of the matter, and wishes to inform these recent converts that dressing in the manner of pagan women is an act of immodesty, and modesty is required for one to achieve salvation. He states that all Christians are temples of God, and modesty is the caretaker of the temple, keeping out all

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141 *Ibid.*, I.VIII. 4-5; Quain, 127.

142 *Ibid.*, II. I. 1; Quain, 129.

profane and dirty things so that God would not be offended and leave.<sup>143</sup> Continuing, Tertullian emphasizes the special place the Christian has in the world at large by stating that Gentiles and pagans do not possess true modesty. Modesty belongs to Christians and Christians alone because others do not know God, who is the Master and Teacher of truth.<sup>144</sup> Therefore, it is not possible for those who do not know God to have a true grasp of a Christian value such as modesty because they were not taught what it actually entails by the one who made it a value in the first place, nor do they adhere to a moral code that exalts it to the level it deserves. We also find in Chapter One a clear statement that it is not sufficient for a Christian woman to live her life according to the lower values of the world at large. More is expected of her because of him in whom she places her faith: "It is your obligation to be different from them, as in all other things, so also in your gait, as you ought to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."<sup>145</sup>

In Chapter Two, Tertullian states that in order to achieve perfect modesty and walk in the way of true Christian holiness, a Christian should not become an object of desire for anyone. Christian women, therefore, should not beautify themselves so as to avoid arousing lust in others, as Christ himself said: "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."<sup>146</sup>

Beautifying oneself, therefore, can lead to the damnation not only of one's own self, but also that of others who would be beguiled by a woman's appearance and commit a sin against their own will.<sup>147</sup> So, in order to fulfil the Christian duty of helping others to achieve salvation

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<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, II. I. 2-3; Quain, 130.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, II. I. 4; Quain, 130.

<sup>146</sup> Mt. 5:28

<sup>147</sup> *App.*, II. II. 1; Quain, 131.

and to be moral exemplars to the pagan world, it behoves a Christian woman to dress moderately and modestly. Besides, it is not a Christian's business to be concerned with the glories of the flesh, and to a person who professes humility (which is required by the teachings of Christ), all glory is vain and foolish. The only joy that Christians should find in their flesh is when it has been tortured in the name of Christ so that the spirit may be crowned. Therefore, women who are not naturally beautiful have no need to seek beauty,<sup>148</sup> and women who are beautiful should not try to augment that beauty but try to subdue it.<sup>149</sup> He also tries to reassure these women that they will not lose their husband if they neglect their physical appearance, as he has already considered her beautiful if he chose to marry her in the first place. A true Christian man will give precedence to his wife's chastity above her beauty.<sup>150</sup>

Tertullian goes on to say that he does not believe that modesty should create squalor and that personal hygiene is unimportant, but modesty should always take precedence in the mind of the Christian. He also speaks of practical reasons for not dressing ostentatiously, such as the fact that Christian women are not seen in public as often as their pagan counterparts.<sup>151</sup> In Chapter 10 he also states that the reason fineries such as jewelry exist is that God permits them in order to act as a yardstick to measure his people's level of discipline.<sup>152</sup> He then finishes his work with an exaltation of what he believes true beauty to be and with what a Christian woman should adorn herself:

Go forth to meet those angels, adorned with the cosmetics and ornaments of the Prophets and Apostles. Let your whiteness flow from simplicity, let modesty be the cause

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148 *Ibid.*, II. III. 2-3; Quain, 133-134.

149 *Ibid.*, II. IV. 1; Quain, 134.

150 *Ibid.*, II. IV. 1-2; Quain, 134-135.

151 *Ibid.*, II. XI. 1-2; Quain, 144.

152 *Ibid.*, II. X. 5; Quain, 144.

of your rosy complexion; paint your eyes with demureness, your mouth with silence; hang on your ears the words of God, bind on your neck the yoke of Christ, bow your heads to your husbands-and that will be ornament enough for you.<sup>153</sup>

On the Veiling of Virgins is an interesting work in that Tertullian is speaking out against a practice that had become prevalent in the churches of his home in Carthage, namely, the practice of young unmarried women keeping their head uncovered while in church. In Carthaginian society, it was the norm for women older than twelve to wear a head covering while in public, since not doing so implied that the woman was a prostitute. However, it was considered permissible for unmarried women who were older than twelve to leave their head uncovered while attending church. Tertullian thinks it fitting that all women should continue to wear the veil at all times, and in this work he is trying to convince those who disagree with him that it is his view that is in accordance with Scripture and God.<sup>154</sup>

In the first chapter of the work, Tertullian makes an appeal to tradition, as he does in many of his works, saying:

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. For what kind of (supposition) is it, that, while the devil is always operating and adding daily to the ingenuities of iniquity, the work of God should either have ceased, or else have desisted from advancing? whereas the reason why the Lord sent the Paraclete was, that, since human mediocrity was unable to take in all things at once, discipline should, little by little, be directed, and ordained, and carried on to perfection, by that Vicar of the Lord, the Holy Spirit.<sup>155</sup>

This simple appeal to a simpler time shows that, for Tertullian, the fundamental teaching of God and the Holy Spirit trumps any human novelties, and just because it is now fashionable for young women to forego donning the veil upon entering a church, this does not mean that is

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, II. XII. 7; Quain, 149.

<sup>154</sup> Roger Pearse. "De Virginitate Velandis," The Tertullian Project, accessed October 14th 2010. [http://tertullian.org/works/de\\_virginitate\\_velandis.htm](http://tertullian.org/works/de_virginitate_velandis.htm).

<sup>155</sup> *Veil.*, I. 5-6; Thelwall, 27.

either appropriate or correct for them to do so. Also, anything added to the Christian tradition that does not derive from Scripture is alien to the faith and is the work of the devil, which means that those who argue for the shedding of the veil in church are unwittingly doing the devil's work, and causing damage to the souls of the good Christians whom they are trying to help. It is not customs that are Tertullian's concern, but truth.<sup>156</sup>

In Chapter IV Tertullian solidifies his stance and rationale by stating that his position cannot be refuted by Scripture as his opponents would claim.<sup>157</sup> The passage in question is Corinthians 11:5-6, in which St. Paul, when discussing the veil, only mentions 'women' (*mulieres*) as those bound to wear it, and does not mention 'virgins' (*virgines*) at all.<sup>158</sup> Tertullian's basic argument against this is that Paul did not differentiate between women and virgins here because he felt there was no need, as the word 'woman' (*mulier*) encompasses all of the female sex.<sup>159</sup> He then goes on to explain that the term virgin (*virgo*) is a specific form of the general term woman, just as when one says 'body' one does not need to then say 'hand' or 'foot' for the listener to understand that the speaker means all parts of the body.<sup>160</sup> He gives the ultimate example in the sixth chapter, when he states that the Virgin Mary is referred to as a 'woman' several times in Scripture as also is Eve,<sup>161</sup> which demonstrates clearly that virginity has no bearing on whether a female is referred to as a 'woman' in Scripture. This shows yet again that Tertullian feels the need to have absolute scriptural authority for his arguments, and the faith he places on Scripture as the true and infallible word of the just God is illustrated perfectly here.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, III. 9; Thelwall, 29.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 1; Thelwall, 29.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 2-5; Thelwall, 29.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 6-8; Thelwall, 29-30.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, VI. 1; Thelwall, 31.

In the same vein as his writing against the extravagances of women's dress and its effect on a Christian woman's chances of achieving salvation, Tertullian's main arguments in this work ultimately come down to morality. When wearing a veil a woman is clad in her 'panoply of modesty,'<sup>162</sup> and she is protecting both herself and her Christian brothers from the pitfalls of lust and adultery, which would put the salvation of all those involved at serious risk.<sup>163</sup> Keeping in line with Christ's statement that even looking at a woman with lust in one's heart is equivalent to committing adultery with her, Tertullian makes the claim that any public exposure of a virgin is akin to a rape, but in this case it is the spirit that is violated rather than the body. Yet again he asserts that the covering acts as a protection for those who wear it, and he attacks those who argue against him thus:

O sacrilegious hands, which have had the hardihood to drag off a dress dedicated to God! What worse could any persecutor have done, if he had known that this (garb) had been chosen by a virgin? You have denuded a maiden in regard of her head, and forthwith she wholly ceases to be a virgin to herself; she has undergone a change!<sup>164</sup>

In Tertullian's view, Christian virgins are obliged to practice the highest form of Christian morality, and this is the key to understanding his insistence to forgo the fashion of unveiling for the tradition of remaining veiled in church.

Making a further point, Tertullian mentions that it was the daughters of men who were responsible for the fall of certain of the angels as they looked upon them with lust in their hearts and fell from God's grace, and since they were referred to explicitly as 'daughters' rather than 'women' or 'wives,' Tertullian draws the conclusion that it was virgins that were the source of

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<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, XVI. 5; Thelwall, 37.

<sup>163</sup> Carly Daniel Hughes, "Wear the Armor of your Shame!": Debating Veiling and the Salvation of the Flesh in Tertullian of Carthage," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 39. no 2 (2010): 181.

<sup>164</sup> *Veil*, III. 8; Thelwall, 29.

the angels' sin.<sup>165</sup> How much easier, then, would it be for unveiled virgins to entice the heart of human men if it is possible for them to seduce the angels of God? Tertullian wishes for the virgins to cover themselves not only for their own sake, but for the sake of all the members of their community.

Another reason given by Tertullian for the wearing of the veil is the fact that doing so is consistent with other disciplinary and social rules that are followed by virgins and women in general. He says that women are not permitted to preach in churches, nor are they allowed to teach, baptize, offer, etc. as it is a part of their humility,<sup>166</sup> a Christian virtue. The basic argument here is that a woman who casts aside her veil is also casting aside her humility, which will result in her being castigated by society at large, and lead to her humiliation. It is also possible that removal of the veil could lead to confusion of a woman's role in society, as an unveiled virgin may be confused for a married woman or even a widow. To illustrate how easily this can happen, Tertullian gives the example of a virgin he has heard of who, not yet twenty years of age, was given the status of a widow.<sup>167</sup> Tertullian sarcastically refutes this, saying how absurd it is to call a virgin a widow.

I know plainly, that in a certain place a virgin of less than twenty years of age has been placed in the order of widows! whereas if the bishop had been bound to accord her any relief, he might, of course, have done it in some other way without detriment to the respect due to discipline; that such a miracle, not to say monster, should not be pointed at in the church, a virgin-widow! the more portentous indeed, that not even as a widow did she veil her head; denying herself either way; both as virgin, in that she is counted a widow, and as widow, in that she is styled a virgin.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, VII. 5-8; Thelwall, 32.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, II. XII. 7; Quain, 149.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, IX. 5; Thelwall, 33.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

Here we see that Tertullian believes that a virgin taking the office of a widow denies her the esteem that comes with both titles, since she cannot be considered a virgin if she has been married, nor can she be given the respect of a widow if she is still young enough to be a virgin. Tertullian has here denounced the entire purpose that he believes to be at the heart of these young women removing the veil in the first place, and that is the vaunting of social status from virgin to widow. As such it is more profitable for these young women to continue wearing the veil upon their heads in all settings, including church, as a visible representation of their chastity and their devotion to God in order to enjoy the moral esteem that is owed them for their purity and their humility.

Tertullian truly believes that chastity is to be prized and that virgins should be proud of the fact they that they are chaste. He wonders why a virgin would be willing to throw away the visible representation of her virginity. Chastity, after all is a Christian virtue and has always been recognised in the Church as being morally superior to wantonness. As such, it is of no surprise that Tertullian would be in favour of its continued propagation in the society in which he lives. I believe, however, that a certain level of fear can be seen in Tertullian's writing here. With the continued moral decay of the pagan world that he so hotly contests in the Apology, and the influx of pagan influence on the day-to-day lives of Christians which he is trying to defend in On the Apparel of Women, it is certainly possible that Tertullian may be reacting against what he perceives as the loss of morality in Christian communities, which is the direct result of their proximity to pagans and their customs. The veil may be seen as a symbolic representation of higher Christian morality, and essentially represents the core values which make Christianity different and better than the old pagan religions. Because of this its loss cannot be taken lightly, which is why he tries so hard to defend it. Abandoning the tradition of the veil would imply a

disregard of Christian morality, a devaluation of chastity and modesty which, in turn, is a devaluation of the virtues that set Christianity apart from other religions. Thus, Tertullian feels the need to maintain the tradition, in order to preserve the moral purity and uniqueness of the religion to which he converted.

As previously stated, it has been suggested that Tertullian's works carry with them a misogynistic tone. It is quite true that Tertullian focuses his attention on women in many of his disciplinary works, but this occurs mainly in those works dealing with the female Christian's role in society and his call for them to live like Christians. They were to wholly reject the influence of the pagan society in which they lived, an influence which would lead them to live contrary to the will of the God. In this vein it is clear that he is not denouncing women as a whole, but denouncing pagan society, and warning his 'sisters in Christ' to avoid the pitfalls of what is associated with it.<sup>169</sup> Also of note is the fact that in works such as On Chastity and On Modesty Tertullian is, for the most part, completely gender neutral in his instruction on Christian morality, speaking to the Christian population as a whole instead of singling out one group within it. On the other hand, there is a venomous tone to be found in the first chapter of the first book of On the Apparel of Women:

I think, rather, that you would have dressed in mourning garment and even neglected your exterior, acting the part of mourning and repentant Eve in order to expiate more fully by all sorts of penitential garb that which woman derives from Eve the ignominy, I mean, of original sin and the odium of being the cause of the fall of the human race.<sup>170</sup>

And again:

The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives on even on our times and it is necessary that the guilt should live on, also. You are the one who opened the door to the Devil, you are the one who first plucked the fruit of the forbidden tree, you are the first

<sup>169</sup> Hoffman, *The Status of Women and Gnosticism in Irenaeus and Tertullian*, 149.

<sup>170</sup> *App.*, I. I. 1; Quain, 117.

who deserted the divine law; you are the one who persuaded him whom the Devil was not strong enough to attack. All too easily you destroyed the image of God, man. Because of your desert, that is, death, even the Son of God had to die.<sup>171</sup>

The language here is certainly harsh and can easily be interpreted as misogynistic; however, blaming Eve for the fall of man and thus asserting that all women after her share in her guilt, just as all men share in the sin of Adam, was certainly not something that Tertullian invented. If one subscribes such a typological reading to the Bible, Scripture itself reinforces this belief, with the text placing the blame on Eve for tempting Adam, cursing her and her descendants to experience pain in childbirth. The biblical text also implies that woman was subordinate to man both in her role and her origin. As to the latter, she was formed from a part of man's body,<sup>172</sup> thus making her a part of him with no independent existence of her own, whereas man was created independently and is therefore his own separate being. As to the former, it is explicitly stated that a woman is to live subject to her husband and that he is her master.<sup>173</sup> So, any anti-female sentiment present in Tertullian's writing is simply a reflection of the times in which he lived, and given what he was taught and his absolute belief in the word of God, it would have been impossible for him to think any differently.

On the Veiling of Virgins is a very good place to examine Tertullian's alleged misogyny. It is one of his few works in which he is talking explicitly to women, and it contains evidence both for and against. The tenth chapter of this work contains a somewhat unsavory passage in which Tertullian suggests that he believes only men were made in the image of God and women were not. When speaking of the fact that if, male virgins are supposed to display a visible representation of male virginity, such as the feathers and tattoos that were worn by male virgins

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171 *Ibid.*, I. I. 2; Quain, 118.

172 Gen 2:21

173 Gen 3:16

of various cultures throughout the world to mark their purity,<sup>174</sup> then it should be expected that female virgins would do the same, Tertullian says:

How, then, would God have failed to make any such concession to men more (than to women), whether on the ground of nearer intimacy, as being "His own image," or on the ground of harder toil? But if nothing (has been thus conceded) to the male, much more to the female.<sup>175</sup>

But this passage is far more likely to be rhetorical in its nature, and the fact remains that in Tertullian's writings, no other mention is made of the inferiority of women. Also, if the image of God relates only to Adam, and in consequence to all other men, the implications are not necessarily positive: the emphasis is then on the moral shortcomings on the part of the male sex as it has failed to live up to this image.<sup>176</sup>

When one reads On the Veiling of Virgins, it seems clear that the language is not that of someone trying to oppress a group of women who are fighting to assert their social liberties. Instead, what we see is a man trying to appeal to his sisters on the grounds of their shared morality, and begging them not to simply throw away something that makes them special. As we have seen, unveiled women were sometimes viewed as prostitutes in Carthage during Tertullian's time, and he is clearly concerned with the virgins' well-being, physically, spiritually and socially:

Conscious of a now undoubted womanhood, they have the audacity to draw near to God with head bare. But the "jealous God and Lord," who has said, "Nothing covered which shall not be revealed," brings such in general before the public gaze; for confess they will not, unless betrayed by the cries of their infants themselves. But, in so far as they are "more numerous," will you not just have them suspected of the more crimes? I will say (albeit I would rather not) it is a difficult thing for one to turn woman once for all who fears to do so, and who, when already so turned (in secret), has the power of (still) falsely pretending to be a virgin under the eye of God. What audacities, again, will (such a one) venture on with regard to her womb, for fear of being detected in being a mother as well! God knows how many infants He has helped to perfection and through gestation

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<sup>174</sup> *Veil*, X. 2; Thelwall, 33.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, X. 5; Thelwall, 33.

<sup>176</sup> Hoffman, *The Status of Women and Gnosticism in Irenaeus and Tertullian*, 153.

till they were born sound and whole, after being long fought against by their mothers! Such virgins ever conceive with the readiest facility, and have the happiest deliveries, and children indeed most like to their fathers!<sup>177</sup>

Though the language here may seem harsh, as it does in so many of Tertullian's works, what we have here is a legitimate concern for his sisters in Christ. He is worried about what effects their attempts to subvert the tradition of the veil will have upon their path to salvation. As can be seen in almost all of Tertullian's writing, the essential issue here is the need for every Christian, man, woman, or child, to maintain a high moral character in order to live up to the standards that God requires of them.

The argument made by Elaine Pagels in her 1979 book The Gnostic Gospels is that Church Fathers such as Tertullian and Irenaeus opposed the spread of heresies such as Gnosticism because the latter had a more egalitarian view of women and men. The Valentinian concept of a divine mother also ran counter to the orthodox Church's view of a wholly masculine Creator who cursed females for their role in the Original Sin, which allowed for a religious mandate for the continued subjugation of women in the Christian world.<sup>178</sup> If Pagel's claims are true, then the sexism exhibited by the early Latin Church was the result of the imperfect teachings of this Creator, the Demiurge. Therefore, this sexism is a part of the flawed world, which Gnostics reject along with the rest of the world by raising women to equal status with men.<sup>179</sup> However, to make the claim that Gnostic sects were somehow overtly feminist is premature. In actuality, many religions, when they start out, are all-inclusive, offering salvation, or enlightenment, or spiritual attainment to anyone willing to place their faith in their teachings. This outreach often extends to people who are in some way downtrodden by the society in which

<sup>177</sup> *Veil*, XIV; Thelwall, 5-8, 36.

<sup>178</sup> Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 48-50.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-39.

they live, including women and the poor. Then, as the religion expands, the prejudices of the society which surrounds it begins to seep into the religion. Buddhism is a clear example of this. The Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama taught that everyone was capable of achieving Enlightenment, but as his teaching spread, it was decided on that he must have been mistaken, and that women cannot possibly have the same chance of gaining the prize as men. So it became standard Buddhist teaching that a woman had to live her life as best she could in the hope of being reborn as a man, for only then could hope to break the cycle of *samsara* and achieve enlightenment.

The orthodox Christianity Pagels attacks was clearly similar to this. Christ's teachings were all inclusive: he does not state in any canonical Gospel that the Kingdom is open only to men and he was known to have female friends and disciples. But, as with Buddhism, his teachings were gradually changed, and by the Middle Ages, Christ's sacrifice saved only men, and it was Mary, by remaining forever Virgin, who redeemed women. Given all this, it is not surprising that, on the surface, Gnosticism may have appealed to women through its female divinities who seem to have real power, especially over the God of Israel.<sup>180</sup> Gnosticism may have appealed to orthodox Christian women who may have felt disenfranchised with the sexism that seemed to be a part of official Christian dogma. However, upon closer examination, this pro-feminism that Pagels insists existed within Gnosticism is very shallow, if one can even say it existed at all. In actuality, Gnosticism held its goddesses in very low regard. One need only look to the Valentinian myth to see an illustration of this: Sophia is portrayed as overly emotional and filled with jealousy and contempt for her fellow aeons, to the point that she brings forth, on her own, an imperfect being, Achamoth, out of desire to be like the father Bythos. Achamoth was born without the input of Sophia's male consort and was therefore flawed. Similarly, in Greek myth, when Hera tried to create an offspring by herself, she created Hephaestus, who was

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<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

also flawed, but when Zeus, on his own, brought forth the goddess Athena, she proved to be one of the greatest of the Olympians. The male creative principle, in other words, appears here to be superior to the female. Also, Pagels claims that Sophia, as Wisdom, brought forth the Demiurge as her 'agent' in the creation of the world.<sup>181</sup> If this is the case, then it is Sophia who in reality is the author of the Demiurge's incompetence, since she guided his hand in everything he did. This makes Sophia the reason why a flawed world was created, and why the human race is forced to live upon it instead of in the Pleroma.<sup>182</sup>

Tertullian, on the other hand, places women in a relatively good light, considering when and where he lived. He held the Montanist prophetesses in high esteem and saw their teachings as being of real value for his people in Carthage.<sup>183</sup> Also, he himself was married and he had a very high opinion of Christian marriage, seeing it as an equal partnership between husband and wife, a partnership in which the wife had many roles, and this is not something one would expect from a misogynist. He promoted women in many church roles, going further than many other Church fathers by including them in services.<sup>184</sup> In a letter to his wife, Tertullian asks her not to marry again upon his death, but this is in no way an attempt to control her. He simply feels that a second marriage is unnecessary, since his wife will be taken care of by God, and to a certain extent, by the church, in which he has confidence because of the special emphasis placed on the veneration of widows.<sup>185</sup> Also worthy of note is the loving tone he takes towards his female Christian fellows in Book Two of On the Apparel of Women. Whereas the first book opens with

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<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>183</sup> Hoffman, *The Status of Women and Gnosticism in Irenaeus and Tertullian*, 148.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 162-163.

him condemning women as the reason for man's fall, in the second book he speaks politely and sweetly, addressing them as sisters and appealing to the fact that they are better than the pagans whom they are (alas) emulating with their manner of dress.

Passages such as those previously mentioned from On the Veiling of Virgins are problematic, as is the final chapter of On the Apparel of Women, for it seems here that Tertullian is demanding that women be silent and remain in the gender roles traditionally provided for them, and that this is the only true way for them to achieve salvation. Yet, the rest of Tertullian's work seems to paint a man who had great respect for women and one who was not a misogynist at all. In fact, had Tertullian had overtly misogynistic tendencies, he could not have been a spokesman for reciprocal justice. Women have very high moral standards put upon them by society, and a good Christian woman is expected to have a truly high moral compass. It stands to reason, then, that reciprocal justice would view Christian women as exemplars of what is good and right even above Christian men. Regarding women in a negative light, therefore, not only makes no sense, but would be hypocritical. A Christian woman who lives a disciplined, chaste and modest life would be endearing to someone like Tertullian who put so much emphasis on the rule of faith. The truth is, that when Tertullian speaks out against women, it is because they are not acting in accordance with this rule of faith, or because they are heretics. Tertullian's attitude to all heretics, male and female, was confrontational, and he would use any sort of ammunition against them, even if, in some cases, he may appear sexist.<sup>186</sup>

The truth of the matter is that Tertullian does not show any real signs of having a misogynistic outlook. He may be seen as restrictive by today's standards, and he could certainly be labelled as sexist using the same criteria. But he lived in a different time when such beliefs

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186 *Ibid.*, 148-149.

were simply normative and shared by a majority of the population, and in many ways he held women in very high regard, including his wife, for whom he clearly cared deeply:

These considerations, dearest fellow-servant, I commend to you thus early, handled throughout superfluously indeed, after the apostle, but likely to prove a solace to you, in that (if so it shall turn out) you will cherish my memory in them.<sup>187</sup>

Let us now move on to another of Tertullian's disciplinary works, his treatise On Modesty, in which he tries to answer the question with which all Christian churches have to deal, namely, what to do when one of their members falls into sin. Tertullian is here writing against an attitude of compliance which he sees as having taken root in the Carthaginian Church, an attitude which maintained that all sins, major or minor, might be forgiven. This resulted in an edict of a certain bishop that allowed for the forgiveness of adultery. Here, taking a hard, even angry, line, Tertullian lays out what he believes to be forgivable and what is unforgivable.<sup>188</sup> Tertullian believed that the Church only had the power to forgive certain minor sins. Major sins, such as those that affronted God and were counter to his justice, could not be forgiven by mortals.<sup>189</sup> Therefore, the edict of the bishop in question was unacceptable, as he was not qualified to allow fornicators and adulterers to return to grace.

In On Modesty, Tertullian once again uses Scripture to attack those forms of behaviour which, in his opinion, cannot be permitted in a Christian context, allowing for a greater understanding of what he feels does not agree with the concept of reciprocal justice.

He begins his treatise by giving a definition of modesty as he understands it:

Modesty, the flower of manners, the honour of our bodies, the grace of the sexes, the integrity of the blood, the guarantee of our race, the basis of sanctity, the pre-

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<sup>187</sup> *Wife*, I.VIII.5; Thelwall, 44.

<sup>188</sup> Roger Pearse. "De Pudicitia." The Tertullian Project, Roger Pearse, accessed October 11<sup>th</sup> 2010. [http://www.tertullian.org/works/de\\_pudicitia.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/works/de_pudicitia.htm).

<sup>189</sup> Osborn, *Tertullian, First Theologian of the West*, 230.

indication of every good disposition; rare though it is, and not easily perfected, and scarce ever retained in perpetuity, will yet up to a certain point linger in the world, if nature shall have laid the preliminary groundwork of it, discipline persuaded to it, censorial rigour curbed its excesses on the hypothesis, that is, that every mental good quality is the result either of birth, or else of training, or else of external compulsion.<sup>190</sup>

Tertullian's high opinion of this classic Christian virtue is obvious, and he clearly states that modesty is the product of several factors, such as a natural inclination possessed by people towards being modest, which in turn is increased through societal influences that encourage it. He goes on to say that this value of Christian modesty, the greatest and most pure form of modesty in the world, has now been shaken to its core by this new proclamation by the one he refers to mockingly as '*Pontifex Maximus*,' which has tainted the Church's standing as the Bride of Christ.<sup>191</sup> One can read the anger in Tertullian's words in this opening chapter, and it is clear that, for him, this is simply something that should not be tolerated by any good Christian and the entire thing has diminished the glory of the faith:

But now this glory is being extinguished, and that by means of those who ought with all the more constancy to refuse concession of any pardon to defilements of this kind, that they make the fear of succumbing to adultery and fornication their reason for marrying as often as they please since 'better it is to marry than to burn.(1 Cor. 7:9)<sup>192</sup>

Tertullian's vehement attack on this edict shows how much he values both modesty, which in this work is basically defined as the act of refraining from sexual sin, and chastity. As Christian virtues, both of these are demanded by God, who accepts only the highest morality from those who live in his name. It is not permissible then, according to Tertullian, for a Christian church to allow those who fell into such egregious sin to be brought back into communion with the Church so easily. Also, it is evident that Tertullian classified sin into two

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<sup>190</sup> *Mod.*, I. 1; Thelwall, 74.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, I. 3-6; Thelwall, 74.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, I. 15; Thelwall, 75.

distinct categories: minor sins that people committed against each other, and major sins that could only be forgiven by God. Sins that put one's soul at risk, sins that destroyed a Christian's ethical superiority and compromised the working of reciprocal justice, fall into the latter category, and no human bishop, nor any mortal for that matter, has the power to forgive them. Only God is capable of doing that, which is why the edict cannot be tolerated: not only does it strip away the glory of Christendom, but it is also an act of hubris. Here, a human priest is claiming that he is capable of doing what only God can do, granting forgiveness for a major sin, and that is an arrogant act which has no place in a religion founded on humility and self-abnegation.

Once Tertullian has expressed his opinion on how damaging this edict is to the Christian cause in general, he turns his attention to a closer examination of the sins in question, as well as attempts to refute claims being made by allies of the bishop to justify their stance. The first of these is the argument that God is merciful and prefers to offer forgiveness rather than punishment.

But," say they, "God is 'good, 'and 'most good, ' and 'pitiful-hearted, 'and 'a pitier', and 'abundant in pitiful-heartedness, 'which He holds 'dearer than all sacrifice, 'not thinking the sinner's death of so much worth as his repentance', 'a Saviour of all men, most of all of believers.' And so it will be becoming for 'the sons of God' too to be 'pitiful-hearted' and 'peacemakers; giving in their turn just as Christ withal hath given to us; 'not judging, that we be not judged. 'For 'to his own lord a man standeth or falleth; who art thou, to judge another's servant? "Remit, and remission shall be made to thee."<sup>193</sup>

How Tertullian answers this is very important to this study; he refutes this argument by stating that God is indeed good, but that he is also just, saying that not only does God know how to heal, but he also knows how to smite.<sup>194</sup> Here, God is the great judge who demands that people

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, II.1-2; Thelwall, 75-76.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, II. 4; Thelwall, 76.

who commit unpardonable sins answer to justice. Tertullian, as usual, uses Scripture to back up his claim.

And pray not thou unto me on behalf of this People, and request not that they may obtain mercy, and approach not on their behalf unto me, since I will not listen to them.<sup>195</sup>

There is a limit to God's patience with his followers, and the time will come when they have fallen away so far from what he has decreed to be good and lawful that he will rescind his mercy. It is appropriate that the majority of the biblical references used in this chapter are from the Old Testament. As we have seen, Tertullian's own view of God and his relationship with his people, is, at its core, Old Testament in nature, especially with regard to the concept of covenant. In the Old Testament, God pledges to protect his people, the Israelites, and to bless and keep them, but this pledge has its conditions. The Israelites are required to adhere to a very specific collection of laws which set forth a high and demanding morality. The failure to do so would lead to God removing his protection from them, since his protection was their reward for following his laws. Eventually, the lack of commitment of the people of Israel to the God that gave them so much leads to their kingdom being divided, and then, after they transgress even further, completely destroyed. This mirrors Tertullian's own thought, as well as the concept of reciprocal justice as a whole, for only when one party is fulfilling its side of the agreement can the other side be expected to do the same. Since the people of Israel did not do what was expected of them, Tertullian sees no problem with the fact that God removed his protection from them. The same is true for Christians: they too, are expected to keep their part of the bargain, and if they do not, they can only fear the worst.

Tertullian now goes on to differentiate between the two types of sin: forgivable and unforgivable:

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<sup>195</sup> Jer. 7:16.

We agree that the causes of repentance are sins. These we divide into two issues: some will be remissible, some irremissible: in accordance wherewith it will be doubtful to no one that some deserve chastisement, some condemnation. Every sin is dischargeable either by pardon or else by penalty: by pardon as the result of chastisement, by penalty as the result of condemnation.<sup>196</sup>

The differences between remissible and irremissible sins are the focus of On Modesty, and Tertullian goes to great pains to illustrate these differences, such as the difference between merely sinning and sinning “unto death.”<sup>197</sup> Tertullian claims that because God is just, he cannot and will not grant forgiveness to those who perform the sins that Tertullian considers to be mortal. But what of that verse in the Gospel of Matthew that seems to support his opponents' stance: “For with judgment, ye judge and judgment shall be given on you.”<sup>198</sup>

Tertullian refutes this claim, explaining that Christ is not saying that all sins are remissible. What he is saying is that his followers must judge the sins of their fellows in order to keep the Church filled with those who are doing their part to lead good, moral lives, so as to prevent a fate like that of ancient Israel from befalling the Christian people. Such a thought would probably have been at the forefront of Tertullian's mind, considering the fervour of the persecutions and the political power of the enemies of Christianity. And given his belief in reciprocal justice, it is understandable that he would be adamant on insisting that Christianity maintains the higher morality expected of it, since it was God's protection that assured its continued survival in the world.

Tertullian, in this work, is attacking every form of sin against God, but it is clear that his primary focus is upon the sins of adultery and fornication, for it was the episcopal edict allowing those guilty of these sins to stay in communion with the Church that spurred him to write it in the

<sup>196</sup> *Mod. II. 12-13*; Thelwall, 76.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, II. 14; Thelwall, 76.

<sup>198</sup> Mt. 7:2

first place. In Chapter 2 he begins his argument that it is these sins, more than any other, that are completely contrary to the will of God and cannot be forgiven by any human bishop. He claims that St. Paul was speaking of fornication when he said: "Such a man must be surrendered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh."<sup>199</sup>

For Tertullian, these two sins are the twin-headed demon that pull people away from God and lead them to ruin. His wording is extremely strong when he gives his opinion concerning them:

But all the other frenzies of passions----impious both toward the bodies and toward the sexes beyond the laws of nature, we banish not only from the threshold, but from all shelter of the Church, because they are not sins, but monstrosities.<sup>200</sup>

There is nothing too surprising in this, for sexuality and its sinfulness was a key topic of Church writing for much of its history. Yet there may be a personal reason for Tertullian's utter distaste for sexual sins, as he passingly admits to being guilty of adultery himself in his treatise On the Resurrection of the Dead.<sup>201</sup> Though this may seem somewhat hypocritical, Tertullian makes it clear there that he does not expect to receive mercy from any man, but instead will face God in his sinful body and hope for forgiveness. He does not look for forgiveness from a bishop for his sin: he looks only to God. Given this, Tertullian's opposition to the bishop's edict is wholly understandable: to have accepted it would have run counter to all that he believed.

Tertullian then goes on to speak of adultery and its position among the Commandments, claiming that its place in the list proves its pre-eminence as a sin. It takes precedence even over murder and is therefore a much greater sin. Adultery is led, he says, by the great sin of idolatry

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<sup>199</sup> *Mod.*, II. 9; Thelwall, 76.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, III. 5; Thelwall, 77.

<sup>201</sup> Dunn, *Tertullian*, 5.

and it leads to murder in its place.<sup>202</sup> Adultery is also the source from which both murder and idolatry draw their power, joining together to overthrow the essential Christian virtue of modesty.<sup>203</sup>

Tertullian then turns his attention to the laws of the Old Testament, proving that they still apply to the followers of the New, and that the hard stance taken by the Judaic law against adultery is still in effect. The Christian is the establishment of the law, the fulfilment of it in human form; therefore all Christians are subject to the law. He states that ignoring the law as it pertains to adultery would be the same as ignoring the same law as it comes to murder, such as the murder of Naboth by Ahab, and would also be giving approval to the adulteries of David, for which he was severely punished. All throughout history people have paid for committing wanton acts of adultery: David would lose the son he had by Bathsheba because of his lust, and all 24,000 of those who fornicated with the daughters of Madian were wiped out by a single plague.<sup>204</sup> This is a fact that will never change, and even believers can fall if they do not follow the right path. Those loyal to God need to take the greatest care, for lust is a universal virus of the flesh. Even though the flesh was cleansed in Christ the danger still remains, and it is all too easy for people to waver.<sup>205</sup>

In Chapter 7, Tertullian illustrates his point by citing two of the parables used by Christ: the parable of the lost lamb<sup>206</sup> and the parable of the lost drachma.<sup>207</sup> Here, he argues that all of

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202 *Mod.*, V. 5-6; Thelwall, 78.

203 *Ibid.*, Thelwall, 9-10

204 *Ibid.*, VI. 13; Thelwall, 79.

205 *Ibid.*, V. 15-16; Thelwall, 77.

206 Lk 15:3-7.

207 Lk 15: 8-10.

mankind, not only Christians, are sheep of the Lord's flock. And here we must remember that in Tertullian's time most Christians were converted heathens, much like Tertullian himself.

When speaking of sinning in general, Tertullian stresses the ideas of 'straying' or 'lapsing' or 'falling away':

For although he be said to "have perished," there will be the kind of perdition to treat of; inasmuch as the "ewe" "perished" not by dying, but by straying; and the "drachma" not by being destroyed, but by being hidden. In this sense, a thing which is safe may be said to "have perished." Therefore the believer, too, "perishes," by lapsing out of (the right path) into a public exhibition of charioteering frenzy, or gladiatorial gore, or scenic foulness, or athletic vanity; or else if he has lent the aid of any special "arts of curiosity" to sports, to the convivialities of heathen solemnity, to official exigence, to the ministry of another's idolatry; if he has impaled himself upon some word of ambiguous denial, or else of blasphemy. For some such cause he has been driven outside the flock; or even himself, perhaps, by anger, by pride, by jealousy, (or)---as, in fact, often happens ---by disdaining to submit to chastisement, has broken away (from it).<sup>208</sup>

However, when the time comes to discuss the sins of fornication and adultery, the terminology changes. Now, instead of the sinner being thought to have strayed or fallen away from the flock and simply needing to be sought out, the fornicator and adulterer are thought of as being dead as soon as the crime is committed,<sup>209</sup> and, as Tertullian says, there is a huge difference between being dead and simply being lost. A lost sheep is still of value to a shepherd as well as its flock, and, as the Parable states, therefore a shepherd will always try to find it. A dead sheep, however, is of no value to the flock, and therefore would not be sought by anyone. This shows quite clearly that, for Tertullian, these two sins of sexual impropriety are the greatest of sins and are far beyond the scope of redemption. Those who commit them have no place in a Christian community, just as a dead sheep has no place amongst a flock of the living. Adulterers and fornicators are worse than those who indulge in such pagan activities as the gladiatorial games and the theatre, and are completely beyond the realm of salvation. They have simply died.

<sup>208</sup> *Mod.*, VII. 14-16; Thelwall, 81.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, VII. 17; Thelwall, 91.

Following this train of thought, one can see the hubris associated with the bishop's edict. He is not simply claiming that he can forgive the greatest of all sins, but, by claiming that he can grant fornicators forgiveness and return them to the Church, he is stating that he can restore the dead to life, a power which belongs only to God. Clearly, Tertullian sees sexual misconduct as the greatest sin of all and it has absolutely no place amongst the followers of Christ. Those who transgress in this manner are dead, and beyond saving. There is, of course, a counter to this argument, inasmuch as Christ, in his resurrection, defeated death, and gave his followers the promise of resurrection. If, then, one says that a fornicator or an adulterer is dead, one can just as easily say that they are resurrected when their sins are forgiven, and that they receive a new life in Christ. This is true, but only Christ can do it. The followers of Christ cannot resurrect other followers, and throughout the whole of his treatise On Modesty, Tertullian insists that no human can forgive these most heinous of sins. That, just like raising the dead, is reserved for God alone.

This is made eminently clear in Chapter 21, where Tertullian states in no uncertain terms that God alone can remit mortal sins, and that not even the Apostles had this power. Their power to pardon came directly from God, and had nothing to do with who the Apostles were or what they did. It was instead the result of the power bestowed upon them by God.<sup>210</sup> But what, then, of the scriptural evidence that the Church has the power to forgive sins? Here is Tertullian's answer:

“But,” you say, “the Church has the power of forgiving sins.” This I acknowledge and adjudge more (than you; I) who have the Paraclete Himself in the persons of the new prophets, saying, “The Church has the power to forgive sins; but I will not do it, lest they commit others withal.” “What if a pseudo-prophetic spirit has made that declaration?” Nay, but it would have been more the part of a subverter on the one hand to commend himself on the score of clemency, and on the other to influence all others to sin. Or if, again, (the pseudo-prophetic spirit) has been eager to affect this (sentiment) in accordance

210 *Ibid.*, XXI. 3; Thelwall, 98.

with "the Spirit of truth," it follows that "the Spirit of truth" has indeed the power of indulgently granting pardon to fornicators, but will not to do it if it involve evil to the majority.<sup>211</sup>

Here, Tertullian states that the power of the Church is in reality the power of the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, promised to his people by Christ. Tertullian differentiates once more between what the divine is capable of, and what it wishes to do. Because the Church acts under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and is imbued with its power, it can, technically, forgive sexual sins, but, argues Tertullian, by so doing it would cause fornication and adultery to become accepted in society, thereby unleashing the evil of lust on the Christian populace, causing it to become corrupt and eventually fall apart. Therefore, the Paraclete chooses not to lend its power to the Church in this matter, even though it has the power to do so. This leaves any pardon the Church grants to an adulterer devoid of that divine power from which it gets its authority, and the pardon is therefore useless. A human bishop can indeed say that he is forgiving a Christian for these monstrosities, but since his words lack divine authority, his action is completely pointless. As Tertullian says:

And thus, from that time forward, every number (of persons) who may have combined together into this faith is accounted "a Church," from the Author and Consecrator (of the Church). And accordingly "the Church," it is true, will forgive sins: but (it will be) the Church of the Spirit, by means of a spiritual man; not the Church which consists of a number of bishops. For the right and arbitrament is the Lord's, not the servant's; God's Himself, not the priest's.<sup>212</sup>

Tertullian spends the remainder of this chapter arguing against the idea that Christ gave the Church absolute authority in matters of the soul when he told Peter, as the foundation of the Church: "Whatsoever thou shalt have bound or loosed on earth shall be bound or loosed in the

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211 *Ibid.*, XXI. 7-8; Thelwall, 99.

212 *Ibid.*, XII. 17; Thelwall, 99-100.

Heavens."<sup>213</sup> Tertullian's opponents would claim that this statement means that Christ was giving Peter, and by extension the Church, the ability to loose and bind human souls from and to their sins, but this is not the view of Tertullian. For him, the true interpretation of this statement is that Christ was acknowledging that Peter was the first to unlock the heavenly kingdom, loosing it and making it available to human kind. He also loosed certain sins that at one point had been bound, making them now forgivable, which had hitherto not been the case, but some sins, such as adultery and fornication, remained bound so that they would always be a barrier to true salvation. Peter also loosed those parts of the law that were to be abandoned and bound those that were still to be observed. Therefore, Tertullian concludes, the loosing and binding that Christ mentions had nothing to do with forgiving major sins, for if they did, further instruction would have been provided by Christ to make this fact clear.<sup>214</sup>

We should note, too, that Tertullian is not even willing to give his venerated martyrs the power to forgive the sins of fornicators or adulterers. He states how ridiculous and insulting it would be to give this power to the martyrs, claiming a second martyrdom would be required for this to make sense. Since the martyrs have cleansed their own sins through their supreme sacrifice for Christ, a second death would be necessary to remove the sins of another: "Let it suffice to the martyr to have purged his own sins: it is the part of ingratitude or of pride to lavish upon others also what one has obtained at a high price."<sup>215</sup> Only Christ was able to redeem others with a single sacrifice, and that was because he was free from sin. How, then, can the life of a sinner bring about salvation for more than one person? As Tertullian puts it: If you yourself have done no sin, plainly suffer in my stead. If however you are a sinner, how will the oil of

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213 Mt. 16:19.

214 *Mod.*, XXI. 9-15; Thelwall, 99.

215 *Ibid.*, XII. 4; Thelwall, 100.

your puny torch be able to suffice for you and for me?<sup>216</sup> It is not the business of the Church to forgive major sins such as adultery and fornication. No mortal can do that, not even the martyrs, the greatest of mortals. Throughout this treatise we see Tertullian's deep concern when it comes to Christians committing sins that put their own souls, as well as the souls of their fellows, at risk. As we saw in On the Veiling of Virgins, lust was a sin that caused more than one person to fall, for if one person is guilty of fornication, then so is another, and both of them have fallen. For Tertullian, lust is a deadly and dangerous virus, and because of the damage it is capable of dealing to an entire community, it can be viewed as a force of chaos, running counter to the divine justice that brings order to the universe. Also, when one thinks of reciprocal justice, Tertullian's harsh assertion that not all sins can be forgiven makes sense, as it was the sinner who performed this act of destruction against his or her community, thereby violating the terms of the agreement with God. Legally, therefore, the agreement is void, meaning that God does not owe such persons forgiveness, no matter how much they repent.

The final work I wish to examine here is a shorter one, An Exhortation to Chastity.<sup>217</sup> This is a letter written between 204 and 212 AD to a man who had recently lost his wife. Here we are given a good look into Tertullian's views on remarriage in widowhood. Many of the ideas presented here echo those found in his letter To His Wife, but he has much more to say on the question of second marriage.

Tertullian himself was married and he believed in marriage,<sup>218</sup> but, he was strongly against the idea of second marriages upon the death of one's spouse.<sup>219</sup> This is made perfectly clear in his An Exhortation to Chastity and To His Wife. He begins the former treatise by

216 *Ibid.*, XII. 5; Thelwall, 100.

217 Roger Pearse, "De Exhortatione castitatis." The Tertullian Project Roger Pearse, accessed November 12<sup>th</sup> 2010. [http://www.tertullian.org/works/de\\_exhortatione\\_castitatis.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/works/de_exhortatione_castitatis.htm).

218 Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God*, 141.

addressing his spiritual brother and offering his sympathies for the man's loss, but immediately after this he begins his argument, stating that the man is thinking of getting married a second time and telling him why this is wrong. He says that the 'necessities of flesh' run counter to faith and that they cause people to err in their judgement, setting one's rational thoughts astray.<sup>220</sup> We are sanctified and saved by doing God's will, and God's will is that we, as his image, should become like him: "The will of God is our sanctification, for He wishes His "image "----us----to become likewise His "likeness"; that we may be "holy" just as Himself is "holy."<sup>221</sup> Here, we see yet again the call for Christians to live their lives in a manner that is pleasing to God. Tertullian admits that this can be hard, but it is still what is expected of Christians, whose lives are held to a higher standard than others as their God knows they are capable of a higher morality. By living their lives according to God's own moral code, God wishes his people to become as holy as he is himself. This is the sanctification Tertullian is speaking of, and since Christians are the true followers of the one true God, they are the only ones capable of achieving this.

In Chapter Two, Tertullian answers the opposing point of view that if a Christian marries a second time, then this marriage is approved by God, just as the first was. God, after all, controls all things, and it follows that this second marriage would only be taking place because God willed it to happen, since he did not explicitly forbid it. Tertullian believes that such talk is dangerous, for it would result in all sins being automatically forgiven as it simply leaves everything to God's will. Tertullian asserts that there are some things that humans do which God forbids, and that some of these are punishable by eternal torment. Other acts, of course, are

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219 Pearse. "De Exhortatione castitatis." The Tertullian Project Roger Pearse, accessed November 12<sup>th</sup> 2010. [http://www.tertullian.org/works/de\\_exhortatione\\_castitatis.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/works/de_exhortatione_castitatis.htm).

220 *Chas.*, I. 1-2; Thelwall, 50.

221 *Ibid.*, I. 3; Thelwall, 50.

permissible and some are rewarded by eternal life.<sup>222</sup> Using Adam and the first sin as an example, Tertullian shows that an individual who sins does so because they will it, and that the devil simply preys upon this desire to disobey God and whispers excuses into the person's ear, giving them justification to perform an immoral action.

Further, if you inquire whence comes that volition whereby we will anything in antagonism to the will of God, I shall say, it has its source in ourselves. And I shall not make the assertion rashly----for you must needs correspond to the seed whence you spring----if indeed it be true, (as it is), that the originator of our race and our sin, Adam, willed the sin which he committed. For the devil did not impose upon him the volition to sin, but subministered material to the volition. On the other hand, the will of God had come to be a question of obedience. In like manner you, too, if you fail to obey God, who has trained you by setting before you the precept of free action, will, through the liberty of your will, willingly turn into the downward course of doing what God forbids: and thus you think yourself to have been subverted by the devil; who, albeit he does will that you should will something which God forbids still does not make you will it, inasmuch as he did not reduce those our protoplasts to the volition of sin; nay, nor (did reduce them at all) against their will, or in ignorance as to what God forbids.<sup>223</sup>

Tertullian's message here is clear: people have no one to blame but themselves when they fall into sin. Sin is not caused by the devil, for the drive to sin is always present in the human mind, perhaps because of those 'necessities of the flesh' mentioned in the opening chapter. The devil simply manipulates the weak human spirit rather than forcing it to sin. In truth, humans must have free will to sin or not to sin in order for the system to work. God is just, and it would not be just for him to allow people who transgress his law to escape unpunished, for justice demands punishment for wrongdoers. But, it would be unjust for God to punish people for their sins if they were not doing them freely. If it were true that all sin was the work of the devil, then the only criminal would be the devil himself, and the devil would be the only one who could justly be punished. Punishing a person for a sin that the devil made them commit would not be just at all; instead it would make God a tyrant.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, II. 1-3; Thelwall, 50-51.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, II. 5-6; Thelwall, 51.

Tertullian now goes onto to show that the verse that reads 'It is better to marry than to burn,'<sup>224</sup> which, judging by Chapter 3, had been frequently cited to justify multiple marriages in a Christian context, is being misinterpreted. Somewhat amusingly he argues that the Scripture is indeed telling us that it is preferable to marry than it is to burn, but, he says, this is meant to be taken in degrees. Yes, marriage is better for the soul than burning, but that does not mean that marriage is 'good,' only that it is 'better.'

Take away, in short, the condition of comparison, so as not to say, "Better it is to marry than to burn;" and I question whether you will have the hardihood to say, "Better it is to marry," not adding what that is which is better. Therefore what is not better, of course is not good either; inasmuch as you have taken away and removed the condition of comparison, which, while it makes the thing "better," so compels it to be regarded as "good." "Better it is to marry than to burn" is to be understood in the same way as, "Better it is to lack one eye than two: "if, however, you withdraw from the comparison, it will not be "better" to have one eye, inasmuch as it is not "good" either. Let none therefore catch at a defence (of marriage) from this paragraph, which properly refers to "the unmarried and widows," for whom no (matrimonial) conjunction is yet reckoned: although I hope I have shown that even such must understand the nature of the permission<sup>225</sup>

His next argument is that even the Old Law contains prescriptions against multiple marriages, and he cites a passage which he claims comes from Leviticus, but which does not actually appear there, nor in any other book of the Old Testament: "My priests shall not pluralise marriage. (*Sacerdotes mei non plus nubent*)."<sup>226</sup> Tertullian maintains that the law is still in effect today, since Christ reaffirmed the law instead of destroying it.<sup>227</sup> He further strengthens his argument by quoting a passage from Revelation which makes the entire Christian population a nation of priests.<sup>228</sup> Tertullian's main argument in this chapter is that if each individual Christian

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224 1 Cor: 8-9.

225 *Chas.*, III. 9; Thelwall, 52.

226 *Ibid.*, VII. 1; Thelwall, 54.

227 Mt. 5:17

228 Rev. 1:6

has the rights of the priesthood then they must also maintain the decorum and discipline of the priesthood. Not only does this provide another example of how Tertullian expects those with whom he shares his faith to act, it also makes it clear that God's prohibition of multiple marriages among his priests applies to the whole of Christendom. If it is unlawful for a person who has contracted multiple marriages to be a priest of God, then a bigamist cannot be a Christian, because all Christians are priests. And since it is part of Christian duty to be priests of God, bigamists who claim the name of Christian are not living up to the demands God has placed upon them, neither in morality nor in duty, and can be considered 'Christians' in name only and not in truth.

As we have seen in the study of On Modesty, Tertullian considers fornication to be one of the most reprehensible of sins, so when he equates second marriage to fornication, it is easy to see his contempt for the act and how great a sin it is in his eyes:

Second marriage will have to be termed no other than a species of fornication. For, since he says that married persons make this their solicitude, "how to please one another" (not, of course, morally, for a good solicitude he would not impugn); and (since), he wishes them to be understood to be solicitous about dress, and ornament, and every kind of personal attraction, with a view to increasing their power of allurements; (since), moreover, to please by personal beauty and dress is the genius of carnal concupiscence, which again is the cause of fornication: pray, does second marriage seem to you to border upon fornication, since in it are detected those ingredients which are appropriate to fornication?<sup>229</sup>

When challenged with the idea that he is here destroying marriage in general, Tertullian answers by saying that, like all things, marriage is meant to be enjoyed in moderation. And although it cannot be denied that even a first marriage comes with being solicitous about dress, ornament, and so on, a first marriage is not as sinful as it is only the first, and the person is not as far into sin as someone on their third or fourth marriage.<sup>230</sup> The more wives one has, the greater

<sup>229</sup> *Chas.*, IX. 1; Thelwall, 55.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, IX. 4-5; Thelwall, 55.

the distraction to the spirit, Tertullian argues.<sup>231</sup> A first marriage keeps people from committing adultery, since it allows for sexual relations which are blessed and approved by God, but any marriages after this do not have the same blessing, since they are proof that the person cannot suppress the desires of the flesh or live up to the Christian virtue of chastity. Multiple marriages, therefore, are fornication because they destroy a believer's ability to live in the way God intends them to live.

Finally, to solidify his argument, Tertullian speaks of the wonders of chastity and how much social, as well as spiritual, standing his friend looks to gain if he foregoes a second marriage. He argues that when a man is deprived of his wife, he becomes more spiritual. He becomes one with God and the Scripture as a way to cope with his loss and to find meaning in his life, and he adds that Paul suggested Christians should practice temporary abstinence in order to add to the efficacy of their prayers.<sup>232</sup> Essentially, he is saying that when one is deprived of the physical gratification of the marriage bed, a person becomes more spiritually self-aware, and without a husband or wife for companionship, they seek out God and become closer to him, making them more pure and more capable of living good and moral lives. He finishes off his letter thus:

How many men, therefore, and how many women, in Ecclesiastical Orders, owe their position to continence, who have preferred to be wedded to God; who have restored the honour of their flesh, and who have already dedicated themselves as sons of that (future) age, by slaying in themselves the concupiscence of lust, and that whole (propensity) which could not be admitted within Paradise! Whence it is presumable that such as shall wish to be received within Paradise, ought at last to begin to cease from that thing from which Paradise is intact.<sup>233</sup>

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231 *Ibid.*, XI; Thelwall, 56.

232 *Ibid.*, X. 1-2; Thelwall, 55-56.

233 *Ibid.*, XIII; Thelwall, 58.

Many of those most devoted to God have lived their lives in total chastity, preferring to offer themselves entirely to God. Not everyone, of course, is capable of living up to this example, and Tertullian presents it as an ideal. But given the fact that it is the ideal and that by being celibate these people have restored honour to their flesh that had once been sinful, it follows that if one must marry, one should marry only once, thereby reducing the damage to the soul to a minimum. We see once again what Tertullian expects of Christians: the ideal is to follow the example set by God, who has no consort, but if that is not possible, Christians still need to be as chaste as possible, imitating God as best as they can.

### Conclusion

Tertullian was, in many ways, a man of contrasts, being both simple and complex. One of the clearest examples of this dichotomy is the fact that he coined much of the terminology which would be used in the development of the doctrine of the Trinity in the Latin Church, a most complicated and philosophical aspect of Christianity, despite his apprehension about dialectic in theological discussion and his desire to keep faith simple. This, however, is but one example of the complexities of the man. Despite his working knowledge of the Roman legal system, he probably did not have any professional attachment to it, being simply an observer of the law and using it as he needed when defending his faith against Roman persecutors. His defence, of Christianity, too, was somewhat contradictory, using the Roman legal system, which should have been the representation of all that was just in the Roman world, and showing that, through the mishandling of Christians, this system was not just at all, since anything that is truly just would not be able to find fault in the Christians. They were, after all, the embodiment of what justice really is.

Tertullian was the definition of what a Christian was supposed to be during the period of the early Church: a person who used his connection to God (his rationality) to answer questions that were raised concerning the faith and to defend it against those who twisted its doctrines into something that would endanger the souls of the good Christians who did not fully understand the consequences of falling into heresy and why heretical doctrines did not work. Also, he did not believe in blind faith, as we have seen many times in this thesis. For Tertullian, reciprocal justice meant that a god must be perfectly moral, and take care of his or her people in order to be worthy of those people's worship. A god that does not perform up to expectations is not one that deserves to be praised by the people who follow them, so simply being a god is not enough to

warrant being worshipped. In this light, one can deduce that Tertullian believed that the pagans and their gods deserved one another, in that the pagans were an immoral, decadent people, and their gods acted like spoiled children. However, Tertullian, through his writing, demonstrates a naivety which is in stark contrast to his in-depth exploration of the faith and his demand that both people and gods live up to the ideals of reciprocal justice, but at the same time it is characteristic of the simplicity he shows when advocating the removal of philosophy from the faith. It would not be a stretch for one to think that a man who spent so much time reflecting on the Bible and its meaning would question it a little more, especially when we remember that, in Tertullian's mind, blind faith is not real faith. However, this is not the case, for Tertullian puts complete faith in Scripture and its truth. He always has Scripture on his side, and uses it in his defences innumerable times. But this is because he believes that Scripture came from a God who is completely just, a God who was indeed worthy of worship and had the best interest of his people at heart, a God who handed down the laws of the Old Testament as a template for the high morality he expects from his followers, and who gave them the New Testament so that they could have the life of Christ to imitate, which was perfect adherence to God's law. The New Testament also gives the promise of eternal life, which was the reward for those who lived up to their end of the contract.

However, one area in which Tertullian is completely consistent in his zeal in defending the faith. He never shows any indication that he has any doubts that his view on every topic is indeed the correct one, and those who disagree with him have misinterpreted some aspect of the faith, and warped it into something heretical, which in turn causes Tertullian and other defenders of the faith to step in and put down their teachings before they can corrupt the hearts and minds of Christ's followers.

In the end, Reciprocal Justice is, for Tertullian, the truth of the universe. It is a legally binding contract between humans and God that keeps the cosmos in order, addressing the needs of both parties involved: God is worshipped and adored throughout Christendom, and his laws on morality are being followed by his chosen people, the people who know him best. Humanity then receives divine protection from the evils of the world, innumerable blessings from the Father, and also the promise of eternity with him in Heaven. When one side fails to do their part, the contract becomes null and void, causing the loss of both sides' contractual benefits. It is because of this fear of losing God's favour that Tertullian writes, to keep people on the right track, advocating the morality that he believes to be the only way for us to honour our side of the divine contract.

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