

Was Tertullian a Misogynist? A re-examination of this charge  
based on a rhetorical analysis of Tertullian's work.

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## **ABSTRACT.**

Feminist scholars have long assumed that Tertullian, a second-century Church Father, was a misogynist. This assumption is based almost exclusively on the infamous “Devil’s gateway” passage in the opening chapter of *De cultu feminarum*. However, feminist scholars have read this passage in isolation without reference to its wider context in *De cultu feminarum* and without considering other passages from Tertullian’s treatises. Furthermore, they have failed to recognize the influence which ancient rhetoric had on Tertullian’s work. By reading the “Devil’s gateway” passage in a wider context, and by engaging in a detailed analysis of Tertullian’s use of rhetoric, it becomes evident that Tertullian’s comments in that passage are not based on misogynistic view of women. Rather, they serve a specific rhetorical purpose in one particular treatise. Furthermore, by looking beyond the “Devil’s gateway” passage to other passages in which Tertullian makes reference to women, it is clear that his comments in the “Devil’s gateway” passage are not representative of his view of women. An examination of themes such as Mary, the anthropology of woman and woman’s role in the social order reveals a more nuanced picture of Tertullian’s view of women, than the one offered by some feminist scholars.

By bringing together two areas - Tertullian’s use of rhetoric and feminist critique of Tertullian and of the Fathers in general - I will challenge the assumption that Tertullian was a misogynist and show that in some areas Tertullian can make a positive contribution to the feminist question.

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## INTRODUCTION.

Among some feminist scholars, there has been a long-standing assumption that the second-century Church Father Tertullian was a misogynist.<sup>1</sup> This charge is based almost exclusively on the infamous “Devil’s gateway” passage in the opening chapter of a treatise entitled *De cultu feminarum*. The passage concerned reads:

And do you not know that you are [each] an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the devil's gateway: you are the unsealer of that [forbidden] tree: you are the first deserter of the divine law: you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert - that is, death - even the Son of God had to die...<sup>2</sup>

A number of feminist scholars have pointed to the “Devil’s gateway” passage as the primary source of evidence of Tertullian’s misogyny. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, for example, accuses Tertullian of having “a theology that evidences a deep misogynist contempt and fear of women”.<sup>3</sup> Marie Turcan in *Vita Latina* claims that: “The woman is in [Tertullian’s] eyes a public menace”. With reference to *De cultu feminarum* she writes: “The man has everything to fear from her, and the first Adam would have done well to be wary about her. The eye with which he looks at her is singularly critical...No occasion is lost to show her vain, conceited, sensual, frivolous, avid and at the same time stupid and cunning”.<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Clark, in *Women in the Early Church*<sup>5</sup> selects only the “Devil’s gateway” passage to illustrate

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<sup>1</sup> By misogyny I mean someone who has a deep-seated hatred of women, as a sexually defined group. Barbara Finlay makes a distinction between misogyny and androcentricism. She claims that whilst Tertullian is androcentric (looking at women through eyes of men) it does not follow that he is a misogynist (hatred of women). See B. Finlay, “Was Tertullian a Misogynist? A Reconsideration” in the *Journal of the Historical Society* Vol. 3 Issue 3-4, June 2003), p. 508 and p. 511.

<sup>2</sup>*De cultu feminarum* 1.1.1-2 (Trans. S. Thelwall, *Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume IV*) In Latin the passage reads: “...et Eam te esse nescis? Viuit sententia Dei super sexum istum in hoc saeculo: uiuat et reatus necesse est. Tu es diaboli ianua; tu es arboris illius resignatrix; tu es diuinae legis prima desertrix; tu es quae eum suasisti, quem diabolus aggredi non ualuit; tu imaginem Dei, hominem, tam facile elisisti; propter tuum meritum, id est mortem, etiam filius Dei mori habuit...”

<sup>3</sup>E.S. Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: a feminist theological reconstruction of Christian origins* (London: SCM Press, 1983), p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> M. Turcan, ‘Etre femme selon Tertullien’ in *Vita Latina* (Sept 1990), pp. 15-21 (English translation: “Being a woman according to Tertullian” from [www.Tertullian.org](http://www.Tertullian.org). Turcan however does soften in her interpretation of Tertullian in the second half of her article and highlights some of his more positive attitudes towards women.

<sup>5</sup>E.A. Clark, *Women in the Early Church* (Collegeville, *Message of the Fathers of the Church* 13, 1983), pp. 38-39.

Tertullian's position on the origins of sin, and Averil Cameron relies upon Clark's work to state that Tertullian was "writing in luridly misogynistic terms".<sup>6</sup>

One criticism which feminist scholars make of the comments in the "Devil's gateway" is that Tertullian placed the entire responsibility for the Fall on the shoulders of Eve. Ruether, for example, in *Religion and Sexism*, writes: "...Eve is made to sound as though she bore the primary responsibility [for the Fall]. Tertullian demands an abasement of woman and the covering of her shameful female nature as the consequence of her continuing imaging of this guilty nature of Eve".<sup>7</sup> In another book, *Sexism and God-Talk*, Ruether makes a similar point: "...the scape-goating of Eve as the cause of the Fall of Adam makes all women, as her daughters, guilty for the radical impotence of 'man' in the face of evil, which is paid for only by the death of Christ!"<sup>8</sup> She points to Tertullian as the prime example of this scape-goating. A further example can be found in Mary Daly's *The Church and the Second Sex* in which she writes: "The primary grievance against [Eve] was her supposed guilt in the Fall. The violence of some of these tirades on this subject has psychoanalytic implications..."<sup>9</sup> Daly points to Tertullian's "Devil's gateway" passage as the example.

The problem with feminist scholars' readings of the "Devil's gateway" passage is that they have used this one passage as the hermeneutical key with which to read Tertullian as a whole. In so doing they treat Tertullian like a systematic theologian and fail to take into account the wider context of *De cultu feminarum*, whilst also ignoring other relevant passages throughout his corpus. However, on many topics Tertullian is not a systematic theologian. For example, as I will demonstrate throughout this thesis, Tertullian did not have a systematic account on the topics of the Fall, Mary, and women.

In his treatises Tertullian writes as an orator, reacting to various controversies which had arisen, with the intention of winning an argument or persuading his audience to follow a particular course of action. As a skilled orator, Tertullian employed techniques from ancient rhetoric in order to make his case more persuasive. In this thesis I argue that, in order to understand the meaning behind a certain passage, it is necessary to understand the rhetorical

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<sup>6</sup> A. Cameron, "Early Christianity and the Discourse of Female Desire" in L.J. Archer, S. Fischler and M. Wyke (ed.) *Women in Ancient Societies: An Illusion of the Night* (London: Macmillan Press, 1994), p. 153.

<sup>7</sup> R.R. Ruether, "Misogyny and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church" in Ruether (ed.), *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Tradition* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), p. 157.

<sup>8</sup> R.R. Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), p. 167.

<sup>9</sup> M. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 45.

context of that passage. One of the aims of my thesis is to demonstrate that a rhetorical reading is the key to understanding Tertullian's comments in the "Devil's gateway" passage because this passage serves a specific rhetorical purpose in *De cultu feminarum*. Moreover, I will argue that because the "Devil's gateway" passage serves a specific purpose in one particular treatise, it is inappropriate to use this one passage as conclusive evidence of Tertullian's misogyny. Rather, one needs to take into consideration Tertullian's work as a whole. Thus, a further aim in my thesis will be to examine a number of passages throughout Tertullian's corpus which give a fuller, and perhaps a more positive, picture of his view of women.

### **Revisionist readings of Tertullian.**

There have been a number of studies which have sought to challenge Tertullian's reputation as a misogynist. Forrester Church's 1975 article "Sex and Salvation in Tertullian" offered a more extensive examination of Tertullian's attitude towards women in an attempt to correct the misconceptions which have been drawn from the "Devil's gateway" passage.<sup>10</sup> The most valuable contribution which Forrester Church makes in his article is that of drawing attention to the fact that *De cultu feminarum* is the only treatise in which Tertullian gives Eve exclusive culpability for the Fall. He also examines a number of other treatises in Tertullian's corpus with the intention of highlighting passages in which Tertullian is positive about women. Forrester Church concludes that the "Devil's gateway" passage seems to be misogynistic only when abstracted from the wider context of Tertullian's corpus.

More recently Barbara Finlay has offered another revisionist reading of Tertullian in her article "Was Tertullian a Misogynist? A Reconsideration". She claims that in order for the charge of misogyny to be accurate, there would need to be evidence of Tertullian holding an essentially different attitude toward women than he did toward men, and he would need to consistently exhibit this negative attitude.<sup>11</sup> Finlay's aim throughout her article is to demonstrate that this is not the case. As well as briefly setting the "Devil's gateway" passage in the wider context of *De cultu feminarum*, Finlay also examines Tertullian's wider corpus

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<sup>10</sup> F. Forrester Church, "Sex and Salvation in Tertullian" in *The Harvard Theological Review* Vol. 68 No. 2 (April, 1973), pp. 83-101.

<sup>11</sup> Finlay, "Was Tertullian a Misogynist?", p. 508.

for positive statements about women. Finlay concludes that Tertullian is a far more complex character than his critics have made him out to be.

In my thesis I will build on the work of Forrester Church and Finlay. Although their work has provided a valuable starting point for a reconsideration of Tertullian's misogyny, there is still more material to be explored and further evidence to be presented to support a revisionist reading of Tertullian. Furthermore, whilst Forrester Church and Finlay allude to the influence of rhetoric in Tertullian's work, they fail to fully realise the extent to which ancient rhetoric shaped Tertullian's arguments. For example, although Forrester Church is aware that Tertullian adapts details about the Fall in different treatises to suit his audience, he does not adequately explain the role which ancient rhetoric played in this. By engaging in a more detailed rhetorical analysis, I will clearly show how Tertullian used ancient rhetorical techniques to make his arguments more persuasive. I will also build on the work of Forrester Church and Finlay by examining passages in Tertullian's wider corpus for more positive statements about women. Whilst they have offered a cursory consideration of some passages, I will present a wider selection of passages from Tertullian's corpus and offer a more detailed analysis of these passages with a particular focus on Tertullian's use of ancient rhetoric. Furthermore, I will engage more fully with feminist critique in order to assess Tertullian's work for traces of misogyny. I will discuss previous scholarly studies on Tertullian's use of rhetoric later in the introduction.

### **Who was Tertullian?**

Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, more commonly known in English as Tertullian, was a prolific Christian writer from the African city of Carthage, who lived from approximately CE 170-212.<sup>12</sup> Many details about Tertullian's life remain uncertain. The traditional picture was painted by Jerome who claimed that Tertullian was a presbyter whose father was a proconsular centurion.<sup>13</sup> Eusebius suggests that Tertullian was trained in Roman law at Rome.<sup>14</sup> Until the publication of Timothy Barnes' 1971 *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study*, these details were accepted as reliable by scholars. However, in his book Barnes questions and dismisses the idea that Tertullian's father was a centurion, that Tertullian was a

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<sup>12</sup> T. D. Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 57-59.

<sup>13</sup> *De viris illustribus* 53.1.

<sup>14</sup> Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 2.2.4.

presbyter and that he was a jurist.<sup>15</sup> Rankin has also challenged the claim that Tertullian had a legal background.<sup>16</sup>

There are clues hidden within Tertullian's treatises which reveal further details about his life. For example, the opening of *De paenitentia* indicates that Tertullian had been a pagan but converted to Christianity.<sup>17</sup> We know from his *Ad uxorem* that Tertullian was married and in *De resurrectione carnis* 59.3 he even admits to committing adultery. The style and content of Tertullian's treatises indicate that he was a highly educated man. He was fluent in both Greek and Latin and, as I will discuss further below, he was trained in the art of ancient rhetoric. Furthermore, as I will show throughout this thesis, Tertullian demonstrates a familiarity with Greek and Roman literature, as well as ancient medicine and philosophy.<sup>18</sup>

Tertullian's writings also suggest that he was sympathetic towards the ideas found in Montanism (referred to by Tertullian as the New Prophecy). This movement had emerged in Phrygia sometime around 165-170 with the oracles of Montanus, Maximilla and Priscilla. The Montanists claimed to be inspired by the Paraclete and followed a more demanding version of Christianity, involving rigorous fasting and a ban on second marriages. A number of scholars have questioned the assumption that Tertullian's sympathy with Montanism meant that he became a schismatic. David Rankin, for example, has claimed that Tertullian never left the mainstream church but rather, was part of a more vigorous and disciplined minority group within the mainstream church, a group which was intolerant of the "less committed" majority.<sup>19</sup> Given that Tertullian never speaks of "converting" to Montanism and keeping in mind that the Christian milieu in which Tertullian was immersed did not have boundaries which were as clearly defined as in later centuries, I am inclined to agree with the conclusions of scholars such as Rankin and Dunn.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Barnes has argued that the reference to the proconsul is based in part on an erroneous manuscript reading. He claims that Jerome inflated Tertullian's title to "priest" because he admired him. However, he notes that Tertullian never refers to himself as a priest, and in two passages, *De exhortatione castitatis* 7.3 and *De monogamia* 12.2, indicates that he is a member of the laity. (See Barnes, *Tertullian*, pp. 3-12 and pp. 13-21).

<sup>16</sup>David Rankin has suggested that while there is no conclusive evidence to suggest that Tertullian was a jurist, his knowledge of Roman law implies that he may have been a legal advocate whose rhetorical training in defending various legal claims could also be employed in theological debates with fellow Christians. (See D.I. Rankin, "Was Tertullian a Jurist?" *Studia Patristica* 31 (1997), pp. 335-342).

<sup>17</sup>*De paenitentia* 1.1.

<sup>18</sup>T. D. Barnes, "Tertullian the Antiquarian," *Studia Patristica* 14 (1976), p. 9.

<sup>19</sup>Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 27-38 and p. 41.

<sup>20</sup>Dunn, *Tertullian* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 6-7 and C. Trevett who claims: "Tertullian the Montanist was Tertullian the Montanist Catholic". (C. Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New*



There are thirty-one extant treatises which are generally accepted as being written by Tertullian. He also wrote a number of others which have not survived. Although Tertullian's treatises encompass a whole range of topics, one characteristic which is common to all of them, is that Tertullian does not write as a systematic theologian. Rather, he writes as a "reactive" theologian, responding to a particular controversy and in order to win an argument. For example, one should not look in *De baptismo* and expect to find a systematic treatment of the sacrament of baptism.<sup>21</sup> Rather, Tertullian wrote this treatise in response to a Cainite heresy which had denied the necessity of baptism for salvation. As I will argue throughout this thesis, understanding Tertullian's purpose and motivation in writing a particular treatise is crucial if one is to have an accurate understanding of the meaning of a certain passage within the treatise. The influence of Tertullian's writings on later Latin Fathers was widespread. Jerome, for example, claimed that Tertullian's writings informed Cyprian as well as Jerome himself and scholars have also identified traces of Tertullian's ideas in Augustine's work.<sup>22</sup>

### **Tertullian and Rhetoric.**

Tertullian lived in a period in which ancient rhetoric dominated the educational system. In the ancient world, rhetoric was developed as a means of becoming an effective and persuasive public speaker. There were a number of handbooks produced, such as Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*, which provided an orator with a practical set of rules for persuasive speaking. There were, generally speaking, three types of speech: epideictic, deliberative and forensic. An epideictic speech was primarily used in ceremonial contexts and its primary objective was to praise or denounce someone or something. A deliberative speech was concerned with a future course of action. Its purpose was to persuade an individual to take the most advantageous course of action or to avoid a dangerous course of action. Finally,

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*Prophecy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 69). For further discussion on this topic see Douglas Powell's article "Tertullianists and Cataphrygians" *Vigiliae Christianae* 29 (1975), pp. 33-54.

<sup>21</sup> Dunn, *Tertullian*, p. 28.

<sup>22</sup> In *Epistle* 84 Jerome writes: "The blessed Cyprian takes Tertullian for his master as his writings prove; yet, delighted as he is with the ability of this learned and zealous writer, he does not join him in following Montanus and Maximilla". (Trans. W.H. Fremantle, G. Lewis and W.G. Martley, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 6). For a study on the influence of Tertullian on Cyprian see C.B. Daly, *Tertullian the Puritan and his Influence. An Essay in Historical Theology* (Dublin:Four Courts Press, 1993). For the influence of Tertullian on Augustine see K.E. Børresen, *Subordination and Equivalence: The Nature and Role of Woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas* (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1995).

a forensic speech was used in court cases to determine what was just or true, and its aim was to persuade an audience to make a judgement about past events.

Rhetorical handbooks also advised orators on how to structure the speech. Although the exact number of sections varied, by the time of Tertullian a speech tended to be divided into at least five or six parts: the *exordium*, *narratio*, *partitio*, *confirmatio*, *reprehensio*, and the *conclusio*. Within these different sections an orator employed a variety of arguments all with the intention of making his case more persuasive. The appropriateness and technique for employing these arguments were also described at length in the rhetorical handbooks.

Scholars have long acknowledged that Tertullian, as a skilled orator, employed many of these recommendations found in the rhetorical handbooks.<sup>23</sup> F.H. Colson first discussed the topic in his 1924 article “Two Examples of Literary and Rhetorical Criticism in the Fathers”.<sup>24</sup> Colson argued that passages from Tertullian’s corpus could be greatly illuminated if one observed that the arguments followed the patterns established by ancient rhetoric. Furthermore, he suggested that ancient rhetoric provided categories and distinctions which affected the structure of thought. He called for a history describing the influence of ancient rhetoric on the basic thought patterns of the Fathers.

Robert Sider, in his book *Ancient Rhetoric and the Art of Tertullian* attempts to take up Colson’s challenge with a rhetorical analysis of Tertullian’s work.<sup>25</sup> Sider’s extensive study focuses on how ancient rhetoric provided Tertullian with the framework for structuring his arguments and gave him the tools for winning a debate.<sup>26</sup> Sider’s investigation has established much of the groundwork for my own investigation and I will refer back to his study throughout the course of my thesis.

Whereas Sider’s book gives a general overview of the use of ancient rhetoric throughout Tertullian’s corpus, there have been a few further studies which offer a detailed rhetorical analysis of individual treatises. Geoffrey Dunn, for example, has produced detailed rhetorical

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<sup>23</sup> See for example G.A. Kennedy who notes: “When Tertullian became a Christian he did not cease to be a rhetorician...” in G.A. Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 154; Dunn, *Tertullian*, pp. 25-30; and, Barnes, *Tertullian*, pp.213-224.

<sup>24</sup> F.H. Colson, “Two Examples of Literary and Rhetorical Criticism in the Fathers”, *The Journal of Theological Studies* XXV (1924), pp. 364-77.

<sup>25</sup> R.D. Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric and the Art of Tertullian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

<sup>26</sup> Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, p. 10.

studies on several treatises including *Adversus Iudaeos* and *De virginibus velandis*.<sup>27</sup> Sider has offered a similar analysis of *De resurrectione carnis*.<sup>28</sup> Such studies are useful for observing the extent to which the tools of ancient rhetoric employed within a single treatise were used by Tertullian to develop and strengthen the particular case he was making.

Throughout this thesis I will use the research of Sider and Dunn as a support for my own arguments. With a fuller awareness of Tertullian's use of ancient rhetoric I will be able to explain why, for example, Tertullian made statements such as those found in the "Devil's gateway" passage. Indeed, since Tertullian wrote as a reactive theologian, composing his treatises in response to some controversy and using the rules of ancient rhetoric to formulate arguments, a rhetorical reading will be necessary if one is to fully understand any passage within Tertullian's corpus.

### **Feminist Considerations.**

Defining feminism is not an easy task because it consists of various movements, theories and philosophies which can be quite wide ranging. Broadly speaking however, feminism is a belief in the political, social and economical equality of women. Feminist theory manifests itself in a variety of disciplines of which feminist theology is one. Feminist theology applies feminist critique to theological questions. It involves both a critical analysis of the Christian tradition and a constructive re-reading and re-writing of Christian texts that seeks to produce a transformation for women from inequality to equality.

Feminist theology can be divided into three waves. First wave and second wave feminist theologians provided a critique of the Christian tradition by highlighting the ways in which Christianity has been limiting or destructive for women. Their fundamental task was to expose the misogyny present in the Christian tradition and to ask whether Christianity can be a positive force in women's lives. Third wave feminism is more philosophical than the previous two waves, and applies postmodern and post-structuralist ideas to theological questions. It seeks to challenge generalisations such as "essentialist" definitions of "woman"

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<sup>27</sup> G.D. Dunn, *Tertullian's Adversus Iudaeos: A Rhetorical Analysis* (PhD Thesis. Australian Catholic University, 1999) and G.D. Dunn, "Rhetoric and Tertullian's *De virginibus velandis*" in *Vigiliae Christianae* Vol. 59, No. 1 (February, 2005), pp. 1-30. .

<sup>28</sup> R.D. Sider, "Structure and Design in the *De resurrectione mortuorum* of Tertullian" in *Vigiliae Christianae* 23 (1969), pp.177-196.

and “femininity” and claims that gender is a complex construct that is only loosely connected with our bodily makeup.

In this thesis I will be responding to and engaging with the work of first-wave and second-wave feminist theologians. This is because the charge of misogyny levelled against Tertullian is found primarily in the textbooks and literature of first wave and second wave feminists. Although there have been some attempts to redress the claims of these feminists about Tertullian, the issues have not been adequately addressed, and so the influence of their work endures as does the assumption that Tertullian was a misogynist.<sup>29</sup> A furthermore reason for focusing on first and second wave feminists is that my methodological approach – which relies on a historical understanding of rhetoric in late antiquity – is more appropriate to rebutting their claims. A more philosophical approach would be needed to adequately rebut the claims of third wave feminists. For these reasons, I have left aside engagement with the scholarship of third-wave feminism for another occasion.

### **Methodological Considerations.**

In this thesis I will use a rhetorical analysis to read passages in Tertullian’s treatises and respond to feminist critique of him. A rhetorical reading is important because, as I have argued above, Tertullian’s treatises are composed not as theological reflections on a particular subject, but rather as rhetorical speeches composed by Tertullian in response to particular issue and controversies which had arisen. Thus, one should not always accept Tertullian’s comments at face value but recognize that he was writing to persuade an audience on a particular matter. A rhetorical analysis involves establishing the historical, polemical and theological context of a treatise, as well as the audience and purpose for which it was composed. I will take these factors into consideration when reading a passage from Tertullian’s corpus.

As noted above, most feminist scholars do not look beyond the “Devil’s gateway” passage when accusing Tertullian of misogyny. In order to give a fairer assessment of Tertullian’s

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<sup>29</sup> For examples of some more recent publications which still use the “Devil’s gateway” passage as “proof” of Tertullian’s negative view of women, see: E.A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 177; L.M. Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe 400-1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.104; S. Summer, *Men and Women in the Church: Building Consensus on Church Leadership* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), pp.40-41.

view of women I will look at other relevant passages throughout his corpus. I will use discussions from a number of feminist scholars as a means of assessing these passages for evidence of misogyny. As noted above, my engagement with feminist scholarship will, for the most part, focus on material from first and second wave feminist scholarship.

In this thesis, by responding to feminist critique using a rhetorical analysis, I employ an original methodological approach. The recent defenders of Tertullian against misogyny have not done so with a rhetorical analysis and those who do acknowledge the influence of ancient rhetoric, such as Forrester Church, do not go into much detail. Those scholars who have undertaken a rhetorical analysis of Tertullian's work do not apply it directly and in detail to feminist critique. By using a rhetorical analysis to respond to feminist critique, this thesis has the potential to expand the understanding of Tertullian's use of rhetoric, and deepen our understanding of his theology-especially in respect to women.

### **Summarized chapter outline.**

I have divided this thesis into three parts, each with its own introduction which includes a more detailed summary of the content of the chapters in this thesis. In what follows, I simply give an abridged overview of each chapter so as not to repeat material unnecessarily.

There are two chapters in the first part, in which I attempt to put the "Devil's gateway" passage into a wider context. In chapter one I examine the "Devil's gateway" passage alongside Tertullian's other references to the Fall throughout his corpus. In chapter two I examine the "Devil's gateway" passage in the wider context of *De cultu feminarum*. In both chapters I demonstrate how an understanding of Tertullian's use of ancient rhetoric can explain the purpose of the "Devil's gateway" passage. In doing so, I will show that many of the feminist scholars who have accused Tertullian of misogyny, have misappropriated the "Devil's gateway" passage by reading it out of context and treating Tertullian as a systematic theologian.

As noted above, certain feminist scholars have assumed that Tertullian's comments in the "Devil's gateway" passage are representative of Tertullian's view of women in general. However, they fail to take into account many other references which Tertullian makes to women throughout his corpus. In parts two and three I attempt to redress this limitation by

offering an examination of numerous passages throughout Tertullian's corpus. This will equip me with the information necessary to produce a more accurate assessment of Tertullian's view of women.

I begin in part two by looking at passages in which Tertullian makes reference to Mary. This is an appropriate place to start because, as I will discuss in the introduction to part two, feminist scholars have been critical of Patristic depictions of Mary which they claim have denigrated women. My aim will be to assess whether Tertullian's depiction of Mary is subject to their criticisms. In chapter three I examine Tertullian's references to Mary's virginity before, during and after the birth of Christ. In chapter four I look at the importance which Tertullian places on Mary being Christ's link to the Davidic line. Finally, in chapter five I consider the importance of the role Tertullian gives to Mary in the incarnation as the provider of Christ's flesh. Over the course of these three chapters I will show how Tertullian uses Mary primarily as a rhetorical tool to support his arguments against a variety of opponents.

In part three I begin with an introduction which sets out the main criticisms of feminist scholars of Patristic depictions of women. Using these criticisms as a starting point, I then examine passages in Tertullian's corpus which make references to women. In chapter six I focus on passages which give an insight into Tertullian's view of women on an anthropological level. In chapter seven I consider Tertullian's view of women on the sociological level. I will examine passages throughout Tertullian's corpus to identify which roles within the church and society he believed were permissible for women to undertake, and those roles which were the prerogative of men alone.

In summary, this thesis will examine the long-standing assumption that Tertullian was a misogynist. As well as dealing with the "Devil's gateway" passage which has been widely accepted as "proof" of Tertullian's misogyny, it will also look at other passages which are relevant to the feminist question. By reading passages from Tertullian's corpus in their rhetorical contexts, whilst also taking into consideration the issues raised by feminist scholars, I will demonstrate that the charge of misogyny levelled against Tertullian by first and second wave feminists and those influenced by them, is to some extent, unfounded. My analysis will go beyond some of the attempts of second wave feminism to reveal women's voices in the early Christian texts. This is because my analysis relies on a more sophisticated

reading of Tertullian's rhetoric which acknowledges its complexity and its ambiguities with regard to the role of women in the church. Finally, I hope that my research will reveal some of the more positive aspects of Tertullian's view of women which have been overlooked by some feminist scholars due to their negative assumptions about Tertullian.

## **PART 1:**

### **The “Devil’s gateway” passage and *De cultu feminarum*.**

#### **Introduction.**

As I noted in the general introduction, the “Devil’s gateway” passage is the most often cited text by feminist scholars as evidence of Tertullian’s misogyny. My aim in part one of this thesis is to show that the “Devil’s gateway” passage seems to be misogynistic only when it is abstracted from the wider context of *De cultu feminarum* and other passages from Tertullian’s corpus in which he refers to the Fall. The research of Forrester Church and Barbara Finlay, discussed in the general introduction, has drawn attention to the importance of reading the “Devil’s gateway” passage in the wider context of *De cultu feminarum* and Tertullian’s corpus as a whole. However, neither Forrester Church nor Finlay provide a suitable rhetorical analysis of *De cultu feminarum* which, I propose, is an essential tool for understanding the purpose and meaning of the “Devil’s gateway” passage. Susan Calef, in her doctoral dissertation “Rhetorical Strategies in *De cultu feminarum*”, has provided this much needed rhetorical analysis of the treatise.<sup>1</sup> She suggests that Tertullian’s aim in the treatise was to maintain the boundaries of Christian identity over against “the world” which he perceives to be threatening to that identity. Calef analyses the treatise chapter-by-chapter, noting in particular the rhetorical techniques used by Tertullian to achieve his aim. Calef’s examination of *De cultu feminarum*, and in particular Tertullian’s use of rhetoric, has been invaluable to my own research into *De cultu feminarum*. However, Calef does not use her study directly to address the feminist critique. Therefore, through a rhetorical analysis, I will show that Tertullian’s comments in the “Devil’s gateway” passage were not motivated by misogyny but rather were used as a rhetorical device.

In chapter one I will examine the references Tertullian makes to the Fall throughout his corpus in order to show that the “Devil’s gateway” passage is the only passage in which Eve is given total culpability for the Fall. In every other passage Tertullian blames Adam, Adam and Eve, or the Devil. Through a rhetorical analysis, I will demonstrate that Tertullian uses the story of the Fall as a rhetorical device, adapting details about who was responsible for the

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<sup>1</sup> S. A. Calef, “Rhetorical Strategies in *De cultu feminarum*” (PhD Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1996).



Fall depending upon the theme and audience of the treatise, in order to make his case more persuasive.

In chapter two I will discuss the content and arguments found in the two books of *De cultu feminarum*. The “Devil’s gateway” passage has often been read in isolation from the rest of the treatise without a consideration of Tertullian’s purpose in composing it. Through a rhetorical analysis, and drawing on the research of Calef, I will show that Tertullian’s primary concern was to persuade Christian women to dress in a way which reflected their Christian identity. In the context of this rhetorical analysis, I will show that Tertullian’s use of the “Devil’s gateway” serves a specific rhetorical purpose in *De cultu feminarum*.

### **Rhetorical considerations.**

#### The dating and composition of *De cultu feminarum*.

Before examining the content of *De cultu feminarum* it is first necessary to discuss its dating, composition and issues relating to the coherence and unitary character of the two books of which it is comprised. Tertullian offers no specific historical data by which to date the treatise which has led to a wide range of scholarly debate on these issues.

Firstly, there are some who argue that the two books were composed independently from one another. Timothy Barnes, drawing on the earlier research of Gosta Saflund, argues that book two is an independent study written ten years prior to book one.<sup>2</sup> Saflund pointed to internal “evidence” within the texts themselves, and suggested that the difference in style between books one and two indicates the independence of the two. He argues, for example, that in book one Tertullian’s tone is more severe compared to the softer tone found in book two. However, this is a weak argument in support of the independence of the two books for several reasons. Firstly, Tertullian was quite capable of writing aggressively in the first book of a work, and then modifying his position in book two of the same work, as is the case in *Ad uxorem*, for example. Secondly, the markedly severe tone which Tertullian takes at the start of book one, in the “Devil’s gateway” passage, is due to a specific rhetorical technique, as I will make evident later.

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<sup>2</sup> Barnes dates *De cultu feminarum* 2 to 196/7 and *De cultu feminarum* 1 to 205/6. See, T.D. Barnes, *Tertullian: a historical and literary study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 51 and p. 137.

The manuscript tradition may also suggest that the two books were originally two separate works.<sup>3</sup> Although *De cultu feminarum* is the usual title assigned to the whole treatise (consisting of both books), one of the manuscripts indicates that book one may have originally had a different title, namely *De habitu muliebrito*. The manuscripts of the corpus Cluniacense distinguished the two books by calling book one *De habitu muliebris* and book two *De cultu feminarum*. Scholars such as Calef suggest that the divergence of titles in the manuscript points to the possibility of the independence of the two books.<sup>4</sup> However, in the corpus Agobardinum, the only other corpus of Tertullian's works that transmits this treatise to us, and considered the oldest and most valuable witness, both books are assigned the title *De cultu feminarum*. There has been no settlement on the issue of divergent titles and so the evidence from manuscripts remains inconclusive.

A second possibility, put forward by a number of scholars is that both books should be treated as a unified work.<sup>5</sup> For example, René Braun argues that the passage in *De cultu feminarum* 1.4 serves as a plan for the whole treatise and indicates that books one and two are part of a unified work.<sup>6</sup> He proposes that, originally, book two was a sermon to which Tertullian later added book one when he realised there were deficiencies in the sermon. In the end product Tertullian moves from a condemnation of *cultus* to a condemnation of *ornatus* and sets forth this plan in *De cultu feminarum* 1.4. Based on these assumptions, Braun concludes that the time between the original sermon and the second redaction (which we now know as book one) would be no more than a year or two.<sup>7</sup>

As this discussion has illustrated, the questions surrounding the dating and composition of *De cultu feminarum* have not been conclusively answered. I am inclined to agree that books one and two form part of a unified work. Tertullian sets forth his plan in *De cultu feminarum* 1.4 to discuss *cultus* and *ornatus* and proceeds to deal with *cultus* in book one and *ornatus* in book two.

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<sup>3</sup> See the discussion by Calef, "Rhetorical Strategies", p. 113 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Calef, "Rhetorical Strategies", p. 113 ff.

<sup>5</sup> L.B Lawler, "Two portraits from Tertullian", *The Classical Journal* Vol. 25 No.1 (Oct., 1929), pp. 19-25. See also P. Migne in his *Patrologiae Cursus Completus* (Vol 1, 1878).

<sup>6</sup> As discussed by D.E. Wilhite, *Tertullian the African: an anthropological reading of Tertullian's context and identities* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 2007), p. 115.

<sup>7</sup> Calef, "Rhetorical Strategies", p. 118.

## Genre.

As I noted in the general introduction, in ancient rhetorical handbooks there were three genres of rhetorical speech: epideictic, deliberative, and forensic.<sup>8</sup> In *De cultu feminarum* scholars are agreed that Tertullian uses a combination of these genres. Robert Sider proposes that Tertullian uses both epideictic and deliberative themes in *De cultu feminarum* and Calef proposes that there are also elements of forensic oratory in book one.<sup>9</sup> In support of this theory, Calef points to the various passages in which Tertullian takes on the tone of a judge, and the “Devil’s gateway” passage is among the examples. I am inclined to agree with Calef that in book one, epideictic oratory predominates and this is particularly evident from the fact that Tertullian makes frequent appeal to the epideictic themes of origin and utility as I will argue below.<sup>10</sup> In book two, deliberative oratory seems to be the prominent genre for Tertullian encourages his audience to adopt a particular course of action with reference to the theme of advantage.

## Audience.

I will discuss in more detail the role of the audience in chapter one but for now it is enough to note that the audience was an important consideration when composing a speech in ancient rhetoric because the audience could have a bearing on what the speaker would say.<sup>11</sup> Thus, in order to have a full appreciation of Tertullian’s arguments in *De cultu feminarum*, we need to understand the nature of the audience whom he was addressing.

Tertullian makes several remarks in *De cultu feminarum* which are useful for identifying the nature of the audience. Firstly, it is clear that Tertullian is addressing Christian women. This is evident from the fact that he refers to them as “best beloved sisters” (*sorores dilectissimae*) and “handmaids of God” (*ancillae Dei*) in various passages.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, it seems that these Christian women were recent converts to the faith. Tertullian makes several references

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<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1.3.1358b.3 and Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 3.12-15.

<sup>9</sup> R.D. Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric and the Art of Tertullian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 119 and Calef, “Rhetorical Strategies”, p. 129.

<sup>10</sup> Based on her belief that books one and two are independent works, Calef proposes that whilst there are elements of all three species of rhetoric in book one, the epideictic is predominant whereas in book two, the deliberative predominates. (Calef, “Rhetorical Strategies”, p. 129-130).

<sup>11</sup> See for example, Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 11.1. 7.

<sup>12</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 1.1; 2.1; 2.11.

to their former vices and former appearance<sup>13</sup> and speaks of the time before they came to know the faith.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the epithet “blessed ones” (*benedictae*), which Tertullian uses in a number of passages throughout *De cultu feminarum*, is used by Tertullian to address recent converts or catechumens.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Tertullian’s use of the feminine plural, *benedictae*, suggests that Tertullian was specifically addressing female converts.

There is also evidence within *De cultu feminarum* to suggest that the women were from a wealthy socio-economic background. Firstly, in *De cultu feminarum* Tertullian criticizes women for their use of costly luxurious items. The fact that the women addressed in *De cultu feminarum* were able to afford these costly items suggests that they were women of wealth and status.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, there are explicit references to the women’s wealth within the treatise itself. For example, in book two Tertullian claims: “If there are any of you whom the exigencies of riches, or birth, or past dignities, compel to appear in public so gorgeously arrayed as not to appear to have attained wisdom, take heed to temper an evil of this kind...”<sup>17</sup> Tertullian suggests that the women addressed seem to be sensitive to the judgements of social peers within Roman society. For example he states their peers will say of Christian women that: “Ever since she became a Christian, she walks around in poorer garb.”<sup>18</sup> Dennis Groh, based on his study of a variety of Tertullian’s works, concludes that the Christian church in Africa included members of the middle and borderline upper strata of Roman Society.<sup>19</sup> He concludes that conversions among people of these ranks generated problems which Tertullian’s works addressed. Tertullian addresses one such problem in *De cultu feminarum*, the issue of Christian women dressing in accord with status expectations.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.11; 2.1.

<sup>14</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 1.1; 2.9.

<sup>15</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.9.4; 2.13.5 Tertullian also uses this epithet in *Ad martyras* 1.1 and *De oratione* 1.4 to address recent converts. See Calef, “Rhetorical Strategies”, p. 217.

<sup>16</sup> D. Wilhite makes a distinction between the women addressed in book one and book two of *De cultu feminarum*. Based on the assumption that they were two separate works, Wilhite suggests in book one Tertullian warns women against the temptations of wealth and the pursuit of glory but there is no evidence to suggest that women addressed have actually participated in such activities. In book two, however, there is evidence that Tertullian has witnessed Christians who belong to the upper classes and who make a point of displaying their wealth. (See Wilhite, *Tertullian the African*, pp. 117-118). However, I would argue that given that the two book theory is weak, there are fewer grounds for such a distinction.

<sup>17</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.9.4.

<sup>18</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.11.3.

<sup>19</sup> D.E. Groh, “Upper Class Christians in Tertullian’s Africa” *Studia Patristica* 14 (1976), pp. 41-47.

<sup>20</sup> Another example is that of Christians being tempted by public office, an issue which Tertullian addressed in *De idolatria* 17-18.

In summary, the evidence suggests that in *De cultu feminarum* Tertullian was addressing an audience composed of women of wealth and rank who were recent converts to Christianity. Tertullian perceives these women to be deeply embedded in their cultural milieu, and so whose habit of dress is constrained by both its status conventions and gender expectations.

## **CHAPTER 1.**

### ***De cultu feminarum* and Eve's role in the Fall**

In this chapter I will examine Tertullian's references to the Fall throughout his treatises. Based on Tertullian's comments in the "Devil's gateway" passage, feminist scholars have assumed that Tertullian blamed Eve exclusively for the Fall. However, I propose that Tertullian's comments in the "Devil's gateway" passage do not tell the whole story, for, in some treatises, Tertullian also blames Adam and the Devil for the Fall. In this chapter I will show that Tertullian uses the story of the Fall as a rhetorical device, adapting details about who was responsible for the Fall depending upon the theme and audience of the treatise, in order to make his case more persuasive. Finally, I will offer some suggestions as to why Tertullian seems to make a vicious attack on women in the notorious "Devil's gateway" passage in *De cultu feminarum*.

#### **Tertullian and the Fall.**

It is important to note from the outset that Tertullian did not have a systematic account of the Fall. Feminist scholars have treated Tertullian's comments in the "Devil's gateway" as though they were representative of his theology of the Fall. However, as I will discuss below, in different passages throughout his treatises, Tertullian changes various details about the Fall, such as who was responsible and what caused the Fall. This was something which Forrester Church highlighted in his article "Sex and Salvation in Tertullian". He explained: "...one must always keep in mind that in Tertullian a given problem, such as the Fall, may be adapted freely to the requirements both of subject and audience".<sup>1</sup> Whilst Forrester Church refers to the role of rhetoric, he does not fully elucidate the extent to which it had an effect on Tertullian's use of the Fall. In this chapter, I will argue that the apparent inconsistencies in Tertullian's discussions on the Fall can only be understood when one realises that Tertullian was using the story of the Fall as a rhetorical device, to win an argument or persuade his audience to a particular way of thinking. Before I give a more detailed discussion of the influence of rhetoric of Tertullian's thinking on the Fall, it would be useful to look at the passages in which Tertullian refers to the Fall.

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<sup>1</sup> F. Forrester Church, "Sex and Salvation in Tertullian" in *Harvard Theological Review* Vol. 68 No. 2 (April, 1973), p. 86.

## Eve.

The first thing which can be stated with certainty is that Tertullian did not place the blame for the Fall entirely on Eve. Indeed, the “Devil’s gateway” passage is the only passage in which Tertullian gives exclusive blame to Eve. The only other treatise, apart from *De cultu feminarum*, in which Tertullian comes close to suggesting that Eve had primary culpability for the Fall is *De carne Christi*. Even in this treatise, however, Tertullian seems to place the ultimate responsibility on the Devil. Tertullian writes: “Into Eve, while still a virgin, had crept the word, constructive of death: into a virgin no less needed to be introduced the Word of God, constructive of life, so that that which through that sex had gone astray into perdition should through the same sex be led back again into salvation. Eve had believed the serpent: Mary believed Gabriel. The sin which the former committed by believing, the latter by believing blotted out”.<sup>2</sup> In this passage Eve is definitely given a share in the responsibility for the Fall but it is the Devil who is the main perpetrator, for he persuaded Eve to sin. Thus, whereas in *De cultu feminarum* Eve is presented as an active participant, in this passage from *De carne Christi* Tertullian depicts Eve as a pawn used by the Devil. Furthermore, if one looks at the context of this passage, it is clear that Eve’s role in the Fall served a particular rhetorical function. The main purpose in suggesting that Eve had a role in the Fall was to highlight Mary’s role in salvation. Tertullian’s typological comparison between Eve and Mary serves to strengthen his argument that the flesh of Christ was truly human. I will discuss this in further detail in chapter three.

## Adam.

There are a number of passages in which Tertullian blames Adam for the Fall. In *De paenitentia*, for example, Tertullian writes: “For after men [*humanus*], in their presumption, had committed so many and such serious sins, beginning with Adam, the head of the human race; and after the condemnation of man [*hominem*] and of the world, which is his portion . . . then God turned again to his mercy and, in his person, consecrated repentance from that time on, rescinding the sentence which he had passed before”.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *De carne Christi* 17.5.

<sup>3</sup> *De paenitentia* 2.1 and 2.3.

A similar idea is found in *De exhortatione castitatis* 2 where Tertullian places total culpability on Adam. Tertullian argues that disobedience of God originates from within the human person and in this, human beings are like Adam who, in the beginning, willed the first sin. Tertullian writes: “And if you ask me whence comes this volition of ours by which we set our will against the will of God, I should reply that it comes from our own selves. Nor is this rashly said that, Adam, the author of our race and of our fall, willed the sin which he committed;<sup>4</sup> for you yourself must needs be like the father whose seed you are”.<sup>5</sup> Tertullian is explicit in placing the blame on Adam and this is emphasized further in the sentence immediately following in which Tertullian underplays the role of the Devil: “For the Devil did not impose upon him the volition to sin, but subministered material to the volition”.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the desire to sin came from Adam’s free choice and originated in his will and thus, Adam is fully culpable.

The statement: “Adam, the author of our race and of our Fall” is also found in *De paenitentia* where Tertullian calls Adam the “head and fount of the human race, and of human offence”.<sup>7</sup> These pithy phrases are not dissimilar to those found in the opening chapter of *De cultu feminarum*: “You are the Devil’s gateway” and “You are the unsealer of the forbidden tree.” It is clear therefore that Tertullian’s pithy phrases are not limited to those passages in which he appears to be deriding women for he also uses them in passages about Adam.<sup>8</sup>

In *Adversus Marcionem* 2.25 Tertullian claims that Adam is guilty of the first sin of eating from the forbidden tree. Tertullian refers to a passage in Genesis 3.9 in which God asks Adam “where art thou?”<sup>9</sup> Tertullian makes it clear that God did not ask this question because he was ignorant about where to find Adam, “as if a corner of Paradise was hidden from God’s eyes”. Rather, in asking this question God accuses Adam: “For we ought to read this in no simple manner, not with an interrogative intonation, ‘Where art thou, Adam?’, but in an insistent and incisive and accusative tone, *Adam, where thou art!*—which means, Thou art in

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<sup>4</sup> “*ille princeps et generis et delicti Adam uoluit quod deliquit...*”

<sup>5</sup> *De exhortatione castitatis* 2.5.

<sup>6</sup> *De exhortatione castitatis* 2.5.

<sup>7</sup> *De paenitentia* 12.9. In Latin it reads: “*stirpis humanae et offensae in Dominum princeps Adam*”.

<sup>8</sup> In fact, Tertullian is notorious for his succinct and memorable phrases. For example, on the subject of philosophy Tertullian asks: “What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?” (*De praescriptione haereticorum* 7.9) and regarding martyrdom: “The blood of Christians is seed” (*Apologeticum* 50.13).

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 3.9 reads: “But the Lord called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’” (NRSV). Since Tertullian uses the second person singular of *esse* “*Inclamat deus, Adam, ubi es?*” it is clear that God addresses Adam only.



perdition—which means, Thou art no longer here—so that the words spoken may end in reproof and in sorrow”.<sup>10</sup>

In *De pudicitia* Tertullian implies Adam’s responsibility when he speaks of “...the position which Adam lost by his fall...”<sup>11</sup> and in *De jejunio adversus psychicos* (hereafter shortened to *De jejunio*) the exclusive blame is placed on Adam who fell because of his greed.<sup>12</sup> Later in this chapter I will analyse in more detail Tertullian’s use of the Fall in *De jejunio*.

Another way in which Tertullian implies Adam’s guilt for the Fall is through his use of the Adam-Christ typology. In a number of works Tertullian compares and contrasts the role of Adam in the Fall with the role of Christ in salvation. In *Adversus Judaeos* 17, for example, Tertullian writes: “What is more manifest than the mystery of this ‘wood’, [the tree] that the obduracy of this world had been sunk in the profundity of error, and is freed in baptism by the ‘wood’ of Christ, that is, of his passion; in order that what had formerly perished through the ‘tree’ in Adam, should be restored through the ‘tree’ in Christ?” Although this passage implies Adam’s guilt, as I will discuss below, in another passage in *Adversus Judaeos* Tertullian suggests that both Adam and Eve share responsibility for the first sin. In *Adversus Marcionem* Tertullian again employs the Adam-Christ typology and speaks of death reigning from Adam to Christ: “For although death reigned from Adam until Christ, why should not Christ be said to have reigned from the tree, ever since by dying on the tree of the Cross he drove out the kingdom of death?”<sup>13</sup>

To summarize, in a number of treatises Tertullian suggests that Adam was solely responsible for the Fall. Whereas in some passages Tertullian states this in explicit terms, in other treatises there is far more subtle suggestion, such as in those passages which draw on the Adam-Christ typology.

### Adam and Eve.

In two treatises Tertullian speaks about the joint culpability of Adam and Eve. Firstly, in *Adversus Judaeos* Tertullian claims: “For in the beginning of the world he gave to Adam and

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<sup>10</sup> *Adversus Marcionem* 2.25.2.

<sup>11</sup> *De pudicitia* 9.16. In Latin it reads: “Adam transgressus amiserat”.

<sup>12</sup> *De jejunio* 3.3.

<sup>13</sup> *Adversus Marcionem* 3.19.1.

Eve a law, that they were not to eat of the fruit of the tree planted in the midst of paradise...if they had loved the Lord their God, they would not have contravened his precept; if they had habitually loved their neighbour-that is, themselves -they would not have believed the persuasion of the serpent, and thus would not have committed murder upon themselves, by falling from immortality, by contravening God's precept..."<sup>14</sup> In this chapter Tertullian's intention is to show that all precepts were contained in the first law (of not eating the fruit) and thus the breaking of the initial law also involved disobedience in a number of other laws. By stating that God gave the law (not to eat the fruit) to both Adam and Eve, Tertullian implies that they have joint culpability in breaking the law, and this is confirmed in his repeated use of verbs in the third person plural such as "*diligerent*," "*commisissent*" and "*credidissent*". The second work in which Tertullian implies that both Adam and Eve are guilty is in *De anima* 38. In this passage, Tertullian alludes to the Fall and suggests that it was sexual in nature. He speaks of the loss of paradise as the loss of innocence and chastity.<sup>15</sup>

### Devil.

Finally, in some passages the blame for the Fall lies with neither Adam nor Eve, but with the Devil. For example, in *De testimonio animae* 3, the Devil is described as the "architect of all error" (*totius erroris artificem*) and the "corrupter of the whole world" (*totius saeculi interpolatorem*). In *De patientia* Tertullian depicts the Devil as the source of sin and the one who led Adam astray. I will discuss Tertullian's treatment of the Fall in *De patientia* later in this chapter.

This overview of Tertullian's references to the Fall throughout his corpus reveals that in his various works Tertullian blames Adam, Eve and the Devil for the Fall. In most treatises, Tertullian's reference to the Fall is a secondary matter and he simply refers to it in passing. I propose that in some treatises Tertullian uses the story of the Fall as a rhetorical aid in order to make a point, or persuade his audience. There are three works I want to look at in more detail so that we can see how Tertullian uses the Fall as a rhetorical device; *De jejunio*, *De patientia*, and *De cultu feminarum*. Before I do this, however, I want to look at certain aspects of ancient rhetoric, which Tertullian would have been familiar with, for this will help us to understand how Tertullian uses the Fall as a rhetorical device.

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<sup>14</sup>*Adversus Judaeos* 2.2.

<sup>15</sup>*De anima* 38.2.

## **Rhetoric and persuasion.**

I propose that Tertullian's inconsistent description of the Fall can be elucidated when one appreciates that Tertullian used ancient rhetorical techniques in order to advance his theological arguments and make them more persuasive. Persuasion had always been an important aspect of ancient rhetoric. Indeed the primary purpose of rhetoric was to persuade. Aristotle claimed: "Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion".<sup>16</sup> The ancient rhetorical handbooks set out the rules for persuasive speaking. As discussed in the introduction there were three different branches of rhetorical speeches; forensic, deliberative, and epideictic, and these each had their own persuasive end. The purpose of deliberative speeches, for example, concerned with the future, was to move a person to a particular action. In order to achieve this, orators were advised to use arguments which appeal to an advantageous end and the avoidance of harm. The purpose of forensic speeches, on the other hand, was to persuade a judge (or audience) of the innocence or guilt of a particular crime. The formal end of epideictic speeches, according to Aristotle,<sup>17</sup> is in the treatment of what is honourable and shameful. In short, persuasion worked in different ways in each branch of rhetoric.

According to Aristotle, persuasion could be achieved through three complementary means: *ethos* (the appeal to the character of the speaker), *pathos* (an appeal to the emotion of the audience) and *logos* (the rationality of the argument). Aristotle explained: "Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds... persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible... Secondly, persuasion may come through the hearers, when the speech stirs their emotions... Thirdly, persuasion is effected through speech itself when we have proved a truth or an argument by means of the persuasive arguments suitable to the case in question".<sup>18</sup> *Ethos*, *pathos* and *logos* continued to be recognized as the means of persuasion in Tertullian's day and although there is evidence for all three of these in his works, it is the role of *pathos* which is of particular interest in this chapter. Although *pathos* was primarily associated with the emotions (of the audience), it was far more complex than emotion alone. An orator had to appeal to both the audience's sympathies and also its imagination. The aim was not simply to

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<sup>16</sup> *Rhetoric* 1.2 1356a.

<sup>17</sup> *Rhetoric* 1.9.3.1366a.

<sup>18</sup> *Rhetoric* 1.2 1356a.

create an emotional reaction in the listeners, but to get them to identify with a particular viewpoint and even to move the audience to decision and action.

The audience determined the style and content of a speech and thus, in order to be persuasive, the orator had to know the audience. The orator had to be creative in adapting traditional rhetorical structures to suit the need of a particular audience.<sup>19</sup> Cicero and Aristotle, for example, noted that the style of a speech needed to be adapted to the type of audience.<sup>20</sup> Aristotle also recognized the importance of aligning an appropriate argument to a particular audience: “Aristotle realized that audiences determine the reasonableness, and therefore the saliency, of an argument. In order, then, for auditors and readers to render a positive judgement, the rhetor must arrange the discourse in harmony with the mentalities and even the appetites of his listeners”.<sup>21</sup>

Quintilian, in his *Institutes of Oratory*, claimed that if an orator was to be effective, he had to consider the appropriateness of certain subjects and arguments in relation to the purpose and audience of the speech.<sup>22</sup> Speaking about the effect of the audience on a orator, he wrote: “Their power and rank will make no small difference; we shall employ different methods according as we are speaking before the emperor, a magistrate, a private citizen, or merely a free man, while a different tone is demanded by trials in the public courts, and in cases submitted to arbitration”.<sup>23</sup> This relates back to the three divisions in rhetoric for the branch of rhetoric employed depended upon the nature of the audience. For example, a deliberative speech was aimed at a political mass whereas a forensic speech was tailored to a judge and law court. Epideictic speeches, on the other hand, were best suited to a ceremonial context. The arguments employed within each type of speech were appropriate to the audience. Furthermore, an orator’s choice of appropriate subject matter could also be influenced by conditions such as time and place: “Time and place, also, require a due degree of observation; the occasion on which an orator speaks may be one of seriousness, or one of

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<sup>19</sup> T.O. Sloane (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 43.

<sup>20</sup> Cicero, *De oratore* 55 and 21 Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.12-17 In these chapters, Aristotle analyzes the character of different groups in order that a speaker might adapt his portrayed *ethos* to suit the audience in order that he may have an influence on the audience.

<sup>21</sup> Sloane, *Encyclopaedia of Rhetoric*, p. 41.

<sup>22</sup> *Institutio oratoria* 11.1. 7.

<sup>23</sup> *Institutio oratoria* 11.1.43.

rejoicing; the time allowed may be unlimited or limited; and to all such circumstances his speech must be adapted”.<sup>24</sup>

In short, an orator had to be creative when composing a speech and keep in mind factors such as the audience, the circumstance and the purpose of the speech. In doing so, the orator would adapt the conventional features of rhetoric in order to be more effective in his argument and in persuading an audience to a particular way of thinking.

There is ample evidence that Tertullian was creative in his use of rhetoric. For example, Tertullian was imaginative with the way in which he structured his work according to ancient rhetorical patterns. Rather than simply imitating the basic structure of a speech laid out in rhetorical handbooks, Tertullian, like all good orators, adapted the traditional structure to suit his own purpose and argument. As Robert Sider has observed: “[Tertullian] employs the textbook patterns of structure with a great degree of flexibility, omitting, transposing, and combining parts as the demands of rhetorical effectiveness suggested”.<sup>25</sup>

In a similar manner, Tertullian would adapt traditional rhetorical precepts and examples, as and when he needed and this sometimes resulted in him making contradictory statements.<sup>26</sup> For example, in some works, Tertullian emphasized the prosperity and happiness of the Roman world.<sup>27</sup> In other places however, when the argument so demanded, he rendered the prospect gloomy and spoke of an age of iron.<sup>28</sup> Timothy Barnes has commented: “Such statements conceal rather than disclose Tertullian’s true opinions, and it is pointless to ask which he really believed. He may easily have oscillated between genuine optimism and pessimism. Or perhaps he was merely following an orator’s normal practice of selecting the convenient facts.”<sup>29</sup> I would argue, based on the variety and frequency of the inconsistent statements in Tertullian’s works, that Barnes’ latter point is the most plausible explanation for Tertullian’s inconsistent, and sometimes contradictory, statements. This concept of creativity will help to explain Tertullian’s apparent inconsistency when talking about the Fall.

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<sup>24</sup> *Institutio oratoria* 11.1.46.

<sup>25</sup> Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, p. 22. Sider discusses a number of examples. (p. 24 ff.) see also Sider’s “Structure and Design in *De resurrectione mortuorum*” (*Vigiliae Christianae* 23, 1969) for example of this. In another work, Sider writes: “The *De praescriptione haereticorum* revels in a most instructive way Tertullian’s ability to adjust the normal parts of a speech to the needs of a particular debate.” (Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, p. 25).

<sup>26</sup> T. D. Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 219.

<sup>27</sup> *De pallio* 2.7 and *De Anima* 30.3.

<sup>28</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.13.6.

<sup>29</sup> Barnes, *Tertullian*, p. 219.

Tertullian adapts the details of the story of the Fall depending on external considerations such as the audience, theme and purpose of a particular treatise.

### **The Fall as an *exemplum* in *De jejunio*, *De patientia*, and *De cultu feminarum*.**

In *De jejunio*, *De patientia*, and *De cultu feminarum* Tertullian uses the story of the Fall as an *exemplum*. Cicero claimed that an *exemplum*: “supports or weakens a case by appeal to precedent or experience, citing some person or historical event”.<sup>30</sup> Quintilian defined *exemplum* as the recalling of some action (historical or imaginary) which was useful for driving home the orator’s point.<sup>31</sup> In particular, the *exemplum* could be used as a teaching mechanism because it provided a model of behaviour that the orator wanted the audience to imitate or, alternatively, it was a model of bad behaviour which should be avoided. Tertullian uses the story of the Fall as an *exemplum* of bad behaviour. In each treatise he changes the details of the story, depending on the audience and theme of the treatise, so as to highlight which behaviour is to be avoided. Again, this reflects a practice within ancient rhetoric for, as Quintilian observed, it was sometimes necessary to adapt the details of a (historical) *exemplum* in order to make it relevant to a particular audience.<sup>32</sup>

#### *De jejunio*.

Beginning with *De jejunio*, we can see how Tertullian employs these rhetorical techniques.<sup>33</sup> Tertullian composed *De jejunio* during his Montanist period and his intended audience are the non-Montanist Christians (whom he calls “the Psychi”).<sup>34</sup> He wrote it in defence of the Montanists who were under attack for observing extra fasts. In this treatise, Tertullian blames Adam for the Fall and claims that the cause of the Fall was Adam’s greed. He writes: “Adam had received from God the law of not tasting ‘of the tree of recognition of good and evil,’ with the doom of death to ensue upon tasting”.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *De inventione* 1.30.49.

<sup>31</sup> *Institutio oratoria* 5.11.6.

<sup>32</sup> *Institutio oratoria* 5.11.5-6.

<sup>33</sup> Sider suggests that in *De jejunio* deliberative themes of necessity and advantage provided the structure for the work. He argues that in chapters 2-6a Tertullian speaks of the necessity of fasting and in chapters 6b-8 he talks about the advantages of fasting. (See Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, p. 121).

<sup>34</sup> *De jejunio* 1.1.

<sup>35</sup> *De jejunio* 3.1.

He claims that the non-Montanists have made their bellies into a god, just like Adam had in the Garden of Eden. He uses the example of Adam as a model which should not be imitated, for: “[Adam] yielded more readily to his belly than to God, heeded the meat rather than the mandate, and sold salvation for his gullet. He ate, in short, and perished...”<sup>36</sup> Tertullian’s claim that eating was the cause of Adam’s Fall is a deliberate rhetorical technique to strengthen his central argument in the treatise and make it more persuasive. The purpose of the treatise was to persuade the non-Montanists that the extra fasts were permitted. By linking Adam’s Fall to greed, Tertullian suggests that Christians should avoid this behaviour and thus, be more accepting of the extra fasts.

In further support of his argument, Tertullian explicitly states that the remedy for the greed (which was begun in Adam, and continues in the non-Montanist Christians) is extra fasting. Tertullian argues that fasting is the only remedy for greed. Tertullian explains: “...hold, therefore, that from the beginning the murderous gullet was to be punished with the torments and penalties of hunger. Even if God had enjoined no prescriptive fasts, still, by pointing out the source whence Adam was slain, he who had demonstrated the offence had left to my intelligence the remedies for the offence”.<sup>37</sup> In short, since greed was the cause of the Fall, fasting (which is the opposite of greed) corrects and reverses the damage caused by the Fall.

In summary, the purpose of *De jejunió* is to persuade his non-Montanist audience that the extra fasts, prescribed by the Montanist, are justified. To strengthen his case and make it more persuasive, Tertullian associates Adam’s Fall with greed and in doing so implies that contemporary Christians should refrain from gluttony. This makes Tertullian’s central argument more persuasive; Christians should be observing the extra fasts which the Montanists already adhere to.

### *De patientia.*

Tertullian employs the same technique of using the *exemplum* of the Fall in *De patientia*. In the opening chapter Tertullian insists that the right attitude or disposition for the Christian to possess is one of patience.<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, in the opening chapter, Tertullian admits that he is

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<sup>36</sup> *De jejunió* 3.2.

<sup>37</sup> *De jejunió* 3.3.

<sup>38</sup> *De patientia* 1.6-8.

not, himself, a patient man. As discussed briefly above, the character of an orator (*ethos*) was considered to be an important feature in the persuasiveness of a speech. Tertullian himself seems to recognize this when he states that if a person is going to speak about and endorse a particular virtue, he should himself be in possession of the particular virtue under discussion.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, Tertullian turns this to his advantage by claiming that just as a sick person is unable to keep quiet about the blessings of health, he, likewise, is unable to remain silent on the virtue of patience, in spite of his own impatience. It is possible that in admitting that he is impatient Tertullian wants to show that he has empathy with his audience who are also impatient. In so doing, Tertullian intends to win over his audience and thus predispose them to his way of thinking. This rhetorical technique was appropriate, above all, in the *exordium* of a speech.<sup>40</sup>

In order to emphasize the necessity of patience, Tertullian once again uses the *exemplum* of the Fall. However, instead of ascribing the cause of the Fall to greed as he did in *De jejunio*, Tertullian claims that impatience was the root cause of sin and thus the cause of humanity's Fall. He changes the details of the *exemplum*, from greed to impatience because the audience and the purpose of the treatise have changed. In this instance, Tertullian is not trying to justify extra fasts. Rather, he is trying to persuade his audience to practice the virtue of patience.

In order to make his case more persuasive, Tertullian employs a variety of rhetorical techniques. For example, he uses the argument from origin, a popular technique in deliberative speeches, to demonstrate that impatience originates from the Devil.<sup>41</sup> Tertullian claimed that when the Devil looked upon God's creation and observed that the Lord granted to Adam sovereignty over it, the Devil became infected with an impatience for the good that God would bring from such an arrangement.<sup>42</sup> Tertullian claims that the Devil should have "patiently borne" that which God intended.<sup>43</sup> But because the Devil was impatient and doubted God's goodness, he became envious of Adam whom he believed was unjustly in receipt of a goodness unfairly bestowed. The Devil's envy, an ancillary vice which stemmed

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<sup>39</sup> *De patientia* 1.1-2.

<sup>40</sup> See for example, Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 4.1 and Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 3.14.1415a7.

<sup>41</sup> See Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, p. 116.

<sup>42</sup> *De patientia* 5.5.

<sup>43</sup> *De patientia* 5.6.



from his impatience, caused him to deceive Adam and Eve in an attempt to ease his grief.<sup>44</sup> The Devil first “breathed” impatience into Eve, and then Eve spread impatience to Adam.<sup>45</sup> Adam and Eve subsequently passed this impatience on to their son, Cain and it was impatience which led Cain to murder his brother.<sup>46</sup> In short, it is the Devil’s impatience that is the root cause of the Edenic tragedy and impatience is the root cause of all other sin.

As with the *exemplum* in *De jejunio*, Tertullian uses the story of the Fall as a model for behaviour which should be avoided. In *De patientia*, Tertullian explicitly states the benefits of such an exercise: “...if the discourse be concerning some particular good, the subject requires us to review also the contrary of that good. For you will throw more light on what is to be pursued, if you first give a digest of what is to be avoided”.<sup>47</sup> Thus, by using the *exemplum* of the Devil’s impatience, and by highlighting the awful consequences of it, Tertullian hopes to show the necessity of the virtue of patience.

Just as greed was corrected with fasting, as Tertullian explained in *De jejunio*, so too, impatience is corrected by its opposite, patience. Furthermore, if the Devil, and indeed, Adam, Eve and Cain, are examples of impatience, Tertullian points to examples of patience in chapters two and three. For example, he speaks of the patience of God, “who scatters equally over just and unjust the bloom of this light; who suffers the good offices of the seasons, the services of the elements, the tributes of entire nature, to accrue at once to worthy and unworthy; bearing the most ungrateful nations...”.<sup>48</sup> Again, in chapter three he speaks of the example of Christ’s patience as he waited to be born, as he endures the delay of growing up, and is not eager for his true identity to be recognized. Tertullian concludes that “patience is God’s nature”.<sup>49</sup>

Much of the argumentation in *De patientia* is built on the topic of comparison which was another common rhetorical technique utilized primarily in deliberative speeches, to persuade an audience to a particular course of action.<sup>50</sup> Sider explains that Tertullian frequently used the topic of comparison to make a distinction between Christians and pagans with the effect

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<sup>44</sup> *De patientia* 5.6.

<sup>45</sup> *De patientia* 5.9-11.

<sup>46</sup> *De patientia* 5.15.

<sup>47</sup> *De patientia* 5.2.

<sup>48</sup> *De patientia* 2.2.

<sup>49</sup> *De patientia* 3.1.

<sup>50</sup> See for example Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 5.10.86 and Cicero, *Topica* 18.68-69.

of highlighting the necessary course of action for the Christian.<sup>51</sup> Here, Tertullian is employing a different but related technique. By associating impatience with the Devil and the Fall of humankind and by connecting patience with Christ, Tertullian implies that patience is fitting for Christians and thus encourages his audience to cultivate this virtue.

There is one final rhetorical technique worth noting. In *De patientia* 15 Tertullian uses a panegyric to highlight the desirability of patience. The panegyric was a set-piece of extravagant praise used in a speech, particularly an epideictic speech, and was very common in Tertullian's day.<sup>52</sup> Sometimes orators would deliver panegyrics on the most trivial of topics, simply as a display of eloquence. For example, Cato enumerated the virtues of cauliflower whilst Dio of Prusa and Apuleius composed panegyrics on the parrot.<sup>53</sup> Tertullian's panegyric on patience, comes in the penultimate chapter of the treatise, and underlies the importance of the virtue for the Christian: "What honour is granted to Patience, to have God as her Debtor! And not without reason; for she keeps all his decrees; she has to do with all his mandates. She fortifies faith; is the pilot of peace; assists charity; establishes humility; waits long for repentance; sets her seal on confession; rules the flesh...gives their crowning grace to martyrdoms; consoles the poor; teaches the rich moderation...is the delight of the believer..."<sup>54</sup>

In short, in assigning the Fall to the Devil's impatience and highlighting the consequences of it, Tertullian sought to persuade his audience to practice the virtue of patience, which he regarded as a necessary quality for the Christian. To achieve this end, Tertullian used a number of rhetorical techniques and in particular modified the story of the Fall so that he could make it applicable to the problem of impatience.

### *De cultu feminarum.*

We turn finally to *De cultu feminarum*. Let us recall some of the main points of the "Devil's gateway" passage, cited at the start of the introduction. Tertullian implies that Eve was responsible for the Fall and that all women, being each an Eve, share her guilt. He calls those

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<sup>51</sup> Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, p. 109.

<sup>52</sup> Quintilian characterized epideictic literature in terms of *laus* and *vituperatio*. (Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, p. 119) and Sider identifies *De patientia* as an epideictic piece.

<sup>53</sup> See Barnes, *Tertullian*, p. 214. See also Tertullian's panegyric on the peacock *De pallio* 3.3; 3.1.

<sup>54</sup> *De patientia* 15.1.

whom he is addressing the “Devil's gateway” and “the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree”. Woman, being weaker than man, was more easily fooled and tricked by the Devil and with ghastly consequences: she destroyed the image of God in man and because of her actions, the Son of God had to die.

The first thing to be noted is that the audience in *De cultu feminarum* is a group of Christian women, as I argued in the introduction to part one. It is appropriate, therefore, to make Eve the central protagonist in the Fall because, in doing so, Tertullian is able to forge a link between the first Eve and the women in his audience whom he describes as “each an Eve.” As I will argue in chapter two, by associating the original Eve with the contemporary women Tertullian attempts to persuade his audience that the arguments in *De cultu feminarum* are applicable to them.

By opening the treatise in the way he does, Tertullian appears to be making a particularly vicious attack on women. However, Tertullian is using a rhetorical technique known as vituperation. This was a stylized opening which criticized someone or something in order to provoke a response in the audience.<sup>55</sup> Like the panegyric, the vituperation made an effective opening to a speech and it is something which Tertullian uses in a number of works. For example in the opening of *Scorpiace* Tertullian begins: “The earth sends forth a great evil in the shape of a small scorpion”.<sup>56</sup> He then goes on to describe how vile this beast is and how dangerous it is, particularly in the heat of summer. Tertullian uses the image of the scorpion as a metaphor for Christian persecution and it is an image which he maintains throughout the work.

I propose that Tertullian uses the “Devil’s gateway” passage as a vituperation in *De cultu feminarum* in order to create a sense of shame in his audience. As noted earlier, an orator would try to persuade his audience to adopt a particular behaviour by creating an emotional response in them (*pathos*). Aristotle proposes that shame is one of the emotions which an orator could evoke in his audience in order to make them more receptive to a speech and thus persuade them to adopt a particular course of action.<sup>57</sup> This is particularly important in the *exordium* of a speech and since the “Devil’s gateway” passage falls in the *exordium* of *De*

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<sup>55</sup> Barnes, *Tertullian*, p. 214 See for example, Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 3.7.19.

<sup>56</sup> *Scorpiace* 1.1 See Barnes, *Tertullian*, p. 215.

<sup>57</sup> *Rhetoric* 2.6 1384a ff.

*cultu feminarum* it would seem that Tertullian is using it to obtain a favourable reception from his audience.<sup>58</sup>

In the next chapter I will give a detailed analysis of the content of *De cultu feminarum* but in order to show how the *exemplum* functions in this treatise, I will give a brief overview of Tertullian's main objectives. In *De cultu feminarum*, Tertullian attempts to persuade the women whom he is addressing to change their behaviour and more specifically to display the virtues of humility and modesty through the way they dress. It seems that the Carthaginian women whom Tertullian was addressing had a taste for luxurious clothes, jewellery and cosmetics just like the pagan women of Carthage. Tertullian dissuades Christian women from pursuing luxury and from cultivating beauty because he saw it as an obstacle to their salvation. In short, women should dress in simple clothes which are fitting for their condition as contemporary Eves.

In summary, in *De cultu feminarum* Tertullian blames Eve for the Fall because he was addressing a female audience. In giving Eve sole responsibility for the Fall, Tertullian's aim was not to denigrate women. Rather, by expounding the Fall with the use of vituperation, Tertullian is able to evoke an emotional response in the audience and thus persuade them to dress in a way which is fitting for Christian women. In short, Tertullian's reference to Eve and her role in the Fall is simply a rhetorical tool for him to make his point and persuade a particular audience to adopt a particular behaviour.

### **Conclusion.**

This chapter has demonstrated that the "Devil's gateway" passage in *De cultu feminarum* is the only passage in which Tertullian gives total culpability for the Fall to Eve. Feminist scholars have assumed that Tertullian's comments in the "Devil's gateway" passage are representative of his thoughts on the Fall as a whole. However, Tertullian does not have a systematic account of the Fall for, as we have seen, in some works, Tertullian blames Adam and even the Devil for the Fall. Indeed, Tertullian adapts the details about who was culpable and what caused the Fall, depending on the audience and theme of the treatise. One must recognize that in each treatise, Tertullian used the story of the Fall as a rhetorical device to

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<sup>58</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 4.1 and Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 3.14.1415a7.

make a point, win an argument, or persuade his audience to change a particular behaviour. In *De cultu feminarum*, Tertullian blames Eve for the Fall because in that treatise he was addressing a female audience. Understood in this way, Tertullian's comments in the "Devil's gateway" passage should be seen as part of his rhetoric and not as a means of denigrating women.

## **CHAPTER 2.**

### **De cultu feminarum: what is it really about?**

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the content and arguments in *De cultu feminarum*, and to establish Tertullian's motives in writing it. Feminist scholars have tended to focus on *De cultu feminarum* in terms of Tertullian's supposed misogyny but, as I noted in the introduction, they have not looked beyond the "Devil's gateway" passage. By examining the content of the whole treatise, and drawing on the rhetorical analysis of Susan Calef, I will demonstrate that Tertullian's intention in *De cultu feminarum* was not to denigrate women.<sup>1</sup> Rather, Tertullian's main concern was to advise and instruct Christian women on the way they are to live out their Christian faith in a pagan society, specifically through the way they dress. Having considered the wider context of *De cultu feminarum*, I will examine the role of the "Devil's gateway" passage within the treatise. I will argue that the "Devil's gateway" passage serves a specific rhetorical purpose and should be read in the wider rhetorical context of the whole of *De cultu feminarum*.

#### **Tertullian and Christian identity.**

The topic of Christian identity in a pagan society was important to Tertullian for he addresses the issue in a number of treatises. In *De spectaculis* Tertullian gives advice to Christians on the pagan spectacles which were an integral part of ancient society. Tertullian condemned the spectacles and encouraged Christians to refrain from taking part in such entertainment. In fact, for Tertullian, the pagan spectacles acted as a point of distinction between Christians and pagans because he claims that Christians are marked out primarily by their absence from the spectacles.<sup>2</sup> Tertullian writes: "The rejection of these amusements is the chief sign to them that a man has adopted the Christian faith. If anyone, then, puts away the faith's distinctive badge, he is plainly guilty of denying it".<sup>3</sup> Similarly, in *De corona militis* Tertullian advises Christians on their conduct. In this treatise he addresses the issue of Christians wearing the military crown at a pagan ceremony. He points to the example of one faithful Christian who drew negative attention to himself by his refusal to wear the crown: "One of [the soldiers],

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<sup>1</sup> S.A. Calef, "Rhetorical Strategies in *De cultu feminarum*" (PhD Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> *De spectaculis* 24.3.

<sup>3</sup> *De spectaculis* 24.4.

more a soldier of God, more steadfast than the rest of his brethren who had imagined that they could serve two masters, his head alone uncovered, the useless crown in his hand—already even by that peculiarity known to everyone as a Christian”.<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to note that the soldier’s Christian identity was marked by *not* wearing the crown, in the same way that Christians were identified by them *not* being at the spectacles. In *De cultu feminarum*, as I will discuss below, Tertullian encourages Christian women to be distinguished from pagan women through not adopting certain types of dress. Again, in *De idolatria* Tertullian gives advice to Christians about living in a pagan world. In this treatise, Tertullian is concerned with the day-to-day activities which affect Christians, and he advises them on what they are to do in order to avoid idolatry.<sup>5</sup> In all of these treatises the common theme is Christian identity in a pagan world and in each treatise Tertullian gives specific advice on what conduct is appropriate for a Christians and how Christians are to distinguish themselves from their pagan neighbours.

I propose that *De cultu feminarum* is an example of another treatise in which Tertullian is concerned with Christian conduct among pagans. In *De cultu feminarum* Tertullian deals with one aspect of this question which is particularly relevant to women, namely, how Christian women are to dress. Tertullian’s central argument in this treatise is that Christian women are to be distinguished from pagans through their dress. It was essential for Tertullian to address the topic of dress, in his quest to distinguish Christians from pagans, because in the ancient world clothing was an important symbol and communicator of one’s identity. One’s clothes, jewellery and general outward appearance signalled one’s identity to others, revealed one’s values and indicated to whom one owed allegiance. Tertullian uses this feature of pagan society to set Christians apart from others, for Christians, through their dress, ought to display their own Christian values and allegiance to Christ. In other words, dress had the potential to be a marker of Christian identity.

In *De cultu feminarum* Tertullian defines Christian identity by setting out two antitheses: glory versus humility and beauty versus modesty (*pudicitia*) which can be manifested through dress.<sup>6</sup> These distinctions are clearly set out in chapter four where Tertullian argues that dress

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<sup>4</sup> *De corona militis* 1.1.

<sup>5</sup> *De idolatria* 5.1; 9.1; 16.1-5.

<sup>6</sup> One of Tertullian’s favourite rhetorical devices is that of antithesis. (R. Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric and the Art of Tertullian*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 108) See for example, Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 9.3.81 and Aristotle, *Rhetoric*. 3.9.8.

or *cultus* (gold, silver, gems and garments) leads to the pursuit of glory and *ornatus* (the care of the hair and skin) leads to lust. Tertullian claims that the pursuit of glory and the pursuit of beauty are unsuitable goals for Christian women who should be pursuing the virtues of humility (*humilitas*) and chastity (*puđicitia*).<sup>7</sup> I will deal with each of these objections in turn, noting in particular how Tertullian employs various rhetorical arguments to support his central claim that Christian women are to be distinguished from pagan women through their rejection of *cultus* and *ornatus*.

### **The origin of *cultus* and *ornatus*.**

Before giving a detailed analysis of the glory versus humility and beauty versus modesty antitheses, I will explain why Tertullian considered it necessary for Christians to reject the pursuit of *cultus* and *ornatus*. In *De cultu feminarum* 1.2 Tertullian employs the argument from origin, a common feature of epideictic discourse, to discuss the source of female *cultus* and *ornatus*.<sup>8</sup> Drawing on the story of the fallen angels found in Genesis 6 and 1 Enoch Tertullian suggests that items of female *cultus* and *ornatus* can be traced back to the fallen angels. He writes: “For they, withal, who instituted them [items of *cultus* and *ornatus*] are assigned, under condemnation, to the penalty of death, those angels, to wit, who rushed from heaven on the daughters of men...”<sup>9</sup>

By claiming that items of *cultus* and *ornatus* originated from the fallen angels, Tertullian makes it clear that it is unfitting for Christians to seek after such items. This point is repeated more explicitly later in the chapter. Tertullian claims that since, in baptism Christians reject the fallen angels, they should also reject those things associated with the fallen angels, namely female *cultus* and *ornatus*: “And these are the angels whom we are destined to judge: these are the angels whom in baptism we renounce...With what consistency do we mount that future judgement-seat to pronounce sentence against those whose gifts we now seek after?”<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, by associating female *cultus* and *ornatus* with the fallen angels, Tertullian suggests that the issue of Christian women not wearing these things is both a moral and theological matter. Tertullian does not simply oppose women wearing items of *cultus* and

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<sup>7</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 1.4.1-2.

<sup>8</sup> Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, p. 116 and 120.

<sup>9</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 1.2.1.

<sup>10</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 1.2.5.



*ornatus* because it is vain to do so. Rather, there is a deeper issue at stake. By wearing items of female *cultus* and *ornatus*, a woman is involving herself in something demonic. If a Christian woman's allegiance is to Christ, she should reject items of female *cultus* and *ornatus* because they have a demonic origin. As well as using the argument from origin, it seems that Tertullian may also be appealing to *pathos* to evoke shame in his audience and thus dissuade them from pursuing *cultus* and *ornatus*.<sup>11</sup>

### **The pursuit of glory versus humility (*humilitas*).**

Tertullian objected to Christian women pursuing glory through the use of *cultus*. *Gloria* was one of the most important words in the ancient Roman vocabulary and had a wide range of meanings in the classical literature.<sup>12</sup> In the most positive sense a person with *gloria* had a widespread reputation accompanied by praise.<sup>13</sup> In *De cultu feminarum* Tertullian uses *gloria*<sup>14</sup> in a more negative sense, to denote public commendation, recognition, and ostentation, primarily for the purpose of gaining praise for oneself.<sup>15</sup> In other words, he uses *gloria* to speak of one's boasting and self-exaltation.<sup>16</sup>

Tertullian opposed the use of *cultus* as a status marker and as a means of "glorifying" the women who adorned themselves with certain clothes and jewellery. The use of *cultus* as a means of boasting about one's wealth and status was a common practice in Roman society. Olson explains: "Female clothing was supposed to immediately indicate the rank and status of the woman, and ideally garments accurately reflected the birth, wealth and moral character of the wearer."<sup>17</sup> Milesian wools, Chinese silk, Tyrian purple, pearls, and gold were some of the most sought-after items of luxury in the Roman world and are listed in *De cultu feminarum*.<sup>18</sup> When paraded before the public, wearing these items was a means of flaunting

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<sup>11</sup> As we noted earlier, shame was used to dissuade his audience from a particular behaviour. See Aristotle's *Rhetoric* 2.6.

<sup>12</sup> S.A. Calef, "Rhetorical Strategies in *De cultu feminarum*" (University of Notre Dame, 1996), p. 143 n. 23.

<sup>13</sup> D.E. Groh, "Tertullian's Polemic Against Social Co-option" in *Church History* Vol. 40, No. 1 (March, 1971), p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> This was clearly an important issue for Tertullian for he uses the various forms of the adjective *gloriosus* (*gloria*) numerous times throughout both books of *De cultu feminarum* to describe the certain aspects of women's dress. *Gloria* occurs 10 times in *De cultu feminarum* 1 and 7 times in *De cultu feminarum* 2; *gloriosus* occurs two times in *De cultu feminarum* 1; *gloriosior* occurs 4 times in *De cultu feminarum* 2. See Calef, "Rhetorical Strategies in *De cultu feminarum*" p. 143 n.22.

<sup>15</sup> Groh, "Tertullian's Polemic Against Social Co-option", p.10.

<sup>16</sup> Groh, "Tertullian's Polemic Against Social Co-option", p.11.

<sup>17</sup> K. Olson, *Dress and the Roman Woman: Self-presentation and Society* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 113.

<sup>18</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 1.3.

wealth, and thus, of claiming honour and status for oneself and one's family. In accordance with social expectations regarding the ostentatious display of wealth and status, the women addressed in *De cultu feminarum*, like their pagan neighbours, desired to adorn themselves with the luxurious items listed. Tertullian mockingly writes: "On a single thread is suspended a million of sesterces. One delicate neck carries about it forests and islands. The slender lobes of the ears exhaust a fortune; and the left hand, with its every finger, sports with several money-bags. Such is the strength of ambition-equal to bearing on one small body, and that a woman's, the product of so copious wealth".<sup>19</sup> Tertullian judges such dress to be inappropriate for Christian women branding it "too ostentatious" and thus he sets out to dissuade his audience from such behaviour.

Tertullian's critique of luxury and the pursuit of status focus on three items in particular; gold, precious stones and purple dyed fabrics. I will discuss Tertullian's critique of each of these and note in particular the rhetorical arguments and techniques employed in order to dissuade his audience from pursuing these items of luxury.

### Gold.

The first item of luxury which Tertullian was critical of was gold and silver. Gold, usually used for jewellery, was a highly desired metal in ancient Roman society because it was seen as a marker of wealth and status.<sup>20</sup> Pliny, for example, disapproved of women who were from the lower classes wearing gold jewellery precisely because such adornment marked status.<sup>21</sup> Tertullian himself notes that gold and silver are the principal material causes of worldly splendour.<sup>22</sup>

Tertullian discourages his audience from the pursuit of gold by using a number of rhetorical techniques. For example, in chapter five of book one Tertullian examines the quality of gold and silver using the topics of origin and utility (*utilitas*), which were appropriate to epideictic

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<sup>19</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 1.9.3.

<sup>20</sup> Precious metals could also be used for things like luxurious dinnerware. Seneca for example notes: "Now I wish to review thy wealth, the plates of gold and silver, for which our greed gropes in darkness." (*De Beneficiis* 7.10) Pliny makes reference to "Feet shod with gold" (*Naturalis Historia* 33.40) which is probably a reference to gold encrusted sandal- straps.

<sup>21</sup> *Naturalis Historia* 33.12. 40: "are even their feet to be shod with gold, and shall gold create an *ordo* of female *equites* between the *stola* and the *plebs*?" as cited by Calef, "Rhetorical Strategies in *De cultu feminarum*", p. 76

<sup>22</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 1.5.1.

speeches.<sup>23</sup> Regarding the origin of gold and silver Tertullian writes: “Gold and silver...must necessarily be identical [in nature] with that out of which they have their being: they must be earth...”<sup>24</sup> In other words, before its refinements in fire, gold is nothing more than earth. Based on the appeal to origin, Tertullian concludes that gold is no more glorious than any of the other metals which come from the earth and indeed no nobler than the earth itself. Thus, there is no rational basis for the high place given to gold.

The argument from utility leads to a similar conclusion. Tertullian compares the use of gold to that of other metals such as iron and brass and claims that based on utility the latter metals deserve a far greater prestige than gold for: “...the needs of our whole life are dependent upon iron and brass”.<sup>25</sup> For example, drinking vessels, tools for tilling fields, and the materials needed for building ships require the more useful metals of brass and iron rather than gold and silver. In short, by comparing the utility of gold with that of brass and iron Tertullian concludes that gold and silver are not worthy of their exaggerated reputation.

Why then are gold and silver held in such high esteem? Tertullian proposes that gold and silver derive their value from their rarity. In those places where the supply of gold is more plentiful there is very little value placed on the metal. In fact, Tertullian notes that in those countries where gold is plentiful it is even customary to keep criminals in chains made from gold.<sup>26</sup> In making this point Tertullian suggests that the value of gold is relative to its scarcity and not intrinsic to the metal itself.

In short, Tertullian opposes women’s desire for gold and dissuades them from pursuing it by using a number of rhetorical strategies. Based on the arguments from origin and utility, Tertullian draws attention to the fact that the glory attached to gold is unwarranted. By highlighting this to his audience, Tertullian hopes to show them that the pursuit of gold is ultimately a pointless ambition.

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<sup>23</sup> Sider notes that in epideictic speeches the three major themes are: origin, character, and utility. (See Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, p. 116).

<sup>24</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 1.5.1.

<sup>25</sup> Tertullian makes a contrast between the luxury of gold and silver and ‘the necessities of our whole life’. The reference to ‘necessities’ suggests a Stoic influence which made a distinction between the ‘necessary’, provided by nature, and the ‘luxurious’ which is superfluous. Seneca claims: “Nature suffices for what she demands. Luxury has turned her back upon nature ...” (*Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* 90.18-19) as cited by Calef, “Rhetorical Strategies in *De cultu feminarum*” p. 41.

<sup>26</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 1.7.1.

## Precious stones.

The second item of *cultus* criticized by Tertullian is precious stones. In ancient Roman society precious stones were often used for jewellery and, like gold, played a prominent role in distinguishing one's status and rank. Pearls were especially sought after and were often used in the classical literature as a symbol of wealth and extravagance.<sup>27</sup> Pliny claims that among items from the sea, pearls are of the greatest value.<sup>28</sup> Sapphires, rubies and garnets, and emeralds were also among the most desirable jewels and of considerable value. In short, precious stones were costly items and thus a symbol of wealth and status. It is for this reason that they were a highly desired item of *cultus* and therefore criticized by Tertullian.

Tertullian uses the same strategy of examining the origin and utility of items of *cultus* when talking about precious stones. As with gold, Tertullian claims that precious stones have the same humble origin as less prestigious stones such as pebbles, namely earth. Furthermore, in terms of utility, precious stones are less useful than certain other stones which can be used for things such as laying foundations, building walls and assembling roofs. According to Tertullian, the only use which precious stones and pearls have is that of giving glory and status to the women who wear them. Tertullian scornfully writes: "The only edifice which they [precious stones] know how to rear is this silly pride of women: because they require slow rubbing that they may shine, and artful underlaying that they may show to advantage..."<sup>29</sup> In other words, precious stones need labour to make them attractive and costly, and therefore desirable to women. The reference to pride may be an appeal to *pathos*. The implicit argument is that Christian women should be cultivating the virtue of humility and suppressing its opposite, the vice of pride. This is touched upon in chapter four where Tertullian notes that Christian women are assessed on different principles to those of pagan women. Thus, whereas pagan women seek to satisfy their pride by adorning themselves with precious stones, Christian women ought to curtail their desire for them and instead practise the virtue of humility, a value fitting to their Christian identity. I will discuss the topic of humility further below.

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<sup>27</sup> Olson, *Dress and the Roman Woman*, p. 54. See Pliny *Naturalis Historia* 37.15.

<sup>28</sup> *Naturalis Historia* 37.77.

<sup>29</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 1.6.1.

Calef discusses another rhetorical technique employed by Tertullian, the skilful adaptation of material drawn from pagan sources.<sup>30</sup> Tertullian claims that precious stones are taken from the foreheads of dragons. She notes that this tradition is attested to by Pliny: “*Draconitis* or *dracontia* is a stone produced from the brain of the dragon; but unless the head of the animal is cut off while it is alive, the stone will not assume the form of a gem, through spite on the part of the serpent...”<sup>31</sup> Tertullian appropriates pagan material and assimilates it with material drawn from Christian scripture. He substitutes the dragon of the pagan literature with the serpent of Genesis and expresses a scathing judgement: “This is also wanting to the Christian woman, that she may add a grace to herself from the serpent! Is it thus that she will set her heel on the devil’s head, while she heaps ornaments [taken] from his head on her own neck, or on her very head?”<sup>32</sup> Tertullian’s point is clear: if gems come from the head of the serpent, God’s adversary, it is not fitting for Christian women to wear them since Christian women should have loyalty to God.

I propose that this is another form of the argument from origin. In the first argument from origin Tertullian claims that precious stones come from the earth and thus have no intrinsic splendour. In the second argument from origin, drawing on a pagan tradition, Tertullian suggests that they have an evil origin, since they come from the head of the serpent. From the first argument Tertullian implies that the pursuit of precious stones is pointless. From the second argument Tertullian emphasizes even more strongly how inappropriate it is for Christians to desire these precious stones.

### Purple dye.

The third item of *cultus* condemned by Tertullian is purple-dyed garments. In the ancient world purple-dyed clothes were luxurious and costly items. Pliny claims that purple dye (which comes from murex shells) was one of the most valuable items in nature.<sup>33</sup> In addition, he notes that the cost of purple dye is almost equal to the price of pearls.<sup>34</sup> Tyrian purple, in

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<sup>30</sup> Calef, “Rhetorical Strategies in Tertullian’s *De cultu feminarum*”, p. 175.

<sup>31</sup> *Naturalis Historia* 37.57.

<sup>32</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 1.6.3.

<sup>33</sup> *Naturalis Historia* 37.77.

<sup>34</sup> *Naturalis Historia* 9.60. Ovid also laments the cost of purple claiming that there are cheaper dyes available: “what madness to carry whole incomes on one’s body.” (*Ars amatoria* 3.129) as cited by Calef, “Rhetorical Strategies in *De cultu feminarum*”, p. 61.

particular, was considered the height of luxury and is mentioned by Tertullian in *De cultu feminarum*.<sup>35</sup>

Purple was an important status symbol and thus coveted by those living in the status-conscious Roman society. Reinhold, in his article “On Status Symbols in the Ancient World” identifies two reasons why purple became a status symbol in antiquity: “...the great expense of producing this unique animal dye from the mollusc murex, and the fact that it was the only colourfast dye known in antiquity”.<sup>36</sup> There is information in the classical literature about the process involved in dyeing wool with Tyrian purple. Pliny claims to dye wool with Tyrian purple involved a double dyeing process at extravagant expense.<sup>37</sup>

Tertullian’s main criticism of purple-dyed items is that it involves a violation of nature. The appeal to nature was a popular topic in a number of rhetorical handbooks and was employed by Tertullian in order to persuade.<sup>38</sup> Tertullian makes an explicit appeal to nature: “...for what legitimate honour can garments derive from adulteration with illegitimate colours? That which he himself has not produced is not pleasing to God, unless he was unable to order sheep to be born with purple and sky-blue fleeces!<sup>39</sup> If he was able, then plainly he was unwilling: what God willed not, of course ought not to be fashioned. Those things, then, are not the best by nature which are not from God, the Author of nature”.<sup>40</sup>

Tertullian was not the first author to use an argument from nature to support his case. In fact, it was frequently used in discussions on luxury in the classical literature. Seneca, for example, claimed: “Virtue is according to nature; vice is opposed to it and hostile.”<sup>41</sup> Pliny addresses the issue of purple-dye using the the argument from nature and suggests that it is unnatural to use the products of the sea to dye clothes. Pliny, after making an explicit reference to purple asks: “What has the sea to do with our clothes? What is there in common

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<sup>35</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 1.8.1.

<sup>36</sup> M. Reinhold, “On Status Symbols in the Ancient World” *The Classical Journal* , Vol. 64, No. 7 (April, 1969), p. 301.

<sup>37</sup> *Naturalis Historia* 9.60-63 as cited by Calef, “Rhetorical Strategies in *De cultu feminarum*”, p. 78.

<sup>38</sup> Cicero, *De Inventione* 2.53 and Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1.13.

<sup>39</sup> Tertullian repeats this reference to God producing purple and scarlet sheep in *De cultu feminarum* 2.10. Pliny refers to sheep who had their fleeces dyed: “I myself have seen the fleece upon the living animal dyed purple, scarlet, and violet,—a pound and a half of dye being used for each,—just as though they had been produced by Nature in this form, to meet the demands of luxury.” (*Naturalis Historia* 8.74) as cited by Calef, “Rhetorical Strategies in *De cultu feminarum*”, p. 79.

<sup>40</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 1.8.2.

<sup>41</sup> *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* 50.8 as cited by Calef, “Rhetorical Strategies in *De cultu feminarum*”, p. 42.

between waves and billows and a sheep's fleece? This one element ought not to receive us, according to ordinary notions, except in a state of nakedness".<sup>42</sup> In other words, it is unnatural to mix the product of the mollusc murex with the wool from sheep to produce purple clothing. Nature has separated the elements of the sea and elements from animals and therefore to dye wool is a violation of nature because it involves the mixing of the two elements.<sup>43</sup> This is based on the underlying assumption that the goods of nature are absolute and perfect in themselves: "The works of Nature are brought into existence complete and perfect in every respect."<sup>44</sup>

Tertullian, like Pliny, regards the dying of garments as an "adulteration" thus implying that elements of nature are best in their natural forms. Unlike Pliny however he locates the argument from nature within a theological framework. By identifying God as the author of nature, Tertullian's appropriation of the appeal to nature takes on a distinctively Christian tone. As the author of nature God has decreed what is acceptable in the created order. Thus, since purple-dyed clothes are not part of God's original creation, Tertullian concludes that Christians should not desire them in order to flaunt luxury. On the contrary, Christians are to preserve the natural order.

In the final chapter of book one, Tertullian elaborates on one aspect of the appeal to nature, the idea that God's distribution of things must regulate the desires of humans. He suggests that people desire those things which come from foreign lands because the rarity of these things gives them more value. Tertullian claims: "For, as some particular things distributed by God over certain individual lands, and some one particular tract of sea, are mutually foreign one to the other, they are reciprocally either neglected or desired: [desired] among foreigners, as being rarities; neglected [rightly], if anywhere, among their own compatriots, because in them there is no such fervid longing for glory which, among its own home-folk, is frigid".<sup>45</sup> Tertullian argues that Christians' desire for things should be regulated by God's fair distribution. In other words, they should be content with those things which are naturally produced, according to God's pronouncement, in their own countries. A similar idea was also prevalent among the Classical authors who claimed that nature supplies everything that humans need. The moderation which nature imposes should limit one's desire for items

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<sup>42</sup> *Naturalis Historia* 9.53 as cited by Calef, "Rhetorical Strategies in *De cultu feminarum*", p. 80.

<sup>43</sup> *Naturalis Historia* 33.64.

<sup>44</sup> *Naturalis Historia* 22.56 as cited by Calef, "Rhetorical Strategies in *De cultu feminarum*", p. 80.

<sup>45</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 1.9.1.

which are not native to one's own country. However, since humans are enslaved by luxury they no longer acknowledge the limits set by nature. Seneca discusses this idea: "Nature provides for whatever it demands. Luxury deserts Nature, and every day she excites herself; in every age she grows, and by her talent she promotes the vices. At first she began to lust for things superfluous to Nature, from there things contrary to Nature; finally, she sacrificed the soul to the body and commanded the soul to serve the body's lusts".<sup>46</sup> In the passage from *De cultu feminarum* Tertullian appropriates the ideas found in authors like Seneca but adapts them to give them a theological element. Rather than nature distributing to humans those things which are needed, Tertullian posits God as the fair supplier of the necessities of life.

In summary, various items of clothing and jewellery were highly prized and sought after in the ancient world because they were a marker of status and wealth of the person adorned with them. However, Tertullian challenges the basic assumption that items such as gold, precious stones and purple dye are of high importance through his examination of their origin and utility. The effect of his assessment is to undermine any rational basis for the high reputation of these items and thus, expose the inflated value falsely assigned to them. In doing so, Tertullian attempts to discourage his audience from being drawn into the status-conscious pursuit of luxurious items.

This relates to the main purpose of *De cultu feminarum*, to encourage Christians to dress in a way which reflects their identity as Christians and thus distinguish them from pagan women. Whereas pagan women in their pursuit of status wish to adorn themselves in gold, precious stones and purple garments, Tertullian, through the various rhetorical strategies discussed, encourages Christian women to abandon this pursuit of luxury in favour of more humble attire.

### **Humility (*humilitas*).**

Tertullian does not offer an extensive discussion on the virtue of humility but one of the central aims of *De cultu feminarum* is to persuade his audience to cultivate humility instead of pursuing glory through the items of *cultus*.<sup>47</sup> Tertullian implies in several places that

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<sup>46</sup> *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* 90.19 as cited by Calef, "Rhetorical Strategies in *De cultu feminarum*", p. 41.

<sup>47</sup> Although Christians are not to pursue worldly glory they can glory in the flesh for Christ's sake through martyrdom. Tertullian writes: "Plainly, a Christian will glory even in the flesh; but it will be when it has endured



humility is a virtue central to the Christian life and the means by which a Christian woman ought to be distinguished from a pagan woman. In chapter four, for example, Tertullian claims that a “handmaid of God” is assessed on different principles from pagan women and he states that humility is one of those principles which a Christian ought to possess. Consequently, the Christian woman ought to reject the things which pagan women use to flaunt wealth and status and thereby win worldly glory. Rather, by adopting humble attire Christian women are set apart from pagan women.

This argument is set out most fully in *De cultu feminarum* 2.11. Tertullian argues that Christian women do not have the same reasons for appearing in public as do their pagan neighbours and thus have no need for adorning themselves with luxurious clothes. He writes: “What causes have you for appearing in public in excessive grandeur removed as you are from the occasions which call for such exhibitions?”<sup>48</sup> Tertullian then goes on to say that Christians do not go to temples or public shows, nor do they observe the pagan holy days and therefore they have no need to dress in luxurious clothes and jewellery.<sup>49</sup> Tertullian explains: “Now it is for the sake of all these public gatherings, and of much seeing and being seen, that all pomps of dress are exhibited before the public eye; either for the purpose of transacting the trade of voluptuousness, or else of inflating glory”.<sup>50</sup> However, if Christian women do have a need to go out in public, their dress should distinguish them from the pagans. Tertullian claims that by adopting humble attire, Christians can edify their pagan neighbours. Finally, Tertullian poses a potential objection which could be put forward by his audience: “It is urged by some, let not the name [of God] be blasphemed in us if we make any derogatory change from our old style and dress...A grand blasphemy is that by which it is said, ‘Ever since she became a Christian, she walks in poorer garb!’...”<sup>51</sup> Perhaps Tertullian had heard one such excuse given by members of his community as to why they should not give up their luxurious items of *cultus*. Tertullian offers them some guidance: as Christians they should base their behaviour on God’s principles and not those of pagans.

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laceration for Christ’s sake, in order that the spirit may be crowned in it, not in order that it may draw the eyes and sighs of youths after it.” (*De cultu feminarum* 2.3.3).

<sup>48</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.11.1.

<sup>49</sup> These things are prescriptive. In other words, these are things that Christians ought not to be doing. Tertullian addressed these topics in *De spectaculis* and *De idolatria* and it is likely that some Christians were in fact doing these things, since Tertullian had to write treatises telling them not to.

<sup>50</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.11.1.

<sup>51</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.11.3.

In summary, Tertullian draws a contrast between the pagan woman and the ideal Christian woman by using a glory-humility antithesis. Whereas the pagan woman chases after luxurious items such as gold jewellery and purple clothes in order to flaunt her wealth and status and thus bring glory to herself, the Christian woman ought to cultivate the virtue of humility and thus adopt humble attire. However, it would seem that some women within Tertullian's audience were not doing this and hence the need for a discourse on the subject. By setting out the contrast between pagan and Christian in terms of glory (luxurious dress) and humility (humble dress), Tertullian specifies what the ideal Christian woman looks like, and thus demands a choice of attire which is consistent with their Christian identity.

### **Modesty (*pudicitia*) versus cultivation of beauty.**

Tertullian's main focus in book two is the critique of women's cultivation of beauty through the use of various cosmetics with regard to skincare and hairstyling, what Tertullian calls *ornatus*.<sup>52</sup> Once again Tertullian attempts to persuade the Christian women whom he is addressing to be noticeably different to the pagan neighbours through their rejection of the pursuit of beauty and the cultivation and display of *pudicitia*.

### **Beauty and lust.**

Tertullian states that one of the motives behind cultivating beauty is to elicit lust: "How many a one, in short, is there who does not earnestly desire even to look pleasing<sup>53</sup> to strangers? Who does not on that very account take care to have herself painted out, and denies that she has [ever] been an object of [carnal] appetite?"<sup>54</sup> In *De cultu feminarum* 1, Tertullian also implied that there was a relationship between *ornatus* and attracting the eye when he associates care of the hair and skin with bodily prostitution, a theme which he repeats in chapter twelve.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 1.4.2.

<sup>53</sup> The reference to a willingness to "please even strangers..." implies a sexual nature to this conduct. The word used for "to please" (*placere*) is regularly employed by Latin writers for the agreeable behaviour of spouses and lovers towards one another. See Calef, "Rhetorical Strategies in Tertullian's *De cultu feminarum*", p. 210 n.47

<sup>54</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.1.3.

<sup>55</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 1.4.2. In Roman literature a woman who adorned herself was often depicted as a prostitute. Tertullian forges a link between beauty and prostitution, which reflects a trend in pagan literature. However, Tertullian draws on Scripture for evidence, citing two Biblical *exempla*. Firstly the vision of Babylon in Revelation 7.4 and secondly, the example of Judah mistaking the adorned Tamar for a prostitute in Genesis 38.12 (*De cultu feminarum* 2.12.3). By citing these Biblical *exempla* Tertullian once again appropriates a familiar pagan topic, the association between beauty and prostitution, but gives it a Christian foundation.

The link between the pursuit of beauty and the intention to incite lust was a popular topic in the classical literature. Olson argues that an overly made-up face was assumed by some to be self-advertisement for sexual availability.<sup>56</sup> Seneca the Elder, for example, adopting a critical tone addresses a woman: “Very well, go out with your face made up to look utterly seductive”.<sup>57</sup> Particular emphasis was put on the lustful male gaze. The adorned woman who purposely beautified herself to gain male attention was said to welcome the lustful gaze. The desiring gaze was tactile and often compared to sexual penetration.<sup>58</sup> Tertullian likewise makes an explicit reference to the relationship between “seeing” and “lust” in *De exhortatione castitatis*: “The mere sight of a beautiful body richly adorned is able to arouse passion”.<sup>59</sup>

Based on this association between beauty and lust, Tertullian claims that women ought to be more thoughtful about the effects of their beauty on their Christian brethren. He warns them that beauty can be a stumbling block: “But why are we a [source of] danger to our neighbour? Why do we import concupiscence into our neighbour? which concupiscence, if God, in amplifying the law, does not dissociate in [the way of] penalty from the actual commission of fornication...”<sup>60</sup> In other words, one should avoid stimulating lust in another because for them to feel lust is equal to committing fornication. Here, Tertullian seems to be alluding to Matthew 5.27-28.<sup>61</sup> Tertullian states this argument explicitly and adds that the person inciting the lust also incurs the guilt: “For that other, as soon as he has felt concupiscence after your beauty, and has mentally already committed [the deed] which his concupiscence pointed to, perishes; and you have been made the sword which destroys him: so that, albeit you be free from the [actual] crime, you are not free from the odium [attaching to it]...”<sup>62</sup> In other words, even though these women are not guilty of lust or the act of adultery, they still share culpability for inducing lust in another. A similar idea was also present in the classical Literature. Seneca, for example, argued that a woman was guilty of committing adultery even if she just solicited the attention of men. No intercourse actually had to take place for the accusation to be levelled: “...a woman is unchaste if she wants sex, even if she has not had

<sup>56</sup> Olson, *Dress and the Roman Woman*, p. 94.

<sup>57</sup> *Controversiae* 2.7 as cited by Calef, “Rhetorical Strategies in *De cultu feminarum*”, p. 69.

<sup>58</sup> Olson, *Dress and the Roman Woman*, p. 94.

<sup>59</sup> *De exhortatione castitatis* 9.1 See also *De virginibus velandis* 14.5 and *De corona militis* 14.2.

<sup>60</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.2.4.

<sup>61</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’. But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (NRSV).

<sup>62</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.2.4.

it”.<sup>63</sup> Having appealed to the audience’s sense of shame, Tertullian goes on to appeal to their sympathy. Drawing on the Great Commandment to “Love your neighbour as yourself”, Tertullian asks his audience to consider the susceptibility of men to the lusts of the flesh. The appeal to the audience’s sympathy was a common tactic in ancient rhetoric and Aristotle lists pity as one of those emotions an orator should evoke in his audience to persuade them to take a particular course of action.<sup>64</sup> Thus, in appealing to the emotions of shame and pity Tertullian tries to dissuade his audience from being an object of lust through beautification.

Tertullian went beyond the standards set out in the classical literature by claiming that natural beauty is equally dangerous for arousing lust in men.<sup>65</sup> Thus, if a Christian woman is naturally beautiful she should try to conceal it rather than enhance her good looks. Tertullian writes: “Let a holy woman, if naturally beautiful, give none so great occasion [for carnal appetite]. Certainly, if even she be so, she ought not to set off her beauty, but even to obscure it”.<sup>66</sup> Although Tertullian encouraged naturally attractive women to conceal their beauty he nevertheless insisted that basic cleanliness was still expected of them. In other words he is not encouraging them to become “wild in appearance” and “slovenly”. This reflects a distinction found in the classical literature on adornment. The opposite of *culta* (adorned, dressed) is not *immunda* (unkempt, squalid), but *inculta* (unadorned).<sup>67</sup> In other words, those authors who wrote against the use of cosmetics were not advocating uncleanliness or neglect of the body.<sup>68</sup> Seneca the Elder, for example, claimed that a married woman should not go out unkempt: “A married woman who wants to be safe from the lust of a seducer must go out dressed up only so far as to avoid unkemptness”.<sup>69</sup> Tertullian, therefore, emulated the Classical moralists in his recommendation to Christian women regarding basic care. However, he reminds them that they must not overstep the line, marked out by God and thus, adapts the commonplace advice found in the classical literature, to his Christian audience.

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<sup>63</sup> *Controversiae* 6.8 as cited by Calef, “Rhetorical Strategies in *De cultu feminarum*”, p. 70, no. 101.

<sup>64</sup> *Rhetoric* 2. 8.

<sup>65</sup> Tertullian’s rejection of natural beauty sets him apart from many Classical moralists. In the Classical Literature, natural beauty was often considered to be a virtue. Propertius, for example, claimed that beauty was best when it was as nature intended it to be: “All beauty is best as nature made it.” (*Elegies* 2.18B.25) To illustrate the point Propertius cites examples in nature such as flowers, stones and singing birds. (*Elegies* 1.2.9).

<sup>66</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.3.3.

<sup>67</sup> Olson, *Dress and the Roman Woman*, p. 93.

<sup>68</sup> Olson suggests that these were marks of slavery or the lower classes. See Olson, *Dress and the Roman Woman*, p. 7 and p. 93.

<sup>69</sup> *Controversiae* 2.7.3 as cited by Calef, “Rhetorical Strategies in *De cultu feminarum*”, p. 68-9.

In summary, the association of beauty with danger had a long tradition in classical literature. Tertullian takes the ideas found in classical literature, themes that were probably familiar to his audience, and interprets them in light of a theological understanding, drawing on scripture to support his arguments. In so doing, Tertullian attempts to persuade his audience to shun the cultivation of beauty. Tertullian rejects not only artificial beauty but also natural beauty, which goes beyond the pagan moral traditions. Tertullian's appropriation thus involves an implicit moral one-upmanship on the standards of pagan moralists and implies not only a difference between Christian and pagans but the superiority of the former as well.

### Ornatus: cosmetics and hair care.

Tertullian criticizes two specific aspects of *ornatus* by which women beautify themselves and attract the eye; the use of skin cosmetics and various forms of hair-care. I will examine each of these in turn noting in particular the rhetorical techniques used by Tertullian to dissuade his audience from cultivating beauty and thus setting them apart from pagan women.

### Cosmetics.

Tertullian claims that women who rub their skin with medicaments, stain their cheeks with rouge and make their eyes prominent with mascara and eyeliner, sin (*delinquo*) against God.<sup>70</sup> In the classical literature there was a widespread discussion and condemnation of the use of these cosmetics by women.<sup>71</sup> Pliny the Elder, for example, states in regard to eyelashes that: "Daily are they dyed with cosmetic by women: such is their desire for beauty that they colour even their eyes."<sup>72</sup> Propertius criticizes the use of cosmetics and refers to the application of cosmetics to a woman's face as "staining". This implied a violation of the natural order.<sup>73</sup> In particular, he criticizes the foreign origin of the products used: "Belgian rouge is shameful on a Roman face".<sup>74</sup> Juvenal also touches on this topic and suggests that the application of foreign products to the surface of a woman's body is a violation of Roman cultural identity: "She does not think herself beautiful unless she is turned from a Tuscan into

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<sup>70</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.5.2.

<sup>71</sup> Olson gives an extensive account of the material found in the classical literature, including the ingredients used. See Olson, *Dress and the Roman Woman*, p. 60ff.

<sup>72</sup> *Naturalis Historia* 11.154 as cited by Olson, *Dress and the Roman Woman*, p. 62.

<sup>73</sup> Calef, "Rhetorical Strategies in Tertullian's *De cultu feminarum*", p. 55.

<sup>74</sup> *Elegies* 2.18B.25 as cited by Calef, "Rhetorical Strategies in *De cultu feminarum*", p. 55.

a Greekling".<sup>75</sup> Calef argues that this implies that the body and/or face functioned as a site for the display of cultural identity.<sup>76</sup> Tertullian was equally disparaging of these cosmetics and he shared similar concerns to those expressed by the likes of Propertius and Juvenal. Just as the face served as a marker of Roman identity, Tertullian similarly implies that the faces of Christians function as a visible marker of their identity as Christians. Thus, just as a Roman woman violates her cultural identity by wearing rouge or eyeliner, so too, a Christian woman violates her Christian identity by beautifying herself with these products.

The theme of violation presupposes that there is a natural order. Tertullian argues that a violation takes place because the use of cosmetics involves changing God's original creation and thus implies that it is in need of improvement.<sup>77</sup> He scornfully comments: "To them, I suppose, the plastic skill of God is displeasing!"<sup>78</sup> Once again we see Tertullian utilizing the argument from nature in an attempt to dissuade his audience from using these cosmetics. The appeal to nature is set within a theological framework in which God is the author of nature and the devil, the distorter of nature. Tertullian explains: "Whatever is born is the work of God. Whatever, then, is plastered on, is the devil's work. To superinduce on a divine work Satan's ingenuities, how criminal is it!"<sup>79</sup> In other words, the divine order is assumed to be fixed at creation; hence, changes or alterations to the natural state are from the devil and are "sins against God". Thus, the simple, unadorned face is natural and how God created it to be. The face which has been plastered with make-up, on the other hand, is unnatural and the work of the Devil. In short, Tertullian urges his Christian audience not to modify God's original creation by adorning their face with cosmetics, because to do so is to side with the devil, God's adversary.

Another argument developed by Tertullian is that the use of cosmetics involves a form of deception. This is apparent when Tertullian urges his audience to recognize the hypocrisy of a Christian plastered in make-up: "How unworthy the Christian name, to wear a fictitious face, you, on whom simplicity in every form is enjoined! –to lie in your appearance..."<sup>80</sup> Tertullian's reference to a "fictitious face" implies that the woman with an adorned face was

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<sup>75</sup> *Satires* 6.185 as cited by Calef, "Rhetorical Strategies in *De cultu feminarum*", p. 55 n. 68.

<sup>76</sup> Calef, "Rhetorical Strategies in Tertullian's *De cultu feminarum*", p. 63.

<sup>77</sup> Tertullian uses several verbs (anoint, stain, and lengthen) to emphasize the change involved in such practices. Calef, "Rhetorical Strategies in Tertullian's *De cultu feminarum*", p. 222.

<sup>78</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.5.2.

<sup>79</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.5.3.

<sup>80</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.5.5.

pretending to be something she was not. The topic of deception was popular in the Classical Literature. Ovid, for example, argued that cosmetics were necessary to make an ugly woman beautiful and sexually alluring to her lover.<sup>81</sup> He writes: “Rare is the face that lacks blemishes...hide your blemishes, and so far as you can conceal any fault of body”.<sup>82</sup> In effect, there was a consensual deception on the part of lovers. She fakes beauty with the help of foul smelling creams whilst her lover ignores what is evidently a mask. The grotesque reality hiding beneath the mask of cosmetics is concealed from him.

In short, the idea that the use of cosmetics by women was dishonest was popular in the Classical Literature. Tertullian draws on this topic and adds a theological element by suggesting that is inappropriate for a Christian woman to “wear a fictitious face”, to deceive through her appearance. On the contrary, the Christian woman ought to have a simple, unadorned face. Thus, Tertullian employs the topic of deception found in the Classical Literature to persuade Christian women not to use cosmetics.

### Hair-care.

The second area of *ornatus* targeted by Tertullian was matters relating to care of the hair. In chapter six he deals with the dying of hair. He begins by stating that some women use saffron to dye their hair red or a reddish gold (*flammeus*) and associates it with “foreign” hair. He comments: “I see some women turn the colour of their hair with saffron. They are ashamed even of their own nation, ashamed that their procreation did not assign them to Germany and to Gaul...”<sup>83</sup> The association of dyed hair, particularly blonde or red hair, with “foreignness” was common in the classical literature.<sup>84</sup> Tertullian, likewise, associates dyed hair with foreignness and relates it to the argument from nature. By associating dyed hair with the “foreign” Tertullian implies that this practice is unsuitable for the Christian woman who should be faithful to the ethnic state which God gave her at birth. More important to

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<sup>81</sup> *Ars amatoria* 3.159. Ovid offers a complex view on the subject compared to other writers. In this passage Ovid speaks positively about the use of art to improve upon nature. Thus even though he is aware that the use of cosmetics involves deception, he nevertheless positively endorses it. In another work however, Ovid seems to offer a more negative assessment of women’s deception in using cosmetics. In *Remedia Amoris* (a book which advised men on how to get over a woman whom they loved) Ovid speaks of the woman made-up in terms of being constructed, falling apart without her cosmetic artifice. Thus, in order to get over a woman a man ought to see a woman without make-up, to see her as she really is. (*Remedia Amoris* 341-348) as cited by Calef, “Rhetorical Strategies in *De cultu feminarum*”, p. 60.

<sup>82</sup> *Ars amatoria* 3.261 as cited by Calef, “Rhetorical Strategies in *De cultu feminarum*”, p.60.

<sup>83</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.6.1.

<sup>84</sup> Olson, *Dress and the Roman Woman*, p. 73.

Tertullian than preserving the true ethnic state of his audience, is the desire for them to preserve their Christian identity, which is achieved through the refusal to dye one's hair.

A further argument used by Tertullian is the appeal to advantage, a common topic in deliberative speeches.<sup>85</sup> This can be measured on two levels, the physical and spiritual. Tertullian claimed that hair-dyes cause physical harm to women's hair: "The force of the cosmetics burns ruin into the hair; and the constant application of even any undrugged moisture, lays up a store of harm for the head..."<sup>86</sup> However, Tertullian's concern about the damage caused by hair-dyes goes beyond the mere physical. He also implies that there are spiritual dangers. Saffron, Tertullian explains, is usually used for sacrifices to honour unclean spirits: "Shall a Christian woman heap saffron on her head, as upon an altar? For, whatever is wont to be burned to the honour of the unclean spirit...may seem to be a sacrifice".<sup>87</sup> By associating saffron with idolatrous sacrifices Tertullian draws attention to the incompatibility between hair-dye and the living out of one's Christian identity.

In chapter seven Tertullian moves on to discuss various elaborate hairstyles. He notes that some women force their hair into curls, others wear it loose, and others will even go so far as to wear a wig. The variety of these hairstyles and their widespread popularity is attested to in the classical literature.<sup>88</sup> Tertullian criticizes these elaborate hairstyles and uses the argument from advantage to dissuade his audience from adopting them. Tertullian utilizes the argument of advantage in two ways. Firstly, he uses it in matters relating to the present circumstance of his audience. Tertullian argues that all the effort women put into their hair is completely pointless because they should be veiled: "In vain do you labour to seem adorned: in vain do you call in the aid of all the most skilful manufacturers of false hair. God bids you to be veiled. I believe he does so for fear the heads of some should be seen!"<sup>89</sup> In other words, if a woman wears a veil, like she is supposed to, no one will see her hair and therefore, elaborate hair-styles will be pointless. Tertullian deals with the issue of women veiling in more detail, in *De virginibus velandis* as I will discuss in chapter six. The second way in which Tertullian uses the argument from advantage is in matters pertaining to the future destiny of Christians. He asks: "What service, again, does all the labour spent in arranging hair render to

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<sup>85</sup> Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, p. 115.

<sup>86</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.6.2.

<sup>87</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.6.2.

<sup>88</sup> Olson notes that there is little attention given to hairstyles in the technical writings on hair-care. See Olson, *Dress and the Roman Woman*, p. 73.

<sup>89</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.7.2.



salvation?”<sup>90</sup> Tertullian concludes that at the resurrection women will not rise with their fancy and elaborate hairstyles and, therefore, they serve no real purpose in the present world. Christian women, whose primary concern is salvation, should not be preoccupied with hairstyling.

In summary, book two of *De cultu feminarum* focuses on matters relating to *ornatus* and, in particular, cosmetics and hairstyling. A woman’s concern with *ornatus* is in order to beautify herself, a motive which Tertullian perceives as inappropriate for Christian women. Tertullian, following a theme in the classical literature, associates a woman’s beautification with the provocation of lust. Thus, in order to dissuade Christian women from beautifying themselves with various cosmetics and hairstyling, Tertullian uses a number of rhetorical techniques which demonstrate why the cultivation of beauty is an unsuitable objective for Christian women. Having discussed those aspects *ornatus* which Tertullian opposes, I now turn to Tertullian’s vision of the ideal Christian woman, one who exhibits *pudicitia*.

### **Pudicitia.**

Although *pudicitia* was not the primary theme of *De cultu feminarum* it is the fundamental concern which motivates many of the arguments in the treatise, particularly in book two.<sup>91</sup> As Tertullian explains: “But on the present occasion we are to speak not about modesty, for the joining and exacting of which the divine precepts which press upon us on every side are sufficient; but about matters which pertain to it, that is, the manner in which it behoves you to walk”.<sup>92</sup> In other words, Tertullian’s aim is to encourage Christian women to embrace an appearance which is consistent with the true and perfect *pudicitia*.

Tertullian was not the first to emphasize the importance of *pudicitia* for it was considered to be a necessary virtue for the ideal woman in the ancient world. Within the classical literature there was a common theme that a truly beautiful woman also needed to possess *pudicitia*.<sup>93</sup> The classical literature stressed the idea that physical beauty alone was not enough for a

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<sup>90</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.7.1.

<sup>91</sup> The word *pudicitia* can be variously translated: “modesty,” “chastity,” or “purity”. However, these translations do not give an entirely satisfactory rendering of the meaning intended by Tertullian in *De cultu feminarum*. In his use of *pudicitia* Tertullian suggests something more than mere sexual purity of the body. For Tertullian, *pudicitia* is both internal and external purity, it is a way of being which is manifested in exterior things, including the way one dresses and presents oneself.

<sup>92</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.1.2.

<sup>93</sup> Olson, *Dress and the Roman Woman*, p. 91.

woman; *pudicitia* was also required if an otherwise beautiful woman was to be considered truly attractive. Tertullian, like the Classical moralists, suggests that the ideal woman, indeed the ideal Christian, should possess the virtue of *pudicitia*. However, Tertullian's concept of *pudicitia* differs from that which is found in the classical literature in two fundamental ways. Firstly, Tertullian establishes a link between Christian *pudicitia* and salvation and secondly, he emphasizes the necessity of external manifestations of *pudicitia*.

### **Pudicitia and salvation**

Tertullian establishes the link between modesty and salvation in the opening chapter of book two.<sup>94</sup> He begins by claiming that the purpose of the treatise is to secure for his audience the way to salvation which is obtained through *pudicitia*. He writes: "Salvation-and not the salvation of women only, but likewise of men-consists in the exhibition principally of modesty (*pudicitia*)."<sup>95</sup> As Calef has suggested this passage establishes in the minds of his audience an association between *pudicitia* as virtuous means and salvation, as the good end to which Christians aspire.<sup>96</sup> The link between *pudicitia* and salvation should be understood in the context of Tertullian's argument from advantage.<sup>97</sup> Tertullian highlights salvation as the good and advantageous end to which Christians should aim and he also provides the means of attaining that end, namely the external manifestation of *pudicitia*.<sup>98</sup>

The topic of salvation, and its association with *pudicitia*, undergirds many of the themes of *De cultu feminarum 2*, and there are two examples in particular which highlight how the use of the argument from advantage serves Tertullian's rhetorical objectives. Firstly, Tertullian's discussion on the dangers of beauty, discussed above, is underpinned with the argument that female beauty imperils the salvation of men as well as their own. As I noted above Tertullian pleaded with his audience not to be a source of danger to their neighbour (by provoking lust)

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<sup>94</sup> The link between *pudicitia* and salvation is also evident in *De pudicitia* 1.1: "*Pudicitia* is the flower of virtue. It does honour to the body and is an ornament of both sexes...it is the foundation of sanctity."

<sup>95</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.1.1. It is significant that Tertullian places an emphasis on the importance of the exhibition of modesty. This presupposes a point that Tertullian will later express more explicitly, that modesty must be seen in outward appearance. Indeed, this is the whole focus of *De cultu feminarum 2*.

<sup>96</sup> Calef, "Rhetorical Strategies in Tertullian's *De cultu feminarum*", p. 198.

<sup>97</sup> Calef, "Rhetorical Strategies in Tertullian's *De cultu feminarum*", p. 198.

<sup>98</sup> In rhetorical discourse the argument from advantage not only determined the good end to which a person was to aim, but also the means to those ends. Thus, once again Tertullian's arguments demonstrate the influence of common rhetorical techniques. See for example: Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1.6 and Cicero, *De partitione oratoria* 83-89.

and he claimed that a lustful gaze was tantamount to committing the act of fornication.<sup>99</sup> For Tertullian there is a clear choice to set out before his audience: *pudicitia* leads to salvation, beauty leads to perdition. I noted earlier when discussing beauty and danger that Tertullian appeals to *pathos*. He tries to evoke shame and pity in his audience to persuade them to change their behaviour. By claiming that salvation is at stake, Tertullian not only underlines the importance of the subject, but also appeals the audience's self-interest, and thus, endeavours to win a sympathetic reception from the audience.

A second example, also discussed above, pertains to hairstyling. Tertullian points out that the time squandered on creating fancy hairstyles is pointless because it has no positive bearing on one's salvation. Tertullian asks: "What service does all the labour spent in arranging the hair render to salvation?"<sup>100</sup> Tertullian urges his audience to abandon their preoccupation with those beauty practices which are popular among the pagans. For the Christian, whose sole concern is their salvation, such concerns are superfluous. It is worth highlighting briefly that Tertullian believed that the end of the world and Christ's second coming were imminent: "We have been predestined by God, before the beginning of the world, to arise in the extreme end of time".<sup>101</sup> Undoubtedly, this had some bearing on the link between *pudicitia* and salvation. If Christ could return at any moment, the Christian should be prepared and one's mind should be focused solely on doing what was necessary to win one's salvation.

In summary, Tertullian establishes in the mind of his audience an association between *pudicitia* and salvation: by adopting *pudicitia* the Christian woman will obtain salvation. By refusing to do so, and instead choosing to pursue beauty, the Christian jeopardizes their own salvation as well as that of their neighbour. Furthermore, if salvation is the end for which Christians hope, anything which does not tend to this end, and indeed anything which puts it at risk, should be renounced. In short, Tertullian sets before his audience a choice: beauty leading to perdition or *pudicitia* leading to salvation. By claiming that salvation is at stake Tertullian underlines the importance of *pudicitia*, and so, wins a favourable reception from the audience.

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<sup>99</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.2.4.

<sup>100</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.7.1.

<sup>101</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.9.8.

## Externals.

Tertullian's discussion on *pudicitia* also differs from most<sup>102</sup> of the pagan sources on the subject in that he argues that the virtue of *pudicitia* must be externally manifest and visible for others to see: "It is not enough for Christian *pudicitia* merely to be so, but to seem so, too. For so great ought its plenitude be, that it may flow out from the mind to the garb, and burst out from the conscience to the outward appearance".<sup>103</sup> This passage captures the thrust of the entire treatise: Christian *pudicitia* must also include a concern for the external manifestation of *pudicitia*, specifically in a person's appearance.

The theme of "being seen" to be modest is interesting. I noted earlier how Tertullian established a link between the pursuit of beauty and the lustful gaze, and women's desire to be seen. Tertullian suggests that rather than being seen as an object of desire, like the pagans, Christian women ought to be noticed for their *pudicitia*. The importance which Tertullian places on "being seen" to be modest is apparent in the last chapter of book two.

Tertullian states that some women will argue that it is not necessary to be approved by others for God knows what is in their heart. In other words, it does not matter what one's outward appearance is like because God knows whether or not a person possesses *pudicitia* interiorly. However, Tertullian refutes these excuses and advises them: "Let your probity appear before men...Let your works shine...The things which make us luminaries of the world are these-our good works".<sup>104</sup> Christian women have a duty to witness to others through their appearance by being different to pagan women. In fact, not to do so could have a detrimental effect and they could scandalize the Christian faith: "But how much more provocative of blasphemy is it that you, who are called modesty's priestesses, should appear in public decked and painted out after the manner of the immodest".<sup>105</sup> Tertullian's reference to Christians being modesty's priestesses alludes to a point Tertullian made at the start of book two. Tertullian suggests that through baptism a Christian becomes "the temple of God" in which the Holy Spirit dwells.<sup>106</sup> The dignity of being the temple of God requires that *pudicitia* be the sacristan and priestess of

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<sup>102</sup> There is some evidence in the classical literature that the external manifestation of *pudicitia* was important. Seneca the Elder, for example, claimed: "You think you will prove your chastity quite sufficiently if you merely say no to sex-a refusal that even the most shameless woman purposefully feigns in the hope of a better price?" (*Controversiae* 2.7.5) as cited by Calef, "Rhetorical Strategies in *De cultu feminarum*", p. 70, no.101.

<sup>103</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.13.3.

<sup>104</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.13.1.

<sup>105</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.12.1.

<sup>106</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.1.1.

that temple (the Christian's body). In other words, through their baptism Christians are called to live in such a way that reflects their dignity as "temples of God" and thus sets them apart from those who are not baptised.

Tertullian claims that it is precisely this attention to externals which distinguishes the perfect *pudicitia* of Christians from the imperfect *pudicitia* of the pagans. Tertullian argues that the so-called *pudicitia* of the pagans is imperfect and undisciplined because although *pudicitia* is present in them up to a certain point, in matters relating to *ornatus* there is no sign of *pudicitia*. Tertullian explains: "For most women...have the hardihood so to walk as if modesty consisted only in the bare integrity of the flesh, and in turning away from actual fornication; and there were no need for anything extrinsic to boot, in the matter of the arrangement of dress and ornament."<sup>107</sup> Tertullian exhorts his audience to distinguish themselves from pagans by rejecting this behaviour. In contrast to the pagans, Christians are called to manifest *pudicitia* both internally and externally, and specifically in their dress.

Tertullian's insistence on the external manifestation of *pudicitia* is interesting. One might expect Tertullian to say "concern with external appearances is all a waste of time". Instead, as we have noted, one's appearance does matter to Tertullian, it just has to be an appearance that is fitting for a Christian who has the dignity of being the "temple of God". This was a topic discussed by Dennis Groh, in his article 'Tertullian's Polemic Against Social Co-option'. Groh claims that for Tertullian inner truth or reality must find its proper expression in outward lifestyle. Put simply, inner reality must have an exact external or visible form. Groh discusses this idea specifically in relation to Tertullian's *De pallio* and claims: "We have taken a bold step towards solving one of the difficult problems of Tertullian's scholarship: the relation of *De pallio* to the rest of Tertullian's writings. 'A philosopher is heard as long as he is seen' (*De pallio* 6.1). The *De pallio* stands as a particular instance of Tertullian's general concern to bring appearance and inner reality into correlation".<sup>108</sup> Groh suggests that for Tertullian the pallium represented a divine dress which expressed values opposed to those of Roman society which craved public dignity and glory, symbolised by the toga. To wear the pallium was to make a statement of renunciation of the pursuit of public office and social status. In effect, the pallium represented a withdrawal from the populace.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.1.2.

<sup>108</sup> Groh, "Tertullian's Polemic Against Social Co-option", p. 13.

<sup>109</sup> Groh, "Tertullian's Polemic Against Social Co-option", p. 14.

Groh's discussion illuminates Tertullian's emphasis on the importance of the external manifestation of *pudicitia* in *De cultu feminarum*. Just as the rejection of the toga marked the renunciation of public office so too, the rejection of the cultivation of beauty marked the rejection of another element of Roman culture. The Christian is called to display their inner *pudicitia* in their outer body which means adopting a simple, natural and uncultivated appearance. Thus, external *pudicitia* was important to Tertullian because it was an indicator of the Christian life which had been adopted in baptism. As Groh put it: "What we consider exterior indicators of 'life-style' are not additions to Christian faith, but integral and necessary expressions of faith."<sup>110</sup>

The key to understanding Tertullian's emphasis on the external manifestation of *pudicitia* lies in his anthropology. I will discuss Tertullian's anthropology in detail in chapter six but at this stage it is sufficient to highlight in brief the correlation between body and soul. Tertullian believed that body and soul could have a mutual effect on one another. Thus, as I will demonstrate later, fasting (an activity of the body) could strengthen the soul. Likewise, the soul could strengthen the body to help it overcome "fleshy" temptations. Tertullian's understanding of the mutually influential relationship of body and soul may offer another insight into the importance of the external manifestation of *pudicitia*. Outward appearances matter because, according to Tertullian, there is a correlation between internal and external states in both pagans and Christians. Pagans desire to be objects of desire and this is evident in the way they cultivate beauty. Christian women on the other hand should adopt an uncultivated appearance because this reflects the perfect *pudicitia* which they do, or at least should, possess. Thus immodesty (*impudicitia*), in a Christian's outward appearance, is a sign that one is unwilling to live out, in an authentic way, the demands of their Christian faith.

In summary, Tertullian, like a number of the Classical moralists, suggests that *pudicitia* is an ideal virtue for a woman to possess. By linking *pudicitia* to salvation Tertullian gives Christians an incentive to pursue *pudicitia*. Whilst Tertullian did not need to convince Christians of the necessity of the virtue of *pudicitia*, he did need to remind them that perfect *pudicitia* ought to affect the external appearance of a person. Thus a Christian ought to shun the pursuit of beauty in favour of a plain and uncultivated appearance. In setting out the

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<sup>110</sup> Groh, "Tertullian's Polemic Against Social Co-optation", p. 13.

differences between pagan and Christian women, Tertullian opens up a way for Christian women to distinguish themselves from their pagan neighbours, by ensuring that their *pudicitia* is manifested in external appearance. In short, what one wears on one's body reveals what one values.

### **The “Devil’s gateway” passage in context.**

Having examined the content of *De cultu feminarum* we may finally consider what rhetorical purpose the “Devil’s gateway” passage serves in the wider context of the treatise. The “Devil’s gateway” passage appears in the *exordium* of *De cultu feminarum*. The rhetorical handbooks stated that the *exordium* had two purposes. Firstly, it informed the audience about the subject of a speech. In the opening chapter, Tertullian informs his audience that the subject of *De cultu feminarum* is women’s desire for attractive and ostentatious dress.<sup>111</sup> By judging women’s dress to be “too attractive” and “too ostentatious” Tertullian already hints at his intention to dissuade his audience from adopting attire of this kind.

The second purpose of the *exordium* was to dispose the audience to be attentive and receptive to what would be said in a speech. Quintilian, for example, said: “The sole purpose of the *exordium* is to prepare our audience in such a way that they will be disposed to lend a ready ear to the rest of our speech. The majority of authors agree that this is best effected in three ways, by making the audience well-disposed, attentive and ready to receive instruction”.<sup>112</sup> A number of rhetorical techniques could be used to achieve this and there are some obvious examples in the opening chapter of *De cultu feminarum*. For example, Tertullian addresses the audience as “best beloved sisters” and, in so doing, appeals to the *ethos* of the speaker by presenting himself as a fellow Christian. Tertullian establishes rapport with his audience by evoking a sense of Christian identity which they share with him, the speaker. He also makes use of the second person, “you”, so as to address them personally and thus convince them that the advice he is about to give is pertinent to their situation.

An effective way of disposing the audience to be attentive was through an appeal to *pathos*. The “Devil’s gateway” passage is an example of the appeal to *pathos*. Tertullian uses the “Devil’s gateway” passage to evoke shame in his audience so that they are predisposed to

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<sup>111</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 1.1.1.

<sup>112</sup> *Institutio oratoria* 4.1 See also Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 3.14.1415a7.

changing their behaviour. Drawing on the biblical account of the Fall Tertullian levels several charges against Eve.<sup>113</sup> However, he identifies the biblical Eve with the contemporary women in his audience and thus makes them feel like they share in Eve's guilt and shame.<sup>114</sup> The purpose of making his audience feel the guilt and shame of Eve is to persuade Christian women that they should wear clothes which are appropriate to their condition as Eve, clothes which reflect an attitude of penitence and mourning.<sup>115</sup> In other words, women should have a simple and humble appearance. This conclusion prepares his audience for the arguments which he will put forward later in the treatise.

Tertullian explicitly links the guilt and shame of Eve's sin and the need to wear humble clothes with a reference to Genesis. Having accused Eve, past and contemporary, of being the Devil's gateway and the destroyer of God's image, and having told them of the consequences (death for the human race and death for the Son of God), Tertullian scornfully asks: "And you still think of putting adornments over the skins of animals that cover you?" The animal skins, referred to by Tertullian, were the simple garments God gave to Adam and Eve to cover their shame after the Fall.<sup>116</sup> These animal skins are a model for the type of attire which the contemporary Eve ought to be wearing, attire which is appropriate to their post-Fall condition. The reference to putting adornments over the "skins of animals" is a reference to items of *cultus* and *ornatus* which Tertullian will address later in the treatise. It implies that there is a deceptive element to woman's adornment for what is worn on the outside of the body reflects the interior state of a woman. The interior condition should be one of mourning and penitence and this should be manifested externally through humble attire. As we have seen, these are themes which Tertullian will use later in the treatise with reference to specific items of *cultus* and *ornatus*. By using them in the *exordium*, and within the context of an appeal to *pathos*, Tertullian prepares his audience for arguments which he will later elaborate upon.

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<sup>113</sup> The charges he levels, against Eve, past and contemporary, are: "You are the Devil's gateway"; "You are the unsealer of the forbidden tree"; "You are the first deserter of the divine law"; "You are she who persuaded him who the devil was not valiant enough to attack", and; "You destroyed God's image, man".

<sup>114</sup> This is in accordance with rhetorical practices. See Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.1.1378a; 2.6.1384a-1385a; 3.14.1415B.

<sup>115</sup> "If there dwelt upon earth a faith as great as is the reward of faith which is expected in the heavens, no one of you at all, best beloved sisters, from the time that she had first 'known the Lord,' and learned [the truth] concerning her own [that is, woman's] condition, would have desired too gladsome [not to say too ostentatious] a style of dress; so as not rather to go about in humble garb, and rather to affect meanness of appearance, walking about as Eve mourning and repentant, in order that by every garb of penitence she might the more fully expiate that which she derives from Eve..." (*De cultu feminarum* 1.1.1).

<sup>116</sup> Genesis 3.21: "And the Lord God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them" (NRSV).



In summary, the ‘Devil’s gateway’ passage is a rhetorical device which serves to evoke shame and guilt in the audience by identifying the women in his audience with a sinful and penitent Eve. It follows that just as Eve wore garments which reflected her inner mourning and repentance, so too the contemporary Eve should wear attire which reflects the shame and guilt of Eve. Thus, when a woman thinks about wearing gold jewellery or purple garments, items which give glory to the woman, Tertullian has disposed her to think of herself in relation to the penitent Eve. In other words, when dressing the Christian woman should ask herself: what should a penitent Eve wear? In short, Tertullian uses the “Devil’s gateway” passage to convince his audience that the issue of humble attire is relevant to them, for they too are an ‘Eve’.

Tertullian also uses the *exemplum* of Eve as a symbol of the “dead” woman who desires the items of *cultus* and *ornatus* condemned by Tertullian in *De cultu feminarum*. He claims that although items such as gold, pearls, and dyed garments were unheard of at the beginning of time, if Eve had known about these luxurious items she would have coveted them. Tertullian writes: “Eve expelled from paradise, Eve already dead, would also have coveted these things, I imagine! No more, then, ought she now to crave, or be acquainted with them (if she desires to live again) what, when she was living, she had neither had nor known. Accordingly these things are all the baggage of woman in her condemned and dead state...”<sup>117</sup> For Tertullian, items of *cultus* and *ornatus* are items of fallen humanity and Eve symbolizes the woman who is consumed with the desire for these items, she represents the condemned woman. Therefore, by identifying Eve with the condemned woman Tertullian uses her as a model which women should not emulate. The intended effect is to encourage the Christian women in his audience to dress in a way that reflects their conversion to Christianity, and thus their return to the state of humanity before the Fall.

## **Conclusion.**

My aim in this chapter was to examine the content of *De cultu feminarum* and to establish Tertullian’s purpose for writing the treatise. Based on the “Devil’s gateway” passage, feminist scholars have assumed that Tertullian’s purpose was to denigrate women. However,

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<sup>117</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 1.1.3.

it seems that the issue of Christian identity was at the heart of *De cultu feminarum*, for Tertullian's primary aim was to persuade Christian women to distinguish themselves from their pagan neighbours through the way in which they dressed. Tertullian used the two antitheses of glory versus humility, and beauty versus *pudicitia* as a framework in which to contrast the dress of pagan women with that of the ideal Christian woman. Tertullian claimed that the pursuit of glory through *cultus* and pursuit of beauty through *ornatus* was inappropriate for a Christian woman, who should be cultivating humility and *pudicitia*.

A rhetorical analysis revealed that Tertullian used a number of rhetorical techniques to support his arguments and make his case more persuasive. As well as utilising themes found in the classical literature and adapting them to make them appropriate to a Christian audience, Tertullian employed the standard topics set out in the rhetorical handbooks. It is within the rhetorical context of *De cultu feminarum* that the "Devil's gateway" passage is best understood. Occurring in the *exordium* of the treatise, Tertullian used the statements in the "Devil's gateway" passage as a means of making his audience more receptive to the arguments which would follow. Through the means of *pathos* Tertullian created a sense of shame in his audience, by associating contemporary women with the fallen Eve. Tertullian's intention in this was to persuade the women in his audience to change their behaviour. Tertullian suggested that as Eves, the women whom he addressed should adopt a type of dress appropriate to their condition as Eve, and furthermore, since items of *cultus* and *ornatus* are attributes of a post-Fall creation, it follows that Christian women should reject these items and adopt a simpler attire which reflects their Christian identity.

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### **Conclusion to Part One.**

Feminist scholars have repeatedly cited the "Devil's gateway" passage as evidence of Tertullian's misogyny. My aim in part one has been to redress their accusations, taking two approaches. Firstly, by reading the "Devil's gateway" passage alongside Tertullian's other references to the Fall, I have demonstrated that the "Devil's gateway" passage is the only passage in which Tertullian gives explicit and exclusive culpability for the Fall to Eve. Although I used the research of Forrester Church as a starting point, I went beyond his work by offering a detailed explanation of how Tertullian uses the story of the Fall as a rhetorical

device. The second approach was to offer a detailed analysis of the content of *De cultu feminarum* and to read the “Devil’s gateway” passage within this wider context. In this chapter I drew primarily on Susan Calef’s rhetorical analysis of *De cultu feminarum*. Although Calef did not draw out the implications of her research for the feminist question, I have used her research to explain the purpose of the “Devil’s gateway” passage, and thus challenge the basis of the feminist charge of misogyny.

Having exposed the weakness of the claim of some feminist scholars that the “Devil’s gateway” passage is evidence of Tertullian’s misogyny, I will now examine other passages in Tertullian’s corpus in which he makes reference to women. By looking beyond the “Devil’s gateway” passage, I will be able to present a more comprehensive picture of Tertullian’s view of women and thus offer a fairer assessment of Tertullian’s misogyny.

## **PART 2: Mary.**

### **Introduction.**

#### **Feminist considerations.**

The figure of Mary is extraordinarily complex for whilst she may be an inspiring example and an object of devotion for many, she is also the source of debate, controversy, and vilification for others.<sup>1</sup> While an historical woman dwells at the root of the many portrayals of Mary, there has been a plasticity that has allowed the Christian imagination to create widely different Marian symbols and theologies based on spiritual and social needs.<sup>2</sup> A number of feminist scholars have been critical of the figure of Mary because, they claim, she is a construct of the patriarchal mind and has been used as an instrument of ecclesiastical oppression.<sup>3</sup> There is a wealth of feminist critiques of Mary and this cannot be neatly systematized. I have focused on three feminist theologians' critique of Mary in order to highlight some of their key concerns about the patriarchal use of Mary by men within the Christian tradition.

#### **Mary Daly.**

The decisive impulse to feminist theologians' critique of Mariology came from Mary Daly who argued that the image of Mary had become a dangerous symbol for women. In *The Church and the Second Sex*, published in 1968, Daly reviewed the historical record of Christian theology and practice with the primary aim of drawing attention to its inherent misogyny. Daly drew on the work of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), highlighting the contrast between Mary and the ancient goddesses present in pagan myths. Beauvoir claimed that whereas the goddesses commanded autonomous power and utilized men for their own purposes, Mary is wholly the servant of God, expressed in Mary's own

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<sup>1</sup> M. De Haardt, "The Marian Paradox: Marian Practices as a Road to a New Mariology" in *Feminist Theology* Vol. 19 no. 2, (2011), pp. 168-181.

<sup>2</sup> E. A. Johnson, *Truly our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of the Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Jane Schaberg, for example, claims that although Mary is positive in some ways she is also a tool of institutional sexism in J. Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 11-12. See also M. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Picador Books, 1990) p. xxiv-xxv and E.S. Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1994), pp. 164-167.

words: "I am the handmaid of the Lord". Beauvoir writes: "For the first time in the history of humankind a mother kneels before her son and acknowledges, of her own free will, her inferiority. The supreme victory of masculinity is consummated in Mariolatry: it signifies the rehabilitation of woman through the completeness of her defeat".<sup>4</sup>

Following Beauvoir, Daly claimed that Mary is "a remnant of the ancient image of the Mother Goddess, enchained and subordinated in Christianity, as the Mother of God".<sup>5</sup> Daly, like Beauvoir, noted that Christianity has sought to oppress and deceive women. One way in which it attempted to do this, according to Daly, was to hold up unattainable visions of the Virgin Mary as the exemplar of the good Christian woman, while also affirming that Mary was made pure only through the act of a male god and only for the sake of a male saviour. Thus, the exemplary woman is one who is passive, asexual, and subservient to men.<sup>6</sup> The impossible ideal of Mary as the Virgin-Mother has had a punitive function, and since no actual woman can live up to it, all women are given the status of the first Eve, which reinforces the universality of women's low-caste status.<sup>7</sup>

One of the aims of Daly's work was to establish an independent status for the figure of Mary by freeing her from her relation to Christ. In her later book, *Beyond God the Father* (1973), Daly argued that Mary's virginity could become a symbol for female autonomy for, as a virgin, she is independent of man and not defined solely through her relationship to man.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, Mary's role as Mother of God is more problematic because it implies an inherent relation to a child. Finally, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is particularly problematic because Mary is placed on a pedestal so high that it cannot serve as a genuine model for all real women.<sup>9</sup> Therefore real women are associated with the evil Eve in contrast to the impossible ideal of the virginal Mother of God, who is free of all sin.

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<sup>4</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Translated by H.M. Parshley (London: Vintage, 1997), p. 182.

<sup>5</sup> M. Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), p. 83. This idea is repeated in her later work *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978). Daly claims that Mary is a "pale derivative symbol disguising the conquered Goddess," (p. 84) and a "flaunting of the tamed Goddess" (p. 88). Furthermore, her role as servant in the Incarnation of God amounts to nothing other than a "rape" (pp. 83-89). For Daly, the subordination of man to God is something negative, especially when this state of affairs is expressed in a feminine symbol such as Mary.

<sup>6</sup> M. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), pp. 66-69.

<sup>7</sup> Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* p. 81.

<sup>8</sup> M. Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, p.91.

<sup>9</sup> Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, pp.81-2.

## **Marina Warner.**

Marina Warner's 1976 book, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* gave a more sympathetic analysis of the cultural and artistic history of Marian doctrines and devotions. Warner explained how the figure of Mary has both shaped and been shaped by changing social and historical circumstances. In particular, Warner examined the Virgin in her various guises ("Virgin," "Queen," "Bride," "Mother," and "Intercessor"), to see how her myth and cult developed from the origins of Christianity to the present. However, Warner also highlighted the negative elements of Mariology claiming that in Western Christianity, Mary came to symbolize the ideal woman and, as a consequence, Mary "became an effective instrument of asceticism and female subjection".<sup>10</sup> Warner's title phrase, "alone of all her sex," expressed her thesis that the legends of Mary have condemned real women to perpetual inferiority because Mary, alone among women, is honoured as unsullied and privileged. She claimed that although Mary's exaltation emphasizes her uniqueness it thereby excludes and damages the condition of the majority of women. Warner put it succinctly: "In the very celebration of the perfect human woman, both humanity and women are subtly denigrated".<sup>11</sup>

## **Elizabeth Johnson.**

More recently, Elizabeth Johnson has discussed the controversy provoked by the figure of Mary in her 2003 book, *Truly our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of the Saints*. On the one hand, for centuries, Mary was the only female figure allowed near a sanctuary.<sup>12</sup> This kept the image of woman in full view, an important and frequently powerful woman, which not only counterbalanced a heavily patriarchal view of God but also made cultural room for promoting respect for the dignity of women.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, official views of Mary were shaped by men in a patriarchal context and have functioned powerfully to define and control female lives. Women were not consulted nor were they permitted to bring their knowledge and experience to contribute to the portrait of Mary.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the Marian symbol became the product of men's interpretation of the ideal woman.<sup>15</sup> A strong

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<sup>10</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p. 49.

<sup>11</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p. xxi.

<sup>12</sup> Johnson, *Truly our Sister*, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Johnson, *Truly our Sister*, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Johnson, *Truly our Sister*, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Johnson claims that the definition of the ideal woman is based on sexist construals of gender. It draws on the unquestioned assumption that men are by nature active, rational and capable of exercising authority, while

emphasis was placed on Mary's obedience, virginity and her role as a mother.<sup>16</sup> As a consequence, the Marian symbol functioned to keep women in their pre-assigned place, subordinate to patriarchal authority.<sup>17</sup>

Johnson claims that the effect of patriarchal Mariology functions in at least three ways. Firstly, it idealizes Mary to the detriment of all others. By depicting Mary as the most perfect of women, the patriarchal Marian tradition functions paradoxically to disparage all other women. Mary becomes the great exception and all women fall short by comparison with her perfection.<sup>18</sup> Johnson claims that this idea first emerged among the Church Fathers in the Eve-Mary typology.<sup>19</sup> Many of the Fathers compared and contrasted the roles of Eve and Mary to differing degrees but all of their descriptions shared some common themes. Eve, through her disobedience, was responsible for the fall of humankind with all its resulting misery. In contrast, through her obedience Mary, the new Eve, was responsible for bringing forth the conqueror of that sin, the Saviour. "Death through Eve, life through Mary," became a popular epithet.<sup>20</sup> Johnson concludes that the Eve-Mary typology has been used to disparage women much more vehemently than the Adam-Christ typology has been used to men's disadvantage. By idealizing Mary and setting her apart from Eve and all other women, male authors could deploy women as a theological code signalling weakness, sexual temptation and even depravity.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, it allows churchmen to love and revere their ideal of woman in the transcendent woman Mary, but to ignore and dominate concrete women.<sup>22</sup>

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women are naturally receptive, emotional and, orientated towards obedience and service. Male theologians over the centuries created an image of Mary as the ideal feminine person. See Johnson, *Truly our Sister*, p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> Anne Carr makes a similar criticism of the emphasis placed on Mary's 'womanly' virtues: silence, receptivity, and nurturance. See A. Carr, *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women's Experience* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), p. 52.

<sup>17</sup> Johnson, *Truly our Sister*, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> Carolyn Osiek claims that Mary provided Catholic women with an "impossible ideal to which no woman could attain, with whom all women are invited to feel inadequate". C. Osiek *Beyond Anger: On Being a Feminist in the Church* (New York: Paulist, 1986), p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> Johnson, *Truly our Sister*, p. 23.

<sup>20</sup> Jerome, *Epistle 22*.

<sup>21</sup> Ruether is critical of this claiming that Mary has been used as a symbol to exalt the spiritual feminine whilst at the same time denigrating the sexual, maternal, carnal reality of actual women in the concrete. R.R. Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), pp. 144-145. See also Carr who notes that Mary is still contrasted with "Eve" –all other women. (A. Carr, *Transforming Grace*, p. 191)

<sup>22</sup> Johnsons highlights some practical and sociological observations: in those countries where devotion to Mary still flourishes strongly, women find great difficulty in claiming significant involvement in public and political life. Similarly, those denominations which have the strongest official attachment to Mary are the least likely to be open to full participation of women in ecclesial public life and ministry. (Johnson, *Truly our Sister*, p. 25).

Johnson makes reference to Tertullian's "Devil's gateway" passage as a prime example of how ordinary women are associated with Eve. She claims that according to Tertullian Eve is the cause of sorrow, condemnation, corruption and death. Furthermore, through their identification with Eve, ordinary women are sinful, seductive accomplices of Satan and all of this was in contrast to Mary who alone was pure and undefiled.<sup>23</sup> Johnson claims that Tertullian's invective in the "Devil's gateway" passage became the hallmark of preaching about women.<sup>24</sup> As I noted in chapters one and two Tertullian's aim in the using the "Devil's gateway" passage was not to denigrate women. Rather, Tertullian used the *exemplum* of sinful Eve as a rhetorical tool to appeal to the *pathos* of his audience. Thus, whilst Tertullian's "Devil's gateway" passage may have been used by later theologians to denigrate women, this was not the intention of Tertullian in *De cultu feminarum*. In the following chapters my purpose is to examine Tertullian's views on Mary and women in general to see whether or not he is guilty of Johnson's criticism, particularly the idea that Mary is idealized to the detriment of other women.

Secondly, patriarchal Mariology constructs Mary's holiness with virtues which are conducive to women's subservience. Mary is portrayed as the supreme model with characteristics which all other women should emulate. I will discuss two of those characteristics examined by Johnson. The first characteristic is the ideal of Mary's virginal state. Johnson notes that in the early church there was a tension between spirit and matter which resulted in a Christian spirituality that encouraged detachment from the world and its fleshly pleasures.<sup>25</sup> This led to a strong bias against marriage and instead promoted lifelong virginity as the holier way.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Johnson claims that in the 'Devil's gateway' passage women's sexuality is deeply connected with sin which is not the case if you look at Genesis 3. I would argue, however, that Tertullian is not explicitly linking the Fall with women's sexuality in the 'Devil's gateway' passage although there are some passages in *De cultu feminarum* which draw a link between women's beauty and male lust as I discussed in chapter one.

<sup>24</sup> Johnson notes that Fathers such as Jerome, Chrysostom and Augustine have put primary responsibility on to Eve rather than recognizing the joint responsibility of men and women. She claims that this pattern is repeated throughout the history of theology. (Johnson, *Truly our Sister*, p. 24).

<sup>25</sup> Johnson, *Truly our Sister*, p. 27.

<sup>26</sup> Feminists have also highlighted the positive aspects of virginity for women in the ancient world. Virginity offered new possibilities for women. Once married a woman became her husband's property. Virginity opened up possibilities for women that departed dramatically from the traditional role expectations of patriarchal marriage. In this respect, Mary's virginity has the potential to function as a symbol of autonomy, signalling that a woman is not defined by her relationship with a man.



In the battle between spirit and flesh, women were placed on the side of the flesh due to their role as marriage partners and their connection with pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>27</sup> The aversion to female sexuality caused male theologians to honour Mary for her virginity. Mary's virginal conception was expanded to include the idea that she gave birth virginally, with her hymen unbroken, and remained ever afterwards a virgin *par excellence*: "If virginity was the highest ideal for women, then the mother of the Saviour epitomized this ideal".<sup>28</sup>

The exaltation of Mary's virginal status, viewed in the wider context of the suspicion of the body, functioned to the detriment of other women and the exercise of their sexuality. Mary's perpetual virginity, wedded to the Eve-Mary dichotomy, came to be used as a tool with which to disparage all women who engaged in sexual behaviour, even if they were legitimately married. Johnson claims that feminist critique has revealed the fundamental problem of exalting Mary's virginity. Cast in a dualistic framework profoundly hostile to the body and sexuality, the patriarchal construction of Mary's ideal virginity disparages actual women in their embodied, sexual reality.<sup>29</sup>

The second characteristic associated with Mary, discussed by Johnson, is Mary's role as mother.<sup>30</sup> Johnson claims that the exaltation of Mary's role as mother has led to the belief that reproduction is the primary vocation for women. Another problem with the emphasis on Mary's motherhood, identified by Johnson, is the fact that Mary's motherhood is construed in absolute separation from sexual love since she was a virgin-mother. Furthermore, Mary's motherhood is depicted as one of total, life-long devotion which excludes any idea that she might develop as an independent individual.<sup>31</sup>

Johnson notes that there are, however, some aspects of women's experience of being a mother which can be deeply fulfilling. For example, to be a mother means to give life abundantly out of one's own body and to nurture this life with well-being.<sup>32</sup> However,

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<sup>27</sup> Johnson writes: "You can watch it develop in the literature of the early centuries: an increasingly strong torrent of misogyny against women and their bodies". Johnson, *Truly our Sister*, p. 28.

<sup>28</sup> Johnson, *Truly our Sister*, p. 28.

<sup>29</sup> Johnson, *Truly our Sister*, p. 33. Fiorenza was also critical of this aspect of Mariology. She claims that Mariology devalues women because it emphasizes virginity to the detriment of sexuality. Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet*, p. 164.

<sup>30</sup> Johnson, *Truly our Sister*, p. 33 ff. See also Haardt who notes that Mary was the prime and obvious model of the ideal wife and mother (M. de Haardt, "The Marian Paradox", p. 173).

<sup>31</sup> Johnson, *Truly our Sister*, p.33.

<sup>32</sup> Johnson, *Truly our Sister*, p. 34.

Johnson also highlights the importance of recognizing that a mother is more than a bearer of a child and her personal worth is not dependent on having children.

The third way in which patriarchal Mariology functions, according to Johnson, is by drawing sociological consequences from Mary's relationship to Christ in order to highlight female subordination. Johnson claims that the Marian image supports a number of patriarchal social structures. For example, Mary can be used to create a hierarchy between those who take a vow of virginity and those who marry, with the former being held in higher esteem by placing an emphasis on Mary's virginity.<sup>33</sup> A further problem is created when depictions of Mary's relationship to Christ are used as a model for the sociological relationship between concrete historical women and men. Women are relegated to a subordinate position to men because this reflects the dynamics of Mary's relationship to Christ.<sup>34</sup> Mary is exalted precisely because she accepts the secondary role assigned to her in view of the priority of Christ the man.

In summary, this brief synopsis of the critique of Daly, Warner and Johnson reveals to us some of the issues some feminist scholars have with certain aspects of Mariology. Their fundamental critique seems to be that Mary has been used, predominantly by men, as a symbol with which to suppress and control ordinary women. Mary has been portrayed as an exemplary woman and no other woman can live up to Mary's impossible ideal. As a consequence, ordinary women are denigrated and associated with sinful Eve. Finally, feminist scholars object to the roles and images imposed on women through Mary. The emphasis placed on Mary's virginal motherhood is particularly problematic for several reasons. Firstly, no other woman can be both virgin and mother and thus Mary's virginal motherhood is a good example of the impossible ideal which Mary symbolizes. Secondly, emphasis is placed on Mary's perpetual virginity in order to disparage ordinary women in their embodied and sexual condition. Finally, the emphasis on Mary's role as mother leads to the belief that a woman's primary role is that of reproduction without any consideration for her individuality. In short, some feminist scholars have viewed Mariology as a powerful weapon in the hands of men, to control women and to minimize their influence in the Church and public life. As a result, many women have an ambiguous relationship to the Virgin Mary.

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<sup>33</sup> Johnson, *Truly our Sister*, p.35.

<sup>34</sup> Johnson, *Truly our Sister*, p. 35.

In the following three chapters in which I examine Tertullian's references to Mary, I will consider the extent to which Tertullian is guilty of the criticisms highlighted by feminist scholars. I will demonstrate that Tertullian does not construct an image of Mary in order to denigrate women. Rather, through a rhetorical analysis, and by considering the historical and rhetorical contexts in which Tertullian's discussions of Mary occur, I will show that Tertullian uses Mary as a weapon with which to fight his opponents. Thus, Tertullian's portrayal of Mary is shaped by the debates with his opponents.

### **Tertullian and Mary overview.**

Although Tertullian makes a number of references to Mary throughout his corpus he does not have a systematic account of Mariology. Rather, Tertullian's references to Mary come in the context of theological and apologetic debates about issues relating to Christology and the correct interpretation of scripture.

Tertullian's references to Mary can be divided into two categories. Firstly, there are a number of passages in which Tertullian makes reference to Mary in the context of an early creedal formula or rule of faith. For example in *Adversus Praxeam* Tertullian writes: "We believe that Christ was sent by the Father into the virgin and was born of her, man and God, Son of Man and Son of God".<sup>35</sup> Similarly, in *De virginibus velandis* Tertullian writes: "The rule of faith, indeed, is altogether one, alone immoveable and irrefutable; the rule, to wit, of believing in one only God omnipotent, the Creator of the universe, and His Son Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate, raised again the third day from the dead..."<sup>36</sup>

Secondly, there are passages in which Tertullian uses Mary as a rhetorical or theological device to make a theological point or, more often, to win certain arguments which were of concern to Tertullian. Thus, Tertullian was not interested in discussing Mary for her own sake but rather he used her as a tool to argue with.<sup>37</sup> The question which I will be addressing is

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<sup>35</sup> *Adversus Praxeam* 2.

<sup>36</sup> *De virginibus velandis* 1. For more examples of Tertullian referring to Mary in the context of creedal formulas see also: *Apologeticum* 21; *Adversus Marcionem* 4.2; *De praescriptione haereticorum* 13 and 36.

<sup>37</sup> The fathers often used Mary to make a Christological statement, for in saying something about Mary their primary intention was to say something about Christ. Interestingly, G.H. Tavard notes that the depiction of Mary in some of the apocryphal literature is noticeably different to that which is found in the canonical material. Whereas the canonical Gospels mention Mary incidentally and only in relation to Christ, in the *Protoevangelium*

how was she being used by Tertullian?<sup>38</sup> In order to examine how Tertullian uses Mary, I have categorized Tertullian's references to Mary into three types which I will deal with in the following three chapters. It should be noted, however, that Tertullian did not himself set out these categories; they are simply my way of bringing together passages throughout Tertullian's treatises which contain similar themes in order to examine Tertullian's thinking on Mary.

I begin in chapter three with an examination of those passages in which Tertullian makes reference to Mary's virginity before, during and after the birth of Christ. In this chapter I will explain the reasons why Tertullian, although admitting that Mary conceived as a virgin, denied that she gave birth as a virgin and denied that she remained a virgin after Christ's birth. My examination of Tertullian's position will demonstrate that, for Tertullian, Mary's virginity does not serve as a moral exemplar which all women are to emulate, but rather Tertullian's discussions on Mary's virginity, including his denial of her virginity *in partu* and virginity *post partum*, are motivated and shaped by the debates in which he was engaged with his opponents.

In chapter four I focus on Tertullian's construction of Christ's genealogy (through Mary) to establish Christ's identity as the Son of David. In the Hebrew Scriptures there was a belief that the promised Messiah would be from the family of David.<sup>39</sup> In ancient Judaism the "Son of David" was the expected Messiah, the salvific figure who would bring the future of the Jewish people to a victorious conclusion. The early Christians took over this idea and applied the title "Son of David" to Christ.<sup>40</sup> In chapter four I will demonstrate that, according to Tertullian, Mary is the woman who enabled Christ to be inserted into the family of David and she is therefore the instrument for the realization of the Messianic prophecies. Furthermore, Tertullian uses the "Son of David through Mary" formula to prove that Christ's flesh was

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of James the narrative is focussed almost entirely on Mary without reference to Christ. (See G.H. Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary* (Collegeville Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996).

<sup>38</sup> As Amy-Jill Levine has pointed out Mary will always be a figure "to think with" or to express doctrine and desire (A. J. Levine (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Mariology* (London: T and T Clark, 2005), p. 1). Given that this is the case, the question I want to answer is how is Mary being used?

<sup>39</sup> 2 Samuel 7.12-16; Jeremiah 23.5; 33.15; Zechariah 3.8 and 6.12.

<sup>40</sup> There are numerous reference to Christ as 'Son of David' in the New Testament: Mark 10.46-49; 12.35-37; Matthew 9.27-28; 12.23; 15.22; 20.29-31; 21.8-17; Luke 18.35-39; 20.41-44. For a discussion on the use of Son of David as a Christological title see G. Strecker, *Theology of the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), p.79 ff.

truly human. Thus, as with his discussion on Mary's virginity Tertullian uses Mary as a weapon in debates with his opponents.

In chapter five I will discuss the importance of Mary's role in Tertullian's theory of the incarnation. In particular, I will show how Tertullian's use of the Aristotelian theory of conception supports his primary aim to prove the reality of Christ's flesh and birth. Aristotle proposed that the female provided the matter for the embryo and the male provided the form which changed the woman's matter into an embryo. Mary's role as the sole provider of the matter (for Christ's flesh) strengthened Tertullian's claim that Christ's flesh was truly human and that his birth was real. Tertullian's use of Aristotle's theory of conception forms a significant part of his polemic against his opponents and needs to be considered in order to fully understand Tertullian's rhetorical arguments in *De carne Christi* and *Adversus Marcionem*.

### **Rhetorical Considerations.**

Tertullian's references to Mary are shaped by and indeed form a key part of his rhetorical arguments against his opponents. It is necessary, therefore, to briefly outline the rhetorical genre of those treatises in which his references to Mary occur.

#### *De carne Christi*

*De carne Christi*, composed sometime around 206 CE,<sup>41</sup> was written as a forensic speech to defend the reality of Christ's human flesh and human birth.<sup>42</sup> The reality of Christ's flesh and birth are important to Tertullian because by denying the reality of Christ's flesh, Tertullian's opponents challenge the basic Christian hope of the resurrection of the body.<sup>43</sup> This point is reinforced by Tertullian's claim that *De carne Christi* is in fact a prelude to *De Resurrectione*

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<sup>41</sup> E. Evans, *Tertullian's Treatise on the Incarnation* (London: SPCK, 1956), p. vii. T. D. Barnes also dates *De carne Christi* to around 206. See T.D. Barnes, *Tertullian, a Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 55.

<sup>42</sup> Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, p. 27-28 and Evans, *Tertullian's Treatise on the Incarnation*, p.xvi.

<sup>43</sup> Tertullian claims that in order for Christ to save humankind, he needed to possess human flesh. Christ's (real) flesh makes possible the bodily resurrection of Christ and this in turn guarantees the bodily resurrection of humankind. Thus, by denying the reality of Christ's flesh Tertullian's opponents challenge the basic Christian hope for the resurrection of the body.

*carnis*.<sup>44</sup> Evans proposes that in presenting a case for the integrity of the human flesh in two treatises, rather than one, Tertullian imitates a practice adopted by ancient orators who often divided a forensic speech into two acts, the *actio prima* and the *actio secunda*.<sup>45</sup>

In *De carne Christi* Tertullian refutes three opponents who, in one way or another, challenge the reality of Christ's human flesh and birth. Firstly, in chapters 1-5, Tertullian deals with Marcion who denied both the nativity of Christ and the reality of his flesh. Marcion claimed that Christ appeared as an unheralded and unexpected representative of the true god, hitherto unknown. His mission was to reveal the unknown god and to deliver men from the creator god. This Christ appeared in a phantasm of a body and, since the flesh was incapable of salvation, came to save only the soul. Secondly, in chapters 6-9, Tertullian deals with Apelles of whom little is known.<sup>46</sup> According to Tertullian, although Apelles denied the nativity of Christ he did accept the reality of his flesh. Apelles argued that Christ gained his flesh from the heavens (as did the angels) without having to undergo a human birth. Thirdly, Tertullian refutes the Valentinians, in chapters 10-16, who accepted both the nativity of Christ and the reality of his flesh which was spiritual in nature. They argued that Christ's soul became flesh and that he had the nature of an angel. Tertullian summarized the Valentinian position with a pithy phrase: "[Christ was born] through the virgin, not from her".<sup>47</sup>

There has been some scholarly debate about the rhetorical structure of the treatise and in particular the place of chapters 17-23 in the treatise. Evans suggests that chapters 17-23 form a marginal role of the *amplificatio*.<sup>48</sup> Sider has been critical of the minor role which Evans gives to chapters 17-23 and suggests that they form the *confirmatio* and thus play a crucial role in *De carne Christi*.<sup>49</sup> Willemien Otten, in her post-rhetorical analysis, has taken a

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<sup>44</sup> *De carne Christi* 25: "But, that the conclusion of my argument may recall its preamble, the resurrection of our flesh, which I shall have to defend under a different brief, will here be found to have had its foundation laid, it being manifest now, if not before, what sort of thing that was which rose again in Christ".

<sup>45</sup> Evans, *Tertullian's Treatise on the Incarnation*, p. xvi. A good example of this two-part speech can be found in Cicero's *In Verrem*, written around 70 CE, which is a forensic speech divided into the *actio prima* and the *actio secunda*.

<sup>46</sup> Apelles was a follower of Marcion but left (or was expelled) from the Marcionite sect and developed a modified form of Marcionism. More information may have been contained in the treatise which Tertullian had written opposing Apelles but it is no longer extant. See Evans, *Tertullian's Treatise on the Incarnation*, p. xxxi

<sup>47</sup> *De carne Christi* 20.

<sup>48</sup> The *amplificatio* was not so much a formal part of the structure of a speech but rather it was used by orators as a tool to be employed within a speech. The *amplificatio* provided a sort of superstructure for an argument, examining its implications and reaffirming and extending it, often with rhetorical flourish. (Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, p. 22).

<sup>49</sup> Sider suggests that Tertullian's treatment of these chapters demonstrates that he was master rather than a slave of rhetoric form by applying a daring new rhetorical strategy in the treatise. Sider proposes that Tertullian

different approach altogether and asks: “Why do we not let the text speak to us directly, rather than imposing yet another rhetorical structure on it?”<sup>50</sup> She analyses Tertullian’s treatise under two headings: (i) the question of the verity (*veritas*) of Christ’s flesh (chapter 2-5) and (ii) the quality (*qualitas*) of Christ’s flesh (chapters 17-23). Dunn has criticized Otten’s proposals and argues that in *De carne Christi* Tertullian was trying to win an argument rather than offer a theological analysis.<sup>51</sup> He follows Sider in assigning chapters 17-23 to the *confirmatio*.<sup>52</sup> These chapters are of particular interest to my own research because within these chapters Tertullian makes reference to Mary.

### *Adversus Marcionem.*

*Adversus Marcionem* sets out Tertullian's refutation of Marcionism, envisaged as a case argued in court against Marcion as the defendant.<sup>53</sup> The treatise comprises five books of which the first three books are speeches in presentation of Tertullian’s case, and the remaining two are speeches which deal with his opponent's evidence.<sup>54</sup>

In book one and two Tertullian deals with Marcion’s dualism and sets out to disprove the existence of the god invented by Marcion. Tertullian argues that just as the Christian God is known through his works in creation, so too the Marcionite god ought to have produced signs of his existence. In book three Tertullian is concerned with the prophecy in the Hebrew Scriptures and its fulfilment in Christ. The Hebrew Scriptures were not rejected by Marcion as being untrue but as being non-Christian.<sup>55</sup> Marcion believed that the Hebrew Scriptures contained an authentic record of human history and were the work of the demiurge god who made the world. Marcion argued that the Messiah prophesied in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Messiah of the Jews, had not yet come. Marcion invented another Christ who, he argues, appeared suddenly and unannounced to reveal to humankind the existence of a superior god

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inverts the traditional Ciceronian order of a speech by making *confirmatio* (chapter 17-23) follow *refutatio* (chapters 2-16). See Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, p. 33.

<sup>50</sup> W. Otten, “Christ’s Birth of a Virgin who became a Wife: Flesh and Speech in Tertullian’s *De carne Christi*” in *Vigiliae Christianae* Vol. 51 No. 3 (August, 1997), p. 248-249.

<sup>51</sup> G.D. Dunn, ‘Mary’s virginity *in partu* and Tertullian’s anti-docetism in *De carne Christi* reconsidered’ in *Journal of Theological Studies* Vol. 58 no. 2 (October, 2007), p. 468.

<sup>52</sup> Dunn, “Mary’s virginity *in partu*”, p. 475.

<sup>53</sup> It should be noted that most of the information we have about Marcion and his doctrines is derived from those who undertook to controvert him. However, this does not necessarily mean that their information is incorrect. See E. Evans, *Tertullian: Adversus Marcionem* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. ix.

<sup>54</sup> Evans, *Tertullian: Adversus Marcionem*, p. xvii.

<sup>55</sup> Evans, *Tertullian: Adversus Marcionem*, p. xxix.

hitherto unknown and unsuspected, who was to deliver humankind from the inflictions imposed upon them by their creator. Thus, Tertullian's primary aim in book three was to show that Christ is the messiah of the Hebrew Scriptures. Books four and five discuss Marcion's mutilated gospel and his edited version of the Pauline epistles. Tertullian sets out to show that even in spite of his alterations Marcion's "scriptural" passages present a Christ who corresponds to the Creator's law and fulfils the prophecies, thus proving that there is one God.

### *Adversus Judaeos.*

*Adversus Judaeos* is one of Tertullian's most controversial treatises. As well as concerns about a possible anti-Judaic and anti-Semitic attitude within the treatise, there are also questions surrounding the integrity and authorship of the treatise.<sup>56</sup> A number of scholars have argued that the second half of *Adversus Judaeos* was not written by Tertullian.<sup>57</sup> Evans has questioned the authenticity of the first half of *Adversus Judaeos* claiming that the early chapters lack much of the usual "forthright vigour" in Tertullian's works and thus, may have been written by a contemporary imitator of his.<sup>58</sup> Based on the similarity between the two treatises, Evans suggests that the second half of *Adversus Judaeos* was either an earlier draft of *Adversus Marcionem* written by Tertullian himself or it was copied from *Adversus Marcionem* by an imitator of Tertullian.<sup>59</sup>

However, there are some scholars who believe that Tertullian was the genuine author of the whole treatise. Noeldechen, for example, argued that the entire *Adversus Judaeos* was written by Tertullian.<sup>60</sup> He suggests that the first eight chapters are the more polished part of the treatise and the material from the second half was used in the composition of *Adversus*

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<sup>56</sup> Scholars such as Ruether have traced anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism back to the New Testament. (R.R. Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury, 1974). Scholars tend to be concerned primarily with the question of the target audience and whether or not the texts indicate that there was on-going contact between Christians and Jews. Very often the text's portrayal of Jews and Judaism is not based on contact with real Jews and the texts are written as a means of self-definition and a way to edify Christians. See G.D. Dunn's discussion in *Tertullian* (London/New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 64.

<sup>57</sup> Quasten is among those who argue for this position (Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol. 2, p. 269). For more examples of scholars who hold this position see Dunn's discussion in Dunn, *Tertullian's Adversus Judaeos: A Rhetorical Analysis* (PhD Thesis, Australian Catholic University, 1999), p. 6-8.

<sup>58</sup> Evans, *Tertullian: Adversus Marcionem*, p. xx.

<sup>59</sup> Evans, *Tertullian: Adversus Marcionem*, p. xx.

<sup>60</sup> As cited by Dunn, *Tertullian*, p. 63.



*Marcionem*.<sup>61</sup> Timothy Barnes also proposed that *Adversus Judaeos* was an authentic but unrevised treatise by Tertullian.<sup>62</sup> Dunn, based on a rhetorical analysis, has also concluded that all of *Adversus Iudaeos* was written by Tertullian. However, Dunn also admits that it is not a well-written treatise: “It has a very unfinished and rambling quality about it: there are repetitions, digressions, jumps in the logic of the argument, and a tendency to be long-winded. There are sentences that do not read well or make complete sense”.<sup>63</sup>

Dunn has argued that *Adversus Judaeos* was aimed, first and foremost, at other Christians.<sup>64</sup> Dunn proposes that Tertullian was preparing his fellow Christians for the ongoing debates between Christians and Jews by offering them persuasive arguments that could be used to prove that Christians had superseded the Jews. Thus, although Jews were not the direct recipients of the arguments in the treatise they were, at least, in the back of Tertullian’s mind when writing it. Dunn explains: “He might not have intended Jews to read his work but I would think he certainly intended for them to hear his case, even if indirectly”.<sup>65</sup>

It was written in the form of a forensic speech in which Tertullian set forth arguments and dealt with the imagined arguments of an opponent. The purpose of the treatise was not to persuade Jews to convert to Christianity but rather, its aim was to convince Christians that they had replaced the Jews as beneficiaries in God’s plan.<sup>66</sup> Tertullian bases this argument on the fact that the promised Messiah had come in the person of Christ and thus, a crucial part of Tertullian’s arguments in *Adversus Judaeos* is taken up with a discussion of prophecies from the Hebrew Scriptures about the Messiah. Thus, *Adversus Iudaeos* offered Tertullian’s Christian readers a guide on how to respond to the Jews whom they may encounter and with whom they may come to engage in debates about Scripture.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Dunn, *Tertullian*, p. 64.

<sup>62</sup> T. D. Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 53.

<sup>63</sup> Dunn, *Tertullian*, p. 65.

<sup>64</sup> Dunn, *Tertullian’s Adversus Judaeos: A Rhetorical Analysis*, p. 31ff.

<sup>65</sup> Dunn, *Tertullian’s Adversus Judaeos: A Rhetorical Analysis*, p. 57.

<sup>66</sup> Dunn, *Tertullian*, p. 65.

<sup>67</sup> Tertullian claimed that *Adversus Judaeos* was written in response to a recent debate between a Christian and a proselyte Jew but unlike Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho*, *Adversus Judaeos* was not a record of that encounter. Rather, he wrote what the Christian participant should have said or, should say on the next occasion. Dunn explains: “His pamphlet is not a dialogue and never pretends to be what was actually said at any such debate; it is an idealized template for future use”. (Dunn, *Tertullian’s Adversus Judaeos: A Rhetorical Analysis*, p. 57).

## **CHAPTER 3.**

### **Tertullian and Mary's Virginit**

In the West, the Fathers tended to focus on Mary's virginity because of its exemplary value.<sup>1</sup> For example Ambrose proclaimed: "Mary's life should be for you a pictorial image of virginity. Her life is like a mirror reflecting the face of chastity and the form of virtue. Therein you may find a model for your own life, showing what to improve, what to imitate, what to hold fast to".<sup>2</sup> However, as I will show in this chapter, Tertullian was not concerned with highlighting the exemplary character or moral purity of Mary's virginity. Rather, Tertullian makes fleeting reference to the subject when engaged in debates on other topics. Although Tertullian does not offer a systematic account of Mary's virginity, I have drawn together his various references to Mary's virginity under three headings: Mary's virginity *ante partum*, Mary's virginity *in partum* and Mary's virginity *post partum*, in order to piece together his views on Mary's virginity.

#### **Mary's virginal conception (*virginitas ante partum*).**

The belief in Mary's virginity *ante partum* claims that there was an absence of marital relations between Mary and Joseph up to the time of Christ's birth and therefore affirms the virginal conception. Mary's virginity *ante partum* was widely accepted in the early centuries of Christianity. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke bear witness to this early belief in Mary's virginity *ante partum* and the Gospel authors associate the virginal conception with the action of the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup> Both Hippolytus and Ignatius accepted without question Mary's virginity *ante partum*.<sup>4</sup> Justin Martyr also argued for Mary's virginal conception of Christ based on his interpretation of Isaiah 7.14, a theme Tertullian would later develop as I discuss below.<sup>5</sup> Irenaeus also upheld Mary's virginity *ante partum* and frequently draws on it when expounding his Eve-Mary typology.<sup>6</sup> Origen defended the virginal conception against the

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<sup>1</sup> P. Hafner, *The Mystery of Mary* (Gracewing Press, 2004), p. 136.

<sup>2</sup> *De virginitate* 2.2.6.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 1.18-25 and Luke 1.26-38.

<sup>4</sup> Hippolytus asked catechumens: "Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was born of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit?" (*Apostolic Tradition* 21) and Ignatius, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 19.1.

<sup>5</sup> *Dialogue with Trypho* 33; 43 and 67.

<sup>6</sup> See for example *Adversus Haereses* 3.19 and *Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching* 32.

pagan philosopher Celsus who argued that Mary conceived Christ after committing adultery with a soldier.<sup>7</sup>

Tertullian, like his antecedents, accepted Mary's virginity *ante partum*. However, it should not be supposed that Tertullian offered a systematic exposition of Mary's virginity *ante partum*. Rather, Tertullian's discussions on the subject were prompted by polemical considerations. In particular, as I will discuss below, Tertullian's references to Mary's virginity *ante partum* appear in the context of debates about the correct interpretation of scripture and disputes surrounding Christological questions.

#### Mary's virginity *ante partum* and Isaiah 7.14.

Tertullian's references to Mary's virginity *ante partum* appear predominantly in the context of his reading of passages from the Hebrew Scriptures, for Tertullian believed that it was Mary's virginal conception which fulfilled certain prophecies. A key text for Tertullian is Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 7.14: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the 'almâh (young woman) is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel". In the Hebrew text the word 'almâh is used to denote a young, unmarried woman and thus implies the woman is a virgin. In the Greek Septuagint version the Hebrew 'almâh is translated as παρθένος.<sup>8</sup> Matthew, when citing Isaiah's prophecy, also uses παρθένος: "All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the παρθένος shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel'..."<sup>9</sup> Like the Hebrew 'almâh, the word παρθένος was usually used to denote a young woman but it could also be used to mean a virgin woman. Tertullian was aware of these ambiguities surrounding the meaning of 'almâh. In *Adversus Judaeos*, for example, Tertullian argues that the Jews are wrong in using "young woman" when "virgin" is the correct rendering of Isaiah's prophecy: "Consequently whenever in the hope of dislodging anyone from this divine proclamation, or

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<sup>7</sup> Celsus cites the following claim by a Jew against Mary: "When she was pregnant she was turned out of doors by the carpenter to whom she had been betrothed, as having been guilty of adultery, and that she bore a child to a certain soldier named Panthera" (Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.32).

<sup>8</sup> Later Jews, such as Trypho, Justin Martyr's opponent in *Dialogue*, claimed that the Septuagint was wrong. Trypho claimed that 'almah should have been translated *neanis*, which means young girl, rather than *parthenos*. (*Dialogue with Trypho* 43).

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 1.22-23.

whenever you long to convert those who are simple, you dare to lie that it is contained in Scripture not that a virgin (*virgo*) but a young woman (*iuvencula*) is to conceive and bear...”<sup>10</sup>

In order to support his translation of *‘almâh* or *παρθένος* as virgin, rather than young woman, Tertullian points to the significance of Isaiah’s reference to a sign. Tertullian’s basic argument is that since there is nothing unusual about a young woman conceiving it would not, therefore, be considered a sign. On the other hand, since nature does not permit one to believe that a virgin will conceive without losing her virginity, the sign which is spoken about by Isaiah must be that of a virgin conceiving.<sup>11</sup> Tertullian concludes that the Jews’ reading of the sign, as a reference to a “young woman” conceiving in Isaiah 7.14, is incorrect: “...you are disproved also, because no sign is able to be seen in an everyday occurrence, certainly not in the pregnancy and childbearing of a young woman”.<sup>12</sup> The same argument is repeated in book three of *Adversus Marcionem* where Tertullian reiterates the point that a virgin mother is unusual and thus constitutes a sign, whereas the pregnancy and childbearing of a young woman is an everyday occurrence and would not therefore be considered a sign.<sup>13</sup>

What purpose does the Isaiah 7.14 passage serve in Tertullian’s arguments in the treatises in which he discusses it? In *Adversus Judaeos* Tertullian’s discussion of the Isaiah 7.14 passage receives only a brief treatment. It comes in the *confirmatio* in which Tertullian sets out to show that the promised Christ has already come.<sup>14</sup> In suggesting that the sign mentioned by Isaiah refers to a virgin, rather than a young woman, Tertullian attempts to show that firstly, the prophecy of Isaiah 7.14 pointed to Christ’s coming and secondly, to prove that the condition of the prophecy had been fulfilled through Mary’s virginal conception. It is clear therefore, that Tertullian was not explicitly arguing for Mary’s virginity *ante partum*, but rather assumed the truth of it in order to prove that Christ was the Messiah. This supports Tertullian’s overall purpose in the treatise which was to prove that Christians had replaced the Jews as God’s chosen people. Tertullian argued that it was Scripture which would give legitimacy to either the Jews’ or the Christians’ claim to be the authentic people of God.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Adversus Judaeos* 9 When Tertullian cites the passage, he does so in Latin using *virgo* rather than *iuvencula*. Tertullian writes: “*Ecce virgo concipiet in utero et pariet filium*”.

<sup>11</sup> The same argument was put forward by Origen who ask: “What sort of sign would it be if a young woman, not a virgin, bore a son?” (*Contra Celsum* 1.35) It is also found in Irenaeus’ *Adversus Haereses* 3.21.

<sup>12</sup> *Adversus Judaeos* 9.

<sup>13</sup> *Adversus Marcionem* 3. 13. For a discussion on the relationship between *Adversus Marcionem* and *Adversus Judaeos* see Evans, *Tertullian: Adversus Marcionem* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. ix.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion on the place of the *confirmatio* in *Adversus Judaeos* see my earlier discussion.

<sup>15</sup> Dunn, *Tertullian’s Adversus Judaeos: A Rhetorical Analysis* p. 5.

Therefore, by claiming to have the correct reading of Isaiah 7.14, Tertullian suggests that Christians are God's chosen people and also implies that the Jews cannot read their own Scriptures properly.

Similarly in book three of *Adversus Marcionem* Tertullian is concerned with the prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures and their fulfilment in Christ.<sup>16</sup> Tertullian's aim is to demonstrate that the Christ promised by the Creator God, in the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures, is none other than the Christ of the gospels, and that this is the one and only Christ. As was the case in *Adversus Judaeos*, by claiming that the sign foretold by Isaiah was that of a virgin giving birth, Tertullian claims the prophecy has been fulfilled through Christ's birth from Mary. Furthermore, Tertullian claims to have proven that the Christ of the gospels is identical with the Christ promised in the prophecy of Isaiah.

#### The importance of a 'sign' in rhetoric.

Tertullian's recurring emphasis on the importance of the 'sign' foretold by Isaiah reflects the influence of rhetoric on his work. As Sider has noted the evidence of a sign was of paramount importance in ancient rhetorical theory.<sup>17</sup> Quintilian, in book five of *Institutio oratoria* endorses the use of signs in rhetorical speeches, particularly forensic ones, to strengthen an orator's case. Among the signs discussed by Quintilian is one that is relevant to this present discussion. He argues that it is a sign that a woman has had intercourse if she has given birth: "she who has had a child must have lain with a man".<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, Tertullian turns this on its head for he claims that there can be no sign found in the ordinary occurrence of a woman given birth. This is because the "sign" foretold by Isaiah was meant to point to God and therefore had to be something unique and extraordinary. Tertullian writes: "But a sign from God, unless it had consisted in some portentous novelty, would not have appeared a sign".<sup>19</sup> This reflects another idea found in the writings of Quintilian who argued that a sign must have a unique relation to that which is signified.<sup>20</sup> Thus, since the conception foretold by Isaiah was a sign intending to point to God, conception and childbearing that occurs every day could not constitute that sign. On the contrary, the conception which fulfils the sign

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<sup>16</sup> *Adversus Marcionem* 3.13.

<sup>17</sup> Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric and the Art of Tertullian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 54.

<sup>18</sup> *Institutio oratoria* 5.9.4. This example is also used by Cicero in *De inventione* 1.29.44.

<sup>19</sup> *Adversus Judaeos* 9.

<sup>20</sup> *Institutio oratoria* 5.9.5.

foretold by Isaiah had to be a unique conception, something out of the ordinary that would be appropriate to that which it points, namely God, and thus the sign which Isaiah speaks is that of a virgin conceiving. In another treatise Tertullian argues that the fulfilment of prophecy is a sufficient witness to the divine origin.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, Mary's virginal conception and the subsequent fulfilment of Isaiah 7.14 points to Christ's Divine paternity.<sup>22</sup>

*De carne Christi* 17.

The place of chapter seventeen in the overall rhetorical structure of *De carne Christi* has been subject of much scholarly debate as I discussed earlier. I am inclined to agree with the conclusion of Sider and Dunn that chapter seventeen forms part of the *confirmatio*, since it contains the positive arguments in his case.<sup>23</sup> Tertullian begins the *confirmatio* by stating the focus of his investigation: "Whether it was from the virgin that Christ took flesh for it is by this method that we will establish that his flesh was human".<sup>24</sup> In order to answer this question, Tertullian begins with an explanation of why it was necessary for Christ to be born of a virgin, doing so with an argument from motive. As Sider has noted the argument from motive was a key feature of forensic oratory.<sup>25</sup> Tertullian writes: "...we shall need to adduce the reason which prescribed that the Son of God should be born of a virgin".<sup>26</sup>

Tertullian finds a double motive for Christ being born of a virgin. Firstly, as the author of a new (spiritual) birth, Christ himself must be born in a new manner. The "newness" of Christ's birth consists in him having been conceived without the agency of a human father. In other words, Christ was to be conceived by a virgin. Tertullian explains: "This is the new birth, that man is being born in God, since the day when God was born in man, taking to himself flesh of ancient seed without the agency of the ancient seed, so that he might reshape

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<sup>21</sup> *Apologeticum* 20: "I suggest that the fulfilment of prophecy is sufficient witness to the divine origin thereof."

<sup>22</sup> In *Adversus Marcionem*, Tertullian provides a logical argument as to why the virginal conception of Mary points to the divine paternity of Christ. He begins by highlighting that in Scripture Christ refers to himself using two titles: Son of Man and Son of God. Christ is called Son of Man by virtue of his birth from a human mother and since Mary is a virgin and Christ is also called 'Son of God', one must conclude that Christ is begotten by God the Father. Tertullian concludes that this fulfils Isaiah's prophecy: "...if He be Son of Man as born of his mother, because not begotten of a father, and his mother be a virgin, because his father is not human—he will be that Christ whom Isaiah foretold that a virgin should conceive." (*Adversus Marcionem* 4.10).

<sup>23</sup> Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, p. 33 and G.D. Dunn, "Mary's virginity *in partu*", p. 475.

<sup>24</sup> *De carne Christi* 17.1.

<sup>25</sup> Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, p. 56. Quintilian discusses the argument from motive: "...to everything that is done, the question is either 'why,' or 'where,' or 'when,' or 'in what manner,' or 'by what means,' it was done. Arguments are consequently derived from the motives for actions done or to be done." (*Institutio oratoria* 5.10.32-33).

<sup>26</sup> *De carne Christi* 17.

it with new (that is, spiritual) seed when he had first by sacrifice expelled its ancient defilements”.<sup>27</sup> In other words, the virgin birth is, as Isaiah foretold with reference to a sign, a new kind of birth since Christ takes flesh from a virgin without being conceived with male seed. By virtue of Christ’s physical birth of a virgin, Tertullian claims that humanity will experience a spiritual birth in God.

Secondly, Tertullian proposes that it was necessary for Christ to be born of a virgin because his virginal conception had been prefigured in the original creation. Tertullian states that at the beginning of creation the virgin soil brought forth the first Adam just as a virgin mother brought forth the second or last Adam.<sup>28</sup> Tertullian also observes a parallel between Eve and Mary and sets out to show that through the incarnation the Fall is reversed: “Into Eve, while still a virgin, had crept the word, constructive of death: into a virgin no less needed to be introduced the Word of God, constructive of life”.<sup>29</sup> Through Mary’s faith, the evil effect of Eve’s credulity is put right. Similarly, the offspring of Eve was wicked and became his brother’s murderer, but this was counterbalanced by the offspring of Mary who was the good brother, and was to be his brother’s saviour.

The basic parallel of the virgin earth and the Virgin Mary, and the parallel of the virgin Eve and the Virgin Mary reveal the motive in Christ being born of a virgin. Since the first creation originated from the virginal earth the new creation in Christ also had to begin with a virgin. Likewise, just as the Fall of humankind had started through a virgin, so too the salvation of humankind would begin through a virgin as Tertullian makes explicit in the last sentence of the chapter: “...for the salvation of man Christ must needs come forth from that organ (virginal womb) into which man already under condemnation had entered”.<sup>30</sup>

In summary, Tertullian’s discussion on Mary’s virginity *ante partum* focuses primarily on proving that the prophecy of Isaiah 7.14 had been fulfilled. Tertullian’s objective in doing this was to prove that the Messiah had come in the person of Christ. Tertullian’s main focus

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<sup>27</sup> *De carne Christi* 17.

<sup>28</sup> Tertullian notes in passing that Paul’s use of the term ‘second Adam’ in 1 Corinthians 15.45 is a proof of Christ’s humanity. Tertullian asks: “...why was Christ called Adam by the apostle if his manhood was not of terrestrial origin?” (*De carne Christi* 17).

<sup>29</sup> *De carne Christi* 17.

<sup>30</sup> *De carne Christi* 17 Although Tertullian follows Irenaeus in using the Eve-Mary typology, his exposition of it is far less elaborate and he attributes less influence to Mary than does Irenaeus. For example, he has nothing explicit to say about Mary being the cause of salvation for the whole human race, a claim made by Irenaeus, although the idea is implicit in Mary’s role in the incarnation as I will discuss below.

is on the interpretation of the “sign” mentioned by Isaiah and Tertullian, using the tools of ancient rhetoric, insists that Isaiah must have been referring to a virgin conceiving. Not only does the virginal conception point to the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy, it also an indication of Christ’s Divine Father. Finally, Mary’s virginity *ante partum* also plays a crucial role in Tertullian’s rhetorical arguments in *De carne Christi*. Tertullian’s aim is to establish the necessity of Christ’s birth from a virgin which he regards as essential to Christian salvation. In every instance Tertullian uses Mary’s virginity *ante partum* as a means of making a point or winning an argument. Thus, although Mary is not the primary focus of Tertullian’s discussions on Mary’s virginity *ante partum*, she does, nevertheless, play a crucial role in Tertullian’s fight against his opponents.

### **Mary’s virginity during the birth of Christ (*virginitas in partu*).**

The belief in Mary’s virginity *in partu* teaches that Mary gave birth to Christ without her womb being opened. It includes the idea that Mary experienced an absence of labour pains along with the usual infirmities, rupturing and bleeding involved in childbirth.<sup>31</sup> The earliest references to Mary’s virginity *in partu* appear in the apocryphal literature.<sup>32</sup> The oldest written document which stresses Mary’s virginity *in partu* is an apocryphal work entitled the *Ascension of Isaiah*.<sup>33</sup> The author claims: “And while they were alone, Mary looked up and saw a little child, and she was frightened. And at that very moment her womb was found as it had been before she had conceived”.<sup>34</sup> The *Protoevangelium of James* also affirmed Mary’s virginity *in partu*.<sup>35</sup> However, it was not until the fourth century that the belief in Mary’s virginity *in partu* began to flourish in the West.<sup>36</sup> Ambrose, drawing on Isaiah 7.14, claimed that the prophecy stipulated that a virgin would give birth which implies virginity not only in conceiving but also Mary’s virginity *in partu*.<sup>37</sup> Jerome likewise emphasized Mary’s virginity *in partu* suggesting that Christ could open Mary’s womb without violating her virginity.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> In the ancient world the unbroken hymen was a crucial sign that a woman was a virgin. See for example Soranus, *Gynaecology* 1.5.

<sup>32</sup> H. Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1985), p. 41

<sup>33</sup> L. Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: the Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought* trans. T. Buffer (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), p. 33.

<sup>34</sup> *Ascension of Isaiah* 11.8-9. Trans., R.H. Charles in H.F.D. Sparks (ed.), *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 809-810.

<sup>35</sup> *Protoevangelium of James* 19.3-20.1.

<sup>36</sup> Haffner, *The Mystery of Mary*, p. 153.

<sup>37</sup> *Epistola* 42.6.

<sup>38</sup> *Epistola* 49.21



Whilst Tertullian maintained that Mary was a virgin when she conceived Christ, he denied that she remained a virgin in her giving birth to Christ. As with Mary's virginity *ante partum*, Tertullian's references to Mary's virginity *in partu* were prompted by discussions on matters concerning Christology and the correct interpretation of scripture. Along with a number of scholars, I propose that Tertullian denies Mary's virginity *in partu* in order to stress the reality of Christ's flesh and birth.<sup>39</sup>

### *De carne Christi* 23.

Tertullian's discussion of Mary's virginity *in partu*, occurring in chapter twenty-three of *De carne Christi*, is located at the end of the *confirmatio*. As discussed above, Tertullian's aim in the *confirmatio* was to offer proofs in favour of Christ taking flesh from the virgin in order to prove that Christ's flesh was human.<sup>40</sup> Thus, Tertullian's denial of Mary's virginity *in partu* supports his argument in favour of the reality of Christ's flesh and birth.

Tertullian begins the chapter with a reference to Simeon's prophecy in Luke 2.34 which predicts that the Christ-child, who is set for the fall and rising of Israel, is a sign that shall be spoken against, in other words contradicted. Tertullian suggests that this sign, which Simeon refers to, is the same sign Isaiah spoke of in Isaiah 7.14. Tertullian argues that there is indeed a contradiction in the "sign", but the contradiction is in terms of the virgin conceiving, not in terms of the virgin giving birth. As Tertullian will make explicit later in the chapter, Mary gave birth "as a wife", namely, in the ordinary manner.

Tertullian claims that his opponents have seized upon the expression used by certain Academics:<sup>41</sup> "she bare (*sic*) and bare (*sic*) not, virgin and no virgin" to claim that it signifies the appearance of child-bearing without its reality. Tertullian claims that even if the phrase were true, his opponents have misinterpreted it to support their false beliefs surrounding

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<sup>39</sup> Gambero, for example, claimed: "The better to demonstrate the reality of Christ's flesh, [Tertullian] goes so far as to deny that his mother could have remained a virgin in giving birth." (Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: the Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought*, p. 65) See also Dunn, 'Mary's virginity *in partu* and Tertullian's anti-docetism in *De carne Christi* reconsidered', and Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, p. 41-42.

<sup>40</sup> *De carne Christi* 17.

<sup>41</sup> Evans has noted that philosophers of the Academic school professed the uncertainty of all knowledge and thus avoided any direct affirmation or negation. Evans suggests that according to Tertullian a statement in the form "is and is not", "did and did not", would be appropriate to their way of thinking. However, Evans claims that Tertullian's opponents were not in fact adherents of that (philosophical) school and would have refuted any such connexion. (Evans, *Tertullian's Treatise on the Incarnation*, p. 180).

Christ's flesh and birth.<sup>42</sup> He proposes that if the phrase were true, it could be used to support his own case. Mary did deliver but what she delivered had not been conceived in the usual way. Thus, she was a virgin insofar as she had not experienced sexual intercourse, but she was not a virgin because she had delivered a child. Tertullian explains: "...she bare (*sic*), seeing she did so of her own flesh, and she bare (*sic*) not, seeing she did so not of man's seed, a virgin as regards her husband, not a virgin as regards her child-bearing".<sup>43</sup>

Why is Mary not a virgin with regards to her child-bearing? Tertullian claims that through giving birth, Christ opened her womb and thus transformed her from virgin to wife: "For she became a wife by that same law of the opened body, in which it made no difference whether the power (*vi*) was of the male let in or let out: the same sex performed that unsealing (*resignavit*)".<sup>44</sup> Tertullian finds support for his position in a passage from Ezekiel: "Everything male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord".<sup>45</sup> Although this prophecy could be true of any womb, Tertullian claims that it specifically points to Christ: "Who is truly holy, except that holy Son of God? Who in a strict sense has opened a womb, except him who opened this that was shut? For all other women marriage opens it. Consequently, hers was the more truly opened in that it was the more shut".<sup>46</sup>

### Question of definition.

Drawing on the rhetorical practice of arguing from definition Tertullian suggested that he could prove that the scriptures establish that Mary did not give birth as a virgin. Tertullian argues that a virgin (*virgo*) was a female who had experienced neither sexual intercourse nor giving birth to a child. A married woman (*nupta*), on the other hand, was a female who had experienced one or other.<sup>47</sup> Although not all women who experienced intercourse give birth to a child, the very act of intercourse means that they were no longer virgins. In ordinary circumstances a woman who has given birth has already had intercourse and is thus no longer

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<sup>42</sup> Tertullian claims that they use the expression "bare and bare not" to support their claim that Christ was not of Mary's flesh, and they use the phrase "virgin and not virgin" to mean that Mary was not a mother.

<sup>43</sup> *De carne Christi* 23.

<sup>44</sup> *De carne Christi* 23. Evan's translation adapted by author. Evans use of the word "violence" to translate *vis* is dubious and I would suggest that force or power/potency is a more suitable rendering. It seems to me that Tertullian's use of *vis masculis* is a euphemism for male potency and Tertullian is exploiting the vague language to make it also stand for Christ's exit.

<sup>45</sup> Ezekiel 13.2 This passage is echoed in Luke 2.23.

<sup>46</sup> *De carne Christi* 23.

<sup>47</sup> Tertullian does not give the third option of an unmarried female having sexual relations or a further possibility of a married woman who is abstaining from sexual relations.

a virgin. Mary's situation was exceptional because although she gave birth to Christ she did not have sexual intercourse beforehand. Nevertheless, Tertullian argues that through giving birth to Christ Mary ceased to be a virgin even though no prior intercourse had taken place: "...although she (Mary) was a virgin (*virgo*) when she conceived, she was a wife (*nupta*) when she brought forth her son".<sup>48</sup>

Tertullian develops another argument from definition with reference to a passage from Paul which, Tertullian claims, supported the idea that the birth of Christ opened Mary's womb, and thus meant that Mary ceased to be a virgin. Tertullian draws attention to Galatians 4.4, where Paul states that Christ was born of a woman (ἐκ γυναικός or *mulier* in Latin) with no mention of the term virgin (*virgo*).<sup>49</sup> Tertullian claims that Paul uses woman (*mulier*) to denote a non-virgin to distinguish someone from a virgin. Interestingly, Tertullian puts forward the opposite argument in *De virginibus velandis* using the very same passage of Galatians 4.4 as his point of reference.<sup>50</sup> In this treatise, Tertullian argues that Paul uses woman (*mulier*) as a generic term which includes virgin and non-virgin alike. In other words, woman (*mulier*) is the genus of which virgin (*virgo*) is a species. As I will discuss further in chapter six, in *De virginibus velandis* it suited Tertullian's case to argue that the term woman (*mulier*) included virgin because Tertullian wished to prove that Paul's command for women to veil included virgins. In *De virginibus velandis*, it would not have helped Tertullian's case to contrast woman and virgin as he did in *De carne Christi* because it would have strengthened his opponents' position that virgin and woman are two different species and that virgins did not have to be veiled. However, in *De carne Christi* Tertullian wanted to make a distinction between woman (*mulier*) and virgin (*virgo*) so that he might find scriptural support for his argument that Mary was not a virgin during childbearing.

#### Why does Tertullian deny Mary's virginity *in partu*?

One must always keep in mind the overall purpose of a treatise when examining a particular chapter or argument within any given treatise. As I noted earlier, the purpose of *De carne Christi* was to prove the reality of Christ's flesh and birth. Thus, we need to ask how does Tertullian's denial of Mary's virginity *in partu* strengthen his case in favour of the reality of

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<sup>48</sup> *De carne Christi* 23.

<sup>49</sup> "God sent his Son, born of a woman..." (NRSV)

<sup>50</sup> *De virginibus velandis* 6. See also Sider's discussion on Tertullian's use of definition in this treatise. (Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, p. 112 ff.).

Christ's flesh and birth? I propose that Tertullian wanted to demonstrate that ordinariness of Christ's in order to convince his opponents of the reality of Christ's flesh and birth. If Tertullian had accepted that Mary gave birth in an unusual way, as a virgin, this may have given support to the claim of Tertullian's opponents that Christ had unusual flesh and was not truly born of Mary. Indeed, the Valentinians' belief that Christ simply "passed through" Mary's womb, sounds similar to the idea that Mary gave birth as a virgin, without "rupture" to her womb.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, in order to prove that Christ had ordinary human flesh and was truly born of Mary, Tertullian denies Mary's virginity *in partu* and insisted that she experienced all the pains and effects of pregnancy. It follows that if Mary gave birth in the "ordinary" way, Christ possessed "ordinary" human flesh. To defend Mary's virginity *in partu* would have been a step too far for Tertullian and would weaken his claim that Christ truly took flesh from her. In chapter five I will discuss further Tertullian's attempts to prove that Mary's experiences during her pregnancy and in child-birth were the same as those endured by all mothers.

In summary, Tertullian's discussion of Mary's virginity *in partu* was motivated primarily by Christological concerns. This is made evident by the fact that the discussion occurs in the *confirmatio* of *De carne Christi* where Tertullian's primary aim was to prove the reality of Christ's birth and flesh. For Tertullian to admit that Mary gave birth in a miraculous way was to admit that Christ's birth was different and thus give credence to his opponents' claim that Christ's birth and flesh were not truly human. Therefore, by claiming that Mary gave birth in the ordinary way, with all the experiences other women endure, Tertullian affirmed that Christ's flesh and birth were truly human. Thus, once again Mary is an important weapon in Tertullian's fight against his opponents.

### **Mary's virginity after the birth of Christ (*virginitas post partum*).**

Mary's virginity *post partum* is the belief that Mary refrained from marital relations even after the birth of Christ and thus excludes the possibility that Mary had more children. Although not widespread, there was some evidence of belief in Mary's virginity *post partum*

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<sup>51</sup> Tertullian summarizes the Valentinian belief as: "[Christ was} born through the virgin, not from her" (*De carne Christi* 20).

in the second century such as that found in the *Protoevangelium of James*.<sup>52</sup> Belief in Mary's virginity *post partum* became far more prominent in the later Latin tradition. Hilary of Poitiers argued for Mary's virginity *post partum*: "She is called the Mother of Christ, because this she was; not the wife of Joseph, because this she was not".<sup>53</sup> Ambrose was also a defender of Mary's perpetual virginity as is evident in his *Expositio in Lucam* where he expounds the various disputed texts about Mary's perpetual virginity.<sup>54</sup> Augustine likewise defended Mary's perpetual virginity in the often-repeated epithet that Mary: "conceived a virgin, she gave birth as a virgin, she remained a virgin".<sup>55</sup>

Although the subject of Mary's virginity *post partum* was never discussed by Tertullian in explicit terms, there is evidence in two treatises, *Adversus Marcionem* and *De carne Christi*, that Tertullian assumed that Mary had other children apart from Christ. In both passages Tertullian makes reference to the passage in scripture which speaks of Christ's mother and brethren. The passage concerned reads: "Someone told him, 'Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.' But to the one who had told him this, Jesus replied, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?' And pointing to his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.'" <sup>56</sup>

In both treatises<sup>57</sup>, Tertullian's discussions on this scriptural passage come in the context of disputes with his opponents about the reality of Christ's birth and flesh. In *Adversus Marcionem* the discussion appears in book four which, as Evans has pointed out, examines (and refutes) sentence-by-sentence Marcion's mutilated gospel.<sup>58</sup> Tertullian claims that the scriptural passage about Christ's mother and brothers has been misinterpreted to support

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<sup>52</sup> J. Quasten claimed: "The principal aim of the whole writing [*Protoevangelium of James*] is to prove the perpetual and inviolate virginity of Mary before, in, and after the birth of Christ" (J. Quasten, *Patrology* vol.1, p. 120-121).

<sup>53</sup> *Commentarius in Matthaem* 1.3.

<sup>54</sup> Examples include the passage which reads: "...before they came together" (Matt. 1.18) and "He knew her not till she brought forth." (Matt. 1.25) (*Expositio in Lucam* 2.6) See also *De institutione virginis* 35.

<sup>55</sup> *Sermon* 190 no.2 and *Sermon* 196 no.1.

<sup>56</sup> Matthew 12.47-50 (NRSV) See also Mark 3.33 ff.

<sup>57</sup> Although the arguments in *De carne Christi* 7 and *Adversus Marcionem* 4.19 follow the same line there are sufficient differences between the two treatises to indicate that Tertullian was not simply transcribing his earlier work (*Adversus Marcionem*). See E. Evans, *Tertullian's Treatise on the Incarnation*, p. 118.

<sup>58</sup> E. Evans, *Tertullian: Adversus Marcionem*, p. xvii.

Marcion's denial of Christ's flesh and birth.<sup>59</sup> However, Tertullian argues that, in actual fact, the scriptural passage under consideration proves the reality of Christ's flesh and birth.

In *De carne Christi* Tertullian's discussion on the scriptural passage appears in his refutation of Apelles.<sup>60</sup> As noted above, although Apelles admitted that Christ possessed true human flesh he nonetheless denied his nativity.<sup>61</sup> Apelles claimed that in asking the questions: "Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?" Christ repudiates those relationships and, by implication, denies having been born. Through his refutation of Apelles, Tertullian's aim was to prove that Christ's flesh was born in a real human birth, of a mother known and acknowledged to be his mother.<sup>62</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that this scriptural passage was being used by both Tertullian and his opponents as a source of evidence to establish whether or not the mother and brothers of Christ were blood relatives. Tertullian's defence of Christ's birth, through a discussion of the "Who is my mother and who are my brethren?" text demonstrates Tertullian's ability to use ancient rhetoric to interpret scripture in way that is favourable to his arguments.

This is most apparent in *De carne Christi* where Tertullian uses the features of forensic speech to analyse the passage under discussion.<sup>63</sup> As noted above, Apelles had inferred from Christ's statement "Who is my mother and who are my brethren?" that Christ had no family and hence no birth. Sider has highlighted that in chapter seven, Tertullian's challenge to Apelles' interpretation of the "evidence" falls into two parts.<sup>64</sup>

In the first part, Tertullian shows that his opponents have drawn false conclusions from Christ's statement. Tertullian begins with an appeal to the manner in which Christ was addressed.<sup>65</sup> He proposes that people would not have announced to Christ the presence of his mother and brethren if they themselves did not believe he had a family: "...no one would ever

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<sup>59</sup> *De carne Christi* 7.

<sup>60</sup> *De carne Christi* 7.

<sup>61</sup> *Adversus Marcionem* 3.2.

<sup>62</sup> Evans, *Tertullian's Treatise on the Incarnation*, p. xii.

<sup>63</sup> Sider, referring to this passage, has noted: "Perhaps nowhere in the treatise is the immediacy of the forensic context, which Evans claims for the total work, more demonstrable." R. Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, p. 65.

<sup>64</sup> Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, p. 65.

<sup>65</sup> Cicero refers to the argument from manner in *De inventione* 1.27: "But the manner, also, is inquired into; in what manner, how, and with what design the action was done?" Quintilian also refers to the argument from manner in *Institutio oratoria* 5.10.52: "To these we may add manner, the Greek τρόπος, in regard to which we ask how a thing was done."

have reported to him that his mother and his brethren were standing without unless he were sure that he had a mother and brethren and that it was they whose presence he was then announcing, having either previously known them, or at least then and there made their acquaintance”.<sup>66</sup> In other words, it is evident that firstly, Christ must in fact have a mother and brethren, and secondly, that the person who made the announcement (that his mother and brethren were standing outside) was convinced that the mother and brethren were who he said they were.

Tertullian then anticipates a potential objection from his opponents: that those announcing the presence of Christ’s family did so in order to tempt him and to determine whether he was actually of a human family. Tertullian, by invoking the topic of motive, opposes this suggestion claiming that his opponents can offer no motive for the supposed temptation.<sup>67</sup> He then proposes that if those who announced the presence of Christ’s family were in fact tempting him, they went about it in the wrong manner. Tertullian claims that a denial of one’s present possession of a mother and brothers is not necessarily a denial of nativity for, the mother may have died and the brothers may never have existed. In *Adversus Marcionem* Tertullian suggests that the correct way to have determined the truth of Christ’s birth would have been to consult the census.<sup>68</sup>

Sider notes that in the second part of his refutation of Apelles’ interpretation of the scriptural passage, Tertullian recreates the gospel scene, as though in a court situation, with a narrative that supports his side of the case. In particular, Sider highlights that Tertullian creates a forensic tone by deliberately switching from past tense to present tense and by appealing directly to Apelles as though in court.<sup>69</sup> Tertullian says: “But let Apelles, as well as Marcion, hear from me what was the reason behind the reply which for the moment denied mother and brethren”.<sup>70</sup> Tertullian proposes that in the question “Who is my mother and who are my brethren?” Christ’s rebukes his mother and brethren because of their unbelief and interference with his mission: “Our Lord’s brethren did not believe in him...His mother likewise is not

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<sup>66</sup> *De carne Christi* 7. See also *Adversus Marcionem* 4.19: “We on the contrary affirm, first, that there could have been no report brought to him that his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to see him, if he had had no mother or brethren, and if he who brought the message had not known who they were, either by previous acquaintance or by having then and there been informed, either when they asked to see him or when they themselves sent the messenger.”

<sup>67</sup> The argument from motive is discussed by Quintilian in *Institutio oratoria* 5.10.33.

<sup>68</sup> *Adversus Marcionem* 4.19.

<sup>69</sup> Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, p. 66.

<sup>70</sup> *De carne Christi* 7.

shown to have adhered to him...At this juncture their unbelief at last comes into the open".<sup>71</sup> Christ then transfers the titles of kinship to those who do believe and who are interested in doing his work. The transference of those terms of kinship (from his family to his followers) indicates that the mother and brethren mentioned were his genuine family members: "...the admission that they were his mother and his brethren was even more clearly expressed by this refusal to acknowledge them. By adopting others he confirmed those whom through disfavour he denied, and the substitution was not of others more real but of others more worthy".<sup>72</sup> In other words, there could have been no transference of those terms of relationships from his family to his followers if there had not been a mother and brethren from whom to transfer. Once again, although not explicitly stated, this argument suggests that Tertullian believed that Christ had biological brothers and thus denied Mary's virginity *post partum*.

Tertullian develops the theme of transference a stage further by suggesting that Christ's reproof of his mother and brethren is an allegory of Christ's rejection of the synagogue and the acceptance of the Church.<sup>73</sup> Christ's brothers, who remained outside, represents the Jews who did not believe. Tertullian writes: "...there is in his mother's estrangement a figure of the Synagogue, and in his brethren's unbelief a figure of the Jews. Outside, in them, was Israel: whereas the new disciples, hearing and believing, and being inside, by cleaving to Christ depicted the Church which, repudiating carnal kinship, he designated a preferable mother and a worthier family of brothers".<sup>74</sup> Tertullian's suggestion that Mary represents the rejected synagogue is rather striking as Dunn has noted.<sup>75</sup> Graef also has commented that Tertullian's statements about Mary on this topic are among the harshest in the patristic literature.<sup>76</sup> Certainly, this passage is interesting because in it we see that, unlike later Fathers, Tertullian did not feel the need to present Mary as the perfect woman and perfect model for all Christians to emulate. Indeed, in this instance Mary is a model for what Christians ought not to be. Thus, this passage demonstrates that Tertullian was prepared to use Mary as a symbol of something negative when it suited his argument even if in some passages throughout his treatises Tertullian uses her in more positive ways. As Dunn has noted, one should read

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<sup>71</sup> *De carne Christi* 7.

<sup>72</sup> *Adversus Marcionem* 4.19.

<sup>73</sup> This argument does not appear in *Adversus Marcionem*.

<sup>74</sup> *De carne Christi* 7.

<sup>75</sup> Dunn, "Mary's virginity in partu", p. 477.

<sup>76</sup> H. Graef, *Mary: A History of Devotion and Doctrine* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1985), p. 43. This sentiment is echoed by Gambero in *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, p. 62.



Tertullian's comments about Mary representing the Synagogue from a rhetorical perspective: "The point a rhetorical reading would suggest is that Tertullian was not trying to present a consistent theology about Mary but was able here to take a negative interpretation to argue for one point, just as later he could take a more positive stance about her to prove another".<sup>77</sup> Tertullian's negative portrayal of Mary and Christ's brothers enabled him to offer an interpretation of the scriptural passage being debated in a way which allowed him to defend the reality of Christ's birth and flesh.

This brief analysis of Tertullian's understanding of the scriptural verse "Who is my mother and who are my brethren?" demonstrates not only Tertullian's ability to use scripture as 'evidence' within a rhetorical setting, but it has also uncovered a number of interesting ideas about Tertullian's use and portrayal of Mary. Firstly, Tertullian was prepared to use Mary as a symbol of something negative if it aided his argument.<sup>78</sup> In this instance Tertullian used her as a symbol of the unbeliever. Secondly, it proves that Tertullian accepts that Christ's mother and brethren, mentioned in the scriptures, were his genuine biological family. Although not the central subject under consideration, it is clear that Tertullian assumed that Mary had more children after Christ, and thus denied her virginity *post partum*.

A further piece of evidence which suggests that Tertullian denied Mary's virginity *post partum* can be found in Jerome's *Adversus Helvidium* written around 383 in defence of Mary's perpetual virginity. In this treatise Jerome refutes Helvidius who claimed, based on scripture passages which speak of the 'brethren' of Christ, that Mary had children after the birth of Christ. Helvidius appealed to Tertullian as an authority who held the same opinion about the brethren of Christ being a reference to Mary's biological children.<sup>79</sup> Jerome disputes the authority of Tertullian saying: "Of Tertullian I say no more than that he did not belong to the Church".<sup>80</sup>

Those who defended Mary's virginity *post partum* had to find an explanation for the passages in scripture which referred to Christ's brethren. Fathers such as Jerome and Ambrose proposed that the references to Christ's brethren were not to be understood to mean the

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<sup>77</sup> Dunn, "Mary's virginity *in partu*", p. 478.

<sup>78</sup> Gambero made a similar observation when he claimed: "In order to emphasize and exalt the person of Jesus, [Tertullian] does not hesitate to criticize his close relatives when necessary." (Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, p. 63).

<sup>79</sup> *Adversus Helvidium* 19.

<sup>80</sup> *Adversus Helvidium* 19.

biological children of Mary. Rather, in ancient Semitic culture the use of ‘brother’ or ‘sister’ could denote a close relative who was not a brother or sister according to our modern understanding.<sup>81</sup> Thus, Jerome suggested that the brethren of Christ were actually his cousins and Ambrose proposed that they may have been the children of Joseph from a previous marriage.<sup>82</sup> In any case, if Tertullian was aware of this trend within Semitic culture of using ‘brother’ to refer to another relative, he does not discuss it and instead, accepts that Mary had other children. This is not surprising. If we remember that the references to Christ’s brethren come in the contexts of debates about Christ’s birth and flesh it is advantageous for Tertullian to accept that “brethren” was a reference to Christ’s actual brothers. It may have weakened the argument about the reality of Christ’s flesh to say the brothers were actually his step-brothers through Joseph’s previous marriage for if “brethren” was not to be taken literally to mean the brothers of Christ, his opponents may have argued that the same could be said of the reference to his mother.

### De monogamia.

Tertullian makes another brief but interesting reference to Mary’s virginity *post partum* in *De monogamia*. He writes: “Indeed it was a virgin, about to marry once and for all after her delivery, who gave birth to Christ, in order that each title of sanctity might be fulfilled in Christ’s parentage by means of a mother who was both virgin, and wife of one husband”.<sup>83</sup> Although by no means explicit, in calling Mary “the wife of one husband” and by contrasting it with her status as a virgin, Tertullian implicitly denies Mary’s virginity *post partum*. In this passage we see Tertullian using Mary as a moral example to support the main argument of the treatise. *De monogamia* was probably written during Tertullian’s Montanist phase and his aim, in writing it, was to prove that monogamy was the right conduct for Christians to maintain.<sup>84</sup> Tertullian’s reference to Mary’s virginity *post partum* comes in chapter eight of the treatise where Tertullian lists a number of examples from the Gospels which, he claims,

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<sup>81</sup> Hafner, *The Mystery of Mary*, p. 55 This can be seen in the Hebrew Scripture. For example, in Genesis Lot, who although the nephew of Abraham, is referred to as his brother.

<sup>82</sup> Jerome claimed that Joseph, like Mary, remained a virgin: “He who was worthy to be called the father of the Lord, remained a virgin.” Thus, ‘brethren’ were brethren in terms of kinship but not by nature and were either cousins or adopted. See Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p. 23.

<sup>83</sup> *De monogamia* 8.

<sup>84</sup> The Montanists prohibited re-marriage after the death of a spouse and Tertullian criticizes the supposed laxity of other Christians who allowed numerous marriages. In chapter one Tertullian sets out three groups with different views on marriage. Firstly, there are the ‘heretics’ who abolish marriage altogether. Secondly, there are the ‘Psychics’ who accept multiple marriages. Finally, there are those who accept only one marriage and this is the view which Tertullian agrees with and will argue for in the treatise.

demonstrate that monogamy was implicit in biblical teachings. By claiming that Mary was “wife of one husband” Tertullian is able to utilize her as an example of monogamy and thus present her as a model of appropriate conduct for Christians to imitate. It is interesting to contrast Tertullian with other Church Fathers, such as Ambrose cited in the introduction, who depicted Mary as a model of virginity for others to emulate. Tertullian is different in so far as he seems to give equal honour to virginity and marriage/motherhood and regards Mary as a model of both. In *De monogamia*, because of the theme of the treatise, special attention is given to Mary as the model of marriage. I will return to the topics of Tertullian’s view on marriage and virginity in relation to women in general, later in chapter seven.

In summary, Tertullian’s discussion of Mary’s virginity *post partum* is motivated primarily by questions about the correct interpretation of scripture and Christological issues. In both *Adversus Marcionem* and *De carne Christi* the discussion centres on the correct interpretation of the passage “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” Tertullian’s opponents were using this passage as “evidence” of Christ’s denial of having a human family. Tertullian, on the other hand, claims that this passage actually affirms the existence of Christ’s mother and brothers and Christ’s apparent denial was in fact a rebuttal of their disbelief. In *De monogamia* Tertullian uses the denial of Mary’s virginity *post partum* as an example of the ideal of one marriage. Whilst Tertullian’s denial of Mary’s virginity *post partum* is only implicit in *Adversus Marcionem*, *De carne Christi* and *De monogamia* it is nevertheless clear that Tertullian accepted that Mary had other children after the birth of Christ and he used this information to support various arguments in the three treatises.

### **Feminist considerations.**

Feminist scholars have, on the whole, been critical of the emphasis placed on Mary’s virginity because of its negative consequences for other women. However, in all his references to Mary’s virginity, there is nothing to suggest that Tertullian was using Mary as a patriarchal symbol with which to denigrate women. Indeed, Tertullian does not use Mary to say anything about women at all. Rather, Tertullian’s references to Mary’s virginity were used in specific arguments against his opponents, primarily in questions relating to the correct interpretation of scripture and Christological issues.

Feminist scholars such as Johnson, as noted earlier, claim that the construction of Mary's virginity disparages ordinary women in their embodied, sexual reality. However, it is evident that Tertullian did not present Mary's virginity as a virtue or an ideal for other women to emulate. Rather, Tertullian's insistence on Mary's virginal conception is based on his interpretation of the "sign" in Isaiah 7.14 as pointing to a virgin conceiving. Tertullian's primary concern was to demonstrate that this prophecy had been fulfilled in Christ and thus prove that he was the Messiah. Tertullian uses Mary's virginal state as a "proof" in his rhetorical arguments. This could raise problems for feminist scholars because it is clear that Tertullian is using Mary to say something about Christ (a male) rather than being concerned with Mary as an individual. Tertullian also speaks about Mary's virginal conception in the context of the Eve-Mary typology. Feminist scholars have criticized the use of the Eve-Mary typology because they claim that it idealizes Mary and associates ordinary women with sinful Eve. However, it was not Tertullian's intention to contrast Eve and Mary in order to disparage ordinary women, even if it was used subsequently for this purpose. Rather, Tertullian uses the Eve-Mary typology as a rhetorical argument to explain why it was necessary and appropriate for Christ to be born from a virgin.

Tertullian's denial of Mary's virginity *in partu* can have both positive and negative feminist interpretations. On the one hand, the denial of Mary's virginity *in partu* means that her experiences as a woman giving birth are like those of other women. On the other hand, Tertullian's reference to the "opening of the womb" is particularly problematic. He claims that ordinarily it is marriage, in other words the husband, which opens a woman's womb. In Mary's case it is Christ, who is also a male, who opens her womb. For feminist scholars such as Daly, the fact that the opening of the womb is described as being done by a male is problematic because Mary, and her function, is being defined by her relationship to a man. One final problem for feminists is that Tertullian's denial of Mary's virginity *in partu* was prompted primarily, if not exclusively, by the need to defend the reality of Christ's birth and flesh. Mary's loss of virginity is not only accomplished by a male, but it also takes place in order to say something about a male. Thus, on both levels the denial of Mary's virginity *in partu* is being discussed by Tertullian solely in relation to a male, Christ, without any reflection on her as an autonomous individual. However, one must keep in mind that Tertullian was not discussing virginity from the perspective of Mary and nor was he offering a systematic theological account of virginity. Rather, Mary, and in this case the denial of

Mary's virginity *in partu* served as a rhetorical tool in his arguments about the reality of Christ's flesh.

Mary's virginity *post partum* was never discussed explicitly by Tertullian but, as demonstrated above, there is implicit evidence within Tertullian's treatises to suggest that he believed that Mary had more children after Christ. From a feminist perspective, Tertullian's discussion of this topic has both positive and negative readings. In denying Mary's virginity *post partum* Tertullian portrays Mary to be an ordinary woman who had an ordinary relationship with Joseph after the miraculous conception of Christ. By depicting Mary to be more like other women, Tertullian avoids some of the problems of those images of Mary which make her into an inimitable model. Tertullian did not feel the need to present Mary as the perfect women and perfect model for all Christians to emulate. In fact, rather than presenting Mary as a model to emulate, Tertullian was prepared to use Mary as a symbol of something negative, as a model for what Christians ought not to be.<sup>85</sup> For Tertullian, Mary is not a faultless and sinless individual but rather, like all people, she too is imperfect and capable of making mistakes. In spite of the negative symbolism Tertullian also uses her as a positive model in *De monogamia* for he sees Mary as an example of monogamy to support his arguments in favour of one marriage.<sup>86</sup> However, Tertullian speaks of Mary as a mother who was both a virgin and wife of one husband. The roles of mother, virgin, and wife result in Mary being defined by her relationship to a male. Even in her state as a virgin, which, as Daly noted, has the potential to be a sign of a woman's independence from man, Mary is linked to a man by Tertullian, for he speaks of her as a virgin (and wife) of one husband. It must be remembered however, that Tertullian's primary objective was not to make a statement about Mary as virgin, but rather, he was simply using her as an example of monogamy.

In summary, taking my starting point from the issues raised by feminist scholars, but reading Tertullian with a fuller awareness of his use of rhetoric, I have developed a more nuanced reading of his treatment of the topic of Mary. On the one hand it is evident that Tertullian did not construct Mary as a symbol with which to denigrate ordinary women. He did not portray Mary as a perfect and sinless woman whose ideal was impossible to emulate. On the contrary, apart from her miraculous, virginal conception, Tertullian depicted Mary as an

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<sup>85</sup> *De carne Christi* 7.

<sup>86</sup> *De monogamia* 8.

ordinary woman who gave birth to Christ in the normal way, had children thereafter, and who was even capable of error through her unbelief. In portraying Mary in such a way, Tertullian avoids the problems with placing Mary on a pedestal to the detriment of ordinary women. Nevertheless, Tertullian's use of Mary presents its own problems. Tertullian uses Mary as a weapon when engaged in arguments about Christ and the correct interpretation of scripture and is still often defined by her relations to men. In other words, Tertullian is not actually concerned with Mary in her individual, historical reality. Rather his discussions about her are shaped entirely around his rhetorical arguments.

### **Conclusion.**

Tertullian does not offer a systematic account of Mary's virginity but rather makes reference to it when it becomes a useful support to a particular argument. In fact, Tertullian's comments about Mary's virginity before, during and after the birth of Christ are shaped largely by the arguments with his opponents whether those are about the correct interpretation of scripture or about matters relating to Christology. Based on his interpretation of Isaiah 7.14 Tertullian maintains that Mary was a virgin when she conceived. Mary's virginal conception fulfils Isaiah's prophecy and therefore supports Tertullian's claim that the expected Messiah had come in the person of Christ. Tertullian's denies Mary's virginity *in partu* in order to strengthen his claim that Christ's birth and flesh were truly human. By maintaining that Mary gave birth to Christ in the ordinary way, Tertullian sought to prove the reality of Christ's human birth and flesh. Tertullian's denial of Mary's virginity *post partum* is apparent in his discussion about the correct interpretation of the passage "Who is my mother and who are my brethren?" Tertullian refutes the claim of his opponents that this is a denial of the familial relations and instead claims that Christ had both a mother and brothers. Discussions on this passage come in the context of debates about Christ's flesh and Tertullian seeks to strengthen his claim that Christ's flesh was truly human by claiming that Christ had a biological family.

This chapter has demonstrated that the theological and apologetic arguments in which Tertullian was engaged with his opponents had an influence upon his statements about various beliefs. Earlier, in chapter one, I highlighted how Tertullian's statements about the Fall differed according to the audience and theme of a particular treatise. In a similar way, the evidence presented in this chapter (chapter three) has shown that Tertullian's statements on

Mary's virginity were affected by the various arguments with which he was engaged. Thus, this chapter has further demonstrated the importance of understanding the historical and rhetorical context of passages from Tertullian's treatises.

## **CHAPTER 4.**

### **Mary and the Son of David.**

In several of his treatises, namely *Adversus Judaeos*, *Adversus Marcionem* and *De carne Christi*, Tertullian speaks of Christ being the Son of David *through* Mary. Tertullian uses scripture to support his claim stating that the genealogies in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke trace Christ's lineage through Mary to David. However, the scriptural evidence seems to suggest that it was Joseph, not Mary, who had a Davidic ancestry.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I will examine the reasons why Tertullian spoke of "Son of David through Mary" in spite of the scriptural evidence. I propose that Tertullian constructed the "Son of David through Mary" formula in order to support a number of theological and apologetic arguments. Mary is used by Tertullian as a weapon in his fight against the various threats to the faith.

The topic of Tertullian's use of the "Son of David" theme has received very little attention from scholars. There have been a number of studies on the use of the Davidic ancestry in the New Testament, but Geoffrey Dunn in his article 'The ancestry of Jesus according to Tertullian: *ex David per Mariam*'<sup>2</sup> is the only scholar to have given a serious consideration to Tertullian's use of the Davidic ancestry. In particular, Dunn's examination focuses on Tertullian's use of the Davidic ancestry in *Adversus Judaeos* 9.26 in order to argue for the authenticity of the second half of *Adversus Judaeos* which, as noted earlier, is a question disputed by scholars. Dunn suggests that Tertullian used the "Son of David through Mary" formula to make a theological point, namely about the reality of Christ's flesh.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter I will build upon Dunn's work and explore in greater depth Tertullian's theological and apologetic agenda in using the "Son of David through Mary" formula. Finally, I will briefly consider the consequences of Tertullian's use of the "Son of David through Mary" formula, for the feminist question.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 3.23-38 and Matthew 1.1-17.

<sup>2</sup> G.D. Dunn, "The Ancestry of Jesus according to Tertullian: *ex David per Mariam*" *Studia Patristica* 36 (2001), pp. 349-355.

<sup>3</sup> Dunn, "The Ancestry of Jesus according to Tertullian", p. 354-355.



### **Pauline passages.**

The oldest datable New Testament reference to Christ being of the seed of David<sup>4</sup> is found in Romans 1.3: “The Gospel concerning his [God’s] Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh”. Although Paul does not make reference to Mary, Tertullian claims that Christ is of the seed of David because of Mary.<sup>5</sup> Tertullian refers to another Pauline passage (Galatians 3.16) which links Christ not only to David, but also to Abraham. Again, although Paul makes no reference to Mary, Tertullian claims that Christ is related to Abraham and David through Mary. Tertullian’s use of these Pauline passages to speak of the Davidic descent through Mary reflects a theological agenda which I will discuss below. His interpretation of these Pauline passages as a reference to Mary is not in itself problematic as Paul does not state through whom the Davidic line comes. Tertullian simply outlines what Paul says and then assumes that Mary must be the link between Christ and David. Tertullian’s use of the genealogies found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, however, creates an interesting question because although Matthew and Luke trace Christ’s Davidic descent through Joseph’s family-tree, Tertullian, in all but one instance, claims that the Davidic line comes through Mary.

### **The Gospels of Matthew and Luke.**

Tertullian claims that the genealogies of Christ, found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, speak of Mary, and therefore Christ, being from the family of David. In *Adversus Marcionem*, for example, Tertullian states: “That Christ would be of the family of David, in accordance with Mary’s genealogy”.<sup>6</sup> Although it is not explicitly clear which genealogy Tertullian is referring to in this passage it could be a reference to the genealogy in Luke’s Gospel. Some scholars have suggested that whereas the author of Matthew’s Gospel traces Joseph’s family tree the Lucan genealogy traced Mary’s family-tree and this, they claim, explains why there are inconsistencies between the Lucan and Matthean genealogies.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> R.E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), p. 508.

<sup>5</sup> *De carne Christi* 22.

<sup>6</sup> *Adversus Marcionem* 4.1 See also *Adversus Marcionem* 3.20: “Christ is reckoned from David by carnal descent, because of the lineage of Mary”.

<sup>7</sup> Annius of Viterbo, a Dominican friar of the fifteenth century, made this view popular and it has been used in modern times by J.M.Heer. See J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, Anchor Bible no. 28 (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1981), p. 497.

However, scholars are divided on this issue and there has been no conclusive solution to the question of why the two genealogies in Matthew and Luke are so different.<sup>8</sup>

In *De carne Christi* 22 Tertullian makes a direct reference to the genealogy in Matthew's Gospel and states: "The fact that, by a descent which flows from these sources of origin, the sequence is brought down step by step to the nativity (*ad Christi nativitatem*) of Christ, can only mean that the very flesh of Abraham and David is registered as making an offshoot of itself through each several ancestor right down to the Virgin, and as bringing in Christ...Christ himself comes forth from the Virgin".<sup>9</sup>

There are two main problems with Tertullian's interpretation of this passage. Firstly, Evans<sup>10</sup> has noted that all MSS except for *Codex Trecentis* have '*a Christi nativitate*' instead of '*ad Christi nativitatem*' which is the correct version according to Evans and the one quoted above. "*A Christi nativitate*" implies that the genealogy is an ascending genealogy, going from the nativity of Christ (*a Christi nativitate*) to his ancestors all the way back to Adam. "*Ad Christi nativitatem*" on the other hand, implies a descending genealogy going from Abraham down to the birth of Christ (*ad Christi nativitatem*). Whereas Matthew constructs his genealogy descending from Abraham to Christ, Luke constructs his version in ascending order, from Christ to Adam. Thus, since Tertullian refers to Matthew's genealogy in *De carne Christi* 22 Evans is right in suggesting that the passage should read "*ad Christi nativitatem*" rather than, "*a Christi nativitate*" which would be true of Luke's gospel. The second problem with Tertullian's interpretation of Matthew's genealogy, is that he claims that it is through Mary's lineage that Christ is linked to David and Abraham. However, if one looks at the genealogy in Matthew's Gospel, the Gospel author traces the descent from Abraham and David to Christ through Joseph. Matthew begins: "The genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham..." and he concludes the genealogy with: "...Jacob fathered Joseph the husband of Mary, of her was born Jesus who is called Christ". (Matthew 1.16) Interestingly, Tertullian quotes this exact passage of scripture, Matthew 1.16, in chapter twenty of *De carne Christi* and correctly attributes the Davidic family to Joseph: "...the same Matthew, when rehearsing the Lord's pedigree from Abraham down to Mary, says Jacob

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<sup>8</sup> See H.A Sanders, "The Genealogies of Jesus" *The Journal of Biblical Literature* Vol. 32 (Sept. 1913) for an extensive discussion on the issue.

<sup>9</sup> In Latin: *His originis fontibus genere manante cum gradatim ordo deducitur ad Christi nativitatem, quid aliud quam caro ipsa Abrahae et David per singulos traducem sui faciens in virginem usque describitur inferens Christum-immo ipse Christus prodit -de virgine?*

<sup>10</sup> See E. Evans, *Tertullian's Treatise on the Incarnation*, p. 177.

begat Joseph the husband of Mary of whom Christ was born”.<sup>11</sup> Thus, Tertullian must have been fully aware that the author of Matthew’s Gospel traces Christ’s Davidic descent through Joseph and yet, two chapters later in the same treatise, Tertullian claims that the Davidic descent came through Mary. As I will discuss below, in *De carne Christi* 22 Tertullian was using Mary and her Davidic family as a tool to strengthen his case against denials of Christ’s human birth and flesh.

Tertullian also traces Christ’s Davidic line through Mary when discussing relevant passages from Luke’s gospel. In *Adversus Judaeos* Tertullian makes reference to Luke 2.1-7. He writes: “[Christ] was from the native soil of Bethlehem, and from the house of David; as, among the Romans, Mary is described in the census, of whom is born Christ”. However, the Lucan passage which Tertullian bases this claim upon suggests that it is Joseph, not Mary, who was from the House of David. Luke writes: “So Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee for Judea, to David’s town called Bethlehem, since he was of David’s House and line, “in order to be registered together with Mary his betrothed, who was with child”. (Luke 2: 4-6)

How can this apparent misreading be explained? A possible explanation could be that the manuscript which Tertullian was using suggested that both Joseph and Mary were of David’s house. Fitzmyer, in his commentary on Luke’s Gospel, makes some interesting observations. He claims that Luke 2:4 which reads “because *he* (Joseph) was from the house of David” has an alternative reading in some manuscripts, which use “they” (*αὐτοὺς*), instead of “he” (*αὐτον*). Similarly, the Sinaitic OS reads “both” thus implying that both Mary and Joseph were from the House of David.<sup>12</sup> In spite of these possibilities, Fitzmyer is dismissive, claiming that any differences in manuscripts were simply reflections of later traditions which attempt to make Mary a Davidic: “Luke knows of no Davidic connections for Mary. Jesus’ Davidic descent is clearly traced by Luke through Joseph”.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *De carne Christi* 20.

<sup>12</sup> Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke* p. 406. A further point may be added to Fitzmyer’s proposals; if Tertullian had access to a Latin translation of Luke’s gospel, the reading of Luke 2.4 could, at a push, be interpreted as pointing to Mary. The Latin text reads: “*ascendit autem et Ioseph a Galilaea de civitate Nazareth in Iudaeam civitatem David quae vocatur Bethleem eo quod esset de domo et familia David*”. The subject of “*eo quod*” (for that reason/because) is *esset* which could mean either he (Joseph) or she (Mary). However, in Latin the subject of a sentence usually stays the same throughout the sentence and thus, *esset* probably is a reference to Joseph.

<sup>13</sup> Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, p. 406.

An alternative explanation could be that Tertullian was following a belief that since Mary and Joseph were betrothed, they must have been from the same tribe.<sup>14</sup> Evidence of this tradition can be found in Numbers 36. 6 which states: “They may marry whom they please, providing they marry into a clan of their father’s tribe”.<sup>15</sup> The assumption that Mary and Joseph were from the same tribe is present in the works of some of the fathers. Origen, for example, proposed that Mary and Joseph were both from the House of David on the basis that it was required by law that those who marry be from the same tribe.<sup>16</sup> Julius Africanus, a historian of the late second century, also believed that both Joseph and Mary were from the tribe of David.<sup>17</sup> However Dunn has highlighted the limitations of this argument. He notes that the arguments in favour of Mary being a Davidic based on the requirements of inter-tribal marriage only appear in the third century, by which time the tradition of Mary being a Davidic had already been well established.<sup>18</sup> In other words, it is possible that someone like Origen accepted that Mary was a Davidic, based on the tradition, and sought a way to synthesize this belief with scriptural passages which only referred to Joseph’s Davidic lineage. I propose that it is possible that Tertullian, a near-contemporary of Origen, could have done a similar thing.

This theory gains more credibility when one realises that, even without the reference to the legal requirements of inter-tribal marriage, there was an assumption among a number of the fathers that Mary was a Davidic. The *Protevangelium of James* asserted that Mary was a Davidic: “Now there was a council of the priests, and they said: Let us make a veil for the temple of the Lord. And the priest said: Call unto me pure virgins of the tribe of David. And the officers departed and sought and found seven virgins. And the priests called to mind the child Mary, that she was of the tribe of David and was undefiled before God”.<sup>19</sup> Ignatius also makes an implicit reference to Mary’s Davidic descent: “... For the Son of God, who was begotten before time began, and established all things according to the will of the Father, He was conceived in the womb of Mary, according to the appointment of God, of the seed of David, and by the Holy Ghost ...”<sup>20</sup> Justin in the *Dialogue with Trypho* also assumed Mary was from David’s family: “...Christ, Son of God, who was before the morning star and the

<sup>14</sup> Brown lists some of the counter-arguments to this position. See Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* p. 289

<sup>15</sup> Dunn refers to Numbers 32 but as far as I can see there is nothing in this chapter which comments on the present chapter. Dunn, “The Ancestry of Jesus according to Tertullian”, p.353.

<sup>16</sup> *Commentary on Romans* 1.5.

<sup>17</sup> *Elucidations* I.4: ‘Joseph and Mary were of the same lineage’.

<sup>18</sup> Dunn, “The Ancestry of Jesus according to Tertullian”, p. 353.

<sup>19</sup> *Protevangelium of James* 10.1.

<sup>20</sup> *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians* 18.

moon, and submitted to become incarnate, and to be born of this virgin of the family of David...”<sup>21</sup> Dunn incorrectly asserts that this is the only reference Justin makes to Mary’s Davidic ancestry.<sup>22</sup> There are, however, two more references in the *Dialogue with Trypho* to Mary being from the family of David.<sup>23</sup> Irenaeus also speaks of Mary as a Davidic: “[Christ] who was born of the virgin, herself of the lineage of David...”<sup>24</sup> This brief overview suggests that there was a tendency among the early fathers to use phrases such as “Son of God...of this virgin of the family of David” as a semi-regular formula which was similar to the rules of faith. It is possible, therefore, that in assigning Christ’s Davidic ancestry to Mary, Tertullian was simply following a tradition which accepted this as part of the early faith. Whilst this may be true for some of his references to the Son of David, I propose that in some passages Tertullian purposely traces Christ’s Davidic line through Mary, rather than Joseph, for theological and apologetic reasons.

### **Genealogies in the ancient world.**

In the ancient world it was common practice for one to construct a person’s genealogy based not on biological truth, but rather in order to establish social status or some other quality which was relevant to the person. This was particularly important in the ancient world because a person’s social worth and identity were rooted in their ethnic affiliation, ancestors, and family.<sup>25</sup> Williams, for example, has noted that: “Genealogies in the ancient world were rarely constructed primarily to record biological descent; rather their main purpose was to establish claims to social status, rank or a particular office, such as priest or king”.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, this has been the conclusion reached by a number of biblical scholars who claim that genealogies in the Bible were not based on the accurate historical account of biological ancestry but were constructed in order to establish a person’s identity, to undergird status, and

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<sup>21</sup> *Dialogue with Trypho* 45.4.

<sup>22</sup> G.D. Dunn, *Tertullian’s Adversus Judaeos: A Rhetorical Analysis*. Dunn states: “There is only one reference in Justin to Mary’s Davidic ancestry (*Dial.* 45.4)”. In a later paper Dunn seems to modify this position. See Dunn, “The Ancestry of Jesus according to Tertullian”.

<sup>23</sup> In *Dialogue with Trypho* 100 Justin claims: “[Christ] was the son of man either because of his birth by the virgin, who was, as I said, of the family of David”. A reference is also made in *Dialogue* 68.

<sup>24</sup> *Adversus haereses* 3.21.5. In another passage, Irenaeus writes: “of the seed of David according to his birth from Mary...” (*Adversus haereses* 3.16.3) and in another treatise: “[Christ] who became the fruit of that virgin who had her descent from David”. (*Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching* 36).

<sup>25</sup> R.H. Williams, “Histories of Jesus and Matthew 1.1-25” in A.J. Blasi, J. Duhaime, and P.A. Turcotte (ed.), *Handbook of Early Christianities: Social Sciences Approaches* (New York: Alta Mira, 2002), p. 110.

<sup>26</sup> Williams, “Histories of Jesus”, p. 110.

to highlight a particular family or personality trait.<sup>27</sup> The genealogy in Matthew's gospel is a good example because through it Matthew connected Christ with the forefathers of Israel (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and the prominent family of David. The purpose of the genealogy was to demonstrate that Christ had been born into a distinguished family and thus, Christ deserved an honourable status.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, by placing Christ within the Davidic family, Matthew was identifying Christ as Israel's expected Messiah. Thus, the genealogy in Matthew is probably not an accurate list of Christ's biological relatives. Rather, the genealogy is a rhetorical construction which contains significant figures in the history of Israel to support the picture of Christ which Matthew is constructing. Brown has proposed that this understanding of the use of ancient genealogies could help to explain why there are inconsistencies between the two genealogies in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke: "Perhaps the most important single factor is the recognition that genealogies serve different purposes and that an individual can be accorded two or more different genealogies according to the purpose for which they were drawn up".<sup>29</sup>

There was a similar practice of constructing genealogies in ancient rhetoric, particularly in epideictic speeches. Cicero, for example, claimed that topics with respect to persons, including a person's family, are particularly suitable in speeches of praise.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, Quintilian encourages orators to refer to a person's ancestors and country of origin in panegyric speeches.<sup>31</sup> The purpose of a genealogy in rhetorical speeches was to connect a person to the past and to certain historical figures. It gave the person being praised credibility, revealed certain things about him and could direct the mind of the audience towards a particular quality or trait.<sup>32</sup> The purpose of the argument from birth was expressed by Aristotle as such: "The good birth of an individual implies that both parents are free citizens, and that, as in the case of the state, the founders of the line have been notable for virtue or wealth or something else which is highly prized, and that many distinguished persons belong to the family, men and women, young and old".<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, p. 65.

<sup>28</sup> Williams, "Histories of Jesus", p. 110.

<sup>29</sup> Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, p. 65 See also Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, p.498.

<sup>30</sup> *De Inventione* 3.59.

<sup>31</sup> *Institutio oratoria* 3.10.

<sup>32</sup> Plato, for example, claimed that if the ancestors of a person were "landed" or citizens of a free *polis*, then the root stock of the family was noble and thus the person being described was noble. Plato says: "They were good because they sprang from good fathers". (*Menexenus* 237).

<sup>33</sup> *Rhetoric* 1.5.5.

Examples of the argument from birth can be found in ancient biographies which often contained a mini genealogy, linking the character of the biography with some of the key ancestors in their family history in order to highlight a certain point. For example, Suetonius<sup>34</sup> wrote a book about the lives of twelve Caesars, *De vita Caesarum*,<sup>35</sup> which contained a set of twelve biographies which included within them brief genealogies. In his description of Otho,<sup>36</sup> for example, Suetonius constructs a brief genealogy of his family which highlights the noble members of his family and thus points to Otho's own nobility.<sup>37</sup>

Ancient readers expected idealized portraits of persons being described. Thus, just as certain arguments were constructed to suit a particular audience, as I have discussed already in earlier chapters, so too genealogies could be constructed to highlight a particular quality or to support a particular argument. There was an understanding among ancient orators and historians that the details of history (including the history of one's ancestors) could be adapted to suit a particular speech. The Greek historian Thucydides, for example, admitted that he took some liberties when reconstructing historical speeches.<sup>38</sup>

I propose that this practice of constructing a genealogy for a particular purpose helps us to understand why Tertullian traces Christ's Davidic lineage through Mary and not through Joseph. As I will discuss below, the "Son of David through Mary" can be thought of as a genealogical formula which Tertullian constructs with two purposes in mind. Firstly, Tertullian wants to establish Jesus' identity as the promised Messiah and to prove that he had fulfilled the prophecies, which were about him, in the Hebrew Scriptures. Secondly, Tertullian wished to prove that Christ's flesh was truly human. Markus Bockmuehl, in his article "The Son of David and his Mother" claims that the Son of David title was given to Christ for these two purposes. He explains: "More particularly, this belief helped to secure

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<sup>34</sup> Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, commonly known as Suetonius (ca. 69/75 – after 130), was a Roman historian who lived around the period of 75-130 CE.

<sup>35</sup> This work was written sometime around 121 CE.

<sup>36</sup> Otho was Roman Emperor for 91 days in the year 69 CE.

<sup>37</sup> "The ancestors of Otho came from an old and illustrious family in the town of Ferentium and were descended from the princes of Etruria. His grandfather Marcus Salvius Otho, whose father was a Roman knight but whose mother was of lowly origin and perhaps not even free-born, became a senator through the influence of Livia Augusta..." *The Life of Otho* 1.

<sup>38</sup> Thucydides writes: "As for things that they each said by way of argument, either when they were about to go to war or when they were already at war, it was difficult to carry the precise details of the things that were said word for word in one's memory. This was the case both for me, where I heard them myself, and for those who reported them to me from various sources; but they have been rendered in the way it seemed to me likely that each speaker would indeed have said what was needed concerning the present circumstances on each occasion, while sticking as closely as possible to the general ideas behind what was actually said" (Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.22.1-2).

the Christological particularity and authenticity of Jesus against challenges either of his Jewish messianic identity or of his concretely embodied humanity as the incarnate Son”.<sup>39</sup> Although Bockmuehl makes a brief reference to Tertullian as an example of using the “Son of David” title in a polemical context, he does not go into much detail. In the remainder of this chapter my aim is to give a detailed explanation of how Tertullian uses the “Son of David through Mary” formula for these two purposes, and thus affirm the findings of Bockmuehl’s research.

Before discussing these points in more detail I want to offer a brief explanation why, in Tertullian’s mind, the Davidic line had come through Mary rather than Joseph. Whilst it may seem obvious to a modern reader that true Davidic descent could only come through a biological parent, this was not the thinking of all in the ancient world. In Jewish thought, a person could be “of the seed of David” if they were brought up in the house of a descendant of David even if they were not genetically related. In other words, there was no distinction between children who were genetically born into a household and those who were adopted.

This explains why the author of Matthew’s Gospel was able to maintain that Christ’s Davidic ancestry came through Joseph even though he was not his biological father. Christ’s Davidic ancestry is not transferred through natural birth but through legal paternity.<sup>40</sup> The Jewish position acknowledged that sometimes it was difficult to determine who begot the child biologically. Since a man would, in most cases, acknowledge and support a child only if it was his own, the law prefers to base paternity on the man’s acknowledgement. The Mishna *Baba Bathra* 8:6 states the principle as such: “If a man says, ‘This is my son,’ he is to be believed”. Joseph, by exercising the father’s right to name the child acknowledges Jesus as his son and thus becomes the legal father of the child.<sup>41</sup>

Scholars have argued that legal paternity was not an easy concept for the non-Semite.<sup>42</sup> However, even if this is true there was a similar practice present in ancient Roman society. The Romans considered the bonds of family to be biologically based but not biologically

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<sup>39</sup> M. Bockmuehl, “The Son of David and his Mother” in *The Journal of Theological Studies* Vol. 62 No.2 (October, 2011), p. 483.

<sup>40</sup> Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, p. 138.

<sup>41</sup> For this reason, Brown argues that “legal father” is a better title for Joseph to that of the usual title of “adoptive” or “foster father”. Joseph does not adopt someone else’s son as his own. Rather, he acknowledges his wife’s child as his legitimate son, using the same formula by which other Jewish fathers acknowledged their legitimate children.

<sup>42</sup> Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, p. 139.



determined.<sup>43</sup> There was a widespread practice of adoption in the ancient Roman world and this suggests that nature played only a minor role in the Roman conception of the family. Veyne stated: “There were two ways to have children: to conceive them in legitimate wedlock or to adopt them”.<sup>44</sup> According to Veyne a person acquired membership in a family not as the result of biological reproduction, but through the ritual acceptance of the newborn by the *paterfamilias* (or head of the family).<sup>45</sup> Immediately after the birth of a child it was the father’s prerogative to raise the child from the earth where the midwife had placed it, thus indicating that he recognized it as his own, thus: “A citizen of Rome did not ‘have’ a child; he ‘took’ a child, raised him up (*tollere*)”.<sup>46</sup>

If Tertullian was unfamiliar with the Jewish practice of legal adoption it is almost certain that, given his legal background, he was familiar with the Roman practice of adoption.<sup>47</sup> Thus, Tertullian understood that Christ could have obtained his Davidic ancestry through Joseph’s family line as the authors of Matthew and Luke suggest. I propose that Tertullian traced the Davidic descent through Mary because, as the biological parent of Christ, it gave Christ the right kind of membership and the strongest possible family link to David needed for Tertullian’s arguments. If Tertullian had admitted that Christ was a Davidic only through adoption it may have weakened his claim and thus jeopardized the theological arguments which were dependent upon the Davidic descent.

### **Son of David and the promised Messiah.**

One of Tertullian’s main objectives in treatises such as *Adversus Marcionem* and *Adversus Judaeos* was to identify Jesus as Israel’s long-awaited Messiah. Based on passages in the Hebrew Scriptures, there was a belief among the early Christians that the Messiah, who had been promised to Israel, would be from the family of David. Tertullian’s aim therefore was to show that Christ was the Son of David and, for that reason, also the Messiah.

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<sup>43</sup> R.P. Saller, *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 43.

<sup>44</sup> P. Aries and P. Veyne (ed), *A History of Private Life: From Pagan Rome to Byzantium* (Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 17.

<sup>45</sup> Veyne, *A History of Private Life*, p. 9.

<sup>46</sup> Veyne, *A History of Private Life*, p. 9.

<sup>47</sup> See my discussion in the introduction.

One of the ways in which Tertullian attempts to prove that Christ was the Son of David is by showing that he had fulfilled all of the prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures about the Messiah especially those which, according to Tertullian, pointed to the Son of David. Given that Mary was supposedly the biological link to David, she played a vital role in Tertullian's proof that the prophecies had been fulfilled.

### **Adversus Judaeos and Isaiah 11.1.**

A key passage for Tertullian was Isaiah 11.1 which reads: "A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch (*flos*) shall grow out of his roots...."<sup>48</sup> This passage had long been read as a prophecy pointing to a future Messiah who would be from the Davidic line, indicated by the reference to "the stock of Jesse".<sup>49</sup> Tertullian also read Isaiah's prophecy in this way and claims that the prophecy had been fulfilled in Christ, through his birth from Mary.<sup>50</sup> Tertullian writes: "Thus in the figure of a flower (*in floris figura*) he pointed to Christ who was to rise up out of the rod which had come forth from the root of Jesse-that is, the virgin of the offspring of David the son of Jesse..."<sup>51</sup> In another treatise<sup>52</sup> Tertullian explains in more explicit detail how Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled by Christ through Mary. He claims that "the root of Jesse" is a reference to the House of David; the stem (from this root) is a reference to Mary, who can only be the stem if she is descended from David; and finally, Christ is the flower (*flos*) or fruit which comes forth from the stem.<sup>53</sup>

One example of Tertullian interpreting Isaiah 11.1 as having been fulfilled in Christ (through Mary) can be found in the *confirmatio* of *Adversus Judaeos*.<sup>54</sup> As I have noted in several places, the purpose of the *confirmatio* was to present positive proofs that would persuade an audience to believe the case one was making. In *Adversus Judaeos* Tertullian was attempting to demonstrate that the old law had ceased and that the promised new law had come in Christ. The *confirmatio* in *Adversus Judaeos* focussed on the latter point. Tertullian's reference to Isaiah 11.1 comes in chapter nine which, as I indicated in the previous chapter, discussed

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<sup>48</sup> As quoted by Tertullian in *Adversus Marcionem* 5.8.

<sup>49</sup> J. Barton and J. Muddiman (ed.), *The Oxford Biblical Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 448.

<sup>50</sup> Dunn, "The Ancestry of Jesus according to Tertullian", p. 350.

<sup>51</sup> *Adversus Marcionem* 5.8.

<sup>52</sup> *De carne Christi* 21.

<sup>53</sup> When Justin referred to the prophecy of Isaiah 11 (*Dialogue with Trypho* 87.2 and 1 *Apology* 32.12) he did not mention Mary being of David's lineage.

<sup>54</sup> *Adversus Judaeos* 9.26.

prophecies from the Hebrew Scriptures that point to the birth of Christ. Tertullian claims that, since Mary was from the family of David, the prophecy of Isaiah 11.1 has been fulfilled in Christ. Tertullian does not give a detailed examination of Isaiah 11.1 and nor does he go to any great lengths to prove how this prophecy has been fulfilled in Christ. Rather, he simply accepts that Mary is from the family of David and then interprets the prophecy accordingly. Tertullian's use of Isaiah 11.1 supported the overall argument of the *confirmatio* because it proved, according to Tertullian, that the promised Messiah had come in the person of Christ and as a consequence, the new law had replaced the old law of the Jews.

There is one particularly interesting remark which comes at the end of Tertullian's discussion of Isaiah 11.1 in *Adversus Judaeos*: "For [Christ] was from the native soil of Bethlehem, and from the house of David; as, among the Romans, Mary is described in the census, of whom is born Christ". I noted earlier in chapter three, when discussing Tertullian's view on Mary's virginity *post partum*, that Tertullian proposed that the correct way to determine the truth about someone's birth was to consult the census.<sup>55</sup> Tertullian was critical of his opponents because they had attempted to disprove the reality of Christ's birth without consulting the census. In this passage from *Adversus Judaeos*, in which Tertullian is discussing matters relating to Christ's birth, Tertullian follows his own criteria by referring to the census mentioned in Luke 2.2, to support his claim that Christ was from the family of David.

### **Adversus Marcionem and Psalm 132.11**

Another passage in the Hebrew Scriptures which Tertullian claims points to Christ is found in Psalm 132.11 which Tertullian translates as: "*Ex fructu ventris*<sup>56</sup> *tui collocabo super thronum tuum*" translated as: "Of the fruit of your body/womb I will set upon your throne"<sup>57</sup> Tertullian's discussion on the Psalm centres on whose body this promise is referring to. Tertullian claims that it cannot be a literal reference to David's body since it is impossible for David to give birth. Neither does it refer to his wife's body because, argues Tertullian, the Psalm would have said: "the fruit of thy wife's body". Tertullian concludes therefore that it must be a reference to one of David's descendants, namely Mary, the fruit of whom would be

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<sup>55</sup> *Adversus Marcionem* 4.19.

<sup>56</sup> *Ventris* (Genitive, masculine) is from the Latin *venter* and can be translated as belly, womb or offspring.

<sup>57</sup> The NRSV reads: "One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne". The Psalmist quotes from 2 Samuel 7.12: "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom".

the flesh of Christ. Tertullian explains: “But by mentioning his body, it follows that he pointed to some one of his race of whose body/womb the flesh of Christ was to be the fruit, which bloomed forth from Mary’s womb. He named the fruit of the body/womb alone, because it was peculiarly fruit of the womb, of the womb only in fact, and not of the husband also; and he refers the womb to David, as the chief of the race and father of the family”.<sup>58</sup> In short, *ex fructu ventris tui* applied literally to Mary and only figuratively to David.

What purpose does Tertullian’s discussion of Psalm 132.11 serve to his wider arguments in *Adversus Marcionem*? Dunn claims that the purpose of Tertullian’s exposition of Psalm 132.11 was to prove the reality of Christ’s humanity.<sup>59</sup> However, whilst this may have been the case in *De carne Christi*, as I will explain below, in *Adversus Marcionem* it was not Tertullian’s primary concern.<sup>60</sup>

Tertullian’s discussion of Psalm 132.11 comes in book three, chapter twenty of *Adversus Marcionem* where, at the beginning of the chapter, Tertullian spells out explicitly that his intention is to highlight the parallels in the Hebrew Scriptures with the events of Christ’s life. Tertullian’s aim is to show that the prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures were about Christ and not about the Jewish Messiah who, according to Marcion, was still to come.<sup>61</sup> In order to prove that the prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures were talking about Christ, and not some other Jewish Messiah, Tertullian adopts a number of strategies. For example, using the rhetorical *topos* of comparison, Tertullian claims that the promise made in Psalm 2.7-8 which states: “He said to me, ‘You are my son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession’...” is a promise made to Christ and not to David. Tertullian explains that the verse cannot be speaking of a promise made to David because David’s reign was confined to one nation, that is, the Jewish nation. Faith in Christ, by comparison, has spread through the whole world and thus the

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<sup>58</sup> *Adversus Marcionem* 3.20 (Holmes trans. *Ante-Nicene Fathers* vol. 3).

<sup>59</sup> Dunn, “The Ancestry of Jesus according to Tertullian”, p. 354-355.

<sup>60</sup> Whilst Tertullian’s primary concern was to prove that the expected Messiah of the Jews had come in the person of Jesus, there were a number of other matters under dispute which were dealt with, although not explicitly, through this primary concern. For example, Marcion rejected the unity of the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures. By demonstrating that Christ had fulfilled prophecies from the Hebrew Scriptures with the claim that Mary was from David’s line, based on a reference to the census in the Gospel of Luke, Tertullian makes an implicit link between the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, by proving that the prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures had been fulfilled in Christ, Tertullian also strengthened his argument for the unity of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

Psalmist was referring to Christ.<sup>62</sup> Tertullian employs a similar technique in his discussion of Psalm 132 in that he expounds the Psalm in such a way that it could only be speaking about Christ's birth from Mary's womb and thus proves that the promised Messiah had come.

In summary, Tertullian believed that the prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures which spoke about the future Messiah, particularly those which focused on his Davidic origins, had been fulfilled in Christ. This is particularly evident in Tertullian's discussion on Isaiah 11.1-2 and Psalm 132. Tertullian used a number of rhetorical techniques to show that the prophecies applied to Christ and not to some future Messiah. Since Mary was Christ's only biological link to the Davidic line, she too played a central role in the fulfilment of these prophecies.

### **Son of David as a Christological proof.**

The second reason why Tertullian uses the "Son of David through Mary" formula is in order to emphasize that Christ's flesh was truly human by concretely placing him within a human family. The best example of Tertullian using Mary's Davidic ancestry for this purpose is found in chapter twenty-one of *De carne Christi*. Chapter twenty-one occurs in the *confirmatio* of the treatise and, as I have already noted, the *confirmatio* expounded positive proofs which supported the central argument of the treatise, namely, that Christ's birth was real and that his flesh was truly human flesh.

Tertullian's reference to David comes midway through the chapter. He interprets the passage from Isaiah 11.1-2 alongside Elizabeth's statement to Mary in Luke 1.42: "Blessed is the fruit (*fructus*) of your womb". What is this fruit of Mary's womb? Tertullian claims that Christ is the fruit of Mary's womb basing this assertion on Isaiah 11.1. He explains: "Is it not because he is himself the flower (*flos*) from the stem (*virga*) which came forth from the root of Jesse, while the root of Jesse is the house of David, and the stem (*virga*) from the root is Mary, descended from David, that the flower from the stem, the Son of Mary, who is called Jesus Christ, must himself also be the fruit (*fructus*)?"<sup>63</sup> In this passage we see Tertullian extending

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<sup>62</sup>Tertullian also refers to Isaiah 55.5 which he claims foretells the universal spread of Christianity, an argument which continues into chapter 21.

<sup>63</sup>*De carne Christi* 21.

the original prophecy of Isaiah to also include fruit (*fructus*)<sup>64</sup> which obviously suits the present argument because he is trying to explain Elizabeth's comment to Mary: "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb". For Tertullian, the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled in Christ, as Elizabeth's exclamation testifies, but the only way this can be true is if Christ really took flesh from Mary because the only way Christ can be the "fruit of Mary's womb" is if there was a real incarnation. Christ can only be linked to David, as described by Isaiah, if Mary was his mother and if his carnal descent was real. It is particularly interesting how Mary the virgin (*virgo*) is also the *virga* or stem. Whilst Tertullian does not draw out the resemblance of the two words, the similarity between *virga* and *virgo* was convenient for his argument that Mary was the stem and that Christ was the fruit (or flower) of that stem. This would have inevitably struck a chord with his audience particularly as at the start of *confirmatio*, in chapter seventeen, Tertullian posed the question whether it was from a virgin that Christ took flesh. Thus, through the subtle allusion of *virgo* and *virga* Tertullian implicitly indicates that Christ did indeed take flesh from a virgin, the *virgo* who was also the *virga*.

Tertullian develops the argument further, in chapter twenty-one, with reference to Psalm 132.11 which reads: "Yahweh has sworn to David and will always remain true to his word, 'I promise that I will set a son of yours upon your throne'..."<sup>65</sup> Tertullian comments: "Thus it is that God swears to David that this fruit out of his loins, that is, out of the posterity of his flesh, will sit upon his throne".<sup>66</sup> Tertullian believes that the promise to David in Psalm 132.11 is fulfilled in Christ and therefore proves that Christ is a true physical descendent of David. By employing the rhetorical technique of argument from comparatives (from the lesser to the greater) Tertullian concludes that if Christ is from David, even more so is he from Mary.<sup>67</sup> Tertullian writes: "If he is out of the loins (*lumbus*) of David, the more so is he out of the loins (*lumbus*) of Mary, for on her account he is reckoned as having been in David's loins (*lumbus*)".<sup>68</sup> In other words, because Mary is part of David's family tree and since the promise to David is fulfilled in Christ, Christ must have truly been born from Mary and really taken flesh from her. Evans succinctly summarizes Tertullian's position: "He is the

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<sup>64</sup> Tertullian offers a rather elaborate explanation to justify why he can interpret flower as fruit. He writes: "For flower is fruit, because by means of the flower and from the flower every fruit is perfected into fruit" (*De carne Christi* 21).

<sup>65</sup> *De carne Christi* 21.

<sup>66</sup> *De carne Christi* 21.

<sup>67</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 5.10.86.

<sup>68</sup> *De carne Christi* 21. It is interesting to note that Tertullian uses the same word for loins (*lumbus*) for both David and Mary.

fruit of David's loins, which again postulates physical descent from David: and this can only be a fact if he is veritably the son of Mary, herself a descendent from David".<sup>69</sup>

### *De carne Christi 22.*

Tertullian's use of Mary's Davidic ancestry to argue for the reality of Christ's flesh is expressed in more explicit terms in chapter twenty-two: "Consequently Christ's flesh is of the seed of David. But it is of the seed of David in consequence of the flesh of Mary, and therefore it is of Mary's flesh, seeing it is of the seed of David. In whatever direction you twist the expression, either his flesh is of Mary's flesh because it is of David's seed, or else it is of David's seed because it is of Mary's flesh".<sup>70</sup> The argument Tertullian is using here is not a logical one but rather a circular one and the fact that Tertullian draws attention to this, suggests that he regards the circularity of it as a positive support to his argument. It also functions as a figure of speech, popular in ancient rhetoric, known as an *antimetabole*. This figure of speech was a type of chiasm which literally means "turning about in the opposite direction" and it involves a pattern in which the second half of an expression is balanced against the first but with the words in reverse grammatical order. An example can be found in the well-known phrase: "Eat to live, not live to eat". There are numerous examples in Scripture.<sup>71</sup> For example, Christ's statement: "But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first". (Matthew 19.30) Another example can be found in Genesis: "Who sheds the blood of a man, by a man shall his blood be shed..." (Genesis 9.6).<sup>72</sup>

Tertullian uses the *antimetabole*, a recommended stylistic tool in the ancient rhetorical handbooks, in a number of treatises.<sup>73</sup> The purpose of these figures of speech was to grab the attention of the audience<sup>74</sup> and also to make an argument more striking.<sup>75</sup> By dividing the passage up we can see how it fits a chiastic structure:

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<sup>69</sup> E. Evans, *Tertullian's Treatise on the Incarnation*, p. 173.

<sup>70</sup> *De carne Christi 22.*

<sup>71</sup> For a discussion on chiasms in Scripture see J. Breck, *Scripture in Tradition: The Bible and its interpretation in the Orthodox Church* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), p. 89-104.

<sup>72</sup> In the original Hebrew this phrase is exactly six words long, in the form A B C C B A.

<sup>73</sup> See for example *Adversus Judaeos* 1.5; 9.3; and 9.20.

<sup>74</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 9.3.27.

<sup>75</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 9.3.28: "Those sorts of figures that not only concern the form of expression, but communicate grace and energy to the thoughts have a more striking effect".

A- Aut <b>ex carne est Marie</b>	Either Christ is of the flesh of Mary because of
B- quod ex <b>semine est David</b>	the seed of David or
B- aut <b>ex David semine</b> est	He is of the seed of David because of
A- quod ex <b>carne est Marie</b>	the flesh of Mary

This *antimetabole* not only offered a neat summary of Tertullian's argument that Christ was of Davidic descent and from Mary's flesh, but also functioned as a stylistic feature which gave the argument more force.

In a further development of his argument, Tertullian traces the genealogy back a stage further than David to Abraham and to Adam. Tertullian draws on God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 22.18: "...by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves", also using Paul's interpretation of the promise in Galatians 3.16.<sup>76</sup> The whole aim of the discussion is to persuade his opponents that Christ is part of a human family tree. If Tertullian can show that this is the case, it follows that Christ's flesh must be of the same kind as his ancestors, David, Abraham, Adam and Mary.

Earlier in the chapter, I noted that genealogies were constructed in order to say something about status. Here, Tertullian is drawing on the rhetorical *topoi* of arguments from one's birth (or *genus*) in order to say something about Christ's personal characteristics. Quintilian spoke of the importance of knowing about the birth of a person: "...for persons are generally regarded as having some resemblance to their parents and ancestors, a resemblance which sometimes leads to their living disgracefully or honourably; then there is nationality, for races have their own character, and the same action is not probable in the case of a barbarian, a Roman and a Greek".<sup>77</sup> Tertullian, being an experienced rhetorician, would have been aware of the effectiveness of using the topic of birth in an argument. Quintilian's claim that children are thought to have some resemblance to their parents and ancestors was particularly useful for Tertullian's argument that Christ was like his ancestors. In fact, the whole purpose of placing Christ within the Davidic family tree was in order to highlight the similarity between Christ's flesh and that of his ancestors.

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<sup>76</sup> "Now the promises were made to Abraham and his offspring [or seed]; it does not say, 'And to off-springs [or seeds]', as of many; but it says, 'And to your offspring', that it is to one person, who is Christ".

<sup>77</sup> *Institutio oratoria* 5.10.24.



This argument is employed most fully at the end of chapter twenty-two, when Tertullian argues that if Christ's flesh is composed of spirit, as some of his opponents claimed, it follows that Christ's ancestors (Abraham, David and Mary, for example) also had flesh composed of spirit. Clearly, it is absurd to suggest that Abraham and David were composed of spirit, an idea even Tertullian's opponents would reject, and therefore Christ's flesh must be truly human flesh. Tertullian explains: "What quality of flesh must and can we, who (in spite of our opponents' objections) read and believe this, acknowledge in Christ? Surely no other than Abraham's, since Christ is the seed of Abraham; nor other than Jesse's, since Christ is the blossom of the stem of Jesse; nor other than David's since Christ is the fruit of David's loins; nor other than Mary's, since Christ came from Mary's womb; and, higher still, nor other than Adam's, since Christ is the second Adam".<sup>78</sup> In this passage Tertullian utilizes another rhetorical technique known as *anaphora*. This stylistic tool repeats the same word at the beginning of a sentence or clause for emphasis and force and is a recommended technique found in the ancient rhetorical handbooks.<sup>79</sup> Quintilian, for example, argued that repetition should be used "to fix one point in the mind of the audience".<sup>80</sup> The repeated use of: "nor other than" ("*nec aliam quam*") at the beginning of each clause emphasises that Christ's flesh is of the same quality or substance as that of Abraham, David and Mary and thus affirms that Christ's flesh was truly human.

### **Feminist Considerations.**

This examination of Tertullian's use of the "Son of David through Mary" formula raises a number of issues from a feminist perspective. Firstly, it supports my claim that Tertullian does not use Mary as a symbol with which to denigrate women. Rather, as with passages about Mary's virginity, Tertullian uses the "Son of David through Mary" formula to support various arguments.

On the one hand, Tertullian's emphasis on Mary's role as Christ's link to the Davidic line can be seen as something positive for Mary is the solitary female figure in a long family line of

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<sup>78</sup>*De carne Christi* 22.

<sup>79</sup> See for example, Cicero, *De oratore* 3. 39.134: "...the same word may be repeated sometimes at the beginning of a sentence and sometimes at the end, or the sentence may be made to open and close with the same phrase". Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 9.3.30: "Again, a number of clauses may begin with the same word for the sake of force and emphasis". Quintilian also notes that figures of repetition: "make our utterances more vigorous and emphatic and produce an impression of vehemence such as might spring from repeated outbursts of emotion". (*Institutio oratoria* 9.3.50).

<sup>80</sup> *Institutio oratoria* 9.2.4.

prominent men. On the other hand, in his discussion of the “Son of David through Mary” formula, Mary is defined entirely by her relations to men. Indeed, it could be argued that Mary is only important in so far as she is the “link” to a great chain of men, and only useful in so far as she ensures Christ’s Davidic ancestry.

### **Conclusion.**

Although scripture claims that Christ was of the family of David through Joseph, Tertullian insisted that Christ’s Davidic lineage came through Mary. Thus, we may ask: why through Mary and not Joseph? Fundamentally Tertullian believed that the Davidic ancestry would be most strongly established through a biological parent. Since Mary was the only biological parent Tertullian’s aim was to prove that she was Christ’s link to David.

By constructing a genealogy which traced Christ’s Davidic descent through Mary, rather than Joseph, Tertullian was able to make two fundamental theological and apologetic arguments. Firstly, that Christ’s birth through Mary fulfilled certain prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures which suggested that the Messiah would be from the Davidic family. Thus, Tertullian had succeeded in proving that the expected messiah of the Jews had come in the person of Jesus, for, through Mary, he had fulfilled the requirements, namely Davidic ancestry. Secondly, by placing Christ within a ‘real’ family-tree, albeit a theologically constructed one, Tertullian strengthens his argument that Christ’s flesh was truly human. For, just as his ancestors had flesh which was truly human, it follows that Christ, born from an ordinary human family, also had truly human flesh. My research has thus affirmed Bockmuehl’s thesis that Christ’s “Son of David” title served a double purpose: establishing Christ’s identity as the promised Messiah and affirming the reality of Christ’s flesh.

This chapter has expanded upon the research of Dunn who also considered the “Son of David through Mary” theme in Tertullian’s work. Dunn examines the “Son of David through Mary” theme in order to prove the authenticity of the second half of *Adversus Judaeos*. My aim, in contrast, has been to demonstrate that Mary has a crucial role in Tertullian’s theological and apologetic fight against his opponents. Building upon Dunn’s rhetorical analysis and in particular, by examining the function of genealogies in the ancient world, I have shown that the “Son of David through Mary” formula served a particular rhetorical function in passages throughout Tertullian’s corpus. Mary gives Christ his historical roots, and places him within a

family tree which not only connects him with key forefathers in Israel's history, but also aids Tertullian in his argument to prove that Christ's flesh was truly human.

## **CHAPTER 5.**

### **Mary and the Flesh of Christ.**

In this chapter I examine the role Tertullian gives to Mary as Christ's mother in *De carne Christi*. Tertullian's primary motive in his discussion of Mary's motherhood was to prove the reality of Christ's human flesh and birth. One way in which he attempted to do this, was by suggesting that Mary's pregnancy and childbirth were the same as every other woman. If Tertullian could show that Mary's pregnancy was ordinary, it followed that just as every other mother gave flesh to their child, so too Mary gave flesh to Christ. One technique used by Tertullian to demonstrate the normality of Mary's pregnancy was to give a description of some of the physiological experiences of pregnancy, based on the medical knowledge of late antiquity.

In the first part of this chapter I will discuss the role given to the male and female in ancient medical theories of conception. I propose that Tertullian uses Aristotle's theory of conception to explain how Mary conceived Christ and to support his doctrine of the incarnation. Although he never explicitly cites Aristotle, through the language, ideas and analogies used it is clear that Tertullian is influenced by Aristotle's theory. Through his use of Aristotle, Tertullian strengthens his arguments in favour of a real incarnation against those who denied the reality of Christ's human flesh and birth. In the second part of this chapter I will examine Tertullian's discussion on the physiological aspects of Mary's pregnancy and in particular, Tertullian's exegesis of Psalm 22 in *De carne Christi* 20. I propose that Tertullian uses ancient medical theories about pregnancy to support his interpretation of the Psalm in order to prove the reality of Christ's human birth and flesh. Through his use of ancient medical theories, Mary becomes an important weapon in Tertullian's arguments with his opponents. Finally, I will consider both the positive and negative implications of Tertullian's use of Aristotle's theory of conception for the feminist question.

## **Evidence of medicine in Tertullian's works.**

In spite of the numerous references to medicine throughout the corpus of Tertullian's treatises, there have been relatively few scholarly discussions on the topic.<sup>1</sup> Some broad surveys of early Christian attitudes to medicine have made brief reference to Tertullian, but often only to prove or disprove early Christian acceptance of medicine. Vivian Nutton, for example, proposed that "fundamentalist" Christians like Tertullian rejected medicine and urged Christians to pray for a cure or accept disease as a trial from God.<sup>2</sup> Scholars such as Ferngren, on the other hand, cite a number of passages which prove Tertullian's acceptance and use of medicine: "Even a cursory reading of his works will demonstrate that Tertullian knew enough about medicine to make frequent use of medical concepts".<sup>3</sup> However, more recently, Thomas Heyne has been critical of Ferngren's research claiming that he does not go far enough to demonstrate the extent of Tertullian's medical knowledge, how Tertullian used medical ideas, or whether he ever changed his mind.<sup>4</sup> In order to rectify the shortfalls of Ferngren's work, Heyne offers a detailed analysis of Tertullian's references to medical images and texts throughout his corpus and claims that Tertullian had a positive estimation of them.<sup>5</sup> Heyne claims that medical references pervade Tertullian's work and proposes that Tertullian derives his medical knowledge primarily from Soranus and Pliny.<sup>6</sup> He suggests that Tertullian uses medical terminology and images to support his theological arguments and cites numerous examples to support this claim. For example, broadly speaking, medical images and language helps Tertullian portray in vivid terms the desirable effects of painful goods in contrast to the frightening danger of spiritual evils.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Adversus Marcionem* 2.16; *Scorpiace* 5: *De pudicitia* 9.12 and 10.6; *De praescriptione* 2.1-3; *Ad nationes* 2.5.10; *De resurrectione* 60.2; *De anima* 25.3-5; 27.

<sup>2</sup> V. Nutton, "From Galen to Alexander: Aspects of Medicine and Medical Practice in Late Antiquity" in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 38, Symposium on Byzantine Medicine (1984), p. 5. Nutton argues that Tertullian suggests that medicine was unacceptable for Christians and cites *De anima* 30.4 as evidence of this point. (p. 8). See also, F. Kudlien, "Cynicism and Medicine" in *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 48 (1974), pp. 305-337. Kudlien claims that Tertullian attacks not only pagan physicians but also medicine as a whole. (p. 317).

<sup>3</sup> G.B. Ferngren, *Medicine and Healthcare in Early Christianity* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), p. 26. R. D. Sider simply claims that Tertullian studied medicine without giving any citing any of Tertullian's reference to medicine. R. D. Sider (ed.), *Christian and Pagan in the Roman Empire: The Witness of Tertullian* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), p. xi.

<sup>4</sup> T. Heyne, "Tertullian and Medicine" *Studia Patristica* 50 (2011), p. 133.

<sup>5</sup> Heyne, "Tertullian and Medicine", p. 146.

<sup>6</sup> Heyne, "Tertullian and Medicine", p. 131. Heyne claims that Tertullian was unaware of the work of Galen. (p. 145).

<sup>7</sup> For example, Tertullian speaks of heresy and vice (e.g. impatience) as diseases and penance and baptism as medicines. See Heyne, "Tertullian and Medicine", p. 146.

This chapter will build upon Heyne's work by focusing on Tertullian's use of medical concepts and imagery in *De carne Christi*. Heyne's treatment of *De carne Christi* is brief and he misses some of the key medical references. He is too quick to dismiss Aristotelian influence on Tertullian in *De carne Christi*, and fails to recognize the importance of Tertullian's medical references in his rhetoric against his opponents in this treatise. Thus, through a rhetorical analysis, I will show that Tertullian uses ancient medical theories, and particularly Aristotle's theory, to support his claim that Christ truly took flesh from Mary. Furthermore, my research will go beyond that of Heyne's by considering the implications of Tertullian's use of Aristotle from a feminist perspective.

### **Ancient Theories of Conception.**

In the ancient world there were a number of different theories regarding a woman's contribution to the conception process. It is important to set these theories out because, as I will discuss below, ancient theories of conception have been subject to feminist critique.

#### Dual-seed theory.

One theory, sometimes referred to as the dual-seed theory, proposed that both the male and the female contributed seed to the embryo.<sup>8</sup> The dual-seed theory pervaded most of the gynaecological texts in the Hippocratic corpus<sup>9</sup> and some scholars have suggested that it was the predominant theory in the ancient world.<sup>10</sup> In one text from the Hippocratic Corpus, *Genetics*, the author speaks of female seed: "A woman also releases something from her body, sometimes into the womb, which then becomes moist, and sometimes externally as well, if the womb is open wider than normal".<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> I take this name from M. Boylan, "Challenges to Aristotle's Conception Theory" in the *Journal of the History of Biology* Vol. 17 No. 1 (Spring, 1984), p. 87.

<sup>9</sup> The Hippocratic corpus is a collection of theoretical treatises written by several different authors between the last quarter of the fifth century and the middle of the fourth century BCE. Although they are, on the whole, consistent with each other, there are occasions where differences of opinion are evident. L.A. Dean-Jones, "The Cultural Construct of the Female Body" in S.B. Pomeroy, *Women's History and Ancient History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 113.

<sup>10</sup> L.A. Dean-Jones, *Women's Bodies in Classical Greek Science* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), p. 149.

<sup>11</sup> *Genetics* 4.

Galen, a contemporary of Tertullian, also believed that female seed contributed a critical part to the conception process.<sup>12</sup> Galen undertook extensive work examining the female anatomy, albeit mostly on apes, in order to find anatomical evidence for his dual-seed theory.<sup>13</sup> In the course of his anatomical dissections, Galen made several significant observations. Firstly, Galen claimed that the dissection of the genitals of the two sexes revealed that women had all the “parts” that men had, the only difference being that, in women, these “parts” remained inside the woman, whereas in men they were on the outside.<sup>14</sup> Galen suggested that the reason the genitals remained on the inside of the woman was because women could not concoct enough heat to push them outside: “[Woman's genitals] were formed within her when she was still a foetus, but could not because of the defect in the heat emerge and project on the outside”.<sup>15</sup> A second observation which Galen derived from his anatomical dissections was the presence of female seed in a fluid found in the horns of the uterus. Based on this, Galen concluded that female seed contributed to the conception process. During coition that female seed was expelled from the ovaries in such a manner that both the man’s seed and the woman’s seed met in the womb, were mixed together, and formed a membrane called the *chorion*.<sup>16</sup>

Proponents of the dual-seed theory argued that the female also provided menses which gave nourishment to the two seeds. The state of a female’s menses was important because it revealed the environment into which the two seeds would fall and be nurtured.<sup>17</sup> The Hippocratic theory of the four humours proposed that good health was achieved when the four humours of blood, phlegm (or water), yellow bile, and black bile, were in balance. This also applied to conception. For conception to take place, the conditions in the womb, and especially the women’s menses, needed to be suitable. For example, in *De natura muliebri*,

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<sup>12</sup> For a detailed discussion on Galen’s theory of conception see M. Boylan, ‘Galen’s Conception Theory’ in *Journal of the History of Biology* Vol. 19 No. 1 (Spring, 1986), pp. 47-77. Boylan’s article focuses on Galen’s use of elements of the Aristotelian and Hippocratic theories of conception.

<sup>13</sup> *De anatomicis administrationibus* I.2.

<sup>14</sup> Galen writes: “Consider first whichever ones you please, turn outward the woman's, turn inward, so to speak, and fold double the man's, and you will find them the same in both in every respect”. (*De usu partium corporis humani* 14.II. 297).

<sup>15</sup> *De usu partium corporis humani* 14.II. 299.

<sup>16</sup> *On the Construction of the Embryo* 2.

<sup>17</sup> The medical writers identified a link between menstruation and fertility. Soranus, for example, advised a prospective husband to inquire after his intended wife’s menstrual flow to make sure that it was “regular, neither too much nor too little” (Soranus, *Gynaecology* 1.34).

the Hippocratic author remarks that if the women's menses are bilious "the seed of both the male and female is destroyed".<sup>18</sup>

Rousselle has offered an interesting explanation for the dual-seed theory of conception. She claims that the insistence on the presence of female seed suggested that the proponents of this position, in particular the Hippocratics, derived their reproductive theories from a female oral tradition which wished to highlight the equal role women played in procreation.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Rousselle suggested that the insistence on the contribution of female seed was a way of ensuring that men paid attention to the sexual needs of women.<sup>20</sup> However, some scholars have highlighted that the Hippocratics and indeed Galen, were still convinced of female inferiority. Dean-Jones, for example, says: "Their [Hippocratics'] theory of female seed did not in any way amount to saying that women were equal to men..." and notes that they regarded women's seed to be weak.<sup>21</sup> There is certainly evidence for the view that female seed was inferior. Galen, for example, claimed: "[T]he female must have smaller, less perfect testes, and the semen generated in them must be scantier, colder and wetter...".<sup>22</sup> Thus, although the female contributes seed, it is inferior to the male's seed.

### "Furrowed-Field" theory.<sup>23</sup>

Not everyone accepted that the female contributed seed to the conception process. One common theory claimed that the male implants the seed in the female, just like a farmer plants seed in the ground. Those who supported this theory believed that the male seed contained all the necessary characteristics needed for conception. The only elements which the female contributed were a place to grow and nourishment. In Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, Apollo expresses belief in this theory: "It is not the mother who begets the one called her child; she but nourishes the seed sown in her. The begetter is the man who fecundates her; she a stranger safeguards foreign sprout, when the gods do not injure it".<sup>24</sup> Similarly

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<sup>18</sup> *De natura muliebri* 1.8.

<sup>19</sup> A. Rousselle, *On Desire and the Body in Antiquity* (1988) as cited by Dean-Jones, *Women's Bodies in Classical Greek Science*, p. 157.

<sup>20</sup> Rousselle, *On Desire and the Body* p.29 as cited by Dean-Jones, *Women's Bodies in Classical Greek Science* p. 157.

<sup>21</sup> Dean-Jones, *Women's Bodies in Classical Greek Science*, p. 178.

<sup>22</sup> *De Usu Partium Corporis Humani* 14.II.301.

<sup>23</sup> I take this name from M. Boylan, "Challenges to Aristotle's Conception Theory", p. 85.

<sup>24</sup> *Eumenides* 657 as cited by A. Preus, "Galen's Criticism of Aristotle's Conception Theory" in the *Journal of the History of Biology* Vol. 10 No. 1 (Spring, 1977), p. 67.



Euripides, in *Orestes*, compares the mother to a field which is sown: “My father begat me, your daughter bore me, she was a field which received the seed from another; without a father a child would never be”.<sup>25</sup> In short, proponents of “furrowed-field” theory claim that the male provides all the most important elements in conception, whilst the female provides only nourishment.<sup>26</sup> As I will explain below, Soranus’ theory of conception also reflects the “furrowed-field” theory.

### Aristotle’s theory.<sup>27</sup>

Aristotle, in his *De generatione animalium*, objected to the theory of female seed because he claimed that it was impossible for the female to contribute both seed and blood. The only “seed” which the female contributed, according to Aristotle, was that of menstrual fluid. He writes: “Now it is impossible that any creature should produce two seminal secretions at once, and as the secretion in females which answers to semen in males is the menstrual fluid, it obviously follows that the female does not contribute any semen to generation; for if there were semen, there would be no menstrual fluid; but as menstrual fluid is in fact formed, therefore there is no semen”.<sup>28</sup>

Aristotle’s theory of substance provided a structure for two different but complementary roles in generation. For Aristotle a substance was composed of matter and form. For a new substance to come into being, matter needed to take on a new form. For example, a lump of rock before it is made into a column has the form of stone. The form of the column exists in the stonemason’s mind but this form has to be transferred to the rock before it has the (new) form of a column. Human beings, according to Aristotle, were also composed of form and matter. The matter consists of flesh and blood and it was the female alone who provided this matter: “It is clear that the female contributes the material for generation, and that this is in the substance of menses (menstrual blood)...”.<sup>29</sup> Aristotle proposed that there existed within the female’s menstrual blood a mechanism that, once activated, organized the sequential

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<sup>25</sup> *Orestes* 552 as cited by Preus, “Galen’s Criticisms”, p. 67.

<sup>26</sup> M. Boylan, “Challenges to Aristotle’s Conception Theory”, p. 85.

<sup>27</sup> For a detailed discussion on Aristotle’s theory see A. Preus, “Science and Philosophy in Aristotle’s *Generation of Animals*” in *Journal of the History of Biology* Vol. 3 No. 1 (Spring, 1970), pp. 1-52.

<sup>28</sup> *De generatione animalium* 727a26-30. Aristotle highlights further evidence against the existence of female seed in the parallel between male seed and female blood which both appear around the same time (puberty) (*De generatione animalium* 727a5-9) and ceases at the same time (*De generatione animalium* 727a9-10). See Dean-Jones, *Women’s Bodies in Classical Greek Science*, p. 177.

<sup>29</sup> *De generatione animalium* 1.19.

stages of foetal development. This “activation” could only take place when the form came into contact with the female material. It was the male’s seed which provided this activating form, which shaped the material and gave it the form of a foetus.<sup>30</sup>

Aristotle insisted that although the male’s seed was itself material, it did not contribute any of the material to the foetus, by becoming a part of it.<sup>31</sup> Rather, the male’s seed merely brings together and fashions the menstrual blood of the female.<sup>32</sup> Aristotle explains that: “[T]he material of the semen dissolves and evaporates because it has a liquid and watery nature. Therefore we ought not to expect it always to come out again from the female or to form any part of the embryo that has taken shape from it...”<sup>33</sup>

In summary, there were a number of different theories of conception in the ancient world. The dual-seed theory proposed both the male and female contributed seed to the conception process. The female’s menstrual blood also played a role because it determined the condition in which the seeds would grow. The “furrowed-field” theory minimized the female’s role. Whilst the male provided all the important elements in the formation of the foetus, the female simply provided a place for it to grow as well as the nourishment. Aristotle’s theory of conception gave two distinct roles to the male and female. The female provided menstrual blood, the raw material of the foetus. The male provided the form which acted upon the woman’s blood to transform it into a foetus.

### **Aristotle and Tertullian: male and female roles in the Incarnation.**

It is evident that Tertullian uses Aristotle’s theory of conception in *De carne Christi* which, I propose, was a deliberate rhetorical choice. Tertullian’s main objective in *De carne Christi* was to prove the reality of Christ’s flesh and birth. Therefore, Tertullian utilizes Aristotle’s theory of conception in order to highlight Mary’s role in the incarnation as the only one who provides the material for Christ’s flesh. In chapter 17 of *De carne Christi*, Tertullian writes:

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<sup>30</sup> Aristotle in *De generatione animalium* does grant some efficient causality to the female contribution of menstrual fluid. Aristotle held that form (*eidos*) was present potentially in the matter from the female and actively in the semen of the male. When the semen and menses come together, an ‘activity’ (*energeia*) is begun which continues through the life of the new individual. This *energia* is called the nutritive and generative soul (the power of generation and regeneration present in the living being).

<sup>31</sup> For a more detailed discussion on Aristotle’s theory of what happens to semen, see A. Preus, “Science and Philosophy”, p. 27-28.

<sup>32</sup> *De generatione animalium* 771b 20-25.

<sup>33</sup> *De generatione animalium* 737a 11-1 6.

“[Let us ask] whether Christ took flesh from a virgin, for by this method, if by no other, it will be established that his flesh was human, if it derived its substance from a human womb”. In a later passage Tertullian claims that the very reason the Spirit entered the womb of a woman was in order to take flesh from it: “Tell me why the Spirit of God descended into a woman’s womb at all, if he did not do so for the purpose of partaking of flesh from the womb...He had no reason for enclosing himself within [the womb], if he was to bear forth nothing from it...not without reason did he descend into a womb. Therefore, he received flesh from [Mary]...”.<sup>34</sup> In short, Mary’s role, as the female, was to provide Christ with the material for his flesh, which was consistent with Aristotle’s theory that the female contributed the material to the foetus.

As discussed in chapter three, Tertullian accepted Mary’s virginity *ante partum* which meant there was no human father to provide the form. Therefore, Tertullian proposes that God took on the role of male in the Incarnation. This is evident in *De carne Christi* 16 where Tertullian explains how Christ’s flesh was given human form without the aid of human male seed by comparing it to Adam’s creation. Referring to a passage from Genesis 2.7<sup>35</sup> Tertullian writes: “Let us remember that Adam himself was made into this flesh, though not of man’s seed: as earth was changed into this flesh without a man’s seed, so also the Word of God was able, without coagulation, to pass into the material of the same flesh”. In other words, just as the God of Genesis imposed form upon the dust of the earth and breathed life into it, the seed (or Word) of God imposed the form and nature of a human being onto the blood of Mary’s womb. Since the “seed” of God was acting on the material of Mary’s womb (to form the human flesh of Christ), there was no need for human male seed: “Therefore, being already the Son of God ,of the seed of God the Father [that is, spirit], that he might also be the Son of Man all he needed was to take him flesh out of human flesh without the action of man’s seed, for man’s seed was uncalled for in one who had the seed of God”.<sup>36</sup>

Aristotle expressed the same idea, but with a more explicit use of the image of a craftsperson, to explain the action of the man’s seed on the female’s menstrual blood in reproduction. He compared the process of conception to that of a carpenter carving out a bed: “The female, as

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<sup>34</sup> *De carne Christi* 19.

<sup>35</sup> The creation story of Genesis 2.7 speaks of God giving form to the earth in order to make a living being, Adam.

<sup>36</sup> *De carne Christi* 18. In Latin the text reads: “*Ergo iam dei filius ex patris dei semine, id est spiritu, ut esset et hominis filius caro ei sola erat ex hominis carne sumenda sine viri semine: vacabat enim semen viri apud habentem dei semen*”.

female, is passive, and the male, as male, is active and the principle of the movement comes from him. Therefore, if we take the highest genera under which they fall, the one being active and motive and the other passive and moved, that one thing which is produced comes from them only in the sense in which a bed comes into being from the carpenter and the wood, or in which a ball comes into being from the wax and the form".<sup>37</sup> The analogy implies that in conception the female provides the raw material, just as the tree provides the wood. The male, similar to the carpenter, gives the material its form. The female body thus becomes the workplace and source of raw material out of which the male crafts a human foetus.<sup>38</sup> It is likely that Tertullian recognized the parallels between Aristotle's craftsman metaphor and the Genesis account of Adam's creation. Unsurprisingly, Tertullian uses the Genesis account to support his arguments not only because scripture was his authoritative source over and above philosophical sources, but the Genesis version also enabled him to highlight the parallels between the first Adam and Christ, the second Adam.

An image which Tertullian derived directly from Aristotle, in order to illustrate the roles of the male and female in reproduction, is that of the curdling of milk in the production of cheese. According to Aristotle, the male seed "acts on" the female's menstrual blood to transform it into an embryo, in the same way rennet acts on milk to transform it into cheese. Aristotle explains: "What the male contributes to generation is the form and the efficient cause, while the female contributes the material. In fact, as in the coagulation of milk, the milk being the material, the fig-juice or rennet is that which contains the curdling principle, so acts the secretion of the male, as it gets divided into parts in the female".<sup>39</sup> Later in the same work Aristotle gives another description of the process: "When the material secreted by the female in the uterus has been fixed by the semen of the male [this acts in the same way as rennet acts upon milk, for rennet is a kind of milk containing vital heat, which brings into one mass and fixes the similar material, and the relation of the semen to the *catamenia* is the same, milk and the *catamenia* being of the same nature]".<sup>40</sup> In other words, Aristotle equates the milk with menstrual blood and the rennet with semen. Just as the rennet turns milk into cheese, so too, the semen changes the woman's blood into a foetus. Tertullian uses this image in two places in *De carne Christi* which I will now discuss.

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<sup>37</sup> *De generatione animalium* 729b 12-2 1.

<sup>38</sup> *De generatione animalium* 729b 15-73.b.25 See N. Tuana, "The Weaker Seed: The Sexist Bias of Reproductive Theory" in *Hypatia* Vol. 3 No. 1, Feminism and Science (Spring, 1988), p. 38.

<sup>39</sup> *De generatione animalium* 729a10.

<sup>40</sup> *De generatione animalium* 739b20.

De carne Christi 4.

Tertullian, like Aristotle, uses this metaphor to describe the action which male semen has on female menstrual blood. In chapter four of *De carne Christi* Tertullian only makes an implicit reference to Aristotle's analogy when he describes curdling in the womb during the conception process. As previously noted, in this chapter Tertullian is dealing with Marcion's objections to the reality of Christ's flesh and birth. According to Tertullian, Marcion's objections to a real incarnation are based on the belief that the conception process was undignified and therefore unworthy of Christ.<sup>41</sup> Tertullian's first reference to "curdling" in the womb comes in the context of his description of Marcion's view of pregnancy: "Beginning then with the nativity you so strongly object to, orate, attack now, the nastiness of genital elements in the womb, the filthy curdling (*foeda coagula*) of moisture and blood, and of the flesh to be for nine months nourished on that same mire".<sup>42</sup> In *Adversus Marcionem* Tertullian gives a similar description of Marcion's thoughts on pregnancy: "Come then, wind up your cavils against the most sacred and reverend works of nature; protest against all that you are; destroy the origins of flesh and life; call the womb a sewer (*cloacam*) of the illustrious animal...expand upon the impure and shameful tortures of parturition, and then on the filthy, troublesome, contemptible issues of the puerperal labour itself!"<sup>43</sup> This description of the womb as "a sewer of the illustrious animal" has mistakenly been assigned to Tertullian. Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, claims that this was Tertullian's opinion on women and pregnancy.<sup>44</sup> De Beauvoir failed to realise that Tertullian was, in fact, describing, and condemning, the position of Marcion. In contrast to Marcion, although Tertullian agreed that the procreation of children was messy and perhaps even "unclean", he still stressed that the procreative and childbearing process was good. This is evident in chapter four of *De carne Christi* when Tertullian claims that women are both "honourable" and "sacred" in their childbearing.

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<sup>41</sup> In the previous chapter (*De carne Christi* 3), Tertullian had posed and refuted the argument that Marcion rejected the reality of Christ's birth and flesh on the grounds that it was impossible for God to partake in human flesh. Tertullian argues that it is only that which is not willed by God is impossible: "With God nothing is impossible but what he does not will". (*De carne Christi* 3) Since God wills to be born as a human being, he is truly born and does not merely appear to be born as Marcion suggested.

<sup>42</sup> *De carne Christi* 4.

<sup>43</sup> *Adversus Marcionem* 3.11.

<sup>44</sup> S. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Bantam Books, 1961), p. 156.

The second allusion to Aristotle's analogy occurs later in chapter four of *De carne Christi*: "Christ, there is no doubt of it, did care for the sort of man who was curdled in uncleanness in the womb, who was brought forth through organs immodest, who took nourishment through organs of ridicule...".<sup>45</sup> Tertullian argues that Christ loved all of humanity including even the sordid aspects such as conception, pregnancy and childbearing. In fact, Christ's love for humankind was so great, claims Tertullian, that he himself was willing to partake in the "messiness" of conception in order to assume flesh and redeem humankind.

#### *De carne Christi* 19.

Aristotle's analogy is employed most fully in *De carne Christi* 19 when Tertullian is explaining the meaning of the passage in John 1.13 which reads "[Christ] was born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of a man but of God".<sup>46</sup> Tertullian claims that in this passage John does not deny the reality of Christ's birth and flesh, but rather, denies the involvement of male seed in Christ's conception. Tertullian writes: "...neither does the denial that he was born of blood involve any repudiation of the substance of flesh, but of the material of the seed, which material it is agreed is the heat of the blood, as it were by despumation changed into a coagulator of the woman's blood. For from the coagulator there is in cheese a function of that substance, namely milk, which by chemical action it causes it to solidify".<sup>47</sup>

There are two points in this passage which demonstrate the influence of Aristotle's theory of conception. Firstly, Tertullian says that John denies "the material of the seed, which material it is agreed is the heat of the blood". An identical concept is found in Aristotle's theory of conception which proposed that semen is derived from blood. The heat in a male serves to "concoct" the blood and transform it into semen. Since women generate less heat than men, according to Aristotle's theory, they are not able to transform the blood into seed. He writes: "But the semen is a secretion, and this in the hotter animals with blood, the males...But the females, owing to inability to concoct, have a great quantity of blood, for it cannot be worked

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<sup>45</sup> *De carne Christi* 4.

<sup>46</sup> In the early church there was a debate about whether or not the original verse of John 1.13 was singular (was) referring to Christ or plural (were) referring to Christians. For a discussion on this topic see debate J.W. Pryor, "Of the Virgin Birth or the Birth of Christians? The Text of John 1:13 Once More," in *Novum Testamentum* Vol. 27 No.4 (October, 1985), pp. 296-318.

<sup>47</sup> *De carne Christi* 19.3. "...neque enim quia ex sanguine negavit substantiam carnis renuit, sed materiam seminis quam constat sanguinis esse calorem ut despumatione mutatum in coagulum sanguinis feminae".

up into semen".<sup>48</sup> In another place Aristotle writes: "It is plain that the female does not contribute semen to the generation of the offspring. For if she had semen she would not have menstrual fluid; but, as it is, because she has the latter she has not the former".<sup>49</sup> In short, woman's menstrual fluid is the blood that would be turned into semen if she had sufficient heat to concoct it. However, since the woman lacks this heat she is unable to transform this blood and turn it into seed. It is evident from these passages that Aristotle regarded male semen as blood which had been concocted.<sup>50</sup>

Tertullian does not make explicit reference to Aristotle and nor does he explain what he means by the phrase "the material of the seed which is the heat of the blood". Nevertheless, it is evident that Tertullian was using Aristotle's theory which provided support for his overall argument about the reality of Christ's flesh and birth. In using Aristotle's theory that semen is from blood, Tertullian was able to offer an alternative interpretation of John's claim that "[Christ] was born not of blood," against his opponents, who used the passage to support the denial of Christ's flesh. According to Tertullian "born not of blood" was a denial of Christ's human paternity not a denial of his human flesh.

The second phrase to be drawn from the passage in *De carne Christi* 19 describes the male seed as "a coagulator of the woman's blood" which Tertullian illustrates with Aristotle's analogy of a coagulator changing milk into cheese. Following Aristotle, Tertullian claims that male semen is the active agent in conception which "acts upon" the material, namely menstrual blood, contributed by the woman. Thus, just as rennet causes milk to form cheese, so too human semen causes menstrual blood to form a foetus.

The use of this analogy of rennet changing milk into cheese, to explain the conception process, was not unique to Aristotle.<sup>51</sup> Job uses the same analogy in Job 10.10 figuratively to describe the formation of the foetus in the womb: "Did you not pour me out as milk, and

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<sup>48</sup> *De generatione animalium* 4.1.

<sup>49</sup> *De generatione animalium* 727a 27-30.

<sup>50</sup> Further evidence of the parallel made by Aristotle between male seed and female menses is evident when he suggests that menstrual blood 'is analogous in females to the semen in males.' (*De generatione animalium* 727a 3-4). Aristotle explains: "...semen begins to appear in males and to be emitted at the same time of life that the menstrual flow begins in females" and further still "...in the decline of life the generative power fails in the one sex and the menstrual discharge in the other" (*De generatione animalium* 727a.5-10).

<sup>51</sup> For an overview of the widespread use of the cheese analogy after Aristotle see S. Ott, "Aristotle Among the Basques: The 'Cheese Analogy' of Conception" in *Man* New Series Vol. 14 No. 4 (December, 1979), pp.699-711.

curdle me like cheese”. The fact that Tertullian cites neither Aristotle nor Job makes it impossible to identify who Tertullian borrowed this analogy from. Taking into account the context in which he uses it, the reference to semen as concocted blood immediately preceding it, and the more detailed description of the analogy, Aristotle would be a plausible suggestion. However, the fact that the milk-cheese analogy could be found both in scripture and in the work of Aristotle may have made it a particularly appealing analogy to use. It seems that the Fathers were especially keen to use analogies which were found in scripture and in the treatises of philosophers. Morwenna Ludlow has identified a similar trend in Gregory of Nyssa’s *Contra Eunomium* II.<sup>52</sup> Ludlow proposes that the image of the ladder, which Gregory uses to interpret the story of Abraham, is derived from both the Hebrew Scriptures and the writings of Plato. She demonstrates how Gregory developed a sophisticated literary technique, which combined the image of the ladder from different sources to form an original literary creation. Ludlow argues that this was also a theological method for, although the origins of the image of the ladder could be found in both the Hebrew Scriptures and in Plato, the key to Gregory’s interpretation and use of the image lies in the New Testament.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the image of the ladder does not simply mirror previous uses of the same image; but rather, in Gregory’s writings, the ladder image is something new. I would argue that in this last respect, Tertullian differs from Gregory. Whereas Gregory simply borrows the image of the ladder from his sources, whilst developing his own ideas and arguments, Tertullian borrows the image and the argument used by Aristotle and Job in the milk-cheese analogy. Tertullian, like Aristotle and Job, uses the analogy to illustrate the roles of male and female in conception because this supported the argument he was making in *De carne Christi* 19 regarding the interpretation of John 1. 13.

In summary, Aristotle’s theory of conception was employed by Tertullian to highlight the role of Mary in the incarnation. As the female parent, she alone provided the material for Christ’s flesh. God, taking on the role of the male, “shaped” this material and thus the material contributed by Mary was transformed into a human person, Christ. Evidence of Aristotle’s theory is also present in Tertullian’s use of the milk-cheese analogy and to a lesser

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<sup>52</sup> M. Ludlow, “Divine Infinity and Eschatology: the limits and dynamics of human knowledge according to Gregory of Nyssa: *Contra Eunomium* II 67-170” in L. Karfikova, S. Douglass, and J. Zachhuber (eds) *Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium II An English Version with Supporting Studies - Proceedings of the 10th International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Olomouc, September 15-18, 2004)*, (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 167-170.

<sup>53</sup> Gregory takes employs images from both the Hebrew Scriptures and Greek philosophy but claims that they can only be fully understood in Christ.



extent in the craftsman analogy which both Aristotle and Tertullian use to illustrate the roles of the male and female in reproduction. In *De carne Christi* Tertullian used Aristotle's theory of conception because it supported his understanding of the incarnation and in particular, strengthened his case in favour of Christ's human flesh.

### De anima.

Throughout the corpus of his work, Tertullian is not entirely consistent in his theory of conception. In *De anima* Tertullian uses the "furrowed-field" theory, which he derived from Soranus.<sup>54</sup> In this theory the sperm of the father contains all that is necessary for the creation of the foetus, namely the soul and the material for the foetus' body. Soranus maintained that the body of the embryo sprung from the sperm of the father, a conclusion which is based on several factors. Firstly, Soranus claimed that the woman did not contribute any sperm to the foetus: "The female seed seems not to be drawn upon in generation since it is excreted externally...".<sup>55</sup> Secondly, Soranus sees the female's womb as nothing more than a depository for the sperm of the male: "...the female on the other hand also receives seed and conceives it into the substance of the living being...".<sup>56</sup> The idea that Soranus did indeed think of his notion as a "furrowed-field" theory finds further support in his frequent comparison of procreation with the influence of soil on plants.<sup>57</sup>

Tertullian's use of Soranus's theory of conception comes in *De anima* 27 where he claims that the male is the sole contributor to the embryo. Tertullian asserts that there are two kinds of seed; the seed of the body and the seed of the soul. Tertullian claims that the sperm of the father consists of a corporeal substance (*humor*) and a psychic substance (*calor*).<sup>58</sup> He suggests that the corporeal element proceeds from the whole body and is moist. The psychic element comes from the soul (*ex animae destillatione*) and is a hot, aerial essence just like the soul itself.<sup>59</sup> Tertullian claims that during intercourse the man actually experiences the soul-

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<sup>54</sup> J. H. Waszink claims that in this chapter Tertullian bases his conception theory on Soranus' theory. He writes: "Tertullian's statements agree with the view of Soranus: the sperm of the father contains all that is necessary for the creation of man, and is kept *sulco et arvo suo*..., so that a human being comes into existence *ex utraque substantia* (out of both substances) both furnished by the father" See J.H. Waszink, *Tertullian's De anima* (Amsterdam: J.M. Muelenhoff, 1947), p. 346.

<sup>55</sup> *Gynaecology* 1. 12. 2.

<sup>56</sup> *Gynaecology* 1.33.1

<sup>57</sup> See for example *Gynaecology*. 1.35.6; 1.36.1; 1.39.3; 1.40.3; 1.53.1.

<sup>58</sup> *De anima* 27.5.

<sup>59</sup> *De anima* 27.6.

producing seed going out from him. He writes: “Indeed (if I run the risk of offending modesty even, in my desire to prove the truth), I cannot help asking, whether we do not, in that very heat of extreme gratification when the generative fluid is ejected, feel that somewhat of our soul has gone from us? And do we not experience a faintness and prostration along with a dimness of sight? This, then, must be the soul-producing seed, which arises at once from the out-drip of the soul, just as that fluid is the body-producing seed which proceeds from the drainage of the flesh”.<sup>60</sup>

What reasons did Tertullian have for using two different theories of conception? Waszink proposes that Tertullian believed that he could hold both views of conception without contradiction.<sup>61</sup> However, it is difficult to see how one could hold both of these views to be true when they are so different. In Aristotle’s theory the embryo derives its flesh from the menstrual blood of the mother. According to Soranus, the father provides the matter.

Another possibility could be that Tertullian’s thought simply developed or changed. In other words, is it simply a case that Tertullian held one theory of conception at an earlier date and as his thought developed, he changed his mind and adopted a different theory of conception at a later date? Scholars seem to be agreed that *De carne Christi* and *De anima* were written within a very short period of one another. Harnack dates *De carne Christi* and *De anima* in the period between 208-212, placing *De anima* before *De carne Christi* in the chronology. Barnes dates *De carne Christi* around 206 and *De anima* a little later around 206/207. It seems remarkable that Tertullian could use two very different theories of conception within such a short period of time, without commenting upon his change of thought and without explaining the obvious inconsistencies between the two.

I propose that a more plausible solution can be found in Tertullian’s rhetorical motives. In *De anima* Tertullian’s primary concern was to show that the soul was present in the embryo from the moment of conception. Tertullian insists that body and soul are “conceived, and formed, and perfectly simultaneously, as well as born together; and that not a moment’s interval occurs in their conception, so that a prior place can be assigned to either”.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, he used a theory of conception which supported his argument that the body and soul of an

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<sup>60</sup> *De anima* 27.6.

<sup>61</sup> Waszink, *Tertullian’s De anima* p. 346.

<sup>62</sup> *De anima* 27.

embryo came into existence simultaneously, at the moment of conception. By adopting the same theory as Soranus, that the sperm contains both body and soul, Tertullian was able to give a physiological account of the simultaneous formation of body and soul through the procreative act. In *De carne Christi* Tertullian is responding to a very different problem and therefore he uses a different theory of conception. In *De carne Christi*, as we have seen, Tertullian's primary concern was to prove the reality of Christ's flesh. Therefore, he adopts Aristotle's theory of conception which emphasizes the role of the mother as the contributor to his flesh. This is another example of Tertullian's rhetorical technique. In chapter two I highlighted how Tertullian adapted details about the Fall (who was responsible, the cause etc) depending on the audience and theme of a treatise. In the same way Tertullian uses whichever theory of conception best suited his argument in any particular treatise.

### **Pregnancy and its physiological processes.**

One of the techniques Tertullian uses to demonstrate that Christ had truly taken flesh from Mary, was to suggest that the physiological effects of pregnancy experienced by Mary, were the same as those experienced by every other pregnant woman. Tertullian's discussions on the physiological effects of pregnancy are based on his knowledge of ancient medical theories.

### ***De carne Christi* 20 and the umbilical cord.**

In *De carne Christi* 20, Tertullian highlights two verses in Psalm 22.9 which, based on his knowledge and use of ancient medicine, prove the reality of Christ's birth and flesh. The first verse concerned reads: "For thou art he that didst rend me out of my mother's womb". Tertullian argues that when one is rent from something, it takes something from that which is rent. In the case of pregnancy, the newly born child takes something from the womb from which it was rent. This, he understood to be the umbilical cord. Tertullian claims that verse in the Psalm is spoken by Christ<sup>63</sup> and therefore indicates that Christ was tied to Mary's womb by means of an umbilical cord, through which Christ received nourishment: "If he who clove [to the womb] was drawn (*auellere*) from it, how could he have adhered to it, if it were not that, all the while he was in the womb, he was tied to it, as to his origin, by the umbilical cord

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<sup>63</sup> "Quia tu es qui avulsisti me ex utero matris meae".

(*nervum umbilicarem*), which communicated growth to him from the matrix?” Earlier in *De carne Christi*, Tertullian had already made an implicit reference to the feeding of the foetus in the womb when he noted that the foetus is “nourished on that same mire of moisture and blood”.<sup>64</sup>

In the ancient world, there was widespread acknowledgement that, whilst in the womb, the foetus was nourished by the female’s menstrual blood. The Hippocratics, for example, suggested that the foetus was nourished by the female’s menstrual blood through the *chorion*.<sup>65</sup> Likewise, Galen also proposed that the foetus was nourished on the mother’s blood<sup>66</sup> and was joined to the mother by the *chorion*: “...these vessels take the source of their formation from the arteries and veins of the womb, the extremities of which feed into the space within the womb; it is by these vessels alone that the embryo is connected with the bearer of the embryo”.<sup>67</sup>

I propose that Tertullian’s most likely source was Aristotle who proposed that, whilst in the womb, the foetus receives nourishment from the mother’s blood by means of the umbilical cord, which is like a root attached to the uterus.<sup>68</sup> Heyne dismissed Aristotle’s influence on Tertullian’s interpretation of Psalm 22.9.<sup>69</sup> He bases this assumption on the claim that Aristotle does not speak of the *umbilicus* in *De generatione animalium* 2.7 which he cites from Jean-Pierre Mahe’s “La Chair du Christ”.<sup>70</sup> However, although Aristotle does not speak of the *umbilicus* in *De generatione animalium* 2.7, he does in *De generatione animalium* 2.4 (740a24-7): “[The foetus] makes use of the uterus and the mother, as a plant does of the earth, to get nourishment, until it is perfected...nature has first designed the two blood-vessels from the heart, and from these smaller vessels branch off to the uterus. These are called the *umbilicus*, for this is a blood-vessel, consisting of one or more vessels in different animals...The vessels join on to the uterus like the roots of plants, and through them the embryo receives its nourishment”.<sup>71</sup> Aristotle claimed that the menstrual blood of the female

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<sup>64</sup> *De carne Christi* 4.

<sup>65</sup> *Medical Definitions* 454. See also *On the Diseases of Women* 1.25 in which the Hippocratic author claims that the female’s menstrual blood makes the embryo grow.

<sup>66</sup> Galen writes: “For the embryo attracts the most useful blood to itself, as nourishment...” (*Commentary on Hippocrates’ Epidemics* 3.3.77).

<sup>67</sup> *On the Construction of the Embryo* 2.

<sup>68</sup> *De generatione animalium* 745b23-26.

<sup>69</sup> Heyne, “Tertullian and Medicine”, p. 154 n.154.

<sup>70</sup> J.P. Mahe (ed.), *La Chair du Christ* (Paris: *Sources Chretiennes* 216, 1972), p. 418 cited by Heyne,

“Tertullian and Medicine”, p. 154.

<sup>71</sup> *De generatione animalium* 740a24-7.

was used for both the formation of the foetus and nourishment needed for its growth. Aristotle made a distinction between the two, suggesting that the material used in conception is of a higher quality than that used for nourishment. When conception first takes place within a woman, the male's seed 'sets' the purest part of the female's menstrual blood and this is used to form the flesh of the foetus. The leftover fluid part of the menstrual blood, not 'set' by the male's seed, is used for the nourishment of the foetus.<sup>72</sup>

Although Tertullian's reference to existence of and nourishment through the umbilical cord was far less descriptive than those found in the ancient medical texts, it is apparent that Tertullian derives his knowledge from these sources. Given that Aristotle speaks of *umbilicus* it is plausible that Tertullian derives his basic idea about the function of the umbilical cord from Aristotle's *De generatione animalium*, although he makes no direct reference to Aristotle.

By interpreting the Psalm verse with the assistance of Aristotle's theory, Tertullian strengthens his argument in favour of the reality of Christ's birth and flesh by adding "scientific" credibility to it. For it is certainly true that during childbirth the foetus carries with it something from that which it was rent, the womb, which physiologically happens with the umbilical cord. Tertullian's central argument is that this could only be the case if Christ truly took flesh from Mary and it thus disproves the claims of opponents such as the Valentinians who argued that Christ only "passed through" the womb.<sup>73</sup>

#### *De carne Christi* 20 and breast-feeding.

The second verse taken from Psalm 22 reads: "And my hope is from my mother's breasts" (Psalm 22.10).<sup>74</sup> Again Tertullian understands this to be Christ speaking to the Father. Commenting on this verse, Tertullian writes: "But what were his mother's breasts which he mentions? No doubt they were those which he sucked. Midwives, and doctors, and naturalists, can tell us, from the nature of women's breasts, whether they usually flow at any other time than when the womb is affected with pregnancy, when the veins convey there from the blood of the lower parts to the *mamilla*, and in the act of transference convert the

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<sup>72</sup> Dean-Jones, *Women's Bodies in Classical Greek Science*, p. 207.

<sup>73</sup> *De carne Christi* 20.

<sup>74</sup> "Et spes me ab uberibus matris meae".

secretion into the nutritious substance of milk. That is why during lactation, the monthly periods cease...”.

Heyne claims that Soranus is Tertullian’s likely source in this passage.<sup>75</sup> However, I would propose that there is nothing within this passage to suggest that Soranus was the source of Tertullian’s information. In fact, Soranus’ discussion on breast-feeding would not support the point Tertullian was trying to make in *De carne Christi* 20, that Christ was able to feed at Mary’s breasts because Christ took truly flesh from her. Soranus claimed that the mother’s milk was unwholesome for the child for the first twenty days and it was therefore advisable for her to employ a wet nurse for the first couple of weeks.<sup>76</sup> Thus, rather than Christ feeding at Mary’s breasts, following Soranus’ recommendations, he would have been fed by a wet nurse.

Whilst I question the likelihood of Soranus being Tertullian’s source, it is certain that, at several points in this passage, Tertullian utilized ancient medical knowledge to support his argument. Firstly, Tertullian’s suggestion that blood is transferred into the more nutritious substance of milk is probably derived from Aristotle. Whilst some Hippocratic texts speak of blood being converted into milk<sup>77</sup> there was an alternative Hippocratic theory which proposed that milk was formed from the sweetest part of the mother’s food and was redirected from the stomach to the breasts. The author of one Hippocratic text explains: “The cause of lactation is as follows: when the womb becomes swollen because the child presses against the woman’s stomach and if this pressure occurs when the stomach is full, the fatty parts of the food and drink are squeezed out into the flesh...Now from this fatty substance which is warmed and white in colour, that portion which is made sweet by the action of heat coming from the womb is squeezed into the breasts”.<sup>78</sup>

On the other hand, Aristotle proposed that blood which had not been used up in the formation of the foetus, or used for its nourishment in the womb, was converted into milk and transferred to the breast for the nourishment of the child after it was born. He explains: “That

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<sup>75</sup> Heyne, “Tertullian and Medicine” p. 155. See also B. Leyerle who also cites Soranus as Tertullian’s likely source in “Blood is Seed” *Journal of Religion* Vol. 81 No.1 (January, 2001), p. 36.

<sup>76</sup> *Gynaecology* 2.87.

<sup>77</sup> Galen also claimed that during the eighth month of pregnancy the blood was diverted from the womb to the breasts to become milk. (*Usefulness of Parts* 14.8/ II. 310. 8-313).

<sup>78</sup> *On the Nature of Men* 21. See also *On the Diseases of Women* 1.73 which claims that the sweetest part of the woman’s nourishment is diverted to the breasts. See, Dean-Jones, *Women’s Bodies in Classical Greek Science*, p. 218.

milk has the same nature as the secretion from which each animal is formed is plain...For the material which nourishes is the same as that from which Nature forms the animal in generation. Now this is the sanguineous liquid in the *sanguinea*, and milk is blood concocted”.<sup>79</sup> Aristotle argued that once the embryo had been fully formed, it required a different type of food from that which it had received in the womb.<sup>80</sup> Consequently, the menstrual blood which nourished the child through the umbilical cord is redirected to the breasts, becoming useful when the child is born. Aristotle writes: “...when the nourishment coming through the umbilical cord is no longer sufficient for the foetus because of its size, then at the same time the milk becomes useful for the nourishment of the newly-born animal, and the blood-vessels round which the so-called umbilical cord lies as a coat collapse as the nourishment is no longer passing through it; for these reasons it is at that time also that the young animal enters into the world”.<sup>81</sup> In short, at the time of birth the female’s blood is converted into milk so that she is able to feed her child outside of the womb.

Tertullian utilizes ancient medical theories on the production of breast milk in order to support his arguments in favour of the reality of Christ’s flesh and birth. Because, Christ truly took flesh from Mary, she also experienced the ordinary physiological process of pregnancy, including those which changed her menstrual blood into milk. By making reference to this, Tertullian added scientific credibility to his argument.

A second point follows on from this which is that “during lactation, the monthly periods cease”. This argument may have been based on observation but there was also medical theory behind it: surplus menstrual blood was being diverted to the breasts as milk. Galen, for example, claimed that lactation was a way of getting rid of menstrual blood and proposed that “...those women who are of an age to menstruate, but are lactating, have no periods”.<sup>82</sup> Aristotle, likewise, suggested that during the period in which a woman was breastfeeding she would stop menstruating: “In the natural course of events, no menstrual evacuations take place during the suckling period, nor do women conceive then, and if they do conceive the milk dries up, because the nature of the milk is the same as that of the menstrual fluid and nature cannot produce a plentiful enough supply to provide both; so that if the secretion takes

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<sup>79</sup> *De generatione animalium* 4.8.

<sup>80</sup> *De generatione animalium* 77 6a 34-b4.

<sup>81</sup> *De generatione animalium* 4.8.

<sup>82</sup> *On Venesection Against Erasistratus* 5 and 26 (K165).

place in one direction, it must fail in the other...”<sup>83</sup> In other words, whilst a woman is breastfeeding the monthly menstruation ceases because the surplus blood, which would be released in menstruation, is converted into milk to nourish the child. Although Tertullian’s reference to the lack of menstruation during lactation is brief, there were medical explanations for it, which may have been well known and which added further scientific credibility to Tertullian’s argument.

A third point which can be drawn from this passage is the connection Tertullian identifies between pregnancy and breastfeeding. Tertullian claims that the production of breast milk is the direct consequence of being pregnant. Later in the same chapter Tertullian makes this causal relationship even more explicit. Responding to his opponents’ denial of a real incarnation, he asks: “...how did a womb which had wrought nothing, performed nothing, experienced nothing, decant its fountain into those breasts in which it causes change only by the process of giving birth? It cannot have possessed blood for the supply of milk without also having reasons for the blood itself, namely the tearing away of flesh which was its own”<sup>84</sup>.

In the ancient world the link between breast and womb was widely acknowledged.<sup>85</sup> The Hippocratics, for example, claimed when women complain of problems in the reproductive system, there tended to be secondary symptoms which manifest in the chest.<sup>86</sup> The connection between the womb and the breasts was also evident to Galen<sup>87</sup> who claimed: “Among animals those that do not become pregnant have no milk, and those that have milk are by nature subject to pregnancy”.<sup>88</sup> Aristotle observed an even more specific link between pregnancy and the production of breast-milk when he proposed that milk starts to be formed in the breasts as soon as the animal becomes pregnant, although it does not become useful until around the time of birth.<sup>89</sup> In human beings, the exact length of gestation is not determined, and so the milk has to be available at the earliest date a child can be born, which

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<sup>83</sup> *De generatione animalium* 4.8.

<sup>84</sup> *De carne* Christ 20.

<sup>85</sup> R. Flemming, *Medicine and the Making of Roman Women: Gender, Nature, and Authority from Celsus to Galen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 234.

<sup>86</sup> Dean-Jones, *Women’s Bodies in Classical Greek Science*, p. 215 (*On the Diseases of Women* 2.133).

<sup>87</sup> Galen also suggested the onset of menstruation occurs at the same time as the swelling of the breasts (*Commentary on Hippocrates’ Epidemics* 6.4.28) See Flemming, *Medicine and the Making of Roman Women*, p. 310.

<sup>88</sup> *On Venesection Against Erasistratus* 26 (K165).

<sup>89</sup> *Historia Animalium* 522a4.



is around the seventh month. Aristotle explains: "...in humans, since there are several times of birth, it must be ready at the first of these; hence in women the milk is useless before the seventh month and only then becomes useful".<sup>90</sup> Aristotle claims that this is an example of Nature's good timing.<sup>91</sup>

Tertullian, like Aristotle, uses the presence of milk as evidence of pregnancy. Indeed, Aristotle's influence on Tertullian can be seen not only in his use of the medical knowledge but also in the rhetorical use of breast-milk as a necessary sign of pregnancy. In *Rhetoric* Aristotle pointed to the production of breast-milk as a result of pregnancy as a necessary sign: "...The fact that she is giving milk is a sign that she has lately borne a child."<sup>92</sup> Here we have the infallible kind of sign, the only kind that constitutes a complete proof, since it is the only kind that, if the particular statement is true, is irrefutable".<sup>93</sup> Tertullian, following Aristotle, proposed that women produce milk only after having been pregnant. The fact that Christ fed at Mary's breasts, at least according to Tertullian's interpretation of Psalm 22.9, indicates that she truly bore him in the ordinary way, and thus Christ really took flesh from Mary.

In summary, by interpreting Psalm 22.9 with the help of ancient medical theories on conception, Tertullian attempts to show that the physiological effects of pregnancy experienced by Mary were the same as those experienced by every other pregnant woman. In doing this, Tertullian strengthened his argument that Christ had truly taken flesh from Mary, because Mary could only experience the physiological effects of pregnancy if Christ truly took flesh from her.

### **Feminist considerations.**

There are a number of positive aspects which can be derived from Tertullian's discussion of Mary's role as Christ's mother. Firstly, Tertullian's discussion makes it clear that Mary alone is the source of Christ's flesh: God did not implant him in her. Secondly, although Tertullian admits that procreation is messy, he maintains that it is honourable. Thirdly, Mary is a woman like all others in her experience of pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding.

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<sup>90</sup> *De generatione animalium* 4.8.

<sup>91</sup> *De generatione animalium* 4.8.

<sup>92</sup> However, in another text Aristotle also acknowledged that occasionally breast milk does appear in males and non-pregnant women. See *Historia animalium* 522a11-21.

<sup>93</sup> *Rhetoric* 1.2 (1357b).

There are two aspects which may be open to feminist critique. Firstly, Tertullian's emphasis on Mary's role as mother may be problematic for feminists. As noted above, feminist scholars such as Johnson claim that the exaltation of Mary's role as mother has led to the belief that reproduction is the primary vocation for women. Tertullian's emphasis on Mary's motherhood is primarily for rhetorical purposes. Although Tertullian examines in graphic detail some of the experiences Mary underwent during her pregnancy, it was in order to say something about Christ. Mary's motherhood was a polemical weapon against those who denied the reality of Christ's birth and flesh. In proving that Mary was truly the mother of Christ, like all other mothers she gave flesh and nourishment to Christ. Thus, although Tertullian does use Mary as a symbol of ideal motherhood, he does place her value in her role as the mother of Christ.

Secondly Tertullian's use of Aristotle may raise some specific problems. The critique feminists make of Aristotle's work may also be applied to certain aspects of Tertullian's work in *De carne Christi*, specifically his understanding of the roles of male and female in conception. Feminist scholars have been critical of Aristotle's work, claiming that it is fundamentally patriarchal and suggest that Aristotle is responsible for later misogyny in the West. Eve Browning Cole, for example, has claimed: "We have become accustomed to regarding Aristotle as the fountainhead of one long tradition of western misogyny".<sup>94</sup> Likewise, Maryanne Cline Horowitz in her article "Aristotle and Women", claims that a thorough examination of Aristotle's concept of the female human nature is necessary because many of the standard arguments for women's inferiority have come from Aristotle.<sup>95</sup> To this end, Horowitz discusses several aspects of Aristotle's biology which denigrate women. I will use Horowitz's critique of Aristotle to assess Tertullian's discussion on Mary in *De carne Christi*.

Horowitz is critical of the minor role Aristotle assigns to women in reproduction. She writes: "Aristotle went about as far as one can in attributing fertility exclusively to the male sex". As previously discussed, Aristotle claimed that the male semen produced the form and impetus from which an embryo grew. The only cause which Aristotle attributes to the female is the

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<sup>94</sup> E. Browning Cole, in a review of Paige DuBois, *Sowing the Body*, in *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Philosophy and Feminism* 89 (Autumn, 1989), p. 88-9.

<sup>95</sup> M.C. Horowitz, 'Aristotle and Women' in *Journal of the History of Biology*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Autumn, 1976), p. 183.

material, from her menses, for the embryo's growth and nourishment. Horowitz claims that this suggests that there was female inferiority present in Aristotle's work. Although matter was a necessary element in conception, it was of less importance in the hierarchy of being and thus the female contribution was regarded as inferior to the male. She writes: "Aristotle's belief that the male semen produces the form and impetus from which an embryo grows and the female womb contributes only the material nourishment discounted female importance in the one area where the primitive or uneducated mind suspects female superiority".<sup>96</sup> In other words, although on the face of it women seemed to play an important role in reproduction, according to Horowitz, Aristotle's theory ensured that a woman's role was 'downgraded' so that she became the inferior partner in the reproduction process.

Another criticism of Aristotle, highlighted by Horowitz, is that whilst the male is associated with activity, the female is associated with passivity. Indeed Aristotle is explicit in this when he writes: "The female, as female, is passive, and the male, as male, is active and the principle of the movement comes from him".<sup>97</sup> Horowitz points out that Aristotle's craftsman's analogy is a vivid illustration of the association of 'maleness' with activity and form and the association of 'femaleness' with passivity and matter. The male is analogous to the craftsman, and the female menses to the craftsman's material. She explains: "The analogy implied the following: utilizing the female body as a workplace containing raw material, nature through the male takes the female generative matter, activates it, and makes of it a human life".<sup>98</sup> She claims that the implication of the craftsman analogy is this: the woman passively takes on the task of fulfilling the man's design and plan. Thus, a woman's role in reproduction is secondary and inferior to that of the man, and the product of her labour, the embryo, was not hers.<sup>99</sup>

What are the implications of Horowitz's critique of Aristotle for my examination of Tertullian's use of Mary? As noted above Tertullian, following Aristotle, assigned to Mary the role of providing the matter. By contrast, God took on the role of the male providing the form which transformed the material of Mary's womb into the human person of Christ. Not only is Tertullian guilty of assigning the inferior contribution of matter to Mary, but there is

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<sup>96</sup> Horowitz, "Aristotle and Women", p. 186.

<sup>97</sup> *De generatione animalium* 1.21.

<sup>98</sup> Horowitz, "Aristotle and Women", p. 196.

<sup>99</sup> Horowitz, "Aristotle and Women", p. 197.

the further problem of him also associating God with the male and thus reinforcing the male/spirit and female/flesh hierarchy of which feminists have been widely critical.

On the other hand, one should not underestimate the high place Tertullian gives to the flesh. In passages throughout *De carne Christi* Tertullian discusses at length Mary's contribution of the "material" because it is this "matter" which becomes the flesh of Christ. The reality of Christ's human flesh is the central theme in *De carne Christi*, because the salvation of humankind depended upon the reality of Christ's human flesh. Far from being the least important element in the conception process, the image depicted in *De carne Christi* is that the matter is of equal importance to the form. Without human flesh, Christ cannot save humankind.

Furthermore, as I will discuss in chapter six, Tertullian has a very high regard for the flesh of all human beings. He considers the flesh to be intrinsically good and of equal importance to the soul. The human person is composed of body and soul and both will be raised up at the resurrection. Thus, although feminists, such as Horowitz, argue that in Aristotle's theory of reproduction the material contribution of the female is of little importance in the reproduction process, and certainly inferior to the male contribution, the same cannot be said of Tertullian. In Tertullian's thinking, the flesh is extremely important and thus Mary's contribution of the matter is not inferior.

Horowitz's second criticism of Aristotle, that the female is passive and the male is active, is applicable to Tertullian. Using Aristotle's theory, Tertullian sees God as the active agent who "acts upon" the menstrual blood of Mary, the passive agent. This is evident in the images Tertullian borrows from Aristotle, the carpenter metaphor and the cheese-milk analogy, to explain the male and female roles in reproduction. However, I would argue that the conclusions Horowitz reaches, based on the active-male/passive-female comparison, are not entirely applicable to Tertullian. For example, Horowitz claims that the female's role in reproduction is secondary and inferior to that of the man. However, I would argue that based on Tertullian's understanding of the incarnation, Mary plays an important and necessary role, one which is equal to that of the male (or God). For, without Mary there is no flesh and without flesh there is no salvation. Furthermore, Tertullian's own words refute the notion set forth by Horowitz that the product of the female's labour, the embryo, is not hers. Tertullian states the opposite of this: "...'Behold', says Isaiah, 'a Virgin shall conceive in the womb'.

Conceive what? I ask. The Word of God, of course, and not the seed of man, and in order, certainly, to bring forth a son...Therefore, as the act of conception was her own, so also what she brought forth was also her own, although the cause of conception was not”.<sup>100</sup> Tertullian’s claim that “what she brought forth was also her own” suggests that the foetus was in fact her own, and thus, this particular aspect of Horowitz’s critique is not applicable to Tertullian. Furthermore, Tertullian’s claim that “the act of conception was her own” gives Mary a more active role than perhaps Horowitz would envisage for Aristotle’s female. Nevertheless, one must also admit that Tertullian’s claim that the “cause of conception was not [Mary’s own]” does seem to suggest a passive role in conception.

### **Conclusion.**

In this chapter I have examined the emphasis Tertullian places on Mary’s role as Christ’s mother in *De carne Christi*. Tertullian’s primary concern in this treatise was to prove the reality of Christ’s human flesh and birth against those who were denying it, and Tertullian uses Mary’s motherhood as a rhetorical argument to support his case. Although Tertullian does not cite any medical texts or authors in *De carne Christi*, I have attempted to show that it was Aristotle’s theory of conception which influenced Tertullian’s own thinking. Tertullian, following Aristotle, suggested that the woman provides the material in conception, which becomes the flesh of the foetus, through the action of the male seed or, in the case of the incarnation, the Spirit of God. Tertullian, like Aristotle, employs the milk-cheese metaphor to explain the roles of the male and female in the conception process. Tertullian’s use of Aristotle’s theory of conception is a rhetorical device which enables Tertullian to highlight Mary’s role as the only one who could give Christ his flesh and thus, strengthen his case against his opponents.

In the second part of this chapter I examined Tertullian’s use of ancient medical theories to interpret Psalm 22.9 which, according to Tertullian, describes some of the physiological aspects of pregnancy, such as the nourishment of the foetus through the umbilical cord and breastfeeding. This was a rhetorical device in order to prove the reality of Christ’s human flesh and birth. The link between pregnancy and the ability to breastfeed was a particularly convincing argument. Following Aristotle, Tertullian claimed that the only way Mary would

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<sup>100</sup> *De carne Christi* 21.

have been able to produce was if Christ was truly incarnate, if he had truly taken flesh from his mother. Tertullian employs a similar argument with regards to Christ's nourishment through the umbilical cord. In short, Tertullian's references to these physiological aspects of pregnancy are a rhetorical device employed by Tertullian to support, and give scientific credibility to, his claim that Mary truly bore Christ and thus, prove that his flesh was truly human.

Tertullian's emphasis on Mary's role as Christ's mother is based entirely on his desire to prove that she is the one who provides Christ with his human flesh. Whilst this is potentially problematic for some feminist scholars, I propose that there are positive elements to be drawn from Tertullian's discussion. According to Tertullian, Christ's human flesh was necessary for the salvation of humankind and thus Mary has a key role to play in the salvation of humankind. Christ needed Mary's flesh in order that he might assume human flesh and through it bring salvation to humankind. Without Mary providing the material for Christ's flesh therefore, there would be no salvation for humankind. However, Tertullian does not exalt Mary above other women in her motherhood. In fact, Tertullian honours Mary because she is human and because her experiences during pregnancy were 'ordinary'. Mary is not honoured in spite of her being a woman, but rather, because she is a woman. The implications of Tertullian's Mariology are not restricted to women alone. His references to Mary honour her flesh and thus suggest that the flesh and nature of all human beings, men and women, is honourable. Fundamentally for Tertullian, the flesh is good and it takes central place in the plan of salvation. This favoured view of the flesh is a central theme in *De resurrectione carnis* and will be discussed further in the next chapter.

## **PART 3: Women.**

### **Introduction.**

Feminist scholars such as Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elizabeth Clark have recognized that within the writings of the Fathers there has been a dual evaluation of women.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand the Fathers' writings portray a deep-seated hatred and fear of women and yet, there is another strand which gives high praise to women.<sup>2</sup> Clark discusses this dual evaluation of woman by the Fathers under the "umbrella" headings of "devil's gateway" and "bride of Christ".<sup>3</sup> Predictably, Clark points to Tertullian's "Devil's gateway" passage as a prime example of the negative depiction of women by the Fathers.<sup>4</sup> Although Clark discusses both positive and negative treatments of women by a number of the Fathers, she only uses negative examples from Tertullian's work. Furthermore, Clark extrapolates these negative statements from their wider context. In so doing, Clark reinforces Tertullian's stereotype as a misogynist.<sup>5</sup> My aim in the third part of this thesis is to uncover a more nuanced analysis of Tertullian's view on women.

### **Anthropology.**

One topic which is of particular concern among feminist scholars is that of patristic understandings of anthropology. At issue is the fundamental question of what it means to be a human being. Within this broad question lies the specific topic of what it means to possess the specific sex of man or woman.<sup>6</sup> Generally speaking, in the ancient world women were

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<sup>1</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church" in R.R. Ruether (ed.), *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Tradition* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), p. 150 -212 The primary focus of Ruether's essay is a critical evaluation of the relative merits of Augustine and Gregory for feminist theology. E. A. Clark, "Devil's Gateway and Bride of Christ: Women in the Early Christian World," in E.A. Clark (ed.), *Ascetic Piety and Women's Faith: Essays on Late Ancient Christianity* (Lewiston, New York, 1986), pp. 23-60.

<sup>2</sup> Ruether, "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church", p. 150.

<sup>3</sup> Clark, "Devil's Gateway and Bride of Christ", p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Clark, "Devil's Gateway and Bride of Christ", pp. 25-26.

<sup>5</sup> Clark, "Devil's Gateway and Bride of Christ", pp.35-6 and p.41.

<sup>6</sup> In this chapter I am using "sex" to refer to the biological differences that distinguish men and women. This is to be distinguished from gender which is generally agreed culturally constructed. See E.A. Clark, "Women, Gender, and the Study of Christian History" in *Church History* 70:3 (September, 2001), p. 419. Some scholars, such as K. E. Børresen, reject the sex/gender distinction altogether arguing that the distinction between sex as biologically determined and gender as culturally to be constructed is "a relic of androcentrism in asexual disguise". (See K.E. Børresen, "Women's Studies of the Christian Tradition: New Perspectives" in U. King (ed.), *Religion and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 246-247).

regarded as men's inferior and evidence to support this position was drawn from science (medicine), philosophy, and religion (scripture).<sup>7</sup>

### Science.

In ancient medical texts men were depicted as the normative human being and women, by contrast, were said to be failed males. Both Aristotle and Galen, for example, called woman a “mutilated (πεπηρωμένον) male”. Aristotle writes: “For the female is, as it were, a mutilated male, and the *catamenia* are semen, only not pure; for there is only one thing they have not in them, the principle of soul”.<sup>8</sup> Thus, it seems that Aristotle's claim is based on the fact that women are unable to produce male semen. In another passage, Aristotle describes woman as deviating from the fertile male norm: “A woman is, as it were, an infertile male”.<sup>9</sup>

As I noted in chapter five, according to Aristotle, women were unable to concoct the all-important male semen because they lacked the necessary vital heat and were thus, colder in nature. Aristotle claimed that a woman's lack of vital heat also affected her intellectual ability, for her power of reason never reaches its full potential. Consequently, because man commands superior intelligence, he rightly takes charge over woman: “[T]he relationship between the male and the female is *by nature* such that the male is higher, the female lower, that the male rules and the female is ruled”.<sup>10</sup> In other words, according to Aristotle woman's subordinate position to man was part of the natural order and thus, the man's domination over her was justified. Peter Brown, in *The Body and Society*, has summarized the thinking of those in the ancient world: “Women by contrast were failed males. The precious vital heat had not come to them [women] in sufficient quantities in the womb. Their lack of heat made them soft, more liquid, more clammy-cold, altogether more formless than were men”.<sup>11</sup> In short, women were seen as “imperfect” men and inferior to them both physically and intellectually.

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<sup>7</sup> K. E. Power, “Of Godly Men and Medicine: Ancient Biology and the Christian Fathers on the Nature of Woman” in *Woman-Church* 15 (Spring, 1994), pp.26-33. Whilst I have discussed each one separately, there was often overlap between these three categories in the ancient world.

<sup>8</sup> *De generatione animalium* 737 a25-30. See also Galen, *De usu partium corporis humani* 2.620: “[T]he creator ha purposely made one half of the whole human race imperfect, and, as it were, mutilated”.

<sup>9</sup> *De generatione animalium* 1.728a. See also *De generatione animalium* 1.82: “A male is a male in virtue of a particular ability, and a female in virtue of a particular inability”.

<sup>10</sup> *Politica* 1254 b 10-14.

<sup>11</sup> P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1989), p.10.



## Philosophy.

Another factor which both led to and was used to justify the subordination of women is philosophical dualism. “Dualism” describes a view of the world which divides reality into a hierarchy of opposite categories and mutually opposed principles such as spirit and matter, soul and body.<sup>12</sup> This dualistic view of the world inevitably had a bearing on anthropology taking, as its starting point, the obvious biological sex differences between men and women. Based upon an essentialist view of gender, a dualistic anthropology ascribed to men and women two separate and opposing kinds of human nature. Men, who were said to have a masculine nature, were marked by the higher categories of spirit, soul, reason, and transcendence. Women, in contrast, were associated with the lower categories of matter, body/flesh, emotion and immanence.<sup>13</sup> Feminist scholars such as Salisbury have accused Tertullian of holding a dualistic anthropology and of associating women with these lower characteristics: “He [Tertullian] too believed that women represented the carnal world”.<sup>14</sup>

Feminist scholars have claimed that the dualistic model of anthropology has had serious implications for women. Ruether, for example, suggests that woman is not seen as a self-sufficient, whole person with equal honour to man.<sup>15</sup> On the contrary, woman is associated with weakness, sin and the flesh, and she is considered to be a danger to the man.<sup>16</sup> Simone de Beauvoir described in stark terms this association of women with the body, temptation and evil: “Evil is an absolute reality; and the flesh is sin. And of course, since woman remains always the Other, it is not held that reciprocally male and female are both flesh: the flesh that for the Christian is the hostile Other is precisely woman”.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> M.J. Giblin, “Dualism” in L. M. Russell and J.S. Clarkson (ed.), *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies* (London: Mowbray, 1996), p. 74.

<sup>13</sup> Elisabeth Johnson for example has claimed: “Men are to women as spirit is to matter...”. (E.A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of the Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003), p. 49). See also, B. S. Turner, “The Body in Western Society: Social Theory and Its Perspectives,” in S. Coakley (ed.), *Religion and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 22; J.E. Salisbury, *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), p. 27; and Ruether, “Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church”, p. 156 .

<sup>14</sup> Salisbury, *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins*, p. 27. See also T. Beattie, *Woman*, New Century Theology Series (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), p. 117.

<sup>15</sup> Ruether, “Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church”, pp. 156-7.

<sup>16</sup> Beattie, for example, claimed that womanliness was unambiguously associated with weakness, the flesh and sin. (See Beattie, *Woman*, p. 104) See also B. Clack, *Misogyny in the Western philosophical Tradition: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999). Clack argues that Tertullian identifies woman with sexuality and claims that if she wants to be redeemed, she must deny this aspect of her nature (p. 49).

<sup>17</sup> S. de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Translated by H.M. Parshley (London: Vintage, 1997), p. 167.

Because of women's association with weakness, sin and the flesh, some of the Fathers claimed that it was necessary for the woman to transcend her weak female nature and in so doing "become male".<sup>18</sup> Ruether explains: "If woman was essentially body and had sensual and deprived characteristics of mind, then it followed (according to a dualistic view of redemption) that either she was irredeemable or else she was redeemed only by transcending the female nature and being transformed into a male".<sup>19</sup> One way in which a woman could transcend her female nature was through virginity. By renouncing their female sexuality it was claimed that women could "become male" and thus could move closer to the divine. Jerome, for example, claimed: "As long as woman is for birth and children, she is different from man as body is from soul. But when she wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then she will cease to be a woman and will be called man (*vir*)".<sup>20</sup> The virginal woman was seen as man's equal, not his inferior but this could only be achieved through the renunciation of her female nature, or more accurately, those elements which the Fathers claimed are female characteristics.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the identification of perfection with masculinity meant that in the resurrection there would be only male bodies, women having been changed into men.

### Scripture: Genesis 1 and 2.

Feminist scholars claim that patriarchal readings of the Genesis creation accounts, prevalent among the Fathers, have profoundly affected the Christian understanding of women.<sup>22</sup> They are particularly critical of Genesis 2 which, they claim, has been used as the source-or-excuse to justify women's subordination to man.<sup>23</sup> According to Genesis 2, Adam was created first and was thus the founder of the human race. Consequently, the Fathers found it natural to

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<sup>18</sup> See K. Vogt, "Becoming Male": One Aspect of an Early Christian Anthropology" in J.M. Soskice and D. Lipton (ed.), *Feminism and Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 49-61. Vogt discusses use of the "becoming male" metaphor in the writings of Clement of Alexandria and Origen.

<sup>19</sup> Ruether, "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church" p. 160. See also G. Cloke, *"This Female Man of God": Women and Spiritual Power in the Patristic Age, AD 350-450* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 220; T. Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate: A Marian Narrative of Women's Salvation* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 56; T. M. Shaw, 'The Virgin Charioteer and the Bride of Christ: Gender and the Passions in Late Ancient Ethics and Early Christian Writings on Virginity' in A. J. Levine (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Patristic Literature* (London: T and T Clark, 2008), pp. 200-201.

<sup>20</sup> *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* 3. See also Ambrose's *De institutione virginis* 1.3 and *De virginitate* 4.20.

<sup>21</sup> *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* 71. See also Clark, "Devil's Gateway and Bride of Christ", p. 43

<sup>22</sup> L. Japinga, *Feminism and Christianity: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), p. 75.

<sup>23</sup> M. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 35.

assume that Adam, the man, was the normative human being. Eve created after Adam, from the rib of Adam's side, was secondary.

The relationship between Adam and Eve was seen as a prototype of the relationship between man and woman in general. Thus, Eve's secondary creation from Adam has been used as the basis for woman's continuing subordination to man since it is claimed to be part of God's original and enduring intention for human life.<sup>24</sup> The primacy of Adam's creation established the headship of man over the weaker woman who needed the man to guide her. In contrast, the purpose of the woman's creation was to be the man's helpmate as indicated in Genesis 2.18.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, there was a tendency among some of the Fathers to reduce the woman's function as "helpmate" to that of reproduction alone. Augustine, for example, claimed that if Adam had wanted help to cultivate Eden, another man would have been stronger. Similarly, if Adam was in need of company, another man would have been better than a woman. Thus, the only use that a woman serves, which a man could not, is that of reproduction.<sup>26</sup>

Genesis 1, generally the more favoured creation account among feminist scholars, speaks of the simultaneous creation of male and female in the image of God: "God created man (*anthropos, homo*) in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female" (Gen. 1.27). Since *anthropos/ homo* means human being, feminist scholars such as Daly have suggested that the reference to "the image of God" pertains to the human person, whether man or woman. Thus, Genesis 1 stresses the original sexual duality and equality between man and woman. Furthermore, God gives dominion to both the man and the woman and both are endowed with the responsibility for reproduction.<sup>27</sup>

In spite of, or perhaps because of, these positive implications for women, feminist scholars have claimed that Genesis 1 has been largely ignored or misconstrued.<sup>28</sup> Some have argued that women were created in God's image only in a partial way. For example, Augustine claimed that although the woman together with Adam was the image of God, on her own the woman was not in the image of God. The man, on the other hand, was in the image of God

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<sup>24</sup> Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, p. 35; Beattie, *Woman*, p. 100; Børresen, *Subordination and Equivalence*, pp. 17-20 and 30-31.

<sup>25</sup> Japinga, *Feminism and Christianity*, p. 76.

<sup>26</sup> G. Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity: Pagan and Christian Lifestyles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 124. See Augustine's *De genesi ad litteram* 9.5.

<sup>27</sup> Daly claims that there is evidence in the Genesis narrative for the plural is used: "And God said let *them* have dominion ..." (Gen 1.26) (Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, p. 35).

<sup>28</sup> Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, p. 35.

even on his own.<sup>29</sup> Thus, it was possible to interpret Genesis 1 in such a way as to support notions of female inferiority and subordination.

In summary, woman's subordination to man could be justified through references to science, philosophy and scripture. Woman's description as a "mutilated male" was supported with medical "evidence" from Aristotle. Philosophical dualism enabled the Fathers to associate women with the lower characteristics of body/flesh, sin and weakness, while men were characterised by the superior attributes. Finally, the Genesis creation accounts could be interpreted in a way which emphasized woman's secondary creation and thus depicted her as defective, inferior to man, and not quite in the image of God. Through references to these three sources, the Fathers were able to claim that women's subservient stance was their natural and God-intended place.

### **Sociological Roles.**

As I noted above, feminist scholars have acknowledged that women both won and lost in the early Christian centuries. Not only was this true with regards to the anthropological portrayals discussed above, but also in terms of the sociological roles women were permitted to undertake.

On the one hand, the anthropological concepts discussed above were used as the basis on which to construct different social roles for men and women. The characterization of man as the normative and fully-formed human being, and man's association with the soul and reason meant that men were fit to exercise authority in the public sphere. In contrast, women's secondary creation and her association with the lower characteristics of flesh and sexuality, was used as a justification for why women should not be allowed to take up certain roles within the church. Furthermore, women's association with the flesh and sexuality inevitably meant that women's primary role and purpose was limited to the private domain of child-bearing and home-making.<sup>30</sup> As Warner has summarized: "The priesthood is closed to

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<sup>29</sup> *De Trinitate* 7.7.10.

<sup>30</sup> Clark claims that perhaps one of the most important reason for the Church's limitation of women's roles may well have been based on the fact that women were inextricably linked with sexuality, marriage and procreation. (Clark, "Devil's Gateway and Bride of Christ", p. 37). Ruether, based largely on the work of Augustine, claims that because of her association with the body, woman was seen either as masturbatory tool for the male or alternatively, she was seen merely as an instrument for procreation. (Ruether, "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church", p. 163).

women because they are considered a secondary image of the maker, too gentle and timid by nature, and destined to serve either their husbands and children as wives and mothers, or priests and children as nuns”.<sup>31</sup>

Clark has proposed that the mainstream church’s quest for self definition was another factor which led to the limitations of women’s roles within the church.<sup>32</sup> In the early church there were a number of different groups and sects which claimed to embody authentic Christianity and thus posed a challenge to mainstream Christianity. Many of these groups offered women opportunities for leadership roles and thus attracted large numbers of female followers. In order to define itself over against these sects, mainstream Christianity singled out for attack various features of these groups including the roles women were allowed undertake. Thus, whilst women in the mainstream church were not allowed to teach, baptize or offer the Eucharist, women in many of the “heretical” Christian sects were permitted to perform these roles. Consequently many of the Fathers, Tertullian included, used the image of the “heretical” woman teaching and baptising as a rhetorical tool with which to malign and denigrate the various “heretical” sects.<sup>33</sup> I will discuss the place this had in Tertullian’s rhetoric in chapter seven.

The work of Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek has presented a more nuanced picture of women’s roles within mainstream Christianity.<sup>34</sup> In their book *Ordained Women in the Early Church*, Madigan and Osiek have compiled documentary and archaeological evidence which suggests that in some places, there were women who were permitted to take on the roles of deacon and presbyter. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that this practice was by no means widespread.

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<sup>31</sup> M. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Picador Books, 1990), p. 191.

<sup>32</sup> Clark, “Devil’s Gateway and Bride of Christ”, pp.33 -37. See also A. Cameron, “Neither Male Nor Female,” in *Journal of Greece and Rome* 27, No.1 (April, 1980), pp. 60-68. Cameron claims: “But as orthodox Christianity came more and more to embrace the ideal of celibacy and to clamp down on the heresies where women were most involved, it excluded women more completely from the organization of the Church” (p. 66).

<sup>33</sup> V. Burrus has illustrated some of the ways in which "orthodoxy" was secured by aligning the female with heresy. See V. Burrus, "The Heretical Woman as Symbol in Alexander, Athanasius, Epiphanius, and Jerome," in *Harvard Theological Review* 83 (1991), pp. 229-48; V. Burrus, ““Equipped for Victory’: Ambrose and the Gendering of Orthodoxy,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4 (1996), pp. 461-76.

<sup>34</sup> K. Madigan and C. Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005).

Although women had some limited roles which they were permitted to undertake, feminist scholars like Clark have noted that the ascetic movement became the movement that, more than any other, provided liberation for Christian women.<sup>35</sup> The ideal of virginity offered women liberation on two levels. Firstly, on a theological level, virginity enabled women to overcome many of the negative qualities associated with being a woman and bestowed upon them an elevated status.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, virginity was the means through which a woman is freed from the two-fold curse of the Fall, childbearing and male domination.<sup>37</sup> Cyprian, for example, could say to the virgin: “You do not fear the sorrows of woman or their groans. You have no fear of the birth of children. Nor is your husband your master, but our Master and Head is Christ, in the likeness and in the place of man”.<sup>38</sup> Secondly, the virginal life offered to women many practical advantages. Women were not only liberated from the domestic worries of marriage and motherhood, but they were also free to pursue friendships with men. Some women were given the opportunity to travel whilst others even found themselves in leadership roles in women’s monasteries.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, the female virgin could only be surpassed by the female martyr.<sup>40</sup> For many in early Christianity the martyr represented the ideal Christian. As Fox has suggested: “The most excellent Christians in the early Church were neither virgins nor the visionaries. They were the Christians whom pagans put to death”.<sup>41</sup> Martyrdom gave women an opportunity to be on a par with men and female martyrs were often upheld as good examples who Christians were encouraged to emulate. At other times, female martyrs could be used as a rhetorical device to shame men.<sup>42</sup> The *Passion of Perpetua*, edited by Tertullian, has been of particular interest to feminist scholars because it purports to be Perpetua’s own record of events. Thus, the *Passion of Perpetua* is notable not only because it was written in the words of a martyr, but also

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<sup>35</sup> Clark, “Devil’s Gateway and Bride of Christ”, p. 43. However, Ruether has claimed that, on the whole, Christianity actually lowered the position of women, for woman was only elevated in her role as virgin which was “unnatural” and “anti-feminine”. (Ruether, “Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church”, p. 165).

<sup>36</sup> Clark, “Devil’s Gateway and Bride of Christ” p. 43 and Cameron, “Neither Male Nor Female”, p. 66

<sup>37</sup> Ruether, “Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church”, p. 159 and Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p. 72.

<sup>38</sup> *De habitu virginum* 22 Cited by Ruether, “Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church”, p. 159.

<sup>39</sup> E. A. Castelli, “Virginity and its Meaning for Women’s Sexuality in Early Christianity” in A.J. Levine (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Patristic Literature* (London: T and T Clark, 2008), pp. 72-100.

<sup>40</sup> Cameron, “Neither Male Nor Female”, p. 66.

<sup>41</sup> R. L. Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Harper, 1988), p. 419.

<sup>42</sup> K. Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 86.

because this martyr was a woman.<sup>43</sup> As Rives noted: “[Perpetua’s] account gives us a rare insight into the thoughts of a Christian martyr and an even rarer insight into the experience of a woman in the early days of Christianity”.<sup>44</sup> I will discuss *The Passion of Perpetua* further in chapter seven.

### **Tertullian and women overview.**

As was the case with the topic of Mary, Tertullian does not have a systematic theology of woman. Although Tertullian wrote two treatises addressed to women, namely *De cultu feminarum* and *De virginibus velandis*, nowhere in his corpus does he directly deal with the question of what it means to be a woman. This may be because Tertullian, being a reactive theologian, never found the need to respond to or write about the topic. This may raise its own problems for feminist scholars, and it certainly makes it more difficult to uncover what Tertullian actually thought about women. By piecing together various passages about women or issues relating to them, it is possible to build up a picture of Tertullian’s view of women. However, since Tertullian’s references to women are mostly found in the context of debates about other topics, it will also be necessary to consider the rhetorical context of each passage.

In chapter six I will examine Tertullian’s view of woman within the context of his anthropology. The main focus of this chapter will be to ask: does Tertullian consider women to be men’s equal or are they relegated to a status which is inferior to men? Although Tertullian never addresses this question directly, treatises such as *De anima* and *De resurrectione carnis* contain information with which we can attempt to answer this question. In particular, I will focus on passages which are relevant to the feminist concerns and criticisms discussed above. Inevitably, it will be necessary to consider the context within which each passage occurs, with a particular focus on Tertullian’s rhetorical objectives.

In chapter seven I will examine the status of women within the social order in Tertullian’s treatises. Firstly, I will discuss the roles, especially within an ecclesiastical setting, which Tertullian argued were not open to women. Since Tertullian never wrote a treatise exclusively on this topic, once again it is necessary to draw information about the subject from passages throughout Tertullian’s corpus. Rhetorical considerations will be especially important

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<sup>43</sup> G. Clark, *Christianity and Roman Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 42.

<sup>44</sup> J. Rives, “The Piety of a Persecutor” in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4 (1996), p. 1.

because in several passages, Tertullian uses the topic of the heretical women performing ecclesiastical roles closed to her, as a means of denigrating various “heretical” groups. Secondly, I will consider those roles which, according to Tertullian, were open to women. Besides the obvious examples of wife and virgin, Tertullian celebrates the example of women who are widows, prophetesses and martyrs.



## **CHAPTER 6.**

### **Tertullian and Women.**

In this chapter I will investigate the place women hold in Tertullian's anthropology and whether he regards woman as subordinate to man. Although Tertullian never addresses these issues directly, and whilst he has no systematic account of anthropology, there are a number of passages throughout his corpus which are relevant to these questions. In the first part I will examine passages in *De anima* and *De resurrectione carnis* which suggest that Tertullian viewed women as men's equal, even if he never states this explicitly. Bearing in mind some of the issues raised by feminist scholars, as discussed in the introduction above, I will show that Tertullian's work is not subject to many of their criticisms. I propose that Tertullian's use of the Genesis creation narratives and the elevated place of the flesh in his anthropology, implicitly raises all of humanity, men and women alike, to the same level. In the second part, I will examine passages from Tertullian's corpus which speak of woman's subordination to man, with a particular focus on Tertullian's *De virginibus velandis*. I propose that the apparent inconsistency between passages which suggest women are men's equals, and those which speak of women's subordination, can be understood when one considers Tertullian's rhetorical and polemical objectives in each passage. Thus, this chapter will further demonstrate the importance of reading Tertullian's work in its original polemical and rhetorical context.

#### **De anima.**

Tertullian's *De anima* is a forensic treatise in which Tertullian discusses the nature and function of the soul.<sup>1</sup> As with many of Tertullian's treatises, *De anima* was written, not as a theological reflection on the soul, but as a polemical work to refute heretical beliefs about the soul.<sup>2</sup> A forensic treatise was particularly useful in a polemical setting since it enabled

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<sup>1</sup> See D. M. Reis, "Thinking with Soul: *Psychē* and *Psychikos* in the Construction of Early Christian Identities" in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* Vol. 17 No. 4 (Winter, 2009), p. 581. For a discussion on the rhetorical structure see S. H. Hulme, "Rhetorical and Topical Outline of Tertullian's *De anima*" in *Church History 272a: Out of Africa, Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine* (Autumn, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> A number of scholars have recognized that Tertullian's primary intention in *De anima* was polemic. Waszink, for example, has claimed: "...from no chapter of *De Anima* are polemical discussions totally absent". (J. H. Waszink (trans. and ed.), *Tertullianus, De anima* (Amsterdam : Meulenhoff, 1947), p. 21). Reis makes a similar point when he claims that Tertullian's *De anima* is not a dispassionate reflection on the soul but rather should be read as an attempt to establish and identify the boundaries between "orthodoxy" and "heresy". (Reis, "Thinking with Soul", p. 588-9). See also, A.D. Nock, "Tertullian and the Ahori" in *Vigiliae Christianae* Vol. 4 No. 3 (Jul.,

Tertullian to set out and defend his ideas, whilst also attacking the erroneous ideas put forward by his opponents. Tertullian claims that heretical beliefs about the soul originate from the philosophers and he is particularly critical of Plato, who he labels “*condimentarius haereticorum*” (the source/origin of heretics).<sup>3</sup> According to Tertullian, Plato’s ideas about the soul formed the basis for Gnostic beliefs. For example, Plato claims that the soul pre-existed the body and, in the spirit world, could apprehend the Forms. Whilst the soul thus possessed true knowledge while in the spirit world, this knowledge was lost at birth.<sup>4</sup> This led to the belief that the material world is inferior to the spiritual world, an idea which permeates the Gnostic and Marcionite thinking, and challenged orthodox ideas about the Incarnation and resurrection of the body. Thus, in opposing the heretical ideas of philosophers like Plato, Tertullian also undermined the beliefs of his contemporary opponents. As I will show, Tertullian uses evidence from philosophy, Scripture, and medicine to support his arguments.

#### *De anima* and Tertullian’s use of Genesis 2.

As I noted above, the Genesis 2 creation account is problematic for some feminist scholars because the relationship between Adam and Eve served as a prototype for the relationship between man and woman from then on. Thus, since Adam was created first and Eve depends on him for the material of her body, Genesis 2 is used to highlight the priority of Adam and Eve’s subordination to him.

Tertullian refers to the Genesis 2 creation account in several passages throughout *De anima*. However, as will become apparent, Tertullian does not give a detailed exegesis of Genesis 2 and he does not draw out implications about woman’s subordination to man. Instead, Tertullian employs material from Genesis 2 to support the various arguments against his opponents in the respective chapters. By examining the three chapters in *De anima* in which Tertullian utilizes Genesis 2, it will become evident that rather than using Genesis 2 as proof of woman’s subordinate position to man, Tertullian uses the creation account as a rhetorical tool, as evidence to support the case he is making in each chapter.

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1950), pp. 129-141, and C.T. Lievestro, “Tertullian and the Sensus Argument” in *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol. 17, No. 2 (April, 1956), p. 265.

<sup>3</sup> *De anima* 23.5.

<sup>4</sup> *Phaedo*, 72d-e26.

De anima 27.

Tertullian's first allusion to the Genesis 2 creation account comes in a section of the *refutatio*<sup>5</sup> in which Tertullian sets out to oppose the theory of metempsychosis also known as the transmigration of souls. The theory of metempsychosis presupposed that the soul was unborn and pre-existent and was inhaled by the newborn with its first breath.<sup>6</sup> After death the same soul went on to inhabit a new body, either that of another human being or alternatively, the body of a non-human animal. Metempsychosis, thus, excluded the need for the resurrected body.

In order to oppose the theory of metempsychosis Tertullian sets out to prove that an individual's soul comes into existence at the moment of conception, along with the body, an argument which Tertullian develops in chapters 25-27.<sup>7</sup> In proving that an individual's soul was conceived at the same time as the body, Tertullian was able to refute the key premise of the metempsychosis theory that souls were unborn and continued to enter new bodies after death.

In *De anima 27* Tertullian draws on the medical theory of Soranus, as I discussed previously in chapter 5, in order to prove that the body and soul are conceived and develop simultaneously, from the moment of conception.<sup>8</sup> To recap briefly, Tertullian, following Soranus, claimed that the male contributes both the body and the soul to the embryo in procreation. The sperm of the male consists of a corporeal substance (the *humor*) which proceeds from the whole body and is moist, and also a psychic vapour-like substance (the *calor*) which comes from the soul (*ex anima destillatione*). By adopting the same theory as Soranus, that the sperm contains both body and soul, Tertullian was able to give a

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<sup>5</sup> The *refutatio* spans chapters 23-57 and is described by Hulme as "the heart of *De anima*" (Hulme, "Rhetorical and Topical Outline of Tertullian's *De anima*" p. 16). Barnes claims that chapters 23-57 forms the *amplificatio*. (See T. D. Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 207). However, I am persuaded by Hulme's arguments as to why this section is the *refutatio*, rather than an *amplificatio*. For example, Hulme argues that far from being an after-thought, these chapters constitute the majority of the treatise. Furthermore, the topics discussed are mainly based on objections that Tertullian's opponents might put forward against his own theory. (Hulme, "Rhetorical and Topical Outline of Tertullian's *De anima*", pp. 15-16).

<sup>6</sup> Tertullian argues that Plato's claim that the soul is unborn is problematic because it makes the soul divine/equal to God. (*De anima* 4).

<sup>7</sup> In chapters 25-27 Tertullian's particular focus is on the origin of soul and attack on metempsychosis. (Hulme, "Rhetorical and Topical Outline of Tertullian's *De anima*", p. 17).

<sup>8</sup> See chapter 5.

physiological account of the simultaneous formation of body and soul through the procreative act.

Having drawn on the medical sources to support his argument, Tertullian then turns to scripture. It is at this point that Tertullian alludes to the creation account in Genesis 2 because the creation of Adam, claims Tertullian, was a prototype of all future procreation. Adam's flesh was formed out of clay which is a type of moisture, and is thus a prototype of the *humor*, the liquid substance of the sperm. Adam's soul was formed by the breath of God and this was a prototype of the *calor*, the psychic part of the sperm. Tertullian asks: "But what else is the breath of God than the vapour of the spirit, whence should spring that which we breathe out through the generative fluid?"<sup>9</sup>

In the first creation, the two different substances of clay and breath, combined to form the first man, Adam. Subsequently, these two substances were mixed and combined in the male semen and thus, from Adam onwards, the two substances were discharged simultaneously in the form of male semen into the "seed-pot" of the woman's womb. Tertullian explains: "Forasmuch, therefore, as these two different and separate substances, the clay and the breath, combined at the first creation in forming the individual man, they then both amalgamated and mixed their proper seminal rudiments in one, and ever afterwards communicated to the human race the normal mode of its propagation..."<sup>10</sup> In short, the substances of clay (*limus*) and breath (*flatus dei*) used in Adam's creation, were prototypes of the *humor* and *calor* which are now contained in the sperm of the male. From this Tertullian concludes that all human beings consist of the very same substances (not just the same kind of substance) which were present in Adam because they were derived directly from Adam in the male's sperm.

If human beings inherit a common soul, and indeed body, from Adam, what can be said of Eve? Tertullian does not mention Eve in *De anima* 27. Based on his use of Soranus' theory of conception one may assume that, for Tertullian, Eve's (and woman's) role in the propagation of the human race was reduced to that of providing a suitable environment for the male sperm. In contrast, the role given to Adam as the first male is that of being the progenitor of the human race. Tertullian states this explicitly: "Accordingly from the one (primeval) man

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<sup>9</sup> *De anima* 27.

<sup>10</sup> *De anima* 27.

(*uno homine*) comes the entire outflow and redundance of men's souls - nature proving herself true to the commandment of God, 'Be fruitful, and multiply'. For in the very preamble of this one production, 'Let us make man,' man's whole posterity was declared and described in a plural phrase, 'Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea,' etc. And no wonder: in the seed lies the promise and earnest of the crop".

Interestingly, in this passage Tertullian appeals to Genesis 1 in order to underline Adam's role as the progenitor of the human race. For example, Tertullian implies that the command to "Be fruitful and multiply" is given to Adam alone. However, as Daniel-Hughes has pointed out, Tertullian ignores the fact that the commandment in Genesis 1 is given to both Adam and Eve together.<sup>11</sup> It must be remembered, however, that Tertullian was not interested in giving an accurate exegesis of this scriptural passage. Rather, Tertullian's primary objective was to use scripture to support his rhetorical aims. Thus, in *De anima* 27 Tertullian interprets Genesis 1 in a way that supports his depiction of Adam as the progenitor of the human race. Similarly, Tertullian's use of Genesis 2 was focused on supporting Soranus' theory of conception that body and soul have a simultaneous origin, deriving from the male sperm.

In summary, Tertullian's use of the Genesis 2 creation account in *De anima* 27 does not tell us much about his view of Eve in relation to Adam, and thus his view of woman in relation to man. Indeed, this question was not of concern to Tertullian. Rather, Tertullian uses Genesis 2, along with Genesis 1, to support his claim that all souls are derived from the male, beginning with Adam. Moreover, Tertullian suggests that the souls of all humans are of the same substance as Adam, having received it directly from him, and this applies as much to women as it does to men. Through his use of Genesis 2, Tertullian demonstrates that his medical theory of conception, based on the work of Soranus, is supported by scripture with the example of Adam. In short, Tertullian reads the Genesis creation accounts as a rhetorician, looking for evidence to support the main argument of *De anima* 27, and thus strengthen his case against the theory of metempsychosis.

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<sup>11</sup> C.D. Daniel-Hughes, *Dressing for the Resurrection: Modest Dress as Embodied Theology in Tertullian of Carthage* (PhD Dissertation, Harvard Divinity School, September 2007), p. 49.

De anima 36.

The second passage in which Tertullian alludes to the Genesis 2 creation account is in *De anima* 36, a section of the *refutatio* which discusses the properties of the soul.<sup>12</sup> Tertullian returns to the topic of the simultaneous creation of body and soul, discussed in chapter 27 and as Waszink has suggested, *De anima* 36 should be regarded as a continuation of chapter 27.<sup>13</sup>

In *De anima* 36 Tertullian is specifically concerned with the question of sexual difference. Tertullian claims that the embryo receives its sex at the moment of conception, at the same time as the body and soul are conceived. If either the body or the soul was the first to be conceived one would then be inclined to ascribe the sex of the embryo to one of these substances. Thus, if like Apelles one gives priority to the soul, it follows that the body receives its sex from the soul. Alternatively, those philosophers who claim that the soul is introduced after birth are led to conclude that it is the body which gives its sex to the soul. Tertullian concludes that since body and soul are conceived simultaneously, one cannot tell whether the seed of the body or the seed of the soul is the cause of the sex of the embryo. Tertullian explains: “The soul, being sown in the womb at the same time as the body, receives likewise along with it its sex; and this indeed so simultaneously, that neither of the two substances can be alone regarded as the cause of the sex”.<sup>14</sup> Although Tertullian is quite certain that neither the body nor the soul cause the sex of the embryo, he does not offer any suggestion as to who or what does cause the sex of the embryo.

Having set out the philosophical argument, Tertullian claims to find further support in scripture. It is at this point that Tertullian alludes to the creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2: “Certainly in this view we have an attestation of the method of the first two formations, when the male was moulded and tempered in a completer way, for Adam was first formed; and the woman came far behind him, for Eve was the later formed. So that her flesh was for a long time without specific form (such as she afterwards assumed when taken out of Adam’s side); but she was even then herself a living being, because I should regard her at that time in soul as even a portion of Adam. Besides, God’s *afflatus* would have animated her too, if there

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<sup>12</sup> Hulme, “Rhetorical and Topical Outline of Tertullian’s *De anima*”, p. 21.

<sup>13</sup> Waszink, *Tertullianus, De anima*, p. 420.

<sup>14</sup> *De anima* 36.

had not been in the woman a transmission (*tradux*) from Adam of his soul also as well as of his flesh”.

Although Tertullian does not explain in clear terms how his interpretation of Genesis 2 supports his arguments in this chapter, it is possible to deduce some of the key points in this passage. Firstly, Tertullian highlights Adam’s role as the progenitor of humanity by underlining that Adam was the primary creation and claiming that Eve’s flesh and soul were present in Adam. Secondly, Tertullian suggests that when the woman was created her body and soul were created at the same time which underlines Tertullian’s main argument that both body and soul are conceived together. Furthermore, since Eve received her sex at the same time as her body and soul, Tertullian (implicitly) uses Genesis 2 to support the argument that it is impossible to identify which substance is the cause of her sex.

Tertullian’s use of Genesis 2 in *De anima* 36 has been subject to feminist critique. For example, Daniel-Hughes claims that in *De anima* 36 Tertullian depicts sexual difference in a hierarchical mode. She claims that whereas in *De anima* 27 Tertullian had used Genesis 2 to stress that every person shared in Adam's soul and body, and thus underline the equality between all people, in *De anima* 36 Genesis 2 is interpreted so that this “sameness” encompasses a hierarchy of male over female, evidenced by God's creation of Eve from Adam's side.<sup>15</sup> Daniel-Hughes concludes that Eve's secondary appearance in creation becomes the means by which Tertullian articulates the natural hierarchal ordering of male over female, written into creation from the very moment of Adam and Eve's paradigmatic births.<sup>16</sup>

In my opinion Daniel-Hughes’ reading of this passage is problematic. Her claim that Tertullian bases the female’s subordinate position to the male on Eve’s secondary creation from Adam is weak. Nowhere in *De anima* does Tertullian use this as proof of woman’s subordination to man. If anything, in *De anima* 36 Tertullian highlights Eve’s creation from Adam in order to emphasize the equality between the two for they share the same substances of flesh and soul. Scholars such as Turcan have also offered this more sympathetic reading of *De anima* 36. Turcan argues that since Adam’s soul was used in the creation of Eve’s soul it

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<sup>15</sup> Daniel-Hughes, *Dressing for the Resurrection*, p. 54.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel-Hughes, *Dressing for the Resurrection*, p. 55.

follows that both Adam and Eve share the same substance of soul and thus woman is the equal to man in the eyes of God.<sup>17</sup>

It must also be remembered that in *De anima* 36 Tertullian returns to the theme of *De anima* 27, the simultaneous origin of body and soul.<sup>18</sup> As noted above, in *De anima* 27 Tertullian argued that the soul is transmitted to the embryo by the father at the same time as the body. In *De anima* 36 Tertullian wants to underline Adam's role as the progenitor of all humanity, and thus he uses Genesis 2 as proof that Eve was created from Adam and this necessarily entails a secondary temporal creation.

Interestingly, however, Eve's creation from Adam was unique in so far as her body and soul were not derived from Adam's seed. Indeed, if they had originated from Adam's seed, Eve would surely be Adam's daughter rather than his wife. Although Eve was created from Adam's side, Tertullian uses Genesis 2 to demonstrate that Eve nevertheless received body and soul from the male, Adam. By depicting Adam as the progenitor of Eve, Tertullian strengthens the argument that all souls are derived from his soul. As if to underline the point further, Tertullian claims that if there had been no transmission of soul from Adam to Eve, God would have breathed a soul into Eve. Thus, it is not a case of Eve being unworthy to receive her soul directly from the inbreathing of God's *afflatus* but rather it was unnecessary, for she had already received her soul from Adam.

In summary, Tertullian uses Genesis 2 in *De anima* 36 as a rhetorical tool to support the arguments in that chapter. Unlike in *De anima* 27, Tertullian actually makes reference to Eve's creation from Adam. Although some scholars have seen this as an example of Tertullian's misogyny, Tertullian does not actually draw out any explicit conclusions about Eve's equality or inequality to Adam. Indeed, Tertullian was not concerned with discussing the equality of the sexes. Rather, Tertullian's primary aim was to demonstrate that an embryo receives its sex at the same time as its body and soul, at the moment of conception.

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<sup>17</sup> M. Turcan, "Etre femme selon Tertullien" in *Vita Latina* (Sept 1990), pp. 20 (English translation: "Being a woman according to Tertullian" [www.Tertullian.org](http://www.Tertullian.org)). Barbara Finlay makes a similar point in "Was Tertullian a Misogynist? A Reconsideration," in *The Journal of the Historical Society* Vol. 3 Issue 3-4 (June 2003), p. 521.

<sup>18</sup> Waszink claimed that Tertullian's primary concern is not to discuss whether or not the soul has a definite sex. Rather, Tertullian's aim is to preclude the possibility of denying the simultaneous conception of body and soul. (J.H. Waszink, *Tertullianus, De anima* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1947), p. 342).



De anima 43.

Another passage in which Tertullian draws on the Genesis 2 creation account can be found in *De anima* 43. This chapter comes in the section of the *refutatio* where Tertullian discusses the fate of the soul after death. His focus in *De anima* 43 is on questions about the nature and function of sleep because, according to Tertullian, there is in sleep an image of death.<sup>19</sup>

Tertullian begins by setting out and rejecting a number of theories of sleep put forward by various philosophers who suggest that sleep is a supernatural (*extranaturale*) phenomenon. Instead, Tertullian endorses the Stoic theory that sleep is a temporary suspension of the activity of the senses, which procures rest for the body alone. Tertullian's insistence that sleep is a necessity only for the body is based on the premise that rest is a condition which pertains to that which is mortal. Whereas the body is mortal and therefore requires rest, the soul is immortal, and thus does not need sleep.

Tertullian develops his argument by highlighting the benefits which sleep gives to the body: "[S]leep is so fit for man, so useful, so necessary, that were it not for it, not a soul could provide agency for recruiting the body, for restoring its energies, for ensuring its health, for supplying suspension from work and remedy against labour, and for the legitimate enjoyment of which day departs... Since, then, sleep is indispensable to our life, and health, and succour, there can be nothing pertaining to it which is not reasonable, and which is not natural".<sup>20</sup> In short, Tertullian maintains that sleep is a natural function which gives rest to the body and it is a necessary part of life.

In order to prove that sleep is a natural function, Tertullian uses evidence from Scripture to support his argument and it is at this point that he turns to Genesis 2. Tertullian claims that when one looks at the example of Adam it is evident that the human person has always had a desire for sleep.<sup>21</sup> Tertullian points out that Adam, the fountain of the human race, slept before he worked, before he ate and drank, and, even before he spoke. This proves, concludes Tertullian, that sleep is as natural as eating and drinking - functions which are considered to be natural by everyone.

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<sup>19</sup> *De anima* 42. The discussion of sleep is covered in chapters 42-49.

<sup>20</sup> *De anima* 43.

<sup>21</sup> Genesis 2.21: "So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept..." (NRSV).

Tertullian draws a further conclusion from Genesis 2 which is relevant to the topic being discussed in this part of *De anima*: sleep is a model of death and both are common to all humankind.<sup>22</sup> Tertullian claims that the sleep of Adam foreshadowed the death of Christ and thus supports his claim that sleep is the image of death: “For as Adam was a figure of Christ, Adam’s sleep shadowed out the death of Christ, who was to sleep a mortal slumber, that from the wound inflicted on his side, might in like manner (as Eve was formed), be typified the Church, the true mother of the living”.<sup>23</sup> In other words, Tertullian sees Adam’s sleep in Genesis 2 as a prophecy of Christ’s death.

Scholars such as Børresen have claimed that the Eve-Church typology is problematic from a feminist perspective because there is an implicit subordination of the woman to man in this typology. She explains: “Christ, as the new Adam, plays the principal role: the function of the Church in the order of salvation is purely instrumental and subordinate; it can act only through its union with Christ, because it is taken from his side just as Eve was formed from the rib of Adam”.<sup>24</sup> Although Børresen refers primarily to Augustine’s use of the Eve-Church typology she notes that the “traditional theme” (of the Eve-Church typology) was already present in Tertullian and points to the passage in *De anima* 43 as proof. Therefore, one can assume that the criticism Børresen makes of Augustine’s Eve-Church typology is equally applicable to Tertullian’s Eve-Church typology.<sup>25</sup>

It is fair to say that Tertullian’s use of Christ-Church and Adam-Eve parallel entails an implicit subordination. Given that all would agree that Christ is superior to the Church, the parallel would suggest that Tertullian regarded Adam as superior to Eve. However, when one examines the context of the Eve-Church typology in *De anima* 43 it is evident that Tertullian is not interested in drawing out conclusions about women’s subordinate position to man. Rather, Tertullian’s primary aim in using the Genesis 2 account is to highlight the similarities between sleep and death. He simply uses the Eve-Church typology to strengthen the parallel

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<sup>22</sup> Tertullian claims that God provides human beings with types and parables in order to give support to one’s faith. During sleep the body is prostrated and immovable in position which prefigures the body’s condition after death whilst it awaits reunion with the soul. Furthermore, the body’s awakening from sleep is a symbol of resurrection.

<sup>23</sup> *De anima* 43.

<sup>24</sup> K.E. Børresen, *Subordination and Equivalence: The Nature and Role of Woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas* (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1995), p. 77.

<sup>25</sup> Børresen, *Subordination and Equivalence*, p.76.

between Adam's sleep and Christ's death. This is another example of why it is important to look at the context in which a particular passage occurs.

### **Feminist Considerations.**

Although I have already touched upon some feminist issues, there are three points in particular which are worth highlighting. Firstly, Tertullian's discussion of the Genesis 2 creation account does not involve any explicit or deliberate subordination of women. Certainly, Tertullian accepts details of the Genesis 2 narrative which are problematic for feminist scholars, namely, Eve's secondary creation from Adam and her dependence on him for the substance of her body and soul. However, at no point in *De anima* does Tertullian draw conclusions from Genesis 2, about the inferiority of women to men based on the Adam-Eve prototype. Rather, Tertullian uses Genesis 2 as a rhetorical tool to support various arguments throughout *De anima*.

Secondly, Tertullian argues that all human beings inherit a common soul and body from Adam. Whilst Tertullian's emphasis on Adam as the progenitor of humanity may raise some questions among feminist scholars, there are also positive conclusions to be drawn from Tertullian's arguments. Of primary importance is that all human beings, including women, share the same substance of soul. Tertullian's claim in *De anima* 27, that all souls come from Adam, inevitably means that the souls of women (which also derive from Adam), are of the same substance as his soul. This idea is repeated in *De anima* 36 when Tertullian claims that Eve's soul was derived from Adam's soul. Thus, although it is the man alone who is given the role of generating the body and soul of an individual, all human beings, including women, are equal in so far as they possess the same human nature, and are composed of the substances of body and soul.

Finally, Tertullian's discussion in *De anima* 36 suggests that the sex of an individual is an intrinsic part of creation and not the result of some external cause. In contrast, many in the ancient world argued that the sex of an individual was determined by external factors. Aristotle for example claimed that the lack of vital heat in the womb from the sperm of the

father resulted in the production of a “mutilated male”, a woman.<sup>26</sup> Others, such as those of the Hippocratic School, argued that the sex of an individual was determined by which side of the womb the seed fell into, or by which testicle it had come from.<sup>27</sup> According to these theories, the production of a female was accidental and due to a deficiency somewhere in the conception process. Tertullian, however, suggests that sexual difference occurs at the moment of conception and is an intended and intrinsic feature of God’s creation. That the distinctions between man and woman are written into God’s design for creation is an argument Tertullian also utilizes in *De resurrectione carnis*, as I will discuss below.

### *De resurrectione carnis.*

*De resurrectione carnis* was written as a forensic speech in which Tertullian argues for a physical resurrection, meaning that the flesh will be raised and reunited with the soul.<sup>28</sup> Tertullian notes that although many believe in some form of resurrection of the dead, most deny that the flesh will be included in the resurrection.<sup>29</sup> As noted earlier, Tertullian composed *De resurrectione carnis* as the *actio secunda* of *De carne Christi* and it thus forms a crucial part of his defence of the flesh against Marcion, Valentinus and Apelles, whose denigration of the flesh led to their denial of its resurrection.<sup>30</sup> Tertullian’s primary objective in *De resurrectione carnis*, therefore, was to build on the work of *De carne Christi*, by affirming the glorious status of the flesh and thus assert its worthiness to partake in the resurrection.

The passages from *De resurrectione carnis* which I will examine below are illuminating for my discussion of Tertullian’s view of woman for several reasons. Firstly, as was the case in

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<sup>26</sup> *De generatione animalium* 766a35-767b5. Some in the ancient world claimed that sexual difference did not become apparent until puberty with the onset of menarche. See L.A. Dean-Jones, *Women’s Bodies in Classical Greek Science* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), p. 46-47.

<sup>27</sup> Dean-Jones, *Women’s Bodies in Classical Greek Science*, p. 167.

<sup>28</sup> Evans claims that *De resurrectione carnis* is written as a treatise rather than a forensic speech (Evans, *Tertullian’s Treatise on the Resurrection*, p. xvi) However, Sider has persuasively demonstrated that Tertullian not only employs many of the conventional parts of a forensic speech, but moreover he uses conjectural methods and themes throughout. (Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric and the Art of Tertullian*, p. 23, 63, and 84). See also R.D. Sider, “Structure and Design in the *De resurrectione mortuorum* of Tertullian,” in *Vigiliae Christianae* 23 (1969), pp. 177-196.

<sup>29</sup> *De resurrectione carnis* 1.

<sup>30</sup> See my discussion in the introduction to part two. Evans has highlighted the common link between the two treatises: “The two treatises, *De carne Christi* and *De resurrectione carnis*, were written to controvert all those who, denying that the human body can partake of salvation, held docetic views of the humanity of Christ. Such were Marcionites, Appelleasts, Valentinians, and Gnostics of every sort”. (Evans, *Tertullian’s Treatise on the Resurrection*, p. 570).

*De anima*, Tertullian uses the Genesis creation accounts to support his rhetorical arguments, and there is no evidence of Tertullian using them to justify women's subordination. Secondly, one of Tertullian's main objectives is to demonstrate that all human beings are composed of flesh and soul and that both substances are an essential part of one's human identity. This, combined with Tertullian's extremely positive view of the flesh, demonstrates the absence of the dualistic anthropology, described in the introduction above, which is the subject of feminist critique.

*De resurrectione carnis 5: Argument from definition.*

In *De resurrectione carnis 5*, Tertullian uses Genesis 2 to describe the formation of the first human being in order to prove that the flesh is an integral part of the human person. Using the argument from definition Tertullian claims that the designation of "*homo*" was applied first and foremost to the flesh: "Remember that man (*hominem*) properly speaking is flesh (*carnem*), for this was first designated by the term man (*hominis*) 'And God formed man clay from the earth' (man even then while still clay) 'and breathed into his face the breath of life, and man' (that is clay) 'was made into a living soul' (Genesis 2.7-8). Thus man (*homo*) is first the thing formed, then the whole (*totus*) man".<sup>31</sup>

Evidently, in this passage Tertullian is using Genesis 2 to support his rhetorical arguments. Rather than associating the flesh with woman, Tertullian insists that the flesh is integral to the identity of every human being. Consequently, Tertullian concludes, the flesh will be included in the resurrection, for: "Whatever has been provided and promise by God to man belongs not only to the soul but to the flesh as well".<sup>32</sup> In other words, since God's promise of the resurrection was given to man (*homo*) and given that the definition of man (*homo*) was first applied to the flesh, the promise of the resurrection necessarily pertains to the whole person, flesh as well as soul.

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<sup>31</sup> *De resurrectione carnis 5*. Tertullian makes the same point in a passage from *Adversus Marcionem*: "Yet what else is man (*homo*) if not flesh? It was corporeal matter, not animate matter, which first obtained from its author the name of 'man'" (*Adversus Marcionem* 1.24).

<sup>32</sup> *De resurrectione carnis 5.9*.

*De resurrectione carnis* and Tertullian's panegyric of the flesh.

In the next section of *De resurrectione carnis* Tertullian embarks upon the panegyric of the flesh, announced in chapter 5: “[W]e too shall of necessity begin by providing the quality of the flesh with defence-works, routing the vilification of it by means of an encomium”. It is in the panegyric that we see the depth of Tertullian’s love for the flesh. Through his praise of the flesh, Tertullian successfully avoids the tendency of those in the ancient world, and particularly those advocating a dualistic anthropology, of characterizing the flesh in negative terms. Indeed as Osborn has rightly observed: “[Tertullian] defends the flesh and goodness of creation with stronger claims than any other early Christian writer”.<sup>33</sup> As I will argue below, Tertullian’s optimistic estimation of the flesh has positive implications for the feminist question.

Tertullian composes his panegyric of the flesh in response to his opponents who, according to Tertullian, criticized the flesh’s origin and substance. Marcion, for example, believed that flesh, having originally been created by the demiurge god, was thus intrinsically evil.<sup>34</sup> In *De resurrectione carnis* 4 Tertullian summarizes his opponents’ view of the flesh: “...unclean from its formation of the dregs of the ground, uncleaner afterwards from the mire of its own seminal transmission; worthless, weak, covered with guilt, laden with misery, full of trouble; and after all this record of its degradation, dropping into its original earth and the appellation of a corpse...”<sup>35</sup> This unfavourable view of the flesh led to the denial of the resurrection of the flesh because the flesh was not deemed worthy enough to partake in the resurrection.

It is in order to refute this vilification of the flesh that Tertullian embarks upon the panegyric. As Sider pointed out and as I will explore in more extensive detail, Tertullian draws upon epideictic themes especially appropriate to the praise of a great public work.<sup>36</sup> Quintilian recommended three topics to be employed in a panegyric of a great public work: its utility, its beauty, and the eminence of the architect or artist.<sup>37</sup> Whilst drawing on the creation accounts

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<sup>33</sup> E. Osborn, *Tertullian, First Theologian of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 237.

<sup>34</sup> *Adversus Marcionem* 3.8.

<sup>35</sup> *De resurrectione carnis* 4.

<sup>36</sup> Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric and the Art of Tertullian*, p. 124. Although *De resurrectione carnis* is primarily based on a forensic speech, as I noted earlier orators commonly used themes and topics from all three species of rhetoric.

<sup>37</sup> *Institutio oratoria* 3.7.27. Citing the example of temples, Quintilian writes: “Temples for instance will be praised for their magnificence, walls for their utility, and both for their beauty or the skill of the architect” (*Institutio oratoria* 3.7.27).

of Genesis 1 and 2, Tertullian employs these three epideictic topics in his panegyric of the flesh. In so doing, Tertullian attempts to defend the goodness of the flesh, in spite of its lowly origins, in order to show that it is worthy to partake in the resurrection.

### God, the architect of the flesh.

The first epideictic theme which Tertullian employs is that of the eminence of the architect (*artifex*). Tertullian claims that in spite of the lowliness of the material from which the flesh originates, the substance of the flesh has great honour because of the dignity and skill of its architect, namely God. Tertullian, alluding to Genesis 2, paints a vivid image of God as an architect, lovingly moulding and sculpting the clay into the flesh of a human being: “Imagine God wholly employed and absorbed in it— in His hand, His eye, His labour, His purpose, His wisdom, His providence, and above all, in His love, which was dictating the lineaments (of this creature). For, whatever was the form and expression which was then given to the clay (by the Creator) Christ was in His thoughts as one day to become man (*homo*), because the Word, too, was to be both clay and flesh, even as the earth was then”.<sup>38</sup> Tertullian develops this argument with a reference to Genesis 1.26. He claims that the “image of God” mentioned in Genesis 1.26 was a reference to Christ’s human nature, and specifically his flesh. Thus, Christ’s human flesh, the “image of God”, was the form or expression (given to the clay) in the formation of the human flesh. Thus, here is an example of a Father using Genesis 1.26 in a way that does not subordinate women. Indeed, since the “image of God” is a reference to Christ’s human flesh, all those who possess human flesh (including women) are in the image of God.

In a development of the architect theme, Tertullian argues that although his opponents use the epithet of *pusillitas* to describe the clay from which the flesh originated, *beatus* is a more fitting description because it has been touched by the hands of God.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, this “hands-on” creation by God establishes a hierarchy within the created order. Drawing on Genesis 1 Tertullian claims that whereas non-human animals were created by God’s command alone, human beings were created in a more personal way. The reference in Genesis 1.27 to God forming the human person implies that God moulded the flesh with his own hands.<sup>40</sup> This is

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<sup>38</sup> *De resurrectione carnis* 6.

<sup>39</sup> *De resurrectione carnis* 6.1-4.

<sup>40</sup> *De resurrectione carnis* 5.

particularly interesting for the feminist question because although Tertullian identifies a hierarchy within creation, it is not one in which man is superior to woman. Rather, the hierarchy is between non-human animals and *all* human beings (men *and* women).

Finally, in order to illustrate the nobility an architect can infuse to a work, Tertullian points to the example of the statue of the Olympian Jupiter made by the great Grecian sculptor Phidias. The statue was made out of ivory and gold; the parts representing flesh being of ivory, and the drapery and other ornaments were of gold. Tertullian claims that this statue is worshipped not because it is made of ivory but rather, because it was made by the well-renowned Phidias. In other words, it is the greatness of the architect which gives dignity and worth to the statue. From this example, Tertullian concludes that if this is true of a mere man (Phidias), how much more true is this of God. Thus, it is God the architect which gives nobility to the flesh.

#### Magnificence of the flesh.

The second epideictic theme employed by Tertullian is that of the beauty of a work. Tertullian argues that in spite of its lowly origin, the original clay has been transformed into the more glorious substance of flesh.<sup>41</sup> Tertullian sets out to establish the time and the manner in which this transformation took place.

Tertullian begins by refuting the idea that human beings were clothed with flesh as a result of the Fall. This, according to Tertullian, was based on the assumption that the reference to “coats of skin” in Genesis 3.31 was a reference to the flesh. Tertullian claims that “coats of skin” was not a reference to the forming of the flesh but rather, was a literal reference to skin. He argues that after the Fall, Adam and Eve were given a cutaneous covering which was placed over the flesh. Thus, if one was to withdraw the skin one would be left with bare flesh.<sup>42</sup> To support his argument, Tertullian points to Adam’s statement in Genesis 2.23: “This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh”. In this statement, Adam recognizes the flesh of the woman as the propagation of his own flesh. This proves that even before the Fall Adam and Eve possessed flesh.

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<sup>41</sup> *De resurrectione carnis* 7.

<sup>42</sup> To support his argument, Tertullian draws on Colossians 2.11 where Paul calls circumcision a putting off (or spoliation) of the flesh. Tertullian concludes that this affirms that skin is a coat or tunic, as was described in Genesis 3.31.



At what point, therefore, was the clay transformed into flesh? Tertullian, referring to Genesis 2, claims that it happened at the time when God breathed the soul into Adam. Thus, it was the breath of God (*afflatus Dei*) which transformed the clay into flesh. In order to illustrate his point, Tertullian compares God to a potter who by tempering the blast of his fire, changes the clayey material into a stiffer, more beautiful substance. In the same way, the breath of God transformed the original clay into the more noble substance of flesh.<sup>43</sup>

In a further development of the second epideictic theme, Tertullian argues that the flesh is further ennobled because it takes on the “ornament of the soul”.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, the fact that the flesh is considered to be a suitable adornment for the soul, suggests that the flesh itself has intrinsic worth. Tertullian points to an example from the pagan world to support his point: “Your care for your property is not greater than God's: yet you mount Scythian and Indian gems, and the gleaming pearls of the Red Sea, neither in lead nor bronze nor iron nor even silver, but in choice gold carefully separated from its dross... and is it conceivable that God has consigned to some very cheap receptacle the reflection of his own soul, the breath of his own spirit, the workmanship of his own mouth, and has thus by giving it an unworthy lodging definitely brought about its damnation?” Thus, by using the argument from comparison Tertullian is able to argue that if the soul is entrusted to the flesh, the flesh must in and of itself be worthy of such an honour.

### The utility of the flesh

The third epideictic topic employed by Tertullian is the utility of the flesh. Tertullian argues that the soul is dependent upon the flesh, for it is only through the flesh that the soul can enjoy and experience the world. Every human act is performed by the flesh: speech is the product of a fleshy organ, the mouth; the arts are executed through the flesh; and, all work and business pursuits are accomplished by the flesh. Furthermore, the close unity between soul and flesh is integral to Tertullian's understanding of salvation for he claims that the salvation of the soul comes through the flesh: “...there is not a soul that can at all procure

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<sup>43</sup> *De resurrectione carnis* 7.

<sup>44</sup> According to Tertullian, the soul originates from the breath of God. Thus, the breath of God had two effects: firstly, it transformed the clay into flesh, and secondly, it endowed the flesh with the soul.

salvation, except it believe while it is in the flesh, so true is it that the flesh is the very condition on which salvation hinges (*caro salutis est cardo*)”.<sup>45</sup>

Tertullian suggests that an individual’s flesh is the necessary medium through which salvation for the soul and flesh is obtained. This is primarily evident in the sacraments which, although performed on the external flesh, witness to a deeper internal action being performed on the soul. Tertullian explains: “The flesh, indeed, is washed, in order that the soul may be cleansed; the flesh is anointed, that the soul may be consecrated; the flesh is signed (with the cross), that the soul too may be fortified; the flesh is shadowed with the imposition of hands, that the soul also may be illuminated by the Spirit; the flesh feeds on the body and blood of Christ, that the soul likewise may fatten on its God. They cannot then be separated in their recompense, when they are united in their service”.<sup>46</sup> The same idea is echoed in *De baptismo* where Tertullian claims that baptism affects both soul and body: “...the spirit (*spiritus*)<sup>47</sup> is in this waters corporally washed, while the flesh is in those same waters spiritually cleansed”.<sup>48</sup> In short, the sacraments which have an effect on the soul of a person minister to the soul through the flesh.

Tertullian argues that the flesh has a further role to play through the sufferings and sacrifices it undergoes for God. The soul can be trained through fasting, the practice of virginity, and persecution, all of which are performed by the flesh.<sup>49</sup> Although Tertullian only briefly alludes to this in *De resurrectione* 8, it is a subject which he discusses in a number of treatises. For example, in *De jejunio* Tertullian claims that fasting, which denies to the flesh the food it desires, strengthens the soul of a person and enables him or her to endure prison, persecution and even martyrdom.<sup>50</sup> Tertullian compares the Christian to an athlete: just as an athlete trains for a contest, so too the Christian ought to train for death. However, the Christians’ contest is not against the flesh as some feminist scholars may assume.<sup>51</sup> Rather, the contest is against the evil spirits and powers of the world. Tertullian argues that one needs to be strong in spirit and yet it is through the flesh, by fasting, that the soul is strengthened.

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<sup>45</sup> *De resurrectione carnis* 8.

<sup>46</sup> *De resurrectione carnis* 8.

<sup>47</sup> *Spiritus* and *anima* are one and the same thing according to Tertullian (*De anima* 10.11). Evans notes that the only distinction Tertullian makes between them is that *anima* is a term of substance, whereas *spiritus* is a term of function. (See Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism* (London: SPCK, 1964), p. 61 n.26).

<sup>48</sup> *De baptismo* 4.

<sup>49</sup> *De resurrectione carnis* 8.

<sup>50</sup> *De jejunio* 12.

<sup>51</sup> This assumption is based on the body-soul antithesis in the dualistic anthropology as I discussed earlier.

Tertullian concludes by saying that an “over-fed” Christian will be more pleasing to the lion and bear which devours him, than to God.<sup>52</sup>

Tertullian’s use of the epideictic theme of utility not only enables Tertullian to develop his panegyric of the flesh, but also forms the basis for one of his main arguments for why the flesh will be raised. For if the flesh renders such a great service to the soul whilst on earth, argues Tertullian, it follows that the flesh will also enjoy the rewards (or indeed punishment) given to the soul after death.<sup>53</sup> I will discuss this topic in more detail below.

### **Feminist Considerations.**

Although Tertullian’s primary aim in *De resurrectione carnis* is to defend the resurrection of the flesh, there are several ideas in this treatise which can be used to construct a positive vision of woman from a feminist perspective.

Firstly, there is no clear evidence in *De resurrectione carnis* of a dualistic anthropology which systematically associates the higher characteristic of soul with man and the inferior flesh with woman. Rather, for Tertullian the flesh is integral to the identity of *all* human beings both now and in the resurrection. Furthermore, Tertullian’s high view of the flesh establishes an equality between flesh and soul which puts an end to the antithesis between the two.<sup>54</sup> Whilst Tertullian does not draw conclusions from this about woman’s equality with man, his emphasis on the goodness and dignity of the flesh, implicitly raises all of humanity, men and women alike, to the same level.

Secondly, in *De resurrectione carnis* Tertullian uses the Genesis creation accounts in ways which are entirely positive from a feminist perspective. Rather than using Genesis 1 and 2 to justify the subordination of woman to man, Tertullian uses the creation narratives to support his rhetorical arguments and to develop epideictic themes in his construction of the panegyric of the flesh. Primarily, Tertullian uses Genesis 2 to prove that the flesh is an integral part of

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<sup>52</sup> *De jejuniis* 17.

<sup>53</sup> For example, in *De resurrectione carnis* 15 Tertullian compares the nature of divine judgement with the normal demands of human judgement. If God does not reward the flesh for its good deeds and punish it for its evil deeds he is less than human judges. (See Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, p. 84).

<sup>54</sup> As Bray has noted: “By raising the flesh to the level of the soul...Tertullian virtually abolished the antithetical relationship between them which was such a common feature of classical philosophy, and thus laid the foundation for its eventual overthrow”. (G.L. Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God: Perspectives on the Theology of Tertullian* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1979), p.86).

one's human identity, whether man or woman. This is a foundation on which Tertullian will construct numerous arguments throughout the treatise. Tertullian also employs Genesis 2 to illustrate the privileged place that the flesh has in God's creation. For Tertullian, the innate goodness of the flesh stems from it having been created by God and this is expressed most vividly in Tertullian's allusion to Genesis 2 in *De resurrectione carnis* 6 cited above. Although clearly embedded in rhetoric, this passage reveals the high esteem Tertullian held for the flesh. As Osborn has rightly observed: "[I]t is hard to imagine a more optimistic account of human origin than that of Tertullian".<sup>55</sup>

Tertullian's use of Genesis 1 is perhaps the most significant for a feminist reading. Rather than interpreting the "image of God" in Genesis 1.26 as a reference to the divine aspect or God-like soul of a human, Tertullian understands this to be a reference to Christ's human flesh. Thus, an individual shares in the "image of God" by virtue of his/her human flesh. This is significant because some patriarchal readings of Genesis 1.26 attempted to exclude women from the "image of God" on the grounds that women lacked the rational, God-like element in their soul. Although Tertullian never explicitly argues for it, his reading of Genesis 1.26 suggests that *all* human beings, regardless of their sex, participate in the "image of God" because they possess human flesh.

Tertullian also uses Genesis 1 to establish a hierarchy in creation. As noted earlier, patriarchal readings of Genesis 2 claim that Eve's secondary creation from Adam establishes a hierarchy of the man over the woman. Tertullian, however, using Genesis 1, creates a hierarchy which places humanity at the peak of creation on the grounds that the flesh of the human being was formed by God's hands. Although Tertullian does not state explicitly that women are included in the hierarchy, given that his objective is to demonstrate the goodness and dignity of the flesh, it would seem likely that Tertullian regards all those who possess human flesh as the peak of God's creation.

In summary, my analysis of *De resurrectione carnis* 4-8 has uncovered some important arguments which are of interest for constructing a picture of Tertullian's view of woman. Firstly, for Tertullian, the flesh is an integral part of one's human identity. Although Tertullian makes this claim in order to argue for the necessity of the flesh in the resurrection,

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<sup>55</sup> Osborn, *Tertullian, First Theologian of the West*, p. 99.

it is positive from a feminist perspective because it means that all human beings, men and women alike, are characterized by flesh. Secondly, Tertullian argues that the flesh is intrinsically good in virtue of it having been created by God. Whilst Tertullian makes this claim in order to prove the worthiness of the flesh to partake in the resurrection against his gnostic opponents, it has positive implications from a feminist perspective. In raising the flesh to the level of the soul, Tertullian avoids the problems of dualism which, by placing soul above flesh, reinforces a hierarchy of male over female. Finally, Tertullian's use of the Genesis creation accounts is wholly positive from a feminist perspective. Tertullian draws on Genesis 1 and 2, not to support women's subordination, but to support his rhetorical arguments and to construct the panegyric of the flesh.

### **A Sexed Resurrection.**

Tertullian's discussion of the nature of the resurrected body in *De resurrectione carnis* is significant for our understanding of the place women held in Tertullian's anthropology. In a number of passages Tertullian implies that women, as well as men, will retain their sexual identities in the resurrection. In other words, individuals will be raised as men and women. Whilst a number of scholars have praised Augustine for teaching that individuals would retain their sexual identity at the resurrection, the fact that Tertullian also teaches this has been widely ignored.<sup>56</sup> I propose that the positive elements of Augustine's theory, highlighted by feminists, apply equally to Tertullian's view of a resurrected body which is sexed.

### **De resurrectione carnis 60 - 61.**

Tertullian's reference to a sexed resurrection occurs in *De resurrectione carnis* 60 and 61, chapters which are part of a discussion on the nature of the resurrected body.<sup>57</sup> In both chapters, Tertullian maintains that men and women will retain their sexual organs in their resurrected bodies and thus suggests that individuals will be raised as men and women. In these chapters, Tertullian is responding to an alleged claim from his opponents that since individual organs will be superfluous after death, there can be no resurrection of the flesh.

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<sup>56</sup> Among those scholars who acknowledge Augustine's theory of a sexed resurrection are: A. Louth, "The Body in Western Catholic Christianity" in S. Coakley (ed.), *Religion and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 118; Børresen, *Subordination and Equivalence*, p. 85-7; T. Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism: Theology and Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 118-119.

<sup>57</sup> These chapters form part of the *amplificatio* which extends from chapters 52-62. (See Sider, "Structure and Design in the *De resurrectione murtuorum*", p. 179.

They claimed, for example, that since there will be no procreation after death, the sexual organs will be redundant. Tertullian summarizes their argument: “To what purpose the loins, privy to the seed, and the rest of the reproductive organs of both sexes, with the lodgements of conception and the fountains of the breasts, when cohabitation and childbearing and nurture are to pass away?”<sup>58</sup>

Whilst Tertullian agrees that there will be no sexual intercourse after the resurrection, he disagrees with his opponents’ conclusion that the sexual organs will not therefore be raised. On the contrary, Tertullian insists that all parts of the body, including the sexual organs, will be part of the resurrected body. He develops this position with two main arguments.

Firstly, Tertullian claims that God’s justice demands that the whole person is raised and this includes all parts of the body. Tertullian explains: “For though [bodily organs] be delivered from their functions, yet are they retained for judgements, that every man may receive through his body according as he hath done. For God's judgement-seat demands a man in full being: in full being however he cannot be without the members, for of their substances, though not their functions, he consists...”<sup>59</sup> Thus, even though the sexual organs will not perform their procreative function in the resurrected body, they are still needed in order to constitute a full human being.

The topic of the whole person appearing before God’s judgement-seat is a theme which Tertullian employs in *De resurrectione carnis* 14-17.<sup>60</sup> In these chapters Tertullian is discussing the resurrection of the flesh in general, in comparison to *De resurrectione carnis* 60 where Tertullian is speaking of specific organs. As discussed above, Tertullian argued that the soul and flesh are united in every action, and it is through the flesh that the soul’s activities are made effective during this life. Therefore, since the flesh is a partaker with the soul in all human conduct, God’s justice demands that the whole person face God’s judgement and receive the subsequent reward or punishment.<sup>61</sup> Tertullian explains: “Now since the entire man consists of the union of two natures, he must therefore appear in both, as it is right that he should be judged in his entirety; nor of course, did he pass through life

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<sup>58</sup> *De resurrectione carnis* 60.

<sup>59</sup> *De resurrectione carnis* 60.

<sup>60</sup> Sider proposes that many of the themes in the later chapters of *De resurrectione carnis* are developed to as parallels to the themes in the earlier chapters. The punishment-reward theme is one such example. See Sider, “Structure and Design in the *De resurrectione murtuorum*”, p. 194.

<sup>61</sup> *De resurrectione carnis* 15.

except in his entire state. As therefore he lived, so also must he be judged, because he has to be judged concerning the way in which he lived”.<sup>62</sup> Tertullian employs the same argument in *De resurrectione carnis* 60 to explain why all individual body parts, including the sexual organs, will share in the resurrection.

Secondly, Tertullian employs the argument from utility and claims that no part of the body will be extraneous, even in the resurrected state. In this life the bodily organs often have multiple functions. For example, the mouth is used for eating but it is also used for speaking and for praising God. Likewise, the functions of the sexual organs are not limited to procreation, for these same organs are also used for discharging urine. Tertullian claims that although a woman’s womb is the place where a man’s seed is deposited, it also the place where her surplus menstrual blood is discharged.<sup>63</sup> Tertullian concludes that although these organs will not perform the same functions in the resurrection, there will nevertheless be a purpose for them, for in the presence of God nothing is extraneous.<sup>64</sup>

In summary, Tertullian maintains that men and women retain their sexual organs in the resurrection and are thus raised as sexed individuals. Whilst his opponents denied the resurrection of the entire flesh on the grounds that certain organs would be superfluous after the resurrection, Tertullian proposed that all parts of the body will be useful even if their functions are different to those whilst on earth. Furthermore, God’s justice demands that the whole person is judged and thus all body parts are needed in order to constitute a full human being. In defending the integrity of individual organs in the resurrection, Tertullian strengthened the overall case of the treatise which argued for the resurrection of the flesh.

“They will be like the angels”.

In various passages throughout his corpus, Tertullian speaks of men and women becoming “like the angels” in the resurrection.<sup>65</sup> This is based on a passage in scripture in which Christ claims: “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage; they will be like

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<sup>62</sup> *De resurrectione carnis* 14.

<sup>63</sup> *De resurrectione carnis* 61.

<sup>64</sup> *De resurrectione carnis* 60.

<sup>65</sup> *De oratore* 3.3: “[We who are] candidates for angelhood”; *De resurrectione carnis* 36; *De resurrectione carnis* 62.4.

the angels”.<sup>66</sup> A number of scholars have claimed that the Fathers interpreted this to mean that women will transcend their created sex and either become male or take on a sexless angelic state. Børresen, for example, points to a passage in *De cultu feminarum* where Tertullian speaks of women being promised an angelic nature: “The same angelic nature is promised to you, women, the selfsame sex is promised to you as to men, and the self-same dignity of being a judge”.<sup>67</sup> Børresen claims that Tertullian, in this passage, implies that in the resurrection women will be transformed into a mixed angelic and male state.<sup>68</sup> In other words, she will transcend those characteristics which make her female. However, this seems to contradict Tertullian’s position in *De resurrectione carnis* 60 and 61 which, as we have seen, claims that men and women will retain their sexual identity. Is Tertullian being inconsistent? What does Tertullian actually mean when he says that a resurrected person will be “like the angels”?

I propose that Tertullian uses the scriptural passage “they will be like the angels” to speak of the lack of sexual intercourse after the resurrection. In other words, it is a reference specifically to the function of sexual organs rather than a denial of sexual difference.<sup>69</sup> This explanation is made more plausible when one looks at the specific passages in which Tertullian refers to the future angelic nature. For example, in *De resurrectione carnis* 36, Tertullian writes: “For they will be like the angels, in that they are not to marry...” Similarly, in *Ad uxorem* Tertullian claims: “At the resurrection there will be no marriage because men and women will be transformed into angelic nature”.<sup>70</sup>

The strongest piece of evidence that “they will be like the angels” is a reference to the function of sexual organs rather than a denial of sexual difference, is found in *De resurrectione carnis* 62 where Tertullian discusses the passage of scripture, Matthew 22.30,

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<sup>66</sup> Matthew 22.30 and also a parallel passage in Luke 20.36.

<sup>67</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 1.2.5. In Latin the verse reads: “Nam et uobis eadem tunc substantia angelica repromissa, idem sexus qui et uiris, eadem iudicandi dignationem pollicetur”.

<sup>68</sup> K.E. Børresen, “God’s Image, Man’s Image? Patristic Interpretations of Genesis 1.27 and 1 Corinthians 11.7” in K.E. Børresen (ed.), *The Image of God: Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 190; Ruether, ‘Misogyny and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church’ in Ruether (ed.), *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Tradition* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), p. 160.

<sup>69</sup> J. Henery makes a similar observation in the work of Augustine. Henery argues that Augustine’s reference to the angelic life is not about the lack of sexed individuals, men and women, in the resurrected body, but solely about the change in function of the sexual organs. (See J. Henery, “Jovinian’s Proposal: Augustine’s Changing Views on Marriage and their Consequences for Virginity” in *Studia Patristica* 43 (2006), p. 120 ff).

<sup>70</sup> *Ad uxorem* 1.1.4.



from which “they will be like the angels” is taken.<sup>71</sup> Tertullian uses this passage about being “like the angels” to support his claim that individuals will be resurrected as sexed beings, as men and women. This is clear from the opening of the chapter when Tertullian, referring to the arguments in the previous chapter, writes: “But the Lord's pronouncement shall conclude this discussion...” and then goes on to cite the Matthew 22.30 passage quoted above. As discussed above, in the previous chapters Tertullian had argued that although the procreative function of various sexual organs will cease at the resurrection, these sexual organs will nevertheless be part of the resurrected body. In *De resurrectione carnis* 62 Tertullian explains that “they shall be like the angels” does not mean one’s human nature will be transformed into an angelic-like substance which would involve an elimination of sexual difference. Rather, “they shall be like the angels” is a reference to the transformation of the function of sexual organs, for individual will no longer need or desire procreation.

In order to make his point Tertullian employs the argument from comparison. Referring to Genesis 18.4-8, Tertullian claims that the angels appeared to submit to the needs of the flesh-eating, drinking and washing, for example-without loss of their angelic nature. In a similar way, human beings will be “like the angels” in that they will not succumb to the needs and wants of the flesh. But this in no way implies a loss of human nature. Tertullian explains: “We shall not therefore cease to continue in the flesh, because we cease to be importuned by the usual wants of the flesh; just as the angels ceased not therefore to remain in their spiritual substance, because of the suspension of their spiritual incidents...When [Christ] ascribed an angelic likeness to the flesh, he took not from it its proper substance”.<sup>72</sup>

In summary, Tertullian uses the scriptural passage about being “like the angels” as a proof to support his argument that whilst the procreative function of the sexual organs will cease, the sexual organs will still constitute part of the resurrected body. Although men and women will be “like the angels” in so far as they will not procreate, their human nature will remain intact and the sexed body will be retained. Thus, rather than contradicting the claim that men and women retain their sexual identity in the resurrected body, Tertullian uses the passage “they shall be like the angels” to support his argument. Finally, when Tertullian makes reference (in *De cultu feminarum* 1.2.5) to women obtaining the “self-same sex” as men he is not

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<sup>71</sup> As quoted above Matthew 22.30 reads: “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage; they will be like the angels”.

<sup>72</sup> *De resurrectione carnis* 62.

suggesting that women will become men in the resurrection. Rather, it seems to be Tertullian's shorthand way of saying that women, like men, will have an angelic-like state in the resurrection.

### **Feminist Considerations.**

Evidently, Tertullian believes that sexual difference is part of God's original creation and a permanent feature of the resurrection. What positive elements, from a feminist perspective, can be drawn from Tertullian's belief that women will retain their sexual identity in the resurrection? I propose that there are two significant aspects which are worth highlighting.

Firstly, women do not need to become male in order to be perfect. As noted above, feminist scholars have criticized the Fathers for associating perfection with being male. Since women, in contrast, were associated with weakness, sin and the flesh, it was necessary for them to transcend their female nature in order to become men's equal and reach perfection. However, Tertullian's claim that women retain their sexual identity in the resurrection implies that he sees them as part of God's original and perfect creation.

This is further supported by Tertullian's argument in *De resurrectione carnis* 57. In this chapter Tertullian was responding to his opponents who objected to the resurrection of the flesh on the grounds that if flesh was raised, it would be subject to the weakness, diseases and mutilations which it already now experiences. Consequently, the maimed, and indeed all humankind, would come to regret the resurrection of their imperfect flesh. However, Tertullian argued that the resurrected body will be restored to perfect integrity and will no longer be subject to the diseases and mutilations of the earthly body. Thus, the blind, lame and sick will be restored to health and receive perfect bodies.

Tertullian employs the rhetorical argument from greater to lesser in order to develop his argument.<sup>73</sup> He claims that diseases and mutilations are a "small deaths" and if God is able to raise the flesh, he is also able to restore it to perfect health: "For if the flesh is to be restored from dissolution, much more will it be recalled from discomfort. Greater things prescribe the rule for the lesser. Is not the amputation or the crippling of any member the death of that

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<sup>73</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.19 and Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 5.10.86.

member? If general death is rescinded by resurrection, what of partial death? If we are changed into glory, how much more into health?”<sup>74</sup>

What is particularly interesting is that the perfecting of diseased and mutilated bodies does not include the elimination of the female sex. Although Tertullian does not explicitly state this position, given that Tertullian goes on in *De resurrectione carnis* 60-61 to state that women will retain their sexual organs in the resurrection, one may deduce that Tertullian does not regard woman as an imperfect or mutilated male. This is significant when one remembers, as noted above, that in the ancient world there was a general consensus that women were an imperfect and “mutilated male”. For Tertullian however, women are part of God’s good creation and they will retain their sexual identity as women in the perfected state of the resurrection.

Feminist scholars such as Børresen have celebrated Augustine’s theory of a sexed resurrection because it entails a rejection of the identification of perfection with masculinity.<sup>75</sup> The fact that Tertullian also held this view has, for the most part, gone unnoticed.<sup>76</sup> However, this is an important element of his theology for a reading of Tertullian which seeks to redress the charge of misogyny levelled against him. As Bynum, commenting on *De resurrectione carnis* 61, has rightly said: “This passage makes clear how much more complex Tertullian’s ideas are than the charge of misogyny, so often made against him, allows”.<sup>77</sup>

A second aspect of Tertullian’s belief in a sexed resurrection, which offers a positive reading from a feminist perspective, is his claim that at the resurrection a woman’s body will be freed from the necessity of procreation. As noted above, there was a tendency in the ancient world to define women’s primary role as that of child-bearer. Indeed, for many, procreation was women’s *raison d’être*. However, Tertullian’s discussion in *De resurrectione carnis* 60-62 suggests that he held an alternative view. The fact that men and women retain their sexual organs in the resurrection, even though their procreative function will no longer be active,

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<sup>74</sup> *De resurrectione carnis* 57.

<sup>75</sup> Børresen, *Subordination and Equivalence*, p. 324.

<sup>76</sup> The only two scholars who I have found who acknowledge Tertullian’s belief in a sexed resurrected are Daniel-Hughes (Daniel-Hughes, *Dressing for the Resurrection* pp. 72-72) and Caroline Bynum who I cite below.

<sup>77</sup> C. W. Bynum, “Images of the Resurrection Body in the Theology of Late Antiquity” in *Catholic Historical Review* Vol. 80 Issue 2 (April, 1994), p. 234 n. 26.

suggests that sexual difference is not solely defined by sexual reproduction. Thus, the sexual organs have an intrinsic worth because God created them in the beginning and are an integral part of being a whole human person, whether that be in the form of a man or woman.

Feminist scholars have praised Augustine's theory of a sexed resurrection because it proposed that in the resurrection a woman's body will be free from the necessity of intercourse and childbirth.<sup>78</sup> According to Beattie, Augustine's theory is significant for feminist theology because it suggests that a woman's body has value in and of itself, and not merely for her ability to procreate.<sup>79</sup> Beattie explains: "This vision promises the liberation of women from their roles as wives, child-bearers and sex objects, and invites us to understand resurrection in terms of joyful celebrations of the female body in the eyes of God".<sup>80</sup> Although it has been overlooked, the same comment can be made of Tertullian's theory of a sexed resurrection which recognizes that a woman's identity is not defined by procreation alone, but has value in and of itself.

In summary, whilst Tertullian's primary aim in claiming that men and women will be raised as sexed individuals was to defend the integrity of the flesh in the resurrection, a number of conclusions can be deduced which are positive from a feminist perspective. Clearly, the distinctions between male and female are written into God's original design for creation and are a permanent feature of the resurrection. Furthermore, in view of the fact that, in the resurrection, the flesh will be restored to wholeness, and seeing as Tertullian argues for a sexed resurrection, it follows that Tertullian does not see woman as an imperfect human being. This is quite a remarkable position to hold for someone of Tertullian's cultural milieu, given that women were typically regarded as imperfect and inferior to men. Finally, by arguing that the sexual organs will be retained but not be used for procreation in the resurrected body, Tertullian liberated women from their long association with motherhood and thus implicitly suggested that their value could be found outside of this role.

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<sup>78</sup> Augustine, in *De civitate Dei*, claims that a woman's sexual organs will not revert back to their former use: they will be part of a new beauty which will not provoke lust. Augustine writes: "For my part, they seem to be wiser who make no doubt that both sexes shall rise [at the Resurrection]. For there shall be no lust, which is now the cause of confusion... From those bodies, then, vice shall be withdrawn, while nature shall be preserved. And the sex of a woman is not a vice, but nature. It shall then indeed be superior to carnal intercourse and child-bearing; nevertheless the female members shall remain adapted not to the old uses but to a new beauty, which, so far from provoking lust, now extinct, shall excite praise to the wisdom and clemency of God, who both made what was not and delivered from corruption what He made" (*De civitate Dei* 22.17. Trans. M.Dods, 2009).

<sup>79</sup> Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism* p. 119.

<sup>80</sup> T. Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate: A Marian Narrative of Women's Salvation* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 54.

## **Women's Subordination.**

In a number of places throughout his treatises, Tertullian suggests that women hold a subordinate position to men. Firstly, in *Adversus Marcionem* Tertullian claims that there is hierarchy of man over woman as a result of the Fall. Secondly, in *De virginibus velandis* Tertullian discusses 1 Corinthians 11, a text in which Paul directs women to wear a veil as a mark of their subordination to man.

### **Adversus Marcionem 2.11.**

In book two of *Adversus Marcionem* Tertullian claims that woman is man's servant and thus implies that the woman is subordinate to man. However it is evident from the context of the passage that woman's subordinate role as man's servant is a consequence of the Fall and not part of God's origin design for creation. Tertullian derives the idea from Genesis 3.16 where God, addressing the woman, claims: "I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you". Tertullian, following the Genesis 3 text closely, writes: "The woman is straightway condemned to bring forth in sorrow, and to be in service to her husband. Previously she had been taught of the increase of mankind without any cause for grief, in the words of the blessing, 'Increase and multiply' no more than that: she had also been intended for a help to the man (*adiutorium masculo*), not for servitude to him".<sup>81</sup> Thus, according to Tertullian in her pre-Fall condition, woman was man's helpmate and shared equality with the man.<sup>82</sup> After the Fall, however, she was to be subjected to him, and thereafter experience a subordinate relationship to man as his servant.<sup>83</sup> The same idea is also present in *De cultu feminarum* 1 where Tertullian alludes to Genesis 3.16 when he claims that the pains of childbearing and a man's authority over woman are the result of the Fall.<sup>84</sup>

Women are not the only ones to suffer the consequences of the Fall. Man is destined to toil, death and shame: "Straightway there is sweat and toil for bread though before from every tree

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<sup>81</sup> *Adversus Marcionem* 2.11.1.

<sup>82</sup> This idea is affirmed in *De virginibus velandis* 5 where Tertullian states that woman was originally created, not as man's servant, but as his helpmate: "...this second type of human [the woman] was made by God as man's helper".

<sup>83</sup> See also *De cultu feminarum* 1.1 where Tertullian alludes to Genesis 3.16 claiming that the pains of childbearing and a man's authority over woman is a result of the Fall.

<sup>84</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 1.1.1.

there was livelihood without stint, and food in sure supply. From now on the man (*homo*) is bent down towards the earth, who before was taken out of the earth: from now on turned towards death, though previously towards life: from now on in coats of skin, who before had been naked and unashamed”.<sup>85</sup> Interestingly, Tertullian uses the word *homo* as opposed to *vir* which suggests he believed that, after the Fall, men and women together are orientated towards the earth. Tertullian claims that there are even consequences of the Fall for the natural world: “Straightway also the earth is cursed, which had previously been blessed: straightway there are thorns and thistles where before there had been grass, when it was fruitful of the green herb and of trees”.<sup>86</sup> In short, Tertullian insists that the man, woman and natural world all suffer the effects of the Fall.

Although women are not alone in suffering because of the Fall, one may still question why is it that the consequence for woman is her subordination to man? Is this simply a way for Tertullian to justify the inequality between man and woman in the post-Fall, created order? Unfortunately, Tertullian does not discuss at length the reasons why the woman is subordinate to the man after the Fall. However, if we look at the context of the treatise in which the above passages occur it becomes clear that Tertullian derives his claims from Genesis 3.16. In other words, Tertullian not proscribing anything but is simply describing a situation which he sees as being set out in Genesis 3.

As noted earlier, Tertullian’s aim in book two of *Adversus Marcionem* was to examine the Hebrew Scriptures with the intention of rebutting Marcion’s critique of it.<sup>87</sup> In particular, Tertullian focuses on the Genesis creation account, the Fall and God’s subsequent judgement. In chapter 11, Tertullian’s primary objective is to defend God’s role as judge. Marcion had claimed that the judgements of the creator god of the Hebrew Scriptures were too severe and incompatible with the goodness of the god revealed in the New Testament. Marcion found a solution in positing two gods: the “cruel” god of the Hebrew Scriptures and the good god of the New Testament. Tertullian, however, maintained that there is one God and that God’s goodness necessarily included justice: “[U]nless goodness is governed by justice so as itself to be just, it cannot be goodness: for it will be unjust. Nothing that is unjust can be good, and

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<sup>85</sup> *Adversus Marcionem* 2.11.2.

<sup>86</sup> *Adversus Marcionem* 2.11. 1.

<sup>87</sup> See also Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, p. 81.

everything that is just is bound to be good”.<sup>88</sup> Tertullian expounds Genesis 3.16 in this context by explaining that the consequences of the Fall, woman’s subordination to man and man’s life of toil, were just punishments demanded by the goodness of the one God.

In summary, Tertullian accepts the claim in Genesis that before the Fall the woman shared an equality with the man and only afterwards became his servant. However, Tertullian’s main focus in this passage was not on woman’s relationship to man. Rather, Tertullian was concerned with refuting Marcion’s claim that the goodness of God is incompatible with his justice. Consequently, one is fairly limited in drawing any significant conclusions about Tertullian’s views on women.

### **Feminist Considerations.**

There are several aspects of Tertullian’s arguments in *Adversus Marcionem* 2.11 which are notable from a feminist perspective. Firstly, by identifying the Fall as the cause of woman’s subordination to man, Tertullian implies that her subordinate position was not part of God’s original design for the created order. O’Neil, commenting on the Genesis 3.16 text, suggests that this passage can be read positively from a feminist perspective. She explains: “It is difficult to overestimate the significance of this insight for an anthropology that begins with a vision of human being called to be the image of God together”.<sup>89</sup> In other words, the fact that the Fall leads to woman’s subordination means that she was, originally, created as man’s equal and in the image of God. In reading Genesis 3.16 Tertullian likewise implies that woman was originally created as man’s equal.

Secondly, it is significant that Tertullian accepts that God holds both the man and the woman responsible for the Fall, evident because both receive an appropriate punishment. O’Neil suggests that the fact that the woman was punished is remarkable because it suggests that she was an independent moral agent, capable of making her own moral choices.<sup>90</sup> For many in the ancient world, only the man was regarded as a morally culpable person, and was

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<sup>88</sup> *Adversus Marcionem* 2.11.

<sup>89</sup> M.A. O’Neil, “The mystery of being human together” in C.M. LaCugna (ed.), *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), p. 142.

<sup>90</sup> O’Neil, “The mystery of being human together”, p. 142. O’Neil claims that part of the mystery of being human together is that we share a history of listening to the serpent, of testing the limits, of distorted relationships (p. 143).

responsible not only for his own choices but for those of his dependents also.<sup>91</sup> Thus, by accepting the punishments for women set out in Genesis 3.16, Tertullian accepts that women are morally culpable individuals. This idea resonates with Tertullian's claim that both soul and body will be punished or rewarded for their deeds. Tertullian's theory of moral agency is fully inclusive of soul and body, men and women.

Finally, in spite of these positive assessments, the fact that Tertullian failed to challenge the opinion of Genesis 3.16, may be considered by some as evidence that he accepted woman's subordinate position to man. However, it should be remembered that the question of woman's equality with man was not the topic under consideration. Instead, as I noted above, Tertullian's primary concern in *Adversus Marcionem* 2.11 was to demonstrate that God's goodness and God's justice were compatible. His discussion of Genesis 3.16 should, therefore, be read in this context. Given that Tertullian was attempting to defend God's role as judge, it would not have made sense, to challenge the punishments dealt out by God in Genesis 3.16.

### **De virginibus velandis.**

*De virginibus velandis* was a deliberative treatise in which Tertullian sought to persuade his audience to adopt a future course of action.<sup>92</sup> Specifically, Tertullian's aim was to persuade certain virgin women within the Carthaginian Christian community to wear a veil from the time they become sexually fecund. This is evident from the opening sentence of the treatise: "[I]t is proper that our virgins be veiled from when they reach puberty".<sup>93</sup> Who were the unveiled virgins whom Tertullian was addressing? Firstly, it seems that Tertullian was making a general appeal to all virgins: those women who were not yet married (but would be one day), as well as those who had taken some sort of vow.<sup>94</sup> Secondly, Dunn has proposed

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<sup>91</sup> P. Bird "Images of Women in the Old Testament" in R.R. Ruether (ed.), *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Tradition* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), p. 49.

<sup>92</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 3.8.6. Dunn has pointed out that Tertullian's command in *De virginibus velandis* 16 "uela caput" ("Veil your head") is clear evidence that this was a deliberative treatise. (Dunn, 'Rhetoric and Tertullian's *De virginibus velandis*' in *Vigiliae Christianae* Vol. 59, No. 1 (February, 2005), p. 24).

<sup>93</sup> *De virginibus velandis* 1.1.

<sup>94</sup> This is based on Tertullian's comments in *De virginibus velandis* 16.6 where, appealing to the virgins, he writes: "For wedded you are to Christ: to Him you have surrendered your flesh; to Him you have espoused your maturity. Walk in accordance with the will of your Espoused". The reference to virgins being wedded to Christ suggests that, at least some of the virgins being addressed had made some form of permanent commitment to



that his appeal was specifically aimed at Montanist virgins who had abandoned their veil: “While Tertullian's words are addressed to all the unveiled (including the married women), they seem in particular to be addressed to those Montanist women who had abandoned their veils”.<sup>95</sup>

Tertullian’s main argument in *De virginibus velandis* centred on the correct interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11.2-16, which reads:

But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ. Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head—it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved. For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear a veil. For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. But if anyone is disposed to be contentious—we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.<sup>96</sup>

The unveiled virgins used this passage to support their claim that they are not obliged to wear the veil, arguing that Paul’s command for women to veil in 1 Corinthians 11 excluded

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virginity. In chapter seven, I will discuss in further detail the existence of the order of virgins in the early church and the references to it in Tertullian’s work.

<sup>95</sup> Dunn, “Rhetoric and Tertullian’s *De virginibus velandis*”, p. 25. Dunn bases this claim on Tertullian’s reference to the Paraclete in *De virginibus velandis* 1.7-8 and a reference to a Christian sister receiving a prophecy in *De virginibus velandis* 17.5.

<sup>96</sup> Tertullian also discusses this passage in *Adversus Marcionem* 5.8.

virgins. To support their argument they turned to 1 Corinthians 7 where Paul had made an explicit distinction between virgins and women. Since there was no specific mention of virgins in 1 Corinthians 11, the unveiled virgins claimed that virgins must have been excluded from Paul's command to veil.<sup>97</sup>

Tertullian's primary task, therefore, was to show that Paul's command in 1 Corinthians 11 applied to both virgins and non-virgins alike. This task occupies the main section of the treatise, which forms the *confirmatio* and *refutatio*, and is divided into three types of arguments: argument from scripture, argument from nature or reason, and argument from ecclesiastical teaching.<sup>98</sup>

### **The argument from scripture.**

In the argument from scripture, Tertullian employs the rhetorical topic of definition. Indeed, the whole focus of Tertullian's exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11 in chapters 3-6 is based on the definition of 'woman'. Whereas the unveiled virgins claimed that Paul's reference to 'woman' referred only to married women, Tertullian used the ancient rhetorical categories of *genus* and *species* to argue that 'woman' (*mulier*) was the *genus* which included all *species* of sexually mature females. The species include *virgo* (virgin), *uxor* (wife), *mater* (mother), and *vidua* (widow).<sup>99</sup> All of these classes of women fall under the general term of *mulier*.

Referring to 1 Corinthians 11, Tertullian argues that if Paul had wanted to make a distinction between virgins (*virgo*) and married women (*mulier*), he would have been explicit just as he had been in 1 Corinthians 7.<sup>100</sup> In 1 Corinthians 7 it was necessary for Paul to make a distinction between *mulier* and *virgo* because Paul's aim was to highlight the difference between those females who can devote themselves entirely to God and those females who must devote themselves to their husband. However, in 1 Corinthians 11 there was no need to make a distinction between *mulier* and *virgo* and thus, *mulier* refers to all females including both virgin and non-virgin alike. In short, the fact that virgins were not mentioned specifically in 1 Corinthians 11 did not mean they were excluded from Paul's command to be veiled. Thus,

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<sup>97</sup> *De virginibus velandis* 4.

<sup>98</sup> The *confirmatio* and *refutatio* occupy *De virginibus velandis* 3-15. See Dunn, *Tertullian*, p. 137.

<sup>99</sup> The argument from *genus* and *species* was a formal topic used in arguments in ancient rhetoric. See for example, Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 5.10.55-57 and Cicero, *Topica* 3.13-14; 7.31.

<sup>100</sup> *De virginibus velandis* 4.

although the unveiled virgins had used the two Pauline passages to support their claim, Tertullian employed his skill as an orator, to use 1 Corinthians 7 and 11 to his own advantage.

In order to give further support to his claim, Tertullian highlighted several passages in scripture in which the general term ‘woman’ (*mulier*) was used to refer to a virgin. For example he points out that in Genesis 2.23-24 Eve was called woman even when she was clearly still a virgin.<sup>101</sup> Similarly, in Luke 1.26-28 Mary was called a woman by the angel even though she was a virgin.<sup>102</sup> Tertullian concludes that if, in these passages, the general term for woman is used to speak of a virgin, it follows that in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul’s use of *mulier* also includes virgins.

In summary, Tertullian’s argument from scripture is expounded with the help of the rhetorical topic of definition. Tertullian’s primary concern was to demonstrate that Paul’s use of ‘woman’ in 1 Corinthians 11 included virgins and non-virgins alike. In order to prove this, Tertullian uses the rhetorical categories of *genus* and *species*, arguing that *mulier* is the *genus* of which *virgo* is a *species*. Tertullian points to several examples in scripture in which *mulier* is used as a general term and applied to virgins. Therefore, since Paul’s use of woman in 1 Corinthians 11 included virgins, it follows that his command to be veiled was equally binding on virgins as it was married women.

### **The argument from nature or reason.**

Whilst Sider<sup>103</sup> regards chapter 7 as part of Tertullian’s overall exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11, Dunn has proposed that this chapter marks the start of a new argument, the argument from nature.<sup>104</sup> To support his theory, Dunn points to several pieces of ‘evidence’ in *De virginibus velandis* which indicate that Tertullian was employing an argument from nature/reason in chapters 7-8. For example, Tertullian appears to announce the beginning of a new argument

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<sup>101</sup> *De virginibus velandis* 5.

<sup>102</sup> *De virginibus velandis* 6.

<sup>103</sup> Sider, proposes that Tertullian’s exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11.1-16 occupies chapters 4-8 of the treatise. Sider claims that in chapter 7 Tertullian uses the formal topic of comparison to support his exegesis of the Pauline passage. See Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, pp. 112-3.

<sup>104</sup> Dunn, “Rhetoric and Tertullian’s *De virginibus velandis*”, p. 18.

in the opening sentence of chapter 7: “Let us turn now to the reasons themselves that need to be examined, by which the apostle teaches that it is proper that a female be veiled”.<sup>105</sup>

Dunn proposes that Tertullian uses the argument from nature/reason to support his interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11.<sup>106</sup> Whilst I am in agreement with Dunn on this, I would also want to suggest that Tertullian’s argument from nature/reason is informed and shaped by his reading of 1 Corinthians 11. Tertullian’s primary concern in this section of the treatise is to demonstrate that the reasons given by Paul for why (non-virgin) women are to veil are equally applicable to virgins also. Tertullian does not add anything new to the 1 Corinthians 11 passage. He simply accepts Paul’s reasons and then attempts to show how and why the reasons he gives for women to be veiled are also true for virgins. Tertullian’s aim is to use the disputed passage to prove that virgins ought to be veiled along with all other women who have reached sexual maturity.

#### Women’s subordination.

*De virginibus velandis* 7 is perhaps the most interesting section of the treatise for the theme of the present chapter, because it is here that we find overt references to woman’s subordinate relationship to man.

#### “The husband is the head of his wife...”

Based on Paul’s statement that man is the head (*caput*) of woman, Tertullian claims that the woman should wear a veil as a mark of the man’s authority (*potestas*) over her.<sup>107</sup> Building on the earlier argument from definition, Tertullian claims that man is also the head of a virgin, since she too is a woman and not some third division (*tertium genus*) of humanity.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> *De virginibus velandis* 7 See also *De virginibus velandis* 9 which claims that the arguments previously reviewed (in chapter 7 and 8) were arguments from nature and reason.

<sup>106</sup> Dunn, “Rhetoric and Tertullian’s *De virginibus velandis*”, p.18.

<sup>107</sup> In *De corona militis* 1.14 Tertullian uses 1 Corinthians 11 to support his argument that a Christian man ought not to wear the military crown. For Tertullian the crown represents a man’s subordination to the emperors and to Roman gods. But since Christian men are beholden to the Creator alone, his head should remain uncovered.

<sup>108</sup> Virginia Burrus, taking Tertullian’s comments out of context, claims that his reference to a “third sex” is proof that virgins were a source of unease for some of the Fathers. She writes: “There were sexually continent Christians before the fourth century, to be sure, and it is clear that female ascetics, and perhaps female virgins in particular, were a source of distinct unease as well as distinct pride to male ecclesiastics. The early third-century North African Tertullian suggests, with a horror that is only partly feigned, that the status and independence claimed by female virgins in his own church implies the creation of ‘a third sex, some monstrosity with a head

It follows therefore, that since virgins, like all women, are subordinate to men, and since veiling is a visible mark of this subordination, virgins also ought to wear the veil. Later in the chapter Tertullian employs the argument from comparison to emphasize the virgins' subordinate place: "If a woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head, even more rightly ought the virgin, because she is responsible to the one to whom she belongs". I have already noted Tertullian's use of the argument from comparison in a previous chapter and this was a particularly effective form of persuasion in deliberative works.<sup>109</sup> In this section of *De virginibus velandis* Tertullian employs the argument from comparison (from lesser to greater) in order to persuade his audience that if a married woman ought to veil, then a virgin is most certainly obliged to wear the veil since she belongs to Christ. Tertullian explains this argument most clearly in *De oratore*: "It is a good pretence of being married, if you veil your head: nay rather, it appears that it is no pretence, for you are married-to Christ. To him you have surrendered your body: act according to your husband's instructions: if he commands other men's brides to be veiled, surely much more his own".<sup>110</sup> In short, if married women are obliged to wear the veil as a mark of the man's authority, something which Tertullian's opponents accepted, it follows that virgins have a greater obligation to be veiled, for they are married to Christ.

"Man was not made from woman, but woman from man..."

A further reason why all women ought to veil, according to Tertullian, is because in the order of creation Adam was prior to Eve. Following Paul, Tertullian appeals to Genesis 2.23 to show that woman's subordination to man is written into God's design for creation, and stems from her creation from Adam's rib. Tertullian explains that the subordinate place of the woman in the created order also applies to the virgin because the "rib of Adam", in other

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of its own". V. Burrus, "Word and Flesh: The Bodies and Sexuality of Ascetic Women in Christian Antiquity," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 10 (1994), p. 33. This highlights why it is important to look at the context of any given phrase or passage for Tertullian was actually discussing the definition of woman and arguing that virgin is not a third sex.

<sup>109</sup> Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, p. 109.

<sup>110</sup> *De oratore* 22. Later in *De virginibus velandis* Tertullian employs the same argument. Addressing the female virgins he writes: "Walk according to the will of your groom. Christ it is who commands both the brides of others and wedded women to be veiled, [and] certainly [he commands] his own much more" (*De virginibus velandis* 16). *De oratore* 21-22 has many similarities to *De virginibus velandis*. The question is which one was composed first? Dunn has put forward a plausible case for the priority of *De oratore* arguing, among other things, that whereas *De virginibus velandis* shows evidence of Montanist influence, there are no signs in *De oratore*. Furthermore, "the smooth and flowing tripartite structure" of *De virginibus velandis* suggests a more thought-out discussion compared to the material found in *De oratore* which is "more jumbled and haphazardly arranged. (See Dunn, *Tertullian*, p. 136).

words Eve, was a virgin. Tertullian concludes that Eve's secondary creation was further proof of the subordinate position of women, including virgins, and is thus, a further reason why all women ought to be veiled.

It is interesting that in this passage Tertullian uses Eve's creation from Adam as the basis for establishing woman's subordinate position to man. However, in *De anima* 27 and 36, although Tertullian emphasises the primacy of Adam's creation, he does not draw conclusions from this about woman's subordinate position. In fact, Tertullian uses Eve's creation from Adam as proof that there is equality between the two, since they (and indeed, all human beings) share the same substance of body and soul.

How can we explain this apparent inconsistency in Tertullian's thought? There are two reasons. Firstly, in *De anima* Tertullian is drawing on Genesis 2 directly, whereas in *De virginibus velandis* he is drawing on Paul's interpretation of Genesis 2 in 1 Corinthians 11. Secondly, the rhetorical situation of the two treatises is different. In *De anima*, Tertullian's aim is to prove that an individual receives his/her soul along with the body, at the moment of conception, through the sperm of the father and thus, all souls are derived from Adam. Tertullian points to the example of Eve's creation from Adam to demonstrate that he is the progenitor of the human race but, at the same time, implies that there is equality between the two for the both possess the same substance of body and soul. In *De virginibus velandis*, however, Tertullian wanted to highlight the inequality between the man and woman in order to persuade unveiled virgins to wear a veil. Tertullian's primary aim was to demonstrate that the reasons given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 for why women are to be veiled apply equally to virgin women. Thus, Tertullian accepts Paul's interpretation of Genesis 2, that woman's secondary creation from Adam means she is subordinate, and claims that virgin women must also wear a veil as a mark of their subordinate position.

“Because of the angels....”

Finally, Tertullian argues that virgins ought to veil to stop them from being a temptation to the angels. Tertullian highlights two pieces of evidence which suggest that the angels' revolt against God, referred to by Paul and described in Genesis 6, was due to the angels' lust for virgins rather than married women.

Firstly, Tertullian points out that the reference in Genesis to the “daughters of men” (*filias hominum*) suggests that the women were virgins. Tertullian notes that if the angels had lusted after married women, the passage would have indicated this by calling them “the wives of men” on account of them belonging to their husband. However, the reference to “daughters of men” suggests that the women referred to, belonged to their fathers. Secondly, Tertullian claims that in Genesis 6 the angels were not called adulterers but husbands. If the women who tempted the angels had already been married, it would be more appropriate to refer to the angels as adulterers. However, the fact that they were called husbands of the “daughters of men” indicates that the women were virgins before their encounter with the angels.

Using the argument from comparison, Tertullian argues that even if the angels had been tempted by sexually-experienced women, the purity of virgin women would prove an even greater temptation. Tertullian explains: “In fact, if it is ‘on account of the angels’ [whom] we read plainly that they have fallen from God and from heaven because of their desire for females, can anyone presume that such angels have desired the already defiled (*contaminatas*) bodies and the relics of human lust [so that they will be] even more on fire for virgins, whose youthful freshness even excuses human lust?”<sup>111</sup> In short, if married women could tempt angels, how much more would the pure virgins be a temptation to them. Tertullian concludes, therefore, that since virgins could tempt angels it was all the more reason for them to be veiled.

In *De cultu feminarum*, Tertullian used a similar argument in order to persuade women to dress modestly. As I noted earlier, Tertullian argued that women’s cultivation of beauty provoked male lust. Therefore, making an appeal to *pathos*, Tertullian urged women to be considerate about the effect which their outward appearance has on men, and thus, encouraged them to adopt a modest appearance.<sup>112</sup> In *De virginibus velandis*, Tertullian makes a similar appeal when he claims that an unveiled virgin may provoke the lust of the angels and should, therefore, wear the veil.

Did Tertullian agree with Paul’s reasons for why women ought to wear the veil? In other words, did Tertullian agree that the veil was a sign of man’s authority over the woman, and a way to prevent the virgin from tempting the angels? It is difficult to work out the extent to

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<sup>111</sup> *De virginibus velandis* 7 (translation adapted by author).

<sup>112</sup> See chapter 2.

which Tertullian agreed with Paul on these matters. In this section of *De virginibus velandis* Tertullian's primary aim was to demonstrate that the reasons given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 for why women are to be veiled apply equally to virgin women. The correct interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11 was the key issue under dispute and thus it would not have helped Tertullian's case to challenge Paul's reasons, if indeed Tertullian disagreed with them. It seems that Tertullian's opponents were willing to accept the reasons given by Paul for why married women ought to be veiled. What they disputed was that Paul's command applied to virgins. By presupposing that Paul's reasons were right, Tertullian was able to develop them in order to prove they also applied to virgin women. Thus, Tertullian endorses Paul's claim that all women, including virgins, are subordinate to men and a temptation to the angels in order to persuade virgins that they ought to wear the veil.

### **The arguments from ecclesiastical discipline.**

The third type of argument used in the *confirmatio-refutatio* of *De virginibus velandis*, the argument from ecclesiastical discipline, occupies chapters 9-15. Tertullian's main aim in this section of the treatise is to oppose the claim that virgins should be allowed to remain unveiled because they deserve a mark of honour which distinguishes them from married women.

Tertullian claims that the virgins' claim to a mark of honour is unwarranted. Using the argument from comparison, Tertullian contrasts the honour due to female virgins with the honour due to male virgins. He claims that male virgins are more deserving than female virgins of a mark of honour because self-control is harder for men. Tertullian explains: "The more their gender grows eager and hot for females, the more the self-control of the greater inflamed passion grows difficult, and for that reason the more deserving of all display, if the display of virginity is a dignified thing".<sup>113</sup> In other words, male virgins have to work harder than the female virgins at preserving their virginity, because they have a greater propensity for temptation to lust. Consequently, since no mark of distinction has been prescribed for male virgins, the female virgins' claim is definitely without merit.

What I find particularly interesting is how Tertullian places the emphasis upon men being more prone to temptation rather than blaming the woman for being a seductive temptress.

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<sup>113</sup> *De virginibus velandis* 10.



Although this is clearly a rhetorical technique, Tertullian's willingness to admit men's weakness and inclination to lust demonstrates that Tertullian's criticism was not aimed exclusively at women.

In a further development of the argument, Tertullian claims that it is not only virgin men who are more deserving of recognition. Widows would also, in theory, be more deserving than the female virgins. In a similar argument to the one about male virgins, Tertullian claims that self-control is more difficult for widows because they know what they are missing out on.<sup>114</sup> Tertullian explains: "The struggle of not desiring is great [for the one] for whom desiring has taken root. However, [if] you have not known the enjoyment of this desiring, it will be easy for you not to desire, because you do not have as an opponent the desire for enjoyment".<sup>115</sup> Whereas Tertullian had previously contrasted male virgins with female virgins, in this passage Tertullian compares two different types of females; virgins and widows. In the first argument Tertullian claims that male virgins are more deserving of a mark of honour because men find self-control more difficult. In the second argument Tertullian claims that widows are more deserving of a mark of honour because they too would find self-control more difficult, having previously experienced sexual desire. By contrasting these different groups of people Tertullian highlights that the female virgins' desire for a mark of honour, that of being unveiled, is misplaced. Therefore, virgins, along with all women, must be veiled.

### **Feminist Considerations.**

Evidently, there are passages in *De virginibus velandis* in which Tertullian assumes that women are subordinate to men. Indeed, the very fact that Tertullian writes a treatise urging women to veil, could be taken as indicative of his belief in woman's subordinate status. However, given that Tertullian's comments in the passages from *De anima* and *De resurrectione carnis*, discussed above, suggest woman's equality with man, there is a need for a more nuanced explanation.

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<sup>114</sup> This argument is also used in *Ad uxorem* 1. 8: "More glorious is the continence which is aware of its own right, which knows what it has seen. The virgin may possibly be held the happier, but the *widow* the more hardly tasked; the former in that she has always kept the good, the latter in that she has found the good for herself. In the former it is grace, in the latter virtue, that is crowned".

<sup>115</sup> *De virginibus velandis* 10.

Firstly, Tertullian never explicitly states that women are subordinate to men. Rather, Tertullian's comments about women's subordination are drawn from Paul's arguments in 1 Corinthians 11. However, just because Tertullian uses 1 Corinthians 11, it does not necessarily follow that he agreed with Paul's argument that women should be veiled because they are subordinate to men. Rather, Tertullian uses 1 Corinthians 11 because this was the passage under dispute. By accepting Paul's arguments in 1 Corinthians 11 and demonstrating that they also applied to women, Tertullian was able to use 1 Corinthians 11 as a rhetorical tool with which to persuade virgins specifically to wear the veil. In short, Tertullian's objective is to persuade his audience that virgins ought to be veiled, not that women are subordinate to men.

Secondly, Tertullian's request for virgins to be veiled may have been based on something other than a belief in women's subordination. In *De virginibus velandis* 14 Tertullian claims that the virgins wished to remain unveiled because they wanted to impress certain men within the Carthaginian community. However, Tertullian notes that the problem with impressing men is that it often led to pregnancy. This created a predicament: either the virgin draws (negative) attention to herself by starting to veil, or she lives a lie by remaining unveiled even though she is no longer a virgin.<sup>116</sup> Is it possible that there had been case of "virgins" becoming pregnant? Could it be that Tertullian urged all women to veil in order to prevent the scandal which would inevitably arise from a "virgin" conceiving outside of wedlock?

Another possible reason for why Tertullian wanted virgins to veil is in order to protect a woman's right to prophesy. Dunn has proposed that Tertullian's command for virgins to be veiled may well be based on Paul's statement that any woman who prophesied with her head uncovered brought shame upon herself.<sup>117</sup> Bearing in mind that Tertullian's words in this treatise may have been directed specifically to Montanist virgins, Tertullian's motivation for urging virgins to veil, may well have been more to do with keeping virgins eligible to prophesy, rather than marking their subordination. Dunn explains: "Could it be, given that Paul had insisted that any woman who prophesied with her head uncovered brought shame upon herself (1 Corinthians 11:4), that Tertullian wanted not only married but unmarried women to be veiled in the liturgical gathering, not so that they could simply be submissive to their menfolk but so that there could be no hindrance to any woman exercising a prophetic

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<sup>116</sup> Dunn, *Tertullian*, p. 139.

<sup>117</sup> Dunn, *Tertullian*, p. 141.

ministry?”<sup>118</sup> If this is the case, Tertullian’s references to women’s subordination, should be seen as part of his rhetoric and attempt to persuade the unveiled virgins to wear the veil.

Finally, *De virginibus velandis* may be perplexing for those feminists who seek to retrieve the voices and experiences of real women because it only gives Tertullian’s side of the debate. Thus, it impossible to know if the reason Tertullian cites for why the virgins wanted to be unveiled, namely as a mark of distinction, was genuine or merely a rhetorical device used by Tertullian to make his case more persuasive. There is one fact which we can, with some certainly, deduce from *De virginibus velandis*: there were virgin women within the Carthaginian community who were candid enough to go without the veil. If there had not been, Tertullian would not have needed to write *De virginibus velandis*.<sup>119</sup>

### **Conclusion.**

Tertullian does not have a systematic theology on the topic of woman and he never explicitly discusses the status of woman’s equality with man. In this chapter, I have attempted to build up a picture of Tertullian’s view of woman based on various passages throughout his corpus, taking into consideration both the rhetorical context of the various passages as well as the concerns put forward by feminist scholars. Whilst it is impossible to draw any definite conclusions about Tertullian’s view of woman, we can deduce some speculative points based on the various passages discussed above.

There are a number of passages which (implicitly) suggest that Tertullian recognized that woman was man’s equal. Firstly, from my examination of *De anima* it is clear that Tertullian believed that all human beings share a common human nature, a composition of body and soul. Of particular interest is Tertullian’s suggestion that the woman shares the same substance of soul as the man because this implies that there is an equality between the two, at least on an anthropological level.

Secondly, Tertullian’s panegyric of the flesh in *De resurrectione carnis* reveals the high esteem which he had for the flesh. Whilst the panegyric is clearly part of his rhetoric to

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<sup>118</sup> Dunn, *Tertullian*, p. 141.

<sup>119</sup> Salisbury, *Independent Virgins*, p. 57.

demonstrate the worthiness of the flesh to partake in the resurrection, there are positive conclusions which can be deduced from a feminist perspective. For, not only does Tertullian insist that the flesh is integral to the identity of every human person but furthermore, Tertullian raises the flesh to the level of the soul. Tertullian thus avoids the problems with dualism which places the soul over flesh, and man over woman.

Thirdly, Tertullian believes that sexual difference is part of God's original plan for the created order. This is evident in *De anima* when Tertullian claims that an individual receives his/her sex at the moment of conception and refers to Genesis 2 to support his claim. Furthermore, Tertullian's arguments for a sexed resurrection in *De resurrectione carnis* 60-61 suggests that the biological differences between the man and the woman were part of God's original creation and will be a permanent feature of the resurrected body. Although never explicitly stated by Tertullian, this seems to suggest that he regarded the woman to be as complete a human being as the man.

Tertullian uses the Genesis creation accounts, not to justify the subordination of woman, but as part of his rhetorical arguments. Tertullian points to various details in Genesis 1 and 2 as evidence in support of a particular argument. For example, he points to Eve's creation from Adam in Genesis 2 to support his claim that Adam was the progenitor of humanity and thus all share the same substance of body and soul. Similarly, in *De resurrectione carnis* Tertullian uses Genesis 2 to support, among other things, his claim that flesh is integral to the identity of human beings. Thus, Tertullian is an example of a Father who used the Genesis creation accounts in a manner which is entirely compatible with feminist theology.

However, there are a few passages in Tertullian's corpus which seem to suggest that he regarded women as man's subordinate. Firstly, in *Adversus Marcionem* 2.11 Tertullian implies that woman's subordination is a post-Fall condition based on his reading of Genesis 3.16. However, even in this passage, Tertullian was not using Genesis 3.16 to justify women's subordination. Rather, Tertullian's primary concern was to demonstrate the compatibility between God's goodness and justice, and therefore prove that there is one God. It would not have helped Tertullian's case against Marcion if he had challenged the punishment (of subordination) given to woman in Genesis 3.16. Thus, it is difficult to know if Tertullian actually believed that women were subordinate as a consequence of the Fall, or if he was simply using Genesis 3.16 as part of his rhetoric. Furthermore, if Tertullian did accept

the premise in Genesis 3.16, it indicates that Tertullian believed that women were created equal to men, and thus, her subordination is not part of God's original plan.

Tertullian's exposition of 1 Corinthians 11 in *De virginibus velandis* may, on the face of it, indicate a belief in the woman's subordination to man. Tertullian employs Paul's arguments (about woman's inferior position to man) set out in 1 Corinthians 11. However it seems that Tertullian accepts Paul's reasons for the sake of argument, in order to make the crucial point that Paul's command to veil applies equally to virgins as it does to married women. Although Tertullian uses 1 Corinthians 11 (and the argument in it about women's subordination) as a rhetorical device, the fact that Tertullian even encouraged women to wear the veil could, in itself, be an indication that he regarded the woman as subordinate. However, it is possible that although Tertullian regarded women as men's equal in terms of body and soul, he may have wanted them to wear the veil for sociological reasons. Furthermore, if as I argued above, Tertullian urged women to wear the veil in order to keep them eligible to prophesy, the veil could be seen as a sign of the woman's right to exercise certain ministries rather than a symbol of her subordination.

In summary, although Tertullian does not have a systematic account of "woman" the findings in this chapter suggest that Tertullian had a largely positive view of woman in her relation to man. Although never explicitly stated, it seems that Tertullian believed that women were originally created equal to men. Any subordination is as a consequence of the Fall and not part of God's original design for creation.

## **CHAPTER 7.**

### **Women's Roles in the Sociological Order.**

In this chapter I will examine the sociological roles assigned to women in Tertullian's treatises. Tertullian never wrote a treatise on the topic of women's roles and thus, in this chapter, I will draw information from various passages throughout Tertullian's corpus. In the first part I will discuss the ecclesiastical ministries which were closed to women according to Tertullian. Rhetorical considerations will be particularly important because in several passages, Tertullian used the topic of the heretical woman performing ecclesiastical roles closed to her, as a means of denigrating various heretical groups. In the second part, I will consider those roles which were open to women according to Tertullian. Along with many in the ancient world, Tertullian accepted that a woman could be a wife or virgin. However, besides these obvious examples Tertullian also recognized that women could adopt roles which enabled them to make an important contribution to the Christian community. Through the roles of widows, prophetesses and martyrs, women could minister to their fellow Christians in a variety of ways.

#### **Roles closed to women.**

##### ***De virginibus velandis.***

In *De virginibus velandis* 9.2 Tertullian sets out a comprehensive list of roles women are not permitted to undertake: "It is not permitted to a woman to speak in the church (*Non permittitur mulieri in ecclesia loqui*); but neither (is it permitted her) to teach (*docere*), nor to baptize, nor to offer (*offere*), nor to claim to herself a lot in any manly function (*nec ullius virilis*), not to say (in any) sacerdotal office (*nedum sacerdotalis officii*)".<sup>1</sup>

In the chapter from which this passage is taken, Tertullian is not primarily concerned with the subject of women's roles in church ministry. Rather, as noted earlier Tertullian's aim in *De virginibus velandis* is to persuade virgins to wear a veil. In *De virginibus velandis* 9, where the above passage is taken from, Tertullian's discussion focusses on church discipline and he sets out to prove that in matters of church discipline there is no distinction between woman

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<sup>1</sup> *De virginibus velandis* 9.2.

and virgin. This supports Tertullian's overall argument in *De virginibus velandis* that a virgin is the species which is included in the genus of woman. With this in mind, Tertullian asks whether the above mentioned roles which are closed to women are also closed to virgins. He claim that since virgins are not permitted to perform the roles prohibited to women, it follows that whatever rule is given to woman, is as equally binding on the virgin. In the same way, concludes Tertullian, Paul's command for a woman to veil applies equally to a virgin because the species of virgin is included in the genus of woman.

Evidently, the question of women's roles in the church is of secondary concern to Tertullian and he uses the topic simply as an example to give further support to his primary argument in *De virginibus velandis*. Nevertheless, Tertullian's comments in the passage are useful for ascertaining what roles were closed to women in the Christian communities he was familiar with at the time.

### **Adversus Marcionem.**

In *Adversus Marcionem* 5.8.11 Tertullian alludes to 1 Corinthians 14.34-35, a passage in which Paul bans women from speaking in church. Tertullian writes: "Once more, when [Paul] enjoins upon women silence in the church, that they are not to speak, at all events with the idea of learning—though he has already shown that even they have the right to prophesy, since he insists that a woman must be veiled, even when prophesying- it was from the law that he received authority for putting the woman in subjection, that law which, let me say it once for all, [you suppose] he had no right to take note of except for its destruction".

In this passage Tertullian's primary concern is not with a woman's right to speak in church. Rather Tertullian's discussion forms part of his rebuttal against Marcion's rejection of the Hebrew Scriptures. As noted earlier, Marcion ascribed the Hebrew Scripture to the demiurge god who stood in opposition to the Christian God of the New Testament revealed by Jesus Christ. In order to support his theory Marcion produced his own edited version of Paul's epistles, the *Apostolicon*, from which he removed most of the passages in which Paul's draws on the Hebrew Scriptures support for his arguments.<sup>2</sup> In book five of *Adversus Marcionem* Tertullian accepts, for the sake of argument, Marcion's edited version of Paul's epistle and

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<sup>2</sup> E. Evans (ed.), *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism* (London: SPCK, 1964), p. xv.

discusses, almost sentence by sentence, Marcion's version of Paul's epistles. Tertullian claims that even with Marcion's alterations it is clear that the Paul draws on the Hebrew Scriptures for evidence to support his arguments. Tertullian concludes that the Hebrew Scriptures were an authoritative source for Paul and thus proves that the God revealed by Christ is the same as the creator god of the Hebrew Scriptures.

In this passage Tertullian challenges Marcion's rejection of the Hebrew Scriptures by demonstrating that Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 14.34-35 draws on the Hebrew Scriptures. Tertullian argues that Paul's command for a woman to be silent in church is based on the "law" (in the Hebrew Scriptures) which placed woman in subjection to man. Although Tertullian does not explain which law he is referring to, I agree with Madigan and Osiek who propose that it is probably a reference to Genesis 3.16.<sup>3</sup> As I noted in chapter six, in *Adversus Marcionem* 2.11 Tertullian accepts the claim in Genesis 3.16 that one of the effects of the Fall was the woman's subordination to man. In the *Adversus Marcionem* 5.8.11 passage Tertullian assumes that Paul used Genesis 3.16 to justify women not being permitted to take on certain church roles with the claim that she is subordinate to man. As far as I am aware, *Adversus Marcionem* 5.8.11 is the only passage in which Tertullian explicitly bases a woman's sociological subordination on the belief that she is man's subordinate on a post-Fall anthropological level.

In summary, the question of women's right to speak in church is not the primary focus in *Adversus Marcionem* 5.8.11. Rather, Tertullian demonstrates that Paul's prohibition on women speaking in church is based on his interpretation of Genesis 3.16. This supports Tertullian's wider claim that the Hebrew Scriptures were an authoritative source for Paul. Whilst it is difficult to deduce Tertullian's own views about a woman's right to speak in church from this passage, based on several of the passages discussed below it seems that Tertullian agreed with Paul on this matter.

### ***De praescriptione haereticorum.***

In *De praescriptione haereticorum* 41.5 Tertullian criticizes women from a certain heretical group because they have the audacity to perform ministries which, according to Tertullian,

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<sup>3</sup> K. Madigan and C. Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), pp. 178-9.



are restricted to men. Tertullian writes: “The very women of these heretics, how wanton (*procaces*) they are! For they are bold enough to teach (*audeant docere*), to dispute, to enact exorcisms, to undertake cures- maybe even to baptize”.<sup>4</sup>

When one examines the wider context of *De praescriptione haereticorum* 41.5 it is evident that Tertullian is not primarily concerned with women taking on roles which were not open to them. Rather, Tertullian was criticizing the misconduct of heretics in order to undermine their authority. In early Christianity there were numerous rival Christian groups each claiming to hold the true interpretation of the Christian faith. Tertullian, therefore, had to persuade his audience that the mainstream church possessed the true teaching (and in particular, the correct interpretation of scripture) and was thus distinguished from other Christian groups who taught heresy.

Through an appeal to *ethos* a rhetor could vilify his opponent’s character and thus undermine the credibility of his arguments. In this treatise Tertullian’s opponent is the heretic and in chapter 41 Tertullian employs the rhetorical technique of vilifying the character of his opponent by criticizing the conduct of heretics which he describes in the following way: “[H]ow frivolous it is, how worldly, how merely human, without seriousness, without authority, without discipline...”<sup>5</sup> In particular, Tertullian criticizes the lack of distinction in heretical groups between the ordained and laity, and between catechumens and the baptized. The “wanton” practices of women serve as another example of the inappropriate behaviour of the heretics whom Tertullian is criticizing.

Tertullian’s use of women as an example of inappropriate behaviour is particularly interesting in the rhetorical context of this passage. A number of scholars have observed that the association between women taking on “male” roles and heresy was a common theme in the writings of the Fathers. Gillian Clark, for example, has claimed that a women’s prominent status within heretical groups in early Christianity came to be one way of attacking them.<sup>6</sup> Fiorenza proposes that the polemical arguments of the Fathers against women taking on

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<sup>4</sup> *De praescriptione haereticorum* 41.5.

<sup>5</sup> *De praescriptione haereticorum* 45.1.

<sup>6</sup> G. Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity: Pagan and Christian Lifestyles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 128.

church leadership roles led to the association of women with heresy.<sup>7</sup> Finally, Elizabeth Clark has suggested that the Fathers' association of women taking on leadership roles with heresy was part of the church's quest for self-definition. Clark explains: "To demarcate the boundaries between 'us' and 'them,' the church fathers singled out for attack various features of the sects' allegedly misguided teaching and practices, such as the leadership roles of Gnostic women".<sup>8</sup> In other words, the Fathers' criticism of the status of women within heretical groups was one way of drawing boundaries between the mainstream church (which limited women's roles) and heretical groups which permitted women to take on leadership roles.

In *De praescriptione haereticorum* 41.5 Tertullian uses the example of women teaching, baptizing and performing other ministries which are exclusive to men, as a rhetorical device with which to criticize and undermine the authority of heretical groups. By doing this, Tertullian challenged the credibility of these rival groups and thus implicitly suggests that the mainstream church is the only reliable Christian community of which to be member. Although Tertullian's attack on women in *De praescriptione haereticorum* 41.5 was evidently part of his rhetoric, the fact that he uses the example of women taking on certain roles as a way of attacking heretical groups indicates that Tertullian disapproved of women taking on these roles.

### **De baptismo.**

There are two passages in *De baptismo* in which Tertullian disapproves of women undertaking the roles of teaching and baptizing. Once again Tertullian skilfully associates the women who undertake these roles with heresy, in order to undermine his opponent and thus make his case more persuasive.

### **De baptismo 1.**

In *De baptismo* 1 Tertullian claims that a certain woman teacher, apparently of Gnostic or Marcionite connection, and an adherent of the Cainite sect, had taught that baptism was

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<sup>7</sup> E. S. Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A feminist theological reconstruction of Christian origins* (London: SCM Press, 1983), p. 56.

<sup>8</sup> E. A. Clark, "Devil's Gateway and Bride of Christ: Women in the Early Christian World," in E.A. Clark (ed.), *Ascetic Piety and Women's Faith: Essays on Late Ancient Christianity* (Lewiston, New York, 1986), p. 37.

unnecessary and ineffective: “And in fact a certain female viper from the Cainite sect, who recently spent some time here, carried off a good number with her exceptionally pestilential doctrine, making a particular point of demolishing baptism”.<sup>9</sup>

Tertullian’s primary aim in *De baptismo* is to persuade his audience of the necessity of baptism and thus, Tertullian had to use his rhetorical skill to discredit the alternative view, put forward by the heretical woman, which denied its utility. In the opening chapter of the treatise, by associating the heretical view of baptism with the teaching of a woman, Tertullian sought to discredit her false teachings on baptism and thus make his own arguments about the necessity of baptism more persuasive. This view rests on an assumption that women cannot teach. I will discuss this issue below.

Another technique used by Tertullian to discredit the heretical teaching on baptism was by describing the female teacher as a viper. This served as a rhetorical device in several ways. Firstly, as Evans has pointed out Tertullian’s reference to the viper is a reminder that the Cainite heretics were a sub-sect of the Ophites, the name of which means serpent-worshippers.<sup>10</sup> The Ophites regarded the serpent of Genesis as a hero because through him *gnosis* has been imparted to human beings. As a consequence, humanity will grow to realize that the creator god is the demiurge, and that the true God has yet to be known. For the Ophites salvation is attained through *gnosis*, and not through baptism. In contrast, the underlying premise in *De baptismo* is that baptism is necessary for one’s salvation. Secondly, Tertullian’s description of the female as a viper implies that this woman, and in particular her teaching, is dangerous. For just as a the venom of a viper has the potential to kill, so too the venomous teaching of this woman will inevitably lead to one’s spiritual death, since the very baptism which she wants to abolish is necessary for one’s salvation. Tertullian’s unspoken message is clear: avoid this viperous woman and her poisonous teaching. Thirdly, Tertullian implies that this heretical woman-like Eve-has been infected with the Serpent’s words.

Up until this point in *De baptismo* 1 Tertullian’s focus has been upon the heretical aspect of the woman’s teaching. In a final blow, Tertullian turns his attention to the question of this woman’s right to teach: “[I]t was that that portent of a woman, who had no right to teach

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<sup>9</sup> *De baptismo* 1.

<sup>10</sup> Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism* (London: SPCK, 1964), p. 47.

even correctly, knew very well how to kill the little fishes by taking them out of the water”.<sup>11</sup> Although Tertullian does not state so explicitly in this passage, it seems that her sex was the reason that the woman did not have the right to teach. The fact that Tertullian makes this point without any further elaboration or justification suggests that the prohibition on women teaching was generally accepted among the audience he was addressing. Therefore, by reminding his audience that this woman did not have the right to teach Tertullian challenges the authority of her teaching and thus undermines the content of her teaching.

In short, Tertullian’s aim in *De baptismo* was to persuade his audience of the necessity of baptism against heretical denials of its utility. In order to discredit this heretical view of baptism, Tertullian traces its origin to a woman teacher who not only teaches false doctrine but moreover should not have even been teaching in the first place. By highlighting these two factors Tertullian undermines the authority of her teaching and thus challenges the credibility of her heretical claims about baptism.

### **De baptismo 17**

In *De baptismo 17* Tertullian discusses the practical rules for the administration of baptism including who has the right to baptize. Tertullian sets out a hierarchy in which the bishop is the proper and ordinary minister of baptism. After the bishop a presbyter or deacon can baptize but only with the bishop’s permission. Finally, in cases of emergency, male members of the laity may also baptize. Women, argues Tertullian, are never permitted to baptize.

Tertullian claims that although the Cainite woman referred to in *De baptismo 1* would not claim the right to baptize, since she disapproves of baptism, another heretical woman who approves of baptism may take it upon herself to perform a baptism. Tertullian writes: “But the impudence of that woman who assumed the right to teach is evidently not going to arrogate to her the right to baptize as well - unless perhaps some new serpent appears, like that original one, so that as that woman abolished baptism, some other should of her own authority confer it”.<sup>12</sup> By contrasting the two extreme cases, Tertullian implies that the act of a woman baptizing is as dangerous as the abolition of baptism altogether.

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<sup>11</sup> *De baptismo 1.*

<sup>12</sup> *De baptismo 17.4.*

Tertullian next points to a story of a woman named Thecla who, in the *Acts of Paul*, is said to have preached and baptised. Tertullian is clearly concerned that the example of Thecla will be used by women to support their right to baptise because, in the remainder of the chapter, Tertullian's efforts are focused on disproving the authenticity of Paul's authorship.<sup>13</sup> Instead, Tertullian claims that the *Acts of Paul* were written by a presbyter from Asia who was a devoted disciple of Paul. In order to support his argument, Tertullian draws a comparison between the true teaching of Paul in 1 Corinthians 14.34-35 and the false teaching in the *Acts of Paul*: "How could we believe that Paul should give a female power to teach and to baptize, when he did not allow a woman even to learn by her own right? Let them keep silence, he says, and ask their husbands at home". In other words, Tertullian argues that Paul cannot be the author of the *Acts of Paul* because he would not have approved of Thecla's actions of teaching and baptising, and he turns to 1 Corinthians 14, a Pauline work whose authenticity is accepted, to prove this point. By undermining the authorship of the *Acts of Paul* Tertullian challenged the truth and authority of its content and thus renders the example of Thecla invalid.

Scholars have questioned, without a conclusive answer, whether or not Tertullian was responding to a custom in Carthage where women used the example of Thecla in the *Acts of Paul* as evidence for their right to baptize. MacDonald argues that Tertullian's statement is evidence for a group of women who were using the story of Thecla to justify ministries of women that subverted male ecclesiastical authority.<sup>14</sup> Mount, on the other hand, claims that there is no evidence in *De baptismo* 17 of the existence of such a group and instead, it is likely that Tertullian was refuting a hypothetical possibility.<sup>15</sup> I am inclined to agree with Mount that there is nothing in the *De baptismo* 17 from which we can confidently claim that this text was being used by women wishing to baptize. What is certain, however, is that Tertullian was determined to disprove Paul's authorship so that any woman, actual or potential, who pointed to the example of Thecla to prove their "right" to baptize and teach, would only have the discredited and supposedly forged text of a self-proclaimed disciple of Paul to support their case.

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<sup>13</sup> Tertullian's denouncing of the *Acts of Paul* as a fraud "...indicates that the process of the canonization of early Christian documents was affected by the polemics and struggle concerning the leadership of women in the church. Therefore, the canon reflects a patriarchal selection process and has functioned to bar women from ecclesial leadership" (Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, p.54).

<sup>14</sup> D.R. MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle: The battle for Paul in the Story and Canon* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1983), p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> C. Mount, *Pauline Christianity: Luke-Acts and the Legacy of Paul* (Boston: Brill, 2002), p. 48.

## **Feminist Considerations.**

It is evident from the passage above that Tertullian believes that there are roles within the church from which women are excluded. Although Tertullian does not state it explicitly, it would seem that a woman's sex is the sole reason why a woman is not permitted to undertake these roles. As I noted in the introduction to part three, feminist scholars such as Warner have argued that woman's subordination on an anthropological level has been used as the reason for limiting her roles on a sociological level. However, as I demonstrated in chapter six, Tertullian regards man and woman as equal on an anthropological level, that is, equal in the pre-Fall created order. Thus, unlike some Fathers who used woman's subordinate status in creation as a justification for why women cannot perform certain roles, Tertullian does not give this reason for why a woman's sex is an excluding factor. However, it is clear from the discussion above that in some passages, Tertullian does seem to assume that women's subordination to men since the Fall means that women may not assume the role of teaching.

Fiorenza has erroneously claimed that Tertullian supports women's exclusion from all ecclesiastical leadership roles with "a theology that evidences a deep misogynistic contempt and fear of women" and cites the Devil's gateway passage as evidence.<sup>16</sup> However, her analysis of Tertullian is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, as the discussion above illustrates Tertullian's limitation of women's roles is often a secondary concern which serves another rhetorical aim, and is not part of an attempt to denigrate women. In fact there is only one passage (*Adversus Marcionem* 5.8.11) in which Tertullian justifies women not being permitted to take on certain ministries by claiming that they are subordinate to men. Even in this passage, Tertullian is more concerned with supporting his rhetorical argument than with denigrating the status of woman.

The second problem with Fiorenza's analysis of Tertullian is that she cites the "Devil's gateway" passage as an example of Tertullian's misogyny which, according to Fiorenza, Tertullian uses to justify women being excluded from ecclesiastical leadership roles. However, the "Devil's gateway passage" has nothing to do with women's ministries. Rather, as I noted in chapters one and two, the "Devil's gateway" passage is a rhetorical technique to make his audience in *De cultu feminarum* more predisposed to his arguments in that

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<sup>16</sup> Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, p. 55.

particular treatise. Tertullian's comments in the "Devil's gateway" passage are not indicative of Tertullian's view of women in general. By using the "Devil's gateway" passage as "proof" of Tertullian's misogynistic view of women and the reason why he excludes women from ecclesiastical leadership, Fiorenza erroneously treats Tertullian as a systematic theologian and distorts his comments in the process.

Finally, Fiorenza's claim that Tertullian excludes women from all ecclesiastical leadership roles is inaccurate and unbalanced. She cites passages from Tertullian's *De praescriptione haereticorum* and *De virginibus velandis* to support her point and from these Fiorenza's draws her misleading conclusion. For whilst it is clear that Tertullian believes that some roles within the church are closed to women, there are many passages throughout his corpus which suggest that he encouraged women to participate in roles which were open to them, many of which were important and influential ministries within the church and society. It is to these that I now turn my discussion.

### **Roles permissible to women.**

#### **Women as wives.**

In the ancient world it was assumed that a women's primary purpose in life was to be a wife and mother. This was in part due to the woman's association with the flesh, as discussed above, and Mary's role as Christ's mother was another influential factor within patristic thought.<sup>17</sup> Given that feminist scholars have, on the whole, considered women's role of wife and mother as restrictive and part of a patriarchal strategy to keep women in their place, it may be surprising to hear that Tertullian offers a positive image of marriage in *Ad uxorem*.<sup>18</sup> Whilst Tertullian, based on Pauline teaching, claims that a celibate life is preferable to marriage, Tertullian's depiction of Christian marriage in a passage from *Ad uxorem* contains

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<sup>17</sup> See the introduction to part three.

<sup>18</sup> Tina Beattie has acknowledged that for some women marriage and family life can be a positive influence. She explains: "[F]eminism has not fully accepted that, for the majority of women, the family remains key to female identity, self-worth and commitment. Feminists have frequently portrayed marriage and family life, inspired and upheld by religious values, as a patriarchal conspiracy that renders women little more than domestic slaves. They have failed to recognize that marriage and motherhood are profoundly enriching experiences for many women, allowing them to express their love, sexuality and talent for nurture in the context of committed and faithful relationships" (T. Beattie, "Feminism, Vatican Style" in *The Tablet* (October, 2004)).

one of the most beautiful descriptions of marriage to be found in the ancient world.<sup>19</sup> What is particularly interesting is the tone of equality between husband and wife which permeates *Ad uxorem*. In a cultural milieu where marriage was entered into for practical reasons and in which the wife was generally regarded as subordinate to her husband, this is significant.<sup>20</sup>

### *Ad uxorem.*

*Ad uxorem* is a deliberative treatise, containing two letters from Tertullian to his wife, which advise her on what to do after his death. In the first letter, Tertullian attempts to persuade his wife not to remarry after his death. He praises continence, criticizes second marriage as concupiscence, and points to pagan examples of monogamy (one marriage) which he urges his wife to emulate. In the second letter, Tertullian moderates his position and suggests that if his wife must remarry, it is better for her to marry a Christian man.<sup>21</sup>

In *Ad uxorem* Tertullian uses certain language and ideas which imply that he saw his wife as an equal partner in marriage. One way in which Tertullian creates this impression of equality is through the way in which he addresses his wife. In several places throughout the two letters he calls his wife a “fellow-servant (*conserva*) of the Lord”<sup>22</sup> He combines this with affectionate terms such as: “My best-beloved fellow-servant”<sup>23</sup> and “dearest fellow-servant”.<sup>24</sup> Following ancient rhetorical practice, it is likely these terms were employed in order to win the good will of his audience, in this case his wife, and this was a persuasive

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<sup>19</sup> A number of scholars have praised Tertullian’s beautiful description of Christian marriage in *Ad uxorem* 2.8. See for example, J. LaPorte, *The Role of Women in Early Christianity* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1982). La Porte writes: “Tertullian wrote what I consider to be the most beautiful page among ancient texts about marriage...the description of the spiritual union of the couple is a marvel”. See also, P. Ranfit, *Women and Spiritual Equality in the Christian Tradition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 11; and, N.V. Harrison, “Women, Human Identity and the Image of God: Antiochene Interpretations” in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* Volume 9 Number 2 (Summer, 2001), p. 206.

<sup>20</sup> In the ancient world marriage was rarely based on mutual romantic love as is now commonplace in most western cultures. For the man marriage was often entered into in order to ensure that there were legitimate heirs to their estate and a reliable manager for his household. (G. Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*, p. 3). For “weaker” women marriage was necessary in order to protect them from exploitation. Whilst the literary and epigraphic sources present a mixed picture, in general the girl would move from her childhood home to a marriage, from the authority of her father to the authority of her husband. (L.H. Cohick, *Women in the World of the World of the Earliest Christians: Illuminating Ancient Ways of Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), p. 99).

<sup>21</sup> In *De exhortatione castitatis* and *De monogamia*, both written after *Ad uxorem*, Tertullian reverts back to his position in *Ad uxorem* 1. He claims that second marriages are contrary to God’s will and forbidden by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7.27 (*De exhortatione castitatis* 1.1 and 3.2). In *De monogamia* Tertullian criticizes both those whose denigration of marriage leads them to reject it altogether as well as those who “multiplied” marriages. (*De monogamia* 1.1).

<sup>22</sup> *Ad uxorem* 1.1; 1.8; 2.1; 2.8.

<sup>23</sup> *Ad uxorem* 1.1; 2.1.

<sup>24</sup> *Ad uxorem* 1.8.



technique which was particularly important in a deliberative speech. This theory becomes more plausible when one observes that Tertullian uses these terms in the *exordium* and *peroratio* of the two letters. As I noted earlier, ancient rhetoricians emphasized the importance of the *exordium* and *peroratio* for winning over the audience.<sup>25</sup> Thus, just as Tertullian's addressed the women in the *exordium* of *De cultu feminarum* as "handmaids of the living God"<sup>26</sup> and "my fellow servants and sisters"<sup>27</sup> with the aim of establishing a rapport with his audience in order to be more persuasive, so too in *Ad uxorem* Tertullian uses the same rhetorical technique to win over his wife.

Whilst the language of equality used by Tertullian to address his wife was primarily a rhetorical technique, the tenderness with which he addresses her and the tone of equality are nevertheless significant. Tertullian's critics have been all too willing to highlight those passages in which Tertullian supposedly denigrates women, whilst overlooking or ignoring those passages which reflect Tertullian's more positive attitudes towards women. By highlighting Tertullian's affectionate remarks in *Ad uxorem*, one can begin to redress this imbalance.

A passage in the *peroratio* of *Ad uxorem* 2 further reflects a sense of equality between husband and wife. In this passage Tertullian construction a panegyric which describes his vision of the ideal Christian marriage:

Whence are we to find [words] enough fully to tell the happiness of that marriage which the Church cements, and the oblation confirms, and the benediction signs and seals; [which angels] carry back the news of [to heaven], which the Father holds for ratified...What kind of yoke is that of two believers, [partakers] of one hope, one desire, one discipline, one and the same service? Both [are] brethren, both fellow servants, no difference of spirit or of flesh; nay, [they are] truly 'two in one flesh.' Where the flesh is one, one is the spirit too. Together they pray, together prostrate themselves, together perform their fasts; mutually teaching, mutually exhorting, mutually sustaining. Equally [are they] both found in the Church of God; equally at the banquet of

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<sup>25</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 4.1 and Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 3.14.1415a7.

<sup>26</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.1.

<sup>27</sup> *De cultu feminarum* 2.1.

God; equally in straits, in persecutions, in refreshments. Neither hides [ought] from the other; neither shuns the other; neither is troublesome to the other. The sick is visited, the indignant relieved, with freedom. Alms [are given] without [danger of ensuing] torment; sacrifices [attended] without scruple; daily diligence [discharged] without impediment: [there is] no stealthy singing, no trembling greeting, no mute benediction. Between the two echo psalms and hymns; and they mutually challenge each other which shall better chant to their Lord. Such things when Christ sees and hears, He joys. To these He sends His own peace. Where two (are), there withal (is) He Himself. Where He (is), there the Evil One is not.

This panegyric certainly contains one of the most beautiful descriptions of marriage to be found in the writings of the Fathers. Husband and wife are depicted as equal partners, mutually supporting each other in the service of God. To underline the equality of a Christian husband and Christian wife, Tertullian uses the rhetorical figure *anaphora*. This was a rhetorical device that consisted of repeating a word or sequence of words at the beginning of neighbouring clauses, to give them added emphasis and emotional force.<sup>28</sup> Tertullian uses a number of examples of *anaphora* in the above passage and I highlight four which most obviously express the notion of equality:

“**Both** are brethren, **both** fellow servants...”

(“**ambo** fratres, **ambo** conservi...”)

“**Together** they pray, **together** they prostrate themselves, **together** they perform their fasts...”

(“**simul** orant, **simul** volutantur, **simul** ieiunia transigunt...”)

“**Mutually** teaching, **mutually** exhorting, **mutually** sustaining...”

(“**alterutro** docents, **alterutro** exhortantes, **alterutro** sustinentes...”)

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<sup>28</sup> Tertullian used the same rhetorical technique in the “Devil’s gateway” passage in *De cultu feminarum* 1. Tertullian’s repeated use of “You are...” drives home to the women whom he was addressing that the issue involved them, and thus underlines the link between Eve’s sin and woman’s present condition.

“**Equally** they are both found in church, **equally** at the banquet, **equally** in straits, in persecutions, in refreshments...”

(“In ecclesia Dei **pariter** utrique, **pariter** in convivio Dei, **pariter** in angustiis, in persecutionibus, in refrigeriis.”)

To what extent is Tertullian’s panegyric on marriage and language of equality simply part of his rhetoric? As noted above Tertullian’s aim in the second letter was to persuade his wife to marry a Christian man, if indeed she should remarry at all after his death. In emphasising the equality between a Christian husband and a Christian wife with these instances of *anaphora*, Tertullian highlights the advantages of a Christian marriage and thus makes his argument more persuasive. Earlier in the treatise Tertullian had discussed the disadvantages for a Christian woman marrying a pagan man.<sup>29</sup> For example, the pagan husband will restrict her movements and thus prevent her from carrying out her Christian responsibilities. He will obstruct both fasting and works of charity, he will not tolerate his wife leaving the house in the evening to attend church services, and he will most certainly object to her greeting fellow Christians with the kiss of peace.<sup>30</sup> In contrast to this, Tertullian depicts Christian marriage as one in which the spouses are equal before God, share a common vision and live-out their Christian faith in a mutual partnership.

A further point worth highlighting is that the passage containing Tertullian’s panegyric on Christian marriage comes in the *peroratio* of *Ad uxorem*. This is noteworthy because rhetoricians emphasized the importance of ending a speech on an eloquent and emotional climax. This seems to be Tertullian’s objective in using the *anaphora* in his panegyric on Christian marriage which, as noted above, could give additional emphasis and emotional force to a passage. Thus, this passage from *Ad uxorem* is one example, among many, of Tertullian concluding a treatise on an emotionally climactic note.<sup>31</sup>

In summary, Tertullian’s description of marriage in *Ad uxorem* 2.8 was clearly a rhetorical tactic to present Christian marriage as a more appealing option when compared to marriage with a pagan man. It is possible, therefore, that the image of a Christian marriage as a partnership of two equals was simply a rhetorical tactic, and not necessarily a description of

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<sup>29</sup> As noted previously, the topic of advantage/disadvantage was common in deliberative speeches.

<sup>30</sup> *Ad uxorem* 2.4.1.

<sup>31</sup> Further examples of Tertullian ending his treatise on an emotionally climactic note can be found in *De cultu feminarum* 2.13 and *De resurrectione carnis* 63.

how a Christian marriage was lived out in practice. Nevertheless, at the very least the passage in *Ad uxorem* demonstrates that Tertullian was prepared to depict women as man's equal when it suited his argument.

### **Feminist Considerations.**

One reason that feminists have been critical of women's role as wives is because within marriage there has been a tendency within the Fathers to relegate women to a subordinate position. However, I would argue that Tertullian's description of the relationship between husband and wife in *Ad uxorem* is different. The language with which he addresses his wife suggests that Tertullian regarded his wife as an equal. Furthermore, Tertullian's image of Christian marriage in *Ad uxorem* 2.8 is one where husband and wife are equal partners. Rather than the husband being the sole example of moral virtue, in his claim that "[Husband and wife are] mutually teaching, mutually exhorting, mutually sustaining," Tertullian recognizes that in a Christian marriage both partners are responsible for the spiritual and moral welfare of their spouse.

Interestingly, Catherine Conybeare in her article, "Tertullian on Flesh, Spirit, and Wives", has a very different reading of *Ad uxorem*. Having examined the relationship between spirit and flesh in *Ad uxorem*, Conybeare claims in this treatise Tertullian is primarily concerned with controlling his wife. She argues that just as the spirit is superior to and controls the flesh, so too the husband is superior to and has control of the wife. Conybeare's main argument can be summarized neatly as follows: "For the *conserva* to write back to her husband, to advise him on how to comport himself in her absence, is simply unimaginable: from where would she derive the authority? How could the flesh lead the spirit?"<sup>32</sup>

I find Conybeare's reading of *Ad uxorem* problematic for two reasons. Firstly, the theme of spirit and flesh is not a major theme in *Ad uxorem*. Tertullian discusses it in *Ad uxorem* 2.4 in the context of the excuses people use to justify second marriages. According to Tertullian, some people argue that the weakness of the flesh necessitates a second marriage. Women, for example, may claim that marriage is necessary because they need a husband as "...a source

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<sup>32</sup> C. Conybeare, "Tertullian on Flesh, Spirit, and Wives", in S. Swain, S. Harrison, and J. Elsner (ed.), *Severan Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 437-8.

of authority and of comfort, or to render [them] safe from evil rumours”.<sup>33</sup> However, Tertullian opposes this excuse by pointing to the example of widows who have chosen not to remarry after the death of their spouse. In doing so, Tertullian thwarts the idea that a woman is dependent on a man. Secondly, in *De monogamia* and *De exhortatione castitatis* Tertullian argues the same point as in *Ad uxorem* 1, that after the death of a spouse, one should remain single. In these two treatises, however, Tertullian addresses a male audience. The fact that Tertullian advises both men and women not to remarry challenges Conybeare’s claim that *Ad uxorem* was primarily about Tertullian’s desire to control his wife. Rather, in all three treatises Tertullian seems to be genuinely concerned that second marriages will be detrimental to one’s spiritual well-being and his advice is given to both men and women.

### **Widows and Virgins.**

A number of scholars have pointed out that in the early church there were two church orders which were occupied exclusively by women-widows and virgins-and there are a number of passages in Tertullian’s corpus which indicate that he approved of them.<sup>34</sup>

### **Widows.**

In several passages throughout his corpus, Tertullian indicates that widows had a prominent place within the early Christian communities. Indeed, rather than simply adopting a particular state of life, it appears that there were some widows who formed part of a prestigious, well-defined and officially-recognized social category within the church.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, it is possible that these widows performed some kind of role or ministry within the Christian communities of Carthage.

There are a number of passages in which Tertullian makes a specific reference to an order (*ordo*) of widows within the church. In *Ad uxorem* 1.7, for example, Tertullian writes: “How detrimental to faith, how obstructive to holiness, second marriages are, the discipline of the Church and the prescription of the apostle declare, when he suffers not men twice married to

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<sup>33</sup> *Ad uxorem* 1.4.3.

<sup>34</sup> See for example, D.I. Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 175-180 K.J. Torjesen, “The Early Christian Orans: An Artistic Representation of Women’s Liturgical Prayer and Prophecy” in B.M. Kienzle and P.J. Walker (ed.), *Women Preachers and Prophets Through the Two Millennia of Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 48.

<sup>35</sup> Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church*, p. 178.

preside (over a Church), when he would not grant a widow admittance (*adlegi*) into the order (*ordinem*) unless she had been ‘the wife of one man (*univiram*)’; for it behoves God's altar to be set forth pure”.<sup>36</sup>

As I discussed above Tertullian’s primary concern in *Ad uxorem* 1 is to advise his wife to remain a widow if he should die before her. Thus, in order to dissuade his wife from remarrying, Tertullian highlights the obstacles experienced by those who remarry. Of particular interest to this chapter is Tertullian’s claim, based on 1 Timothy 5.10, of a refusal to admit a woman into the order of widows if she had been married more than once. Later, I will discuss in more detail the criteria for admittance into the order of widows but at this point, Tertullian’s reference to an *ordo* and the indication that individuals could be refused admittance to this order suggests that there was an established and well-defined group of widows.

This is further supported by a passage in *De monogamia* 11 in which Tertullian criticizes the laxity of non-Montanist Christians who allow remarriage after the death of a spouse. He writes: “Grant, now, that you marry ‘in the Lord,’ in accordance with the law and the apostle- if, notwithstanding, you care even about this-with what face do you request (the solemnizing of) a matrimony which is unlawful to those of whom you request it; of a monogamist bishop, of presbyters and deacons bound by the same solemn engagement, of widows whose order (*sectam*) you have in your own person refused?”<sup>37</sup> In this passage, Tertullian once again suggests that there is a distinct group within the church for widows. However, rather than using the word *ordo*, Tertullian uses the word *secta*. Rankin makes a plausible suggestion that Tertullian used *secta*, rather than *ordo*, in order to distinguish the widows’ order from the sacerdotal orders listed alongside the widows.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, a less obvious example of Tertullian making a reference to a specific order of widows can be found in *De praescriptione haereticorum*: “But what if a bishop, if a deacon, if a widow, if a virgin, if a doctor, if even a martyr, have fallen from the rule (of faith), will heresies on that account appear to possess the truth?”<sup>39</sup> Although Tertullian does not use *ordo* or *secta* to refer to the widows, the fact that he lists them alongside other formal orders, such

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<sup>36</sup> *Ad uxorem* 1.7.4.

<sup>37</sup> *De monogamia* 11.1.

<sup>38</sup> Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church*, p. 177.

<sup>39</sup> *De praescriptione haereticorum* 3.5.

as bishop and deacon, may suggest that he considered widows as belonging to a formal *ordo* or *secta*.

Furthermore, if one looks at the context of this passage it is evident that Tertullian regarded the widows as a prestigious group of women within the early Christian communities. *De praescriptione haereticorum* is concerned with how Christians are to deal with the arguments of the heretics. In chapter three, from which the above passage is taken, Tertullian is addressing the issue of when supposedly “orthodox” Christians fall into heresy. He claims that although it is common for individuals with weaker characters to fall into heresy, eminent individuals are also capable of falling into heresy. He points to the scriptural *exempla* of David, Saul and Solomon who, although considered favoured by God, fell into sin. Next, Tertullian asks what happened if eminent people in his own day fell prey to heretical teaching: “How comes it to pass, (they ask), that this woman or that man, who were the most faithful, the most prudent, and the most approved (*usitatissimi*) in the church, have gone over to the other side?”<sup>40</sup> It is at this point that Tertullian lists widows along with bishops, deacons and other groups as examples of eminent people within the Christian community. Thus, it would seem that the widows had a prestigious position and were highly regarded among the early Christians.

### Requirements.

There are several passages which speak of the criteria which widows must fulfil in order to be granted admittance into the *ordo*. These criteria are based on those set out in 1 Timothy 5.9-10, a passage which Tertullian alludes to in *Ad uxorem* 1.7.4 quoted above. The conditions set out in 1 Timothy 5.9-10 for official enrolment in the order of widows are as follows: “Let a widow be put on the list if she is not less than sixty years old and has been married only once; she must be well attested for her good works, as one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the saints’ feet, helped the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way”.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *De praescriptione haereticorum* 3.2.

<sup>41</sup> 1 Timothy 5.9-10. Modern scholars have questioned Paul’s authorship of 1 Timothy. See for example, B. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 393 and R.F. Collins, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: A Commentary* (London: Westminster John Knox Press 2004), p. 4.

As already noted above, in *Ad uxorem* 1.7 Tertullian stipulates that only those women who have had one husband will be granted admittance into the order of widows. Tertullian emphasizes this criterion in *Ad uxorem* because it supported the rhetorical aim of the treatise, to dissuade his wife from remarrying after his death.

In *De virginibus velandis* 9 Tertullian highlights other criteria which are relevant to the rhetorical aim of that treatise. In chapter nine, Tertullian is criticizing a bishop's incorrect decision to induct a virgin into the order of widows. Tertullian is particularly perplexed by the contradiction involved in the existence of a "virgin-widow," (*virgo vidua*) something which he calls a monster (*monstrum*). By definition widows are women who have been married and virgins are women who have never been married. Thus, it is not possible for an individual to be both. Since it is a requirement to have been the wife of one husband, in other words married and not a virgin, the virgin-widow fails to satisfy the criteria needed for admittance.

However, Tertullian's main criticism of this virgin-widow seems to have been her age. From his comments in *De virginibus velandis* 9 it is clear that Tertullian considered it usual practice for a woman to be at least sixty years old before being admitted to the order of widows, and this conforms to Paul's criteria set out in 1 Timothy 5.<sup>42</sup> However, the virgin-widow was no more than twenty years old, and she was therefore far too young to meet the age criterion. Furthermore, Tertullian notes that it is usual for those elected to the order of widows to have been "mothers" (*matres*) and "educators of children" (*educatrices filiorum*) in order that their experiences equip them to help others, as well as proving themselves worthy through the testing they have endured.<sup>43</sup> In the context of *De virginibus velandis*, Tertullian's aim was to demonstrate that it was inappropriate to give the virgin-widow a seat with the widows because whereas the widows had proven themselves worthy of this honour through many years of testing, the virgin-widow had not.

In summary, it is clear from these passages in *Ad uxorem* and *De virginibus velandis* that Tertullian, following Paul, believed that specific criteria needed to be met before a woman

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<sup>42</sup> Although Tertullian does not state this, it seems that one of the reasons for stipulating a minimum age limit is to ensure that she will not look for another husband. This idea is found in the *Didascalia apostolorum*, a third century document, which states that a widow must be at least 50 years old: "in order that by reason of her years she may be removed from the thought of having another husband..." (*Didascalia apostolorum* 14).

<sup>43</sup> All of these requirements are based on 1 Timothy 5.9-10.



could be admitted to the order of widows. The candidate had to be at least sixty years old, married once, known for having educated her children well, and wise and sufficiently experienced to give good counsel. The very existence of these criteria suggests that there was some kind of formal order of widows into which a woman could be admitted if she met the requirements. Furthermore, the reluctance to concede too easy an entry into the order of widows indicates that it was a highly esteemed order. There was no guarantee of automatic admittance, and thus the widow had to prove herself worthy of the honour. In setting out certain criteria, based on 1 Timothy 5.9-10, Tertullian was able to preserve the distinct and special status of the order of widows.<sup>44</sup>

### The role of widows.

What was the function or role of women in the order of widows? The passages examined so far reveal little information about the role of widows. However, a passage in *De pudicitia* may give some indication of the widows' role. *De pudicitia* was concerned with how the church ought to deal with sinners and discusses at what point members should be expelled from the group. Tertullian is appalled by a bishop who has issued an edict detailing regulations for how fornication and adultery can be forgiven, and takes a tough line on sin and repentance. In the following passage, Tertullian describes a scene in which a penitent sinner is seeking forgiveness from all the assembled: "Why, do you yourself, when introducing into the church, for the purpose of melting the brotherhood by his prayers, the repentant adulterer, lead into the midst and prostrate him, all in haircloth and ashes, a compound of disgrace and horror, before the widows, before the elders (*ante viduas, ante presbyteros*), suing for the tears of all, licking the footprints of all, clasping the knees of all..."<sup>45</sup>

This passage suggests that the widows in Carthage sat as a group, separate from the laity, and with the presbyters. Scholars have noted the significance of this detail, claiming that it indicates that widows had a prestigious position within the early Christian communities.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Madigan and Osiek, *Ordained Women*, p. 179. Rankin has suggested that there may have been another, practical, reason for the setting out of criteria. He suggests that it may have been due to the strain on financial budgets of materially supporting the widows. (Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church*, p. 178).

<sup>45</sup> *De pudicitia* 13.7.

<sup>46</sup> Madigan and Osiek, *Ordained Women* p. 180. On the seating of the widows with the clergy, Hoffman has concluded: "This practice recognized that these women were involved in important ministries. They were not mere charity recipients". D.H. Hoffman, *The Status of Women and Gnosticism in Irenaeus and Tertullian*.

Furthermore, this seating of the widows with the clergy during the penitential service suggests that they were probably involved in the service in some way and thus performed an important ministry.

Evidence from two third century documents may offer further information about what women in the order of widows were expected to do, as well as roles which they were prohibited from performing. The *Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus* states that widows were not to perform any of the roles of the ordained clergy and were instead encouraged to spend their time in prayer: “But [the widow] shall not be ordained, because she does not offer the oblation nor has she a liturgical ministry. But ordination is for the clergy, on account of their ministry. But the widow is appointed for prayer, and this is a function of all Christians”.<sup>47</sup> These ideas are echoed in the *Didascalia apostolorum* which states that widows are not to teach or baptise but should dedicate their lives to prayer.<sup>48</sup> The author of the *Didascalia apostolorum* describes the ideal widow as follows: “But the widow who wishes to please God sits within her house, and meditates in the Lord by day and by night, without ceasing, at all times offering prayer and supplication, praying purely before the Lord, and receiving whatsoever she asketh...”<sup>49</sup> Scholars such as Malone have suggested that the frequency with which widows were admonished for performing tasks such as teaching and baptising suggests that this is what the widows were in fact doing.<sup>50</sup> Thus, it may well be that documents such as the *Apostolic Tradition* and the *Didascalia* were prescriptive rather than descriptive. However, it is clear that teaching, baptising and other clerical roles were not the intended and official function of the order of widows, even if some widows were doing these things.

Based on her analysis of the *Didascalia*, Karen Torjesen has argued that by the third century widows had a prominent role in the disciplinary procedures of the Christian community.<sup>51</sup> Torjesen claims that a sinner would appear before a public hearing and if the penitent was deemed to be in need of repentance, the penitent would be assigned a period of fasting and prayer. After this period the penitent would be readmitted to the community. Torjesen claims that the widow had an active involvement in the process for not only did she fast and pray on

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Studies in Women and Religion, Volume 36. (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), p. 164 as cited by Madigan and Osiek, *Ordained Women*, p. 180.

<sup>47</sup> *The Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus* 11.

<sup>48</sup> *Didascalia apostolorum* 14-15.

<sup>49</sup> *Didascalia apostolorum* 15.

<sup>50</sup> M.T. Malone, *Women and Christianity* (Blackrock, Co. Dublin: Columba Press, 2000), p. 129.

<sup>51</sup> K.J Torjesen, *When Women were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995), p. 146.

behalf of the penitents, but she also played a part in restoring them to fellowship within the community. Because of the limited information in Tertullian's corpus, it is impossible to know with any certainty if the widows within Tertullian's community had as active a role in the penitential service as that described by Torjesen. Torjesen's theory would explain, however, why the widows sat with the presbyters during the penitential service as indicated in *De pudicitia* 13.7.

### **Feminist Considerations.**

Based on the passages discussed above, it seems that there existed within Tertullian's Christian community an official and well-defined order of widows for women, of which Tertullian wholly approved. In fact, the passages suggest that the order of widows, and therefore the women who were members of that order, were held in high regard by Tertullian. Indeed, the very existence of criteria (based on 1 Timothy 5) for enrolment to the order of widows suggests that the order, and its members, were highly respected.

Some scholars have even suggested that through the order of widows, women could become part of the clergy. Madigan and Osiek, for example, have claimed that by using the term *ordo*, when referring to widows, Tertullian implies that widows are part of the clergy although not ordained.<sup>52</sup> Whilst I do not think such a conclusion can be drawn on the basis of Tertullian's one explicit use of *ordo* to describe the group of widows, based on their seating position during the penitential service it is evident that the widows were ranked above the laity, and perhaps even shared a status which was equal to that of the sacerdotal orders.

Although Tertullian does not give any explicit information about the particular role played by the widows in the penitential service, the fact that they sat apart from the laity and with the presbyters suggests they had some involvement. Furthermore, if the role of widows within Tertullian's community was similar to that described by Torjesen it would mean that these women had a very important and influential ministry: "The pastoral ministry of correction was the most powerful ministry and the most contested in the third century, for implicit in confronting a sinner, assigning a period of fasting, and restoring a sinner to fellowship was the power to decide who was in the church and who was not".<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Madigan and Osiek, *Ordained Women*, p.5 and p. 181.

<sup>53</sup> Torjesen, *When Women were Priests*, p. 146.

## Virgins.

There has been a considerable amount of scholarship produced on the topic of virginity in the early church. Attention tends to focus on the fourth century which saw a major growth in the number of virgins and was the period when the ascetic movement took on real significance.<sup>54</sup> Some scholars have proposed that the ascetic ideal flourished due to the end of the persecution of Christians. Sebastian Brock, for example, claims that the ascetic movement developed in response to a degradation of the quality of the Christian life after the end of martyrdom. Brock explains: “[T]he ascetic is in many ways the successor of the martyr. To the early church the martyr represented an ideal, and after the end of the persecutions, when this ideal was no longer attainable, it was replaced by that of the ascetic, whose whole life was in fact often regarded in terms of a martyrdom”.<sup>55</sup>

However, the ideal of virginity cannot be solely explained by the end of martyrdom for, as a number of scholars have noted, there is evidence for the existence of virgins even before the fourth century.<sup>56</sup> For example, writing in the first century, Clement of Rome alludes to those who practise chastity and Ignatius sends a personal greeting to virgins in his letter to the Smyrneans.<sup>57</sup> There may even be evidence that as early as the third century there was already some kind of recognized category of virgins within the church and perhaps some form of consecration by which virgins became members of such a group.<sup>58</sup>

I propose that although less obvious than the order of widows, there are some passages in Tertullian’s corpus which suggest that there existed virgins who were part of a prestigious

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<sup>54</sup> See for example V. Burrus, “Word and Flesh: The Bodies and Sexuality of Ascetic Women in Christian Antiquity” in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 10 (1994), p. 33. Malone, *Women and Christianity*, p. 148. E. A. Castelli, “Virginity and its Meaning for Women’s Sexuality in Early Christianity” in A.J. Levine (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Patristic Literature*, p. 77.

<sup>55</sup> S. P. Brock, “Early Syrian Asceticism” *Numen* 20 (1973), p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Burrus, “Word and Flesh” p. 33. Mary Malone has noted that we know very little about these third century virgins and there may well have been very little to distinguish them from other young women. (Malone, *Women and Christianity*, p. 147-148). Castelli has noted that treatises and homilies on virginity and renunciation had their origins in the third century in Africa and seem to have become a favourite of writers in the fourth century and afterwards. (Castelli, “Virginity and its Meaning for Women’s Sexuality”, p. 74) See also J.A. McNamara “Sexual Equality and the Cult of Virginity in Early Christian Thought” in *Feminist Studies* Vol. 3 (1976), p. 152

<sup>57</sup> Clement of Rome, *Epistola 1 ad Corinthios* 38.2 and Ignatius, *Epistola ad Smyrnaeos* 13.1. See also, Ignatius, *Epistola ad Polycarpum* 5.2 and Polycarp, *Epistola ad Philippenses* 5.3.

<sup>58</sup> See for example Cyprian’s *De habitu virginum* 4.24.

and recognized group, albeit a less formal and well-defined version than can be found in the fourth century and beyond.<sup>59</sup>

Firstly, in *De praescriptione haereticorum* 3.5, cited above, Tertullian lists virgins among the other ecclesiastical orders, such as bishops, deacons and widows. Whilst Tertullian does not explicitly mention an order of virgins, the fact that they are listed with other recognized orders may indicate that there was an order of virgins. At the very least, this passage points to the existence of virgins in second century Carthage and it is clear that these virgins were held in high esteem since Tertullian includes them alongside other eminent groups of the Christian communities in which Tertullian was immersed.

Secondly, in a number of passages Tertullian use the image of spiritual marriage when talking about virgins. For example, in *De resurrectione carnis* Tertullian asks: “How many voluntary eunuchs are there, how many virgins wedded to Christ...”<sup>60</sup> Similarly in *De virginibus velandis* Tertullian, addressing virgins, writes: “For you are promised in marriage to Christ to whom you have surrendered your flesh, to him you have pledged your maturity. Walk according to the will of your groom. Christ it is who commands both the brides of others and wedded women to be veiled, [and] certainly [he commands] his own much more”.<sup>61</sup> This passage is paralleled in *De oratione* 22.9: “You do well in falsely assuming the married character, if you veil your head; nay, you do not seem to assume it falsely, for you *are* wedded to Christ: to Him you have surrendered your body; act as becomes your Husband's discipline. If He bids the brides of others to be veiled, His own, of course, much more”. Rankin has suggested that the language of being “wedded to Christ” suggests that there was a formal process of admission by which members of the “order” were said to marry Christ.<sup>62</sup> Whilst it is impossible to deduce from these passages conclusive evidence for an order of virgins, the image of a virgin’s spiritual marriage to Christ suggests that there were women who dedicated themselves to Christ with some sort of vow of lifelong virginity. This

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<sup>59</sup> In *De exhortatione castitatis* 1 Tertullian claims that virginity can be classified under three species. The first species is virginity from one's birth; the second is virginity within marriage by mutual consent; and the third is virginity in widowhood, referred to as monogamy by Tertullian. I am primarily interested with those passages which refer to the first type of virgins. I will also draw on passages about other types of virginity in order to construct a fuller picture about the practice of life-long virgins.

<sup>60</sup> *De resurrectione carnis* 61.6.

<sup>61</sup> *De virginibus velandis* 16 .4.

<sup>62</sup> Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church*, p. 179.

state of being espoused to Christ rendered the virgin sacred and unavailable to any other marriage partner.<sup>63</sup>

Dunn has pointed to a passage in *De exhortatione castitatis* in which, he claims, Tertullian makes reference to an order of virgins.<sup>64</sup> The passage reads: “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!”<sup>65</sup> However, unlike Dunn I can see no clear evidence of a reference to an order of virgins. Rather, it seems to me that Tertullian is referring to the sacerdotal orders of bishop, deacon and presbyter as well as the order of widows. Tertullian’s comment about the continence of men and women who occupy a position in an order (bishop, presbyter, deacon or widow) is a reference to the requirement to be monogamous (married only once throughout a lifetime) before admission to one of these orders will be granted.<sup>66</sup> This reading becomes more plausible when one looks at the wider context of the chapter and treatise. Tertullian’s main objective in *De exhortatione castitatis* is to dissuade a recently widowed (male) friend from remarrying. In chapter thirteen, from which the above passage is taken, Tertullian points to a number of pagan examples of single-marriage which demonstrate that monogamy was held in high esteem. He then turns to Christian examples of monogamy. Although Tertullian does not name individual Christians, by claiming that men and women in ecclesiastical orders owe their position to continence, he reminds his audience of the prerequisite of monogamy for entrance into these orders. In so doing, Tertullian elevates the status of remaining single after the death of one’s spouse, and thus makes it a more appealing option for the widower whom he is addressing.

### The role of virgins.

The scarcity and vagueness of references to virgins means that it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions about the role of virgins. Rankin has suggested that their role may simply have been to be an exemplary model of Christian holiness: “Their very existence is eloquent

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<sup>63</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, p. 274.

<sup>64</sup> Dunn, *Tertullian* p. 140.

<sup>65</sup> *De exhortatione castitatis* 13.4.

<sup>66</sup> See *Ad uxorem* 1.7.4 and *De monogamia* 11.7.

testimony to Christian holiness and to union with Christ”.<sup>67</sup> However, Rankin does not provide any reasons or evidence for this conclusion and his theory may well be influenced by later patristic concepts about virginity.

From the passages discussed above, there is only one potential clue about Tertullian’s view of the role of virgins. In *De resurrectione carnis* 61.6 cited above, Tertullian uses the virgin as a model of the resurrected state. As I noted earlier in chapter six, Tertullian’s aim in *De resurrectione carnis* 61 was to demonstrate that even if the sexual organs will not be used for procreation in the resurrection, they will still be part of the resurrected body. Tertullian points to example of virgins and eunuchs who, even in this present life, possess sexual organs even though they do not utilize their procreative function. Tertullian concludes that if individuals here on earth possess sexual organs which are not used for procreation, so too in the resurrection individuals will retain their sexual organs even though the function will have ceased altogether. Based on *De resurrectione carnis* 61 one may assume that, for Tertullian, the role of the virgin is to be a model and image of the resurrected body, since the virgin lives out the future reality of possessing sexual organs whose procreative function remains inactive. By extension, the virgin is a model of the heavenly life—a symbol of hope for all Christians. On the other hand, it may well be that Tertullian is simply using the example of virgins as a rhetorical device, because they support his arguments in this particular context.

### **Feminist considerations.**

In a society where women were valued primarily for their reproductive function Tertullian’s praise for virgins indicates that he accepted that a woman’s value went beyond the limited roles of wife and mother. Burrus has erroneously claimed that the existence of female virgins was “a source of distinct unease” for Tertullian pointing to a passage in *De virginibus velandis* where Tertullian speaks of a “third sex”.<sup>68</sup> As I discussed in chapter six, Burrus has misread Tertullian’s reference to a “third sex” and has wrongly assumed that Tertullian was speaking about virgins. On the contrary, Tertullian was claiming that the definition of woman includes the category of virgin and thus the virgin is not a third sex. Indeed, far from being a source of unease, virgins were held in high esteem by Tertullian and this most apparent in *De*

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<sup>67</sup> Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church*, p. 179.

<sup>68</sup> Burrus, “Word and Flesh”, p. 33.

*praescriptione haereticorum* 3.5 where Tertullian includes virgins among a list of other prestigious and exemplary Christians.

As discussed in the introduction to part three of this thesis, some feminists have viewed the ascetic movement and women's choice of virginity as a positive development in early Christian history because it provided women with opportunities to pursue things otherwise not open to them. Tertullian does not discuss the advantages of life-long virginity for women. However, in *De exhortatione castitatis* he does highlight the spiritual benefits of remaining celibate after the death of one's spouse. The primary advantage of remaining unmarried according to Tertullian is that an individual is provided with the opportunity for spiritual growth.<sup>69</sup> Tertullian claims that without the distractions of marriage, a Christian could be completely devoted to spiritual activities: "[An unmarried man] savours spiritually. If he is making prayer to the Lord, he is near heaven. If he is bending over the Scriptures, he is 'wholly in them'. If he is singing a psalm, he satisfies himself. If he is adjuring a demon, he is confident in himself..."<sup>70</sup> Although in this passage Tertullian is addressing a male friend, recently widowed, one may assume that Tertullian would highlight the same benefits for unmarried females. Indeed, in *Ad uxorem* 1.3 Tertullian briefly alludes to the spiritual advantage to be gained from remaining unmarried after the death of a spouse, although he does not give as many details as we find in *De exhortatione castitatis*. Following Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 7.34, Tertullian claims that whereas the married woman has to think about the needs of her husband, the unmarried woman can be focussed fully on spiritual concerns.<sup>71</sup> Although these arguments relate to second marriages, one can assume that Tertullian would highlight similar advantages if discussing life-long virginity.

### **Prophetesses.**

The Montanist emphasis on the on-going function of the Holy Spirit gave rise to the importance of the role of the prophet. The Montanists acknowledged that prophetic visions were given to women as well as men, and two of the co-founders of Montanism, Priscilla and

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<sup>69</sup> *De exhortatione castitatis* 10.

<sup>70</sup> *De exhortatione castitatis* 10.

<sup>71</sup> *Ad uxorem* 1.3. In 1 Corinthians 7.34 Paul writes: "And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband" (NRSV).



Maximilla, exercised a ministry as female prophets.<sup>72</sup> Tertullian's sympathy with Montanism enabled him to acknowledge the authority of female prophets within his (present-day) church. In addition to a passing reference to a woman's right to prophesy in *Adversus Marcionem* 5, there are several passages in which Tertullian describes specific instances of women prophesying.<sup>73</sup>

In two of these passages Tertullian identifies the prophetess as Prisca. The first passage comes from *De exhortatione castitatis* 10.5. As noted above, Tertullian's aim in *De exhortatione castitatis* was to dissuade a recently widowed friend from remarrying. In chapter ten, Tertullian discusses the spiritual advantages of remaining sexually continent after the death of one's spouse. Having already drawn on passages from the Hebrew Scriptures and Paul's letters which emphasize the spiritual value of sexual continence, Tertullian points to a prophecy of Prisca which speaks of the importance of purity (sexual abstinence): "[T]hrough the holy prophetess (*prophetidem*) Prisca the Gospel is thus preached, that the holy minister knows how to minister sanctity. 'For purity,' says she, 'is harmonious, and they see visions; and, turning their face downward, they even hear manifest voices, as salutary as they are withal secret'". In this passage Tertullian seems to link purity, or sexual abstinence, with holiness and the receiving of prophetic revelations.<sup>74</sup> Although not explicitly stated, Tertullian seems to be suggesting that prophetic revelations are experienced by those who are spiritually mature, and this is most likely to be found in those who have been married once only. Thus, Tertullian uses Prisca's prophecy to make his argument about not remarrying more persuasive. Tertullian's appeal to Prisca's prophecy in *De exhortatione castitatis* 10.5 is particularly notable because he seems to place the authority of a woman's prophecy on an equal par to the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures and Paul's letters.<sup>75</sup> This is evident because, as noted above, Tertullian draws on the Hebrew Scriptures, Paul's letters and

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<sup>72</sup> For a discussion of prophetesses in Montanism see C. Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 151-174.

<sup>73</sup> In *Adversus Marcionem* 5.8.11 Tertullian makes a brief reference to 1 Corinthians 11.5, a passage in which Paul speaks of a woman's right to prophesy. As noted earlier, Tertullian's aim in *Adversus Marcionem* 5.8 was to demonstrate that Paul uses the Hebrew Scriptures as an authoritative source. Regarding a woman's right to prophesy, Paul claims that the gifts of the Spirit (described by Paul) had been foretold in the Hebrew Scriptures. The continuing existence of prophets (and prophetesses) is evidence of the presence of the Spirit. Although the issue is not his primary concern, it is clear that Tertullian accepts Paul's claim that a woman has the right to prophesy.

<sup>74</sup> Scholars are generally agreed that by purity Tertullian means sexual abstinence. See for example W. Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy and Polluted Sacraments: Ecclesiastical and Imperial Reactions to Montanism* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 113 and T. Berger, *Gender Difference and the Making of Liturgical History: Lifting a Veil on Liturgy's Past* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), p. 116.

<sup>75</sup> Madigan and Osiek, *Ordained Women*, p.179.

Prisca's prophecy to support his argument that it is better to remain unmarried after the death of one's spouse.

The second passage in which Tertullian identifies the prophetess as Prisca is in *De resurrectione carnis* 11. As noted in chapter six, Tertullian's aim in *De resurrectione carnis* was to defend the goodness of the flesh against those who denied its worthiness to partake in the resurrection. Prisca's prophecy in *De resurrectione carnis* 11 pertains to Tertullian's opponents who vilify the flesh: "It is a shrewd saying which the Paraclete utters concerning these persons by the mouth of the prophetess Prisca: 'They are carnal, and yet they hate the flesh' (*carnes sunt et carnem oderunt*)". By highlighting the fact that his opponents possess the very flesh they hate, Tertullian suggests that his opponents' repugnance for the flesh is absurd.<sup>76</sup> Thus, Tertullian uses the prophecy of Prisca to attack his opponents and thus undermine the credibility of their arguments. In so doing, Tertullian suggests that Prisca's prophecy is authoritative.

There are two further passages in which Tertullian endorses the authority of a prophetess but in these passages Tertullian does not establish the identity of the prophetess. Firstly, in *De virginibus velandis* 17.6 Tertullian speaks of "a certain sister of ours" who received a revelation from an angel about the required dimensions of the veil. Although Tertullian's arguments in *De virginibus velandis* are primarily aimed at virgins, in *De virginibus velandis* 17 Tertullian turns his attention to married women. It is clear from this passage that certain married women were trying to circumvent the obligation to wear a veil by adopting a small headscarf which only provided a partial covering. Tertullian urges these married women to wear a veil which covers the neck as well as the head, and he uses the revelation given to the prophetess to support his argument. In so doing, Tertullian once again use the words of a prophetess as an authoritative argument to support his case.

Secondly, in *De anima* 9 Tertullian describes the revelations given to a prophetess about the characteristics of the soul. In *De anima* 5-9 Tertullian's aim is to prove that the soul has a

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<sup>76</sup> Tertullian used a similar argument in *De carne Christi* 4 when he mocked Marcion for denigrating the very processes of birth by which Marcion himself was born: "This natural object of reverence you, Marcion, bespittle: yet how were you born? You hate man during his birth: how can you love any man?...But it is your own concern if you are an object of displeasure to yourself, or if you were born in some other way".

corporeal nature, by which Tertullian means that the soul has a body of its own.<sup>77</sup> Tertullian's insistence on the corporeality of the soul was based on his understanding of ontology which maintains that everything that exists, and is thus characterized by a real and independent being, must be corporeal.<sup>78</sup> In chapters five and six Tertullian employs philosophical arguments to establish the corporeality of the soul, and in chapter seven Tertullian points to scriptural passages which support this position. Finally, in chapter nine Tertullian turns to the revelation given to the unnamed prophetess: "'Amongst other things,' says she, 'there has been shown to me a soul in bodily shape, and a spirit has been in the habit of appearing to me; not, however, a void and empty illusion, but such as would offer itself to be even grasped by the hand, soft and transparent and of an ethereal colour, and in form resembling that of a human being in every respect'..."<sup>79</sup> Tertullian argues that the characteristics of shape and colour are inherent in every bodily substance, and since the soul possesses these characteristics (as the vision of the prophetess confirms), the soul must be a corporeal substance. It is clear, therefore, that Tertullian uses the prophetic vision of the prophetess to support his argument in favour of the soul's corporality.

#### Women may prophesy but not teach-Is Tertullian inconsistent?

As a number of scholars have highlighted, there is an apparent inconsistency between Tertullian's opposition to a woman performing a teaching role and his claim that some women have the authority to prophesy.<sup>80</sup> I propose that there are two possible explanations which could resolve this apparent contradiction in Tertullian's thought.

Firstly, a distinction can be made between teaching which took place in a public setting and prophetic revelations which occurred in the private sphere. In *De anima* 9.4 Tertullian gives some important details about the circumstances of prophetic revelations: "We have now

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<sup>77</sup> For a detailed discussion on Tertullian's theory of the soul's corporeality see P. Kitzler, "Tertullian's Concept of the Soul and his Corporealistic Ontology" (Seminar paper given at The Warburg Institute, University College London, November 2008 –paper available on [www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu)).

<sup>78</sup> This idea is expressed succinctly by Tertullian in *De carne Christi* 11: "But since [the soul] does exist it must of necessity possess something by which it exists. If it does possess something by which it exists, this must be its body. Everything that exists is a body of some kind or another. Nothing is incorporeal except what does not exist".

<sup>79</sup> *De anima* 9.4.

<sup>80</sup> Torjesen, *When Women were Priests*, p. 159. Madigan and Osiek, claim that whilst Tertullian generally, and often vehemently, opposes women exercising a teaching role, he does recognize here that some women (like Prisca), under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, do utter authoritative prophecies (Madigan and Osiek, *Ordained Women*, p. 179).

amongst us a sister whose lot it has been to be favoured with sundry gifts of revelation, which she experiences in the Spirit by ecstatic vision amidst the sacred rites of the Lord's day in the church...After the people are dismissed at the conclusion of the sacred services, she is in the regular habit of reporting to us whatever things she may have seen in vision".<sup>81</sup> Based on the information given in this passage it would seem that although the prophetesses received their prophecies during the liturgical services, they only spoke about the prophetic revelations in private, after the service had ended.<sup>82</sup>

A distinction between the public and private sphere has been a central theme in Torjesen's work on women's roles in the early church. Torjesen argued that in the early church there was a gender ideology which divided society into two domains, the *polis* (city), a male domain, and the *oikos* (household), a female domain.<sup>83</sup> Torjesen proposes that Tertullian regarded the church as a public institution and since women belonged to the private sphere, he thus opposed women taking on certain roles within the church.<sup>84</sup> Based on this theory, Torjesen claims that the main reason for Tertullian's opposition to women teaching is that in so doing they were entering into public discussions, something which was the sole prerogative of men.<sup>85</sup> Although Torjesen acknowledges the paradox in Tertullian accepting women prophesying whilst rejecting women teaching, she does not offer a reason for this. Based on Torjesen's theory of the public-private sphere distinction, and taking into account the information given in *De anima* 9, I propose that Tertullian accepted the legitimacy of prophecies from women because they were disclosed after the service, in a private setting.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *De anima* 9.4.

<sup>82</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society* p. 15. Scholars such as Dunn and Butler have put forward an interesting theory. They claim that both Montanist and non-Montanist Christians attended the main service together, and after it had ended the Montanist group stayed behind to hear about the revelations. Dunn writes: "We may presume that those who remained to listen to her were Montanist devotees. If that be the case, then this is another piece of evidence to suggest that Montanists were not schismatics; they participated in the eucharistic liturgy with their fellow Christians before holding their own gathering afterwards". (Dunn, 'Rhetoric and Tertullian's *De virginibus velandis*' in *Vigiliae Christianae* Vol. 59, No. 1 (February, 2005), p. 20). See also R.D Butler, *The New Prophecy and New Visions: Evidence of Montanism in The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), p. 25. Whilst there is nothing in the text which gives absolute certainty to this theory, it is at the very least a plausible explanation and if true, would offer an alternative view to the idea that the Montanists were a schismatic group. Another possible explanation could be that prophetesses were not allowed to speak about their revelations in public so they and a few select church leaders (priests, deacons and teachers, perhaps) stayed behind to discuss the revelations.

<sup>83</sup> Torjesen, *When Women were Priests*, p. 6.

<sup>84</sup> Torjesen, *When Women were Priests*, p. 160.

<sup>85</sup> Torjesen, *When Women were Priests*, pp. 158-161.

<sup>86</sup> Torjesen notes that when positively represented, a woman who prophesied was pictured as doing so in a private or domestic sphere. (Torjesen "The Early Christian Orans", p. 42).

A second reason why Tertullian allows women to prophesy but denies them the right to teach is based on the issue of authority. A number of scholars have pointed out that women were allowed to prophesy because they were not speaking by their own authority, but rather the prophetess acted as the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit. Richard Hanson, for example, explained: “[Women] may prophesy, presumably because this was the Holy Spirit speaking and not the woman”.<sup>87</sup> It is clear that, for Tertullian, the words of the prophetess carried authority because they were accorded a divinely inspired origin and status.<sup>88</sup> This is most evident in the passage from *De resurrectione carnis* 11, cited above, where Tertullian explicitly states that the Holy Spirit speaks through the mouth of Prisca. In *De anima* 9 Tertullian claims that the prophetess experiences the revelations “in the Spirit”. Finally, in *De virginibus velandis* 17 Tertullian proposes that the revelation was given by an angel. Whilst in this last example the Holy Spirit is not the direct source of the prophecy, it is clear that revelation does not originate from the prophetess but rather from a heavenly origin. In short, although Tertullian refused women the right to teach he accepted that since the words of the prophetesses were accorded divinely inspired status, they thus carried authority.

### **Feminist considerations.**

It is clear that Tertullian recognized that women had an important role to play as prophetesses and this may offer a challenge to some of the negative assumptions about Tertullian’s view of women. Klawiter has suggested that Tertullian’s misogyny would not allow him to grant women an active role within the early Christian communities and has thus concluded that Tertullian’s Montanism must have been different to the earlier Asian Montanism which was more open to women having a role in prophetic ministry.<sup>89</sup> However, scholars such as Dunn and Hoffman have noted that Klawiter does not consider the possibility that it is Tertullian’s

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<sup>87</sup> R.P.C. Hanson, *Studies in Christian Antiquity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, Ltd., 1985), p. 137. Patricia Wilson-Kastner (ed.) claims that: “the women prophets are the vehicles of the Holy Spirit, to be listened to with respect, but are not given a role in the hierarchy of Tertullian's system...” (P. Wilson-Kastner (ed.), *A Lost Tradition: Women Writers of the Early Church* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981), p. xii). See also Madigan and Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church*, p. 179.

<sup>88</sup> As Madigan and Osiek have observed: “While Tertullian generally, and often vehemently, opposes women exercising a teaching role, he does recognize... that some women (like Prisca), under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, do utter authoritative prophecies”. (Madigan and Osiek, *Ordained Women*, p. 179).

<sup>89</sup> F.C. Klawiter, “The Role of Martyrdom and Persecution in Developing the Priestly Authority of Women in Early Christianity: A Case Study of Montanism,” in *Church History* 4.9 (1980). Klawiter writes: “Tertullian is remembered as both a Montanist and a notorious misogynist. Given the boldness and originality of Tertullian's thought, however, it would be perilous to assume that Tertullian's view of women was identical to that originally held by the Montanists of Asia Minor”, (p. 251).

misogyny which needs re-examining.<sup>90</sup> I propose that Tertullian's depiction of prophetesses challenges the assumption that he was a misogynist for the following reasons.

Firstly, the passages from Tertullian's corpus which discuss the prophecies of certain women indicate that Tertullian not only accepted that women could have a prophetic ministry, but more importantly, the prophetess was held in high regard by Tertullian. D'Angelo has claimed: "The long and extremely reverent description in *De anima* of the process by which one woman prophet received her revelations leaves little room for doubting Tertullian's esteem for the women prophets of Carthage".<sup>91</sup> Whilst I agree with D'Angelo that Tertullian's description of the prophecy in *De anima* demonstrates his admiration for female prophets, I propose that Tertullian's use of women's prophecies in his various treatises are even more indicative of the value he gave to them.

This brings me to the second point: although women were not allowed to teach directly, Tertullian used the prophecies of women to support his own teaching. In the four passages discussed above, it is clear that Tertullian employs the women's prophecies to support different arguments in each individual treatise. In *De virginibus velandis* 17.6, for example, Tertullian uses the revelation of the prophetess to teach virgins that their veils should provide an adequate covering. Similarly, in *De anima* 9 Tertullian uses the prophetess' vision to support his argument that the soul is corporeal, whilst simultaneously illustrating what this means. Thus, whilst women are prohibited from teaching openly, indirectly, through their prophecies, women could instruct their fellow Christians.

Finally, Tertullian's use of women's prophecies to support his arguments indicates that he believed that their prophecies were authoritative. As noted above, Tertullian seemed to give prophecies the same authority as scripture. Evidence from external sources highlights the perceived authority of the prophetess. Tertullian's contemporary Hippolytus, for example, writing in the early third century, complained that the Montanists exalted the authority of women prophets over that of Scripture.<sup>92</sup> In fact, Hippolytus' main complaint seems to be that

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<sup>90</sup> Dunn, 'Rhetoric and Tertullian's *De virginibus velandis*' p.2 and Hoffman, *The Status of Women*, p. 148.

<sup>91</sup> M.R. D'Angelo, "Veils, Virgins, and the Tongues of Men and Angels," in E. Castelli (ed.) *Women, Gender and Religion: A Reader* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 406.

<sup>92</sup> "[These Montanists] allege that they have learned something more through [these prophetesses] than from law, and prophets and the Gospels. But they magnify these wretched women above the apostles and every gift of Grace, so that some of them presume to assert that there is in them something superior to Christ...[These

Montanist prophetesses challenged and undermined the teachings in scripture and the authority of the apostles. However, for Tertullian there is no contention between the revelations in scripture and the revelations of the prophetesses. Rather, the revelations of the prophetess support those found in scripture. As noted above, the authority of the prophetess is based on the divine origin of their prophecies. However, whilst a woman does not speak by her own authority, it is nevertheless significant that Tertullian recognized that women could be used by God as vehicles of his prophetic message. The prophetess was in effect “speaking for God”.

### **Martyrdom.**

Whilst the role of the martyr was never a church ministry in any formal sense, martyrdom was held in the highest regard by Tertullian, for the martyr was considered to be the ideal Christian.<sup>93</sup> Tertullian believed that every Christian should be prepared to die for the faith and in *Ad Scapulam* 5 he highlights the variety and multitude of Christians who are prepared to accept martyrdom: “[W]hat will you make of so many thousands, of such a multitude of men and women, persons of every sex and every age and every rank, when they present themselves before you?”<sup>94</sup> This passage clearly indicates that martyrdom was open to women as well as men and this is confirmed in a number of passages throughout Tertullian’s corpus.

### **Female martyrs.**

In *De fuga in persecutione* Tertullian is clearly addressing women when he writes: “...seek not to die on bridal beds, nor in miscarriages, nor in soft fevers, but to die the martyr's death, that [God] may be glorified who has suffered for you”.<sup>95</sup> In the ancient world, women very often died during pregnancy and childbirth and Tertullian plays on this to encourage Christian women to seek a more glorious death in the form of martyrdom. In this treatise it is clear that Tertullian expects the same act of courage in the face of martyrdom from women as from men and thus challenges the assumption that martyrdom would be too much for women to endure.

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Montanists] introduce, however, the novelties of fasts, and feasts, and meals of parched food, and repasts of radishes, alleging that they have been instructed by women”. (Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 8.12)

<sup>93</sup> W.H.C. Friend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), p. 361.

<sup>94</sup> *Ad Scapulam* 5.2.

<sup>95</sup> *De fuga in persecutione* 9.3.

*Ad martyras* is an epistolary treatise written to console and encourage a group of male and female Christians who were awaiting martyrdom.<sup>96</sup> In *Ad martyras* 4, addressing a mixed group, Tertullian writes: “The flesh, perhaps, will dread the merciless sword, and the lofty cross, and the rage of the wild beasts, and that punishment of the flames, of all most terrible, and all the skill of the executioner in torture. But, on the other side, let the spirit set clearly before both itself and the flesh, how these things, though exceeding painful, have yet been calmly endured by many, and, have even been eagerly desired for the sake of fame and glory; and this not only in the case of men, but of women too, that you, O holy women, may be worthy of your sex”.<sup>97</sup>

In this passage Tertullian indicates that many people, including women, have been prepared to endure persecutions not for the Christian faith but for earthly glory. Tertullian lists a number of notable pagan women who have been willing to die for earthly glory. For example, he refers to a woman called Lucretia who stabbed herself in the presence of relatives, “to win praise for her chastity”. Likewise, he praises Dido, a woman who chose to be burned to death rather than remarry after the death of her husband. This use of pagan *exempla* is a rhetorical technique to encourage those Christians awaiting martyrdom. If pagans are willing to die for earthly glory, it follows that Christians should be all the more willing to die for God and heavenly glory.<sup>98</sup>

In a number of other treatises Tertullian points to the example of heroic Christian women who have acted with courage in the face of persecution or death. In *Ad nationes* 17 Tertullian points to the act of courage of a Christian woman who bit off her tongue rather than risk denying Christ. Tertullian uses this rather gruesome example to illustrate the unswerving fortitude of Christians, even when faced with death. In *Apologeticum* 50 Tertullian points to another example of a Christian woman who had recently been subjected to persecution in the form of sexual attack: “[B]ut very lately, in condemning a Christian woman to the *leno* (pimp) rather than to the *leo* (lion) you made confession that a taint on our purity is considered among us something more terrible than any punishment and any death”.<sup>99</sup> By

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<sup>96</sup> R.D. Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric and the Art of Tertullian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 117.

<sup>97</sup> *Ad martyras* 4.2-3.

<sup>98</sup> For a discussion on the theme of glory see Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric*, p. 117.

<sup>99</sup> *Apologeticum* 50.



highlighting the example of this woman, Tertullian once again indicates that Christian women are prepared to suffer persecution for the Christian faith.

In short, Tertullian acknowledges that women are as courageous as men in the face of persecution and death and thus challenges the assumption that martyrdom is too difficult for women. In several passages Tertullian uses women as exemplary models of courage in the face of martyrdom which he encourages others to emulate. It is clear therefore, that a woman's sex is in no way a disqualifying factor for what Tertullian considered to be the most glorious acts for a Christian.

### The *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*.

The *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, which has been widely studied by scholars, is a third century text containing the diary of a young woman named Vibia Perpetua, written whilst she was in prison awaiting execution.<sup>100</sup> In addition to the autobiographical material, the opening and closing sections of the *Passio* contain third-person narratives thought to be the work of an editor. Although it has been the subject of scholarly debate, I am persuaded that Tertullian is the editor and compiler of the *Passio*. As Heffernan has noted the editor of the *Passio* was a well-educated, devout Christian with a good knowledge of Scripture, and was sympathetic towards Montanism. He was someone who was familiar with ancient rhetorical practices and had the ability to apply flexibility to the standard rhetorical composition when needed.<sup>101</sup> All of these details seem to indicate that Tertullian was the editor.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, the philological character of the text suggests Tertullian's editorship for, as De Labriolle succinctly explained: "It is *his* style, *his* language, *his* phraseology..."<sup>103</sup> Finally, we can be sure that Tertullian was fully aware of the events recounted in Perpetua's

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<sup>100</sup> Kraemer claims that although the author claims to be writing in the first person, there is no guarantee of the authenticity and it was common for people in the ancient world to write something in someone else's name: "The editor's claim Perpetua wrote the prison narrative in her own hand does not insure its authenticity for the modern scholar". (R.S. Kraemer, "When is a Text about a Woman about a Woman: The Cases of Aseneth and Perpetua" A.J. Levine (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Mariology* (London: T and T Clark, 2005), p. 167)

<sup>101</sup> T.J. Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 9 and pp. 15 -17

<sup>102</sup> Heffernan claims that whilst all of these details suggest that Tertullian is the editor, there is no conclusive evidence to confirm beyond all doubt that he is the author. (Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua* p. 17).

<sup>103</sup> P. De Labriolle, *History and Literature of Christianity from Tertullian to Boethius* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1924), p. 104. Barnes has also noted stylistic similarities between the *Passio* and Tertullian's other treatises although he acknowledges that this alone does not guarantee that Tertullian was the editor, for someone could have imitated Tertullian's style. See, T.D. Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 80.

diary and greatly admired her for in *De anima* 55 he describes her as the “most heroic martyr” and recounts one of Perpetua’s visions.

### Rejection of conventional role of women.

In a number of passages in the *Passio*, the actions of Perpetua challenge the cultural assumptions about a woman’s role within two familial relations. Firstly, the conventional relationship between father and daughter is challenged.<sup>104</sup> In the course of her imprisonment, trial, and the events leading up to her martyrdom, Perpetua had several traumatic meetings with her father in which he tried to persuade her to be a “good” daughter by which he meant she renounce her faith, abandon the idea of martyrdom and return home to her family. For example, on one meeting he pleads with her: “Daughter...have pity on my grey beard-have pity on me your father...Do not abandon me to be the reproach of men...Give up your pride! You will destroy all of us! None of us will ever be able to speak freely again if anything happens to you”.<sup>105</sup> In spite of his earnest pleas to draw her back into the family, Perpetua rebels against paternal authority and opposes the cultural assumption that her role is to be a dutiful daughter. Furthermore, Perpetua in effect “teaches” her father, who was a pagan, that to be a Christian means being prepared to sacrifice one’s own life for Christ.

Perpetua’s rejection of parental authority is also manifest in a dream in which she treads on the head of a dragon.<sup>106</sup> According to a second-century handbook on the interpretation of dreams, venomous animals (including dragons) signify powerful men.<sup>107</sup> The head signifies parents since they are the cause of life.<sup>108</sup> Putting the two readings together, Perpetua’s trampling on the head of the dragon may be interpreted as a symbol of her trampling on the authority of her father, since the dragon signifies his personage.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> B. D. Shaw, “The Passion of Perpetua” *Past & Present*, No. 139 (May, 1993), p. 22.

<sup>105</sup> *Passio* 2.1.

<sup>106</sup> *Passio* 1.3.

<sup>107</sup> Artemidorus’ *Oneirocritica* documents the symbolism of a whole catalogue of objects and images. On serpents it says: “Venomous animals that are formidable, mighty, and powerful as, for example, the dragon, the basilisk, and the hollow oak viper signify powerful men” (*Oneirocritica* 4.55).

<sup>108</sup> Artemidorus argues elsewhere in *Oneirocritica* 1.35 that the head signifies parents in that both the head and parents are the cause of life.

<sup>109</sup> E.A. Castelli, “Female Martyrs” in J.M. Soskice and D. Lipton (ed.), *Feminism and Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 65. J.E. Salisbury, *Perpetua’s Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 100.

Another conventional relationship which is challenged in the *Passio* is that of mother and son. Inevitably, being imprisoned meant that Perpetua was separated from her son and in spite of her father urging Perpetua to abandon her pursuit of martyrdom for the sake of her son, Perpetua nevertheless decides to pursue that course of action. Perpetua has not abandoned her maternal responsibilities entirely, however. We are told that, concerned for the welfare of her son, she entrusts him to the care of her mother and brother. At several points in the *Passio* Perpetua claims that she asked for her son to be brought to the prison to be with her so she could resume her role as mother. At one point her father refuses to bring her son and she sees the miraculous drying-up of her breast-milk as confirmation that it was God's will for her to break the maternal ties with her son in the pursuit of martyrdom.<sup>110</sup> In giving up her son in favour of martyrdom, Perpetua renounced her maternal function and thus challenged the social expectations of women.

In summary, Perpetua detaches herself from two foundational relationships, the relationship with her father and with her son and the whole structure of the text shows these actions are approved of. This suggests that within the *Passio* there was a renegotiation or perhaps even the rejection of the conventional role of women within familial relations in favour of a higher calling to martyrdom.

#### Perpetua's power to forgive.

Many in the early church believed that the confessor-martyr was endowed with a special authority to grant absolution for sins.<sup>111</sup> By exercising this power to forgive, the martyr was able to restore a lapsed person back into the church. Since the power to forgive had traditionally been the prerogative of the bishop or presbyter, anyone who exercised such power was thereby exercising a ministerial power.

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<sup>110</sup> David Wilhite makes an interesting observation. He claims that the fact that Perpetua gives her child to her father is significant because it usurps normal kinship relationships. It would have been usual for the husband to take the son but Perpetua's husband is never mentioned in the text even though the *Passio* claims that she is newly married. Wilhite claims that even if Perpetua's husband is dead or awaiting death, his family would have the right to claim the child as their own, unless his entire paternal kinship network is also dead or absent. See D.E. Wilhite, *Tertullian the African: An anthropological reading of Tertullian's context and identities* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 2007), p. 89. Shaw has proposed that Perpetua's husband was hostile to her conversion to Christianity and thus had no issue with accepting the harsh actions of the Roman authorities. In that case, his absence from Perpetua's account is easily explicable. Perpetua had in effect rejected him and his views. (Shaw, "The Passion of Perpetua", p. 25).

<sup>111</sup> Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church* p. 181 and Klawiter, "Role of Martyrdom", p. 254.

Interestingly it seems that women martyrs also had the right to forgive sins and this can be supported with evidence from the *Passio*.<sup>112</sup> Through her prayer, Perpetua delivered the soul of her brother who died without baptism. One day whilst in prison Perpetua felt inspired to pray for her brother Dinocrates, who, at the age of seven, had died of cancer. That night she had a vision in which she saw Dinocrates, parched, dirty and thirsty, coming out of a dark place; there was a pool of water above him, just beyond his reach. There was a cancerous wound on his face, and Perpetua knew that her brother was still suffering. She awoke, confident that she could help him, and so, in her own words: "I prayed for him day and night, sighing and shedding tears, that he might be pardoned for me". A few days later Perpetua had another vision in which Dinocrates was washed clean, well dressed and refreshed. The cancerous wound had been healed and the pool of water was within his reach. Dinocrates was drinking from a golden bowl of water and although he drank as much as he wanted, the bowl remained full. After drinking his fill, Dinocrates played like a child. When she awoke, Perpetua believed that her vision was a sign that Dinocrates had been delivered from his punishment.<sup>113</sup> Thus, the *Passio* seems to indicate that it was Perpetua's intercessory prayers and tears which imparted to her brother the forgiveness of sins by the waters of baptism, the water which previously had been out of reach because he had died a pagan.<sup>114</sup>

If Tertullian was the editor of the *Passio* one can assume, based on the fact that the evidence in the *Passio* had not been removed, that Tertullian accepted that women martyrs had the power to forgive sins. In further support of this, there is a possible reference to this practice in *Ad martyras* 1.6: "Some, not able to find this peace in the Church, have been used to seek it from the imprisoned martyrs". Rankin suggests that the peace which Tertullian speaks of is the forgiveness of sins and the reconciliation of those who have lapsed to the church.<sup>115</sup>

However in *De pudicitia* 22.1 Tertullian is critical of the practice of the martyrs forgiving sins. Tertullian complains: "But you go so far as to lavish this 'power' [to forgive] upon martyrs withal! No sooner has any one, acting on a preconceived arrangement, put on the bonds, [bonds] moreover, which, in the nominal custody now in vogue, are soft ones- than adulterers beset him, fornicators gain access to him; instantly prayers echo around him; instantly pools of tears [from the eyes] of all the polluted surround him; nor are there any

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<sup>112</sup> Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy*, pp. 191-192.

<sup>113</sup> *Passio* 2.4.

<sup>114</sup> *Passio* 2.3-4.

<sup>115</sup> Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church*, p. 182.

who are more diligent in purchasing entrance into the prison than they who have lost [the fellowship of] the Church!”<sup>116</sup>

I propose that Tertullian’s criticism of the martyrs forgiving sins in this passage has to be understood in the wider rhetorical context of the treatise. As noted earlier, *De pudicitia* was concerned with the question of whether the sins of fornication and adultery can be forgiven. Tertullian thinks not and is disgusted with an edict, recently issued by a bishop, giving details about how the sins of fornication and adultery can be forgiven. Thus, in *De pudicitia* 22.1 Tertullian is criticising the type of sin which certain martyrs are being asked to absolve, and not the fact that martyrs have the power to absolve. Furthermore, Tertullian’s reference to the “soft bonds” and “nominal custody” in *De pudicitia* 22.1 suggests that the “martyrs” who were claiming to have the right to forgive the sins of fornication and adultery were not real martyrs. A real martyr would never want to encourage the sins of fornication and adultery by granting forgiveness. In short, Tertullian does not believe that these martyrs have the right or power to forgive the sins of adultery and fornication.

In summary, there are two passages from Tertullian’s corpus and evidence in the *Passio* which suggests that Tertullian acknowledged the martyr’s authority to forgive sins. The evidence from the *Passio* indicates that Perpetua’s intercessory prayers released her dead brother from his on-going suffering and brought forgiveness to him. This is significant because it suggests that Tertullian accepted that female martyrs also had the power to absolve individuals of their sins.

#### Perpetua’s transformation into a man.

In her final vision Perpetua goes to the arena to take on the role of an athlete.<sup>117</sup> During her victorious battle with an Egyptian gladiator, Perpetua is transformed into a man: “I was stripped, and became a man (*facta sum masculus*)”.<sup>118</sup> What is the significance of this transformation? Does it reflect the reality of a patriarchal society in which, to achieve power, Perpetua must see herself as male?<sup>119</sup> Scholars have offered numerous explanations and

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<sup>116</sup> *De pudicitia* 22.1.

<sup>117</sup> Castelli notes that the image of the athlete was a common trope in early Christian literature for an individual’s spiritual battle or struggle (Castelli, “Female Martyrs”, p.70).

<sup>118</sup> *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 3.2.

<sup>119</sup> Salisbury, *Perpetua’s Passion*, p. 108.

interpretations of this transformation. Robert, for example, has claimed that Perpetua's transformation into a man was based on a pragmatic reason. He argues that it was necessary for Perpetua to become male in order for her to be allowed to participate in the gladiatorial contest.<sup>120</sup>

Alternatively, a number of scholars have highlighted that "becoming male" was a common trope in Patristic texts which was used to signify the spiritual advancement of an individual.<sup>121</sup> As I noted in the introduction to part three, a woman who had chosen virginity was said to have become male because she had transcended her weak female nature. In other words, "becoming male" was a symbol of spiritual progress. In a similar way, Perpetua's transformation into a man can be seen as a sign of her spiritual progress which is accomplished through the act of martyrdom. Castelli, for example, has noted: "Perpetua's spiritual progress is marked by the social movement away from conventional female roles and by the physical movement from a female to a male body; these processes of transformation signify her increasingly holy status".<sup>122</sup>

I think the most likely explanation for Perpetua's transformation into a man has to do with the physical and spiritual attributes associated with being male. As Grace Jantzen has pointed out, "becoming male" was for Perpetua linked with having the courage, strength and spiritual integrity which was needed for the contest.<sup>123</sup> Perpetua's transformation into a man was a visible sign that Perpetua possessed the physical strength and moral courage needed for a victorious battle. This explanation fits in well with the concluding section of the *Passio* where Perpetua courageously directs the gladiator's sword to her throat and thus determines the moment of her death.<sup>124</sup> Through this act, Perpetua is an active and consenting participant in her martyrdom, rather a weak and passive victim.

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<sup>120</sup> L. Robert, "Une vision de Perpetue, martyre a Carthage en 203" *Comptes rendus de l'Academie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 1982, p. 256-58 cited by Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion*, pp.108-9 and p. 199 n.121.

<sup>121</sup> K. E. Børresen, "Recent and Current Research on Women in the Christian Tradition" in E.A. Livingstone (ed.), *Studia Patristica* 29 (Leuven, 1997), p. 228.

<sup>122</sup> Castelli, "Female Martyrs", p. 64

<sup>123</sup> G.M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 51. See also, A. Marjanen, "Male Women Martyrs: The Function of Gender-Transformation Language in Early Christian Martyrdom Accounts" in T. K. Seim and J. Økland (ed.), *Metamorphoses: Resurrection, Body and Transformative Practices in Early Christianity* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), p. 247.

<sup>124</sup> Marjanen, "Male Women Martyrs", p. 247.

In summary, although the image of “becoming man” is perhaps symptomatic of a patriarchal society, it does not necessarily suggest the presence of misogyny within the text. In fact, this image, although androcentric, is being used to say something wholly positive about Perpetua. In a society where men were assumed to be physically and spiritually stronger than women, it perhaps seemed appropriate to describe Perpetua’s physical and moral strength in terms of her becoming a man.

### **Feminist considerations.**

It is clear that not only did Tertullian accept that women could be martyrs, but moreover he expected it of them. Martyrdom provided an opportunity for the elevation of women and thus, as martyrs women were equal to men. Clark has commented: “The Church Fathers agreed that in martyrdom, no difference of sex obtained. Women proved just as strong in faith and resistant to the threats of the Roman persecutors as men”.<sup>125</sup> The evidence from the passages above suggests that Tertullian regarded women to be as courageous as men in the face of persecution and martyrdom.

In several passages Tertullian uses women martyrs as exemplary models of courage and as triumphant. Tertullian uses female pagan *exempla* in *Ad martyras* to encourage both Christian men and women to be courageous in the more worthy persecution and martyrdom they will suffer. Tertullian’s other references to the example of Christian female martyrs indicate that he believed that women were capable of exhibiting courage in the face of persecution and martyrdom.

The *Passio* has particular significance for the feminist question because not only was it partly composed by a woman, but it also contains the personal experiences of a woman. Shaw has noted that in the earlier *Acta martyrum* there is a division between those martyrologies which portray the fate of collective groups and those which recall the fates of individuals.<sup>126</sup> The latter tended to emphasize the heroic achievements of great individuals, all of whom were men and often an office-holder with some special status within the church.<sup>127</sup> Although female martyrs do appear in “collective” accounts of martyrdom they have a subordinate role

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<sup>125</sup> E.A. Clark, *Women in the Early Church* (Collegeville, Minn. : Liturgical Press, 1990), p. 22.

<sup>126</sup> Shaw, “The Passion of Perpetua”, p. 15.

<sup>127</sup> Shaw, “The Passion of Perpetua”, p. 15.

compared to the male martyrs.<sup>128</sup> Thus, the *Passio* is significant because it is the first individual account of a female martyr and in it Perpetua asserts the authority of her own experience.<sup>129</sup>

As discussed above, details within the *Passio* suggest that Perpetua challenged the cultural assumptions of a woman's role in society. As the editor of the *Passio*, Tertullian accepted that women's roles in society were not limited to that of mother and dutiful daughter. Indeed, through martyrdom women could attain a glorious status among the Christian community and the martyr was endowed with the authority to absolve an individual from their sins. Thus, although Tertullian could, in some passages, praise Perpetua in terms which we might regard as patriarchal or androcentric, he did also recognize that women could have influential roles within the Christian community. As Heffernan has observed: "His [the editor of the *Passio*) celebration of the martyrdom of a powerful female leader like Perpetua and his preference for ecstatic prophecy show unambiguously that he was an advocate of the New Prophecy and a supporter of women in positions of authority in the church".<sup>130</sup>

### **Conclusion.**

In this chapter I have considered the sociological roles which were permissible for women according to Tertullian. It is evident that there were some roles which were closed to women. Teaching and baptising, for example, were among those ecclesiastical roles which were exclusive to men. In passages from *De baptismo* and *De praescriptione haereticorum* Tertullian uses the example of the woman teacher and baptizer as a rhetorical technique with which to denigrate heretical groups. By associating rival Christian groups with inappropriate behaviour, such as women teaching and baptizing, Tertullian challenged the credibility of their teaching.

Although Tertullian restricted women's position in some roles, in other areas he expanded the possibility for women to have an influential role within society and within the Christian community. Like many of the Fathers, Tertullian valued the role of woman as wife. Unlike many of his day, however, Tertullian describes Christian marriage as a partnership of two

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<sup>128</sup> Shaw, "The Passion of Perpetua", p. 15-16.

<sup>129</sup> Shaw, "The Passion of Perpetua", p. 15.

<sup>130</sup> Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua*, p. 16.



equals, in which husband and wife participate in a mutually loving and spiritually beneficial relationship. Women who chose to not marry, dedicated their lives to God in lifelong virginity and Tertullian employs their example as a sign of the resurrected state. As widows women had the opportunity to join a prestigious order in which its members probably had some active involvement in the penitential service. Tertullian also acknowledged that certain women had been given the gift of prophecy. Their prophetic utterances were accorded the same authority as scripture and Tertullian utilized their revelations to support his own arguments in various treatises. Thus, although women were not permitted to teach in any formal way, they could, indirectly, have an instructive influence on the Christian community. Finally, Tertullian recognized that women had the capacity to be equally as courageous as men in the face of persecution and martyrdom. The female martyr was used as an exemplary model and was a highly respected figure within the Christian community. The martyr was endowed with a power to free individuals from their sins and evidence in the *Passio* suggests that female martyrs also had the authority to absolve sins. In her role as martyr, therefore, a woman had an important and influential role within the Christian community.

In short, whilst Tertullian evidently banned women from taking on certain roles, there were many other roles which were open to women. Furthermore, it seems that many of these roles enabled women to have an active and influential role within the Christian community.

## CONCLUSION.

Among feminist circles Tertullian has been vilified as a misogynist. In this thesis I have examined whether this charge of misogyny levelled against Tertullian is fair. My aim throughout this thesis has been to read Tertullian's work in its own rhetorical context in order to understand the meaning and purpose behind those various passages and statements which have been controversial among feminist scholars. Whilst there has been some scholarly research conducted on Tertullian's use of ancient rhetoric, notably by scholars such as Geoffrey Dunn and Robert Sider, thus far there has been no research carried out into how a detailed analysis of Tertullian's use of rhetoric can be used to respond to feminist critique of him.<sup>1</sup> However, in this thesis I have demonstrated that a rhetorical reading of Tertullian's work is necessary because by reading the "Devil's gateway" passage in isolation feminist scholars have developed a distorted understanding of his view of women. In feminist discussions, Tertullian makes only a cameo appearance as one example, among others, of patriarchal misogyny within the Fathers. Feminist scholars have focused on one or two passages from his work which, they claim, are evidence of his misogyny, but they do not consider the wider context of these passages or look at other passages from Tertullian's corpus.<sup>2</sup> By bringing together the two areas - Tertullian's use of rhetoric and feminist critique of Tertullian and of the Fathers in general - I have been able to offer a more nuanced reading of Tertullian's view of women. Furthermore, I have discovered that in some areas Tertullian has positive contributions to make to the feminist question.

I began in part one with an examination of the "Devil's gateway" passage in *De cultu feminarum*. This was an important place to begin because the "Devil's gateway" passage is the text most frequently cited by feminist scholars as "evidence" of Tertullian's misogyny. I proposed that feminist interpretations of this passage were problematic because they have not read it in the wider context of *De cultu feminarum* or Tertullian's other treatises. Therefore, in order to better understand the reason for Tertullian's comments in the "Devil's gateway"

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<sup>1</sup> R. D. Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric and the Art of Tertullian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); G.D. Dunn, "Rhetoric and Tertullian's *De virginibus velandis*" in *Vigiliae Christianae* Vol. 59, No. 1 (February, 2005), pp. 1-30; G.D. Dunn, 'Mary's virginity *in partu* and Tertullian's anti-docetism in *De carne Christi* reconsidered' in *Journal of Theological Studies* Vol. 58 no. 2 (October 2007), pp. 467-484.

<sup>2</sup> As Geoffrey Dunn has noted "one cannot refer simply to one passage in one text to demonstrate Tertullian's opinion on a matter". (G.D. Dunn, *Tertullian* (London/New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 8).

passage, I considered the historical and rhetorical context of the passage, by taking two approaches.

Firstly, in chapter one I examined the “Devil’s gateway” passage alongside the other references Tertullian makes to the Fall throughout his treatises. Based on the “Devil’s gateway” passage feminist scholars have assumed that Tertullian blamed Eve exclusively for the Fall and from this have concluded that he had a negative and misogynistic view of women. However, my examination of Tertullian’s reference to the Fall throughout his corpus revealed that the “Devil’s gateway” passage is the only passage in which Tertullian gives explicit and exclusive culpability for the Fall to Eve. In every other passage Tertullian blames Adam, the Devil or both Adam and Eve for the Fall. By examining the rhetorical context of other passages on the Fall I have demonstrated that some feminist scholars have read Tertullian in the wrong way. They have treated him as a systematic theologian. However, it is evident that Tertullian does not have a systematic account of the Fall and nor does he read it as theological exposition. Rather, Tertullian uses the story of the Fall as a rhetorical device, adapting details about who was responsible for the Fall depending upon the theme and audience of the treatise, in order to make his case more persuasive.

In chapter two my aim was to explain the rhetorical purpose of the “Devil’s gateway” passage in the wider context of *De cultu feminarum*. Based on the “Devil’s gateway” passage, a number of feminist scholars have assumed that Tertullian’s purpose in *De cultu feminarum* was to denigrate women. However, having drawn on Susan Calef’s rhetorical analysis of *De cultu feminarum*, I demonstrated that Tertullian utilized a number of rhetorical techniques in order to persuade Christian women to dress in a way which distinguished them from pagan woman and reflected their Christian identity. Occurring in the *exordium* of *De cultu feminarum*, the purpose of the “Devil’s gateway” passage was to make the audience more attentive and receptive to what Tertullian had to say throughout the rest of the treatise. It is within this rhetorical context that the “Devil’s gateway” passage should be read.

In summary, by examining the rhetorical context of the “Devil’s gateway” passage both within *De cultu feminarum* and Tertullian’s wider corpus I have revealed that feminist scholars have misappropriated this text to support their own claims. Whilst it does not absolve Tertullian completely (the attack is still vicious, even if it just rhetoric), my findings

in these two chapters revealed that Tertullian was not attacking women for the sake of it, but rather using the “Devil’s gateway” passage for a specific purpose in one particular treatise.

Having exposed the weakness of the feminist claim that the “Devil’s gateway” passage is evidence of Tertullian’s misogyny, I then turned to Tertullian’s view of women in general beginning firstly with his view of Mary. This was an appropriate place to start because, as I noted in the introduction to part two, a number of feminist scholars have claimed that the portrayal of Mary (particularly among the Fathers) as the ideal woman has led to the denigration of the ordinary woman. Taking the issues raised by feminist scholars as a starting point, I examined Tertullian’s references to Mary to see if he could also be subjected to their criticisms. Having examined the rhetorical contexts of these passages, I discovered that Tertullian uses Mary primarily as a rhetorical tool to support various arguments against his opponents and, on the whole, has a more positive image of Mary when assessed according to the issues raised by feminist scholars.

In chapter three I examined the passages in which Tertullian refers to Mary’s virginity. Feminist scholars have been critical of patristic emphasis on Mary’s virginity because they claim that it was held up as an exemplary model. This has had negative consequences for ordinary women who could not emulate that ideal. However, having considered the historical and rhetorical contexts of the various passages, it is evident that Tertullian does not use Mary’s virginity in this way. Rather, I proposed that Tertullian’s references to Mary’s virginity before, during, and after the birth of Christ, were shaped entirely by the arguments with his opponents. Although Tertullian accepted that Mary was a virgin when conceiving Christ, he did not accept that she remained a virgin during and after the birth of Christ. Tertullian highlights the “ordinariness” of Mary’s experiences during the birth of Christ in order to support his claim that Christ’s birth and flesh were real, against Gnostic and Marcionite denials of a real incarnation. Similarly, Tertullian’s denial of Mary’s virginity *post partum* was motivated by the desire to prove that Christ was part of a biological family and from this Tertullian deduces the reality of Christ’s birth and flesh.

In chapter four I discussed the importance which Tertullian placed on Mary being Christ’s link to the Davidic line. I proposed that Tertullian used the “Son of David through Mary” formula in order to support two theological and apologetical arguments. Firstly, Christ’s birth through Mary fulfilled prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures which claimed that the Messiah

would be a Davidic. Since Mary was the biological link to David, she played a vital role in Tertullian's proof that the prophecies had been fulfilled. Secondly, by using the "Son of David through Mary" formula Tertullian emphasized that Christ was born into a real human family, thus supporting his claim that Christ's flesh and birth were truly human. My conclusions in this chapter support my wider claim that Tertullian uses Mary primarily as a rhetorical device to support his theological and apologetical arguments.

In chapter five I discussed the role Tertullian gives to Mary as Christ's mother in *De carne Christi*. I proposed that through his use of ancient medical theories, Mary became an important weapon in Tertullian's arguments with his opponents. My research revealed that Tertullian used Aristotle's theory of conception as a rhetorical device in order to highlight Mary's role as the provider of Christ's flesh and thus strengthen the claim that Christ's flesh was truly human. Furthermore, I discovered that Tertullian used Aristotle's medical theory regarding the physiological effects of pregnancy in order to give scientific credibility to his claim that Mary truly bore Christ and thus, prove that his flesh was truly human. Although feminist scholars have been critical of the limited role Aristotle gave to women in his theory of conception, I proposed that Tertullian's use of Aristotle resulted in a more positive estimation of Mary's role in the incarnation. Whilst Mary's role was confined to that of providing the matter for Christ's flesh, the importance which Tertullian placed on Christ's human flesh for the salvation of humankind, suggested that Mary's role was necessary for the salvation of humankind. Most importantly however, Tertullian celebrates the "ordinariness" of Mary's childbearing experiences. Although Tertullian's primary motivation for doing this was to support his arguments, by portraying Mary as an "ordinary" woman Tertullian avoids the problems associated with those Fathers who exalted Mary to a position which was unobtainable to ordinary women.

In summary, in part two I noted that feminist scholars have been critical of the effects which Patristic depictions of Mary have had on ordinary women. My investigation, however, has demonstrated that Tertullian does not use Mary as a patriarchal symbol, model or ideal, but rather uses verses about her in very specific contexts and with specific rhetorical motivations in mind.

In part three I examined Tertullian's view of women in general, taking into account anthropological and sociological considerations. I observed that Tertullian never addresses

questions such as “what does it mean to be a woman?”; “Is woman man’s equal?” or “What is a woman’s role in the sociological order?” Consequently, I attempted to construct answers to these questions based on various passages in Tertullian’s corpus which are relevant to the concerns raised by feminists. However, since Tertullian writes for specific purposes and in specific contexts, it was also necessary to take into account the rhetorical context of each passage.

In chapter six my aim was to assess whether Tertullian considered woman to be man’s equal on an anthropological level. My research revealed that Tertullian, like Augustine, has a subordination and equivalence model.<sup>3</sup> In the first part, I looked at a number of passages from *De anima* and *De resurrectione carnis* in which Tertullian suggests that woman is man’s equal in God’s original design for the created order. In *De anima*, for example, Tertullian used Genesis 2 to support his rhetorical arguments, and through his interpretation implied that woman and man are equal in God’s design for creation. This challenged the assumption of feminist scholars who claim that patristic interpretations of the Genesis creation accounts have been used to justify woman’s subordination to man. Furthermore, my examination of *De resurrectione carnis* revealed that Tertullian argued for a sexed resurrection in which men and women retain their sexual organs in the resurrected state, although their procreative function will cease. I noted that this was significant because not only does it suggest that woman was an intended part of God’s original creation, but moreover it indicates that Tertullian recognized that woman did not exist merely for her procreative value. In the second part of chapter six, I discussed passages in which Tertullian seems to advocate woman’s subordination. Of particular interest were Tertullian’s arguments in *De virginibus velandis*. Based on 1 Corinthians 11 Tertullian seems to accept Paul’s suggestion that woman’s subordination to man is written into God’s design for the created order, which contradicts Tertullian’s position in *De anima* and *De resurrectione carnis*. However, having considered the rhetorical contexts of the passages in this treatise, I concluded that Tertullian accepted Paul’s arguments about woman’s subordination in 1 Corinthians 11, for the sake of argument, in order to make a wider point that Paul’s command to veil applied to virgins as well as to married women.

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<sup>3</sup> As noted earlier K.E. Børresen identified an equivalence and subordination model in her book *Subordination and Equivalence: The Nature and Role of Woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas* (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1995).

Finally in chapter seven I examined Tertullian's corpus in order to find out which roles (within the church and society) he considered to be the exclusive prerogative of men and those roles which he considered to be open to women. I noted that in a number of passages Tertullian claimed that the roles of teaching and baptising were closed to women. Having considered the rhetorical and historical context of these passages, I observed that Tertullian uses the example of the heretical woman teaching and baptising as a rhetorical device with which to undermine the credibility of heretical groups. In the second part I highlighted all the roles which Tertullian believed were open to women. Of particular interest were the roles of widow, prophetess and martyr since there is some evidence to suggest that individuals who undertook these roles had an influential position within the early Christian communities. In short, although feminist critique has tended to focus on the limitations of women's roles within the church and society by the Fathers, my research has indicated that there were many influential and active roles which Tertullian encouraged women to pursue.

In summary, throughout these seven chapters I have read passages from Tertullian's corpus in their rhetorical contexts, whilst also taking into consideration the issues raised by feminist scholars. By taking a different methodological approach I have been led to conclude that the charge of misogyny levelled against Tertullian is, to some extent, unfounded. Furthermore, my research has uncovered some of the more positive aspects of Tertullian's view of women which have been overlooked by feminist scholars due to their negative assumptions about Tertullian. This thesis has expanded upon the research of scholars such as Forrester Church and Finlay by utilising a rhetorical analysis when reading passages from Tertullian's corpus. It has expanded upon the research of scholars such as Sider and Dunn by demonstrating that a rhetorical analysis can be useful when engaged in debates on contemporary issues such as those raised by feminist scholars.

### **Possibilities for future research.**

My thesis has revealed the importance of a rhetorical analysis for a fuller understanding of Tertullian's work. Sider's general overview of Tertullian's use of rhetoric has provided a vital starting point for anyone conducting a rhetorical analysis of his work. The work of scholars such as Calef, Dunn and Sider has produced detailed rhetorical analysis of some of

Tertullian's treatises but there is still further work to be undertaken on those treatises which have not yet been subject to a rhetorical analysis.<sup>4</sup>

There is also further research to be carried out into the influence of Tertullian's ideas on later Christian theology. Scholarship has tended to focus on the influence which Tertullian's ideas and language about the Trinity had on later doctrinal discussions.<sup>5</sup> However, my research has led me to conclude that Tertullian's influence is more extensive than currently realised. For example, in chapter six I highlighted the similarities between the views of Tertullian and Augustine on a sexed resurrection. Augustine like Tertullian argued that the sexual organs of men and women will be retained in the resurrection even though they will not be used for procreation. Further research may determine whether Augustine was directly influenced by Tertullian on this topic, and whether there are other areas where Tertullian influenced Augustine.

Finally, there are wider questions about how modern scholars are to read the Fathers and engage with Patristic texts. Whilst it is inevitable that one will come to these texts with modern questions and attitudes, if one wishes to recover a more sophisticated understanding of a particular Patristic text, it is necessary to enter the mind-set of the original author. For example, it is not always appropriate to read the Fathers as systematic theologians for, as my research into Tertullian's work has revealed, many of the Fathers were skilled in rhetoric, composing their writings for a particular purpose and audience. My thesis has been a case study of how Tertullian's writings can be appropriated in modern theological discussion, namely feminist theology, without distorting the original meaning of the text. Future research may investigate whether the same thing can be accomplished with the writings of other Fathers.

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<sup>4</sup> See for example, R.D. Sider, "Structure and Design in the *De resurrectione mortuorum* of Tertullian," in *Vigiliae Christianae* 23 (1969), pp. 177-196; S.A. Calef, 'Rhetorical Strategies in Tertullian's *De cultu feminarum*' (University of Notre Dame, 1996); and, G.D. Dunn, *Tertullian's Adversus Iudaeos: A Rhetorical Analysis* (PhD Thesis. Australian Catholic University, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> See for example, E. Osborn, *Tertullian: First Theologian of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.117, 131, and 142; J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1960), pp. 115-119; and, A. E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 295.



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