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Was Tertullian of Carthage a schismatic? How did he view the church and its bishops? How did he understand the exercise of authority within the church? In this study David Rankin sets the writings of Tertullian in the context of the early third-century church and the developments it was undergoing in relation to both its structures and its self-understanding. He then discusses Tertullian's own theology of the church, his imagery and his perception of church office and ministry. Tertullian maintained throughout his career a high view of the church, and this in part constituted the motivation for his vitriolic attacks on the church's hierarchy after he had joined the New Prophecy movement. His contribution to the development of the church has often been misunderstood, and this thorough exploration provides a timely reassessment of its nature and importance.

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BY

DAVID RANKIN



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To my wife Julie and children Nicole and Michael

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Abbreviations

ACW	Ancient Christian Writers, Westminster, Maryland, 1946-
A-NCL	Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Edinburgh, 1870-
CCL	Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina, Turnhout, Belgium, 1953-
GCS	Griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte
LCL	Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass., 1912-
PL	J-P.Migne, Patrologia Latina, Paris, 1940-
<i>AC</i>	<i>Antike und Christentum</i>
<i>AJPh</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
<i>ALMA</i>	<i>Archivum Latinitas Medii aevi</i>
<i>AnFLetN</i>	<i>Annales de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences humaines de Nice</i>
<i>CH</i>	<i>Church History</i>
<i>CQR</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly Review</i>
<i>ExpT</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>IER</i>	<i>Irish Ecclesiastical Record</i>
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>KerDo</i>	<i>Kerygma und Dogma</i>
<i>RScRel.</i>	<i>Revue des Sciences Religieuses</i>
<i>REAug.</i>	<i>Revue des études Augustiniennes</i>
<i>REG</i>	<i>Revue des études grecques</i>
<i>RHE</i>	<i>Revue de l'histoire ecclésiastique</i>
<i>ScotJTh.</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>

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<i>SE</i>	<i>Studia Evangelica</i>
<i>SP</i>	<i>Studia Patristica</i>
<i>TheolStuds</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
<i>ZKG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte</i>

A note on chronology of texts

The criteria normally used for determining the chronological order of Tertullian's writings include doctrinal development, stylistic variation, disciplinary rigour, attitudes towards the Catholic church and the New Prophecy movement, historical allusions and references to other writings. Some involve considerable difficulty. With regard to the first – doctrinal development – it is generally accepted that, whatever the attitude towards it in the fourth and later centuries, the New Prophecy of the late second and early third centuries was doctrinally orthodox; and, while the third – disciplinary rigour – is generally useful as an indicator, in some cases, for example, *De Idololatria* (see below), it may not be so.

Of the many attempts to construct a feasible chronology for Tertullian's writings two of the most recent, those by Fredouille (1972) and Barnes (1984 – a revision of his seminal 1970 work) offer the most useful starting points.¹ While there is a considerable degree of harmony between the two, Fredouille, unlike Barnes, insists on a rigid division of the writings into three distinct periods of Tertullian's Christian life: 'période catholique' (197-206), 'sous l'influence montaniste' (207-12) and 'rupture avec l'Eglise' (213-). Barnes, having earlier established 207/8 as the first datable manifestation of Tertullian's Montanism, now

¹ J.-C. Fredouille, *Tertullien et la conversion de la culture antique* (Paris, 1972) pp.487f.; T. D. Barnes, *Tertullian: a historical and literary study*, 2nd edition (London, 1984), pp. 325f. Unfortunately I have had no access to R. Braun, 'Chronologia Tertulliana: Le De Carne Christi et le De Idololatria', *Hommage à P. Fargues, Annales de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences humaines de Nice* 21 (1974).

believes that this date must be shifted beyond 208.² Too precise datings are in any case both problematic and unnecessary, as are assumptions of a definite rupture with the Catholic church on the part of Tertullian.

Barnes identifies eight ideas or expressions distinctive of Montanist beliefs; with only one exception,³ he assigns to the later part of Tertullian's career only those writings which exhibit one or more of these marks: (1) the naming of Montanus or one of his female associates, or appeal to a Montanist oracle; (2) specific reference to the New Prophecy or the rebuttal of charges of 'pseudopropheta' or of 'nova disciplina'; (3) commendation of the ecstatic state; (4) mention of spiritual gifts as possessed only by Montanists; (5) description of the Holy Spirit as 'Paracletus'; (6) 'nos' or 'noster' used to describe persons or things peculiarly Montanist; (7) 'vos' or 'vester' used to contrast Catholic and Montanist; and (8) abuse of Catholics as 'Psychici'.⁴ Only in *De Ieiunio* do all eight marks appear; in *De Pudicitia* there are seven.⁵

Barnes' schema demonstrates significant variations from that of Fredouille with regard to four writings: *De Idololatria*, *Scorpiace*, *De Pallio* and *De Carne Christi*. Despite the obvious rigour of its disciplinary stance (it is, for example, far more rigorous than the admittedly Montanist *De Corona Militis*), Barnes places *De Idololatria* very early in Tertullian's career. Fredouille, like many others, dates it later, to 211-12. Yet Barnes finds support both from van der Nat, who dates it before the persecution of 197, and

² Barnes, *Tertullian*, p. 328.

³ *Ad Scapulam* which, although it contains none of these Montanist 'marks' and resembles more the *Apologeticum* from Tertullian's Catholic period, must be dated, by universal agreement, to 212 by virtue of precise historical references (e.g. 3,2 and 4,5).

⁴ The Latin word 'psychicus' – a loan-word from the Greek – literally means 'of the soul'. Tertullian uses it as a contrast with 'spiritualis' (spiritual) which is consistent with the use of the Greek 'psuchikos' in the New Testament (e.g. 1 Cor. 2,13; 15,14; James 3,15; Jude 19) as a contrast to 'pneumatikos'. The Lewis and Short dictionary translates 'psychicus' as 'animal, carnal, carnally inclined', using Tertullian's *De Monogamia* 1 as an example. Most of the older translations of Tertullian's works – A-NCL for example – also consistently translate 'psychicus' as 'carnal'. While some might properly prefer 'unspiritual' as a more correct translation in the context of its standing over against 'spiritualis', and given that 'carnal' or 'carnally inclined' might not be seen to accord with the literal meaning of the word, I shall nevertheless here follow the well-established tradition.

⁵ Barnes, *Tertullian*, pp. 43f.

Rordorf, who has no doubts that it predates *De Corona*.⁶ It is also worthy of note that Johannes Neander, in his 1824 work on Tertullian, also placed *De Idololatria* among Tertullian's pre-New Prophecy works. While Fredouille (along with others) dates *Scorpiace* to 211-12, Barnes places it early in the first decade of the third century. He argues plausibly that Tertullian's appeal to Matthew 16,18 to support the concept of the transmission of the disciplinary power of the keys through Peter to the church (10,8), is more consistent with the argumentation of the Catholic *De Praescriptione (Haereticorum)* (22,4) than with that of the New Prophecy *De Pudicitia* (21,9).⁷

Most commentators place *De Pallio* very late; Fredouille puts it beyond 217 and posits it as Tertullian's last extant writing.⁸ Barnes, who would not go so far as Constanza in placing it as early as the time of Tertullian's conversion (perhaps in 193),⁹ places it in the middle of the first decade of the third century. It contains no Montanist 'marks' (see above) and there are no historical allusions or signs of doctrinal progression which require a later date. Fredouille places *De Carne Christi* in the period 208-12, 'sous l'influence montaniste'. Barnes originally dated it to 206 (a year or so after *Adv. Hermogenem*), but later suggested an even earlier date. It contains no Montanist marks and for the divine 'Word' Tertullian employs the Latin 'verbum' rather than the more dynamic 'sermo'; the former is typical of his earlier writings, the latter his consistent practice from *Adv. Hermogenem* onwards. The early date is reinforced also by the arguments of Mahé.¹⁰ The only real difficulty for this early dating – the clear reference at 7,1 to *Adv. Marcionem* IV,19 – is dealt with quite adequately by Braun. He suggests that Tertullian

⁶ P. G. van der Nat, *QSF Tertulliani De idololatria*, part 1, (Leiden, 1960), p.14; W. Rordorf, 'Tertullians Beurteilung des Soldatenstandes', *VC* 23 (1969), pp.118f.

⁷ 'Tertullian's Scorpiace', *JTS* ns 20 (1969), p.116. In this book I have also chosen to refer to *De Praescriptione (Haereticorum)* – although more often by the abbreviated *De Praescriptione* – rather than to *De Praescriptionibus*. The former is preferred by the editors of CCL and is that found in the earliest two manuscripts of the work, the ninth-century *Codex Parisinus Latinus* and the eleventh-century *Codex Paterniacensis*.

⁸ *Tertullian*, p. 488.

⁹ S. Constanza, *Tertulliano, De Pallio* (Naples, 1968), p. 35.

¹⁰ J.-P. Mahé, *Tertullien: La Chair du Christ*, Sources Chrétiennes CCXVI-CCXVII (1975), vol. 1, pp. 27f.

wrote *De Carne Christi* in his earlier period, but published it only some years later, along with its companion piece *De Resurrectione Mortuorum*, retouching it only superficially and adding the present preface and conclusion.¹¹

Barnes plausibly places the following writings in the period before the middle of the first decade of the third century (with Fredouille in generally broad agreement, save for the exceptions discussed above) and in the following order:¹² *De Cultu Feminarum* II (Fredouille places this with book I), *Ad Nationes* I and II, *Adv. Judaeos*, *Ad Martyras*, *Apologeticum*, *De Spectaculis*, *De Idololatria*, *De Testimonia Animae*, *De Baptismo*, *De Oratione*, *De Paenitentia*, *De Patientia*, *Ad Uxorem* I and II, *De Praescriptione*, *De Carne Christi*, *Adv. Hermogenem*, *De Pallio* and *De Cultu Feminarum* I.

He places the following, which exhibit one or more of the Montanist 'marks', in the period beyond 207, and probably most of them much later: *Adv. Valentinianos*, *De Anima*, *De Resurrectione Mortuorum*, *Adv. Marcionem* (I and II and III in 207/8; IV and V later), *De Corona*, *De Exhortatione Castitatis*, *De Fuga*, *De Velandis Virginibus*, *Adv. Praxean*, *De Monogamia*, *De Ieiunio*, *De Pudicitia* and *Ad Scapulam*.¹³ For the purposes of this book this chronological ordering of Barnes will be, unless otherwise indicated, that followed.

¹¹ According to Barnes, *Tertullian*, p. 326.

¹² Barnes is not so concerned as are others with precise datings and acknowledges in his second edition that his earlier Montanist datings were far too tight.

¹³ While Barnes had originally regarded *Ad Scapulam*, dated to 212, as the latest extant writing of Tertullian, he is now more open to Fredouille's schema which assigns some of the more vitriolic anti-Catholic works to the latter half of the second decade of the third century.