

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *The Pattern of Authority*

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There is no doubt that spiritual discipline was the keystone of Tertullian's scheme of sanctification. This may seem straightforward enough to us, who have inherited a long tradition of orderly devotion, but in the Roman world of the second century such a concept was bound to meet with certain difficulties in the way of practical application. No one who has studied ancient history can fail to appreciate the administrative genius which enabled Rome to conquer and to hold her Mediterranean empire, but this efficiency in matters of secular organisation did not as a rule extend into the religious sphere. About the only act of worship which the imperial authorities required or made any attempt to regulate was the worship of the emperor's genius. Beyond that, a great variety of religious activity was tolerated, although attempts were sometimes made to suppress particular rites, especially if they offended public decency.

This is not to say that Roman religion was a lax affair, or that it completely failed to command the allegiance of the masses. There is a good deal to suggest that even the cultured intelligentsia preserved a living interest in cultic matters, and religious officials, especially the Vestal Virgins, were widely respected. The difficulty was that Roman religion was bound up with the semi-tribal apparatus of the city-state, and its decay was part of the general breakdown of republican institutions. Various emperors tried to arrest the decline, but even they hardly got further than introducing a form of emperor-worship. This new cult served an obvious political purpose, but in spirit it was essentially alien to the Roman mind. Emperors were chosen and deposed by the senate and people of Rome (which in practice usually meant the army), and there was no concept of divine right. An elected divinity was not likely to be accorded much respect, especially as it was obvious that he

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would soon have a successor who might well choose to execrate his memory. In this respect, the Roman Empire was not dissimilar from modern totalitarian countries like the Soviet Union.

Because they lacked any truly credible authority, the strict moral precepts of Roman religion were generally defenceless against the inroads of foreign fertility cults, whose obscene practices are recorded with disgust by contemporary historians. When Christianity appeared at Rome, it was to encounter a traditional paganism which had been plunged into moral, spiritual and cultic chaos. It soon became apparent, however, that the new faith was of a different order altogether. The ethical precepts of Christianity were not necessarily stricter than those of paganism, but—and this is a matter of the most crucial importance—they came backed by the authority of a written Revelation from an Omnipotent Creator and Redeemer, a fact which gave them universal significance and eternal validity.

When educated Romans like Tertullian became Christians, they were not unnaturally struck by this aspect of their new faith. In the Greek world the universality of Christianity was assimilated to the philosophical concept of a divinely ordered *kosmos*, in which the rich

diversity of human culture and experience could find its fulfilment and purpose. Romans, however, tended to think in more severely practical terms. ‘Spiritual unity’ had little meaning for them apart from its visible manifestation. Moreover, if Christianity embraced the whole of life, then there could be virtually no *adiaphora*, or elements which were not governed by divine regulation.

Thus we can understand why Tertullian devoted an entire treatise to the seemingly trivial question of the veiling of virgins. We may gather from his remarks that most Christians had no very strong feelings on the matter, and preferred not to bother. Scripture enjoined married women to cover their heads in church to indicate their subjection to their husbands, but unmarried girls were not mentioned, and customs apparently varied from place to place. Such laxity Tertullian could not tolerate. He argued from the ambivalence of the Greek word *gynē* (woman, wife) that women could not be divided into two classes, the married and the unmarried, and this meant that a

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discipline laid down for women with husbands should naturally extend to the unmarried and widowed as well.<sup>1</sup> To the objection that some obscure tribes had other notions of modesty, and did not require veiling, Tertullian blandly replied that this was the effect of original sin, tolerated to be sure by divine grace until the final revelation of the truth, but never approved of, and on no account to be imitated by others (*De vir. vel.* 2.1).

It is tempting to ascribe such rigorism to his temperament, or to the influence of Montanism, but the problem is not so simple. Rigidity to the point of enforced uniformity of practice, as well as belief, has always been a feature of the Western Church. Even today there is a ready tendency to confuse doctrinal orthodoxy with outward conformity in behaviour, and Tertullian’s leanings in this direction are not as eccentric as they might appear. To discover the hidden motivations behind his censure, therefore, we must lay aside superficial theories about his personality and examine more closely the assumptions on which his theological system was built.

## THE REGULA

There can be no doubt that a Roman sense of legalism was fundamental to Tertullian’s way of thinking. Even in his analysis of the practice of baptism, for instance, we can see the judicial mind at work. Why should such a rite exist at all? Tertullian explains that it was because Jesus himself, shortly before his ascension, had promulgated a law on the subject, and had even imposed a form for administering the rite, which Tertullian actually called the *lex tingendi* (*De bapt.* 13.3). Of course, if the sacrament of Christian initiation was governed by a legal ordinance, we may be certain that the life of the newly initiated believer would not escape similar regulation.

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<sup>1</sup> *De vir. vel.* 4. Tertullian rests his case on the argument that *mulier* was a general term for ‘woman’, including a *virgo*. Strictly speaking, he may have been right, though *mulier* more naturally suggested a woman with sexual experience. Examination of the modern Romance languages shows that it is in the linguistically peripheral areas that the double meaning of ‘woman’ and ‘wife’ has been preserved, while the more central areas now restrict the sense to ‘wife’—an indication of the weight which must have attached to the word in Latin. Thus in the former category we have Castilian *mujer*, Portuguese *mulher* and Romanian *muiere* (this last being now derogatory) while in the latter are Catalan *muller*, Provençal *molher*, Italian *moglie* and Old French *moillier* (though Modern French *femme* belongs to the first category).

It was an unfortunate (though characteristic) tendency of Adolf Harnack to seize on a valuable insight—in this case, Tertullian’s legalism—and then misapply it in his research. Thus a great deal of scholarly effort has been expended in debate over whether or not the terms *persona* and *substantia*, as Tertullian used them of the Trinity, were derived from legal usage, and even whether the Carthaginian theologian could be identified with the rather obscure jurist of the same name. Both

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these suggestions have now been rightly rejected,<sup>2</sup> but the debates over them have undoubtedly obscured the very real influence which Roman legal thought, then in its greatest flowering, had on Tertullian’s intellectual formation.

Of course this influence must not be exaggerated or misunderstood. Tertullian did not adapt Christianity to Roman law, but the reverse. No one could fail to notice how important the idea of law was in the Old Testament, and Tertullian was well aware, as Marcion and others were not, that Christ had come to fulfil the Law, not to destroy it. Even in the new dispensation, the rule of law, no longer written on tablets of stone but on the table of the heart, continued to be normative for the Christian.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Tertullian believed that the Gospel had given mankind the power at last to fulfil the Law’s strict demands. Jesus himself had said that the righteousness of the Christian was to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, which Tertullian regarded as entirely a matter of degree (*De mono.* 7.1).

As far as the text of God’s Law was concerned, there could be no real dispute. Scripture was the Law of God, written down in plain language which everyone could understand and obey (*De praescr. haer.* 14.3). Tertullian knew that the Bible was not always equally clear on every point, and that it did not cover everything, but he never allowed either fact to obscure his main thesis. Those who sought refuge in allegory to explain away moral and philosophical difficulties in Scripture met with the same rebuff as those who tried to excuse non-biblical practices on the ground that Scripture said nothing about them. The principles which guided Tertullian’s exegesis were simplicity and caution. What Scripture did not explicitly affirm, it implicitly denied (*De mono.* 4-4). Likewise, it was better to obey the clear commands of God than to make them more palatable to sophisticated consciences (*De praescr. haer.* 14.2).

The legal status with which Tertullian invested the Bible may be seen most clearly from the way it was meant to be interpreted and used in the Church. As we have already remarked in our discussion of pre-credal dogmatism, the word which constantly reappears in this connection is the legal term *regula*. Modern research into the history of credal development has made us familiar with the so-called *regula fidei* (‘Rule of Faith’),

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which is thought to have been a statement of doctrine in existence at least from the second century, and which probably formed the basis of the creeds as we now have them. Quite what

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<sup>2</sup> On *persona* and *substantia*, see S. Schlossmann, ‘Tertullian im Lichte der Jurisprudenz’, *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 27, 1906, pp. 251-75, 407-30. On the jurist Tertullianus, see T. Barnes, *Tertullian*, Oxford, 1971, pp. 22-9.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Adv. Iud.* 2.9; 3.7; 6.2. Also, *De mono.* 7.4.

the *regula fidei* was, however, is a matter of dispute. At one extreme are the views of Dom Bernard Capelle, who writes: ‘...at the risk of being practically inapplicable, the notion of the *regula fidei* presupposes that it was something formulated in unambiguous terms, in an official document handed to the believer... the hypothesis of a composite and personalized text must be excluded.’<sup>4</sup> Capelle goes on to argue that the *regula fidei* was identical to the baptismal confession, which seems to have become more standardised about this time.

The proposed link between the *regula fidei* and the baptismal confession has been strongly contested by J. M. Restrepo-Jaramillo, who cites three main arguments in support of his case. First, the baptismal confession contained only trinitarian statements, whereas the *regula fidei* extended to every aspect of the revelation; second, the confession had three sections, in line with its trinitarian structure, whereas the *regula* had only two; third, the confession contained articles on the Church and the forgiveness of sins which the *regula* omitted.<sup>5</sup> Although the first and the third of these objections would appear to contradict each other, Restrepo-Jaramillo’s argument points in the right direction, and its main lines were incorporated by J. N. D. Kelly in his *Early Christian Creeds* (p. 82). It is now widely accepted that the baptismal confession, though in many respects similar to the *regula fidei*, cannot be identified with it.

It would seem that this conclusion is shared also, at least tacitly, by Vincent Morel. His view is more flexible than Capelle’s, and he places much less weight on verbal agreements. Morel recognises that Tertullian was inconsistent in his formulation of the *regula fidei*, but claims that a general pattern is discernible. The decisive difference between the *regula* and the baptismal confession was the former’s omission of the clauses dealing with the Church and the forgiveness of sins. To Capelle’s suggestion that Tertullian may have left them out by accident? Morel replies:

A casual omission of these two truths is, on the other hand, quite improbable, since the omission is consistent and the

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concern of the moment, which always left a strong imprint on Tertullian’s formulations of the rule, would have required a mention of them, in the *De praescriptione haereticorum* as well as in the *De virginibus aelandis*. Tertullian is trying to be exhaustive, and intends to determine in an absolute way, what Christians might discuss, and what in Christianity is or is not susceptible to development or reform. Thus there is no reason, in our opinion, to speak of an omission, either by chance or by design, and the conclusion that Tertullian, even as a Catholic, did not consider the doctrines of the constitution of the Church and of the forgiveness of sins as part of the rule of faith, forces itself upon us.<sup>6</sup>

But though Morel is prepared to allow for greater latitude than Capelle, fundamentally he also believes that the *regula fidei* was a definite formula, not perhaps fixed in the strict sense, but none the less clear in outline. To prove his point, he cites the text of the *regula* as it occurs in *De praescriptione haereticorum* and in *De virginibus velandis*. At first sight his case seems

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<sup>4</sup> B. Capelle, ‘Le symbole romain au second siècle’, *Revue bénédictine* 39, 1928, p. 38.

<sup>5</sup> J. M. Restrepo-Jaramillo, ‘Tertuliano y la doble fórmula en el símbolo apostólico’, *Gregorianum* 15, 1934, pp. 56-8.

<sup>6</sup> V. Morel, ‘Le développement de la disciplina sous faction du Saint-Esprit chez Tertullien’, *Revue d’Histoire ecclésiastique* 35, 1939, pp. 243-65.

plausible enough, but on closer examination it will be seen that the differences between the two ‘complete’ formulae are such as to make his entire thesis untenable. To prove our point we quote them here in parallel form:

***De vir. vel. 1.3***

*Regula quidem fidei una omnino Est sola immobilis et irreformabilis, credendi scilicet*

*in unicum Deum omnipotentem mundi conditorem*

*et filium eius Jesum Christum natum ex virgine Maria*

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*cruci fixum sub Pontio Pilato tertia die resuscitatum a mortuis receptum in caelis, sedentem nunc ad dexteram Patris*

*venturum iudicare vivos et mortuos per carnis etiam resurrectionem.*

***De praescr. haer. 13.1-5***

*Regula est autem fidei ut iam hinc quid defendamus profiteamur, illa scilicet qua creditur.*

*Unum omnino Deum esse nec alium praetor mundi conditorem qui universa de nihilo produxerit per verbum suum.*

*Id verbum filium eius appellatum in nomine Dei varie visum a patriarchis in prophetis semper auditum, postremo delatum ex spiritu patris Dei et virtute in virginem Mariam, carnem factum in utero eius et ex ea natum egisse Jesum Christum.*

*Exinde praedicasse novam legem et novam promissionem regni caelorum, virtutes fecisse.*

*crud fixum tertia die resurrexisse in caelos ereptum sedisse ad dexteram Patris*

*misisse vicarium vim Spiritus Sancti qui credentes agat*

*venturum cum claritate ad sumendos sanctos in vitae aeternae et promissorum caelestium fructum et ad profanos iudicandos igni perpetuo, facts utriusque partis resurrectione cum carnis restitutione.*

A comparison of these two statements reveals that the formula recorded in *De praescriptione* is, generally speaking, much more detailed, except, interestingly enough, in the clauses which deal with the crucifixion and the resurrection. It shows also that the *De virginibus* passage is considerably closer to the Apostles’ Creed as we now have it, a fact which is of some interest, since this treatise is usually thought to be of Montanist inspiration. Morel’s claim that ‘the concern of the moment’ influenced the content and wording of the statements may be doubted; what, for instance, did Pontius Pilate have to do with the veiling of virgins? Similarly, Montanist influence on the *De virginibus* can hardly explain the differences, since references to the Holy Spirit and to the teaching of Christ as a nova lex are confined to the ‘Catholic’ *De praescriptione*.<sup>7</sup>

Both passages cover much the same ground, but specific points of contact between them are few. It is clearly to be expected that the Persons of the Trinity should be mentioned in the traditional order, and that the events of Christ’s earthly life should be put down in

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<sup>7</sup> The third occurrence of the *regula* which Morel does not cite in this context, comes in *Adv. Prax.* 2.1. It is, on the whole, closer to the form of *De vir. vel.*, but with the important addition of a clause explaining the role of the Holy Spirit as Paraclete.

chronological sequence. Beyond that, however, there are not many similarities. Even key words in the theological vocabulary are different—*resuscitatum* instead of

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*resurremsse*, *receptum* instead of *ereptum*, for example. In the light of these discrepancies, not to mention the evident freedom with which Tertullian expanded his basic theme, it seems impossible to define the *regula* as a proto-creed. It is true that the creeds were later composed on models of this kind, but there is no trace in Tertullian of the sacramental context in which creeds were mainly used.

The meaning of *regula* in Tertullian is best appreciated, we believe, by seeing it in the context of his own age. In its primary sense, *regula* means something straight, a rod or a staff. From there it came naturally to mean a measuring-rod, and was used by Cicero to translate the Greek *kanōn*, or standard measure. In philosophical terminology *kanōn* (*regula*) meant a standard, or criterion for distinguishing right from wrong, true from false. It was in this sense that the word entered the vocabulary of the Greek Apologists, and especially Irenaeus, who spoke of *ho kanōn tēs alētheias*, the standard or rule of truth, against which all doctrine must be measured.<sup>8</sup>

There is good evidence that Tertullian borrowed this term from Irenaeus (cf. *De pud.* 8.12: *regula veritatis*), but his use of it went some way beyond Irenaeus' rather vague conception. There is little reason in fact to doubt that Tertullian was strongly influenced in this by the development which the word had undergone at the hands of the Roman jurists of the first and second centuries. As Peter Stein has demonstrated, they took the word from the Greek grammarians, who used *kanōn* to mean a rule of syntax, and applied it to Roman law.<sup>9</sup> In the process, *regula* developed its hitherto largely descriptive sense to take in a prescriptive meaning as well: In Stein's words, '*regula*... connoted to a Roman of the early principate a normative proposition which governed all situations which could be subsumed under its ratio' (p. 66). As such, a *regula* possessed great authority in the science of legal interpretation. When the meaning of a particular statute was unclear or open to different understandings, it was by consulting his *regulae* that a lawyer or judge could discern the sense intended.

It should be emphasised, of course, that legal *regulae* had no independent authority; at most they were but resumes of the law, to which they were subordinate. This is brought out quite clearly by the jurist Paul, who wrote:

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*Regula est quae rem quae est breviter enarrat. Non ex regula ius sumatur, sed ex iure quod est regula fiat. Per regulam igitur brevis rerum narratio traditur, et, ut ait Sabinus, quasi causae coniectio est, quae simul cum aliquo vitiata est, perdit officium suum.*

A *regula* is that which explains briefly what the matter is. The law must not be deduced from the *regula*, but the *regula* is determined by what the law is. By means of the *regula*

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<sup>8</sup> See H. von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible*, Eng. trans. London, 1972 (German edition, 1968), pp. 274-5.

<sup>9</sup> P. Stein, *Regulae Iuris*, Edinburgh, 1066, pp. 49-73.

therefore, a short summary of things is passed on, and, as Sabinus says, it is like the (official) resume of a case, which, as soon as it is tampered with, loses its authority.<sup>10</sup>

As long as a *regula* faithfully reflected its original, the jurists of the classical period were not unduly concerned with its precise formulation; only in Byzantine times did this become a matter for strict codification.

When we apply Stein's findings to Tertullian we discover that the latter's use of the word *regula* ties in perfectly with contemporary legal practice. The *regula fidei* was the summary of the *lex* (i.e. Scripture) which could then be used as the fundamental rule in biblical interpretation. However, faith was not the only aspect of scriptural teaching which was ordered by a *regula*; discipline also came under a similar form of control. In fact the phrase *regula disciplinae* is about as frequent, and certainly as important, as the expression *regula fidei* in Tertullian. Moreover, like the *regula fidei*, the *regula disciplinae* had existed from the beginning, long before the appearance of the first heretics (*Adv. Prax.* 2.2).

Tertullian strongly objected to any suggestion that the Apostles had enjoined a relaxation of the role of discipline found in the Old Testament law, as we can see from his remarks on the subject of adultery (*De pud.* 12.2-3):

*Non in Apostolis quoque veteris legis forma soluta circa moechiae quanta sit demonstrationem, ne forte lenior existimetur in novitate disciplinarum quam in vetustate. Cum primum intonuit evangelium et vetera concussit, ut de legis retinendae necessitate disceptaretur, primum hanc regulam de auctoritate Spiritus Sancti Apostoli emittunt ad eos qui iam ex nationibus allegi coeperant...*

Do we not recognize the form of the old law with regard to the demonstration of adultery and how serious it is, in the

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Apostles also, lest it be thought more trivial in the new (dispensation) than in the old? When the Gospel first sounded forth and shattered the old order, so that it was debated whether or not the law should be retained, this was the first rule which the Apostles, on the authority of the Holy Spirit, sent to those who were beginning to be gathered from among the nations...

But although faith and discipline were each subject to a *regula*, there were great differences between them. The most important of these was that the rule of faith was fixed for all time. The facts and pattern of redemption were eternal—*veritas semper et antiqua res*—but the rule of discipline was not (*De vir. vel.* 1. 2). The variability of the *regula disciplinae* was certainly not arbitrary, as we shall see, though there is no doubt that it did cause Tertullian some embarrassment. Whatever disadvantages there may have been, however, were outweighed by the one supreme advantage which it gave him. For by insisting that spiritual discipline could and did become stricter in the course of time, Tertullian was able to short-circuit those of his opponents who appealed to the *example* of Scripture to govern their conduct (thereby avoiding, so Tertullian would argue, its more rigorous *precepts*). To understand this line of reasoning, and the way in which the rule of discipline operated, we must examine the analysis

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<sup>10</sup> In *Ad Plautium* xvi, cited by P. Stein, op. cit., p. 67.

he gave of the workings of Divine Providence, and in particular his understanding of the dispensations of salvation history.

### THE DISPENSATIONS AND DISCIPLINE

Tertullian saw the unfolding of salvation as a historical process in three distinct phases, which corresponded to the Old Testament, the Incarnation of Christ and the Pentecostal reign of the Holy Spirit. Norman Cohn has seen in this teaching a primitive form of the millenarianism developed by the mediaeval mystic Joachim of Fiore, and transmitted through him to a wide variety of popular protest movements in the later Middle Ages.<sup>11</sup> Whether this was so or not, there can be no doubt that Tertullian's dispensational scheme, even if its elements did not originate with him, represented a radical departure from much

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of what the Church as a whole had previously taught. This was perhaps the chief single reason for the opposition which his disciplinary injunctions encountered in the more sophisticated ecclesiastical circles.

Tertullian was preoccupied with the problem of time. We have already seen how he distinguished between the temporal image and the eternal likeness of God (both of which, of course, were united in Christ) and this carried over into his christology and his trinitarian theology. The problem may be stated briefly as follows. God's will and plan for Adam's race is eternal and immutable. Adam, however, chose to exercise his free will and disobeyed God's decrees. But God was not content to abandon his creation, so he resolved to redeem man by teaching him to obey the Divine Law. This instruction was given in three historical stages (*dispositiones*), in each of which a different Person of the Trinity took the leading role.<sup>12</sup> In the first of these stages, or dispensations, God revealed the *content* of the Divine Law, which was subsequently interpreted by the Prophets (*De vir. vel.* 1.7). In dealing with the Old Covenant, Tertullian generally followed St Paul, though there is some indication that he played down the Abrahamic origins of Israel's faith and put more emphasis on Moses than was warranted, particularly in the matter of circumcision. It is somewhat strange, for example; that although he speaks of faith without the need for circumcision, and of circumcision being a spiritual as well as a physical act, he never mentions the fact that the sign had originally been given to Abraham because of his faith (*Adv. Marc.* v. 4.8-10).

The first dispensation was that of the Father, and Tertullian was at great pains to point out the logical continuity of the plan of God through the trinitarian dispensations, in opposition especially to the Marcionites, who rejected the Old Testament (*ibid.*, v.4.1). The first dispensation held good until the time of John the Baptist, last of the line of prophets. Did Tertullian teach that there was a precise moment at which the dispensation of the Father became the dispensation of the Son? There is some evidence that he regarded the moment of Christ's baptism as the point at which the change occurred,<sup>13</sup> which, if true, would tie in very

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<sup>11</sup> N. Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, pp. 108-9.

<sup>12</sup> This is a point which seems to have been missed even by J. Moingt, *La théologie trinitaire de Tertullien*, 4 vols, Paris, 1966-9.

<sup>13</sup> This may be inferred from several facts. (1) He is fond of repeating the phrase *lex et prophetae usque ad Iohannem* (Matt. 11.13) which occurs eight times in his writings. (2) He is insistent that John's mission was to announce the coming Messiah, a task which he performed by baptising men for the remission of sins, cf. *De*



well with the great importance which he attached to the rite. On the other hand, he frequently quoted

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Luke 16.16 (*lex et prophetae usque ad Iohannem*) without any mention of baptism.<sup>14</sup> It is therefore possible that he regarded the two dispensations as partially overlapping in the time between Christ's baptism and John's death. Such a view would tie in with John's own statements in Scripture (John 3.30), but it may not have commended itself so easily to one as conscious of time as Tertullian was. The answer is probably that, of these alternatives, the former would have appealed most to Tertullian and comes closest to what he actually believed.

For our purposes we may assume that it was the baptism of Christ which marked the beginning of the second dispensation, in which the chief role was played by the Son. In the overall context of the Divine Law, this new revelation of God was of the greatest significance. For Christ was the *supplementum legis et prophetarum* (*Adv. Marc.* iv. 2.2), and *nostra lex ampliata atque suppleta* (*De orat.* 22.8). In him the Law of God which during the old dispensation had been hidden in parables and allegories, was made manifest in its fullness (*De resurr. mort.* 19-2 1). In Christ the sentence of death on sinful Adam was annulled, and eternal life made available to men (*De pud.* 9.6). Tertullian never thought for a moment that Jesus had revealed anything fundamentally new. In keeping with the pattern of recapitulation, the work of Christ was one of revelation in the most literal sense—he had come to unveil the truth which had been present from the start in shadows and types (*Adv. Marc.* v.11.5-7). The life and death of Jesus, therefore, formed an extended commentary on, and fulfilment of, the divinely appointed Law.

It was in the final element of his dispensational scheme, however, that Tertullian was at his most original, and where his views, often in remarkably unmodified form, are still capable of provoking controversy.<sup>15</sup> The prominence which Tertullian gave to the reign of the Paraclete is not surprising when we consider that it was, after all, the age in which he and his contemporaries were living. But it was also the period for which there was the least amount of divine instruction available. The prophets of Israel had been around to interpret the first dispensation as need arose, and the Apostles had explained the second, but who was there to carry on this work in the third? In theory, the answer seemed obvious enough. The prophet Joel

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had predicted that in the last days God would pour out his Spirit on all flesh, and this promise had been remembered and repeated on the Day of Pentecost (*ibid.*, v.8.6). On the nature of

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*bapt.* 10.5 ff. (3) Christ himself underwent John's baptism, when the Spirit of God descended on him, *De carn. Chr.* 3.8. (4) The crucifixion did not supersede the baptism but confirmed it. Not only did Pilate wash his hands in water to excuse himself from responsibility, but water even flowed from the pierced side of the Saviour, *De bapt.* 9-4.

<sup>14</sup> The phrase was particularly important to him because it signified the end of the period of God's initial indulgence towards man. The abolition of the Law meant only that sin, which the Law had restrained, was now to be wiped out entirely. This is made clear, e.g., in *De pud.* 6.2.

<sup>15</sup> This has been the case, for example, in the recently revived Pentecostal (Charismatic) Movement. For a discussion of this, see F. D. Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, Grand Rapids, 1970, pp. 36-7.

these spiritual gifts, both Isaiah the prophet and St Paul the Apostle were in complete agreement, a point which Tertullian raised in his attack on Marcion (ibid., v.8.8.).

The theory, so it seemed, was clear enough. But where were these new prophets who were supposed to guide the Church? Montanus was clearly one, and even at Carthage there were occasional examples of prophetic ecstasy.<sup>16</sup> But these were the exceptions which only served to confirm the rule—the new spiritual life was not evident in the majority of cases. In recognising this, Tertullian both conformed to and sharply dissented from the so-called ‘gnostic’ picture of the Church. He agreed with the Valentinians and others that there were two kinds of Christian—the *spiritalis* and the *psychicus*, but differed radically from them as to the reasons why this was so. In the ‘gnostic’ scheme, the *psychici* were intellectually deficient, since they had no knowledge of those higher spiritual realities, which went under the name of the Aeon, the Pleroma and the Nous. Tertullian rejected all this as mythological nonsense, which is hardly surprising, given his conception of revelation as the unveiling of the Divine Law. Knowledge was not the problem, since everything there was to know had already been revealed in Christ. The real difficulty lay deeper, at the level of experience.

In Tertullian’s scheme, the transition from the second to the third dispensation was neither as neat nor as sudden as the switch from the first to the second. Instead of being instantaneous, it occurred in two steps over a ten-day period. The first of these, of course, was the Ascension, which represented not only the culmination of the earthly work of Christ, but even more important, the beginning of a new relationship between man and God. For it was in ascending that ‘he led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men’ (ibid., v.8.5). These gifts materialised ten days afterwards at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples. The significance of this event was enormous. The Spirit brought no new knowledge (*De mono.* 3.9), but he did bring something equally important—the power to put the teaching and example of Christ into practice. In the

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third dispensation, the Law-fulfilling life of the one Man was to become the standard for all, and it was the task of the Paraclete to make this feasible (ibid., 4.1). The dividing line between spiritual and unspiritual Christians was not one of knowledge, therefore, but of sanctification.

Tertullian’s use of the term *Paracletus* to qualify the Holy Spirit is significant for the light it sheds on the unity of the dispensations. Its importance as a badge of Montanism has been greatly exaggerated, with the unfortunate result that its real significance has been obscured. For the word *Paracletus*, taken as it is from Jesus’ promise to his disciples that he would not leave them bereft,<sup>17</sup> emphasised as nothing else could the close link between the work of the Holy Spirit and the Person of Christ. The task of the Paraclete was to conform men to Christ so that they could follow his holy example more closely. In them, he would translate

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<sup>16</sup> *De anima* 9.4. The famous case of the woman who had visions in Church has often, though not always, been held to be an example of Montanism. The main supporting evidence for this seems to be that only Montanists would allow women to prophesy. But this is not so. Philip the Evangelist had four daughters who were prophetesses (Acts 21.8) and although St Paul specifically forbade women to teach or to preach, he never denied them the right to prophesy. Tertullian followed the Apostle faithfully, even after coming into contact with the Montanists; cf., e.g., *De vir. vel.* 9.1.

<sup>17</sup> John 16.7. The word also had a wide circulation in heretical Judaism, but there is no indication that Tertullian, or the Montanists for that matter, got their term from that source. Cf. O. Betz, *Der Paraklet*, Leiden, 1963.

into reality the full implications of the Incarnation. The Law which had been revealed to Moses and fulfilled in Christ would now be written on the heart of every *spiritalis* by the Divine Comforter himself.

Tertullian's dispensationalism, important though it was, should not be confused with millenarianism in the usual sense. There is no doubt that he believed that Christians were living in the last days, but this belief was always tempered with practical considerations which were far more important in his teaching. He took the Apocalypse seriously, of course, and believed it more or less literally, but it is significant that he confined himself to repeating a catalogue of the expected events and did not indulge in speculation about the Beast and so on (cf. e.g., *De resurr. mort.* 27.1). Considering that millenarianism was at this time widely accepted in the Church, even by people as hard-headed as Irenaeus, and that Tertullian sympathised publicly with the Montanists, who were millenarians of the first order, this is perhaps somewhat surprising. But it is less so if we consider what his main purpose was in developing his dispensational ideas in the first place.

Tertullian needed dispensationalism not for supernatural reasons, but in order to provide a solid theological basis on which to build his disciplinary structure. This is clear from the way in which he handled moral precepts and their application. It was obvious, for instance, that for some reason a different

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standard was applied to adulterers in the New Testament from that which had obtained under the Mosaic Law. On the one hand Jesus himself had altered the Law's provisions (or so it seemed), and perhaps made possible further modifications later on, by transferring the power of binding and loosing to his disciples. But at the same time, Scripture clearly stated that the gospel was everlasting and unchanging. How could these two apparently contradictory statements be reconciled?

Tertullian's solution of this dilemma was ingenious. As he explained it, both faith and discipline existed in principle from the beginning, though in both cases the revelation of the details proceeded by stages. The discipline of the Old Testament, like the faith of the Israelites, was incomplete. Because of this God excused some of the people's failings, by the grace which Tertullian called his *indulgentia*, until the fullness of the revelation should come (*De exhort. cast.* 3.2). The advent of Christ brought an end to this period of tolerance, but God's *indulgentia* was not immediately withdrawn. Even after Pentecost the Apostles continued to allow remarriage, for instance, even though it was against the principles of the creation settlement (*De pud.* 20.1-4). The reason for this, however, was only that since sinful human beings could not change their habits overnight, the Apostles had been instructed to proceed leniently and by stages with the application of the full weight of the discipline revealed in Christ. This period of extended indulgence had lasted 160 years, but now, Tertullian claimed, it was to be wound up (*De mono.* 3.8). How and why was this?

It was at this point that Tertullian's line of reasoning began to diverge seriously from New Testament principles. The Apostles had taught that the last days had arrived, and their decisions, in matters of discipline as well as of faith, were regarded as final. But Tertullian wished to impose a stricter moral regime than the one the Apostles had tolerated. He therefore had to show that the moral behaviour of the New Testament Church, including the Apostles'

advice, was inferior to the precepts which these same Apostles had laid down as normative. He also had to show that the Holy Spirit had since filled the gap left in Scripture with a completed teaching of his own.

This extraordinary course was not as difficult as it might

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appear, however. The main lines of the New Testament teaching on marriage had been set out by St Paul in his letters to the Corinthians, but it was on this subject that he had shown the greatest degree of hesitation. He had even acknowledged that he had no direct command from God, but only the mind of the Spirit to guide him (*De exhort. cast.* 4.4; *De cor.* 4.6; *De pud.* 16.21). For Tertullian this was literally a godsend. If the Apostle himself had no specific instructions, then it was obvious that the advice which he gave was not in the same category as his other pronouncements. This did not mean that it carried no weight at all, of course, but rather that its authority was of a special nature. St Paul had spoken on the strength of the Holy Spirit given to him. But clearly he was not the only one to whom the Spirit had been given, and if his views on the marriage question were so uncertain, was it not likely that the Spirit would later provide more detailed instructions through some other spokesman? This was what Tertullian claimed had happened in the prophecies of the Montanists. Their exhortations to chastity and holy living were the final element which completed the divine scheme of sanctification (*De mono.* 3.8).

The particular role of Montanus and his followers in this scheme, however, needs to be treated with some caution. For one thing, Montanus began to prophesy about the year 171, or only 140 years after Pentecost. Since Tertullian says 160 years, he must have been speaking more of his own time than of the previous generation, to which the original Montanists belonged. Then too, the Montanist emphasis on the Paraclete and the descent of the New Jerusalem would suggest that Montanus was heavily influenced by a Johannine outlook, while Tertullian's thought is more Pauline. What place then did Tertullian assign to Montanus? Probably he regarded him and his immediate followers as fulfilling a task analogous to that of John the Baptist, who announced the coming of a Kingdom but was not himself part of it. Both John and Montanus were prophets outside the main tradition, and both heralded the impending arrival of a new order. Like John, Montanus had also been rejected by the religious leaders of the day and his message had gone unheeded. But Tertullian took him seriously, and regarded the New Prophecy as the authentic sign of the approaching end. The conclusion was inescapable—the strictest

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possible moral discipline must be enforced without delay, so as to be ready for the Second Coming of Christ and the final judgment.

### **SCRIPTURA, NATURA, DISCIPLINA**

The importance of the dispensations for the development of Tertullian's pattern of discipline was reinforced by a wider system of authority involving the universal principles of Scripture and nature. The fullest explanation of their relationship is given in the following passage from *De virginibus velandis* 16.1-2:

*In his consistit defensio nostrae opinionis secundum Scripturam, secundum naturam, secundum disciplinam. Scriptura legem condit, natura contestatur, disciplina exigit. Cul ex his consuetudo opinionis prodest, vel qui diversae sententiae color? Dei est Scriptura, Dei est natura Dei est disciplina. Quicquid contrarium est istis, Dei non est. Si Scriptura incerta est, natura manifesta est, et de eius testimonio Scriptura incerta non potest esse. Si de natura dubitatur, disciplina quid magis Deo ratum sit ostendit. Nihil est illi carius humilitate, nihil acceptius modestia, nihil operosius gloria et studio hominibus placendi. Illud itaque sit tibi et Scriptura et natura et disciplina quod ratum Deo in veris, sicut iuberis omnia examinare et meliora quaeque sectari (1 Thess. 5.21).*

The defence of our opinion is as follows, according to Scripture, nature and discipline. Scripture establishes the law, nature testifies to it and discipline demands it. Which of these is the primary authority, or what element of diversity is there between them? Scripture is of God, nature is of God, discipline is of God. Whatever goes against these is not of God. If Scripture is uncertain, nature is clear, and from its witness Scripture cannot be uncertain. If nature is unclear, discipline shows what God prefers. Nothing is dearer to him than humility, nothing more welcome than modesty, nothing more burdensome than pride and a desire to please men. Therefore let it be a rule for you, that you will find God's will in Scripture, nature and discipline, as you have been commanded to *examine all things and choose whatever is best* (1 Thess. 5.21).

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The key concepts in this passage are contained in the trilogy *Scriptura, natura, disciplina*. At first sight it might appear as if Tertullian accorded equal weight to all three, but a closer inspection will show that this is not the case. The relationship between them is perhaps best compared to that between the Persons of the Trinity. Nor is this likely to have been an accident. Although Tertullian nowhere explained his choice of terms, it is possible that he was guided mainly by trinitarian considerations. Scripture, after all, was given by God the Father, nature was redeemed in Christ, and discipline was applied in the Church through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The parallel cannot be pressed too far, of course, but the analogy is there none the less. Certainly Scripture is given a pride of place not unlike that accorded to the Father (cf. *Adv. Marc.* iii.20.1). The relation of the Three Persons to the Law is also markedly similar. The law was established by God the Father, its truth witnessed to by the Son, and its provisions enforced by the Holy Spirit.

In Tertullian's trilogy there can be no doubt that a very definite primacy was accorded to Scripture, which alone established the Law. Nature and discipline might clarify it, but only the written text carried the seal of ultimate authority. The Christian who sought to know God's will must begin with the Bible; only when it was unclear could he turn to nature and discipline. Not that Scripture was ever truly unclear, of course—uncertainties of interpretation were due to the inability of men to understand divine truth, not to mistakes on God's part (*De resurr. mort.* 21.2).

As for nature, it is true that Tertullian allowed a secondary appeal to it to clarify obscurities in the Bible, but great care must be taken to understand just exactly what he meant by this term. Nature to him was not the *physis* of Aristotle, still less the *natura* of Thomas Aquinas. Nature was the created state before Adam's corruption by original sin. It is essential to realise that for Tertullian fallen man as we know him was not natural but unnatural, in direct contrast to the

usual modern usage. His famous remark that the soul was *naturaliter christiana* (*Apol.* 17.6) must be understood in this light.<sup>18</sup> Tertullian was speaking about the created, perfect soul, not the corrupt unregenerate substance actually present in men. It is therefore quite wrong

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to suppose, as some have done, that Tertullian ever imagined that the ‘natural’ man (in the Thomist sense) could attain to a knowledge of God independent of revelation. It is true that when Tertullian spoke of man in his actual fallen state, he did use the term *natura* to describe it, but never without qualification, as we have already seen. Like God, the devil too was capable of giving man a nature, although in this case it was but a corruption and a counterfeit of the divine gift.

It is when we come to the third element of the trilogy, however, that we meet the most serious difficulties. We have already seen how the distinction between a principle and its application allowed Tertullian to talk of a *nova disciplina* while at the same time denying accusations that he was introducing this very thing. This was possible because in principle discipline was an unchanging factor in the life of the Church. It had always existed, always been necessary as a defence against sin, and always been mandatory in the pursuit of holiness (*De vir. vel. 1; De mono. 1*). In practice, however, discipline, at least as it was applied in the Church, was a potentially variable series of rules and regulations. On the other hand the changes in question were not arbitrary, but based on Scripture and governed by its ratio (*De exhort. cast. 6.2*).

The scriptural foundation for discipline and especially the dependence of ratio on the written law must be emphasised in view of the fact that many scholars, particularly among Roman Catholics, have tried to find an authority for discipline in unwritten traditions, presumably in an attempt to trace post-Tridentine dogma back to the Apostles themselves. The effects of this approach may be seen in the following from Morel (*op. cit.*, p. 264):

...in the development of *disciplina*, the author accords primary importance to *ratio*, i.e. to the rational basis of traditions and extra-Scriptural practices. In this perspective it is natural for a human institution which has shown itself conformable to reason and useful for the good of souls (the hierarchical organization of the Church) to be one day confirmed by the Paraclete and raised from the human institution it was to the rank of a divine one.<sup>19</sup>

This extraordinary statement Morel supports from two

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passages, neither of which has the slightest bearing on ‘the hierarchical organization of the Church’. The first of these (*De cor.* 4.5) reads as follows:

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<sup>18</sup> See S. Otto, *Natura and dispositio. Eine Untersuchung zum Naturbegriff and zur, Denkform Tertullians*, München, 1960.

<sup>19</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 264:

...dans l'évolution de la disciplina, l'auteur accorde une importance primordiale à la *ratio*, c'est-à-dire, au fondement rationnel des traditions et des pratiques extra-scripturaires. Dans cette perspective, il est naturel qu'une institution humaine, qui s'est révélée conforme à la raison et utile au bien des âmes (la constitution hiérarchique de l'Eglise) soit un jour confirmée par le Paraclet et, d'institution humaine qu'elle était, élevée au rang d'institution divine...

*Porro si ratione lex constat, lex erit omne iam quod ratione constiterit a quocunque productum. An non putas omni fideli licere concipere et constituere, dumtaxat quod Deo congruat, quod disciplinae conducat, quod saluti proficiat...*

Furthermore if the law stands by *ratio*, everything which stands by *ratio* will be law, whoever (or whatever) it comes from. Or do you not think that it is allowed to every believer to think and formulate, provided that it be what accords with God, leads to discipline and is useful to salvation...

This passage is quoted to show that Tertullian regarded *ratio* as an authority superior to law, but it is extremely doubtful whether this is really what is meant here. It is certainly true that he says that the law is determined by *ratio*, but it is important to notice how this was decided in practice. *Lex* in this context does not refer to a text, but to *ad hoc* regulations for which no written provision has been made. This wider meaning is made explicit in the second clause, where *carte blanche* is given to establish further practices as law without recourse to specific legislation. At the same time, however, this process is not arbitrary, nor is it grounded in autonomous human reason. It is not what the Christian deems to be rational which has the force of law, but what accords with the data already known by revelation. Admittedly, Tertullian does not say so explicitly, but since he frequently insists that God and the plan of salvation can be known only by revelation, and also that this revelation exists in written form (*Scriptura*), it seems plain that we are to understand this passage as confirming the primacy of Scripture over *ratio*.

This supposition is confirmed by Morel's second quotation, this time from *De ieiunio* 10.5:

*Eorum quae ex traditione obseroantur tanto magis dignam rationem adferre debemus quanto carent scripturae auctoritate donec aliquo caelesti charismate aut confirmentur aut corrigantur.*

As for these things which are observed on account of tradition, we must produce a worthy *ratio*, all the more in that

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they lack Scriptural authority, until such time as they are either confirmed or altered by some heavenly *charisma*.

Morel believes that this strengthens his case for the independence of *ratio* as a source of authority, but it is difficult to see how this follows from the evidence he cites. It is precisely the lack of scriptural authority which highlights the need for *ratio* in the first place, and even then the practices established in this manner remain subject to modification by some heavenly *charisma*.

Tertullian is tantalisingly vague about what this might be, but it would certainly have included prophecy, and experience suggested that prophetic utterances would soon find their way into writing and be added to the existing body of Scripture. Indeed, it seems quite likely that Tertullian has in mind a process similar to the one which produced the New Testament, in which traditional Jewish observances are substantially modified on precisely this basis.

As for Christian discipline, it might be derived from unwritten conventions, but the validity of these was still dependent on their conformity to the ratio of Scripture. To quote Tertullian (*De cor.* 4.1):

*Harum et aliarum eiusmodi disciplinarum si legem expostules Scripturam nullam leges. Tradition tibi praetendetur auctrix et consuetudo confirmatrix et fides obseatrix. Rationem traditioni et consuetudini et fidei patrocinatorum aut ipse perspicias aut ab aliquo qui perspixerit discas.*

As for these and other like disciplines, if you demand a law (legal basis) you will find no Scriptural warrant (for them). Tradition is claimed to be the author, custom the sanctioner and faith the observer. The *ratio* which will support the tradition, the custom and the faith—this you may discern for yourself or else learn from someone who has discerned it.

It will be noted that Tertullian does not say *traditio est auctrix* but only *traditio praetendetur auctrix*, a hint that a given practice's origin in tradition was more seeming than real. This is important in view of the fact that it has sometimes been suggested that Tertullian conceived of tradition as an authority distinct from, and even superior to, Scripture.<sup>20</sup> This view, however,

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seems to derive from a misunderstanding of the word *ratio*. Fontaine, for example, identifies it with the Stoic concept of divine harmony, and regards it as the common link between Scripture and tradition, which are otherwise independent sources of authority. Thus *disciplina* might be derived from either in the first instance, though ultimately it depended on *ratio*.<sup>21</sup> Morel is less explicit, but he too regards *ratio* as fundamental. The mistake which both Fontaine and Morel have made, however, is that they have equated *ratio* with 'reason' in the philosophical sense, whereas Tertullian used the word in its legal meaning, which is not the same at all. What *ratio* meant to a jurist has been explained by Jacques Ellul as follows:

*Ius est ars aequi et boni*, i.e. the art of finding the most equitable and effective momentary application of a given notion common to all men. This application is made according to a precise and established mode of reasoning which the Roman jurists call *ratio* (which does not mean 'reason'). This natural law includes institutions like the family and property, and rules such as the prohibition against stealing or killing. It is not justice itself. Justice appears as a sort of double relationship: on the one hand, relationship between natural law and the given circumstances in which it is to take form, and, on the other, relationship between the positive law and the action of a particular individual.<sup>22</sup>

In Ellul's definition we can discern the legal process by which Tertullian interpreted the Scriptures for the needs of the Christian community at Carthage. Scripture itself was the law, common to all Christians and accepted by them as authoritative. The application of biblical principles was governed by *traditio* (precedent), *consuetudo* (practice) and *fides* (consent). Operating together, these three factors were the *ratio* by which the written law was

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<sup>20</sup> F. De Pauw, 'La justification des traditions non-écrites chez Tertullien', *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 19, 1942, p. 11; R. P. C. Hanson, *Origen's Doctrine of Tradition*, London, 1954, pp. 189-90.

<sup>21</sup> J. Fontaine, *De corona*, Paris, 1966.

<sup>22</sup> J. Ellul, *The Theological Foundation of Law*, New York, 1960, p. 25.



administered. This ratio was not an independent authority, but merely a procedure, by which Scripture was shown to speak in particular circumstances.<sup>23</sup>

But if Tertullian's use of ratio cannot be traced to a philosophical source, the same cannot be said for the triadic formula *Scriptura, natura, disciplina*, the origins of which go back to the pre-Socratic philosophers. Even when we allow for the fact that it was a common habit of the Ancients to divide everything

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into three parts, there is unmistakable evidence that a combination remarkably like this one enjoyed considerable popularity over a long period. Although different writers, including Tertullian, adjusted the triad to suit their own purposes, there is solid evidence that a definite tradition, well represented in the didactic philosophy of all periods, took hold and was generally accepted from a very early date.

The idea of a triadic formula may well have originated with Protagoras, as an offshoot of his interest in numerology. In Plato's dialogue he is quoted as saying: *ex epimeleias kai askēseōs kai didachēs* (*Prot.* 323d), and there is a well-known fragment which supports this.<sup>24</sup> Other evidence may be found in Democritus,<sup>25</sup> but it is Plato who first used the three-point formula as we know it. Aside from the quotation already given, there is a passage in the Laws which reads: *ethesi kai epainois kai logois* (ii. 663.d) and a sentence in the Meno which says: *Echeis moi eipein, O Sōkrates, ara didakton hē aretē ē ou didakton all' askēton, ē oute askēton oute mathēton, alla physei paragignetai tois anthrōpois...* The last of these shows perhaps most clearly the basis on which the later formula was built. The three elements *didakton*, *askēton* and *physis* were already present, with *mathēton* as an obvious synonym for the first of these.

Greater systematisation is apparent when we turn to Aristotle, who usually avoided the awkward juxtaposition of nouns and adjectives which we saw in the *Meno*. It also seems that Aristotle was more conscious of the advantages of a particular order in the triad. Thus we find the following combinations:

<i>physei, ethei, didachei</i>	( <i>Ethica Nic.</i> 1179 b 20)
<i>physis, ethos, logos</i>	( <i>Politica</i> 1332 a 40)
<i>physei, ethei, mathēsei</i>	( <i>Metaphysica</i> 1047 b 33)

An odd one out is the combination *ethesi, philosophiāi, nomois* (*Politica* 1263 b 40) though this too fits the general pattern. This was contained not in the actual words used, but in the significance attached to their position within the triad. First place was given to the constitutive principle, second to the corroborating testimony, third to the means of application. Stated in this form, the pedagogical triad soon became a commonplace of ancient philosophical thought. Direct evidence of Aristotelian

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Adv. Marc.* iii.20.10. On the subject of *ratio* and its meaning in Tertullian, see G. Bray, 'The Legal Aspect of *Ratio* in Tertullian', *Vigiliae Christianae* 31, 1977, pp. 94-116.

<sup>24</sup> Fr. B3.ii.264.23 (Diels): *physeōs kai askēseōs didaskalia deitai.*

<sup>25</sup> Fr. B33.ii.153.1 (Diels): *hē physis kai hē didachē.*

influence is provided by Cicero, who wrote: *Ab Aristotle mores instituta disciplines... cognovimus* (*De fin.* 5.11). The passage is intriguing because in the literal sense, there is no corresponding phrase actually used by Aristotle. Even allowing for the uncertainties of translation, it seems hardly likely that Cicero would ever have put *mores* as the equivalent of *physis*. *Mores* is clearly *ethē*, but then what is *instituta*? This could be *nomoi* but that would leave us with the combination *ethē, nomoi, mathesēis* which is not attested in Aristotle. The ‘translation’ is explicable, however, if we assume that Cicero was referring primarily to a triadic scheme whose elements were all present in Aristotle, and not to a particular verbal formula. This is borne out by another passage, in which *mos* and *discipline*, now in the singular, appear with *religio* as the second element (*De div.* 2.70).

By Cicero’s time the idea of using triads had caught on in almost any context, and his writings are a rich source of supply. His rhetorical expertise occasionally produced inversions (or partial inversions) to vary the effect, but when this is taken into account, we are left with the following:

<i>ingenio, usu, doctrina</i>	( <i>De oratore</i> ii.39.162)
<i>ingenio, doctrina, usu</i>	( <i>ibid.</i> , iii.20.77)
<i>studio, ingenio, doctrina</i>	( <i>ibid.</i> , iii.4.16)
<i>artis, studii, natura</i>	( <i>De invent.</i> i.2)
<i>ingenium, artem, usus</i>	( <i>Pro Balbo</i> 20.45)
<i>natura, usu, doctrina</i>	( <i>Pro Scauro</i> 24)

From this it will be apparent that Cicero’s writings show a high degree of verbal consistency, although even after due allowance has been made for the influence of rhetoric, a logical order in the elements is more difficult to discern. It is likely that he was not particularly bothered about this, since he was mostly speaking in practical terms about human qualities, although he had a certain tendency to put *ingenium* (which is to be identified with *natura*, cf. *De orat.* i.25.I 13) first and then *doctrina* and *usus*, either in that or in reverse order. The inversion of the second and third words is not as significant as it might appear, since the main emphasis fell on the first element of the triad, and other writers like Plutarch did the same (*De lib. educ.* 2a).

The hypothesis that *ingenium—natura—physis* was the con-

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stitutive principle of this particular triad is confirmed by the evidence of later writers. Taking them in turn we find the following:

Plutarch:	<i>physis, logos, ethos</i> <i>physis, mathesis, askesis</i>	( <i>De lib. educ.</i> 2a) ( <i>ibid.</i> , 3b)
Quintilian:	<i>natura, arte, exercitatione</i> <i>ingenii, doctrina, usu</i> <i>natura, doctrina, studium</i> <i>ingenii, studii, doctrinae</i>	(iii .5.1) (vi.2-3) (vii.10.14) (xii.1.9)
Apuleius:	<i>ingenium, usus, discipline</i>	( <i>De Platone</i> 228)
Marius Victorinus:	<i>natura, studio, discipline</i>	( <i>Explan. in Cic.</i> )

		<i>Rhet., Teubner,</i> p. 156, 1)
Augustine:	<i>natura, discipline, usus</i>	( <i>De div. quaest.</i> 83.q.38)
	<i>natura, doctrina, usu</i>	( <i>De civ. Dei</i> ii.25.5.22)
	<i>physica, logica, ethica</i>	( <i>ibid.</i> )

These examples, which range in date over four centuries, are sufficiently uniform for us to be able to state with confidence that a definite formula existed, based on the fundamentally Platonic idea of nature.<sup>26</sup>

At the same time, however, there was another version of the triad, which apparently owed more to Stoic influence than to Plato. This variation on the common theme is also found in Cicero, though probably it originated with Posidonius or with another philosopher whom Posidonius copied. As the phrase stands in the *De officiis* (1.156) it reads: *leges, mores, disciplinam*. It appears again in reverse order in the *De re publica* (1.2) as *disciplinis, moribus, legibus*. Plutarch claimed that all things could be attributed to three causes, *nomos, anankē* and *ethos*<sup>27</sup> and there is evidence, as in the examples quoted above, that he regarded ethos and askesis as interchangeable, at least in certain contexts. The characteristic features of the ‘Stoic’ triad are that it replaces nature with law as the first element, and shows a preference for discipline over *doctrina* or any of its synonyms. Thus it is probable that the Ciceronian *mos, religio, disciplina* is

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to be attached to the ‘Stoic’ branch of the triad although there are other instances, e.g. *voluntate, studio, disciplina* (*Flacc.* 53) where Platonic elements are stronger. The use of *disciplina*, therefore, is not a guarantee of Stoicism although it was characteristic of that school.

Of all the various forms of the triad which we have looked at so far, there is no doubt that the Ciceronian *leges, mores, disciplina* comes closest to the *Scriptura, natura, disciplina* which we find in Tertullian. The similarity is all the greater when we remember that for Tertullian Scripture was the *lex Dei* and as such was given pride of place. It also ties in well with what we know about Tertullian’s sympathies with Stoicism. But do these resemblances, striking though they are, amount to proof that Tertullian borrowed his language from Cicero? Probably not. Cicero almost always preferred plural to singular nouns in his triads, and although it is not difficult to see why *Scriptura* should have replaced *leges*, *natura* is a much less likely equivalent for *mores*. More significantly, the pattern is wrong. *Natura* in Cicero usually came first in a triad, and never occurred with *leges*. Given the equation of *natura* with *ingenium*, it is extremely unlikely that Cicero, or the Stoics generally, would have regarded an irrational element as dependent on a well-ordered *nomos*. *Lex* could replace *ingenium*, conceivably even follow it (as an element of *ars* or *disciplina*), but it could not precede it. Tertullian may well have got some of his vocabulary from Cicero—given the history of Latin

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. O. Du Roy, *L’intelligence de la foi en la Trinité selon Saint Augustin*, Paris, 1966, pp. 299-303; also P. Hadot, ‘Etre, vie, pensée chez Plotin et avant Plotin’, *Recherches sur l’antiquité classique V: Les sources de Plotin*, Vandoeuvres-Geneve, 1957, p. 107-57 (esp. pp. 123-9).

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Menan. *Siob.*, p. 240: *omnia fiunt tribus causis nomōi anakēi ethei tini.*

technical terms, this would have been difficult to avoid—but at a deeper level their thoughts ran in rather different channels.

Somewhat surprisingly, a closer parallel than anything Cicero offers can be found in Philo of Alexandria. To some extent Tertullian moved in a spiritual milieu not dissimilar to Philo's, but it must remain doubtful whether he was acquainted with his works at first hand. He never mentioned Philo by name, although that does not necessarily mean much. Hellenised Jewish converts to Christianity may have helped diffuse Philonic concepts to most parts of the Early Church, which may account for the wide spread of allegorising tendencies which Tertullian condemned so strongly. (On the other hand, he did recognise the need for allegorical interpretation in certain parts of the Old Testament, and this may have drawn him closer

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to Philo, whose exegetical methods were beginning to have a great influence on Clement of Alexandria and Origen.)

But whatever the case may be, it is worth noting that Philo's triadic formula is both more stable in form than any of the philosophers', and closer to Tertullian's own. Philo uses the combination *mathēsis* (or, with approximately equal frequency, *didaskalia*), *physis*, *askēsis*. Variations of this pattern occur, but they are rare and insignificant.<sup>28</sup> It is hardly necessary to remind ourselves that for Philo, both *mathēsis* and *didaskalia* refer primarily to Scripture, the divine *mathēsis*, and *physis* is certainly closer to *natura* than either of these is to *mos*. Particularly important is the way in which Philo habitually put *mathēsis*] *didaskalia* before *physis*, a trait which marks him off as unique in the Greek-speaking world.<sup>29</sup> Nor is this a matter of indifference. Being a devout Jew, Philo could hardly admit that the instruction specifically given by God was in any way inferior to, or dependent upon, mere nature, which anybody could examine whether he had been enlightened by the Law or not. The subordination of nature to Scripture was a characteristically Judaeo-Christian phenomenon which stands out as such even when tinged, as in Tertullian's case, with elements derived from Stoicism.

The only major difficulty arises when we consider *disciplina* as a translation of *askēsis*. Cicero had of course used *disciplina* in his triads, but he explicitly claimed to have got his usage from Aristotle, and Aristotle avoided the word *askēsis* in favour of *didache* or *mathēsis*. Philo, on the other hand, never used *didachē* in a triad, although *mathēsis* and *didaskalia* appear as synonyms. Quite why Philo used *askēsis* at all is hard to say. Protagoras and Plato had both used it, of course, but that was before triadic formulae had really been developed. Probably it is the simplest answer which is the most likely. Philo could not use *didachē*

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<sup>28</sup> The formula with *mathēsis* is found in Philo (Cohn-Wendland) as follows: ii.13.17; iii.241.8; iv.61.4; v.350.16:

With *didaskalia*: iii-79-14; iv. 13.3; iv. 13.8; v.347.7.

In iii.240.20 Philo puts *mathēsis* at the end: *tēn aretēn ē physei ē askēsei ē mathēsei*; and once (iii. 158.2) he speak of the three *physeis*, replacing *physus* in the triad by *teleiotēs*: *ton triōn physeōn didaskalias teleiotētos askēseōs*.

<sup>29</sup> In addition to the example quoted in n. 28, there is only one other exception to this in Philo, *De Abrahamo* 54. Du Roy, op. cit., p. 301, n. 2 gives two examples, but the first of these is incorrect. Following Hadot, du Roy recognises that the three elements of the triad are interdependent, but he does not examine the significance attached to the order in which they appear.

because it was synonymous with mathesis and too similar in form to *didaskalia*, and so chose askesis as the most suitable alternative. Stoic influence may also have played a role in this.

More to the point, it seems quite possible that Tertullian was thinking primarily of *askēsis* when using the word *disciplina*. The Latin term can be used to translate three different words in Greek, *didachē*, *paideia* and *askēsis*. The first of

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these occurs in Cicero and the second in the Latin New Testament, but neither quite fits Tertullian's usage. New Testament occurrences of *didachē* he translated not by *disciplina* but by *doctrina*,<sup>30</sup> though Morel has argued that Tertullian often used *doctrina* and *disciplina* synonymously, basing his case on the frequency with which the two words occur in tandem.<sup>31</sup> But it must be remembered that even this is no guarantee that the two words are identical; *disciplina* was often used in contexts where *doctrina* would clearly have been inappropriate, including the passage we are at present discussing. Tertullian did use *disciplina*, on the other hand, to translate the New Testament *paideia*, which in turn is a translation of the Hebrew *rnûsâr*.<sup>32</sup> Doubtless, *disciplina*, with its emphasis on learning the hard way, was the best word to convey this idea in Latin, but Tertullian used the term in ways which can scarcely be said to correspond to *paideia* in the New Testament sense.<sup>33</sup>

A comparison of the two words shows that *disciplina* was much too formalised a concept to accord well with *paideia*, which strikes us as meaning rather a regrettable necessity in exceptional circumstances. *Paideia* corresponds more closely to Tertullian's *correctio* than to *disciplina* which with its complicated system of regulated behaviour can only be described as a primitive form of asceticism,<sup>34</sup> which of course makes a derivation from *askēsis* all the more likely. The fact that *disciplina* stands for *paideia* in Tertullian's New Testament quotations need not matter unduly; it may well have been a traditional translation which Tertullian was content to retain and subordinate to his own somewhat different ideas.<sup>35</sup> On the whole, therefore, it seems most consonant with the general tenor of his works to say that mentally Tertullian was more akin to Philo than to Cicero or Aristotle.

Thus we see how the triad of *Scriptura*, *natura* and *disciplina* assumed its shape and substance. As in all such formulae, the order in which the terms occurred had its own importance. Scripture was the constitutive principle, the *point de départ*, nature the

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<sup>30</sup> Cf., e.g., *De praescr. haer.* 44.5, which refers to Rom. 16.17 and *Adv. Marc.* iv. 13.1, which is a translation of Mark 1.22 (Matt. 7.29; Luke 4.32).

<sup>31</sup> V. Morel, 'Disciplina, le mot et l'idée représentée par lui dans les oeuvres de Tertullien', *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 40, 1944-5, pp. 5-46. See also H. Marrou, 'Doctrina et disciplina dans la langue des Pères de l'Eglise', *Archivum latinitatis medii aevi* 9, 1934, p. 5. Of lesser interest is W. Dürig, 'Disciplina. Eine Studie zum Bedeutungsumfang des Wortes in der Sprache der Liturgie unter Vätern', *Sacris Erudiri* 4, 1952, pp. 245-79.

<sup>32</sup> E.g. Heb. 12.5 (Prov. 3.11). Tertullian used *disciplina* in *Adv. Marc.* v.18.11 to translate *paideia* in Eph. 6.4.

<sup>33</sup> Of course, *paideia* in the New Testament did not mean what it meant to classical educators, whatever Morel (op. cit., pp. 27 ff.) may think. This *paideia* was rendered in Latin by *humanitas*; cf. Aulus Gellius xiii.16.1. See also H. I. Marrou, *St Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*, Paris, 1938, pp. 552-4, where he cites P. de Labriolle, 'Pour l'histoire du mot humanitas', *Les humanités, Classes de lettres* VIII, 1931-2, pp. 478-9.

<sup>34</sup> Morel, for example, speaks, op. cit., p. 44, of: ... l'ascétisme vigoureux et impitoyable d'un Tertullien...; but he nowhere mentions *askēsis*.

<sup>35</sup> This would certainly accord well with Tertullian's use of Scripture and his style of exegesis; cf. Moingt, op. cit., I, pp. 177-82; also T. P. O'Malley, *Tertullian and the Bible. Language, Imagery, Exegesis*, Nijmegen, 1967.

corroborating witness, and discipline the practical application. In the looser structure of the philosophers it was usually possible for the second and third of these elements to change places; as in a bar of music, the ictus fell at the beginning, and there was little concern to establish the precise value

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of the rest. But for Tertullian such laxity was scarcely possible. Tied in with his triad was a complete theology. It was not chance or convenience which had established this system, but the Spirit of revelation himself. As we hinted earlier, it was the Father who gave the Law, the Son who confirmed it by taking on human nature, and the Spirit who applied it by discipline. Such a scheme of divine activity inevitably placed the last of the three at the very centre of the Church's concern. In the Pentecostal reign it was sanctification which the redeemed must pursue, and discipline, so the Holy Spirit had revealed, was the chosen means by which the Will of God would be accomplished.

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