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TERTULLIAN'S BAPTISMAL SPIRITUALITY
IN HIS *DE BAPTISMO* AND
ITS VALUE TODAY

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Darrell Rylan Allen
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APPROVAL SHEET

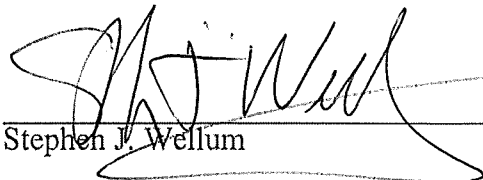
TERTULLIAN'S BAPTISMAL SPIRITUALITY
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ITS VALUE TODAY

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Date October 5, 2020

To Katie,
you are my wife,
and I love you!

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PREFACE

I would never have pursued doctoral studies were it not for the encouragement of many throughout my academic career. James Estep, John Wineland, Kelvin Jones, Perry Stepp, and Guthrie Veech encouraged me to continue my studies even while I was still an undergraduate at Kentucky Christian University. Scott Ford, along with Drs. Jones and Wineland, suggested a route similar to the one which I have taken.

Johnny Pressley and Jack Cottrell fanned the flames for theological studies in my mind and heart. They taught me the content of biblical sound doctrine and they modeled proper theological teaching method for me. I am grateful to both for the education, encouragement, and support.

For a decade I have learned from Michael A. G. Haykin. The richness of the trinitarian theology, biblical pneumatology, and an appreciation for the Fathers has been generously poured into me by the mentorship of Dr. Haykin. I am so thankful that God, in his providence, led me to study historical theology at this time and place. Dr. Haykin has shown great patience, encouragement, and mentorship to me as my supervisor. The Lord has blessed me these past several years as I have learned from Dr. Haykin.

My parents, Darrell and Donna Allen, encouraged me to pursue doctoral studies. They were generous toward me with their time, financial support, and patience during my years of study at SBTS. Most of all, my parents have shown me love and pointed me towards Christ. I appreciate and love them both.

My wife, Katie, and four children have been a source of love, comfort, encouragement, and growth for me during this decade of study. I could not have gotten to this point without my dear family. They have been gracious.

Like Tertullian, Augustine, and Patrick, I recognize and confess my sinfulness before a holy God. And like these dear brothers, and mentors in the faith, I rest in God's grace and am forever grateful for forgiveness in Christ and the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit.

Rylan Allen

Louisville, Kentucky

December 2020

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the meta-narrative of the Bible, salvation is God’s work in which he forgives sins and bestows the gift of his Holy Spirit on those who exercise faith in the crucified and risen Christ. In Acts 2:38 this gift of salvation is also explicitly tied to baptism. In what is the first gospel sermon, the apostle Peter said, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).¹ Paul, the apostle, appears to have echoed the same when he asserted that the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit is found in the matrix of baptism: “He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). The Holy Spirit washes and spiritually cleanses the baptizand in the physical waters of baptism. Tertullian (fl.190–215), the first Latin-speaking Christian author from Carthage, also repeated this baptismal perspective in his *De Baptismo* when he stated: “The [human] spirit is in those waters [of baptism] corporally washed, while the flesh is in those same waters spiritually cleansed.”² During the centuries since Tertullian wrote *De Baptismo*, the first Christian treatise devoted to the ordinance of baptism, his writings have been a fecund ecclesiological source for various baptismal spiritualities: Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Stone-Campbellite. The very diversity of these claimants naturally raises the question: Surely all of these cannot claim Tertullian’s support for their widely-differing positions?

¹ All Scripture passages are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

² Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 4, trans. Ernest Evans in his ed. and trans., *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1964), 11, brackets added.

What did he actually teach about baptism in *De Baptismo* and other early writings that touch on the subject?

It is amazing that there is no substantial study of this baptismal theology as it is found in his *De Baptismo*, and this is a central aim of this thesis, namely, to lay out what Tertullian taught in this treatise and why. The latter will necessitate both looking at his Scriptural exegesis and his historical context, for Tertullian was a biblicist but was also shaped by the issues of his era. After an overview of the *status quaestionis* of the literature on Tertullian's baptismal theology in this chapter, Chapter 2 plunges into a detailed study of the major themes of *De Baptismo*. Since Tertullian touches on this subject in sections of his other early works, an examination of them is necessary and is conducted in Chapter 3 to ascertain their similarity to or difference from what is found in *De Baptismo*. The final chapter answers the important so-what question: given what has been determined regarding the shape of Tertullian's baptismal thought, what then is its value for ecclesial communities today?

History of Research

Introductions to English Translations of *De Baptismo*

There are three relatively recent translations of Tertullian's *De Baptismo*. The most recent is by Lawrence Johnson in 2009. Johnson chose to translate it from the French of R. Refoulé, rather than from the original Latin.³ Johnson's introduction to the translation is quite brief. The standard English translation from Latin into English thus remains that of Ernest Evans from 1964. Although Pádraig Horgan's translation for a doctoral thesis was published two years after that of Evans, given its form—embedded in

³ Lawrence J. Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church: An Anthology of Historical Sources* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 1:119–132. Johnson's translation was into English from the French of R. Refoulé, *Tertullien: Traité du Baptême*, Series Latina 35 (Paris: Sources Chrétiennes, 1952). A footnote did evidence that Johnson consulted the Latin as well. Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 124, note e.

doctoral thesis that is not readily available—it will be Evans’ translation that is used in this thesis. A trio of recent French, German, and Italian translations, with their introductions, have been consulted also for the thesis.⁴

Ernest Evans

When did Tertullian write *De Baptismo*? Evans did not date *De Baptismo* precisely in his introduction. Rather, he dated the treatise generally: Tertullian wrote between 190, the year of his conversion, and 206 (the year that Evans suggested he joined the Montanists).⁵ Other scholars have agreed with this estimation. Mark LeTourneau dated the treatise “between 198 and 203, prior to Tertullian’s embracing the Montanist heresy.”⁶ Kilian McDonnell dated *De Baptismo* to “early in these Christian years,” which were “190–195.”⁷ J. Patout Burns, Jr. and Robin Jensen have concurred: “This treatise, the only full description of the ritual of the African church, is dated to the beginning of the third century and provides information about baptism in that time and place.”⁸

Evans understood Tertullian’s purpose in writing *De Baptismo* as a defence of baptism against heretical detractors and as a way of proper instruction for catechumens.⁹

⁴ French: Refoulé, *Tertullien*; German: Dietrich Schleyer, *Tertullian De Baptismo, De Oratione—Von der Taufe, Vom Gebet*, Fontes Christiani 76 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2006); Italian: J. G. Borleffs, *Tertulliano: Il Battesimo De Baptismo* (Bologna, Italy: Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 2011).

⁵ Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, ix–x.

⁶ Mark S. LeTourneau, “General and Special Topics in the *De Baptismo* of Tertullian,” *Rhetorica* 5 (1987): 88.

⁷ Kilian McDonnell, “Communion Ecclesiology and Baptism in the Spirit: Tertullian and the Early Church,” *Theological Studies* 49 (1988): 688. McDonnell concluded that *De Baptismo* was definitely Catholic. McDonnell labeled *De Baptismo* “a reliable source of Catholic practice in North Africa at the end of the second century.” McDonnell, “Communion Ecclesiology and Baptism,” 690.

⁸ J. Patout Burns, Jr., and Robin M. Jensen, eds. *Christianity in Roman Africa: The Development of Its Practices and Beliefs* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 166. Burns and Jensen further stated, “Tertullian’s arguments gave indirect evidence of the actual practice of baptizing infants and young children who were not in immediate danger of death.” Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 168.

⁹ Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, xii. Gerald Bray suggested that many, not just heretical groups, were questioning the need for baptism and so Tertullian wrote *De Baptismo* to defend the

There was a work of the Holy Spirit in conjunction with baptism but it did not occur simultaneously at baptism, according to Evans's exegesis of Tertullian. Evans thus summarized Tertullian's baptismal theology, "We do not, when baptized, receive the Holy Spirit actually in the water, but are there cleansed by the angel in preparation for the Holy Spirit whom we receive when sealed by faith in the threefold Name."¹⁰ To support his argument, Tertullian referred to the presence of the Spirit upon the waters at creation, upon the Ark during the Flood, at the Red Sea, upon the waters of Mara, and at the baptism of Christ as types of Christian baptism.¹¹

What did God do at baptism? To answer this question, Evans felt compelled to broaden his scope of examination beyond *De Baptismo* to include pre- and post-Montanist works by Tertullian. According to Evans's exegesis of *Adversus Marcion* 1.28,

rite. Bray explains, "It seems that many people were questioning the need for such a rite, and Tertullian goes into great detail about the purifying effects of consecrated water on sinful human flesh. . . . In his treatise Tertullian criticizes the widespread practice of infant baptism." Gerald Lewis Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God: Perspectives on the Theology of Tertullian* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979), 4–5. Cf. Timothy D. Barnes's comment on the occasion of *De Baptismo*: "The *De Baptismo* was occasioned by the activities of a heretical woman who evidently persuaded several neophytes that baptism was unnecessary." Timothy D. Barnes, *Early Christianity and the Roman Empire* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984), 118. Cf. also Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 173. William Tabernee argued that the catechism that Saturus taught Perpetua and her co-martyrs was actually Tertullian's *De Baptismo*: "As Tertullian's *De baptismo* was probably the text used at Carthage by catechists, like Saturus, when explaining the nature and practice of baptism to catechumens such as Perpetua, her baptism was presumably conducted in accordance with the principles laid down in Tertullian's treatise." William Tabernee, "Perpetua, Montanism, and Christian Ministry in Carthage in c. 203 C. E.," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 32 (2005): 435.

¹⁰ Evans, *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, xiii. Evans evidently understood Tertullian to have a personal understanding of the Holy Spirit whose name is part of the Divine Name, which is part of the baptismal formula. The sealing of faith, to which Evans referred, was the laying on of hands immediately following baptism. Evans summarized Tertullian: "The imposition of the hand in benediction calls down the Holy Spirit." Evans, introduction to *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, xiv. Cf. Evans, who also wrote, "Baptism also confers or conveys the Holy Spirit. Tertullian does not carefully distinguish between the specific gifts of baptism and of what we now call confirmation; nor does he connect the collation of the Holy Spirit with the unction which is given on emergence from the water, but with the laying on of the hand shortly afterwards in benediction. . . . All he can say is (though this implies more than it says) that as we come out from the washing the Holy Spirit comes down upon bodies cleansed and blessed, as he came down upon our Lord at his baptism in the form of a dove, bringing to us the peace of God, as did the dove which flew back to Noah's ark. (Evans, *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, xxxii–xxxiii)

¹¹ Evans, *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, xii–xiii, xiv.

for example, Tertullian answered this question by emphasizing that in baptism God gives four gifts. Evans explained: “They are the remission of sins, deliverance from death, a second birth to newness of life, and endowment with the Holy Spirit.”¹² Evans discerned these four theological themes of baptism also in Tertullian’s *Adversus Marcionem* 1.14, *De Corona* 3, *Adversus Praxean* 26, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 36, and *De Resurrectione Carnis* 8.¹³ Any examination of Tertullian’s baptismal theology, then, must take into consideration the wider baptismal thought of the North African author.

Padraig Horgan

The influence of the mystery religions as a theological opponent for Tertullian and his use of typology constituted the primary foci of Horgan’s introduction to his translation and commentary on *De Baptismo*. Horgan examined the presence of parallels between Tertullian’s theology and that of the mystery religions and found a similarity in the meaning of baptism assigned by both Tertullian and the mystery religions. Horgan argued, “Christianity taught that the Christian on being baptized died and rose again. This same idea was common property of the mystery cults.”¹⁴ Despite this connection, Horgan did not find Tertullian’s baptismal theology, at least as presented in *De Baptismo*, to be in harmony with that of the mystery religions. Horgan summarized his argument regarding Tertullian’s use of the mystery religions this way, “Little can be found in his writings that is uncolored by his unwilting opposition to them.”¹⁵ Clearly for Horgan, Tertullian was aware of the mystery cults which he regarded as major adversaries of the Christian Faith.

¹² Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, xxx.

¹³ Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, xxiii–xvi.

¹⁴ Padraig S. Horgan, “Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani, *De Baptismo*: Translation with Introduction and Commentary” (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1966), 6. Horgan argued further, “The idea that ritual washing effected an interior cleansing was common to both Mithraism and the cult of Isis.” Horgan, “Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani, *De Baptismo*,” 8.

¹⁵ Horgan, “Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani, *De Baptismo*,” 9.

According to Horgan, Tertullian wrote *De Baptismo* for catechumens.¹⁶ Horgan further argued that Tertullian borrowed his understanding of baptism partly from military usage of the term *obsignatio*, or “sealing.” Horgan stated, “Tertullian who saw baptism as a military oath realized its absolute finality. Baptism was the ‘sealing’ of the faith of the believer.”¹⁷ Horgan also succinctly summarized Tertullian’s use of Old Testament typology with regard to baptism: “The type of the new creation was none other than the original creation of the world; the deluge and the crossing of the Red Sea showed water as a destructive element; the sweetening of the waters of Mara was a transforming miracle typifying the life-giving properties of the waters of baptism.”¹⁸

All in all, according to Horgan, Tertullian’s treatise *De Baptismo* was essentially a summary of the official teaching of the church catholic of his day. He argued, “What Tertullian preserved was the official church catechesis.”¹⁹ This also implied that the treatise would have been acceptable for use later among Roman Catholics.

The introductions to the most recent English texts of *De Baptismo* having been considered, recent studies on Tertullian’s doctrine of baptism will now be surveyed.

Studies on Tertullian’s Doctrine of Baptism

The theses of Ian Balfour and Claire Stegman have both discussed Tertullian’s baptismal theology, though neither thesis was specifically directed towards explicating Tertullian’s baptismal theology. Balfour discussed baptism in relationship to the

¹⁶ Horgan, “Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani, *De Baptismo*,” 14.

¹⁷ Horgan, “Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani, *De Baptismo*,” 19, altered. The word baptism in the first sentence of this quote by Horgan was capitalized in the original, but the capital has been here removed to comply with conventional English grammar. The same practice here employed will be followed throughout.

¹⁸ Horgan, “Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani, *De Baptismo*,” 21, altered. See footnote 16.

¹⁹ Horgan, “Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani, *De Baptismo*,” 31, altered. See footnote 16.

conversion process, while Stegman discussed baptism as it pertains to Tertullian's pneumatology.

Ian Balfour

Balfour wrote his doctoral thesis, "The Relationship of Man to God, From Conception to Conversion, in the Writings of Tertullian," in 1990 in order to investigate Tertullian's teaching on anthropology throughout three major life situations: childhood, unregenerate adulthood, and Christian adulthood. Balfour carefully investigated Tertullian's use of Roman legal terms in his discussion of each life situation. Baptism was a major topic of this investigation. In essence, Balfour argued that baptism was the crossing line from unregenerate to Christian adulthood for Tertullian and the early church. In this regard, Balfour's research highlighted the fact that Tertullian taught believer's baptism.

Balfour confined his theological exposition of Tertullian's corpus to the first person of the Trinity.²⁰ Balfour believed that Tertullian conceived of God in trinitarian terms and the Holy Spirit in personal terms throughout his writing career. Balfour, however, had limits in his exploration: "While catechumens would be given instruction about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—because candidates for baptism were required to affirm their belief in the three persons of the Trinity—it is outside the scope of this thesis to explore the relationship of the catechumen to Christ and to the Holy Spirit."²¹ So for Tertullian, the baptismal formula, which Tertullian used, evidenced at least some acceptance of the doctrine of the Trinity. With regard to the Holy

²⁰ Ian I. L. Balfour, "The Relationship of Man to God, from Conception to Conversion, in the Writings of Tertullian" (PhD diss., Edinburgh University, 1990), vii.

²¹ Balfour, "Relationship of Man to God," 267, altered. See footnote 16. Balfour also stated, "Certainly the candidate was expected to have some understanding of the Trinitarian formula used in the baptismal ceremony, which was fundamental for his becoming a Christian." Balfour, "Relationship of Man to God," 294. Further, Balfour proclaimed, "When the baptismal vow was taken, the candidates for baptism were immersed not only one but three times; during the calling of the three names of Persons of the Trinity, the candidates were baptized to the individual persons." Balfour, "Relationship of Man to God," 354.

Spirit, Balfour explained Tertullian's understanding of baptismal pneumatology thus: "The catechumen had no significant or abiding relationship with Christ until baptism, and would not receive the Holy Spirit, as a permanent possession, until he had completed all the baptismal ceremonies."²² The Holy Spirit thus sealed the Christian. But did this occur at baptism or confirmation? Though this question was not a direct concern of Balfour's thesis he work does shed some light on the question.

Balfour argued against G. H. W. Lampe that the Holy Spirit, in Tertullian's theology, is given at the laying on of hands rather than in the waters of baptism. Balfour observed, "It is important to note that it was an angel, not the Holy Spirit Himself, who sanctified the baptismal water. It emphasizes Tertullian's teaching that the blessing of the water was no more than a preparatory part of the baptismal ceremony ... even baptism did not confer the gift of the Holy Spirit—that came later with the imposition of the hand."²³ Balfour thus argued that the Holy Spirit came at confirmation rather than baptism.

In a similar manner, Balfour argued against a Roman legal meaning for Tertullian's use of *suscepti*. Balfour explained: "The word '*suscepti*' seems to be derived from a custom among the pagans ... to set a new-born child on the earth, from which the father raised it up, thus acknowledging it as his own, conferring upon it legitimate status, and declaring his intention of rearing it and not exposing it."²⁴ Balfour acknowledged that history of the word's use but he remained unconvinced that Tertullian conceived of it in a primarily Roman legal sense. The word was used more metaphorically for the bearing of children at the time of Tertullian. Balfour explained his understanding of Tertullian's nuanced use of the word: "*Suscepti*, therefore, as Tertullian used it here means 'born

²² Balfour, "Relationship of Man to God," 267.

²³ Balfour, "Relationship of Man to God," 345, altered. See footnote 16.

²⁴ Balfour, "Relationship of Man to God," 360.

(again)'; like the infant at the 'raising,' the newly baptized were acknowledged as the children of God."²⁵ Balfour did not consider this to be a Roman legal use of the term.

Balfour reached a similar conclusion regarding Tertullian's use of the term *sacramentum*. Specifically, he argued, "In Tertullian's hands the word did convey the most profound spiritual consequences."²⁶ Balfour elaborated on Tertullian's purpose in using *sacramentum*. Balfour explained, "This enables Tertullian to regard the newly baptized Christian, who had just emerged from the triple immersion of baptism ... as both son of God and also a slave of God."²⁷ Further, Balfour concluded that "there is little evidence that any words or thought-patterns from Roman law were in themselves instrumental in shaping his thought about baptism to any material extent."²⁸ To sum up, Balfour argued that Tertullian's use of Roman legal concepts was independent of their actual technical usage in Roman law.

Balfour also examined Tertullian's understanding of baptismal themes. For instance, regeneration was "one of the four spiritual consequences of baptism mentioned in *De Anima*."²⁹ Balfour stated, "the concept of regeneration in baptism was important to Tertullian, because he saw in it a symbolic representation of dying to rise again (although not in such a sense to exclude a corporal resurrection in the future)."³⁰ Balfour argued further, "A further concept, apparently introduced into theology for the first time by Tertullian in *De Anima*, was that of marriage between the soul and the Holy Spirit.

²⁵ Balfour, "Relationship of Man to God," 360.

²⁶ Balfour, "Relationship of Man to God," 373.

²⁷ Balfour, "Relationship of Man to God," 378. Cf. Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 170.

²⁸ Balfour, "Relationship of Man to God," 386.

²⁹ Balfour, "Relationship of Man to God," 357, altered. The name of Tertullian's treatise has been capitalized here to conform to the style of this thesis. This practice will be followed throughout.

³⁰ Balfour, "Relationship of Man to God," 357.

Before the baptismal ceremony, the catechumen might have experienced passing touches and effects of the Spirit, but the indwelling of the Spirit was possible only after.”³¹ At this time, “when the Holy Spirit was ‘married’ to the soul, the body ... was like a slave who formed part of a dowry.”³² Balfour considered this instance to be one of “only two places where Roman law could have been in Tertullian’s mind, as he expressed the relationship of man to God in the closing parts of the baptismal ceremonies.”³³ Tertullian thus understood baptism as the time of regeneration.

In *De Baptismo*, Tertullian used the baptismal formula given by Christ in Matthew 28:19 to prove that baptism belonged exclusively to the church.³⁴ Balfour argued that this remained the position of Tertullian throughout his life, whether Montanist or not. According to Balfour’s analysis: “Tertullian at all times claimed for the Church the exclusive right to the sacraments which led to salvation. He interpreted Matthew 28.19 as a directive given to the Church only and used it to exclude heretical (or any other) baptism.”³⁵ Thus the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19, in Balfour’s exegesis, proved determinative for Tertullian’s understanding of this rite.

Claire Stegman

The main focus of Stegman’s dissertation “The Development of Tertullian’s Doctrine of ‘Spiritus Sanctus’” was to argue that Tertullian’s *Adversus Praxean* was written to defend the New Prophecy against its Catholic detractors and, in this document, Tertullian finally came to understand the Holy Spirit in personal terms. Stegman argued:

³¹ Balfour, “Relationship of Man to God,” 397, altered. For alteration, see footnote 29. See also Balfour, “Relationship of Man to God,” 409.

³² Balfour, “Relationship of Man to God,” 408.

³³ Balfour, “Relationship of Man to God,” 408.

³⁴ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 13.

³⁵ Balfour, “Relationship of Man to God,” 309.

In order to defend the Paraclete's disciplinary role in the struggle for men's salvation waged between God and the devil, Tertullian is pushed to defend the Paraclete's authority as superior to that of bishops, as equal to that of Scripture, and finally as the authority of God Himself, thus turning the charge of psychics into blasphemy. This final stage in the Paraclete's defense is reached in *Adversus Praxean*, where in the section of the treatise in which Tertullian constructs his own position (chapters 11–17), as opposed to attacking that of his opponents, he is clear in affirming the appropriateness of designating as *Deus et Dominus* not only the Father and the Son but also as 'tertius,' *Spiritus*, while he explains that he does not thereby preach 'three gods' and 'three lords' (*Adu. Prax.* 13.5–8).³⁶

Stegman's thesis is focused on Tertullian's pneumatology, but she did not ignore his doctrine of baptism.

³⁶ Claire Ann Bradley Stegman, "The Development of Tertullian's Doctrine of *Spiritus Sanctus*" (PhD diss., Southern Methodist University, 1978), 232. Stegman suggested that it may be "the psychics as well as the Monarchians," that Tertullian was arguing against in *Adversus Praxean*. Stegman, "The Development of Tertullian's Doctrine," 209. See also Stegman, "Development of Tertullian's Doctrine," 212, 221, 224. Psychics here should be understood as those who focused on and lived for the physical flesh. They are contrasted with the spiritualists, who lived in and for the Spirit. See also Bray, who wrote, "But the most famous anti-heretical treatise of all is undoubtedly the one against Praxeas, an unknown Greek who claimed that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were but names to distinguish the different operations of the one God. This teaching, which in Tertullian's phrase, 'crucified the Father,' led him to develop the first full-length doctrine of the Trinity." Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God*, 7. Cf. Barnes, who wrote, "The *Adversus Praxean* exemplifies a paradox: Tertullian helped to rescue the Catholic Church from theological heresy precisely because he was a Montanist." Timothy David Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 142. Rex Butler also agreed: "Furthermore, the Montanist emphasis on the Spirit helped Tertullian develop and transmit his Trinitarian formula to the orthodox church." Rex 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), 29. Cf. William Tabernee, *Fake Prophecy and Polluted Sacraments: Ecclesiastical and Imperial Reactions to Montanism* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2007), 161. Also cf. James Dunn who argued, "Our idea of the 'person' and the 'personal' is so different from that of the ancients, including Paul and Tertullian. . . . It is far from clear whether there was a conceptual boundary or marked distinction between 'personal' and 'impersonal.'" James D. G. Dunn, "Tertullian and Paul on the Spirit of Prophecy," in *Tertullian and Paul: Pauline and Patristic Scholars in Debate*, ed. Todd D. Still and David E. Wilhite (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013), 1:74. David Wilhite took a contrary view to that of Stegman. He did note a shift in Tertullian's pneumatology but considered it to be "semantic" rather than doctrinal:

The said semantic shift, however, is found to be largely cosmetic, and it certainly was occasioned by the controversy at hand more than a prior "conversion" to a "movement." Tertullian's pneumatology remains largely Pauline throughout his writings, except he borrows the Johannine language of the Paraclete when explaining the distinct operations of the Spirit (but surprisingly, not for differentiating the person of the Spirit). The Johannine vocabulary, while substantial in thought when contesting patripassionism, nevertheless eclipses Tertullian's indebtedness to Paul. (Wilhite, "The Spirit of Prophecy: Tertullian's Pauline Pneumatology," in Still and Wilhite, *Tertullian and Paul*, 1:50)

In this instance he seemingly took Stegman to task without specific reference to her doctoral thesis. Wilhite summarized his position: "Tertullian more clearly articulates the distinct personhood of the Holy Spirit when utilizing Pauline texts." Wilhite, "The Spirit of Prophecy," 61. See also Philip C. Atkinson, "A Study in the Development of Tertullian's Use and Interpretation of Scripture, with Special Reference to His Involvement in the New Prophecy" (PhD diss., Hull University, 1976), 59.

Development in Tertullian's understanding of *spiritus* directly impacted his understanding of baptism. The *spiritus* was active at baptism. Tertullian's thinking about baptism should have developed as his understanding of the Spirit matured. Concerning the *spiritus* that hovered over the baptismal waters in *De Baptismo*, Stegman explained: "This *spiritus* is that created spirit or power of the Son which conveyed the breath of life to all creatures."³⁷ Baptism, for Tertullian in *De Baptismo*, according to Stegman, was not so much a time of regeneration or sealing by the Holy Spirit. Rather, it was a restoration of the human *spiritus* to its original status as a bearer of the image of God. "What water baptism accomplishes is thus nothing less than a restoration of man to that status before God which he enjoyed prior to Adam's sin and subsequent sentence of 'death': his spirit is healed, his eternal salvation is renewed, death for him is canceled (*De Bapt. 5.6*)."³⁸ Therefore, there was a contrast between the corrupted *spiritus* given to humans at birth and the renewed *spiritus* given by Christ at baptism.³⁹

Stegman elaborated on Tertullian's understanding of the *spiritus* given by Christ at baptism. Passages from *De Baptismo*, *De Praescriptorione Haereticorum*, *De Paenitentia*, *De Corona*, and *De Patientia* were harmonized by Stegman to illustrate Tertullian's synonymous use of the terms grace and power applied to the *spiritus*. "These passages suggest an equating of *gratia spiritus sancti* with *uis spiritus sancti* and fit the basic pattern of the action of the Son (*spiritus sanctus*) working within the world, here

³⁷ Stegman, "Development of Tertullian's Doctrine," 51–52.

³⁸ Stegman, "Development of Tertullian's Doctrine," 55, altered. See footnote 29. See also Stegman's discussion of Tertullian's understanding of *De Spectaculis*. Stegman suggested, "*Spiritus sanctus* in this passage [*De spectaculis* 15.2–3, 5] has been interpreted as the third person of the Trinity, and yet if Tertullian's theology at this point is indeed binatarian, then *spiritus sanctus* here is more likely the sanctified human *spiritus* of baptism." Stegman, "The Development of Tertullian's Doctrine," 89. Stegman made similar comments on Tertullian's understanding of the *spiritus* given at baptism in *Ad Martyres*. Stegman, "The Development of Tertullian's Doctrine," 100.

³⁹ Stegman, "Development of Tertullian's Doctrine," 57.

specifically in human history.”⁴⁰ Stegman stated more specifically: “The church first received it at Pentecost and the individual believer at his baptism.”⁴¹ Stegman interpreted the pre-Montanist Tertullian’s use of *spiritus*, given at baptism, as Christ’s gift or power rather than the person of the Holy Spirit. “Thus, *gratia*—and by analogy, the other personified aids—represents the redeeming activity of not a third but the second person of the Trinity.”⁴²

Early in his embrace of Montanism, according to Stegman, Tertullian wrote *De Resurrectione Mortuorum*. The *spiritus* gives life. Who is this *spiritus*? Stegman identified the *spiritus* as Christ in *De Resurrectione Mortuorum* 37.1–3, 7. “Christ as *spiritus* give ‘life.’ He ‘vivifies’ that which was dead, namely *caro*.”⁴³ The doctrine of the

⁴⁰ Stegman, “Development of Tertullian’s Doctrine,” 81.

⁴¹ Stegman, “Development of Tertullian’s Doctrine,” 81, altered. See footnote 16.

⁴² Stegman, “Development of Tertullian’s Doctrine,” 81.

⁴³ Stegman, “Development of Tertullian’s Doctrine,” 137; see also 145. Stegman exegeted Tertullian in *De Carne Christi* 17.4 and *Adversus Marcionum* to apply vivification to the restoration of the soul to the original image of God. “‘Vivified’ in baptism by this *spiritus*, a man becomes again a son of God.” Stegman, “Development of Tertullian’s Doctrine,” 150. Cf. Horgan, who stated, “It is the same Spirit who vivifies water on each occasion [creation and baptism]. In baptism this vivifying action is more spectacular, is spiritual rather than carnal.” Horgan, “Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani, *De Baptismo*,” 22. Horgan evidently equated regeneration and vivification. Obviously he understood Tertullian to be using Old Testament typology to compare the work of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, at creation and baptism in *De Baptismo*. Thus, Horgan neither observed a progression in Tertullian’s understanding of the personhood of the Holy Spirit nor an increasing appreciation for the Spirit’s work of vivification tied to baptism. Horgan understood Tertullian’s pneumatology differently than Stegman and this directly affected the understanding each expressed regarding Tertullian’s baptismal theology. Cf. Bray, who explained, “Baptism was the sacrament in which the Holy Spirit acted through an earthly substance to reverse the effects of human sin.” Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God*, 91–92. Bray explained the effect of baptism in Tertullian similarly to both Stegman and Horgan, but like Horgan, Bray identified Tertullian’s concept of *spiritus* as the person of the Holy Spirit, which was, of course, contrary to Stegman’s thesis. As well, cf. Nasrallah wrote, “Baptism is the second birth whereby this corruption is taken away.” Laura Salah Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy of Folly: Prophecy and Authority in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 124. Nasrallah further explained Tertullian’s doctrine of baptism: “Baptism is the second birth, on which occasion the Holy Spirit pushes away the evil spirit that might have associated itself with one’s soul.” Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy of Folly*, 131. Again, cf. Balfour, who exegeted Tertullian, thus: “With the removal of sin in the baptismal water, man, who had lost his likeness of God through sin, was restored again to the divine *similitudo*, as well as having the status of the divine *imago*, i.e. the unalienable capabilities of man, such as reason and free will.” Balfour, “Relationship of Man to God,” 365; see also 385. Cf. Roy Kearsley also picked up on Tertullian’s theme of baptism as the time of vivification: “Above all, baptism is a power that sets free from death, from despair and, we would say today, meaninglessness.”

vivification of the flesh as a result of baptism demonstrated a development in Tertullian's explanation of baptismal pneumatology for Tertullian. Stegman, however, did not directly pursue the idea of doctrinal development in Tertullian's understanding of baptism. She was focusing on Tertullian's pneumatological development, thus baptismal doctrine was a side issue. Stegman noted, "So when in baptism *caro* becomes the 'servant' of *spiritus* in place of *anima* (*De An.* 41.4), understand that the man baptized no longer lives under the influence of *spiritus profanes*, of *spiritus mundi*, but now yields to *spiritus sanctus*."⁴⁴

Stegman argued that Tertullian's use of Matthew 28:19 in *De Baptismo* was not clearly trinitarian. She said she agreed here with Evans.⁴⁵ Even in Tertullian's early Montanist works, Stegman did not observe any evidence of trinitarian thought.⁴⁶ Commenting on the theology of *De Carne Christi*, and its Pauline derivation, Stegman argued: "A trinitarian interpretation of Tertullian's theology even in his early Montanist works is unnecessary and indeed ruled out."⁴⁷ But Stegman discovered a decisive

Roy Kearsley, "Baptism Then and Now: Does Moltmann Bury Tertullian or Praise Him?," in *Dimensions of Baptism: Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 234 (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 240. Finally, see also Wilhite, "The Spirit of Prophecy," 54.

⁴⁴ Stegman, "Development of Tertullian's Doctrine," 152, altered. See footnote 29.

⁴⁵ Stegman, "Development of Tertullian's Doctrine," 66. Cf. Evans, introduction to *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, xxxii–xxxiii. See also footnote 9. It seems that Stegman misread Evans.

⁴⁶ Cahal B. Daly did not agree:

The ingenuity with which he handles this text and, by tortuous exegesis, makes it serve the cause of his ecclesiology, is fully worthy of him. Recalling that, at baptism, the names of the three divine Persons are involved, he concludes, on the strength of this text, that mention of the Church is necessarily included in the baptismal formula, since three constitute a Church. There is as yet, no ecclesiological conclusion based on the text. But with this exegetical dexterity, it is easy for him to conclude from it that the Church is essentially constituted, not by members, not by external organization, but by the inner life of the Spirit. Just as the Spirit is the unifying principle of the divine Trinity, so also the Spirit is the principle and the constituent of the Church, which the Lord made to consist of three. (Cahal B. Daly *Tertullian the Puritan and His Influence: An Essay in Historical Theology* [Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1993], 10)

⁴⁷ Stegman, "Development of Tertullian's Doctrine," 109.

pneumatological shift in Tertullian's late Montanist works. "Tertullian in his late Montanist works will then be pushed to defend this authority by a development in his concept of the Godhead itself."⁴⁸

Pneumatology thus directly affected Tertullian's thinking about baptism. Tertullian's acceptance of the New Prophecy thus impacted his understanding of the *spiritus* given at baptism. "Later Tertullian will focus all this 'assistance' against temptation in the 'person' of the Montanist Paraclete and will view the 'assistant' as sufficiently strong to dispense with the 'aid' of a second repentance."⁴⁹ Cahal Daly has interpreted Tertullian similarly:

As a Catholic, Tertullian admitted that this shipwreck ["sin after baptism"] was not irreparable, that salvation was still possible through the second plank of penance. As a Montanist, however he maintained that the shipwreck of post-baptismal sin could never be repaired, that sinners could never again recover the assurance of salvation which only communion with the Church could give.⁵⁰

After quoting a passage from *De Fuga*, a late Montanist work, Stegman argued: "So acceptance of the Paraclete's guidance is set in terms of the Christian's baptismal commitment to submit *caro* to *spiritus*."⁵¹

Stegman argued in defense of her thesis: "*Aduersus Praxean* marks the point of transition at which the 'enabling' side of this concept—the Messianic *gratia/charismata*—is transformed into the divine *persona, spiritus sanctus*."⁵² Tertullian realized and defended the deity of the Holy Spirit, the Montanist Paraclete, against his

⁴⁸ Stegman, "Development of Tertullian's Doctrine," 167.

⁴⁹ Stegman, "Development of Tertullian's Doctrine," 87. Cf. Horgan, who argued, "While admitting the fact of the possibility of forgiveness it went against his natural grain to do so. He admitted it only because he was forced to by the teaching of the Church. When his respect for the Church waned he reversed his stand on this question." Horgan, "Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani, *De Baptismo*," 4.

⁵⁰ Daly, *Tertullian the Puritan*, 7–8.

⁵¹ Stegman, "Development of Tertullian's Doctrine," 176.

⁵² Stegman, "Development of Tertullian's Doctrine," 228.

Catholic detractors based in part of his understanding of the Divine Name used in the baptismal formula.⁵³

Conclusion

This examination of the history of research on Tertullian's doctrine of baptism reveals a lacuna that this thesis seeks to fill and also the necessity of moving beyond *De Baptismo* to Tertullian's other treatises to ascertain the fullness of his baptismal theology. To fulfill the latter we turn now in Chapters 2 and 3 to first examine Tertullian's baptismal thought in *De Baptismo* and then look at other passages in his corpus.

⁵³ Stegman, "Development of Tertullian's Doctrine," 227.

CHAPTER 2

BAPTISM IN TERTULLIAN'S OTHER PRE-MONTANIST WORKS

A personified viper supplied Tertullian with a suitable opponent in the treatise in which he explicated the Christian doctrine of baptism. Similarly, in the polemic defending Christian martyrdom, the North African author employed the scorpion in the title of his work, which was suitably entitled *Scorpiace. De Baptismo* and *Scorpiace* were similar in a variety of other ways, but most importantly in their teaching on baptism and the theological doctrine related to second repentance. This chapter will investigate those works which have been categorized as pre-Montanist, especially by Barnes.

Which Works Are Considered to be Pre-Montanist?

Barnes' *Tertullian* has long been the standard work on Tertullian's writings and their chronology. Barnes considered the following works of Tertullian to be pre-Montanist: *De Spectaculis*, *De Idololatria*, *De Cultu Feminarium II*, *Ad Nationes*, *Adversus Judaeos*, *Ad Martyras*, *Apologeticum*, *De Testimonio Animae*, *De Baptismo*, *De Oratione*, *De Paenitentia*, *De Patientia*, *Ad Uxorem*, *De Praescription Haereticorum*, *Scorpiace*, *Adversus Hermogenem*, *De Pallio*, *De Cultu Feminarium I*, and *De Carne Christi*.¹ Stegman added *De Corona* and removed *De Carne Christi* from Barnes' list of pre-Montanist works.² This chapter will discuss *Scorpiace* since it has been categorized by many scholars as a pre-Montanist work. This chapter will briefly mention *De Carne*

¹ Timothy David Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 54–55.

² See Claire Ann Bradley Stegman, "Development of Tertullian's Doctrine of *Spiritus Sanctus*" (PhD diss., Southern Methodist University, 1978), 9, 108.

Christi. Since *De Corona* did not add to Tertullian's baptismal theology an argument will not be offered regarding its Montanism and it will not be discussed in depth.

Theological Themes in the Other Pre-Montanist Works

Five theological themes of baptism will be evaluated within Tertullian's pre-Montanist works. These are: cleansing, separation from heathens and heretics, forgiveness and repentance, John's baptism, and vivification. These will now be evaluated in turn.

Cleansing

In *De Oratione* Tertullian emphasized the cleansing that occurred at baptism. Tertullian stated, "In fact we ought not to set ourselves against the example of the man who delivered him up, and for that reason not rinse ourselves, unless we wash them for some defilement of human conversation for conscience' sake. For the rest, hands are enough which, along with the whole body, we have once for all washed in Christ."³ Tertullian here referenced the biblical scene in John 13:1–10.

Prior to the Passover and the institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus washed the disciples' feet. Peter protested, and then following Jesus' rebuke, asked that Jesus wash all of him. Jesus explained that he only needed his feet washed; the rest of him was clean. Jesus answered Peter directly in John 13:10, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash" (John 13:10). Clearly, for Tertullian, Peter's previous "bathing" was a type of the Christian's baptism. Tertullian argued that Christians, like the Apostle Peter, are clean. They have been immersed into Christ.

Unlike Pilate, Christians are not traitors with unclean hands who need to wash again. Tertullian juxtaposed Peter's need to have only his feet washed against Pilate's washing of his hands to absolve himself of the guilt of crucifying Christ. In Matthew

³ Tertullian, *De Oratione* 13, in *Tertullian's Treatise on the Prayer*, trans. Ernest Evans (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1953), 19.

27:24, Pilate washed his hands in the presence of the Jewish leaders before he handed Jesus over to be crucified. Pilate then said, “I am innocent of this man’s blood, see to it yourselves” (Matt 27:24). Pilate washed his hands not to have his guilt removed through repentance; Peter’s feet were washed only because he was already forgiven on the basis of his previous cleansing by faith and repentance. Peter’s previous bathing, which brought forgiveness, was a type of Christian baptism, according to Tertullian. Tertullian’s biblical exegesis implied a connection between baptism, faith, repentance, and cleansing. In addition to a time of cleansing from sin and defilement, Tertullian also taught that baptism was a time of separation.

Separation from Heathens and Heretics

In *De Idololatria* Tertullian focused his discussion of baptism on the theological theme of separation of heathens and heretics. In chapter 6, the North African theologian argued, “If no law of God had forbidden us to make idols, if no pronouncement of the Holy Spirit threatened the makers of idols no less than their worshippers, we should infer simply from our sacrament that such arts are opposed to our faith. For how have we renounced the devil and his angels, if we make them?”⁴ Tertullian referenced in this passage the prohibition against making idols in the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:4-6). This teaching was also echoed by James, the brother of Jesus, in Acts 15:19–20 and similarly by Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:14–18. Christians were to be separate from idolaters and this separation began at baptism. Baptism in the early church included a public renunciation of Satan and his works. Tertullian described this process in *De Corona* 3, which will be discussed below. Renouncing Satan therefore meant renouncing idolatry

⁴ Tertullian, *De Idololatria* 6, in *Tertullianus: De Idololatria, Critical Text, Translation and Commentary*, trans. Jan H. Waszink and Jacobus Cornelis Maria Van Winden, *Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae* 1 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1987), 31.

and all false religion and heresy. *De Idololatria* was, of course, a polemic against idolatry.⁵

Similarly, in *De Spectaculis*, Tertullian argued that baptism was a time of separation of Christians from heathens and heretics. Tertullian argued, “So, if it shall be proved true that the entire apparatus of the spectacles originates from idolatry, we will have reached a decision in advance that our profession of faith in baptism refers also to the spectacles, since they belong to the devil and his pomp and his angels because of the idolatry involved.”⁶ The spectacles were plays, gladiator fights, and circuses that took place in the Roman theaters and amphitheaters. Tertullian mentioned baptism only a few times in *De Spectaculis*, but each time he mentioned the sacrament he was drawing on the theme of separation from the heathen and heretics as it applied to renunciation of the devil and various forms of idolatry.⁷

In *De Corona*, the separation from both pagans and the heterodox was discussed, especially as it related to renouncing the devil and avoiding military service, which necessarily entailed idolatry. The theologian from Carthage argued, “To begin, for instance, with baptism: When we are about to enter the water, and, as a matter of fact, even a short while before, we declare in the presence of the congregation before the bishop that we renounce the Devil, his processions, and his angels.”⁸ This was an early

⁵ See also Tertullian, *De Idololatria* 10, 14, and 24; Tertullian, *Ad Martyras* 3; Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum* 2.

⁶ Tertullian, *De Spectaculis* 4, trans. Rudolph Arbesmann, in *Tertullian: Disciplinary, Moral, and Ascetical Works*, The Fathers of the Church 40 (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1959), 56–57, altered. See footnote 16.

⁷ See also Tertullian, *De Spectaculis* 4 and 24.

⁸ Tertullian, *De Corona* 3, trans. Edwin A. Quain, in *Tertullian: Disciplinary, Moral and Ascetical Works*, 236, altered. The latter part of this passage in the Latin reads *contestamur nos renuntiare dia(bolo et pompae) et angelus eius*. The term *pompae* which has been translated “processions” refers to religious processions in which images of the gods were carried. Tertullian, *De Corona*, ed. Emil Kroymann, in *Tertulliani Opera: Opera Monastica*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 2 (Turnholt, Belgium: Brepols, 1954), 1042. See also Tertullian, *De Corona* 11.

attestation to the practice of the renunciation of Satan at baptism. Clearly, separation from heathens and heretics proved a significant theme in Tertullian's pre-Montanist writings.

Tertullian reiterated that baptism was a time of separation in *Adversus Judaeos*. Tertullian drew on the type of the staff, or tree, as figure of the cross of Christ. Moses sweetened the waters with this tree at Mara in Exodus 15:22–25. Tertullian exegeted the passage according to his typology:

In fact, this tree was at that time a mystery, when Moses sweetened the bitter water, from where the people, who were dying of thirst in the desert, revived by drinking. We who have been taken out of the calamities of the times in which we used to dwell, dying of thirst, do the same—that is, having been approved by the divine word—we have come back to life by the tree of the suffering of the Christ through the waters of baptism, drinking the faith that is in him.⁹

The Israelites had been led out of Egypt by Moses. They had crossed the Red Sea. They were separated from their former world of slavery in Egypt. Christians were separated from their former life of idolatry and slavery to sin in baptism. At baptism one is brought out from the realm of darkness by the cross of Christ.

Moreover, in *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* Tertullian argued that the true faith of the church was sealed at baptism. Thus, baptism is both a seal of faith and a time of separation from pagans and heretics. In Tertullian's words: "She unites the Law and the Prophets with the writings of the evangelists and the apostles; from that source she drinks her faith, and that faith seals with water, clothes with the Holy Spirit, feeds with the eucharist, encourages to martyrdom; and against that teaching she receives no one."¹⁰ Clearly, the Law and the Prophets was another name for the Old Testament and the writings of the evangelists and the apostles referred to the New Testament. Tertullian

⁹ Tertullian, *Adversus Judaeos* 13, in *Tertullian*, trans. Geoffrey D. Dunn (New York: Routledge, 2004), 98.

¹⁰ Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 36, in *Early Latin Theology: Selections from Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, and Jerome*, trans. Stanley Lawrence Greenslade (Louisville: Westminster, 1956), 57.

observed that the church is based on biblical faith. Paul, the apostle, taught similarly in Ephesians 2:20. Paul said that the church was “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (Eph 2:20). The North African argued that the Scriptures were the source of the church’s life and faith.

Tertullian stated that the faith of the church “seals with water.” He must have meant baptism when he referred to water. But, Ephesians 1:13 actually says Christians “were sealed with the Holy Spirit.” Also, Galatians 3:27 says, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ Jesus have put on Christ.” Tertullian, however, spoke of being clothed with the Holy Spirit. Feeding with the eucharist may be a reference to John 6:54, where Jesus said, “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” No Scripture clearly “encourages to martyrdom” as Tertullian does. Those persecuted by Satan did suffer martyrdom in Revelation. These martyrs “conquered [Satan] by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death” (Rev 12:11). In the middle phrases Tertullian either took liberty with the text, mistakenly remembered what they actually said, or simply incorrectly understood their actual meaning.

Tertullian’s last phrase, “against that teaching she receives no one,” may refer either to the teachings of the Scriptures in general, which he appealed to earlier in this section, or to the specific teaching of Jesus about discipleship. Jesus said, “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt 16:25).

Tertullian further argued against heretical baptism, such as that practiced within the mystery cult of Mithra.¹¹

¹¹ Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 40 and 41.

Forgiveness and Repentance

Tertullian briefly mentioned second repentance after baptism in *De Corona*. He explained the need for repentance so that the Christian would not lapse into serious sin: “Moreover, that kind of argument destroys the very essence of our sacramental oath, since it would loosen the fetters for voluntary sins. For, it will be possible to maintain that inclination is a compulsion, too, since there is, indeed, some sort of compelling force in it.”¹² Tertullian drew upon the New Testament’s teaching on baptism and Roman military life in this passage from *De Corona*. First, baptism was connected with repentance throughout the New Testament.

Tertullian carefully distinguished John’s baptism from Christian baptism. The former was described by the Paul as “the baptism of repentance” (Acts 19:4).¹³ Christian baptism, however, involved a work of the Spirit, and such a work was not definitely characteristic of John’s baptism. Still repentance was a pre-requisite for both John’s baptism and Christian baptism. Recall that Acts 2:38 joined baptism with forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit. It also united baptism and repentance. It is more likely that Tertullian had Romans 10:9–10, 1 Timothy 6:13, or 1 Peter 3:21 in view here. Romans 10 provided the content of the good confession, which Christians make unto salvation. 1 Timothy mentioned that Jesus made that confession during his trial before the Roman Governor Pilate. Peter explained that baptism was a time for the Christian to ask for, or make, a clear conscience, or confession. The most direct explanation in this passage from *De Corona* is that Tertullian intended a comparison between the commitments Christians made at baptism, their sacramental vows, and the commitments made by those joining the military, which were also sacramental vows. The former involved confessing Christ as Lord and renouncing the devil. The latter apparently involved a commitment to follow

¹² Tertullian, *De Corona* 11, trans. Quain, in *Tertullian: Disciplinary, Moral and Ascetical Works*, 260.

¹³ See also Matt 3:11; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 13:24.

the emperor, and commanding officers, unconditionally and possibly also included an oath of allegiance to the gods.¹⁴

John Helgeland explained the difficulty in defining the Roman military sacrament. He explained, “The military oath (*sacramentum*) bound the army unconditionally to the emperor its supreme commander. Although no text of the oath survives, its basic content was that the soldiers promised never to desert, to follow all orders from superiors, and to die for the empire.”¹⁵ Stephen Gero mentioned that there are scholars who argue that Tertullian was opposed to military service not primarily due to official military requirements or statements but because of the effect of living and dwelling so closely with other soldiers who were Roman pagans.¹⁶ Gero argued that Tertullian’s argument in *De Corona* suggested these scholars were at least partially correct. Gero summarized, and argued, “Some have argued that the real motivation for the early Christian opposition to military service was the danger of the compulsory idolatry which was greater than in civilian life, rather than the mere abhorrence of bloodshed. In this passage at least [*De Corona* 11], Tertullian does not give much support to this position.”¹⁷ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to determine whether Helgeland or Gero is correct, or if both are wrong.

What does become clear is that Tertullian compared the oath of baptism, which must have included a positive confession of Christ and a negative renunciation of the devil, with the military’s oath. Both were referred to as sacraments. Both involved commitments to authority. And Tertullian found it impossible to reconcile the sacrament

¹⁴ John Helgeland, “Christians and the Roman Army A. D. 173–337,” *Church History* 43 (1974), 151–152.

¹⁵ Helgeland, “Christians and the Roman Army,” 151.

¹⁶ Stephen Gero, “‘Miles Gloriosus’: The Christian and Military Service According to Tertullian,” *Church History* 39 (1970), 295.

¹⁷ Gero, “Christian and Military Service,” 295.

of baptism with the sacramental oath required for military service—whatever that oath may have been.

Tertullian went on to explain the necessity of choosing Christ over military service or life. The Carthaginian argued: “For this very reason we must either refuse public offices lest we fall into sin, or we must endure martyrdom in order to sever our connection with them.”¹⁸ At baptism the human spirit received freedom from sin. Therefore, one did not have to commit serious sin after baptism. Furthermore, one should not and must not lapse into any serious sin after baptism, according to Tertullian. Clearly, in the passage above, the serious sin which concerned Tertullian was idolatrous apostasy. The Christian must choose martyrdom over idolatry if presented with such a quandary. Obviously, Tertullian argued that military obligation demanded such a painful choice for Christians. Die rather than deny Christ. Revelation 2:10 exhorts, “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.” Though Tertullian did not quote Revelation directly, he clearly had this biblical instruction on martyrdom in view.

In *De Paenitentia*, the North African theologian discussed baptism as it related to second repentance more fully. Tertullian wrangled against those who viewed the catechumenate period as a time for sinning rather than repenting. His objection ran this way: “It is a rash confidence in the efficacy of Baptism [sic] which leads to all of this culpable delay and hesitancy in the matter of penitence. Since they are certain of an assured pardon for their sins, they steal, meanwhile the intervening time and make of it an interlude for sinning, rather than for learning not to sin.”¹⁹ Tertullian argued that the catechism should be a time of learning self-control rather than a last experience with unrestrained licentiousness. Ephesians 4:20–22 similarly stated that coming to Christ

¹⁸Tertullian, *De Corona* 11, trans. Quain, in *Tertullian: Disciplinary, Moral and Ascetical Works*, 260.

¹⁹ Tertullian, *De Paenitentia* 6, in *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance: On Penitence and On Purity*, trans. William P. Le Saint, *Ancient Christian Writers* 28 (New York: Newman, 1959), 24.

necessarily meant learning to put off sins. It stated: “But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have learned about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires.” Baptism served as the time for dying to sin. Repentance must therefore proceed baptism, continue through the catechetical process, and continue throughout the Christian’s life. The baptizand had to have already embraced Christ and shunned sins prior to receiving forgiveness at baptism.

Tertullian questioned further those who had no regard for the need for repentance leading to baptism: “I do not deny that the divine benefaction, I mean the forgiveness of sins, is absolutely assured to those who will enter the water; they must make an effort, however to succeed in getting there. And who will oblige you, a man so renegade to penitence, with a single dash of any water at all?”²⁰ Recall that in Acts 2:38, the first gospel invitation, the apostle called sinners who had expressed faith in Christ to repentance first and baptism second. Logically, the order is appropriate and consistent. Turn from sins, receive assurance of forgiveness of sins in baptism, and then live a life repentant from sins.

Tertullian stated his position on repentance and baptism matter-of-factly: “We are not baptized so that we may cease committing sin but because we have ceased, since we are already clean of heart.”²¹ Baptism demanded repentance for Tertullian—both before and after baptism. The clean heart associated with baptism echoes the teaching of 1 Peter 3:21, Titus 3:5, and Romans 6:1–4. The content of 1 Peter 3:21 and Titus 3:5 have been discussed previously. Both of those passages united baptism and the Spirit’s work of regeneration. Romans 6:1–4 and Tertullian’s statement in *De Paenitentia* 6 shall be correlated. Paul said in Romans 6:1–4:

²⁰ Tertullian, *De Paenitentia* 6, in Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, 25.

²¹ Tertullian, *De Paenitentia* 6, in Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, 26.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized in Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Tertullian's statements in *De Paenitentia* discussed the same spiritual reality as did Paul in Romans 6: the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit. Tertullian more specifically implied that regeneration must proceed baptism. Tertullian explained that a clean heart is experienced by all who were repentant. He said, "The cleansing water is a seal of faith, and this faith has its beginning and finds its reward in a genuine repentance."²² Baptism seals faith, and faith in turn, along with repentance bring regeneration, according to Tertullian in *De Paenitentia* 6.

Regarding second repentance for those who commit serious sin after baptism, the theologian from Carthage warned: "He has placed in the vestibule a second penitence so that it may open the door to those who knock; only once, however, because it is already a second time; never again, however because the last time was in vain."²³ Jesus spoke of himself as one who stood at the door knocking. Revelation 3:20 offers this invitation from Jesus: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." Jesus' voice invited his people to him and away from sin. Jesus' invitation was clearly one which demanded repentance for Tertullian. His interpretation, of course, agreed with the obvious meaning of Revelation 3:20. The immediate context of Revelation 3:20 proved this. Jesus said clearly and directly in Revelation 3:19: "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent." Those who are penitent are allowed a single second repentance after baptism according to Tertullian. The basis for Tertullian's limitation on one repentance after baptism and no more could be his exegesis of Hebrews

²² Tertullian, *De Paenitentia* 6, in Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, 26.

²³ Tertullian, *De Paenitentia* 7, in Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, 29.

6:1-8 and Hebrews 10:1-18. The supposed biblical basis for Tertullian's teaching regarding one second repentance was, however, less clear.

Serious fasting should be part of this penance for the lapsed. Tertullian explained: "Therefore, since you know that in exomologesis you have a second safeguard against hell which backs up that first line of defense, the Lord's baptism, why do you abandon the means of salvation which is yours?"²⁴ There remained a second repentance for Tertullian when he wrote *De Paenitentia* but it was reserved for serious penance, which necessarily involved fasting. Tertullian based his argument for the effectiveness of exomologesis in restoring the sinner on the example of King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:34–37. The theologian explained, "Long did he [Nebuchadnezzar] offer to the Lord a sacrifice of penance, performing his exomologesis for seven squalid years, his nails growing wild like the shaggy mane of a lion."²⁵ Sinning after baptism was as serious as Nebuchadnezzar's prideful blasphemy that resulted in his downfall. The king of Babylon was only restored after seven years of serious humility. A Christian, according to Tertullian, should experience no less humiliation and self-denial when seeking to be restored after serious sin. Tertullian obviously considered serious sin after baptism to be tantamount to the blasphemy of Nebuchadnezzar.

Martyrdom, however, provided the sole means of restoration for the lapsed following baptism in Tertullian's *Scorpiace*, which is similar to his teaching in *De Baptismo*. Tertullian militated against serious sin after baptism and asserted that only martyrdom could bring forgiveness to the lapsed in chapter 6:

God had also foreseen other weaknesses of the human condition—the snares of the adversary, the deception of affairs, the trap of the world, the faith that would be endangered even after ritual washing, and after salvation the majority, the sort who soiled the wedding garment, who had not prepared oil for their little torches, and who needed to be looked for in the mountains and ravines and needed to be carried back on the shoulders, would be destroyed again. Therefore (God) established

²⁴ Tertullian, *De Paenitentia* 12, in Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, 36, altered.

²⁵ Tertullian, *De Paenitentia* 12, in Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, 36.

second atonements and the final defences [sic], the contest of martyrdoms and the ritual washing with blood following after that. David says about the happiness of such a person, ‘Blessed are they whose iniquities have been let go and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the one to whom God charges no fault.’ For in a proper sense nothing now is able to be reconsidered with the martyrs with whom, in the ritual washing, life itself is handed over.²⁶

Only martyrdom could thus restore the one guilty of serious sin following baptism according to Tertullian.²⁷ The passage above was rich in biblical allusion and imagery. Paul listed the qualifications for elders to Timothy. In that list, found in 1 Timothy 3:1–8, Paul warned that elders must not be recent converts due to the inherent risks the eldership would pose to new converts. Paul directed Timothy, “He [the elder] must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil” (1 Tim 3:7-8). Timothy compared this deception and trap potentially faced by elders who might be appointed pre-maturely to that faced by new Christians who stumble after baptism, or “ritual washing.”²⁸

Three parables told by Jesus also provided Tertullian with material which was both illustrative and instructive. Jesus’ rebuke of the church at Laodicea in Revelation 3 perhaps served, once again, as the basis for Tertullian’s teaching. The soiled wedding garment mentioned in *Scorpiace* 6 was apparently an interpretive allusion to Revelation 3:17–18. Tertullian possibly had the parable of the wedding, which Jesus shared in Matthew 22:1–14 in mind as well. The parable mentioned a man present at the feast dressed in clothing inappropriate for the occasion. He was cast out. The parable of the wise and foolish virgins recounted in Matthew 25:1–13, provided the North African theologian with the comparison between lack of oil and failure to be sanctified, walk in the Spirit, and thus resist temptation. Similarly, Tertullian drew on the imagery found in

²⁶ Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 6, in Dunn, *Tertullian*, 118.

²⁷ Tertullian speaks of martyrdom as a sacrament, like unto baptism, in *Scorpiace* 8 and 9. See Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 8 and 9.

²⁸ Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 6, in Dunn, *Tertullian*, 118.

parable of the lost sheep, which Jesus told in Luke 15:1–7. The lost sheep is the one who “needed to be carried back on the shoulders.”²⁹ Clearly these parables demonstrated lostness and gave ample explanation of the miserable plight of those who became so lost.

Tertullian quoted Psalm 32:1–2. He claimed this promise of divine justification, which David celebrated for those who endured martyrdom, even after serious post-baptismal sins. The theologian from Carthage understood martyrdom to be a “ritual washing” on par with the “ritual washing” of Christian baptism. The apostle John described the souls of Christian martyrs before God. John described what he saw: “I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne” (Rev 6:9). Likely the same group of martyrs appeared in Revelation 7:9–17. John learned, “These [the ones wearing the white robes] are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:14). Tertullian could have conflated these two passages, along with Revelation 3:18, which led him to the conclusion that martyrdom was the path for forgiveness of serious post-baptismal sins.

Tertullian’s argument perhaps ran this way: White robes were worn by martyrs. Those who had soiled their clothes were told to get white garments from Christ. White garments were available to those who had their clothes washed in the blood of the Lamb via the “ritual washing” of martyrdom. Clearly, martyrdom was the second “ritual washing,” since Tertullian stated that in it, “life itself is handed over.”³⁰ Martyrdom served as a second baptism for those whose sanctification was polluted by serious sins.

John’s Baptism

There is only minimal reference to the doctrine of baptism in *Adversus*

²⁹ Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 6, in Dunn, *Tertullian*, 118.

³⁰ Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 6, in Dunn, *Tertullian*, 118.

Valentinianos, where Tertullian referred to the baptism of Jesus Christ by John.³¹ *De Carne Christi* proved to be a similar case in point. In the treatise, *De Carne Christi*, Tertullian's primary use of the doctrine of baptism is related to John's baptism of Jesus.³²

In chapter 2 of *De Paenitentia*, Tertullian examined the occasion of John's baptism. In this baptism God "commanded that there should first be a Baptism [sic] of penance."³³ The baptism practiced by Christ's forerunner and instated prior to Christian baptism demanded repentance. According to Tertullian, the baptism of John served as the specific occasion for genuine repentance. John scolded the Pharisees: "Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. . . . Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matt 3:8, 10). In Christian baptism, similarly, the sinner needed to repent. Indeed, the purpose of John's baptism found its echo in Christian's baptism call to repentance. Christian baptism, however, offered more. Forgiveness and new life in the Holy Spirit were given as the gifts of Christian baptism. Tertullian described the difference in John's baptism and Christian baptism clearly when he argued of John's teaching in *De Paenitentia* 2: "Of this John is not silent, for he says: *Begin to repent*."³⁴ In Matthew 3:2, John the Baptist exhorted, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Tertullian highlighted John's baptism primarily because of its teaching, which demanded repentance, and its occasion, which brought true repentance.

Vivification

There was to be a cleansing of the flesh granted to martyrs which would be more than just a cleansing. This experience would also be a bringing of the body to new

³¹ Tertullian, *Adversus Valentinianos* 27.

³² Tertullian, *De Carne Christi* 3. See also Tertullian, *De Patientia* 3.

³³ Tertullian, *De Paenitentia* 2, in Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, 16.

³⁴ Tertullian, *De Paenitentia* 2, in Le Saint, *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*, 16. (Italics original.)

life, a vivification of the flesh, according to Tertullian in *Scorpiace*. The end of chapter 12 of *Scorpiace*, quoted below, included a significant discussion of baptismal vivification:

Next, to every victor (the Spirit) promises now the tree of life and pardon from the second death, now the hidden manna with the white pebble and the unknown name, now the power of the iron rod and the brightness of the morning star, now to be clothed in a white garment and not to be blotted out from the book of life and to become a column in the temple of God, having been inscribed with the name of God and of the Lord and of the heavenly Jerusalem, now to reside with the Lord on his throne, which once was denied to the sons of Zebedee. Who (are) these blessed victors if not proper martyrs? For indeed, theirs (are) the victories, whose also (are) the fights, but indeed theirs (are) the fights, whose also (is) the blood. But also, in the meantime, the souls of the martyrs rest quiet under the altar and they nourish their patience with the assurance of revenge and, having been covered with long garments, they use the dazzling white (garment) of brightness until others also may fill the share of their glory. For the innumerable multitude clothed in white is revealed, distinguished with the palms of victory, no doubt triumphant over the antichrist, as one of the elders affirms, ‘These are the ones who are coming from the great affliction and have washed their clothing and whitened it in the blood of the lamb.’ For the attire of the soul is flesh. Even filth is washed away by baptism, but stains are truly made white by martyrdom. For Isaiah also promises whiteness like the snow and the wool from the red and scarlet. Even the drunkenness of great Babylon, when it is described as drunk with the blood of the holy ones, is, without a doubt, catered for from the cups of martyrdoms, the terror of which, since it is about to be endured, is equally shown. For among all the deceitful, or rather before (them) all, (are) the fearful. ‘However, the lot for the fearful,’ says (the author)—and then follows the others (in the list)—(will be) in the pool of fire and Sulphur.’ Thus fear, (as he says) in his letter, which love throws out, has punishment.³⁵

In this quote from *Scorpiace* 12, Tertullian first catalogued the blessings offered to the churches in Revelation if they remained faithful. Tertullian’s teaching in the above passage from *Scorpiace* shows that Tertullian clearly argued that the gifts were offered specifically to martyrs. In the context of martyrdom, he referred to “every victor,” which would have been every martyr.³⁶ Tertullian confirmed this understanding later in the passage from *Scorpiace*. He argued, “Who (are) these blessed victors if not proper martyrs?”³⁷ To these martyrs were blessings guaranteed by Jesus. Christ promised the

³⁵ Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 12, in Dunn, *Tertullian*, 130–31.

³⁶ Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 12, in Dunn, *Tertullian*, 130.

³⁷ Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 12, in Dunn, *Tertullian*, 130.

tree of life to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:7. Pardon from the second death was assured by Jesus to the church at Smyrna in Revelation 2:11. Hidden manna and a white stone was offered to the church at Pergamum in Revelation 2:17. The church at Thyatira should expect the morning star from Jesus based on Revelation 2:28. A white garment and an assurance never to be blotted from the book of life were the gifts promised to the church at Sardis in Revelation 3:5. The church at Philadelphia should be made a pillar in God's temple based on Jesus' promise in Revelation 3:12. Lastly, to join Christ on the heavenly throne proved to be the great reward promised to the church at Laodicea in Revelation 3:21.

He also expounded on the scene of the souls of the martyrs as described in Revelation 6:9-11. The biblical passage from the Apostle John's Apocalypse says,

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

These souls longed for their redemption. In the passage this included God avenging their deaths. In Tertullian's exegesis, their redemption also necessarily entailed the vivification of their flesh. They expected that God would clothe their souls again with flesh. This clothing with flesh is the resurrection of the body and it is the second resurrection, which is contrary to the second death.

Tertullian referenced Revelation 7:9-14 in this passage from *Scorpiace*. This passage, thus, apparently served as an amplification of Tertullian's discussion, which was related to limited second repentance, in *Scorpiace* 6. Tertullian elaborated on theological truths present in this scene. He said, "For the attire of the soul is flesh. Even filth is washed away by baptism, but stains are truly made white by martyrdom."³⁸ Cleansing,

³⁸ Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 12, in Dunn, *Tertullian*, 131.

forgiveness, and new life came at baptism, but complete whiteness—cleansing, forgiveness, and new life—were full and final following martyrdom. The filth of the soul has been washed away at baptism and the filth of the body will be finally eradicated by the Spirit and his work of vivifying the flesh in the final redemption.

This promise is undeniably claimed by Christian martyrs. Tertullian claimed the promise of God to Isaiah in Isaiah 1:18 for the Christian martyrs. God said, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool” (Isa 1:18). The positive side of redemption, again, found its fulfilment in life for the martyrs. The punishment of the Babylon, the persecutor of the church, expressed the negative side of Christ’s redemption of the martyrs. Tertullian referred to “the drunkenness of great Babylon.”³⁹ The theologian from Carthage exegeted Revelation 18:8, in which the loud voice stated, “Pay her back as she herself has paid back others and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed.” Tertullian found a reference to Babylon’s drunkenness from the blood of Christian martyrs in this apocalyptic passage.

Tertullian concluded *Scorpiace* 12 with a warning from Revelation 21:8. The one seated on the throne said, “But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death” (Rev 21:8). From this Johannine passage, Tertullian drew the exhortation not to be afraid of martyrdom. The cowardly, or the fearful, were to experience the condemnation of burning in fire and sulfur. Tertullian warned against cowering before men only to receive greater condemnation and torture later. Baptism vivified soul and would vivify body. Martyrdom, Tertullian argued in *Scorpiace*, hastened the body’s full and final vivification.

³⁹ Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 12, in Dunn, *Tertullian*, 131.

Conclusion

Outside of Tertullian's *De Baptismo*, which will be discussed in chapter 3, Tertullian's teaching on baptism focused on its spiritual and theological application to the greater topic at hand. In *De Oratione*, a tractate on the spirituality of prayer, cleansing was the focus. Separation from heathens and heretics at baptism held the North African's attention in several polemical treatises: *De Idololatria*, *De Spectaculis*, *De Corona*, *Adversus Judaeos*, and *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*. In *De Paenitentia*, a treatise on the subject of Christian repentance, and also in a few passages in *De Corona* and *Scorpiace*, Tertullian argued that Christians necessarily practiced genuine repentance in concurrence with the ordinance of baptism. Tertullian's discussion of John's baptism in *De Paenitentia* merely amplified his teaching on the undeniable unity of baptism with repentance. Finally, in *Scorpiace*, Tertullian argued for the necessity of baptism for the vivification of the body, which the Christian would experience finally and exhaustively via martyrdom. For Tertullian, in his pre-Montanist works, baptism was a spiritual event whereby the baptizand was cleansed, separated from the world, genuinely repentant, and vivified for both her present and her future.

CHAPTER 3

BAPTISM IN TERTULLIAN'S *DE BAPTISMO*

Introductions to the Standard Translations

Devoted in its entirety to the subject of baptism, *De Baptismo* is the ideal starting point for an investigation into Tertullian's doctrine of baptism. First, this chapter will consider the date, purpose, occasion, audience, and theological foci of the work. Second, the primary baptismal themes of *De Baptismo* will be discussed at length.

Date of *De Baptismo*

First, the date of *De Baptismo* will be considered. Despite his reluctance to venture an exact date for the composition of Tertullian's *De Baptismo*, Evans suggested that Tertullian wrote it at the beginning of the third century. Tertullian's lack of ostensible Montanism in *De Baptismo* provided partial justification for Evans' dating.¹ Similarly, Dietrich Schleyer and R. Refoulé dated *De Baptismo* to 200–206.² Attilio Carpin proposed two general dates: 198–200, which he preferred, and 200–206. Carpin maintained the latter date held wider acceptance among scholars at the time of his writing.³ Lacking a convincing argument for the date of *De Baptismo* to the contrary of the weight of scholarship, the general dating of 200–206 shall be assumed in this thesis.

¹ Ernest Evans, introduction to *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1964), xi.

² Dietrich Schleyer, *Tertullian De Baptismo, De Oratione—Von der Taufe, Vom Gebet*, Fontes Christiani 76 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2006), 10; R. Refoulé, *Tertullien: Traité Du Baptême*, Series Latina 35 (Paris: Sources Chrétiennes, 1952), 12. Horgan concurred with the general date of 200–206. Padraig S. Horgan, "Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani, *De Baptismo*: Translation with Introduction and Commentary" (STD diss., Catholic University of America, 1966), 43.

³ Attilio Carpin, *Tertulliano: Il Battesimo De Baptismo* (Bologna, Italy: Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 2011), 9.

Barnes proposed four criteria to determine the chronology of Tertullian's works. Barnes stated: "Four criteria have been employed: historical allusions, references to other works, doctrinal progression and style."⁴ Barnes then provided his justification for dating *De Baptismo* and other works to "before 206."⁵ He explained, "They [Barnes' four criteria] yield virtually nothing for several treatises of the period before Tertullian became a Montanist."⁶ This thesis will not venture an argument about Tertullian's possible Montanism when he wrote *De Baptismo*. However, any connection to Montanism need not force a later dating; Tertullian perhaps was attracted to Montanism earlier than some scholars argue.⁷

Purpose and Occasion

De Baptismo served a doctrinal and polemical purpose. A heresy, personified by Tertullian as "a certain female viper from the Cainite sect," came to Carthage, "demolishing," or tearing down the correct teaching on baptism.⁸ Tertullian identified the

⁴ Timothy David Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 54.

⁵ Barnes, *Tertullian*, 55.

⁶ Barnes, *Tertullian*, 54–55.

⁷ Though I believe an argument could be made for Tertullian having written *De Baptismo* as a Montanist such an argument is outside the scope of this thesis.

⁸ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 1, in Evans, *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, 5. Cf. Tertullian's *Scorpiace*, which was written against Satanic heresy personified as "the dog-headed one itself." Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 1.10, in *Tertullian: The Early Church Fathers*, trans. James Dunn (London: Routledge, 2004), 109. Tertullian also personified his opponent with the devil in *Adversus Praxeas* 1: "The serpent has forgotten himself: for when he tempted Jesus Christ after the baptism of John it was as Son of God that he attacked him, being assured that God has a son at least from those very scriptures out of which he was then constructing the temptation. . . . Nay but he himself rather is a liar from the beginning and so is his own [coin], like Praxeas." Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeas* 1, in *Tertullian's Treatise against Praxeas*, trans. Ernest Evans (1948; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 130. Evans explained his use of "<>," which has been changed to "[]" in this dissertation for the sake of continuity: "The text here printed follows the manuscript authorities as closely as possible: all emendations or additions, except such as have already become common form, are indicated in the text by italics or <>." Evans, *Tertullian's Treatise against Praxeas*, 85. In other texts from Tertullian, the use of "<>" will reflect the same purpose, but these will be likewise changed to "[]". In *De Baptismo*, *Scorpiace*, and *Adversus Praxeas*, Tertullian declares the devil and his heresies to be his real opponent via metaphorical reference to vipers, serpents, and mythological creatures which all personify

occasion for his writing: he wrote to counteract the heretical teaching on baptism and explicate the proper teaching on baptism for catechumens.⁹

What Was the “Cainite Sect”?

Expounding on Tertullian’s stated occasion for writing, Evans further identified Tertullian’s opponent as “apparently gnostic or Maricionite.”¹⁰ Schleyer likewise designated Tertullian’s opponent as a purveyor of a sort of gnostic dualism.¹¹ However, Carpin noted that there is a textual variant regarding the name of the sect. Tertullian’s antagonist belonged possibly to the Gaius sect.¹² The heresy could also be of the Cainite

Satanic evil. Thus, Tertullian’s opponent in *De Baptismo* need not be a woman who is teaching heresy, but may rather be a heretical system represented by a female viper as Satanic evil personified.

⁹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 1.

¹⁰ Evans, introduction to *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, xi.

¹¹ Schleyer, *Tertullian De Baptismo*, 14–15.

¹² Tertullian apparently mentioned the heretical group tied to Gaius in *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*. Tertullian categorized the Gaius sect with the Nicolaitans mentioned in Revelation: “Today we have a new kind of Nicolaitan, called the Gaian heresy. In the epistle [1 John], however, he gives the name of Antichrist above all to those who denied that ‘Christ is come in the flesh’ and to those who did not believe that ‘Jesus is the Son of God.’” Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 33, in *Early Latin Theology: Selections from Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, and Jerome*, trans. and ed. Stanley Lawrence Greenslade (Louisville: Westminster, 1956), 54–55. Peter Holmes connected the “Gaian heresy” here mentioned with that of the Cainites: “The common reading [would be] ‘Caiana.’” Peter Holmes, in Tertullian, *On Prescription against Heretics*, trans. and ed. Peter Holmes, in *Latin Christianity, Its Founder, Tertullian*, vol. 3, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, American ed. (1885; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 259n19. Pier Angelo Gramaglia did not affirm the link between the Gaius sect and the Cainite sect. He stated that the link was based on the mention by Jerome. Gramaglia, however, argued conversely, “È la più valida? Noi crediamo di no.” Pier Angelo Gramaglia, *Tertulliano, Il Battesimo* (Rome: Edizioni Paoline, 1979), 119n3. Gramaglia further contends, “È possibile perciò che si tratti di una seta fondata da un certo Gaio, il quale teorizzava la libertà nel mangiare carne immolata agli idoli, nel contrarre qualsiasi tipo di matrimonio e nel ritenere il battesimo un rito inutile alla fede.” Gramaglia, *Tertulliano, Il Battesimo*, 120n. Gramaglia preferred to base his understanding of the sect of *De Baptismo*’s opponent on the basis of Tertullian’s writings first and foremost rather than on Jerome’s. Thus, he reversed the primary order he claimed that he found in other scholars’ writings. After Tertullian’s writings, Gramaglia considered those of not only Jerome but also Irenaeus. The latter described an essentially gnostic group which apparently exalted the feminine in his *Against Heresies*. See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.31.1–2. Nonetheless, Gramaglia concludes his argument: “Pare dunque più verosimile pensare che quella donna appartenesse non già ai Cainiti . . . bensì ad un gruppo non molto noto che si rifaceva alle teorir religiose di un certo Gaio.” Gramaglia, *Tertulliano, Il Battesimo*, 121n.

sect.¹³ Carpin further noted that it was likely Tertullian who conflated the Cainites of Carthage and the Nicolaitans condemned in Revelation 2:6.¹⁴ Horgan named the Cainite

¹³ Carpin, *Tertulliano*, 10. The codex Trecensis had *canina* whereas the Mesnartii had *Gaiana*. J. G. Ph. Borleffs, *De Baptismo*, ed. E. Dekkers, in *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina*, vol. 1, *Tertulliani Opera Pars 1* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1953), 277n1:8. The Cainites were mentioned in *Against All Heresies*: “Moreover, also there has broken out another heresy also, which is called that of the *Cainites*. And the reason is, that they magnify Cain as if he had been conceived of some Virtue which operated in him; for Abel had been procreated after being conceived of an inferior Virtue, and accordingly had been found inferior.” Pseudo-Tertullian, *Against All Heresies 2*, trans. S. Thelwall, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, *Tertullian*, 651. Aemilius Kroyman, who edited the critical edition of *Adversus Omnes Haereses* in *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* and *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, assigned the work to Victorinus of Pettau based on the arguments of Eduardus Schwartz. Aemilius Kroyman, *Adversus Omnes Haereses*, ed. S. Petri, *Opera Monastica*, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 2* (Turnholt, Belgium: Brepols, 1954), 1400, 1401–10. See also Aemilius Kroyman, *Adversus Omnes Haereses*, ed. Aemilius Kroyman, in *Tertulliani: Opera Pars III*, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 47* (Vienna, Italy: Academiae Litterarum Caesareae, 1906), 213–26. Thus, this polemical work, *Against All Heresies*, is not considered to be authentic to Tertullian’s corpus. It was written by Victorinus, according to Kroyman and Quasten. See Johannes Quasten, *The Ante-Nicene Literature after Irenaeus, Patrology* (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1952), 2:41–13. Still, it did provide further illumination on the sect in question, even if not written by Tertullian himself. The sect was evidently a gnostic sect that exalted Cain because of his supposed superiority to Cain. Evidently, the sect in its teaching followed suite and declared the practice(s) of their group superior to those of the church catholic. It should be further noted that *Against All Heresies* condemned Montanists, as well as Cainites. Pseudo-Tertullian includes in his enumeration of heresies: “Other heretics swell the list who are called Cataphrygians, but their teaching is not uniform.” Then, the author pinpoints the one area of agreement in the teaching of the sect: “The common blasphemy lies in their saying that the Holy Spirit was in the apostles indeed, the Paraclete was not; and in their saying that the Paraclete has spoken in Montanus more things than Christ brought forward into (the compass of) the Gospel, and not merely more, but likewise better and greater.” Pseudo-Tertullian, *Against All Heresies 7*, 654. Were this work proved to be of bona-fide Tertullianistic authorship a strict dating would be necessary to establish its place (especially since it was clearly anti-Montanistic) in the writings of Tertullian. Since *Against All Heresies* was not considered to be written by Tertullian, it need only be used to provide contemporary corroboration of the Cainite sect. Jerome refuted a Cainite heresy in Letter 69:

The heresy of the Cainites rises before me and the once slain viper lifts up its shattered head destroying not partially as most often hitherto but altogether the mystery of Christ. This heresy declares that there are some sins which Christ cannot cleanse with His blood, and the scars left by old transgressions on the body cannot be effaced by the remedy by the remedy which He supplies. What else is this but to say the Christ has died in vain?” (Jerome, *Letter 69*, trans. W. H. Fremantle, G. Lewis, and W. G. Martley, *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, vol. 6, *Nicene Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 2 [1893; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983], 141–42)

Jerome made an apparent allusion to Tertullian’s *De Baptismo 1* by mentioning the “viper.” Jerome may have had in mind the devil, the viper in the garden of Eden, and Tertullian may have as well. Assuming, nonetheless, that the Cainites of Tertullian’s time and also of Jerome’s time were consistent in their doctrine, the Cainites’ soteriological doctrines of the atonement and baptism were both clearly unorthodox. See Fremantle, Lewis, and Martley, in *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, 141n8; and Tertullian, *De Baptismo 1*.

¹⁴ Carpin, *Tertulliano*, 11. See also Refoulé, who suggested *De Baptismo* began as polemical sermons that Tertullian preached but later published. Tertullian provided little explanation regarding who the Cainites were and what they taught. Refoulé, *Tertullien*, 10.

heretic Quintilla. However, he supplied no justification for this nomenclature.¹⁵

There is another possibility for the leader of the heretical group opposed by Tertullian. Eusebius mentioned an anti-Montanist author named Caius.¹⁶ Eusebius identified this Caius as “a certain ecclesiastical writer, Caius by name.”¹⁷ What makes the figure so intriguing as a possibility is his time-period, locale, and opposition to Montanism. He lived as a contemporary of both Zephyrinus, bishop of Rome, and Tertullian.¹⁸ John Gwynn summarized the historical evidence for Caius in this way: “It may be briefly said, that hardly anything has been hitherto known of him with certainty, beyond the facts that he flourished about the year of our Lord 200, and that he wrote a *Dialogue* against Proclus, a Montanist leader.”¹⁹ Thus, Eusebius and Hippolytus apparently dated Caius to a similar time period.

Caius was considered an “ecclesiastical writer” by Eusebius.²⁰ He knew Roman landmarks well enough to be able to offer “‘to show,’ says he, ‘the trophies of the apostles.’”²¹ These were said to be at the Vatican and Ostian road.²² Salmond considered

¹⁵ Horgan, “Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani, *De Baptismo*,” 43. It was likely the textual variant in the “edition Gelenii” that led Horgan to assume the heretical teacher was in fact Quintilla. Borleffs, *De Baptismo*, 277n1:13.

¹⁶ Eusebius Pamphilus, *The Ecclesiastical History* 25, trans. Christian Frederick Cruse, *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius of Pamphilus, Bishop of Caesarea, in Palestine* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 80.

¹⁷ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 25, 80.

¹⁸ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 25, 80.

¹⁹ John Gwynn, “Hippolytus and His ‘Heads against Caius,’” *Hermathena* 6 (1888): 397.

²⁰ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 25, 80.

²¹ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 25, 80.

²² S. D. F. Salmond explains this reference: “The reference is to the Vatican as the traditional burial place of Peter, and to the Ostian Road as that of Paul.” S. D. F. Salmond, *Fragments of Caius*, in *Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix*, vol. 5, ed. Cleveland Coxe, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 601n3.

Caius to be a “presbyter of Rome” under Bishop Zephyrinus.²³

Evidently, Caius wrote a treatise against Montanism. Eusebius claimed that Caius’ letter was written to “disput[e] with Proclus the leader of the Phrygian sect.”²⁴ Of course, Gwynn referred to Caius’ *Dialogue*, which was reputedly written against Proclus.²⁵ Gwynn discovered and discussed five passages from this lost work. Gwynn said, “These passages, five in number, are embodied in the inedited Syriac *Commentary on the Apocalypse, Acts, and Epistles* of Dionysius Barsalibî, the learned Jacobite divine of the twelfth century.”²⁶

The passage that is most relevant to this thesis is based on Caius’ comments on Revelation 9:2–3, which stated: “He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth.” The question under discussion was whether this passage in John’s *Apocalypse* incorrectly taught that the scorpions here mentioned were to attack non-believers rather than genuine believers. Caius evidently discounted the genuineness of the text based on objections such as this one, regarding whom the scorpions attacked. Hippolytus argued against Caius’ charge of spuriousness, claiming that the faithful would be attacked up until this point and then “the righteous have rest” while the unrighteous are attacked.²⁷

²³ Salmond, *Fragments of Caius*, 599.

²⁴ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 25, 80.

²⁵ Gwynn, “Hippolytus and His ‘Heads against Caius,’” 397.

²⁶ Gwynn, “Hippolytus and His ‘Heads against Caius,’” 397.

²⁷ Gwynn, “Hippolytus and His ‘Heads against Caius,’” 401.

Tertullian answered a similar problem in *Scorpiace*.²⁸ Tertullian's question is essentially: why are Christians suffering persecution when the ungodly are supposed to suffer the scorpion's sting? This is a similar question to the one which was discussed in Caius' *Dialogue*. Tertullian and Caius lived and wrote around the same time. Since Caius' *Dialogue*, *De Baptismo*, and *Scorpiace* were all written at similar dates: 200, 200–206, and 203–204, respectively, it is possible, though beyond satisfactory proof, that Tertullian's opponent in both *De Baptismo* and *Scorpiace* were one and the same: Caius of Rome.²⁹ He identified Caius by name as the leader of the sect in *De Baptismo* 1 and the North African theologian argued against the teaching of Caius' *Dialogue* in *Scorpiace* 1.

T. Scott Manor challenged the historical portrayal of Caius, or Gaius, of Rome. He discounted the value of Barsalibi and Eusebius in understanding the Montanist controversies with the church at Rome in the third century. Manor summarized his argument by deconstructing the textual evidence and offering an alternate interpretation:

Most notably, the *Caius haereticus* of the bar Salibi commentaries is incompatible with the historical figure Gaius of Rome. This is seen throughout bar Salibi's account, where he gives no indication that he is aware of Gaius' provenance in Rome or his battle against the Montanists that took the form of a *Dialogue* in Rome or his battle against the Montanists that took the form of a *Dialogue* against Proclus. As I have argued, the 'Gaius' of the bar Salibi commentaries is based on the faulty interpretation of the bare figure of Eusebius' account in *HE* 3.28.1. Rather than the 'ecclesiastical' man of Eusebius' time, bar Salibi has misunderstood Gaius as the opponent of the Apocalypse and, with the supporting testimony of Epiphanius, the Gospel of John. Rather than the 'learned' man of Eusebius' era whose reputation grew posthumously into one of orthodox and intellectual prestige, bar Salibi's Gaius is attributed with charges against the Apocalypse that more accurately reflect the style of Origenian hermeneutical questions concerning textual integrity.³⁰

²⁸ See Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 1.

²⁹ For the date on Caius' *Dialogue* as 200, see Gwynn, "Hippolytus and his 'Heads against Caius,'" 397. For the date of 200–206 for *De Baptismo*, see Schleyer, *Tertullian De Baptismo*, 10; Refoulé, *Tertullien*, 12; and Horgan, "Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani, *De Baptismo*," 43. For the date of 203–204 for *Scorpiace*, see Barnes, *Tertullian*, 35.

³⁰ T. Scott Manor, *Epiphanius' Alogi and the Johannine Controversy: A Reassessment of Early Ecclesial Opposition to the Johannine Corpus*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 135 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2016), 231–32.

Manor has raised objections to the generally accepted history of Caius. There remain questions to be answered, though. Who was Tertullian writing *De Baptismo* against, if not Caius of Rome; and why does *Scorpiace* address such a similar topic as that supposedly addressed by Caius in his *Dialogue*?³¹

The occasion for Tertullian's writing was the necessity to respond to the heresy, which the African theologian labeled Cainite or of Caius (or Gaius). Tertullian wrote to combat this heresy with a clear exposition of the church's teaching on the sacrament of baptism.

Audience

Evans, Refoulé, and Carpin have suggested that Tertullian's audience for his tractate, as well as the sermons which inspired his published work, encompassed both Christians and catechumens.³² Schleyer has argued further that Tertullian's focus was first catechumens and then Christians.³³ Tertullian's work itself provides ample justification for this understanding of his intended audience.

Defending and defining Christian baptism, recently attacked by a purveyor of heretical teachings, Tertullian wrote for those seeking baptism and those already baptized. The theologian from Carthage opened his treatise with these succinct words:

This discussion of the sacred significance of that water of ours in which the sins of our original blindness are washed away and we are set at liberty unto eternal life, will not be without purpose if it provides equipment for those who are at present under instruction, as well as those others who, content to have believed in

³¹ Judith M. Lieu reviewed Manor's book and concluded, "While not all may be persuaded by the attribution to Origen and his 'school' of some of the views later attributed to the 'Alogi', this is a careful and sober analysis of the sources which should help lay the latter to rest." Judith M. Lieu, review of *Epiphanius' Alogi and the Johannine Controversy. A Reassessment of Early Ecclesial Opposition to the Johannine Corpus* by T. Scott Manor, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 68 (2017): 592. Though Lieu accepted Manor's thesis, the quote does evidence that not all scholars did. Thus, the verdict is still out on the value of Manor's argument.

³² Evans, introduction to *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, xii; Refoulé, *Tertullien*, 10; Carpin, *Tertulliano, Il Battesimo*, 13.

³³ Schleyer, *Tertullian De Baptismo*, 11.

simplicity, have not examined the reasons for what has been conferred upon them, and because of inexperience are burdened with a faith which is open to temptation.³⁴

Tertullian wrote for those “under instruction,” or catechumens and “others . . . burdened with a faith which is open to temptation,” or those who were seduced by the heretical teachings brought to Carthage.³⁵ What occupied Tertullian’s theological focus when he expounded on the church’s sacrament of baptism?

Theological Foci

In Tertullian’s view, baptism provided the occasion for God to forgive sins and give the gift of the Holy Spirit. Tertullian assigned these divine benefits to baptism and more also, according to Evans. Evans has explicated Tertullian’s teaching on baptism in *De Baptismo* thus:

It may not be necessary to follow him in his attempt, not very convinced or convincing, to assign each several effect, each several grace of God, to its own particular ceremony: the one all-inclusive act of washing in water with the spoken word of the trinitarian formula may be supposed to effect not only the removal of sins and regeneration to newness of life, but also to carry with it those further graces of which the subsidiary ceremonies may have been (in their origin) illustrative tokens rather than effective signs.³⁶

Evans maintained that Tertullian assigned several divine works to baptism. God granted forgiveness and regeneration, but he also bestowed other gifts which were symbolized by other aspects of the baptismal ceremony, according to Evans.

Exegeting *De Baptismo* 4, Evans drew a correlation between a seeming contrast between the bodily and the spiritual. At baptism the spirit is washed in water and the body is made clean spiritually.³⁷ In this chapter of *De Baptismo*, and in Evans’ exegesis of that passage, Tertullian elaborated more fully on the death of sin, especially sins of the flesh, in the life of the Christian. But the full development of this theological

³⁴ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 1, in Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 5.

³⁵ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 1, in Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 5.

³⁶ Evans, introduction to *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, xxix.

³⁷ Evans, introduction to *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, xxxi.

theme, namely the death of sin, and an understanding of the Spirit's work of vivification at baptism, only fully emerged after Tertullian's acceptance of Montanism.

Evans identified the second baptismal theme evaluated in this dissertation, death of sin, along with forgiveness, regeneration, and the gift of the Holy Spirit as the major theological themes Tertullian associated with baptism in *De Baptismo*.³⁸

Theological Themes in *De Baptismo*

Evans provides the most exhaustive list of the benefits of baptism in his introduction of *De Baptismo*. For this reason, the seven benefits that he lists will serve as a guide and comparison for the present discussion. It should be noted that Evans references works outside of *De Baptismo* to expound on certain baptismal themes. In these instances, he does not indicate a change, or development, of Tertullian's views on baptism but rather continuity between Tertullian's treatises. For instance, regarding Tertullian's writings about the baptismal ceremony, Evans explained, "The following references, for the most part incidental, in his other works confirm the allusions of *De Baptismo* and fill out a few of its omissions."³⁹ When Evans discussed Tertullian's theological themes, he echoed the previous statement: "Tertullian's references to this doctrine, once more, are allusive rather than systematic, and are often to be discerned in a casual word or turn of phrase."⁴⁰ Refoulé, unlike Evans, asserted: "Ses écrits nous permettent encore aujourd'hui de suivre son évolution vers le montanisme, secte phrygienne récemment introduite en Afrique."⁴¹

Evans lists the following seven gifts of baptism: "remission of sins," "cleansing," "deliverance from death," "new birth to everlasting life," "conveys the Holy

³⁸ Evans, introduction to *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, xxxi–xxxiii.

³⁹ Evans, introduction to *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, xxiii.

⁴⁰ Evans, introduction to *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, xxix.

⁴¹ Refoulé, *Tertullien*, 8.

Spirit,” “the devil . . . is drowned,” and “admission into the Church.”⁴² These gifts of baptism, which Evans culled from Tertullian’s *De Baptismo*, will be examined in detail below.

The Remission of Sins

Baptism and remission of sins were linked well before Tertullian wrote. In the New Testament the sacrament and the gift were irrevocably tied. Preaching on the day of Pentecost, Peter set forth a Gospel invitation, as recorded in Acts 2:38: “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Thus, the New Testament linked baptism with the forgiveness of sins and the conveying of the Holy Spirit. Tertullian also linked baptism with these two gifts, or benefits.⁴³ Though Refoulé did not focus his discussion of baptismal themes on the remission of sins, the other three authors of the major introductions to *De Baptismo* did.⁴⁴

Evans considered the “remission of sins” to be “fundamental to the grace of baptism” in Tertullian.⁴⁵ Schleyer and Carpin agreed.⁴⁶ Schleyer discovered Tertullian’s solution for whether the Holy Spirit was given at baptism or the imposition of the hand by assigning remission of sins, and not the conveying of the Holy Spirit, to baptism. Schleyer reasoned: “Tertullian löst das Problem dadurch, daß er dem Taufakt nur die Sündenvergebung zuweist.”⁴⁷ Carpin, who conversely argued that forgiveness of sins and

⁴² Evans, introduction to *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, xxxi–xxxiii.

⁴³ See Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 1, 4, 5, 6, 11, 20.

⁴⁴ See Refoulé, *Tertullien*, 15; Evans, introduction to Tertullian, *Tertullian’s Homily Baptism*, xxxi; Schleyer, *De Baptismo*, 31; and Carpin, *Tertulliano*, 14, 49, 76, and 90.

⁴⁵ Evans, introduction to *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, xxxi.

⁴⁶ See Schleyer, *De Baptismo*, 31 and Carpin, *Tertulliano*, 14, 49, 76, and 90.

⁴⁷ Schleyer, *De Baptismo*, 40, see also 44, 63, 96, and 102.

the Holy Spirit were given at baptism, summarized Tertullian: “Ma, tramite questo semplice gesto, Dio dona effettivamente la salvezza, la remissione dei peccati, la vita eterna.”⁴⁸ Refoulé focused his treatment of the benefits of baptism more on the freedom from sin rather than its forgiveness.⁴⁹

The following sections: “Death to Sin” and “No Second Repentance” will show that Tertullian did place primary importance on the remission of sins as an effect of baptism. The authors of the four main introductions concurred, or at least, they did not disagree, as in the latter case of Refoulé. Sin’s guilt was remitted, or forgiven, at baptism. According to Tertullian, the baptized was also cleansed, or freed from sin’s power.

Cleansing

Tertullian’s explanation of the benefits of baptism followed a logical progression, which could be observed by Evans’ exegesis of *De Baptismo*. Evans summarized Tertullian: “Nor does remission remain merely an external act or transaction” because it also imparted “cleansing.”⁵⁰ Evans further observed: “we are made clean in the waters.”⁵¹

The themes recognized by Evans do overlap, especially that of cleansing, deliverance from death, and new birth to eternal life. Refoulé perhaps captured these three gifts of baptism in two over-arching categories. He pinpointed the thrust of Tertullian’s theology of baptism thus: “Deux aspects reviennent chez Tertullien avec une particulière insistance: l’aspect de <<régénération>> du baptême, et celui de

⁴⁸ Carpin, *Tertulliano: Il Battesimo* 20. See also Carpin, *Tertulliano: Il Battesimo* 14, 49, 76, and 90.

⁴⁹ Refoulé says, “Deux aspects reviennent chez Tertullien avec une particulière insistance: l’aspect de <<régénération>> du baptême, et celui de <<libération>>.” Refoulé, *Tertullien*, 15.

⁵⁰ Evans, introduction to *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, xxxi.

⁵¹ Evans, introduction to *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, xxxi.

<<libération>>.”⁵² In terms of a cleansing, or curing, at baptism, Refoulé put it well: “L’Esprit descend dans la fontaine baptismale pour guérir l’homme du mal du péché.”⁵³ Schleyer offered a similar metaphor to explain the spiritual work of cleansing as a cure at baptism. He spoke of “die Auffassung der Taufe als geistige Heilung hinzu.”⁵⁴ The cure of baptism was part and parcel of the sacred act’s cleansing. Carpin also described baptism in Tertullian as a time of cleansing, or purification. Baptism “purifica realmente dai peccati,” according to Carpin’s exegesis of Tertullian.⁵⁵ Once again, this examination of Tertullian’s treatise on Christian baptism proved Evans to be correct in recognizing the theme of cleansing in Tertullian’s baptismal teaching.⁵⁶

Deliverance from Death

It was, according to Evans’ reading of Tertullian, a result of the remission of sins and cleansing, or purification, from sin’s power that the baptized was also freed from both death and Satan.⁵⁷ Refoulé stated simply but succinctly: “Dans le premier chapitre, le baptême apparaît comme l’antidote de la mort.”⁵⁸ Schleyer includes deliverance in list of the benefits of baptism when he explained the contrast Tertullian made between Christian baptism and similar rites practiced in the mystery religions.⁵⁹ Similarly, Carpin also recognized the theme of deliverance, or liberation, when he wrote about Tertullian’s use of the Old Testament baptismal type of the Red Sea, which Moses and the Israelites

⁵² Refoulé, *Tertullien*, 15.

⁵³ Refoulé, *Tertullien*, 22; see also 45.

⁵⁴ Schleyer, *De Baptismo*, 47; see also 67.

⁵⁵ Carpin, *Il Tertulliano: Il Battesimo* 13. See also, Carpin, *Tertulliano: Il Battesimo* 41 and 69.

⁵⁶ See Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 4, 7, 20.

⁵⁷ Evans, introduction to *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, xxxi–xxxii.

⁵⁸ Refoulé, *Tertullien*, 16; see also 15, 17, 21, 25, and 26.

⁵⁹ Schleyer, *De Baptismo*, 108.

crossed when God delivered them from Pharaoh.⁶⁰ According to Carpin, two gifts of baptism for Tertullian were: “liberazione e inizio della nuova vita della grazia.”⁶¹

The theme of deliverance from death and the devil was clearly present in Tertullian’s *De Baptismo*.⁶² This theme was most obviously observed, as Schleyer pointed out, in Tertullian’s discussion of the Israelites’ deliverance from Pharaoh through the Red Sea.⁶³

New Birth to Eternal Life

Evans explained Tertullian’s doctrine of rebirth to eternal life in *De Baptismo* succinctly in two phrases: “in the water we are born anew,” and this gift “has become salvation which is eternal.”⁶⁴ Refoulé also mentioned the new birth theme in his discussion of Tertullian’s doctrine of baptism.⁶⁵ Schleyer and Carpin also both commented briefly on the theme of new birth.⁶⁶ There was thus no argument against new birth as a baptismal theme.⁶⁷

Conveys the Holy Spirit

There was, however, disagreement among the four authors significantly and especially on the point of whether, or how, the Holy Spirit was conveyed at baptism. Though Evans qualified his statement, he wrote matter-of-factly: “Baptism also conveys

⁶⁰ Carpin, *Tertulliano: Il Battesimo* 58.

⁶¹ Carpin, *Tertulliano: Il Battesimo* 58.

⁶² See Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 9.

⁶³ See Schleyer, *De Baptismo*, 108; Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 9.

⁶⁴ Evans, introduction to *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, xxxii.

⁶⁵ Refoulé, *Tertullien*, 19 and 29.

⁶⁶ Schleyer, *De Baptismo*, 45, 68, and 74; Carpin, *Tertulliano: Il Battesimo* 13–14, 49,

⁶⁷ See Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 1, 5, and 20.

the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁸ The qualification followed immediately: “Tertullian does not carefully distinguish between the specific gifts of baptism and of what we now call confirmation.”⁶⁹ Evans followed the example he evidently perceived in Tertullian and did not seem to resolve the issue either. Other exegetes proved quicker to make an argument about whether Tertullian taught that the Holy Spirit was given at baptism or not.

Refoulé argued that the Holy Spirit according to Tertullian was conveyed at the imposition of hands rather than at baptism. He thus explained regarding chapter 8 of *De Baptismo*: “Il prouve incontestablement que pour Tertullien, c’est l’imposition des mains (plus exactement de la main) qui constitue le rite essentiel de la collation de l’Esprit-Saint.”⁷⁰ He does offer somewhat of a qualification as well though. He wrote: “Tertullien semble parfois rattacher à ce rite tous les effets positifs du baptême et confondre ainsi les plans.”⁷¹ Schleyer, as already mentioned, took a similar position to that of Refoulé. Again, Schleyer wrote, exactly: “Tertullian löst das Problem dadurch, daß er dem Taufakt nur die Sündenvergebung zuweist.”⁷² Schleyer and Refoulé agreed. Carpin did not.

Carpin, moreover, made more of a “both/and” argument. The Holy Spirit is given at baptism and the laying on of hands, as Tertullian wrote; the gift of the Spirit is different in each instance though. Carpin expounded on his understanding of Tertullian’s teaching on the conveying of the Holy Spirit: “Pertanto, sia l’abluzione battesimale sia l’imposizione della mano ci donano una grazia dello Spirito Santo: nel battesimo ci è comunicato il dono stesso dell Spirito Santo per lo sviluppo in noi della nuova vita

⁶⁸ Evans, introduction to *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, xxxii.

⁶⁹ Evans, introduction to *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, xxxii.

⁷⁰ Refoulé, *Tertullien*, 42.

⁷¹ Refoulé, *Tertullien*, 42.

⁷² Schleyer, *De Baptismo*, 40.

cristiana.”⁷³ The Holy Spirit came at baptism and confirmation, but with different purposes.

Based on the arguments Tertullian made in *De Baptismo*, he seems to have taught that the Holy Spirit served in varying roles at baptism and confirmation. At baptism, the Holy Spirit came to bring cleansing and forgiveness to the one baptized. At confirmation, the Holy Spirit was called to bring spiritual gifts. Tertullian implored those who had been baptized and confirmed to pray for such gifts. The North African theologian urged his audience with these words:

Therefore, you blessed ones, for whom the grace of God is waiting, when you come up from that most sacred washing of the new birth, and when for the first time you spread out your hands with your brethren in your mother’s house, ask of your Father, ask of your Lord, that special grants of grace and apportionments of spiritual gifts be yours.⁷⁴

The Spirit thus brought gifts at confirmation.

However, according to Tertullian, when did the Holy Spirit come to live in the Christian? Stegman argued that Tertullian did not understand the Holy Spirit in personal terms until his later works.⁷⁵ According to Stegman, Tertullian understood the Spirit as a force or power rather than a person when he wrote *De Baptismo*. Stegman summarized her argument in this way: “The *spiritus sanctus* received in baptism is *spiritus noui hominis*, Jesus Christ, i.e., the *spiritus dei* granted to the ‘new humanity’ of the Church. In this way, baptism reverses the status of man whose *anima* in Adam had been defiled by *spiritus diaboli*.”⁷⁶ Stegman observed several different uses of *spiritus* as employed by Tertullian, some of which were equivocal and some not. Her purpose in analyzing the use of *spiritus* in *De Baptismo*, which she considered to be pre-Montanist and also “pre-

⁷³ Carpin, *Tertulliano*, 85.

⁷⁴ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 20, in Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 43.

⁷⁵ Claire Ann Bradley Stegman, “Development of Tertullian’s Doctrine of *Spiritus Sanctus*” (PhD diss., Southern Methodist University, 1978), 6.

⁷⁶ Stegman, “The Development of Tertullian’s Doctrine,” 50.

trinitarian,” was to prove that this usage met her first criterion for development in Tertullian’s theology.⁷⁷ The first criterion was “to discredit or, at least, bring into question the view that the terms *spiritus sanctus*, *spiritus dei*, and *spiritus* represent the third person of the Trinity in Tertullian’s usage in his “pre-trinitarian” works.”⁷⁸ Thus, the analysis of the term *spiritus* was necessary for her thesis.

A strong argument presented by Stegman was that the spirit which hovered over the waters at creation in Genesis 1:2 was understood by Tertullian as a force rather than a person.⁷⁹ Genesis 1:2 said, “The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”⁸⁰ The strength of her case lies primarily in the fact that this is precisely what Tertullian said in *Adversus Hermogenem* 32. Tertullian plainly stated:

Wind was created which was reckoned with the formation of the earth, which was wafted over the waters, balancing and refreshing and animating all things: not (as some suppose) meaning God himself by *the spirit*, on the ground that ‘God is a Spirit,’ because the waters would not be able to bear up their Lord; but he speaks of that spirit of which the winds consist.⁸¹

Clearly, Tertullian understood the *spirit* over the waters of creation in Genesis 1:2 as a part of creation. This *spiritus* was not a divine person of the Godhead, but rather was a force of nature. It was synonymous with the wind. Tertullian further identified this spirit, or wind, with the spirit over the waters of baptism. The North African theologian connected the spirit over both waters in *De Baptismo* 4 as he explained:

⁷⁷ Stegman, “The Development of Tertullian’s Doctrine,” 4, 9, and 50.

⁷⁸ Stegman, “The Development of Tertullian’s Doctrine,” 4.

⁷⁹ Stegman, “The Development of Tertullian’s Doctrine,” 51–52.

⁸⁰ The translators of the English Standard Version have signified their interpretation of this passage to be referring to the person of the Holy Spirit by capitalizing “Spirit.” The ESV’s interpretation is thus contrary to Stegman’s exegesis of Tertullian’s view of a spiritual force.

⁸¹ Tertullian, *Adversus Hermogenem*, trans. Peter Holmes, *Against Hermogenes*, in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, vol. 3, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 495, altered, italics and parentheses original.

The Spirit of God, who since the beginning was borne upon the waters, would [be the] baptizer abide upon waters. A holy thing in fact was carried upon a holy thing—or rather, that which carried acquired holiness from that which was carried upon it. Any matter placed beneath another is bound to take to itself the quality of that which is suspended over it: and especially must corporal matter take up spiritual quality, which because of the subtlety of the substance it belongs to finds it easy to penetrate and inhere.⁸²

Here, Stegman understood that Tertullian was speaking of a created spirit in *De Baptismo* 4. She stated: “That *spiritus* which was borne above the waters in the beginning remains the instigator . . . above the waters of baptism. This *spiritus* is that created spirit or power of the Son which conveyed the breath of life to all creatures.”⁸³ Tertullian understood the spirit as a created force. This became clear later in *De Baptismo* 4, where Tertullian identified the spirit, or wind, with an angel: “The waters have in some sense acquired healing power by an angel’s intervention.”⁸⁴ The angel at baptism offered the same service as the wind at the creation—both stirred the waters. The reference to the angel at baptism is clearly drawn from the account about the angel stirring the waters in the pool of Bethesda in John 5. Though its genuineness has been disputed, John 5:4 stated: “For an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred the water: whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was healed of whatever disease he had.” As Tertullian argued in *De Baptismo* 5: “No one should think it over-difficult for God’s holy angel to be present to set waters in motion for man’s salvation There has already occurred a precedent of that which was to be. An angel used to do things when he moved the Pool of Bethesda.”⁸⁵ Thus far, Stegman’s analysis has provided insight into Tertullian’s use of *spiritus* in *De Baptismo*. However, Stegman took her argument further than the evidence of Tertullian’s *De Baptismo* allowed. She argued, “This spirit acts in a

⁸² Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 4, in Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 9, 11, brackets added.

⁸³ Stegman, “The Development of Tertullian’s Doctrine,” 52.

⁸⁴ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 4, in Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 11.

⁸⁵ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 5, in Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 15.

manner which accords with the Stoic conception of *spiritus*.”⁸⁶ Also, Stegman assumed that Tertullian’s identification of the spirit over the waters of creation as the spirit over the waters of baptism and the angel at the pool of Bethesda proved that Tertullian did not understand a personal Holy Spirit, who exists as a member of the Trinity. Stegman also rightly noted the connection between the spirit over the waters of baptism and the breath of life breathed into Adam.⁸⁷

Stegman, however made two incorrect assumptions regarding Tertullian’s uses of *spiritus*. First, Stegman wrongly identified the dove mentioned at John’s baptism and Noah’s ark as the *spiritus* over the waters of creation and baptism. Genesis 8:8 stated: “Then [Noah] sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground.” Stegman argued: “This *sanctissimus spiritus* is identified with that symbolized by the dove at Christ’s baptism. Further, as Tertullian goes on, the figure of the dove recalls the ‘baptism’ of the world in the Flood.”⁸⁸ She thus appealed to Tertullian’s explanation of the salvation process in *De Baptismo* 8. Tertullian explained that following the imposition of hands:

That most holy Spirit willingly comes down from the Father upon bodies cleansed and blessed, and comes to rest upon the waters of baptism as though revisiting his primal dwelling-place. He came down upon our Lord in the form of a dove, and thus the nature of the Holy Spirit was clearly revealed in a creature of simplicity and innocence, since even physically the dove is without gall. . . . This too has the support of a type which had preceded . . . a dove as herald . . . the dove who is the Holy Spirit is sent forth from heaven.⁸⁹

This *spiritus*, who is identified with the dove at Christ’s baptism and the dove on Noah’s ark is not a created spirit, according to Tertullian. This *spiritus* does a work that no

⁸⁶ Stegman, “The Development of Tertullian’s Doctrine,” 52. The depth of Tertullian’s indebtedness to Stoicism has been debated, as evidenced by the discussion in chap. 1 of this dissertation. It should be considered beyond the scope of this dissertation, and likewise Stegman’s, to go too far into that debate. Stegman apparently assumed a large borrowing of Stoic ideas by Tertullian.

⁸⁷ Stegman, “The Development of Tertullian’s Doctrine,” 56.

⁸⁸ Stegman, “The Development of Tertullian’s Doctrine,” 63.

⁸⁹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 8, in Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 19.

creature can do. According to Tertullian, “the most holy Spirit” plays “a tune of spiritual sublimity.”⁹⁰ This is a work of divine enlightenment, which only God could do. This in turn led to Stegman’s second error.

Second, Stegman did not differentiate between the timing of the arrival of the *spiritus*, or angel, which came over the waters of baptism prior to the candidate’s immersion and that the “most holy Spirit” who came after the imposition of hands.⁹¹ For Tertullian, God sent a spirit, or wind, to stir the baptismal waters.⁹² The Holy Spirit came to regenerate at the time of baptism.⁹³ And then, the Holy Spirit came to bring gifts to the Christian at the laying on of hands.⁹⁴ Thus, the divine person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, comes at baptism for regeneration and at the laying on of hands to impart spiritual gifts. Tertullian understood that he is a person, because he does that which only a person can do. Tertullian’s New Testament references to the Holy Spirit further proved that the North African theologian understood the divine Spirit in personal terms contrary to Stegman’s argument.

Moreover, certain passages in *De Baptismo* 6 indicated that Tertullian had a robust pneumatology. The angel of baptism is compared to John the Baptizer. Tertullian stated that the angel “[prepares] his ways,” by “cancelling of sins which is granted in response to faith signed and sealed in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”⁹⁵ The Spirit is mentioned by Tertullian along with the Father and the Son in a reference to the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19, which said: “Go therefore and make disciples of all

⁹⁰ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 8, 19 and 17.

⁹¹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 8, 19; Stegman, “The Development of Tertullian’s Doctrine,” 63.

⁹² Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 4.

⁹³ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 5.

⁹⁴ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 8.

⁹⁵ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 6, in Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 15.

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Tertullian further stated: “That number of divine names of itself suffices to the confidence of our hope because where there are the three, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, there is the Church.”⁹⁶ Here Tertullian understood the Holy Spirit as one of three members of the one divine nature. Other New Testament passages are employed by Tertullian which indicate a personal understanding of the Holy Spirit. Tertullian quoted John 3:5, in which Jesus stated: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”⁹⁷ Bringing regeneration implies a personal action. Similarly, the Spirit spoke to Philip and commanded him in Acts 8, which Tertullian referenced in *De Baptismo* 18.⁹⁸ Acts 8:29 said, “And the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go over and join this chariot.’” Speaking and commanding are personal actions as well. Tertullian did indeed understand the Holy Spirit of the baptismal formula to be a divine person of the Trinity who came at baptism and the laying on of hands.

The Devil Is Drowned

Evans observed Tertullian’s comparison of the devil and Pharaoh as well as the waters of the Red Sea and the waters of baptism: “By this series of acts [the baptismal ceremony en masse] the devil, our ancient tyrant, is left drowned in the waters, as Pharaoh with his host was drowned in the Red Sea.”⁹⁹ Exodus 15:3 told of the destruction of Pharaoh’s army: “Pharaoh’s chariots and his host he cast into the sea, and his chosen

⁹⁶ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 6, 17. Stegman argues, “The term ‘pre-trinitarian’ will be used to describe those works which exhibit no evidence of a trinitarian conception of God, regardless of whether or not they contain a reference to the traditional ‘trinitarian’ baptismal formula.” Stegman, “The Doctrinal Development of Tertullian,” 6. This approach was unfounded. The baptismal formula was trinitarian and Tertullian obviously understood it as such, based on his use of it.

⁹⁷ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 13, in Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 31.

⁹⁸ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, in Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 39.

⁹⁹ Evans, introduction to *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, xxxiii.

officers were sunk in the Red Sea.” Evans and Refoulé agreed in their exegesis of Tertullian. The latter again says it best: “Dans l’eau, l’homme délaisse le diable son ancien tyran, englouti et noyé.”¹⁰⁰ Schleyer also briefly commented on this baptismal theme. He explained that the Red Sea type was: “Vorbild für die befreiende Wirkung der Taufe durch die Auslöschung der Herrschaft Satans.”¹⁰¹ Carpin summarized Tertullian’s use of the typology of the Red Sea more generally: “Il battesimo, dunque, è distruzione del peccato e liberazione dalla sua schiavitù.”¹⁰² Indeed Evans, Schleyer, Refoulé, and Carpin rightly noted Tertullian’s use of the baptismal theme in the drowning of Satan.¹⁰³

Admission into the Church

Evans explained that he indirectly observed the final baptismal theme he listed in *De Baptismo*. “If Tertullian does not expressly say that baptism is the gate of admission into the Church . . . He does however observe that baptism gives admission into the Church.”¹⁰⁴ Refoulé observed this theme to be explicit in *De Baptismo*. He wrote: “il nous introduit dans la famille du Seigneur, il est une incorporation dans une communauté.”¹⁰⁵ Schleyer exegeted *De Baptismo*, thus: “die Taufe das Tor zur Zulassung zur Kirche ist.”¹⁰⁶ Carpin, though, did not highlight the theme of baptism as admission to the church in his introduction. Evans offered the best understanding of this final baptismal theme in Tertullian’s *De Baptismo*. The typology of the church and the ark and

¹⁰⁰ Refoulé, *Tertullien*, 18.

¹⁰¹ Schleyer, *De Baptismo*, 85.

¹⁰² Carpin, *Tertulliano*, 58; see also 15.

¹⁰³ See Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 9.

¹⁰⁴ Evans, introduction to *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, xxxiii.

¹⁰⁵ Refoulé, *Tertullien*, 251; see also 16.

¹⁰⁶ Schleyer, *De Baptismo*, 51.

baptism and the floodwaters indicated a link between baptism and admission to the church. That link was assumed rather than explicitly stated.¹⁰⁷

John's Baptism and Infant Baptism

John's baptism and infant baptism were, of course, not gifts of baptism. Both were rather types of baptism which Tertullian presented as contrasts to Christian baptism. John's baptism did correspond to Christian baptism, but only as a type. The two baptisms remained distinct, Tertullian argued. The Holy Spirit was not given until Christ ascended. John's baptism pre-dated Christ's ascension; therefore it could not be Christian baptism because it did not, and could not, convey the Spirit.¹⁰⁸ In John 7:39 Jesus himself explained: "Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." John, of course, lacked divinity so it was only reasonable that his baptism could not convey the divine Spirit.

The apostles were saved. Either they received Christian baptism and it was not recorded, or they received John's baptism and that was enough for them, or they were exceptional and only saving faith was required for their salvation.¹⁰⁹ Abraham was saved by faith, but his salvation pre-dates Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. Therefore Abraham's salvation does not prove paradigmatic of salvation in the New

¹⁰⁷ See Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 8.

¹⁰⁸ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 10. It is curious that Tertullian argued that the apostles did not need to receive Christian baptism because they had already received John's baptism and there is only one baptism. He argued that logically they were baptized as they followed Christ. The argument for the necessity of baptism and the question of whether they received baptism or not is settled for Tertullian finally in the assertion that they had saving faith. Clearly, Tertullian taught the necessity of baptism but not the absolute, unexceptional necessity of the rite for salvation. Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 12.

¹⁰⁹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 12.

Testament—except that saving faith is required in both instances.¹¹⁰ Tertullian states explicitly: “Yet now that the faith has been enlarged, for those who believe in his nativity and passion and resurrection the sacrament has been expanded and the seal of baptism added, in some sense a clothing for the faith which was previously unattired: and <faith> can no longer save apart from its own law.”¹¹¹ Even Paul, the apostle, was baptized following his encounter of Christ, because it was only baptism that he lacked for salvation.¹¹² Ananias told Paul what he needed to do after meeting Jesus. Paul was instructed in Acts 22:16: “And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.”

Evans stressed the uniqueness of Tertullian’s denial of infant baptism. “The homily *On Baptism* is only by accident controversial: it contains much information bearing on the customs observed in the African churches in the administration of that sacrament, along with some of Tertullian’s personal views—notably his objection (in which he stood almost alone) to the baptism of infants.”¹¹³ Tertullian taught that the proper mode of baptism was immersion even when he found himself evidently in the minority in Christendom.

In Tertullian’s argumentation, more recent teaching, was greater in its application than the older teachings which preceded it. Novelty, even in theology, was embraced by Tertullian. It was considered clearer in its application for the present. This very logic of thought was crucial to Tertullian’s explanation and defense of Montanism.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 13. Tertullian placed a premium on faith. Reassuringly, he states, “Faith unimpaired has no doubt of its salvation.” Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 19, in Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 41.

¹¹¹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 13.

¹¹² Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 13.

¹¹³ Evans, introduction to *Tertullian’s Treatise against Praxeas*, 4.

¹¹⁴ See, for instance, Tertullian *De Monogamia* 2–4.

Separation from Heathens and Heretics

Heretics did not possess Christian baptism and thus could not administer Christian baptism. They lacked Christian baptism because they lacked the true God and Christ. Heretics did not have fellowship with the true church, which has the true God and true baptism, which made them outsiders to the things of Christ.¹¹⁵

Tertullian reprimanded heretics of all kinds in his defense of baptism, but especially those who embraced a pagan gnostic dualism. The Cainite heretic taught against the necessity of baptism, but Tertullian proved the sacrament's effectiveness when rightly undertaken.¹¹⁶ Tertullian also scoffed at contemporaries of his who were idolaters. Tertullian reminded them that even pagans recognized a cleansing power in water. It was on the basis of logic, as well as Scriptural teaching, that Tertullian refuted the Cainite Gnostics. Tertullian's argument for a cleansing at baptism was especially solidified by the fact that even his opponents agreed that cleansing could be found in water. That being the case, then, surely the true God, who created the water and gave it its potency, was able to use it to bring cleansing.¹¹⁷

Forgiveness and Repentance

In chapter 1, Tertullian described the benefits of baptism: sins were washed away, new life was bestowed, eternal life was given, and safety and liberty were granted.¹¹⁸ He employed several Old and New Testament types in his baptismal instruction. In chapter 3, his typology began with the waters of creation being compared to the waters of baptism. In both instances the Spirit brought life.¹¹⁹ The Spirit rests on

¹¹⁵ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 15.

¹¹⁶ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 1.

¹¹⁷ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 5.

¹¹⁸ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 1. See also, Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 2, 4, 5, and 6.

¹¹⁹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 3.

the baptismal waters as the Spirit rested on the primal waters of creation.¹²⁰ Pharaoh and his army drowned in the Red Sea. At baptism Satan, the tyrant of slavery to sin, was also defeated. Thus, death to sin was secured at baptism. There is death in sin but life in Christ. The benefits of Christ are received in baptism by the cross of Christ just as the waters were sweetened at Marah when Moses threw the tree in it.¹²¹ Exodus 15:25 conveys the response of both Moses and God to the people's outcry about the bitter waters of Marah: "And [Moses] cried to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet."

The importance of baptism's role in initiating the Christian's death to sin leads Tertullian to understand baptism as a time of final repentance. After baptism there should be no serious lapse into sin and thus there should be no need for a second repentance. As Tertullian's theology matures his view on a second repentance after baptism becomes more and more limited.

There was, however, an indication in the first chapter of *De Baptismo* that Tertullian understood baptism as a time for the Christian to die to sin and find life and freedom in Christ. The waters brought a safety that was exclusive: "Only while we are in the water are we safe and sound."¹²² This implied that safety or salvation could be lost, which was what Tertullian clearly taught. Later in his treatise Tertullian elaborated more on whether salvation, which had been lost, could be granted again or not and if so, in what manner. Tertullian's interpretation of the baptismal typology of Noah's ark and the flood further proved unforgiving of post-baptismal lapses into sin.

The ark provided safety for Noah and his family during the flood. The ark was thus "the type of the church" and "those waters of the flood" were a type of baptism,

¹²⁰ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 8.

¹²¹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 9.

¹²² Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 1, in Evans, *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, 5.

according to Tertullian.¹²³ The New Testament taught, further, that though there would be no more floods, there would be fire. Tertullian interpreted the biblical teaching on the impending destruction of the world by fire as a personal warning not to lapse into sin after baptism. Tertullian stated clearly: “[The world sinned], and so is appointed for the fire, as also a man is when he renews his sins after baptism: so that this also needs to be accepted as a sign and warning to us.”¹²⁴ Tertullian warned that there would be fire to expect for those who found life through the ark of the church in baptism but then fell into serious sin. Tertullian was alluding to 2 Peter 3:6–7, where Peter warned: “By means of these [waters of creation] the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and the earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.” Even in *De Baptismo* baptism’s finality and the danger of post-baptismal sin is paramount. Succinctly, Tertullian proclaimed that sins once washed away “ought not to be committed a second time.”¹²⁵

Baptism was referred to as a “burden” by Tertullian.¹²⁶ He also urged seriousness when approaching baptism, for baptism “is not a toy for sinners to amuse themselves with.”¹²⁷ It brought a requirement to obey and cease to sin, and to realize the vows made in baptism. For this reason, Tertullian urged the unmarried to delay baptism until they were married lest they fall into temptation, give in to fornication, and lose the forgiveness and freedom they had received in baptism.¹²⁸ This was also the logic for

¹²³ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 8, in Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 19.

¹²⁴ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 8, in Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 19.

¹²⁵ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 15, in Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 35.

¹²⁶ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, in Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 39.

¹²⁷ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 15, in Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 35.

¹²⁸ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18.

Tertullian to discourage children from being baptized. Tertullian's recommendation for children: "Let [children] be made Christians when they have become competent to know Christ."¹²⁹ Young children, and certainly infants, cannot know Christ. Infants did not need baptism in Tertullian's theology because they were innocent.¹³⁰ It followed from Tertullian's argument that children needed to know their sins and be ready to die to sin before they were baptized. The North African theologian counseled children to delay baptism and not risk losing their salvation due to gross sin following baptism.

Tertullian did allow for a second repentance in *De Baptismo*, though he did not in later treatises.¹³¹ First, he argued that martyrdom brought a second repentance. He labeled martyrdom a baptism of blood, and he stated that this baptism "gives back again [a repentance] that has been lost."¹³² At baptism, one received forgiveness of past sins. Baptism was thus a time of repentance and forgiveness. Following baptism, one should not fall into serious sin or else risk losing the salvation granted at baptism. After being baptized only martyrdom, a baptism of blood, could assure the lapsed of forgiveness of serious sins committed after baptism.

Vivification of the Flesh

Even in *De Baptismo*, there was an indication that Tertullian had begun to view baptism as a crucial component to the Spirit's work of vivification. Death to sin was a primary focus for Tertullian as he detailed the benefits conferred by baptism. The death of death, however, is more than the death of sin and even more than the granting of new

¹²⁹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 19, in Evans, *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, 39.

¹³⁰ Tertullian poses the following question regarding the baptism of children: "Why should innocent infancy come with haste to the remission of sins?" Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, in Evans, *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, 39.

¹³¹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 8. Cf. Tertullian, *De Pudicitia* 13.

¹³² Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 16, in Evans, *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, 35.

life or eternal life. Tertullian argued, in *De Baptismo* 4, that in baptism “death is washed away.”¹³³

Tertullian wrote that “the spirit is in those waters corporally washed, while the flesh in those same waters spiritually cleansed.”¹³⁴ Due to the Holy Spirit’s work at baptism, the North African theologian argued that there was a spiritual work on the body at baptism. Chapter 8 of *De Baptismo* will be evaluated due to its importance to ascertaining Tertullian’s teaching on baptism. There is debate regarding whether he taught that the Holy Spirit was conveyed at baptism, or rather that the Spirit descended with the laying on of hands following baptism. In chapter 6, Tertullian asserted that baptism was the time for the body to be prepared for the Holy Spirit rather than the actual time the spirit descended on the new Christian. Similarly, in chapter 8, Tertullian stated that the Holy Spirit was invited by the “imposition of the hand.”¹³⁵ This could indicate that Tertullian was thinking through the meaning of each part of the baptismal service. It may also indicate that Tertullian thought even early on about the effect of baptism on the body. Tertullian introduced a rule of biblical logic in chapter 5. He asserted: “The general rule is that carnal things always come first as examples of things spiritual.”¹³⁶ This echoed Tertullian’s earlier statement regarding the spiritual cleansing of the flesh, or body, in the waters of baptism.

¹³³ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 2, in Tertullian, in Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 7. See also Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 5.

¹³⁴ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 4, in Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 11. See also Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 7.

¹³⁵ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 7, in Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 17.

¹³⁶ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 5, in Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 15.

Baptism as Immersion

The heretical teaching which Tertullian sought to combat made “a particular point of demolishing baptism.”¹³⁷ The word translated by Evans as “demolishing” is “*destruens*” in Borleffs’ critical edition.¹³⁸ This word does not have to indicate that practice of baptism was abolished, but rather that baptism was ruined by impropriety. Tertullian, in his answer, explained the theological purposes and meaning of baptism, but he also argued for a proper mode of baptism: immersion.

Tertullian ended chapter 1 with a metaphor: “But we, being little fishes . . . begin our life in the water, and only while we abide in the water are we safe and sound. Thus it was that [the heresy] . . . knew very well how to kill the little fishes by taking them out of the water.”¹³⁹ This metaphor subtly, but clearly, indicated that baptism was an immersion, contrary to the arguments the heretics made against immersion. Tertullian, in fact, addressed a question raised by his opponents regarding the necessity of baptism. This objection was raised and countered in chapter 13. This indicated that the mode of baptism was not their primary objection, since Tertullian did not address it until the latter part of his treatise, but rather, it was a counterpoint made by his opponents to prove their greater point that baptism itself did not matter. *De Baptismo* 13 begins by addressing this concern: “In view of this those thorough-going scoundrels, raisers of unnecessary questions, continue: “Therefore those for whom faith is enough have no need of baptism: for Abraham also pleased God, with no sacrament of water, but only of faith.””¹⁴⁰ This was a concern that Tertullian addressed in a series of arguments presented by his opponents, but it evidently proved not to be their primary argument.

¹³⁷ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 1, in Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 5.

¹³⁸ Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, in Borleffs, *De Baptismo*, 277.

¹³⁹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 1, in Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 5.

¹⁴⁰ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 13, in Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 31.

Further, Tertullian argued that it did not matter where one's baptism occurred. He offered examples of acceptable places for baptism. Each of his examples would have been suitable locations for immersion. Carthage's learned theologian said, "Consequently it makes no matter whether one is washed in the sea or in a pond, a river or a fountain, a cistern or a tub."¹⁴¹ Notice that these all implied immersion. The reference to baptismal type of the Pool of Bethesda also implied immersion.¹⁴²

Conclusion

This chapter began the discussion on baptism with Tertullian's *De Baptismo*. The tractate has been dated to 200–206.¹⁴³ Tertullian's purpose in writing was to respond negatively to the heresy of the Cainite sect and positively to provide the corrective of the biblical teaching on baptism.¹⁴⁴ The audience for *De Baptismo* was the catechumenate.¹⁴⁵ The primary baptismal themes of *De Baptismo*, identified by Evans, have been discussed at length. They were, as stated by Evans: (1) "remission of sins," (2) "cleansing," (3) "deliverance from death," (4) "new birth to everlasting life," (5) "conveys the Holy Spirit," (6) "the devil . . . is drowned," and (7) "admission into the Church."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 4, in Evans, *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, 11.

¹⁴² Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 5.

¹⁴³ Schleyer, *Tertullian De Baptismo*, 10; R. Refoulé, *Tertullien*, 12. Horgan, "Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani, *De Baptismo*," 43. Carpin, *Tertulliano: Il Battesimo*, 9. Barnes, *Tertullian*, 54–55.

¹⁴⁴ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 1.

¹⁴⁵ Evans, introduction to *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, xii; Refoulé, *Tertullien*, 10; Carpin, *Tertulliano, Il Battesimo*, 13; Schleyer, *Tertullian De Baptismo*, 11; Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 1.

¹⁴⁶ Evans, introduction to *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, xxxi–xxxiii.

CHAPTER 4

DE BAPTISMO 18 RECEPTION

Tertullian's theology of baptism has been used as a strong confirmation of believer's baptism, but it could also provide comment on the regular, accepted practice of infant baptism. In this final chapter the writings of three scholars will be considered and evaluated. First, Tertullian's passage of greatest interest for this discussion, *De Baptismo* 18, will be quoted in full and then exegeted theologically. Second, the arguments about the passage made by David Wright (Church of Scotland), Everett Ferguson (Church of Christ), and Brian Brewer (Baptist) will be assessed.¹ Third, a personal reflection on Tertullian's teaching on baptism will be offered.

***De Baptismo* in Context**

Tertullian's *De Baptismo* 18 runs thus:

Moreover, that baptism ought not to be rashly granted, is known to those whose function it is. *Give to everyone that asketh thee*, has its own application, which strictly pertains to almsgiving. One ought indeed rather to have regard to that other [injunction], *Give not that which is holy to the dogs, neither cast ye your pearl before swine*, and, *Do not lay hands on easily, nor become sharers in others' sins*. But if [it is] because Philip so easily baptized the eunuch, let us reflect that the Lord's manifest and express good pleasure had intervened. The Spirit had told Philip to turn towards that road. The eunuch himself was found not uninterested, nor as one who of a sudden desired to be baptized: he had set out from home to the Temple to pray, and was intent upon divine scripture. Such is the position a man needed to be found in to whom God, without being asked, had sent an apostle, whom the Spirit a second time ordered to join himself to the eunuch's chariot. The scripture meets the man's faith just when it is wanted: [Philip] is invited and received [into the chariot]: the Lord is made known, faith makes no delay, water is

¹ David F. Wright, *Infant Baptism in Historical Perspective: Collected Studies* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007); Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009); Brian C. Brewer, "'To Defer and Not to Hasten': The Anabaptist and Baptist Appropriations of Tertullian's Baptismal Theology," *Harvard Theological Review* 106 (2013): 287-308.

there to hand: his task completed, the apostle is caught away. It is true that Paul also was speedily baptized: for Simon, his host speedily knew that he had been appointed a vessel of election. God's good pleasure sends as herald its own privileges: any request can both disappoint and be disappointed. It follows that deferment of baptism is more profitable, in accordance with each person's character and attitude, and even age: and especially so as regards children. For what need is there, if there really is no need, for even their sponsors to be brought into peril, seeing they may possibly themselves fail of their promises by death, or be deceived by the subsequent development of an evil disposition? It is true our Lord says, *Forbid them not to come to me*. So let them come, when they are growing up, when they are learning, when they are being taught what they are coming to: let them be made Christians when they have become competent to know Christ. Why should innocent infancy come with haste to the remission of sins? Shall we take less cautious action in this than we take in worldly matters? Shall one who is not trusted with early property be entrusted with heavenly? Let them first learn how to ask for salvation, so that you may be seen to have given to one that asketh. With no less reason ought the unmarried also to be delayed until they either marry or are firmly established in continence: until then, temptation lies in wait for them, for virgins because they are ripe for it, and for widows because of their wandering about. All who understand what a burden baptism is will have more fear of obtaining it than of its postponement. Faith unimpaired has no doubt of its salvation.²

In the passage above Tertullian transitioned from explaining his position on women teaching and baptizing in the church to begin teaching against the hurried administration of baptism. Tertullian stately plainly: "Baptism ought not to be rashly granted."³ He agreed that Jesus did teach the apostles to give when the request was made. This was, of course, a quote from Matthew 5:42; Jesus said, "Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you." As Tertullian correctly explained, the passage did not refer to baptism at all. Jesus did not say, "If anyone wants to be baptized, then baptize him or her." Jesus actually taught the disciples to lend a hand to those who request assistance, which is about "almsgiving," Tertullian explained.⁴

Tertullian argued that a passage which would apply more clearly to a request for baptism was Matthew 7:6. The Lord commanded: "Do not give dogs what is holy,

² Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, trans. Ernest Evans, *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, (London, UK: Society Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1964) 37, 39, 41.

³ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, trans. Evans, *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, 37.

⁴ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, trans. Evans, *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, 37.

and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.” The gospel, and by extension, baptism as a means to receive it, was clearly in view in this statement. Tertullian also referenced 1 Timothy 5:22, where Paul exhorted Timothy, the evangelist: Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others: keep yourself pure.” The context of 1 Timothy 5:17–24 lends itself to the observation that Paul has the ordination of elders in mind. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:5: “Do the work of an evangelist.” Surely this included appointing elders, for which Paul listed qualifications in his letter to Timothy. Paul’s instructions to Titus must have been the same as those for Timothy. Paul told Titus in Titus 1:5: “This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.” Both ordination and confirmation included the imposition of hands. They are thus related but most likely it was the former rather than the latter which Paul had in mind in his instructions to Timothy. Still, Tertullian used both passages to counter the charge that all who ask to be baptized should be. For Tertullian rather, only those who are spiritually ready for such and not irreverent dogs should be baptized. To baptize those who are not ready is to share in their sins, according to Tertullian’s exegesis.

Tertullian then moved to a more lengthy treatment of the episode of Philip and the Ethiopian in Acts 8:26–40. The same day that Philip was led to the eunuch’s chariot the evangelist baptized him. Of course, that was a quick conversion! The Ethiopian was reading from Isaiah 53. He did not understand what he read, or even who the Messianic passage was talking about. Philip explained the passage was about Jesus the Messiah. In response to the eunuch’s faith and request, Philip baptized him into Christ. Tertullian explained how such a quick response could be acceptable. He explained: “The Lord’s good pleasure had intervened. The Spirit had told Philip to turn towards that road.”⁵ The

⁵ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, trans. Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 37.

Lord led Philip to the eunuch with these words from the Spirit found in Acts 8:29: “Go over and join this chariot.” Tertullian reasoned that God sent Philip and the eunuch had been intently searching. The eunuch, being “intent upon divine scripture” was ripe for conversion. He did not simply ask; he had been diligently seeking.⁶ Tertullian furthered explained: “The scripture meets the man’s faith just when it is wanted.”⁷

Tertullian then considered the case of Saul, the persecutor of Christ, who became Paul, the apostle of Christ after his conversion. The North African theologian explained the quick conversion of Paul thus: “It is true that Paul also was speedily baptized: for Simon, his host, speedily knew that he had been appointed a vessel of election.”⁸ Tertullian has apparently conflated the account of Paul, who was hosted by Judas, and taught the way of salvation by Ananias with the stay of the Apostle Peter in the home of Simon the tanner. During Peter’s stay with Simon, messengers came to invite him to the home of Cornelius, the Roman centurion. This account is found in Acts 9 and 10. While Paul stayed at the home of Judas after the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus, he fasted and prayed three days. Ananias then came to him and healed him of his blindness, in Jesus’ name. He also ordered Paul to be baptized. Acts 22:16 recorded the words of Ananias to Saul: “And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.” Again Tertullian considered Paul’s baptism a result of “God’s good pleasure.”⁹ Tertullian then moved to the point of his argument in this section.

A quick conversion was acceptable to Tertullian in certain circumstances. Still, “it follows that deferment of baptism is more profitable . . . especially so as regards

⁶ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, trans. Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 39.

⁷ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, trans. Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 39.

⁸ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, trans. Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 39.

⁹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, trans. Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 39.

children.”¹⁰ Tertullian noted that children and infants were being baptized in his day. This must have been the case because he matter-of-factly spoke about sponsors for children who were unable to answer for themselves. The theologian from Carthage provided an incidental glimpse into early-third-century infant baptismal practice: “For what need is there, if there really is no need, for even their sponsors to be brought into peril, seeing they may possibly themselves fail of their promises by death, or be deceived by subsequent development of an evil disposition?”¹¹ Young children are unable to appropriately answer for themselves during baptismal interrogation. Their adult sponsors were standing in to answer for them and proclaim their faith in their stead.

Tertullian then quoted another passage from the teaching of Jesus in the gospel, which had apparently been applied to baptism.¹² He quoted Matthew 19:14, where Jesus said, “Let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus had been blessing the children who were brought to him by their parents. This included imposition of hands by Jesus. This was not baptismal confirmation or elder appointment. It was a blessing by the imposition of hands. Confirmation of children who had been baptized as infants was evidently deemed valid by some based on this passage. Tertullian did not object to applying this passage to confirmation. He did however provide a contrary mode for its application. He responded: “So let them come, when they are growing up, when they are learning, when they are

¹⁰ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, trans. Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 39.

¹¹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, trans. Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 39.

¹² Wright explained the connection between infant baptism and the appeal to Mark 10:13–16 (which is a parallel passage to Matthew 19:14) as a justification for the practice. Wright said, “A third possible stimulus for the baptism of babies or children in the apostolic churches might be sought in the blessing of children.” Wright, *Infant Baptism*, 19. Ferguson also addressed the apparently earlier teaching which Tertullian addressed regarding the application of Matthew 19:14 to infant baptism. Ferguson explained, “Tertullian confronts an already definite scriptural argument for baptizing children, namely Jesus’ words in Matthew 19:14.” Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 365. Brewer quoted Baptist authors John Smyth and Thomas Grantham. Both authors quoted Tertullian *De Baptismo* 18 and acknowledged his application of Matthew 19:14. Brewer, “To Defer and Not to Hasten,” 299 and 301.

being taught what they are coming to: let them be made Christians when they have become competent to know Christ.”¹³ Clearly Tertullian discouraged parents from bringing children and infants to the waters of baptism prematurely. He then made his case against the necessity of regular infant baptism.

A key question, which does not easily lend itself to clear interpretation, is posed by Tertullian: “Why should innocent infancy come with haste to the remission of sins?”¹⁴ Tertullian implied that infants were innocent in regard to sin by this interrogative. He also reaffirmed that baptism was the time for the remission of sins by asking the question the way that he did. Tertullian’s intended meaning of this question will be discussed more fully in the next two sections.

Luke 16:11 was then employed by Tertullian as he brought up two follow-up questions. In Luke 16:11, Jesus exhorted: “If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches.” Tertullian’s questions, applying the Lukan passage to baptism, were: “Shall we take less cautious action in this than we take in worldly matters? Shall one who is not trusted with earthly property be entrusted with heavenly?”¹⁵ Infants are unable to ask for food or care. Even young children are often too immature to recognize their wrongs without being taught and they do not often ask for forgiveness until they grow in maturity and understand their wrong more fully. Children, and especially infants, are not ready to be born again when they have only just recently been born the first time. Perhaps there is an implicit reference to John 3:12, where Jesus asked the Jewish teacher, Nicodemus: “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” Infants are newly born and not ready for spiritual rebirth, according to Tertullian.

¹³ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, trans. Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 39.

¹⁴ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, trans. Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 39.

¹⁵ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, trans. Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 39.

Tertullian then alluded again to Matthew 5:42, and perhaps by extension Matthew 7:7. Tertullian advises parents, and sponsors of infants and young children: “Let them first learn how to ask for salvation, so that you may be seen to have given to the one that asketh.”¹⁶ Children, and especially infants, who are not asking for salvation (and infants are unable to ask) do not need to be baptized yet. It is premature to baptize the one who has not expressed his or her faith yet.

Marriage was the topic next brought up by the North African theologian. Though apparently changing topics abruptly, Tertullian said, “With no less reason ought the unmarried also to be delayed until they either marry or are firmly established in continence: until then, temptation lies in wait for them, for virgins because they are ripe for it and for widows because of their wandering about.”¹⁷ Tertullian here alluded to Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 7:8–9, which says, “To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.” Tertullian apparently understood the lack of self-control among the unmarried to be a lack of restraint and wandering among widows.

Two final statements in this section conclude Tertullian’s argument regarding the expediency of sometimes delaying baptism, and these statements also tie his remarks together. He said, “All who understand what a burden baptism is will have more fear of obtaining it than of its postponement. Faith unimpaired has no doubt of its salvation.”¹⁸ Baptism was described as a burden by Tertullian. How is baptism a burden? For Tertullian, baptism was a burden because it was the event at which God remitted past sins—but not future sins. Tertullian had previously explained the one and only cleansing

¹⁶ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, trans. Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 39.

¹⁷ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, trans. Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 39.

¹⁸ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, trans. Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 39, 41.

offered in baptism. He said, “So then, we enter into the bath once only, once only are our sins washed away, because these ought not to be committed a second time.”¹⁹ Baptism is a burden because it entails death to sin. Baptism is the time when past sins are washed away. Those who have been baptized have died to sin and therefore must cease to sin. The burden for Tertullian was continued holy living from thenceforth. Therefore, baptism was not to be granted the careless, immature, and impulsive. It was a serious decision for dedicated people. The opposite of unimpaired faith is impaired faith. Weak, lacking, deficient faith was impaired. Such faith was unworthy of baptism because of its weakness and immaturity. On the contrary strong, vibrant, unimpaired faith “has no doubt of its salvation.”²⁰ Infants should not be baptized and neither should the unmarried. They are too immature. They are not ready to shed their immaturity with their sin and live for Christ in unabated holiness from the time of baptism onward.

David Wright

Wright argued that Tertullian clearly implied that infants were being baptized in Carthage. But Tertullian objected to this practice, according to Wright. He asked of Tertullian: “Is his preference for the deferment of baptism . . . [in *De Baptismo* 18] a protest against an innovation, or his dissent from common observance?”²¹ Wright argued against the former in favor of the latter. He said, “But novelty is one argument that Tertullian does *not* level against infant baptism—presumably because he knew he could not convincingly do so.”²² Not only did Wright consider infant baptism to be occurring in Tertullian’s North Africa, but he argued it was a regularity. Wright argued, “We conclude

¹⁹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 15, trans. Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 33, 35.

²⁰ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, trans. Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 41.

²¹ Wright, *The Origins of Infant Baptism*, 7.

²² Wright, *The Origins of infant Baptism*, 8, italics original.

that Tertullian's objections were directed against a practice already prominent in the Carthaginian church."²³

Having surveyed scholarly arguments related to Tertullian's teaching in *De Baptismo* 18, Wright drew the following conclusion: "Before 200 in Rome, and possibly North Africa too, the baptism of babies had become routine but in a form of service devised for professing believers."²⁴ The qualification limiting infant baptism to those families where the parents were believers was based on Wright's understanding of the application of 1 Corinthians 7:14 to baptism by the early church. 1 Corinthians 7:14 says, "For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and he unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy." Wright argued that baptism of young children led to the practice of baptizing infants among believers. This practice grew out of the exegesis of Matthew 19:14 and 1 Corinthians 7:14, along with other passages. Wright argued that though the evidence was incomplete, he favored the following interpretation: "In so far as more of the evidence points to young children belonging to the Christian community alongside their elders and hence presumably on the same basis of faith-baptism, the extension of children's baptism to baby baptism is becoming an increasingly attractive hypothesis."²⁵ To sum up, for Wright, Tertullian acknowledged infant baptism as a regular practice though he cautioned strongly against it.

Everett Ferguson

Ferguson took a contrary position to Wright regarding the so-called "prominent" place of baptism in the early church, specifically during Tertullian's day.²⁶

²³ Wright, *The Origins of Infant Baptism*, 8.

²⁴ Wright, *The Origins of Infant Baptism*, 20.

²⁵ Wright, *The Origins of Infant Baptism*, 21.

²⁶ Cf. Wright, *The Origins of Infant Baptism*, 8; Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 363–64.

Ferguson argued that Tertullian placed the Rule of Faith, and church teaching tradition, in such a prominent place in his theology that he would not have discouraged infant baptism if it were an already-entrenched part of church practice. In the words of Ferguson:

“[Tertullian] refers to the baptism of small children as something already being done and for which a practical and scriptural rationale was advanced . . . but in view of Tertullian’s respect for tradition at this period of his life evidently not a practice of long standing.”²⁷

Ferguson then quoted a portion of *De Baptismo* 18 and offered his exegesis of Tertullian’s teaching contained there.

First, based on the context of *De Baptismo* 18, which has already been discussed at length in this chapter, Ferguson argued that Tertullian advised baptism only for those mature enough to handle such a commitment. Ferguson said that for Tertullian, “Baptism should be given only to those prepared to accept its responsibilities and live by them.”²⁸ This connected Tertullian’s teaching against infants, the unmarried, and widows being baptized. Those people in these categories were not ready to make the commitment required for baptism.

Second, in dealing with Tertullian’s use of Matthew 19:14, Ferguson argued that Tertullian believed that children were innocent with regards to sin. Ferguson explained, “[Tertullian] joins a host of earlier Christian writers in the affirmation of the innocence of children, a condition making infant baptism inconsistent in his view with the generally recognized meaning of baptism as bringing the forgiveness of sins.”²⁹ Here Ferguson seems to have woven together Tertullian’s question about childhood innocence in *De Baptismo* 18 with Matthew 19:14 and John 3:5.³⁰ Recall, Tertullian had asked:

²⁷ Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 363–64.

²⁸ Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 364.

²⁹ Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 365.

³⁰ See Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 364–65, 378.

“Why should innocent infancy come with haste to the remission of sins?”³¹ Matthew 19:14 has been quoted previously and discussed at length. There Jesus instructed his followers to give to the one who asked. In John 3:5, Jesus spoke to Nicodemus: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” How did Ferguson relate John 3:5 to Tertullian’s teaching? Citing *De Baptismo* 12, among other early church writings, Ferguson argued: “John 3:5 had left a strong impression on the second-century church as requiring the necessity of baptism for entrance into heaven.”³² Baptism was the time God forgave sins for Tertullian and the early church. Since children had not sinned and did not yet have faith, baptism was unnecessary according to Ferguson’s exegesis of Tertullian.

Third, the practice of infant baptism, which Tertullian acknowledged but argued against was practiced primarily in emergency situations when a child’s life was in danger. Ferguson explained, “The practice of such ‘baptisms of necessity’ was recognized already by Tertullian, our first attestation (literary or any other kind) of infant baptism. When we recall the high infant mortality rate of the ancient world, it is easy to understand how an emergency practice eventually became a normal practice.”³³ Thus Ferguson and Wright both postulated an evolution of rarer infant baptisms becoming more common due to the circumstances of the day.

Brian Brewer

Brewer also quoted Tertullian’s *De Baptismo* 18 and argued that Tertullian: “urged the church to arrest its practice of baptizing children, arguing in ways which would later resonate with key leaders of the early Anabaptists and Baptists alike.”³⁴

³¹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, trans. Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 39.

³² Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 378. Cf. Wright, *Infant Baptism*, 19.

³³ Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 379. Cf. Wright, *Infant Baptism*, 184.

³⁴ Brewer, “To Defer and Not to Hasten,” 290.

Brewer then outlined the reception of Tertullian's teaching against infant baptism among the two groups he mentioned. In evaluating the usefulness of Tertullian for the baptistic cause, Brewer offered both agreement and critique. He essentially sets the record straight regarding what Baptists should approve and discard from the reception of Tertullian's teaching on infant baptism.

First, the early Baptist author John Smyth "demonstrated an acquaintance with Tertullian's works."³⁵ Brewer argued that Smyth had *De Baptismo* but earlier Anabaptists did not.³⁶ Brewer quoted an example Smyth's usage of *De Baptismo* 18. Brewer then summarized Smyth's arguments, which he found supported by Tertullian. Brewer summarized: "Smyth concluded that catechesis must precede baptism, and baptism is properly only given upon both personal confession and the new believer's request for the rite, not because of birthright, sacramentalism, or covenant theology."³⁷ For Smyth, according to Brewer, Tertullian extolled believer's baptism. Based on the passage quoted and exegeted above, Smyth proved correct. Nonetheless, Brewer found an apparent misunderstanding, or at least oversight, of Tertullian's theology of baptism by Smyth.

Brewer explained the dissimilarity between Tertullian's theology and that of Smyth. Brewer argued, "Yet Tertullian's statements, as shall further be elucidated, intimate that the Latin father was undoubtedly motivated to delay baptism by a different rationale than that which the early Baptists posited for rejecting infant baptism."³⁸ Brewer further argued that Tertullian argued against the baptism of infants because they were innocent and did not need their sins forgiven. Baptism was about human sinfulness and divine forgiveness, according to Brewer. For the early Baptists like Smyth, baptism was a

³⁵ Brewer, "To Defer and Not to Hasten," 291.

³⁶ Brewer, "To Defer and Not to Hasten," 298–299.

³⁷ Brewer, "To Defer and Not to Hasten," 299.

³⁸ Brewer, "To Defer and Not to Hasten," 300.

church ordinance, not necessary for salvation, that was open only to those able to publicly proclaim their faith in Christ. Recall again that Tertullian asked, in *De Baptismo* 18: “Why should innocent infancy come with haste to the remission of sins?”³⁹ Brewer understood Tertullian to be arguing that infants had no sins to be forgiven; they were innocent. Smyth, however, did not believe that baptism carried with it the forgiveness of sins, according to Brewer. Therefore, Smyth appealed to Tertullian as an early church example who opposed infant baptism. But Brewer pointed out that the two writers opposed the practice for different reasons. Brewer explained the need for his corrective of Smyth: “Because Baptists, including John Smyth, did not see baptism as remitting sin, Smyth either glossed over these words or merely rendered them as symbolic.”⁴⁰ For Brewer this is a substantial difference. Again, he argued further: “Tertullian’s statements . . . intimate that the Latin father was undoubtedly motivated to delay baptism by a different rationale than that which the early Baptists posited.”⁴¹

Henry Lawrence, another early Baptist, also appealed to Tertullian’s *De Baptismo* 18. He similarly quoted the passage and commented on it where he found support for the baptistic doctrine of believer’s baptism. Brewer summarized Lawrence’s exegesis of Tertullian succinctly: “Children were not appropriate candidates for baptism because they would not be cognizant of the faith commitment made.”⁴² Again though, Brewer sought to set the record straight about baptistic reception of Tertullian’s doctrine of believer’s baptism. Though the appeal for believer’s baptism was made by both Tertullian and Lawrence, such baptism was imbued with different results: forgiveness of past sins versus the expression of genuine faith. Brewer explained: “Tertullian and

³⁹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, trans. Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 39.

⁴⁰ Brewer, “To Defer and Not to Hasten,” 299–300.

⁴¹ Brewer, “To Defer and Not to Hasten,” 300.

⁴² Brewer, “To Defer and Not to Hasten,” 301.

Lawrence would undoubtedly differ on the substance of the Christian's responsibilities, as we shall see later in this essay."⁴³ To the witness of Smyth and Lawrence, Brewer added one more early Baptist: Thomas Grantham.

Grantham also leaned on Tertullian in his opposition of infant baptism. Brewer explained: "Grantham turned to Tertullian for scriptural proof of the exclusive practice of believer's baptism."⁴⁴ Grantham appealed to Tertullian as a guide for proper Scriptural exegesis and as a direct source in favor of believer's baptism. Grantham directly quoted at least part of *De Baptismo* 18. Still, Grantham's use of Tertullian needed correction, according to Brewer, who concluded: "However, like his Baptist contemporaries, Grantham may not have fully appreciated the basis and context of Tertullian's argument for baptism's deferral."⁴⁵ So what did Tertullian mean in his discussion of infant baptism in *De Baptismo* 18? Brewer offered his interpretation.

According to Brewer's exegesis of Tertullian, especially *De Baptismo* 18: "Infant baptism was unwise and superfluous for Tertullian because infants had not yet committed individual, personal sin."⁴⁶ Innocence was thus key to Tertullian's thinking. But so was what Tertullian labeled the "burden" of baptism.⁴⁷ Brewer elaborated: "Moreover, since Tertullian argued that baptism should only be performed once in a lifetime, the effect of baptism (i.e., washing away one's sins) would be unnecessarily performed on a person who had not yet accumulated sin and who would inevitably still

⁴³ Brewer, "To Defer and Not to Hasten," 301.

⁴⁴ Brewer, "To Defer and Not to Hasten," 302.

⁴⁵ Brewer, "To Defer and Not to Hasten," 303.

⁴⁶ Brewer, "To Defer and Not to Hasten," 303. See also Mark Searle, "Infant Baptism Reconsidered," in *Living Water, Sealing Spirit: Reading on Christian Initiation*, Maxwell E. Johnson, ed., (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1995), 365–409.

⁴⁷ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, trans. Evans, *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, 39.

do so through the course of life.”⁴⁸ Brewer thus read Tertullian’s *De Baptismo* 18 in its entirety and arrived at a fuller contextual understanding of the passage. Brewer stated: “Tertullian’s call to ‘defer and not to hasten’ baptism apparently was then built upon a discerning strategy for the management of human iniquity.”⁴⁹ So Tertullian and baptistic authors likewise oppose infant baptism but for different reasons.

So why did the Baptists appeal to Tertullian? Brewer speculated: “It is then probable that the early Anabaptists and Baptists who utilized Tertullian’s words may have either misunderstood or merely glossed over his reason for delaying baptism, especially in light of their excitement to have discovered a significant church father apparently supporting their cherished doctrine of credobaptism.”⁵⁰ It may not be possible to prove or disprove Brewer’s theory about the motivation behind the baptistic reception of Tertullian’s teaching on infant baptism, but his critique should offer a corrective for theologians today: know what an ancient author taught before appealing to his teaching to support one’s own views.

Personal Reflection

De Baptismo 18 has proven to be a significant passage for the church. The passage has already been quoted and an exegesis has been offered. The insights of Wright, Ferguson, and Brewer on the passage have also been offered. Clearly Tertullian did argue against infant baptism. He said, “Let them be made Christians when they have become competent to know Christ.”⁵¹ Infants are unable to answer for themselves or place personal faith in Christ. The question that Tertullian sought to answer, which remains debated, is why oppose infant baptism? Indeed Tertullian asked, “Why should

⁴⁸ Brewer, “To Defer and Not to Hasten,” 304.

⁴⁹ Brewer, “To Defer and Not to Hasten,” 304.

⁵⁰ Brewer, “To Defer and Not to Hasten,” 305.

⁵¹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, trans. Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 39.

innocent infancy come with haste to the remission of sins?”⁵² Both innocence and remission of sins are put forth by Tertullian as possible reasons to delay baptism. Innocence does not appear to be Tertullian’s primary focus though. He concludes his discussion with admonishments against sin. Tertullian knew the temptations of life. He must have. When he concluded the tractate under consideration, *De Baptismo*, he humbly requested: “This only I pray, that as you ask you also have in mind Tertullian, a sinner.”⁵³ Tertullian is concerned not about innocence in this work but rather sin.

Tertullian loved baptism because there Christ removed sins. Recall his words of caution in *De Baptismo* 15: “So then, we enter into the bath once only, once only are our sins washed away, because these ought not to be committed a second time.”⁵⁴ At baptism God forgives sins. In another passage, *De Baptismo* 12, Tertullian discussed the forgiveness of sins and also the necessity of baptism. Tertullian stated plainly: “Now there is a standing rule that without baptism no man can obtain salvation.”⁵⁵ His rationale was John 3:5, which again states: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” Baptism is the time when God takes sins of those who believe and trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Tertullian affirmed this early in church history. This is important for understanding the New Testament teaching on baptism and its reception in the early church. This is equally important to affirming, with Tertullian, the biblical teaching on believer’s baptism.

A corrective is in order. Tertullian taught that at baptism all past sins were forgiven and no serious sins should be committed after baptism. In *De Baptismo* martyrdom is the only clearly stated hope for the remission of serious sins after baptism.

⁵² Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18, trans. Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 39.

⁵³ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 20, trans. Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 43.

⁵⁴ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 15, trans. Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 33, 35.

⁵⁵ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 12, trans. Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 27.

Tertullian solemnly warned: “[Martyrdom] is the baptism which makes actual a washing which has not been received, and gives back one that has been lost.”⁵⁶ This is inconsistent with the biblical teaching on forgiveness. Hebrews 10:18 reassures the Christian who trusts in Christ alone for salvation: “Where there is forgiveness of these [their sins and lawless deeds], there is no longer any offering for sin.” Christians do not have to pay for their post-baptismal sins, either through penance or martyrdom. Christ already paid for all sins and no more sacrifice is needed. His sacrifice was enough. Christians can join Tertullian in acknowledging sin and finding a remedy from God in Christian baptism. But the corrective needs to be added: no sacrifice whether acts of penance or loss of life in martyrdom are needed to pay for sins, which Christ already paid for on the cross. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

A question remains, which falls outside the scope of this paper: why did Tertullian believe that serious sins after baptism could only be forgiven through either martyrdom or penance, or perhaps both? That is a significant question. Its answer would be helpful to understand Tertullian, his teaching, and provide necessary correctives to the reception and use of Tertullian’s teaching today. Though many speculations could be made, no answer will be here offered.

Conclusion

Tertullian wrote *De Baptismo* 18 to discourage quick conversions. He examined the Scriptural command to give to those asking and found it did not directly apply to baptisms of the immature. He evaluated biblical evidence of rapid conversions and judged that each was a special case involving a special work of God for a specific purpose. He took special care to address the command of Jesus to allow the children to come to him, which was recorded in Matthew 19:14.

⁵⁶ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 16, trans. Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 35.

Tertullian's advice proved weighty for early Baptists as well as Presbyterians. Wright argued, from a Presbyterian perspective, that Tertullian's witness proved infant baptisms were common in the early church.⁵⁷ Brewer argued, from a Baptist perspective, that Tertullian was received by early Baptists as a champion of believer's baptism. Though Tertullian encouraged believer's baptism, Brewer argued that Tertullian did so on the ground of the innocence of children, which was not as important for early Baptists who did not believe baptism was necessary for salvation.⁵⁸ Ferguson, writing from a Church of Christ perspective, rightly focused on Tertullian's emphasis on believer's baptism for the remission of sins.⁵⁹ Ferguson's analysis most closely adheres with the exegesis of *De Baptismo* 18, offered earlier in this chapter.

However, like Brewer's corrective for Baptist scholars, one should offer caution to Ferguson and Campbellite scholars. Tertullian taught that baptism was the time of forgiveness of sins.⁶⁰ For Tertullian this included past sins only.⁶¹ Serious sins after baptism could only be assuredly forgiven, according to the positive statements in *De Baptismo* through martyrdom.⁶² Such a limited view of baptism's scope of forgiveness is incompatible with New Testament teaching on salvation through grace by faith in Christ alone. Tertullian's *De Baptismo* is a worthy testimony of the Bible's teaching on believer's baptism as the time God forgives sins through Christ. Still, it must be used judiciously because its focus on limited second repentance does not find biblical precedent.

⁵⁷ Wright, *The Origins of Infant Baptism*, 20.

⁵⁸ Brewer, "To Defer and Not to Hasten," 304.

⁵⁹ Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 365.

⁶⁰ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 12.

⁶¹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 15.

⁶² Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 16.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Tertullian (fl.190–215), the first Latin-speaking Christian author from Carthage stated: “The [human] spirit is in those waters [of baptism] corporally washed, while the flesh is in those same waters spiritually cleansed.”¹ During the centuries since Tertullian wrote *De Baptismo*, his writings have been a fecund ecclesiological source for various baptismal spiritualities, including Presbyterian, Baptist, and Stone-Campbellite. The very diversity of these claimants naturally raises the question: Surely all of these cannot claim Tertullian’s support for their widely-differing positions? What did he actually teach about baptism in *De Baptismo* and other early writings that touch on the subject? These questions have been the foci of this thesis.

Ernest Evans provided the critical edition of the English translation of Tertullian’s *De Baptismo*, which was Tertullian’s full-length tractate devoted to the subject of Christian baptism.² Padraig Horgan also offered a translation of *De Baptismo* for his doctoral dissertation, but it has not been as recognized as the work of Evans.³ Ian Balfour investigated Tertullian’s use of legal terminology in his description of the conversion process.⁴ Claire Stegman thoroughly investigated Tertullian’s teaching on the

¹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 4, trans. Ernest Evans in his ed. and trans., *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1964), 11.

² Ernest Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1964).

³ Padraig S. Horgan, “Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani, *De Baptismo*: Translation with Introduction and Commentary” (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1966).

⁴ Ian I. L. Balfour, “The Relationship of Man to God, from Conception to Conversion, in the Writings of Tertullian” (PhD diss., Edinburgh University, 1990).

Holy Spirit throughout his writing career, from which she argued for a sharp development in his trinitarian thinking.⁵

Tertullian's Montanism has long been a source of disagreement among scholars. Whether or not Tertullian converted to Montanism, or to what extent he was influenced by Montanism, is beyond the scope of this thesis. For the purposes of this thesis Barnes' classification has been assumed.⁶ Baptism as the time of cleansing was the prominent theme found in *De Oratione*.⁷ *De Idololatria*, *De Spectaculis*, *De Corona*, *Adversus Judaeos*, and *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* exemplify Tertullian's baptismal theme of separation from heathens and heretics.⁸ Tertullian taught that baptism united a time of Christian repentance and the event in which God granted remission of sins in *De Corona*, *De Paenitentia*, and *Scorpiace*.⁹ The North African theologian discussed John's baptism in *Adversus Valentinianos*, and *De Carne Christi*, *De Patientia*, and *De Paenitentia*.¹⁰ The theme of vivification found mention in *De Paenitentia*, and *Scorpiace*.¹¹

⁵ Claire Ann Bradley Stegman, "The Development of Tertullian's Doctrine of *Spiritus Sanctus*" (PhD diss., Southern Methodist University, 1978).

⁶ Timothy David Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 54–55.

⁷ Tertullian, *De Oratione* 13.

⁸ Tertullian, *De Idololatria* 6, 10, 14, and 24; Tertullian, *De Spectaculis* 4 and 24; Tertullian, *De Corona* 3 and 11; Tertullian, *Adversus Judaeos* 13; Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 36, 40, and 41.

⁹ Tertullian, *De Corona* 11; Tertullian, *De Paenitentia* 6, 7, and 12; Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 6, 8, and 9.

¹⁰ Tertullian, *Adversus Valentinianos* 27, *De Carne Christi* 3, *De Patientia* 3, and *De Paenitentia* 2.

¹¹ Tertullian, *De Paenitentia* 2 and *Scorpiace* 12.

It has been assumed that Tertullian wrote *De Baptismo* around 200–206 in agreement with scholarly consensus.¹² For Timothy David Barnes this date excluded any Montanist affiliation for Tertullian.¹³ Tertullian wrote *De Baptismo* in part as a polemic against the heretical teachings of the “Cainite sect.”¹⁴ Three theological themes for baptism found in *De Baptismo* are worthy of emphasis: baptism conveys the Holy Spirit, vivification, and a limited second repentance. The notion of the bestowal of the Holy Spirit for his personal indwelling would be further clarified in *Adversus Marcionem*, though the general concept is found in *De Baptismo*.¹⁵ Tertullian argued that the Spirit did a work of vivification upon the soul of the baptizand in *De Baptismo*.¹⁶ He would further expound upon the Spirit’s work to vivify the flesh at the second resurrection in *De Resurrectione*.¹⁷ Tertullian then argued that second repentance after baptism could only be found in martyrdom in *De Baptismo*.¹⁸ There was thus a limited second repentance in *De Baptismo*.

A careful reading of Tertullian’s *De Baptismo* in its context demonstrates that Tertullian’s focus in *De Baptismo* 18 was the importance of a mature commitment before baptism. The reason for this was that baptism was a one-time cleansing of past sins.¹⁹ A

¹² Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, xi. Dietrich Schleyer, *Tertullian De Baptismo, De Oratione—Von der Taufe, Vom Gebet* Fontes Christiani 76 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2006), 10; R. Refoulé, *Tertullien: Traité Du Baptême*, Series Latina 35 (Paris: Sources Chrétiennes, 1952), 12. Horgan concurred with the general date of 200–206. Horgan, “Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani, *De Baptismo*,” 43. Attilio Carpin, *Tertulliano: Il Battesimo De Baptismo* (Bologna, Italy: Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 2011), 9. Timothy David Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 54.

¹³ Barnes, *Tertullian*, 54–55.

¹⁴ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 1, in Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 5.

¹⁵ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 8; *Adversus Marcionem* 1.28.

¹⁶ Tertullian *De Baptismo* 4.

¹⁷ Tertullian, *De Resurrectione* 8.

¹⁸ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 16.

¹⁹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 15.

sense of gravity regarding the possibility of serious sin after baptism, and loss of the washing's effects, led Tertullian to urge that children, the unmarried, and widows delay baptism till they were ready to effectively live a life devoid of serious sin.²⁰ Tertullian thus wrote *De Baptismo* 18 to discourage quick conversions.

Tertullian's advice proved weighty for early Baptists as well as Presbyterians. Wright argued from a Presbyterian perspective that Tertullian's witness proved infant baptisms were common in the early church.²¹ Brewer argued, from a Baptist perspective, that Tertullian was received by early Baptists as a champion of believer's baptism. Though Tertullian encouraged believer's baptism, Brewer argued that Tertullian did so on the ground of the innocence of children, which was not as important for early Baptists who did not believe baptism was necessary for salvation.²² Ferguson, writing from a Church of Christ perspective, rightly focused on Tertullian's emphasis on believer's baptism for the remission of sins.²³ Ferguson's analysis most closely adheres with the exegesis of *De Baptismo* 18, offered earlier in this chapter.

A caution, however, needs to be urged upon Ferguson and Campbellite scholars. Tertullian taught that baptism was the time of forgiveness of sins.²⁴ For Tertullian this included past sins only.²⁵ Serious sins after baptism could only be assuredly forgiven, according to the positive statements in *De Baptismo*, through martyrdom.²⁶ Such a theological stance is incompatible with New Testament teaching on

²⁰ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 18.

²¹ Wright, *The Origins of Infant Baptism*, 20.

²² Brewer, "To Defer and Not to Hasten," 304.

²³ Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 365.

²⁴ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 12.

²⁵ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 15.

²⁶ Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 16.

salvation through grace by faith in Christ alone. Tertullian's *De Baptismo* is a worthy testimony of the Bible's teaching on believer's baptism as the time God forgives sins through Christ. Thus it remains beneficial for Christian use today. Still, Tertullian's teaching on the doctrine of baptism must be used judiciously because its focus on limited second repentance does not find biblical precedent.

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ABSTRACT

TERTULLIAN'S SPIRITUALITY OF BAPTISM IN HIS *DE BAPTISMO* AND ITS VALUE TODAY

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Tertullian wrote extensively on the subject of baptism. Tertullian's mention of baptism is surveyed throughout his corpus. Special attention is paid to his *De Baptismo* and other pre-Montanist works. Tertullian's *De Baptismo* 18 has received significant use by Presbyterians, Baptists, and Stone-Campbellites. *De Baptismo* 18 is exegeted in context, interpretations of the text by David Wright, Everett Ferguson, and Brian Brewer are analyzed, and the value of Tertullian's baptismal theology for today is assessed.

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