

# Tertullian and Rhetoric: Subverting Classical Culture

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Church History 272a  
Fall 2005  
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## Introduction

Tertullian is one of the most quotable, and most misquoted, Church Fathers. As a polemicist, Tertullian uses his gift to flatten an opponent with a phrase, and then kick the helpless, defeated heretic with the swift boot of sarcasm. His gift for the mordant phrase means that his one-liners linger in the memory long after the context or controversy that he addressed has been forgotten.

Over the past 1700 years there has been much controversy over two remarks of his: “credo quia ineptum” and “Quid ergo Athenis et Hierosolymis? quid academiae et ecclesiae?”<sup>1</sup> This paper was inspired by the second remark, and a comment made by T.D. Barnes concerning it in his controversial, and in some ways brilliant, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study*.<sup>2</sup>

Barnes uses the Jerusalem/Athens “dichotomy” to frame the debate around Tertullian’s rejection or embrace of classical culture. He contends that “in a wider sense he has himself reconciled Christianity and classical culture”.<sup>3</sup> Barnes’ summary of his argument to support this claim deserves quotation in full:

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<sup>1</sup> The first remark is usually misquoted as “credo quia absurdum”, which misrepresents Tertullian’s attitude towards rational religious belief. The reference is to *De carne Christi* 5:4, and the context is “crucifixus est dei filius: non pudet, quia pudendum est. et mortuus est dei filius: prorsus credibile est, quia ineptum est. et sepultus resurrexit: certum est, quia impossibile.” The second remark can be translated “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem, or the Academy to do with the Church?”. and is from *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 7.9. For an interesting discussion of Tertullian, rationality and belief, see Justo Gonzalez, “Athens and Jerusalem Revisited: Reason and Authority in Tertullian”, from *Studies in Early Christianity* VIII (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1993), p.152ff.

Throughout this paper, Tertullian will be quoted from the Latin text in the *Corpus Christianorum Latinorum*, vols 1-2 (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 1954). This text will be abbreviated as *CCL* hereafter. The author will translate the quotes where the meaning is not immediately obvious. The translations will appear in either in the main text or footnotes.

<sup>2</sup> Barnes, Timothy D., *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), especially Chapter XIII, p. 205-210. This work will be abbreviated as *Barnes* hereafter.

<sup>3</sup> Barnes, p. 210.

“For he used the benefits of his pagan erudition to defend and propagate what he considered to be the truth. The closing words of the *De Pallio*<sup>4</sup> resolve any conflict between the two cultures: the humble pallium of the pagan philosopher is ennobled, once it is donned by a Christian. In Tertullian’s hands, rhetoric too underwent a similar transformation.”<sup>5</sup>

This paper will use Barnes’ analysis as a jumping-off point to look at Tertullian’s use of, and reaction to, classical culture. The quotation above raises two questions. First, why did Tertullian use pagan erudition? Second, from whom was he defending his faith? These questions will be investigated by considering two important works: *De Praescriptione Hereticorum* and *De anima*. Based on an analysis of these works, the paper will consider a third important question: whether Tertullian, as Barnes states, “had himself reconciled Christianity and classical culture”<sup>6</sup>.

This paper will demonstrate that Tertullian uses “pagan erudition”, in the form of classical persuasive rhetoric, to persuade an audience that can be reached through it. The answers to the three questions above form the thesis of the paper. First, Tertullian does not need persuasive rhetoric in a situation where he simply trying to strengthen and enlighten the faithful. Second, when Tertullian fights a battle, his opponents are both heretics and pagans. While he appears to attack both them in the same work, he normally uses the attack on paganism to undermine his Gnostic opponents. *De anima* is a striking example of this technique.

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<sup>4</sup> CCL, *De pallio*, 6.4.21: “Gaude, pallium, et exsulta! melior te iam philosophia dignata est, ex quo Christianum vestire coepisti”. The Corpus Christianorum Scriptorum edition of this treatise will be abbreviated *De pallio* hereafter.

<sup>5</sup> Barnes, p. 210.

<sup>6</sup> Barnes, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

Third, Tertullian uses Classical rhetoric to subvert the typical religious syncretism<sup>7</sup>, in vogue since Alexander, in favor of the exclusionary claims of Christianity. This syncretism allowed multiple gods from multiple locations to be worshipped. It emphasized acceptance and toleration, rather than exclusive worship of a single god. To reconcile “Christianity and classical culture” would require a transformation of this syncretism.

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<sup>7</sup> “Syncretism” is defined, for the purposes of this paper, as “the attempted reconciliation or union of different or opposing principles, practices or parties, as in philosophy or religion”. (*The American College Dictionary*)

## ***De Praescriptione haereticorum***

Tertullian's success as a polemicist is demonstrated by his impact on later theologians. His impact can be seen in the fact that the weapons he chose and developed been used ever since.<sup>8</sup> A key element of his persuasiveness comes from his ability to understand his audience. This paper will first examine the tools Tertullian employs in *De Praescriptione haereticorum*.<sup>9</sup>

Tertullian lays out a general case against heretics in *De Praescriptione haereticorum*. This didactic work seems to be intended to strengthen a Christian<sup>10</sup> audience against heresy. It accepts the inevitability of heresy and points out that the existence of heresies was foretold in Scripture: "Conditio praesentium temporum etiam hanc admonitionem prouocat nostram non oportere nos mirari super haereses istas, siue quia sunt, futurae enim praenuntiabantur".<sup>11</sup> The parent of heresy is philosophy: "Ipsae denique haereses a philosophia subornantur."<sup>12</sup> This is a constant theme in Tertullian, as will be seen in *Apologeticum* and in the treatise that he devotes to the destruction of Platonic ideas concerning the soul, *De anima*.

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<sup>8</sup> Tertullian's originality is a separate question. He was clearly indebted to, for example, Irenaeus, for a number of his ideas, including probably the concept of *regula fidei*. Influences on Tertullian are discussed at length in J.H. Waszink, *De Anima Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani* (Amsterdam: J.M. Meulenhoff, 1947). This topic deserves a separate study.

<sup>9</sup> Since this paper is intended to be a rhetorical and literary study, the chronology of Tertullian's works is not discussed. Since Dr. Barnes wrote his book this chronology has been hotly debated by scholars far better qualified than this author. For purposes of this paper, the conventional chronology given in *CCL*, volume II, p. 1627f is assumed, as opposed to that in *Barnes*.

<sup>10</sup> For the purposes of this paper, the term "Christian" will be used to designate both Catholic and Montanist believers. It is assumed that Tertullian's conception of Montanism did not require acceptance of doctrine counter to Catholic orthodoxy.

<sup>11</sup> *CCL, De Praescriptione haereticorum*, 1:1. "The condition of the present times in fact calls out our warning, that we ought not to be surprised on account of these heresies, nor that they exist, since in fact they were predicted to occur." The Corpus Christianorum Scriptorum edition of this treatise will be abbreviated *De Praes. haer.* in footnotes hereafter.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:3: "These heresies are, in fact, instigated by philosophy."

The cause of heresy is the weakness and gullibility of the Christian,<sup>13</sup> as well as excessive seeking into questions that have already been settled by the Church's scriptures.<sup>14</sup> True doctrine can be defined by the Rule of Faith, the "*regula fidei*". This rule is summarized by Tertullian as:

Si haec ita sunt, constat perinde omnem doctrinam, quae cum illis ecclesiis apostolicis matricibus et originalibus fidei conspirat, ueritati deputandam, id sine dubio tenentem, quod ecclesiae ab apostolis, apostoli a christo, christus a deo accepit; omnem uero doctrinam de mendacio praeiudicandam quae sapiat contra ueritatem ecclesiarum et apostolorum christi et dei.<sup>15</sup>

The *regula fidei* ensures correct understanding of Scripture. Most important, the Rule bounds inquiry into all matters of faith, providing a fence, as it were, for the sheep, and separating the sheep from the heretical goats<sup>16</sup>. Tertullian also makes a case that the heretics are not entitled to use the Scriptures, because these Scriptures belong to the Church as part of the testimony of faith that the Church inherited and which is ruled by the *regula fidei*. The heretics have been disinherited and have no claim to the legacy of the Apostles.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 3:1: "Solent quidem isti miriones etiam de quibusdam personis ab haeresi captis aedificari in ruinam".

<sup>14</sup> Chapter 11 of *De Praes. haer.*

<sup>15</sup> *CCL, De Praes. haer.* 21:3 "If this is the case, it is established, then, that all doctrine which agrees with these apostolic, mother churches, originals of the faith, must be accepted for truth, holding without doubt that which the churches received from the Apostles, the Apostles from Christ, and Christ from God. Indeed, all doctrine must be prejudged [to come from] falsehood that one understands [to be] against the truth of the churches, of the Apostles of Christ, and of God."

<sup>16</sup> See Francine Jo Cardman, *Tertullian on the Resurrection* (Dissertation, Yale, 1974), p. 3f: "In contrast to Origen, for instance, who uses the Rule of Faith as a touchstone from which to launch his theological speculations, Tertullian regards the Rule as the boundary of inquiry, and he is forever working inward from it, explicating and defending the Rule, but never venturing beyond it into the realm of speculation or systematic construction".

<sup>17</sup> *CCL, De Praes. haer.* 37:6: "Vos certe exheredauerunt semper et abdicauerunt ut extraneos, ut inimicos" ("They [the Apostles] have always disinherited you and rejected [you] as strangers, as enemies").

*De Praescriptione haereticorum* uses Scripture to explain why heresies can exist, and why some heretics style themselves as Christian, despite the fact that Truth has been revealed in the Church. This aspect of Tertullian's argument seems to be intended to strengthen the faithful of the Church because he has already taken Scripture away from the heretics.

The effectiveness of Tertullian's arguments in *De Praescriptione haereticorum* derives from his understanding of his audience. Tertullian uses ideas that will resonate with a believing audience to strengthen their resistance to heresy. While he touches on a favorite theme, that philosophy is the parent of heresy, he does not need to attack the philosophical underpinnings of the constellation of Gnostic heresies in order to persuade this audience. His objectives can be met through use of Scripture and through explication of the method that underpins the *regula fidei*.

It is interesting that *De Praescriptione haereticorum* does not seem to be amenable to the kind of rhetorical analysis used by a number of scholars<sup>18</sup> on his other works. In *De Praescriptione haereticorum* Tertullian simply launches his argument about the origins, effects, causes and cures for heresy with the first chapter<sup>19</sup>. He then enunciates and explicates his key points: heresy has been warned against in Scripture<sup>20</sup>; heresy is product of self-will<sup>21</sup> and pagan philosophy<sup>22</sup>; curiosity should not range beyond the *regula fidei*<sup>23</sup>. Opposing views of heretics are rebutted as necessary, but there is no detailed attack made on them.

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<sup>18</sup> For example, Drs. Barnes and Cardman.

<sup>19</sup> That is, Chapter 1 discusses the inevitability of heresy; Chapter 2, that the weak will be victims of heresy; Chapter 3 that heresy was warned against in the New Testament.

<sup>20</sup> *De Praes. haer.* Chapters 1 and 4.

<sup>21</sup> *De Praes. haer.* 6.

<sup>22</sup> *De Praes. haer.* 7

<sup>23</sup> *De Praes. haer.* Chapters 11 and 14.

Finally, Tertullian makes no attempt to draw the reader into his presentation by establishing common ground (*ethos*). The premise that heresy is an evil is simply assumed. It may well be that Tertullian felt no need for the *dispositio* or *τάξις* because the work addressed an audience whose prejudices and presuppositions he shared. There was no need, in this treatise, to mount a full-scale assault on heresy. Tertullian's purpose is to help the faithful avoid heresy.

## Classical Rhetorical Structure

When Tertullian needs to attack the foundations of a belief-system he will deploy all the resources of classical rhetoric. For works intended for persuasion, as opposed to didactic works, Tertullian tends use the typical classical rhetorical structure illustrated in the table<sup>24</sup> below:

<i>exordium</i>	Introduction
<i>narratio</i>	Statement of Facts
<i>propositio</i>	Point at issue or statement of point speaker wishes to make
<i>partitio</i>	Outline of the major points in the argument.
<i>confirmatio</i>	Proof
<i>confutatio</i>	Counter argument(s) considered. In Tertullian, chapters devoted to <i>confutatio</i> are often interspersed among chapters of <i>confirmatio</i> .
<i>peroratio</i>	Summary and conclusion

This method is useful for pagan, heretical and Christian audiences, since it earns the reader's sympathy instead of assuming it as a prerequisite. For an educated audience the structure would have been instantly recognizable, and would probably have, itself, contributed to the persuasiveness of the treatise. That *De anima* follows this structure can be seen in the next section.

<sup>24</sup> This table is based on the discussion in *Barnes*, 206-209; Cicero, *De oratore* 1, §137-147 from the Loeb edition of *De oratore Books 1,2*, E.W. Sutton, trans. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942); Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, Book 4, from the Loeb edition *Institutio Oratoria*, H.M. Hubbell, trans. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968); Anderson, R. Dean, *Glossary of Greek Rhetorical Terms Connected to Methods of Argumentation* (Leuven, NL: Peeters, 2000).

## ***De anima***

The ideas of the various Gnostic heretics seem to have resonated well with people in the ancient world because they syncretized Platonic and Christian thought<sup>25</sup>. For that reason alone Hermogenes, Valentinus and Marcion would have been a threat to Christianity. Were they not popular, and intellectually attractive, it is unlikely that Tertullian would have devoted so much ink and effort to fighting them.

The challenges from these heresies presented major problems for the Catholic church, in particular a church of martyrs like that in North Africa. If Marcion, Valentinus, Apelles, and the rest were correct, the Incarnation was a sham and Christ did not really suffer. If Christ did not suffer, what was the point of martyrdom?

Plato's ideas about the soul, laid out in the *Phaedo* and the *Timaeus*, form crucial support for these heresies. In the *Phaedo*, Plato offers a theory in which the soul pre-existed the body and, in its existence in the spirit world, could apprehend the Forms and thus there possessed true knowledge while in that world. However, this knowledge was lost at birth:

“But the return to life is true, and the living come into existence from those who have died, and the souls of those who have died still exist...[and] if it is true that learning is, for us, nothing other than recollection, this would be impossible unless the soul that is in us existed somewhere before it took human shape.”  
(Plato, *Phaedo*, 72d-e<sup>26</sup>)

<sup>25</sup> And in some forms, Gnosticism seems alive and well today, based on the success of Elaine Pagels *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

<sup>26</sup> ἀλλ' ἔστι τῷ ὄντι καὶ τὸ ἀναβιώσκεισθαι καὶ ἐκ τῶν τεθνεώτων τοὺς ζῶντας γίγνεσθαι καὶ τὰς τῶν τεθνεώτων ψυχὰς εἶναι...εἰ ἀληθὴς ἔστιν...ὅτι ἡμῖν ἢ μάθησις οὐκ ἄλλο τι ἢ ἀνάμνησις τυγχάνει οὐσα...τοῦτο δὲ ἀδύνατον, εἰ μὴ ἦν που ἡμῖν ἢ ψυχὴ πρὶν ἐν τῷδε τῷ ἀνθρωπίνῳ εἶδε γενέσθαι. All references to the works of Plato are to *Platonis Opera*, ed., J. Burnet, vols. I-IV(Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1977). All translations are by the author of this paper.

From these ideas comes the conclusion that this material world is inferior to the world of the spiritual. This idea, running from Plato through the Neo-Platonists, was one of the pillars of Gnosticism and of Marcionism, and threatened the Catholic ideas about the Incarnation. Moreover, the ideas of rewards and punishments for the soul's behavior outlined in the *Timaeus*<sup>27</sup> were completely incompatible with Christianity. Finally, the eternity of the soul would have eliminated the need for salvation.

Tertullian, as he tells us at the beginning of *De anima*, had already written a treatise against Hermogenes on the origin of the soul<sup>28</sup>. However, that treatise had not dealt with all the issues that needed to be handled. Tertullian, therefore, sets out to kill two birds with one stone. He will attack the ideas of Plato and the Platonist philosophers<sup>29</sup>, the ideas by which the heathen are captured, and by which the faithful are lead astray by heretics.<sup>30</sup> Tertullian's method for doing so will require him to lay out his case as persuasively as he can. This requirement will mean that he must build a treatise that uses the forms and structures of classical rhetoric. The following analysis of *De anima* treats the work in terms of the table in the section **Classical Rhetorical Structure** above.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Timaeus* 42b.

<sup>28</sup> *CCL, De anima* 1:1. The Corpus Christianorum Scriptorum edition of this treatise will be abbreviated *De anima* in the footnotes hereafter.

<sup>29</sup> In *De anima* Tertullian refers to philosophers who, at least generally, accept Plato's views on the soul as "Platonist". This paper will use Tertullian's classification. Modern scholars would probably call these philosophers "neo Platonist".

<sup>30</sup> *De anima* 3:3 "ut et illa quibus ethnici a philosophia capiuntur...et haec quibus fideles ab haerisi concutiuntur".

<sup>31</sup> *Barnes* gives a very brief summary of the rhetorical structure of *De anima*, together with a brief discussion of Tertullian's reasoning on p. 206f. J.H. Waszink, *De Anima Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani* (Amsterdam: J.M. Meulenhoff, 1947) gives a longer outline that deals with the philosophical subjects treated on p. 15\*ff.

## Exordium

The first three chapters of *De anima* comprise the *exordium*<sup>32</sup>. Tertullian first declares that he will be jousting, mainly, with philosophers<sup>33</sup>. He considers, first, Socrates. He notes that the account of the soul given by Socrates in prison is hardly a disinterested exposition: Socrates is facing death, and thus can be expected to want to maintain his composure and comfort his friends. Tertullian asserts that truth can only come from God by revelation. It is better not to know God, if He does not reveal Himself, than to know about God through human presumption.<sup>34</sup>

Tertullian considers other sources of knowledge, principally philosophy. He acknowledges that philosophers occasionally hit upon the truth.<sup>35</sup> However, no one ought to investigate farther than that which has been said by God, because what God has said is everything: “Porro non amplius inueniri licet quam quod a deo discitur; quod autem a deo discitur, totum est.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> “nunc ad reliquas conuersus quaestiones plurimum uidebor cum philosophis dimicaturus” (*De anima* 1:1)

<sup>34</sup> *De anima* 1:6.

<sup>35</sup> *De anima* 2:1.

<sup>36</sup> *De anima* 2:6.

Next he considers the question “why does heresy exist”, the same question that will be considered in detail in the first chapters of *De Praescriptione haereticorum*. Tertullian asserts that philosophers are the patriarchs of heresy.<sup>37</sup> He also asserts that philosophy would “blackmail”<sup>38</sup> the truth: “siquidem et ab apostolo iam tunc philosophia concussio ueritatis prouidebatur.”<sup>39</sup>

Tertullian sarcastically notes that Christian doctrine suffers because it comes from Judea, not Greece, and was spread by fishermen instead of sophists.<sup>40</sup> The exordium concludes at the end of Chapter 3, with a mention of his earlier work against Hermogenes on the origin of the soul. Tertullian now wishes to move on to other questions.

## **Narratio and Propositio**

The *narratio* explains the nature and background of the case that Tertullian will make. Tertullian summarizes what he hopes to accomplish next in the first line of Chapter 4: “Post definitionem census quaestionem status patitur. Consequens enim est, ut ex dei flatu animam professi initium et disputaremus”.<sup>41</sup> If the soul comes from the breath of God, it has a beginning, though Plato would have it be unborn and unmade, that is, fully eternal.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *De anima* 3:1.

<sup>38</sup> Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, definition of *concussio*, definition 2, p. 406. Tertullian also uses the word in *Ad Scap.* 4, which is the citation for this definition.

<sup>39</sup> *De anima* 3:1.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:3.

<sup>41</sup> *De anima* 4:1.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

Plato's idea is a problem for Tertullian, because its eternity would put the soul on par with God. Tertullian is here practicing a technique called "innoculation", in which the most potentially damaging piece of evidence against the author's case is brought forward early, and dealt with expeditiously. Tertullian deals with this problem, and strikes his first real blow at Plato, by bringing forward a number of Stoic philosophers who assert the soul's corporality. He cites, specifically, Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus and Lucretius.<sup>43</sup>

The following arguments are given: the corporality of the soul is shown by the fact that death results when the soul leaves the body [Zeno]; family likenesses include characteristics of both soul and body [Cleanthes]; only a body can touch and be touched [Lucretius]; when the body deserts the soul, the body dies [Chrysippus]<sup>44</sup>.

The *narratio* uses only pagan sources to refute Plato, and to prepare the ground for Tertullian's thesis, which is presented in one succinct sentence at the end of Chapter 5: "Therefore, the soul is body, since, if it were not corporeal, it could not desert the body".<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *De anima* 5:1-6.

<sup>44</sup> *De anima* 5:6.

<sup>45</sup> *De anima* 5:6: "Igitur corpus anima, quae nisi corporalis corpus non derelinquet."

## Confirmatio: Origin, Nature and Faculties of the Soul

The discussion Tertullian's *confirmatio* in *De anima* will demonstrate his use of a "tripod" to support his arguments: philosophy, Scripture, and medicine. He will not allow any of his assertions to be supported only by Scripture, but uses it as a secondary support. This technique allows Tertullian to address both pagan and heretical objections in terms that pagans and heretics can accept.

### Chapters 6-10: Contra Platonem

The first five chapters of *De anima's confirmatio* take issue with Plato and the Platonists on a number of points concerning the corporeal nature of the soul. Tertullian's arguments are primarily logical and medical, though he does include one supporting reference from Scripture. Tertullian makes the following points in Chapters 6-10:

- 1) The Platonists assert that every body must be either animate or inanimate. Inanimate bodies receive motion from something else; animate ones cause motion.<sup>46</sup> Since the soul neither receives nor causes motion, it cannot be a body. Tertullian's counter-argument is that the soul causes the feet to walk, the hands to touch, the eyes to see. How then can it not be a body? "Vnde uacuae rei solida propellere?"<sup>47</sup> In addition, there is medical evidence (from Soranus, a late 1<sup>st</sup> century physician) that the soul is actually refreshed when the body eats.<sup>48</sup>
- 2) Scripture, specifically Luke 16:23-24, is used as evidence for the body's corporality. This example uses the story of Dives and Lazarus to illustrate physicality of the soul.<sup>49</sup>
- 3) Chapter 8 details other medical arguments for the corporality of the soul, using Soranus as source.
- 4) Plato maintains that, if the soul had a "figure" or "likeness" ("*effigies*"), it would be compound and therefore soluble, and therefore not immortal. Tertullian contradicts Plato based, first, on the divine revelation given to a Montanist sister.<sup>50</sup> He goes on to develop the idea that the soul was formed in Adam as the breath of God suffused Adam's body and made the soul fill the body and take on Adam's shape. Thus, a person has two faces for one body, inner and outer.<sup>51</sup> Tertullian then asserts that the purpose of this likeness is recognition.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *De anima* 6:1.

<sup>47</sup> *De anima* 6:3.

<sup>48</sup> *De anima* 6:6.

<sup>49</sup> *De anima* 7:2.

<sup>50</sup> *De anima* 9:4.

<sup>51</sup> *De anima* 9:8: "Hic erit homo interior, alius exterior, dupliciter unus".

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

- 5) Soul is uniform substance, as Plato asserts. Spirit and soul are the same.<sup>53</sup>  
 “Ipsum est enim quid, per quod est quid”.<sup>54</sup>

### Chapters 11-16: Taxonomy of the Soul

Tertullian now turns to the structure of the soul. He demonstrates that spirit is not separate from the soul, but is a faculty or operation of it.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, the mind (*νοῦς*) is also a faculty of the soul.<sup>56</sup> It is not distinct from the soul.<sup>57</sup> Since the mind is the soul’s instrument, it is the soul that is supreme.<sup>58</sup>

While various philosophers would divide the soul into its components, Tertullian maintains that the only possibility is a logical division into functions, rather than a physical division into parts. Tertullian uses a (musical) organ, said to have been created by Archimedes, as a metaphor to explain this point.<sup>59</sup>

Tertullian then posits a ἡγεμονικόν, a supreme director, for the soul<sup>60</sup>. He provides three sets of supporting evidence: the agreement of (numerous) philosophers; Scripture; and the opinion of learned medical doctors.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *De anima* 10:9.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* “The thing itself is that through which it is”. This quotation, though elegantly simple in Latin, is exceeding difficult to translate into idiomatic English!

<sup>55</sup> *De anima* 11.

<sup>56</sup> *De anima* 12.

<sup>57</sup> *De anima* 12:6.

<sup>58</sup> *De anima* 13:3.

<sup>59</sup> *De anima* 14:4.

<sup>60</sup> *De anima* 15:1

<sup>61</sup> *De anima* 15.

Chapter 16 includes a discussion of the rational and irrational elements in the soul. This logical division was suggested by Plato.<sup>62</sup> Tertullian, however, elaborates: the rational element is the soul's natural state, and comes from God. The irrational came later, as an accretion whose origin was the Devil and which was the result of sin. All sin is irrational.<sup>63</sup>

The rational part of the soul has two parts “θυμικόν” (“indignatium”) and “ἐπιθυμικόν” (“concupiscentium”). Since Christ had a soul like ours, it did contain these two parts. The first part consisted, in the case of Christ's soul, in His anger at the scribes and Pharisees. The second consisted of His desire to eat the Passover meal with his disciples.<sup>64</sup>

As in the previous section of his *confirmatio*, Tertullian uses Scripture as support when he can, but leans mainly on philosophy and medicine to prove his points.

### **Chapters 17 and 18: Heretical Objections**

Plato points out ways that soul is deceived by the senses, an idea that was picked up by the Platonists (Tertullian's term for the neo-Platonists) and, from them, by the Gnostic heretics. In the *Timaeus*, Plato declares that the operation of the senses is irrational and is conditioned by our opinions.<sup>65</sup> He uses mirages (e.g., the bend in the oar when seen under water) as a proof.

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<sup>62</sup> *De anima* 16:1.

<sup>63</sup> *De anima* 16:2: “igitur a diabolo irrationale, a quo et delictum, extraneum a deo, a quo est irrationale alienum.”

<sup>64</sup> *De anima* 16:4.

<sup>65</sup> For example, *Timaeus* 28C and 51A

For once, Tertullian is able to call on the Epicureans for help. The senses are not at fault, it is some condition exterior to them that causes the senses to react as they do. The senses are operating correctly – it is their inputs that are bad.<sup>66</sup> Tertullian tells us that the reason he has brought this issue up is to refute Marcion, who would make Jesus into a phantom.<sup>67</sup>

In Chapter 18, Tertullian discusses the Forms of Plato in order to deal with the separation of senses and intellectual perceptions propounded by the Gnostics and Valentinians. Forms are those invisible, ideal, entities that are the patterns and causes of the objects of nature that our senses perceive.<sup>68</sup>

From this concept of Forms, says Tertullian, come the heresies of the Gnostics and Valentinians. These heretics separate senses from intellectual perceptions. Senses can be deceived, intellect cannot. Tertullian, on the contrary argues that the soul and senses cannot be separated. If corporeal things are perceived by the soul, then the mind is a sensuous faculty and not just intellect: “Denique a quo sentiuntur corporalia? Si ab animo, ergo iam et sensualis est animus, non tantum intellectualis, nam dum intellegit, sentit, quia si non intellegit, nec sentit.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> “Garbage in, garbage out” as computer programmers say. The discussion referred to is in *De anima* 17:6, and is summarized as *Nam ut in aqua remus inflexus uel infractus appareat, aqua in causa est; denique extra aquam integer uisui remus.*”

<sup>67</sup> *De anima* 17:14.

<sup>68</sup> *De anima* 18:3.

<sup>69</sup> *De anima* 18:8.

### Chapters 19-21: Development of the Soul

Chapter 19 is concerned with when the intellect first appears in a human being. Aristotle's example of the tree is used. Aristotle, according to Tertullian, demonstrates that a tree can have vitality without knowledge, thus something can exist that has vitality without a soul.<sup>70</sup> The reason that this idea is threatening to Tertullian's thesis is that it might be used to show that there is a time, for instance childhood, when the child has a soul but not a mind.<sup>71</sup>

Tertullian turns the tables on Aristotle and authors who agree with him, using the tree example. He observes that, in contradiction to Aristotle, any plant, no matter how young, already knows how to grow. Ivy plants, from the very beginning, know how to hang on to something as they grow. Infants, in fact, are able to recognize their mother, the nurse, their own cradle from the very beginning. "Vnde" asks Tertullian, "illi iudicium nouitatis et moris, si non sapit?"<sup>72</sup> "Whence comes to him this discernment of new things and of customary ones, if he does not have knowledge?"

From this evidence, Tertullian deduces that all the properties of the soul are present in it from the very beginning, and grow along with it. The soul is uniform as a seed, but develops characteristics as it grows that are caused by its environment.<sup>73</sup> He buttresses his claim with the Stoic Seneca, and evidence from Plato, Sallust and others.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> *De anima* 19:2.

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

<sup>72</sup> *De anima* 19:9.

<sup>73</sup> *De anima* 20:2.

<sup>74</sup> *De anima* 20:1-3.

Tertullian comments that Christians hold that there is an influence on the soul's development by God and the devil, but that these ideas have been treated in their own, separate, work.<sup>75</sup>

In Chapter 21, Tertullian returns to the attack on Valentinians, who held that the soul's character was immutable since "a good tree cannot bear bad fruit; a bad tree cannot bear good fruit" (Luke 6:43). Tertullian's counter argument is that a bad tree can, indeed, have a good branch grafted on to it, and thus bear good fruit. The power of the grace of God is more potent than nature.<sup>76</sup>

In this section of the *confirmatio*, Tertullian tries to prove that a human being is always in possession of an intelligent soul, that souls develop as humans grow, and that the character of a soul can change as a result of the exercise of free will. He proves the first two points by means of reason and of the authority of pagan thinkers. The final point, on free will, is primarily a matter of dispute with the heretics. To counter them it is appropriate for him to invoke the only gospel in the canon of Scripture that both Catholic and heretic accept.

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<sup>75</sup> *De anima* 20:5.

<sup>76</sup> *De anima* 21:6.

## Chapter 22: Summary of the Confirmatio

Tertullian has laid out a case for the soul's corporality using the resources of philosophy, Scripture, and medicine. He has established the following propositions about the origin, nature and faculties of the soul:

- The soul comes from the breath of God
- The soul is immortal, but not eternal
- Soul possesses a body and has a form
- The soul is a simple, non-compound, substance
- Soul has an intelligence in its own nature
- It develops its power in various ways
- Soul has free will
- It is subject to changes through accident
- can be changed through the operation of its faculties
- rational and supreme
- contains spirit of prophesy

Plato and Platonists have been the primary opponents that the *confirmatio* has engaged.

The reason for this choice of opponents will emerge in the next section of *De anima*.

## Refutatio

Barnes states<sup>77</sup> that it would be natural to follow the summary what Tertullian has proved with a peroration. He attributes the fact that Tertullian continues for another 36 chapters to a perception of fragility in Tertullian's argument thus far.<sup>78</sup> Barnes calls what follows, that is, Chapters 23-57, an "amplificatio".

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<sup>77</sup> Barnes, p. 207.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

Barnes' logic is suspect for four reasons. First, these chapters constitute the majority of the work. They do not appear to be an after-thought. Second, the topics discussed in them are mainly objections that heretics might advance against Tertullian's thesis. This choice of topics contrasts with the topics of the *confirmatio*, as we have seen, which are focused on pagan philosophy in general and on Plato in particular. Third, where Platonic ideas are discussed (for example, anamnesis and metempsychosis), Tertullian will frame the problems in terms of the roots of heresy. Fourth, in Chapters 23-57 Tertullian will use, primarily, philosophy and medicine as tools in his arguments, since the heretics would not accept his Scriptural canon, and since he does not believe that heretics have any right to Scripture.

All these factors lead to the conclusion that the primary intended audience of *De anima* is heretic, not pagan, and what has been discussed in the *confirmatio* is simply preparation for the ideas he will now introduce. For these reasons, Chapters 23-57 are better termed a *refutatio* whose purpose is to refute objections that his true opponents, the heretics, might make. This large section is the true heart of *De anima*.

**Chapters 23-24: Introductory Attack on Anamnesis**

In Chapter 23, Tertullian begins the *refutatio* by refuting the idea of anamnesis, which is Plato's conception of how people learn. Tertullian needs to deal with this issue because many heretics either deny creation of humanity by God, and/or state that the soul descends from the (better) spiritual world into the material, and the originator of these heresies is Plato: "Doleo bona fide Platonem omnium haereticorum condimentarium factum."<sup>79</sup>

It is Plato who imagines the creation of humans by inferior gods<sup>80</sup>. Plato, in the *Phaedo*, also develops the notion of the transmigration of souls ("metempsychosis") from spiritual to physical worlds, and back again. These theories entail acceptance of the idea of 'μαθήσις ἀναμνήσεως'. Tertullian proposes to defeat the heretics by disproving anamnesis.<sup>81</sup>

The problem with Plato's idea is that anamnesis is internally inconsistent. Plato holds the soul to be unborn, immortal, incorruptable and impassible. However, he allows it to forget the world of Forms when it is born, which would require passibility.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *De anima* 23:5.

<sup>80</sup> *Timaeus* 69C; 42E-43A.

<sup>81</sup> *De anima* 23:6.

<sup>82</sup> *De anima* 24:3.

Moreover, how does it occur that the knowledge from the intellectual faculties (which are supposedly the higher ones) can fail in a person, while the instinctual faculties never do so? <sup>83</sup> Finally, asks Tertullian, why is it that, of all the people who have been in the world, it was only Plato who was able both to forget and to recollect the Forms?<sup>84</sup>

### **Chapters 25-27: Origin of the Soul and Attack On Metempsychosis**

Tertullian returns to explanation of how all souls are derived from one, and when and how they are produced. He is trying to show that the soul exists in the human embryo, and adduces the experience of human mothers to support his view.<sup>85</sup> They can attest to the existence of life in the womb.<sup>86</sup> Even Plato (who usually maintains that the soul enters the body when the infant draws its first breath) offers the view in the sixth chapter of the *Laws* that the soul comes from the seed.<sup>87</sup>

The danger with Plato's idea of metempsychosis is that it contradicts the need for resurrection. Integral to the concept of metempsychosis is the idea that the soul enters the body at birth. This danger that metempsychosis poses is so great that Tertullian continues his argument in Chapter 26, where he offers a number of Scriptural references to support his point of view. Again, as usual when debating heretics, his New Testament references come from Luke.

Chapter 27 concludes this section of the *refutatio* with an argument for the simultaneous origin of body and soul, and idea that would exclude metempsychosis.

Tertullian offers three arguments: philosophical<sup>88</sup>, medical<sup>89</sup> and scriptural<sup>90</sup>.

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<sup>83</sup> *De anima* 24:7.

<sup>84</sup> *De anima* 24:11: "Plato scilicet solus in tanta gentium silva, in tanto sapientium prato, idearum et oblitus et recordatus est"

<sup>85</sup> *De anima* 25:2.

<sup>86</sup> *De anima* 25:3.

<sup>87</sup> *De anima* 25:9.

<sup>88</sup> *De anima* 27:1-2.

**Chapters 28-35: Additional Refutations of Metempsychosis**

Tertullian tackles the views of various philosophers and heretics concerning metempsychosis: Pythagoras, Empedocles, Simon Magus and Carpocrates.

The attack on Pythagoras includes both *ad hominem* and philosophical arguments. Chapter 28 defines his view as “reciprocal transmigration”, where souls recycle endlessly between the worlds of living and dead.<sup>91</sup> Chapter 28 builds the case that Pythagoras is a liar, since he staged a fake trip to the Underworld. Chapter 29 offers a logical counter-argument to Pythagoras. Since the living have to come before dead, in the natural order of things, then “Igitur si ab initio vivi non ex mortuis, cur postea ex mortuis?”<sup>92</sup>

Chapters 30 and 31 continue the logical refutation of Pythagoras. If this reciprocal transmigration were true, the number who exit and the number who return would remain constant<sup>93</sup>, neither shrinking nor growing. However, history shows that the population of the world has in fact grown.<sup>94</sup> A couple other logical problems are mentioned in Chapter 31, principally that, if people depart this life at various ages, why is it that they return at the same age, that is, as infants.<sup>95</sup>

Empedocles is the next philosopher to be considered. He is ridiculed for having dreamed that he was a god. Then Tertullian develops the real attack against him: Empedocles thought that people might transmigrate into animals, and animals into people.

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<sup>89</sup> *De anima* 27:6.

<sup>90</sup> *De anima* 27:9.

<sup>91</sup> *De anima* 28:1.

<sup>92</sup> *De anima* 29:2: “If from the beginning the living do not come from the dead, then how do they do so afterward?”

<sup>93</sup> *De anima* 30:1: “Nam neque plures aut pauciores exissent quam redirent.”

<sup>94</sup> *De anima* 30:2-3.

<sup>95</sup> *De anima* 31:2.

Tertullian develops the argument that this idea would require animals to change their essential natures, from one pole (e.g., water animals) to another (e.g., to land animals)<sup>96</sup>. In addition, there is the issue of size: could an elephant, if it returned as a man, fit inside his skin?

Chapter 33 continues the attack on Empedocles, using sarcasm to mock the fate of those who, as punishment, must come back as animals whose qualities they cannot enjoy (for example, a poet would not care to return as a peacock, which, though handsome, has a repellent voice)<sup>97</sup>. The real issue with transmigration, however, is introduced at the end of Chapter 33: the judicial sentence for behavior during life is not permanent.<sup>98</sup>

Chapters 34-35 contain attacks on two heretics, Simon Magus and Carpocrates, for their views on transmigration. The attack on Simon Magus is an extended *ad hominem*, branding him as fornicator and presenting a horrible example of the transmigration of a prostitute named Helen from Tyre who went through several metempsychoses to wind up as Helen of Troy. Carpocrates is another heretic who was both a magician and fornicator, though lacking the transmigrating Helen, and the attack on him moves forward accordingly. This Carpocrates thought human souls would transmigrate until sins had been expiated: “Itaque metempsychosin necessarie imminere, si non in primo quoque vitae huius com meatu omnibus inlicitis satisfiat (scilicet facinora tributa sunt uitae!)”<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> *De anima* 32:6

<sup>97</sup> *De anima* 33:8.

<sup>98</sup> *De anima* 33:10.

<sup>99</sup> *De anima* 35:1.

**Chapters 36-41: Properties of the Soul**

These chapters summarize the major elements of Tertullian's conception of the soul. The summary is placed at this point in *De anima* because the remaining part of the *refutatio* will cover the fate of the soul, rather than the soul's characteristics.

Chapters 36 and 37 recapitulates and summarizes when the soul is placed in humans and when the sexual determinate of the embryo takes place. Tertullian has established that the soul placed in humans with the seed. The soul is uniform from the very beginning and sexual selection takes place simultaneously with conception. The result is that one cannot tell whether seed or soul is the cause of the sex of the embryo. The embryo becomes human at conception: "Ex quo igitur fetus in utero homo, a quo forma completa est."<sup>100</sup>

Chapter 38 outlines the growth of the soul. The soul grows at the same rate and goes through the same stages as does the body. The reason that the soul has desires, for example, for food, for drink and for sexual activity, is that the body is the temporary abode of the soul, and the soul will naturally want to maintain and improve its home<sup>101</sup>.

The topic of Chapter 39 is that the Evil Spirit has marred the purity of the souls from birth. Evidence of this comes from the prevalence and persistence of pagan customs around childbirth.<sup>102</sup> Tertullian argues that evil spirits are invited into the soul of the infant through the doorway that is opened by use of pagan customs.

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<sup>100</sup> *De anima* 37:2.

<sup>101</sup> *De anima* 38:5.

<sup>102</sup> *De anima* 39:2.

In the case of mixed marriages (a Christian and a pagan), the infant does have a hope of salvation, but baptism is required for holiness. John 2:3 is cited as proof: “ ‘nisi quis nascetur ex aqua et spiritu, non inibit in regnum dei’, id est, non erit sanctus.”<sup>103</sup>

In Chapter 40 Tertullian addresses the question of evil and whether its origin is in the body or soul. Evil is committed by means of the body, not because of the body: “Nam etsi caro peccatrix, secundum quam incedere prohibemur, cuius opera damnantur concupiscentis adversus spiritum, ob quam carnales notantur, non tamen suo nomine cara infamis.”<sup>104</sup> Since the flesh doesn’t get credit for good deeds done at the direction of the soul, therefore it would be improper to give it the blame for bad deeds.

Tertullian discusses original sin rather briefly in Chapter 41: “Malum igitur animae, praeter quod ex obventu spiritus nequam superstruitur, ex originis vitio antecedit, naturale quodammodo.”<sup>105</sup> However, because the soul comes from God, its goodness cannot be completely extinguished. “Propterea nulla anima sine crimine, quia nulla sine boni semine.”<sup>106</sup> The soul can be saved if it receives the second birth.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> *De anima* 39:4.

<sup>104</sup> *De anima* 40:2: “Even if the spirit were the sinner, on account of which we are forbidden to go about with her, whose works are condemned for lusting against the spirit, on account of which they are called carnal, nevertheless it has not [incurred] the name of sin.”

<sup>105</sup> *De anima* 41:1.

<sup>106</sup> *De anima* 41:3.

<sup>107</sup> *De anima* 41:4.

### Chapters 42-49: Discussion of Sleep

Tertullian will turn to a discussion of death now, but he will first discuss sleep because of the apparent similarities. He rejects, of course, idea of Epicurus that sleep, because it lacks sensation, is nothing to human beings (“‘quod sensu caret, nihil ad nos’”).<sup>108</sup> His reasoning is that, since we must suffer death it cannot be nothing to us. Moreover, we must talk about death just as we would posthumus life and other “provinces of the soul”<sup>109</sup>, including sleep, the mirror of death.

In the opening paragraphs of Chapter 43, Tertullian reviews, briefly, the views of a number of philosophers on the subject of sleep. He offers his own opinion on their views, which is that he has never slept in such a way that he can confirm anything of what they say.<sup>110</sup> His view of the soul’s activity during sleep is that, given its immortality, sleep cannot be the separation of the spirit from the body.<sup>111</sup> Since, as the Stoics say, the soul is always in motion,<sup>112</sup> sleep must be a function of the body only: a temporary suspension of the activities of the senses. It is not the dissolution or lessening of the senses (*resolutionem sensualis uigoris*)<sup>113</sup>.

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<sup>108</sup> *De anima* 42:1.

<sup>109</sup> *De anima* 42:3.

<sup>110</sup> *De anima* 43:2: “Ego me nunquam ita dormisse praesumo, ut ex his aliquid agnoscam.”

<sup>111</sup> *De anima* 43:4: “Perinde deminutionem animalis spiritus aut indigentiam spiritus aut segregationem consati spiritus immortalitas animae non sinit credi.”

<sup>112</sup> *De anima* 43:5.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

Continuing his discussion, Tertullian asserts that the sleep/wake cycle is an image of the death/resurrection sequence. This is the nature and the reason for sleep, and why it is the mirror of death. If we regard it so, we initiate faith, we make hope grow, we learn how to die and how to live, we learn how to keep watch, all while we sleep.<sup>114</sup>

Chapter 44 includes some possible evidence to contract his thesis that the soul does not leave the body during sleep. Tertullian first examines the story of Hermodotimus, who slept so deeply he was thought to have died, and, as a result was cremated by his enemies. Tertullian attributes these events to a disease<sup>115</sup> or to Divine intervention<sup>116</sup>. The second piece of evidence that Tertullian deals with is the story in Suetonius that claims that Nero never dreamed. Tertullian counters this with the assertion that Suetonius also reports that Nero was, in fact, able to dream late in his life.<sup>117</sup>

Chapters 45 through 49 discuss dreams. Tertullian asserts that dreams show that the soul's motion is perpetual, even while dreaming. These facts demonstrate the soul's immortality.<sup>118</sup> Since the soul is moving, even in a dream, and since the body's limbs are not available, the soul uses its own limbs: : "Igitur cum quies corporibus euenit, quarum solacium proprium est, uacans illa a solacio alieno non quiescit et, si caret opera membrorum corporalium, suis utitur."<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> *De anima* 43:12: "Ita cum euigilauerit corpus, redditum officiis eius resurrectionem mortuorum tibi affirmat. Haec erit somni et ratio naturalis et natura rationalis. Etiam per imaginem mortis fidem initiaris, spem meditaris, discis mori et uiuere, discis uigilare, dum dormis."

<sup>115</sup> *De anima* 44:2.

<sup>116</sup> *De anima* 44:3.

<sup>117</sup> *De anima* 44:2.

<sup>118</sup> *De anima* 45:1.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

The question of dreams' oracular qualities is considered next. Tertullian distinguishes two types of oracular dreams. The Stoic view is endorsed – God gives us some dreams to enable our own natural, oracular ability :“Sed et Stoici deum malunt prouidentissimum humanae institutioni inter cetera praesidia diuinatricum artium.”<sup>120</sup> However, other kinds of oracular dreams may come from demons.<sup>121</sup>

After a digression regarding ways to improve ones' dreaming<sup>122</sup>, Tertullian reasserts his belief that no one does not dream. The ability to dream is inherent in the natural constitution of the soul: “Dum ne animae aliqua natura credatur immunis somniorum.”<sup>123</sup>

### **Chapters 50-57: Death**

Despite what Epicurus says, Tertullian declares that death is natural and inevitable. The general opinion of humanity is that it is the debt of nature : “Publica totius generis humani sententia mortem naturae debitum pronuntiamus.”<sup>124</sup> The heretic Menander (not the comic poet of the same name) claims that his baptism will prevent death, but this is absurd.<sup>125</sup> To refute Menander, a number of examples of “killing waters” (as opposed to healing waters) are introduced.<sup>126</sup> Tertullian allows that Enoch and Elijah were “translated” but this means that their death was only postponed. “Translatus est Enoch et Helias nec mors eorum reperta est, dilata scilicet.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> *De anima* 46:11.

<sup>121</sup> *De anima* 47:4

<sup>122</sup> The subject of Chapter 48 of *De anima*.

<sup>123</sup> *De anima* 49:3.

<sup>124</sup> *De anima* 50:2

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> *De anima* 50:5.

The thesis of Chapter 51 is that death entirely separates the soul from the body: “Opus autem mortis in medio est, discretio corporis animaeque.”<sup>128</sup> This chapter is interesting, because it is constructed as a short oration.

Tertullian introduces a short *refutatio* to this *propositio*, when he considers whether there have really been cases where a soul, or part of a soul, remained with the body after death. He examines a number of cases and finds that there are other plausible, physical, explanations for the apparent retention of the soul after death.<sup>129</sup> In summary, because the soul is immortal it is also indivisible. Death, too, is indivisible and operates on the entire soul.<sup>130</sup> Two counter-examples of Christians who were dead but seemed to move afterwards are introduced. However, Tertullian considers these to be in the category of “signs and portents” rather than to show some activity of the soul after death.<sup>131</sup> The conclusion of this chapter – a short *peroratio* – is that death is a complete entity that completely removes soul from body. It cannot mix with life, any more than day and night can mix: “Mors, si non semel tota est, non est; si quid animae remanserit, uita est; non magis uitae miscebitur mors quam diei et nox.”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> *De anima* 51:1.

<sup>129</sup> *De anima* 51:2ff.

<sup>130</sup> *De anima* 51:5.

<sup>131</sup> *De anima* 51:6.

<sup>132</sup> *De anima* 51:8.

Chapter 52 is also structured in terms of an oration. The case that Tertullian makes is that death, all death, is a consequence of the first sin. Most humans see two kinds of death: natural (from natural causes), and unnatural, from violence.<sup>133</sup> The first is in accord with nature and the second, contrary to nature. This first part of the chapter forms a short *exordium* and *narratio*.

Tertullian, however, advances the *propositio* that death is the result of a fault and this fault is in no way natural: “Qui autem primordia hominis nouimus, audenter determinamus mortem non ex natura secutam hominem, sed ex culpa, ne ipsa quidem naturali”<sup>134</sup>

His *confirmatio* makes the following points to prove his *propositio*. First, if humanity had been created with the intention that we die, one could say that death was natural. “Nam si homo in mortem directo institutus fuisset, tunc demum mors naturae adscriberetur.”<sup>135</sup> However, humans were not intended to die since death comes from our own choice. If one did not sin, one would not die. Therefore, death cannot be natural, since it comes from our own will rather than from necessity.<sup>136</sup>

Next comes an *amplificatio*, in which Tertullian elaborates the unnaturalness of death. Death, Tertullian argues, overturns the natural union by separating soul and body.<sup>137</sup>

The *peroratio* concludes by comparing death, even when tranquil, to a shipwreck that occurs when the navigation of the soul is removed: “Nihilo refert integram abire corporis nauem an dissipatam, dum animae nauigatio euertatur.”<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> *De anima* 52:1.

<sup>134</sup> *De anima* 52:2.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *De anima* 52:3f.

Chapter 53 stresses the indivisibility of the soul, even in the process of dying. Tertullian states that, no matter whether death is slow or quick, the soul is withdrawn from the body all at once. No part of the soul leaves until all of it leaves. “Non omnis autem pars statim et abscisa est, quia postera est, nec quia exiqua est, statim et ipsa peritura est.”<sup>139</sup>

Chapters 54 and 55 discuss the soul’s destination. Various philosophers posit various destinations for the soul after it leaves the body, but, in general, the philosophers believe that the souls of the wise ascend to the ether (or to the moon), while the souls of the unwise descend to Hades.<sup>140</sup> The Christian view is that Hades is in the depths of the earth: “Nobis inferi...[sunt] in fossa terrae et in alto uastitas et in ipsis uisceribus eius abstrusa profunditas”<sup>141</sup>

Christ, in his humanity, descended into Hades as a dead man, so that the prophets and patriarchs might partake of Himself, before He ascended to the right hand of the Father.<sup>142</sup> The souls of most Christians, despite what certain heretics think,<sup>143</sup> will not ascend until the world ends and the kingdoms of the heavens will be unlocked: “Cum transactione enim mundi reserabuntur regna caelorum.”<sup>144</sup> (*De anima* 55:3). Paradise contains only the souls of the martyrs. Your only key to paradise is your blood: “Tota paradisi clavis tuus sanguis est.”<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> *De anima* 52:4.

<sup>139</sup> *De anima* 53:4.

<sup>140</sup> *De anima* 54:1-4.

<sup>141</sup> *De anima* 55:1.

<sup>142</sup> *De anima* 55:2.

<sup>143</sup> *De anima* 55:3.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> *De anima* 55:5.

In the penultimate chapter of the *refutatio*, Tertullian considers two questions: when does the soul depart for Hades, and what kind of body will we have in the Resurrection? He contends that it would be unfair for the soul to suffer because of the slowness of the living to bury the body.<sup>146</sup> In addition, Tertullian refutes the notion that the souls of those who die prematurely must wander the earth until the number of year have passed that is equal to the number of years that they would have lived. He points out that one cannot age without a body: “Aetatem enim non potest capere sine corpore, quia per corpora operantur aetates.”<sup>147</sup> Since we will receive our bodies back at the resurrection, our souls will receive back these bodies in the same age and mode that they had before.<sup>148</sup> The question of those who have died violent deaths is taken up next. They, too, will pass an exile in Hades, in one of its two regions. The bad will reside in the bad section, the good, in the good section.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> *De anima* 56:3.

<sup>147</sup> *De anima* 56:5.

<sup>148</sup> *De anima* 56:5f.

<sup>149</sup> *De anima* 56:8.

In the final chapter of the *refutatio*, Tertullian closes by taking a look at the “appearances” on earth of those who have died. He flatly states that any magic that claims to be able to bring souls back from Hades is phony: “Sic et in illa alia specie magiae, quae iam quiescentes animas euellere ab inferis creditur et conspectui exhibere, non alia fallaciae uis est”<sup>150</sup> Hades cannot be opened, nor can souls leave it to return to earth, as Luke 16:26 shows.<sup>151</sup> Finally, in a true resurrection, the solid, provable and touchable reality of the souls in the body will compel one to recognize the fraudulence of any apparition of a dead person.<sup>152</sup>

### Peroratio

The concluding chapter of *De anima* treats the status and fates of souls waiting in Hades for the final judgment through a dialogue with an imaginary interlocutor.<sup>153</sup> The theme in this series of questions is that souls *should* receive a foretaste of their final reward or punishment. The soul cannot, by nature, remain static, so must stay in motion in Hades. In addition, it would be quite unfair for the evil to fare well in Hades, while the good worry about their ultimate fate.<sup>154</sup> The soul, moreover, is capable of sinning without the aid of the body, as Christ Himself pointed out in Matthew 5:28.<sup>155</sup> Therefore, it does not have to wait to be reunited with the body for punishment to begin.<sup>156</sup> This point, Tertullian notes, has been stressed by the Paraclete.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> *De anima* 57:6.

<sup>151</sup> *De anima* 57:11.

<sup>152</sup> *De anima* 57:12.

<sup>153</sup> An example of *contrapositio*, as noted in *Barnes* p. 208.

<sup>154</sup> *De anima* 58:3.

<sup>155</sup> *De anima* 58:6.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> *De anima* 58:8: “Hunc etiam paracletus frequentissime commendauit.”

To conclude the treatise, Tertullian makes two related points. First, “necessariae curiositati satisfacimus”<sup>158</sup>, that is, “we have satisfied the necessary curiosity”. This curiosity, as discussed in *De Praescriptione haereticum*, is that which stops seeking after it has found.<sup>159</sup> Second, and finally, that curiosity that is extravagant and idle will still lack information.<sup>160</sup> This self-willed curiosity is Tertullian’s idea of the motivation of heretics. The closing slap against heretics reinforces the impression that the real target for this treatise is the heretic. The destruction of the claims of philosophers in the *confirmatio* of *De anima* is intended to cut down the intellectual scaffolding that supports heresy.

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> See the previous discussion of *De Praes. haer.* Chapter 11.

<sup>160</sup> *De anima* 58:8.

## Conclusions and Ideas for Further Research

### Conclusions

*De Praescriptione haereticorum* is a major work in terms of size, topics covered, and effects on later generations. However, an analysis of the work does not reveal a structure that uses the principles of classical rhetoric. *De Praescriptione haereticorum* is not intended to persuade outsiders so much as enlighten and strengthen the faithful by showing them how to avoid falling into heresy. Tertullian can assume that his audience will read the treatise to be informed, not persuaded. In addition, this treatise does not want or need to take on deeply-held values of classical civilization like religious syncretism.

*De anima*, on the other hand, is intended to persuade its audience. For that reason, it is structured into *exordium*, *narratio* and *propositio*, *confirmatio*, *refutatio* and *peroratio*. In addition, several of the key chapters in *De anima* are, themselves, organized using this structure. The audience of *De anima* might be pagans, heretics or both. The concentration on philosophy and medicine to support his proof might point to either group. The amount of space devoted to refutation of heretics, and the tendency to use Luke when Scripture is quoted, indicate a heretical audience. It also appears that Tertullian intends the work to destroy the foundations for Gnostic heresies by attacking their “mentor”, Plato.

Does Tertullian resolve conflicts between Christianity and classical culture, as Barnes states and as the final line of *De pallio* seems to imply?<sup>161</sup> It is clear that Tertullian is quite comfortable turning classical rhetoric to Christian uses. In that respect he is near the beginning of a long and honorable tradition of Christian writers. Tertullian has clearly received thorough training in rhetoric, as would many intellectuals in North Africa up through the time of Augustine. The fact that he uses the tools he knows is not surprising. Use of them must have been almost second nature to him. His reliance on familiar tools is not sufficient to prove that, in himself, he reconciled classical culture and Christianity.

The key issue in such a reconciliation would have been the issue of tolerating the worship of multiple gods, which was the pattern in the ancient world, and is what is meant by “syncretism”. This idea was deeply engrained in classical civilization, since it had been present since Alexander. The assumption by the pagans that syncretism was a good thing is the reason why the judges and martyrs-to-be in the martyr stories from the second and third centuries seem to be speaking separate languages. The judges never understand why it is worth dying to avoid making symbolic gesture. The martyrs-to-be do not understand how anyone could prefer life with idolatry over death. Syncretism is a concept that would have looked like “idolatry” to Tertullian.

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<sup>161</sup> Barnes, p. 210 and *De pallio* 6:4.

Therefore, the unresolved conflict with syncretism disproves Barnes' assertion that there was a reconciliation in Tertullian between Christianity and classical culture. It is certain, however, that Tertullian used his pagan education to further the cause of the Church. Whether he understood what was happening or not, he is one of the major forces that at least converted, if not subverted, classical rhetoric to the use of Christianity.

### **Ideas for Further Research**

This project began when the author realized that Barnes' analysis of the rhetorical structure of *De anima* constituted the only such analysis of this important example of classical oratory. The summary analysis presented in this paper needs to be refined and extended beyond the constraints of a term paper.

There is another treatise of Tertullian that needs to be put through the same kind of analysis: the *Apologeticum*. Tertullian's treatise deals with the questions of acceptance and syncretism outlined in this paper. The *Apologeticum* is a persuasive treatise addressed to a pagan audience. A cursory analysis of the work shows the following rhetorical structure:

<b>Chapters 1-3</b>	<i>exordium and narratio</i>
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<i>propositio</i> <sup>162</sup>
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<i>partitio</i>
<b>Chapters 5-49</b>	<i>confirmatio</i>
<b>Chapter 50</b>	<i>peroratio</i>

<sup>162</sup> The *propositio* is "iam de causa innocentiae consistam, nec tantum refutabo quae nobis obiciuntur, sed etiam in ipsos retorquebo, qui obiciunt, ut ex hoc quoque sciant homines in Christianis non esse quae in se nesciunt esse, simul uti erubescant accusantes." ["I shall take a firm stand on the cause of our blamelessness. Not only will I refute what is charged to us, but I will also turn the charges back against those making the charges, so that from this men may know that Christians do not have those sins which their accusers have, unknowing, in themselves, so that they may blush while they accuse us.] *CCL, Apologeticum*, 4:1.

A great deal of space in *Apologeticum* is devoted to an explanation of why Christians reject pagan gods<sup>163</sup>. In addition, Tertullian justifies Christian refusal to sacrifice even on behalf of the emperor<sup>164</sup> in *Apologeticum*. Throughout this work Tertullian assumes that worshipping anyone except the Christian God is idolatrous.<sup>165</sup> Both parts of his argument constitute reasoned rejections of religious syncretism.

It is certainly difficult to imagine a man so convinced in his beliefs as Tertullian reconciling Christianity with any other culture, either consciously or unconsciously. However, it might be possible to argue that Tertullian, though he would not worship any god but the Christian God, would have been willing to tolerate other religions. Such toleration is what he is arguing for, on behalf of Christians, in the *Apologeticum*. Would he have been willing to extend that toleration to others? The answer may well be “no”, but it is a question worth exploring.

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<sup>163</sup> *CCL, Apologeticum*, Chapters 10-16.

<sup>164</sup> *CCL, Apologeticum*, Chapters 24f.

<sup>165</sup> For example, *CCL, Apologeticum* Chapters 29-30.

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