3

Simplicity and Power

Tertullian of Carthage and Ritual Knowing

With Tertullian, we find another complex account of catechetical knowledge, one both idiosyncratic and yet recognizable within the scope of late second-century Christianity. Though our knowledge of Tertullian's catechesis, like Irenaeus's, must remain circumspect, we have at least three texts – *De baptismo*, *De spectaculis*, and *De paenitentia* – in which he mentions catechumens or those "approaching baptism" as members of his audience. *De oratione*, too, has also been included among possibly catechetical texts.[1] Finally, Tertullian is, like Irenaeus, a key witness to the Rule of Faith in early Christianity, and here again we find suggestive ways in which the Rule might have functioned in catechetical settings.

In observing these texts, one is struck by the importance that ritual plays in Tertullian's approach to shaping knowledge. When addressing catechumens and the newly baptized, Tertullian highlights the simplicity of material rituals and practices as commensurate with the kind of divine power that engenders spiritual knowledge. While pagan and heretical rites distract and obscure, participation in orthodox Christian rituals

[1] Unlike, say, Irenaeus's *Demonstratio*, there is much less scholarly discussion on the extent to which Tertullian's writings should be considered catechetical. Ernest Evans places *bapt.* and *or.* in a distinct group from Tertullian's main writings, which he categorizes as apologetic, disciplinary, and theological writings. Evans, *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism* (London: SPCK, 1964), xi. Robert Simpson and David Clark group *or.*, *bapt.*, and *paen.* as a distinct body of texts related to catechetical instruction. Simpson, *The Interpretation of Prayer in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 20–21; Clark, *The Lord's Prayer: Origins and Early Interpretation* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 180. The least likely candidate is *De oratione*, which I will discuss in more detail below. Regardless, we are dealing with a rather fluid method of organization.

brings cognitive and spiritual illumination and union with God. In Tertullian's catechetical writings, we learn not only about theological polemics but also about the correlations between epistemology and pedagogy taking place in a ritual initiation. Tertullian offers catechumens instruction on the meaning of participation in core rituals, arguing that divine power is made especially manifest through the simple rituals and moral purity attendant in orthodox Christian baptism.[2]

This chapter will begin by reconstructing what we can of the North African catechumenate in Tertullian's period. Next, it will peruse *De spectaculis*, *De baptismo*, and *De oratione* to tease out Tertullian's epistemology of ritual simplicity, with an excursus on the important issue of delaying baptism. Finally, I analyze two of Tertullian's appeals to the Rule of Faith to explore the connections between knowledge and ritual participation. Although Tertullian's catechesis is multi-faceted and motivated by several overlapping concerns, a guiding thread is to teach catechumens that the simple practices of Christian ritual can become trustworthy pathways to divine knowledge.

THE CATECHUMENATE IN TERTULLIAN'S NORTH AFRICA

While sources are too limited to construct an indubitable picture of the catechumenate in North Africa prior to Constantine, at least based solely on North African sources,[3] we can surmise that some formalized structure existed by the end of the second century, and certainly by the mid third century.[4] Though evidence is sketchier here than for later periods, we can conclude that catechesis was a visible practice by this time. In Tertullian's writing, as well as the *Passio Perpetuae*, we find the Greek term *catechumenus* used in a technical sense to designate those affiliated with Christianity but distinct from the baptized.[5] Tertullian describes members in this class as *audientes* (*paen.* 6.15, 17), *nouitioli* (*paen.* 6.1), *tirocinia* (*paen.* 6.14), and, more generally, those who are "under instruction"

[2] For a more comprehensive account of divine power in Tertullian's writings, see Roy Kearsley, *Tertullian's Theology of Divine Power* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1998).

[3] As scholarship now highlights more frequently the regional diversity of initiation before the fourth century, it is not as easy to assume that ritual practices outlined, say, in the *Traditio apostolica* were representative of North Africa.

[4] For a good overview of the North African rites in Tertullian's period, see J. Patout Burns, Jr. and Robin M. Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa: The Development of its Practices and Beliefs* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 166–76.

[5] Tertullian, *praescr.* 41.2 (CCSL 1:221); *cor.* 2.1 (CCSL 2:1041).

(*formantur*; *bapt.* 1.1) or "proceeding" to faith/God (*idol.* 24; *spect.* 1.1).[6] The *Passio* refers to those arrested as "young catechumens" (*adolescentes catechumeni*) with a clear sense that this term located them within the Christian community though distinct from the baptized.[7] It is unclear whether Tertullian himself considered catechumens fully Christian.[8] We should not suppose that a strict *disciplina arcani* was in place during his time, with clear regulations, for example, about whether teaching the Lord's Prayer, eucharist, or baptism should be withheld from the non-baptized. Tertullian both appears to teach non-baptized persons about what should be "inner" Christian doctrine, even as he criticizes heretics for indiscriminately allowing nonbelievers access to intra-Christian rituals.[9] Tertullian, famously, is an exceedingly difficult writer to pin down; he can make what appears to be contradictory statements depending on his audience and rhetorical purposes.

Teaching, it seems, could be administered by either ordained or lay persons and took place probably in homes during the Agape meal. Saturus, the teacher of Perpetua and her friends, was likely a lay person.[10] Tertullian's own ecclesiastical status is, it should be noted, a source of no little puzzlement. Jerome's comment that he was a presbyter is mostly rejected; Tertullian himself never claims as much.[11] He was perhaps one of the *seniores laici*, a somewhat unique status among North African churches – a kind of lay elder, not ordained but tasked with either patronal or disciplinary duties, including teaching.[12] If a lay member,

[6] Tertullian, *paen.* 6.1, 15, 17 (CCSL 1:329, 331); *bapt.* 1.1 (CCSL 1:277); *idol.* 24.3 (CCSL 2:1124); *spect* 1.1 (CCSL 1:227).

[7] *Pass.* 2.1 (ed. and trans. Thomas Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012], 105).

[8] See Éric Rebillard, *Christians and Their Many Identities in Late Antiquity, North Africa, 200–450 CE* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 11.

[9] Tertullian, *praescr.* 41.2; *cor.* 2.1.

[10] *Pass.* 4.5 says of Saturus that "he himself taught us" (*ipse nos aedificauerat*) (Heffernan, *Passion of Perpetua*, 105).

[11] Jerome, *uir.* 53. Cf. Rebillard, who accepts Jerome's testimony that he was a presbyter. Rebillard, *Christians and Their Many Identities*, 10.

[12] For early references to *seniores*, though with unspecific descriptions, see Tertullian, *apol.* 39.5; *Passio* 12.4. For the view of their evolution from synagogal elders, see Pier Giovanni Caron, "Les seniores laici de l'Eglise africaine," *Revue internationale des droits de l'antiquité* 6 (1951): 7–22; W. H. C. Frend, "The *Seniores Laici* and the Origins of the Church in North Africa," *JTS* 12 (1961): 280–4. For their emergence in relation to patronal systems, see Brent Shaw, "The Elders of Christian Africa," in *Mélanges offerts à R. P. Etienne Gareau, Numéro spéciale de cahiers des études anciennes* (Ottawa: Éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1982), 208–26; Alistair Stewart-Sykes, "Ordination Rites and Patronage Systems in Third-Century Africa," *VC* 56, no. 2 (2002): 115–30.

then perhaps, like Justin Martyr but in an African context, he operated as a revered teacher within a larger ecclesial community. In terms of the setting for such teaching, Timothy Barnes has proposed the "love feast" described in *Apologeticum* 39, where Tertullian depicts a temperate meal, the reading of sacred texts, and times for exhortation and admonition.[13]

No Roman North African writings in the pre-Constantinian era mention a specific length of time a person was to remain a catechumen. The common assumption of a three-year catechumenate comes only from sources elsewhere – namely, the *Traditio apostolica*, the canons of the Council of Elvira, and two potential but oblique references in Clement and Origen of Alexandria.[14] Tertullian argued against the hasty reception of baptism, of course, though the host of biblical arguments he is compelled to refute suggest that it was a contested practice among Christians.[15] Megan Devore has argued that the catechumens described in the *Passio Perpetuae* were not "new converts" but well-taught and committed disciples capable of making articulate declarations of the faith.[16] Nevertheless, there are no clear prescriptions or examples by which to ascertain the average duration of the North African catechumenate.

When we consider the rites of initiation, we have slightly better evidence. Our best aids are two passages from Tertullian, *De baptismo* 20 and *De corona* 3, along with a few other scattered references.[17] Tertullian mentions Easter as the preferred date for baptism,[18] and he

Against the view that they were clergy, see David Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 139–41; William Tabernee, "Perpetua, Montanism and Christianity Ministry in Carthage 203 CE," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 32, no. 4 (2005): 421–41 (at 435–38).

[13] Tertullian, *apol.* 39.2–4, 16–18. Timothy David Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 117. Other references to gatherings for teaching and reading Scripture might include *praescr.* 36.1 and *an.* 9.4. For references to morning and evening gatherings in Tertullian's writings, see Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*, 234–46.

[14] See *TA* 17.1; Council of Elvira, canon §4; Clement of Alexandria, *strom.* 2.95–96; Origen, *Comm. Io.* 6.144–45.

[15] Tertullian, *bapt.* 18.1–6.

[16] Megan DeVore, "*Catechumeni*, Not 'New Converts': Revisiting the *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*," *SP* 91 (2017): 237–47.

[17] Tertullian, *bapt.* 20.1; Tertullian, *cor.* 3.2–3.

[18] Tertullian, *bapt.* 18.1. See Maxwell Johnson, "Tertullian's '*Diem Baptismo Sollemniorem*' Revisited: A Tentative Proposal," in *Studia Liturgica Diversa: Essays in Honor of Paul F. Bradshaw*, ed. Maxwell Johnson and L. Edward Phillips (Portland: Pastoral Press, 2004), 31–43.

describes a multi-stage process including the renunciation of Satan (one of the earliest records of this practice),[19] a threefold profession of faith in the waters,[20] a post-baptismal anointing and benediction,[21] reception of the eucharist (which included milk and honey),[22] and a prayer among the faithful.[23] Evidence from the *Passio* is more circumspect, but some scholars have noticed parallels between its literary account of martyrdom and baptismal initiation.[24] Perpetua's invocation of Christ against Satan models the renunciation of Satan in baptism, while her exchanges with Saturus echo certain liturgical formulas.[25] Her reception of "cheese" perhaps alludes to eucharistic participation.[26] It is not clear to what extent the Lord's Prayer was part of initiation at this point (as it would be, say, in Augustine's time). However, it has been suggested that a baptismal setting for the Lord's Prayer was emerging and that Tertullian's treatise on the Lord's Prayer perhaps originated here.[27]

Many aspects of the early North African catechumenate remain uncertain. We will see certain developments by Cyprian's bishopric in the next generation (discussed in more detail in Chapter 5), especially a growing focus on the role of the bishop in administering baptism. With Tertullian, though, our reconstruction must remain inconclusive: We can affirm that there was such a teaching practice in place, and that there was a growing need to clarify the rules and teachings appropriate for pre-baptismal candidates. In what remains, I will try to articulate Tertullian's ritual-based epistemology of simplicity to understand this key moment in the development of early Christian catechesis.

[19] Tertullian, *cor.* 3.2; *spect.* 4.1.
[20] Tertullian, *cor.* 3.3; *bapt.* 6.2; *spect.* 4.1.
[21] Tertullian, *res.* 8.3.
[22] Tertullian, *cor.* 3.3.
[23] Tertullian, *bapt.* 20.5.
[24] Victor Saxer, *Les rites de l'initiation chrétienne du IIe au VIe siècle. Esquisse historique et signification d'après leurs principaux témoins* (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'alto Medioevo, 1988), 132–37; Elizabeth Klein, "Perpetua, Cheese, and Martyrdom as Public Liturgy in the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*," *JECS* 28, no. 1 (2020): 175–202 (at 182–87). Klein is here following Anne Jensen, *God's Self-Confident Daughters: Early Christianity and the Liberation of Women*, trans. O. C. Dean (Louisville: John Knox, 1996), 102–8.
[25] Jensen, *God's Self-Confident Daughters*, 102–3.
[26] Klein, "Perpetua, Cheese, and Martyrdom," 187–93.
[27] I discuss this issue below in the section, "Power and Prayer: Simplicity of Speech and Moral Virtue in *De oratione*."

SIMPLICITY AND THE DOCTRINE OF CREATION IN *DE SPECTACULIS*

De spectaculis was one of Tertullian's earliest treatises, and it was addressed to both catechumens and the newly baptized.[28] In it, Tertullian's main task is to persuade Christians that they should avoid participation in the shows, or "spectacles" – a major contested issue in early Christianity.[29] For our purposes, the most interesting aspect of this text is how Tertullian addresses the issue of participation in the spectacles as it relates to knowledge of God. Within his argument, Tertullian charts a path by which Christians hold together commitments both to the goodness of creation and to the obfuscation of rituals by demonic powers. Tertullian stresses that Christian truth is rendered visible through Christian rites, which are manifest and simple – not hidden in secrecy – and yet the perception of the truth found in the rituals is prone to distortion by demons.[30] *De spectaculis* thus offers catechumens a primer on how to understand God amid the conditions of the created world, which is both good but prone to distortion. As Christians participate in the rituals of the church, they are led to a proper understanding of divine truth and guided in a proper mode of action in the world.

In the *exordium*, Tertullian announces that he will respond to two kinds of arguments – one pagan and one Christian.[31] It is the former that likely would have held more sway among catechumens, and so I will focus on those arguments here. Pagans might argue, Tertullian writes, that the spectacles are merely bodily or sensory activities – not religious ones. They are pleasures of the eyes and ears but not the mind. Similarly,

[28] Tertullian, *spect.* 1.1 (CCSL 1:227; FC 40:47). Those who are approaching God in baptism (*qui cum maxime ad Deum acceditis*) are invited to learn (*cogniscate*) what their baptismal oaths will require, whereas the faithful present are called upon to relearn it (*recongiscate*). As Sider notes – against the view that it was an ad hoc polemical piece – *De spectaculis* represents "an opportunity for the careful elaboration of a theology appropriate to the baptismal setting." Robert D. Sider, "Tertullian, *On the Shows*: An Analysis," *JTS* 29, no. 2 (1978): 339–65 (at 340). On the dating of this treatise, see Barnes, *Tertullian*, 54–55, 325.

[29] Rebillard, *Christians and Their Many Identities*, 20–23.

[30] As Robert Sider describes the theological core of this work: "Truth will not appear in any mystical fashion in the *De spectaculis*. It will refer to an order of reality whose integrity is to be realized through obedience to the precepts of its Lord." Sider, "Tertullian, *On the Shows*," 345.

[31] Tertullian, *spect.* 1.3. In *spect.* 3.1, Tertullian says he will turn from addressing pagan to Christian arguments in favor of attending the shows, and so presumably this, too, is a non-Christian argument.

pagans might argue that attending the spectacles was acceptable if one continued to fear God. Finally, they could argue that if all things were created by a good God, as Christians teach, participation in the shows should not be illegitimate since these activities all involve created goods – the horse, the lion, the human body, the melodious voice. There is, therefore, no reason that Christians should oppose the spectacles.[32] Tertullian responds to these arguments by explicating the key differences between Christian and non-Christian knowledge, the fulcrum of which is baptism. Baptismal knowledge enables Christians to perceive God more clearly, which is also related to their better understanding of the origins and purposes of creation.

Tertullian makes clear that pagan practices like the spectacles do not indict the goodness of God or his creation. In fact, by discerning patterns in nature, even non-Christians can come to the knowledge that there is, for instance, only one God who is creator of all, which implies that creation is fundamentally good. However, there is a difference, explains Tertullian, between knowing God by laws of nature and knowing God by the more intimate knowledge afforded to Christians who know God as children through baptism.[33] Because of the more distant form of knowing God by laws of nature, pagans are ignorant of creation's proper uses and the ways that demonic forces have perverted them. Christians, on the other hand, are privy to a kind of familial knowledge that comes through the adopted sonship of baptism. Such knowledge assumes the knowledge of God by laws of nature but also goes beyond them. In particular, the familial knowledge afforded in baptism allows Christians to know God as a father rather than only as a creator. Moreover, knowing God as father also affords Christians the knowledge of creation's purposes and their susceptibility to demonic misuse. Through this kind of knowledge, Christians can maintain both the integral goodness of God's creation while also affirming the demonic deception that generated the spectacles in the first place.

Tertullian's rationale for avoiding the shows bears closely upon a theological epistemology attached to the ritual of baptism. Tertullian grounds his rejection of the shows by demonstrating how ritual knowledge instills true knowledge of God, who can be glimpsed but not fully

[32] Tertullian, *spect.* 2.1 (CCSL 1:228; FC 40:49, alt.): igitur neque alienum uideri posse neque inimicum deo quod de conditione constet ipsius, neque cultoribus dei deputandum, quod ei non sit inimicum, quia nec alienum.

[33] Tertullian, *spect.* 2.5.

grasped through natural laws but who requires baptism to be known more intimately. In view of the non-baptized members of Tertullian's audience in this text, we can observe the way he takes this opportunity to teach them not only about the shows but also about the kind of knowledge attained through baptism.

IN PRAISE OF WATER: SIMPLICITY AND POWER IN *DE BAPTISMO*

De baptismo provides another example of Tertullian's ritual epistemology in catechesis.[34] While this work has attracted interest for understanding early Christian baptism, it also holds promise for analyzing Tertullian's approach to knowledge. Against certain heretical groups that would reject the use of water in baptism, Tertullian provides a panegyric on water that articulates ordinary rituals as fitting and powerful means for expressing divine power.

Like *De spectaculis*, the addressees of *De baptismo* include but are not limited to baptismal candidates.[35] Tertullian's point of departure is the teaching of a female leader of the "Cainite heresy,"[36] whose rejection of water baptisms have, according to Tertullian, led many Christians astray. We know very little about the Cainites apart from polemical sources.[37]

[34] Some of the following section appears in Alex Fogleman, "Tertullian as Catechist: The Example of *De baptismo*," *SP* 126 (2021): 279–88.

[35] Tertullian, *bapt.* 1.1 (CCSL 1:277; Evans, *Homily on Baptism*, 4–5): instruens tam eos qui cum maxime formantur quam et illos qui simpliciter credidisse contenti, non exploratis rationibus traditionum temptabilem fidem per imperitiam portant. Another possible reference to a pre-baptismal context recurs at *bapt.* 20, where Tertullian addresses those who are "progressing to baptism" about how they are to pray. Tertullian, *bapt.* 20, 1, 5 (CCSL 1:294, 295; Evans, *Homily on Baptism*, 40–1): Ingressuros baptismum orationibus crebris, ieiuniis et geniculationibus et peruigiliis orare oportet [et] cum confessione omnium retro delictorum … Igitur benedicti, quos gratia dei expectat, cum de illo sanctissimo lauacro noui natalis ascenditis et primas manus apud matrem cum fratribus aperitis, petite de patre, petite de domino, peculia gratiae, distributiones charismatum subiacere.

[36] The only surviving manuscript, from Clairvaux in the twelfth century (now at Troyes), has *caina haeresi*. The first printed edition (in 1545) has *Gaiana*.

[37] In addition to Tertullian, the main sources are Irenaeus, *haer.* 1.31; Hippolytus, *ref.* 8.20; Ps.-Tertullian, *adu. omn. haer.* 2; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 38; and Jerome, *ep.* 69.1. According to Irenaeus and Epiphanius, the Cainites believed that the higher power sired Cain, who then became, along with Esau, the Sodomites, and finally Judas, an enemy of the world's creator – all of whom escaped demise though their transposition into the higher aeons via gnosis of the higher power. In *praescr.* 33, Tertullian links them with the Nicolaitans, a libertine party condemned in the Book of Revelation for eating food sacrificed to idols

While, as we saw in Chapter 1, reflection on the interplay between material symbols and spiritual potency in baptism were contested issues in this period, few Christian groups actually rejected such rites altogether. The Cainites, however, were a possible exception. In *De baptismo*, Tertullian focuses on their rejection of water baptism and the underlying view of the created world that this rejection entailed. He is at pains to show how the rejection of water undermined a view of creation in which Christianity's simple ritual of baptism accentuated God's simplicity and power.[38]

Tertullian attacks the Cainite teaching by focusing on the premise that water rituals are too ordinary or lowly to carry spiritual power. A simple rite like water baptism seems too quotidian to convey the extraordinary reality of eternal life. On the contrary, Tertullian argues, it is precisely water's simplicity that accentuates God's power most supremely: "There is indeed nothing that so strengthens human minds as the simplicity of God's works as they appear in action, compared with the magnificence promised in their effects."[39] In the case of baptism, what occurs in the simplicity of baptism is nothing short of extraordinary:

> With such complete simplicity, without pomp, without any unusual equipment, and (not least) without anything to pay, a man is sent down into the water, is washed to the accompaniment of a few words, and comes up little or no cleaner than he was, [yet] his attainment to eternity is regarded as beyond belief.[40]

For Tertullian, it is precisely the simplicity of the ritual that most highlights God's power. The use of pompous and expensive rituals facilitates belief only through facade – emphasizing the ritual elements themselves

and committing fornication (Rev. 2:6, 15). Irenaeus makes a similar conjecture in *haer.* 1.26.3. Other polemical sources suggest a variety of broadly gnostic associations – Ophitic, Naassene, or Carpocratian.

[38] On the theme of power and simplicity in this treatise, see the brief remarks in Eric Osborn, *Tertullian: First Theologian of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2–4, and the more developed account in Øyvind Norderval, "Simplicity and Power: Tertullian's *De Baptismo*," in *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*, ed. David Hellholm et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 2:947–72.

[39] Tertullian, *bapt.* 2.1 (CCSL 1:277; Evans, *Homily on Baptism*, 5–6, alt.): Nihil adeo est quod obduret mentes hominum quam simplicitas diuinorum operum quae in actu uidetur, et magnificentia quae in effectu repromittitur.

[40] Tertullian, *bapt.* 2.1 (CCSL 1:277; Evans, *Homily on Baptism*, 5–6, alt.): et hinc quoque, quoniam tanta simplicitate, sine pompa sine apparatu nouo aliquo, denique sine sumptu, homo in aqua demissus et inter pauca uerba tinctus non multo uel nihilo mundior resurgit, eo incredibilis existimatur consecutio aeternitatis.

rather than the divine *dynamis*. The "solemn and secret rites" of pagan rituals, Tertullian explains, builds "credence and prestige by pretentious magnificence and by the fees that are charged," while in reality they "deny to God his characteristic properties of simplicity and power."[41] The humble means of water in orthodox baptism, meanwhile, displays divine power in an altogether more majestic way, cultivating faith and wonder (*admiratio*).[42] Drawing on the Pauline principle that God uses foolish things to confound the wise (1 Cor. 1:27) and the axiom that a juxtaposition of opposites highlights an entity's power (*uirtus*), Tertullian contends that the simple creature, water, is a most fitting display for God's power to elicit faith.[43] For Tertullian, nothing so strengthens the human mind like observing God's mighty works amid the simplicity of these rituals.

Tertullian expounds upon the virtues of water based on its antiquity, honor, and achievement. Water's great antiquity and role in the processes of creation merit it praise: Even before the world was formed, God's Spirit chose water upon which to rest. While the other elements existed in unformed chaos, water remained – "always perfect, joyous, simple, of its own nature pure, laid down [as] a worthy carriage for God to move upon."[44] Water was involved in the separation of earth and heaven and the creation of other creatures. After the creation of matter, water was needed to moisten it and render it malleable. Its originally generative function thus ought to attune Christians to its regenerative significance. At this point, Tertullian wonders whether he has not reverted from a treatise on baptism to a "panegyric on water":[45]

[41] Tertullian, *bapt.* 2.2 (CCSL 1:277; Evans, *Homily on Baptism*, 4–7): Sollemnia uel arcana de suggestu et apparatu deque sumptu fidem et auctoritatem sibi extruunt. Pro misera incredulitas, quae denegas deo proprietates suas, simplicitatem et potestatem.

[42] Tertullian, *bapt.* 2.2 (CCSL 1:277–78; Evans, *Homily on Baptism*, 6–7): quia mirandum est, idcirco non creditur? atquin eo magis credendum est: qualia enim decet esse opera diuina nisi super omnem admirationem?

[43] Tertullian, *bapt.* 2.3 (CCSL 1:278; Evans, *Homily on Baptism*, 6–7): et sit plane ut putas: satis ad utrumque diuina pronuntiatio praecucurrit: stulta mundi elegit deus ut confundat sapientiam eius: et, quae difficilia penes homines facilia penes deum. Nam si deus et sapiens et potens, quod etiam praetereuntes eum non negant, merito in aduersis sapientiae potentiaeque, id est in stultitia et impossibilitate, materias operationis suae instituit: quoniam uirtus omnis ex his causam accipit a quibus prouocatur.

[44] Tertullian, *bapt.* 3.2 (CCSL 1:278; Evans, *Homily on Baptism*, 8–9): solus liquor, semper materia laeta simplex, de suo pura, dignum uectaculum deo subiciebat.

[45] On the use of classical rhetoric in this passage, see Robert Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric and the Art of Tertullian* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 125; Mark LeTourneau,

If I go on to tell of all or most of the things I could relate concerning the authority (*auctoritate*) of this element, the greatness of its power (*uis*) or its grace, with all the devices, all the functions, all the equipment with which it supplies the world, I fear I should seem to have composed a panegyric (*laudes*) on water instead of a rationale for baptism. Even so, I should be explaining more fully that there is no room for doubt whether God has brought into service in his very own sacraments that same material that he has had at his disposal in all his acts and works, and whether this which guides earthly life makes provision for heavenly things also.[46]

Tertullian admits that he is praising the merits of water as much as providing a logic of baptism. This rhetoric, however, is not unrelated to the baptismal rite, precisely as it attempts to garner trust among his hearers that the simple ritual and the material creatures employed can offer true knowledge of God. He wants to instill confidence in these rituals as trustworthy means by which God offers his saving power. The same material disposed in the world's creation is the same material by which the world is recreated.

If Tertullian has, by his own admission, strayed from a consideration of baptism per se, it is because he has found it important to show how the simple ritual of baptism unlocks certain capacities of human knowing. Through participation in the ritual of water baptism, properly understood, Christians gain true transforming knowledge of God.

EXCURSUS: DELAY OF BAPTISM AS CHRISTIAN PAIDEIA

An important issue for understanding the ritual aspects of knowledge in Tertullian's setting concerns his well-known appeals for delaying baptism, especially in *De baptismo* 18 and *De paenitentia* 6. In these passages, Tertullian argues that Christians should only receive baptism once they have understood the meaning of Christ and the gravity of sin. This argument has sometimes been offered as evidence of a fundamental fault line underlying pre- and post-Constantinian catechesis. I propose, however, seeing Tertullian's calls for baptismal delay within the scope of his

"General and Special Topics in the *De baptismo* of Tertullian," *Rhetorica* 5 (1987): 87–105.

[46] Tertullian, *bapt.* 3.6 (CCSL 1:279; Evans, *Homily on Baptism*, 8–9): Si exinde uniuersa uel plura prosequar quae de elementi istius auctoritate commemorem – quanta uis eius aut gratia, quot ingenia quot officia quantum instrumenti mundo ferat – uereor ne laudes aquae potius quam baptismi rationes uidear congregasse, licet eo plenius docerem non esse dubitandum si materiam quam in omnibus rebus et operibus suis deus disposuit, etiam in sacramentis propriis parere fecit, si quae uitam ter[re]nam gubernat etiam caelestia procurat.

apologetic purposes, comparable to the arguments he makes elsewhere in which he contrasts orthodox Christian churches as philosophical communities espousing discipline and piety while "heretical" Christians are inchoate and indiscriminate in their structure. In this way, Tertullian's rationale for delaying baptism might thus be seen as part of a larger apologetic effort to present Christianity as a form of Christian *paideia*, a mode of learning that initiated new Christians into membership through the slow acquisition of virtue.[47]

In *De baptismo* 18, the argument for delaying baptism comes after several refutations of two scriptural passages that would seem to warrant a quicker administration of baptism – a somewhat figural reading of a text from Luke's Gospel, "Give to everyone that asks of you" (Luke 6:30), and the example of the Ethiopian Eunuch from Acts 8. In response, Tertullian argues that "deferment of baptism is more profitable, in accordance with each person's character and disposition, and even age, especially regarding children."[48] So, he continues,

> 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. ... All who understand what a burden (*pondus*) baptism is will have more fear of obtaining it than of its postponement.[49]

In this passage, Tertullian's pedagogical emphasis is primarily on the learner's intellectual and moral formation prior to baptism. New Christians need the proper character and cognitive understanding of key tenets of the faith. They need to obtain a proper knowledge of Christ and a sense of the seriousness of sin after baptism to understand what they receive at baptism. A lengthy process of time is thus warranted.

[47] Despite long-standing caricatures of Tertullian as the archetype of Christian fideism who opposed Athens to Jerusalem, it has become increasingly clear that his critiques of ancient wisdom were highly rhetorical and that he in fact knew and utilized non-Christian classical sources extensively. See Timothy Barnes, "Tertullian as Antiquarian," *SP* 14 (1971): 3–20; Jean-Claude Fredouille, *Tertullien et la conversion de la culture antique* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1972); H. Steiner, *Das Verhältnis Tertullians zur antiken Paideia* (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1989); Peter Gemeinhardt, *Das lateinische Christentum und die antike pagane Bildung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 61–81.

[48] Tertullian, *bapt.* 18.4–6 (CCSL 1:293; Evans, *Homily on Baptism*, 38–41): itaque pro cuiusque personae condicione ac dispositione, etiam aetate cunctatio baptismi utilior est, praecipue tamen circa paruulos.

[49] Tertullian, *bapt.* 18.4–6 (CCSL 1:293; Evans, *Homily on Baptism*, 38–41): Veniant ergo, dum adolescunt, dum discunt, dum quo ueniant docentur: fiant Christiani cum Christum nosse potuerint. quid festinat innocens aetas ad remissionem peccatorum? ... Si qui pondus intellegant baptismi magis timebunt consecutionem quam dilationem.

A similar emphasis appears in *De paenitentia* 6, though it is perhaps slightly more focused on moral and affective matters. Tertullian argues that delaying baptism cultivates an appropriate disposition toward God, guarding against a presumption that would view the catechumenate as an "interlude for sinning, rather than for learning not to sin."[50] People who use the catechumenate like this are like those who demand a service without payment, as if baptism obligated God to grant remission of sins by necessity.[51] Delaying baptism, however, instills a posture of humility before God:

> He who desires [baptism], honors it; he who receives it presumptuously, despises it. ... Presumption is the part of rash irreverence. It puffs up the petitioner and contemns the donor; thus it is sometimes disappointed, since it promises itself something which is not yet its due and so always offends the one who is expected to grant it.[52]

Without overplaying the difference between these two passages, the emphasis here seems slightly more on the affective dimensions of delaying baptism; delay serves to facilitate a disposition of piety and reverence for Christian rituals. At the same time, this rhetoric emphasizes purification: "We are not baptized so that we may cease committing sin but because we have ceased, since we are already clean of heart."[53] With slightly different emphases, both passages share a similar logic: Emphasizing the delay of baptism counters the presumption that the rite's apparent simplicity justifies an indifference toward the ontological change effected through divine power. Appearances to the contrary, Christian baptism entails a profound change in being.

The apologetic character of these arguments comes to light when we place them alongside Tertullian's catalog of heretical practices in *De praescriptione haereticorum* 41 and *Aduersus Valentinianos* 1. In the former, Tertullian offers his famous portrayal of heresy as ecclesiastical chaos – lacking *grauitas*, *auctoritas*, and *disciplina*:

[50] Tertullian, *paen.* 6.3 (CCSL 1:329; ACW 28:24): commeatum sibi faciunt delinquendi, quam eruditionem non deliquendi.

[51] Tertullian, *paen.* 6.3.

[52] Tertullian, *paen.* 6.21–24 (CCSL 1:332; ACW 28:27): Qui enim optat, honorat; qui praesumit, superbit ... Praesumptio inuerecundiae portio est: inflat petitorem, despicit datorem; itaque decipit nonnumquam. Ante enim quam debeatur repromittit, quo semper is qui est praestaturus offenditur.

[53] Tertullian, *paen.* 6.17 (CCSL 1:331; ACW 28:26): Non ideo abluiumur ut delinquere desinamus sed quia desiimus, quoniam iam corde loti sumus.

One cannot tell who is a catechumen and who is baptized. They come in together, listen together, pray together. Even if any of the heathen arrive, they are quite willing to cast that which is holy to the dogs and their pearls (false ones!) before swine. The destruction of discipline is to them simplicity, and our attention to it they call affectation .... Their catechumens are perfect before they are fully instructed.... Their ordinations are hasty, irresponsible and unstable .... So one man is bishop today, another tomorrow. The deacon of today is tomorrow's reader, the priest of today is tomorrow a layman. For they impose priestly functions even upon laymen.[54]

Especially of interest here is Tertullian's claim that "catechumens are perfect before they are fully instructed" (*ante sunt perfecti catechumeni quam edocti*). The heretics, he alleges, do not take the time to teach catechumens but consider them as already having achieved knowledge, presumably through some more immediate process of spiritual enlightenment.

This portrait – polemical as it is – may seem at odds with his equally polemical characterization of Valentinian initiation. But the Valentinian's lengthy initiation process, he argues, is equally contemptible, for it too betrays a rejection of classical learning. The Valentinians are only attractive to the uninitiated because they use tricks of concealment and mystery to delude initiates.[55] He compares Valentinian rituals to the Eleusinian mysteries, which likewise prey on the gullible and weak.[56] Valentinian

[54] Tertullian, *praescr.* 41.1–8 (CCSL 1:221; trans. S. L. Greenslade, *Early Latin Theology: Selections from Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, and Jerome* [London: SCM Press, 1956], 61–62): Non omittam ipsius etiam conuersationis haereticae descriptionem quam futilis, quam terrena, quam humana sit, sine grauitate, sine auctoritate, sine disciplina ut fidei suae congruens. In primis quis catechumenus, quis fidelis incertum est, pariter adeunt, pariter audiunt, pariter orant; etiam ethnici si superuenerint, sanctum canibus et porcis margaritas, licet non ueras, iactabunt. Simplicitatem uolunt esse prostrationem disciplinae cuius penes nos curam lenocinium uocant. Pacem quoque passim cum omnibus miscent. Nihil enim interest illis, licet diuersa tractantibus, dum ad unius ueritatis expugnationem conspirent. Omnes tument, omnes scientiam pollicentur. Ante sunt perfecti catechumeni quam edocti. Ipsae mulieres haereticae, quam procaces! quae audeant docere, contendere, exorcismos agere, curationes repromittere, fortasse an et tingere. Ordinationes eorum temerariae, leues, inconstantes. Nunc neophytos conlocant, nunc saeculo obstrictos, nunc apostatas nostros ut gloria eos obligent quia ueritate non possunt. Nusquam facilius proficitur quam in castris rebellium ubi ipsum esse illic promereri est. Itaque alius hodie episcopus, cras alius; hodie diaconus qui cras lector; hodie presbyter qui cras laicus. Nam et laicis sacerdotalia munera iniungunt.

[55] Tertullian, *Val.* 1.1.

[56] Tertullian, *Val.* 1.1.

initiation, for Tertullian, does not yield true learning but only kindles false desires through secrecy: "They teach initiates for five years in order that they may build their belief (*opinionem*) by a suspending of cognition and in this manner they may seem to exhibit so much greatness as to prepare desire (*cupiditatem*)."[57] Their teaching, in other words, is merely rhetorical – indeed sophistical: "They persuade before they teach."[58] For Tertullian, by contrast, "truth persuades by teaching, it does not teach by persuading."[59] While Valentinians had a lengthy initiation, they did not guide initiates in true wisdom and virtue.

We hardly need to suppose that Tertullian is giving us an objective description of his opponents to appreciate his purposes. Like Irenaeus before him – or indeed like Plotinus after him, in his famous critique of the "Gnostics"[60] – Tertullian presents his opponents as rejecting the educational standards of classical *paideia*. These writers associate the metaphysical duality associated with these groups as part and parcel of a rejection of learning and the patient acquisition of virtue. By presenting his version of the orthodox Christian community as a well-ordered society, by contrast, one that entails a lengthy process of catechetical learning before baptism, Tertullian seeks to distance his Christian community from such groups.

For all of Tertullian's vitriol against pagan knowledge, we find him at key moments drawing on widely shared assumptions about the value of classical learning. For Tertullian, the rhetoric of delaying baptism fits well within the apologetic scope of his presentation of Christianity. It serves to present true Christianity as upholding moral and intellectual virtue, not resorting to mystifying rituals. The goods of learning are not rejected but ordered within a larger vision of knowledge and pedagogy. Catechesis, with its lengthy process of learning, is critical to this task.

[57] Tertullian, *Val.* 1.2 (CCSL 2:753; trans. Mark T. Riley, "Q. S. Fl. Tertulliani: Aduersus Valentinianos" [PhD Diss., Stanford University, 1971], 73, alt.): cum epoptas ante quinquennium instituunt, ut opinionem suspendio cognitionis aedificent atque ita tantam maiestatem exhibere uideantur, quantam praestruxerunt cupiditatem.

[58] Tertullian, *Val.* 1.4 (CCSL 2:753–54; Riley, "Aduersus Valentinianos," 73, alt.): Habent artificium, quo prius persuadeant quam doceant.

[59] Tertullian, *Val.* 1.4 (CCSL 2:753–54; Riley, "Aduersus Valentinianos," 73): Veritas autem docendo persuadet, non suadendo docet.

[60] See Plotinus, *enn.* 2.9.15. For a helpful discussion of Plotinus's arguments, see Dylan Burns, *Apocalypse of the Alien God: Platonism and the Exile of Sethian Gnosticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 42.

POWER AND PRAYER: SIMPLICITY OF SPEECH AND MORAL VIRTUE IN *DE ORATIONE*

We can return now to other potential sources among Tertullian's catechetical corpus. *De oratione* is perhaps a more questionable source for Tertullian's catechesis, though it is not without merit for being included among his catechetical writings. It does not mention catechumens or those progressing to the font as an audience in the way the other treatises surveyed above do.[61] Most peculiarly, if this work emerged in pre-baptismal instruction, it betrays many secrets of Christian practice forbidden by the *disciplina arcani*. Again, though, it is unlikely that such strict rules of secrecy were in effect this early in Christian history.[62] While Tertullian notes, as we just observed in *De praescriptione* 41, that heretics allowed pagans access to prayer, it is not apparent that teaching intra-Christian rites was off-limits when pre-baptismal candidates were present. In addition, several clues in Tertullian's *De baptismo*, along with Cyprian's treatise on the Lord's Prayer, indicate that the Lord's Prayer was becoming part of the baptismal rite in this period, and thus instruction about its meaning and function would be entirely suitable for catechetical instruction.[63] We can cautiously propose, following Alistair

[61] Roy Hammerling, in his comprehensive survey of the Lord's Prayer in the early church, notes that while some scholars think that this text was an address to catechumens, "in fact, the document suggests that its audience was primarily mature members of the church, with an occasional emphasis upon recently baptized believers. The text, therefore, was preached or taught to an audience in which both mature and probably newly baptized members would have been present." Roy Hammerling, *The Lord's Prayer in the Early Church: The Pearl of Great Price* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 26.

[62] William Harmless seems to have changed his mind on this issue between the first and second editions of his book, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*. In the earlier edition (1995), he thought Tertullian's and Cyprian's indulgence of eucharistic doctrine suggested a non-catechetical provenance; in the revised edition (2014), he acknowledges that "it is possible that these treatises first originated as catecheses for catechumens." See William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 287 n169; Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 47 n42.

[63] Tertullian states in *De baptismo* 20 that when the newly baptized first emerge from the water, they should stretch out their hands with their brothers. Cyprian's text provides more evidence: In *Or. dom.* 9–10, he refers to those reborn addressing God as "Father" and says that the "Our Father" is said of those who have been sanctified through the birth of spiritual grace; in *Or. dom.* 17, he says that the will of God is done among those who have been made "heavenly" by being born "of water and the spirit"; in *Or. dom.* 23, he refers to those who have received a "second birth." For these arguments, see Alistair Stewart-Sykes, *Tertullian, Cyprian, and Origen on the Lord's Prayer* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), 22–26. Stewart also depends on Robert Simpson's

Stewart, that while the audience of this text is not specified, "it is entirely reasonable to see these discourses [Tertullian's and Cyprian's treatises on prayer] reflecting the instruction that was given to catechumens . . . at the last stage of their formation."[64]

Like *De spectaculis* and *De baptismo*, *De oratione* considers a key aspect of Christian ritual – namely, the practices of corporate and personal prayer. The practices of prayer, no less than the rejection of the spectacles and Christian baptism, were key aspects of Christian identity in the ancient world.[65] Our attention will once again be drawn to how instruction on Christian ritual – here, the Lord's Prayer – elucidates Tertullian's approach to epistemology. Two features that stand out here are the correlation of divine power manifest through the simple speech of Christian prayer and the framing of prayer as a form of spiritual sacrifice, a corollary of moral virtue that contrasts ostentatious pagan ritual.

Prayer was a contested issue in ancient philosophy. Though prominent in nearly all forms of cultic ritual, many philosophers balked at the incongruity between petitionary prayer and commitments to divine omniscience and providence.[66] Tertullian's reflections show clear engagements with such perspectives. For Tertullian, prayer is a nonnegotiable aspect of biblical Christianity, yet he wants to distance it from pagan practices and align it instead with philosophical impulses that understand prayer as a form of spiritual exercise. Hints of metaphysical reflection also color his reflections on prayer. For him, simple speech and the spiritual

argument that the structural and pedagogical congruences between Tertullian's treatise on prayer and the more clearly catechetical works like *De baptismo* and *De paenitentia* support its being included among catechetical works. Simpson, *Prayer in the Early Church*, 59.

[64] Stewart, *Tertullian, Cyprian, and Origen on the Lord's Prayer*, 23.

[65] Alistair Stewart comments about the way in which the specific practices of prayer in Tertullian's writing reveal a concern for separating Christians from the wider society: Stewart, *Tertullian, Cyprian, and Origen on the Lord's Prayer*, 31. On the image of combat as a central metaphor in Tertullian's writing, see Osborn, *Tertullian*, 150; Michael Joseph Brown, *The Lord's Prayer through North African Eyes: A Window into Early Christianity* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 216–54; Clark, *Lord's Prayer*, 179.

[66] Key reflections on prayer in Hellenistic and late antique philosophy are Epictetus' *Discourses*, Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, Maximus of Tyre's *Fifth Oration on Prayer*, and Porphyry's *Letter to his Wife Marcella*. For a good summary of these issues, see Maria Louise Munkholt Christensen, *Relating Through Prayer: Identity Formation in Early Christianity* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2019), 70–81; Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (London: Penguin, 1986), 116–17.

sacrifice of moral living are all that is needed to address the God who is omnipresent to creation and who does not demand bloody sacrifices. Following Paul, Tertullian understands prayer within the category of spiritual sacrifice (Rom. 12:1). Tertullian's participatory epistemology of ritual simplicity allows him to teach the Lord's Prayer as enabling the Christian's prayer to "ascend to heaven, commending to the Father the things the Son has taught."[67]

Tertullian situates the Lord's Prayer as a gift of heavenly wisdom that both complements and supersedes the prayer of John's disciples (John 11:1). The coming of Christ transforms all that has gone before – it is "the new grace renewing all things from fleshly into spiritual being."[68] A new pattern of prayer is thus required. The Lord's Prayer is both the revelation of "heavenly wisdom" (*caelestem eius sophiam*) and a "summary of the entire gospel" (*breuiarium totius euangelii*).[69] Access to this heavenly wisdom unfolds through participation in the simple speech provided by the prayer's brief phrases. And yet, lest his audience be deceived by the apparent simplicity of the short prayer, Tertullian demonstrates the breadth of divine power contained in the prayer's simple speech, especially by appealing to Jesus's injunctions to pray in secret and without ostentation (Matt. 6:6–8).[70] The Christian prays in secrecy and simplicity, Tertullian explains, because God is omnipresent to creation. The efficacy of prayer owes not to one's spatial location or a multiplicity of words but to the faith of the believer who needs only to trust "him who is everywhere to hear and to see."[71] By grounding the practice of prayer in a doctrine of divine omnipresence, Tertullian provides a rationale for how the simplicity of the Lord's Prayer offers the Christian access to heavenly wisdom.

Alongside Tertullian's high appreciation for simple speech is his insistence on moral virtue. Tertullian especially appeals to the Pauline teaching

[67] Tertullian, *or.* 9.3 (CCSL 1:263; Stewart, *Tertullian, Cyprian, and Origen on the Lord's Prayer*, 49).

[68] Tertullian, *or.* 1.2 (CCSL 1:257; Stewart, *Tertullian, Cyprian, and Origen on the Lord's Prayer*, 41): Omnia de carnalibus in spiritualia renouauit noua dei gratia superducto euangelio, expunctore totius retro uetustatis.

[69] Tertullian, *or.* 1.4, 6 (CCSL 1:258; Stewart, *Tertullian, Cyprian, and Origen on the Lord's Prayer*, 42).

[70] Tertullian, *or.* 1.7.

[71] Tertullian, *or.* 1.4 (CCSL 1:257–58; Stewart, *Tertullian, Cyprian, and Origen on the Lord's Prayer*, 42): Dei omnipotentis et conspectum et auditum sub tectis et in abditum etiam adesse confideret.

that describes moral virtue as a form of spiritual sacrifice (Rom. 12:1).[72] For prayer to ascend to God, Tertullian explains, Christians must be attentive to God's instructions – chief among which is that Christians should be free from anger and unforgiveness. For "how shall one who is angry with his brother placate the Father, when all anger is forbidden us from the beginning?"[73] He adds that Christians should not only be free from anger but from "all manner of perturbations of the soul."[74] Tertullian describes the acquisition of virtue here in sacrificial language. By living virtuously, the Christian's prayer ascends to the heavenly throne: "We should lead [the prayer] up to the altar of God, devoted from the whole heart, fattened with faith, prepared by the truth, spotless in innocence, pure in chastity, garlanded with charity, with a procession of good works."[75] The proper oblation to God cannot exclude the life of virtue. Instead, the Christian's life must become a sacrifice pleasing to God.

Tertullian's treatise on prayer evidences a form of catechetical knowledge commensurate with what we have seen in *De spectaculis* and *De baptismo*. If this text was indeed produced in or for a catechetical setting, it accords well with his other works of this kind. In it, Tertullian provides hearers with an account of Christian ritual that finds simple speech and virtue – not profuse verbosity or elaborate sacrifices – as most conducive for obtaining true knowledge of God.

TERTULLIAN AND THE RULE OF FAITH

A final place to consider Tertullian's catechetical epistemology is his use of the Rule of Faith.[76] As with Irenaeus, my interest in Tertullian's

[72] Cp. Tertullian, *exh. cast.* 10.1, where Tertullian closely links continence with effectiveness in prayer, not unlike an argument Origen makes in his treatise on prayer (Origen, *or.* 2.2).

[73] Tertullian, *or.* 11.1 (CCSL 1:263–64; Stewart, *Tertullian, Cyprian, and Origen on the Lord's Prayer*, 50): Quomodo placabit patrem iratus in fratrem, cum omnis ira ab initio interdicta sit nobis?

[74] Tertullian, *or.* 12.1 (CCSL 1:264; Stewart, *Tertullian, Cyprian, and Origen on the Lord's Prayer*, 50): Nec ab ira solummodo sed omni omnino confusione animi libera esse debet orationis intentio, de tali spiritu emissa qualis est spiritus ad quem emittitur.

[75] Tertullian, *or.* 28.4 (CCSL 1:273; Stewart, *Tertullian, Cyprian, and Origen on the Lord's Prayer*, 62): Hanc de toto corde deuotam, fide pastam, ueritate curatam, innocentia integram, castitate mundam, agape coronatam cum pompa operum bonorum inter psalmos et hymnos deducere ad dei altare debemus, omnia nobis a deo impetraturam.

[76] On the catechetical provenance of the Rule of Faith, particularly in Tertullian, see L. Wm. Countryman, "Tertullian and the *Regula Fidei*," *Second Century* 2, no. 4 (1982): 208–26.

appeals to the Rule does not concern the evidence they provide of credal-like statements or polemical tools.[77] Instead, my focus is on what Tertullian's appeals suggest about theological epistemology. Looking at two key passages where Tertullian draws on the Rule of Faith – *De praescriptione haereticorum* 13–14 and *Aduersus Praxean* 2–3 – I want to draw attention to the way Tertullian structures knowledge of God around the discourse of simplicity. In the former passage, Tertullian appeals to the Rule's simplicity as a guard against a vicious kind of incessant speculation. In the latter, however, Tertullian must demonstrate, against Praxeas's monarchianism, that the purported complexity of his (Tertullian's) trinitarianism did not compromise the simplicity espoused in the Rule of Faith. In these two quite different settings, the Rule enters the discussion when issues of simplicity arise. Speculatively, we can propose that this discourse was an important aspect of Tertullian's approach to ordering knowledge of God in catechesis.

In *De praescriptione haereticorum* 13–14, after presenting a heretical genealogy of philosophical speculation, Tertullian introduces the Rule of Faith as the church's guide to sound inquiry, learned from Christ himself. Here he associates the Rule with belief in one God who created the world through the Word – the same Word who was made known in the prophets, who became flesh in the incarnation, proclaimed a new law of the kingdom, was crucified and resurrected, and who sent the Holy Spirit to lead believers into eternal life.[78] The Rule, in other words, entails a certain picture of how the ultimate creator is related to divine activity in the economy of creation and redemption. After this summary, Tertullian contrasts the simplicity of faith with the curiosity-laden "exercises" of the heretics:

> In the last resort, however, it is better for you to remain ignorant, for fear that you come to know what you should not know. For you do know what you should know. "Thy faith hath saved you," [Luke 18:32] it says; not an exercise in Scripture (*exercitatio scripturarum*). Faith is established in the Rule. There it has its law, and it wins salvation by keeping the law. Learning derives from curiosity and wins glory

[77] For example, J. H. Waszink claims that "the only thing which occupies [Tertullian] is to maintain correct norms of exegesis in a polemical context." Waszink, "Tertullian's Principles and Methods of Exegesis," in *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition: In Honorem Robert M. Grant*, ed. William R. Schoedel and Robert L. Wilken (Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1979), 17–31 (at 24). Brown also notes that, for Tertullian, "The *regula* ... is not so much a positive authority, revealing ever-deeper truths, as it is a negative authority, a limiting authority that provides all the truth that is absolutely necessary to identify and define Christianity identity." Brown, *Prayer through North African Eyes*, 221.

[78] Tertullian, *praescr.* 13.1–6.

only from its zealous pursuit of scholarship (*de peritiae studio*). Let curiosity give place to faith, and glory to salvation. Let them at least be no hindrance, or let them keep quiet. To know nothing against the Rule is to know everything.[79]

Tertullian contrasts the simplicity of faith with the curiosity of the scriptural *exercitatio*, which for Tertullian is equivalent to a kind of self-glorification that stands in contrast to the Rule of Faith that leads to salvation. Rather than seeing this rhetoric as an example of fideism – of faith opposing knowledge – it seems more appropriate to understand Tertullian presenting the faith learned in the Rule as a distinct mode of knowledge,[80] one that eschews the vice of curiosity and is instead governed by what Jean-Claude Fredouille has called Tertullian's "aesthetic of brevity."[81] This aesthetic of brevity, which has both scriptural and classical (especially Stoic) sources, is Tertullian's way of highlighting the divine origin and content of the faith, rather than the manner of speech in which it is decorated.[82] Unlike Tertullian's depiction of Valentinian initiation, which substitutes persuasion for teaching,[83] orthodox teaching employs an aesthetic of *breuitas* to accentuate the stability and substance of truth.

Tertullian's account of the Rule here is instructive in its linkage of the simple *taxis* of the divine economy in *De praescriptione* 13 with the juxtaposition of faith and curiosity-prone exercises in *De praescriptione* 14. Tertullian's treatment of the Rule here shows that the orthodox account of God's relation to creation is commensurate with a form of theological knowledge that prizes simple faith.[84] For Tertullian,

[79] Tertullian, *praescr.* 14.1–5 (CCSL 1:198; Greenslade, *Early Latin Theology*, 40): Ceterum manente forma eius in suo ordine quantumlibet quaeras et tractes et omnem libidinem curiositatis effundas, si quid tibi uidetur uel ambiguitate pendere uel obscuritate obumbrari: est utique frater aliqui doctor gratia scientiae donatus, est aliqui inter exercitatos conuersatus, aliqui tecum, curiosius tamen quaerens. Nouissime ignorare melius est ne quod non debeas noris quia quod debeas nosti. Fides, inquit, tua te saluum fecit, non exercitatio scripturarum. Fides in regula posita est, habet legem et salutem de obseruatione legis. Exercitatio autem in curiositate consistit, habens gloriam solam de peritiae studio. Cedat curiositas fidei; cedat gloria saluti. Certe aut non obstrepant aut quiescant. Aduersus regulam nihil scire omnia scire est.

[80] So Osborn: "at every point Tertullian argues for the rationality of the rule and the irrationality of heresy. He argues for, by and from faith." Osborn, "Reason and the Rule," 57.

[81] Fredouille, *Tertullian et la conversion*, 32–35.

[82] Fredouille, *Tertullian et la conversion*, 33. For similar remarks, see Tertullian, *Marc.* 2.23.3; *an.* 2.7; *uirg. uel.* 4.4.

[83] Tertullian, *Val.* 1.4, cited above.

[84] One should also note his careful articulation of the meaning of "seek and you will find" in *praescr.* 8; here, he does not negate speculative thought but orders such thinking according to proper principles of exegesis. As Osborn notes, "'Seek and you will find'

Christianity provides access to the one God, creator of all, yet it does so through the unexpected means of faith and an aesthetic of brevity, not vainglorious curiosity or scriptural exercises.

Tertullian's appeal to the Rule of Faith in *Aduersus Praxean* also shows how the Rule functioned to shape theological knowledge vis-à-vis the simplicity of faith. Here, however, Tertullian's adversary is not the infinite speculations of demiurgical heretics but the monarchian theology of Praxeas, who viewed trinitarianism as an unnecessary complication of the simple teaching that God is one. In building his case for trinitarian theology on the logic of the Rule of Faith, Tertullian shows that a nuanced view of the relation between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is not incommensurate with the simple teaching that God is one. For Tertullian, rather, the Rule of Faith offers a reliable guide to understand the deep connections between divine unity and plurality – the distinction but not division of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The monotheism of Praxeas, according to Tertullian, failed to distinguish properly between Father and Son and so led to the impious conclusion that it was the Father who was born and who suffered on the cross.[85] Tertullian then introduces the Rule of Faith to relate the one God with the plurality of the three persons in the divine economy:

> We . . . believe that there is one only God, but under the following dispensation, or οἰκονομία, as it is called, that this one only God has also a Son, his Word, who proceeded from himself, by whom all things were made, and without whom nothing was made.[86]

He follows with an account of the dispensation of the Son's birth, death, resurrection, coming again, and sending of the Spirit,[87] before turning to

(*praescr.* 8.2) means that there is a proper curiosity to the nit-picking scrupulosity of the heretics." Osborn, *Tertullian*, 42.

[85] For the suggestion that Tertullian's appeal to the Rule of Faith owes to the Praxean language of "Pater natus et Pater passus" originating from an early Roman baptismal interrogation, see Wolfram Kinzig and Markus Vinzent, "Recent Research on the Origin of the Creed," *JTS* 50, no. 2 (1999): 535–59 (at 547).

[86] Tertullian, *Prax.* 2.1 (CCSL 2:1160; trans. Ernest Evans, *Q. S. Fl. Tertullianus: Treatise against Praxeas* [London: SPCK, 1948], 131, alt.): unicum quidem deum credimus, sub hac tamen dispensatione, quam oikonomiam dicimus, ut unici dei sit et filius, sermo ipsius qui ex ipso processerit, per quem omnia facta sunt et sine quo factum est nihil.

[87] Tertullian, *Prax.* 2.1 (CCSL 2:1160; Evans, *Treatise against Praxeas*, 131): Hunc missum a patre in uirginem et ex ea natum hominem et deum, filium hominis et filium dei, et cognominatum Iesum Christum: hunc passum, hunc mortuum et sepultum secundum scripturas, et resuscitatum a patre et in caelo resumptum sedere ad dexteram patris uenturum iudicare uiuos et mortuos: qui exinde miserit, secundum promissionem suam,

a discussion of how the Rule of Faith functions in theological knowing. It begins with turning "simple people" from polytheism to monotheism: "The Rule of Faith itself transfers [them] from the many gods of the age to the one, true God."[88] This suggests that a key function of the Rule in shaping belief was the exclusion of multiple gods.[89] However, when "simple" people encounter the monotheism governed by the Rule, they may become confused as to how divine unity accords with multiple stages or a graded divine hierarchy, which seems incumbent with descriptions of the economy: "They judge that economy, implying a number and arrangement of trinity, is really a division of unity; whereas [in fact] unity, deriving trinity from itself, is not destroyed by it but made serviceable."[90] Tertullian's task in the remainder of this treatise is to demonstrate the coherence of this thesis.

Tertullian next outlines a way of understanding the unity between monarchy and economic plurality, offering a variety of scriptural expositions, arguments, and metaphors – many of which would figure in later trinitarian debates.[91] Important to our purposes here, however, is that Tertullian introduces the Rule to present a mode of knowing God in which speculative reflection on the divine being is commensurate with the "simple" belief in one God. In an anti-monarchian context, Tertullian must counter his opponent's ostensibly simpler paradigm that eschews the complex distinctions of trinitarian theology. Indeed, Praxeas might well

a patre spiritum sanctum paracletum, sanctificatorem fidei eorum qui credunt in patrem et filium et spiritum sanctum.

[88] Tertullian, *Prax.* 3.1 (CCSL 2:1161; Evans, *Treatise against Praxeas*, 131, alt.): Simplices enim quique, ne dixerim imprudentes et idiotae, quae maior semper credentium pars est, quoniam et ipsa regula fidei a pluribus diis saeculi ad unicum et uerum deum transfert.

[89] In *Marc.* 1.5, Tertullian also draws on *regula* language to organize belief in only one God, in this case against the theological dualism of Marcion. We read, for example: "The force of this reasoning, by our very definition, forbids belief in many gods, in that rule [of faith] which sets forth one God does not admit of belief in two, since by it God has to be that to which, as the supremely great, nothing is considered equal, and that to which nothing is considered equal must be one and alone" (Denique apud nos uis rationis istius ipso termino plures deos credi non sinit, quod nec duos illa regula unum deum sistens, qua deum id esse oporteat cui nihil adaequetur, ut summo magno unicum autem sit cui nihil adaequetur). Tertullian, *Marc.* 1.5.2 (CCSL 1:446; trans. Ernest Evans, *Tertullian: Aduersus Marcionem* [Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 1972], 12–13).

[90] Tertullian, *Prax.* 3.1 (CCSL 2:1161; Evans, *Treatise against Praxeas*, 132): Non intellegentes unicum quidem sed cum sua oeconomia esse credendum, expauescunt ad oeconomiam. Numerum et dispositionem trinitatis diuisionem praesumunt unitatis, quando unitas ex semetipsa deriuans trinitatem non destruatur ab illa sed administretur.

[91] On Tertullian's role in the Nicene debates, see Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 70–76.

have accused Tertullian of the vain "curiosity" that Tertullian himself decried in *De praescriptione*. Tertullian, therefore, must show how the divine economy does not threaten the divine monarchy expressed in the Rule but is in fact a logical corollary – that which underscores the inseparable unity of the one God who is Father, Son, and Spirit.[92]

Given the Rule's focus on correlating divine unity with trinitarian plurality, we can see the way in which a discourse of simplicity was important to Tertullian's understanding of the Rule of Faith. This simplicity was not opposed to reason or speculation. Rather, beginning with the simple Rule of Faith was the way in which Christians could find a generative context to discern the ultimately mysterious nature of the triune God.

CONCLUSION

Tertullian's catechesis is characterized by a mode of knowing God in which the paradox between divine power and ritual simplicity comes to the fore. He aimed to teach not only certain tenets of belief or morals but also to guide new Christians into forms of practice that would generate true knowledge. Contestations over the nature of the world and its relation to God were, of course, marked features of early Christian discourse – not only between differing Christian communities but also between Christians and non-Christians. The boundaries between such groups were fluid and often unclear. One way in which Tertullian sought to structure Christian identity was by shaping a mode of attention to God through the simplicity of Christian ritual. The simple rituals of water baptism and the succinct formula of the Lord's Prayer accentuated the power and greatness of God. The simplicity of belief encapsulated in the Rule of Faith was likewise a sure guide to knowing the one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Christian's rejection of the shows was grounded in a view of creation's goodness but susceptibility to demonic perversion. In each of these contexts, Tertullian stressed that Christian knowing prioritizes simplicity and faith as a reliable means of knowing the one true God.

[92] For *regula* language later in the text, see Tertullian, *Prax.* 8.7–9.1 (CCSL 2:1168; Evans, *Treatise against Praxeas*, 140): Ita trinitas per consertos et connexos gradus a patre decurrens et monarchiae nihil obstrepit et oikonomiae statum protegit. Hanc me regulam professum, qua inseparatos ab alterutro patrem et filium et spiritum testor, tene ubique, et ita quid quomodo dicatur agnosces.