

OVERVIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY IN 36 ILLUSTRATED LECTURES

LECTURE 5 – TERTULLIAN AT CARTHAGE AND CHRISTIAN LANGUAGE

We usually start with a prayer from the period to be studied. We don't have the words of any prayer by Tertullian, but his commentary on the Lord's Prayer, *On Prayer*, included:

Prayer is the bulwark of faith, our defensive and offensive armour against the enemy who is watching us from every side. So let us never proceed unarmed: by day let us remember the station, by night the vigil. Beneath the armour of prayer let us guard the standard of our commander and let us pray while waiting for the angel's trumpet. Even the Lord Himself prayed, to whom be honour and power for ever and ever.

The rest of this page is an outline of this lecture.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Tracing our ancestry

There's interest nowadays in finding out where we came from, how we got to where we are. This lecture traces some words and formulae, which we use today to express the Christian faith, back to their creator, an early Christian called Tertullian (c.160 - c.215/220) – full name Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus.

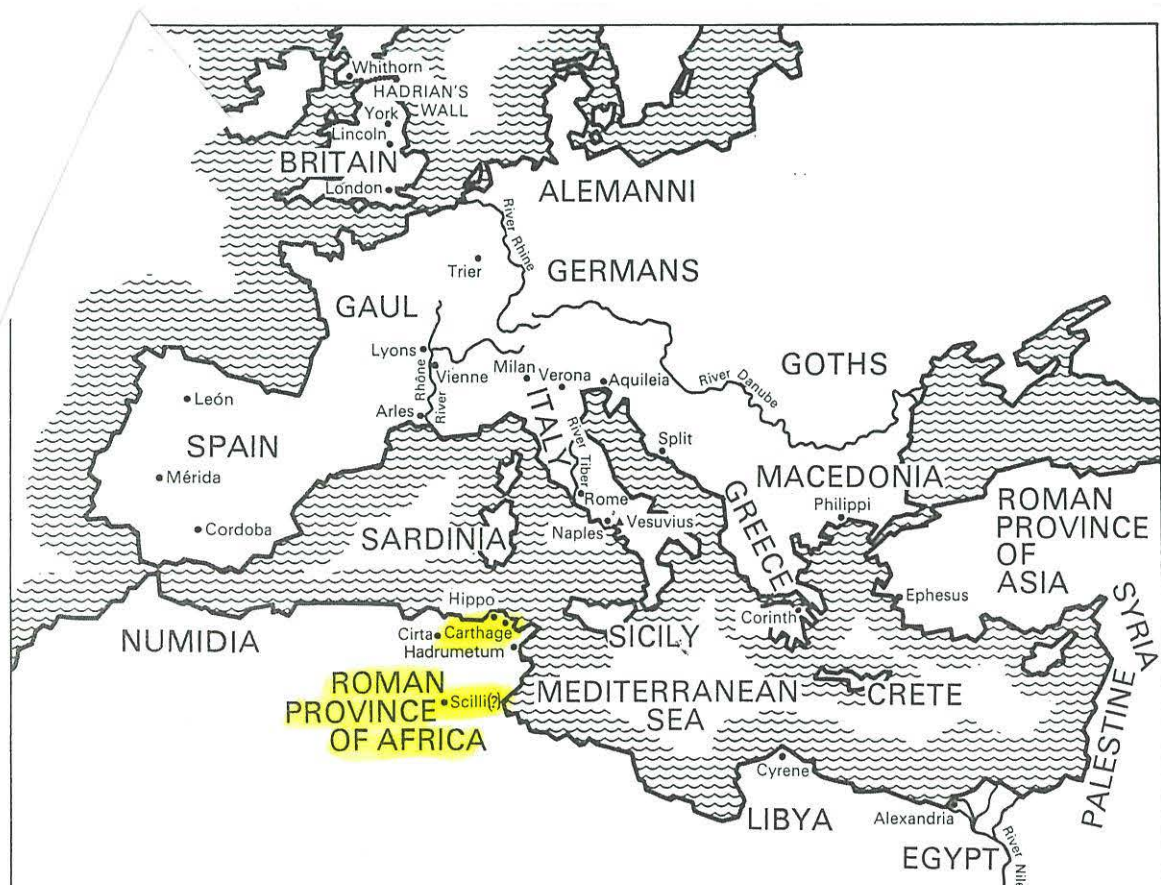
Over the years 200-260, three churches emerged as key centres of Christianity. Two of them were Rome and Alexandria, whom we looked at in Lecture 3. (Lyons ceased to be significant after the death of Irenaeus, Lecture 4.) The third was Carthage. Developments there between the years 200-260 hugely influenced Western Christianity. Although Carthage is now in ruins, while Rome now has a dominant place in the Church and Alexandria is a huge city, two developments at Carthage between these years had lasting significance for the Western Church. They were:

- (1) some of the language we still use to express our Christian faith was coined, and
- (2) Episcopal church government, used by eighty percent of those who today call themselves Christians, was developed.

We'll devote this lecture to the first of these and Lecture 6 to the second of them.

1.2 Early Christianity in Roman Africa

We think of Africa stretching from the Mediterranean Sea to the Cape of Good Hope, but the Sahara desert cut the Roman Empire off from the rest of Africa. The Roman Province of Africa, as you see on the map below, is now Tunisia and part of Algeria. Its links were with Italy – not with sub-Saharan Africa and not with Egypt, which was over 1,000 miles away. The area supplied a third of Rome's grain, and given a favourable wind, ships from Carthage reached the seaport for Rome in two days. Roman Africa was therefore very much part of the Empire – and yet distinctively different. Its capital was Carthage (see the map) near the modern city of Tunis.



How the gospel came to Roman Africa is not known; perhaps traders brought it, perhaps Christians in the Roman army shared their faith with the civilian population, perhaps missionaries came from Rome – we don't know. The first record we have is from the year 180, when twelve Christians from the town of Scilli, which you see on the map on the previous page, south of Carthage, were beheaded (martyred) at Carthage – Christianity was still an illegal religion and Christians were subject to the whim of local officials. Since they lived in a village some distance from the city, it is likely that there were already Christians in the city of Carthage itself.

What impact this had on a young pagan Carthaginian lawyer called Tertullian we don't know, but after his conversion to Christianity about ten years later, he implied that the fortitude of martyrs and the moral superiority of Christianity over paganism were two factors in his conversion. In an evangelistic address in the year 197, Tertullian said that although Christians were now numerous and spreading rapidly, they were of recent origin:

We (that is Christians) are but of yesterday and yet we have filled all the places that belong to you - cities, islands, forts, towns, assembly halls, even military camps, tribes, town councils, the palace, the senate and the market place; we have left you nothing but the temples. (*Apology* 37:4).

Quite an orator! Who was he?

2. BIOGRAPHY OF TERTULLIAN

(Cairns, 106-7, 110; Olson, 82, 84-85, 90-98; Lion, 112; Vos, 16, 18; Lane, 17-20; Hanks, 70 Great Christians, 21-24.)

2.1 Early life

Tertullian was born c160 and lived most of life in the city of Carthage. It was the chief city of the Western Roman Empire after Rome itself, with half a million inhabitants. Our first glimpse of Tertullian is as Christian, securely within the fold of the church at Carthage, but we can piece together something of his background from his extant works - although he was rarely autobiographical. The generally accepted picture is that Tertullian was born to pagan parents and that his father was a centurion in the Roman army. It was a wealthy home as Tertullian spoke of 'our domestics ... slaves ... his nurse ...'. He complained about taxation and he made a Will. Idolatry, which he vehemently opposed as a Christian, was the framework of the society in which he grew up and there is no trace of any Christian influence on his youth. He received a good education in philosophy and classical literature and in law, and he practiced law in some form or other.

2.2 His life's work

We have no details about his conversion, probably in his early 30s, but he gave up his secular career, married a Christian, and, being of independent means, devoted the remainder of his life to four things:

- a. To teaching catechumens, that is enquirers about the Christian faith and young converts – what we call discipleship classes. By the late C2, the Church in the West of the Roman Empire believed that repentance which culminated in baptism washed away all sin up to that point, but that you had to take steps to cover any sin after that. Tertullian didn't originate this, but he went along with it and therefore insisted that candidates for baptism had to be thoroughly grounded in

how to live the Christian life before he approved them for baptism – his classes lasted for up to three years.

- b. He explained the Christian faith to the hostile pagan world, by written Apologies (as they were called, not saying sorry, as we use the word, but reasoned explanations of the faith,) of which five of Tertullian's have survived.
- c. He attacked every known heresy that threatened the Church, and set out the orthodox view of the Trinity and the Person of Christ and much else, in language which (in translation) we still use today because no one has improved on it. We'll explore that in sections 4 and 5.
- d. He gave himself to deepening the spiritual life of the local Church.

Whether Tertullian was ordained or remained a layman we don't know. Some claim he must have been a layman, because priests should be celibate and Tertullian was married, but others claim that to preach as much as he did, Tertullian would have had to be ordained. We have no painting or statue of him, despite some fanciful drawings on the Internet, but we can build up a picture of him from his 31 extant works – they cover 1,400 pages in modern book layout, and there are English translations of all 31.

2.3 Website, <http://www.tertullian.org/>

Run by an enthusiastic computer programmer, a layman, who, like Tertullian, was converted in mid-life; there's not much about Tertullian, ancient texts or modern research, that you won't find here.

2.4 Montanist influence

When Tertullian in his late forties, he became disillusioned with some aspects of Church life, especially its lax teaching on separation from the world, and he was drawn to an ascetic movement known as Montanism – it and its originator Montanus, will be explored in the Topic. It didn't influence any of the words or formulae that were going to look at here, but it did influence his teaching on Christian behaviour, as mentioned in section 6.3.

When Tertullian died we don't know, perhaps between the years 216-220, which would make him nearly 60, and as far as we know from natural causes.

2.5 Epigrams

Tertullian's epigrams are worth reading – 'The blood of Christians is the seed of the Church' – 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?' (i.e., what has Greek philosophy to do with the Bible?) – 'Heretics are rats who gnaw at the gospel' – 'Christians are made, not born' – 'The crucifixion is credible because it is unfitting' (i.e., such a thing shouldn't happen to the Son of God, and the fact that it did happen makes it believable - you don't make up things like that) – and many more.

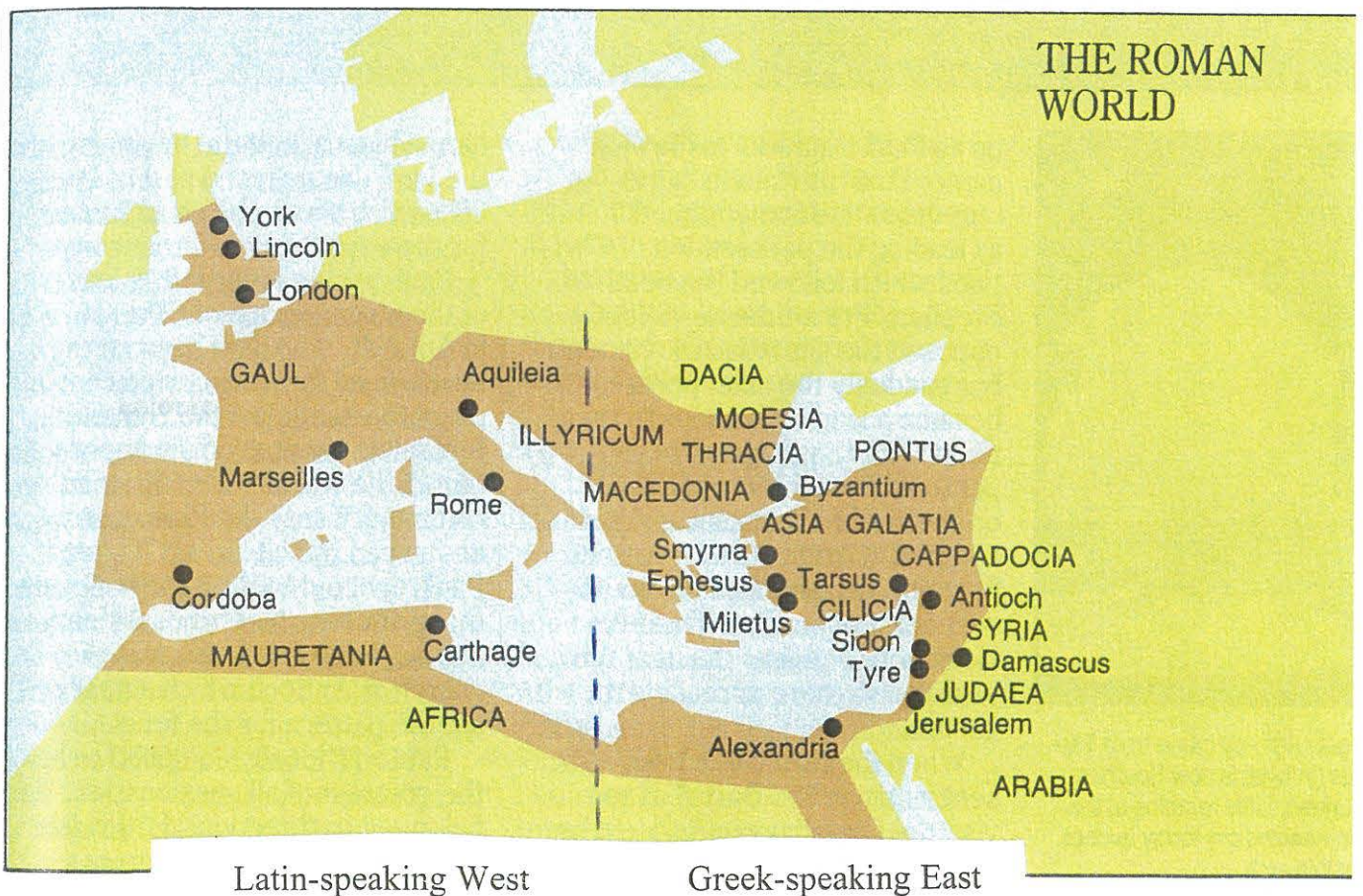
'Tertullian possessed an ability rare among theologians: he was incapable of being dull.'

3. TERTULLIAN'S INFLUENCE ON CHRISTIANITY TODAY

3.1 Christian Latin

We saw briefly in Lecture 3 how and why the Church in the Latin-speaking West developed differently from the Church in the Greek-speaking East, and this is illustrated on the map below. When Tertullian became a Christian, all the churches on that map had one thing in common – their services were in Greek and their leaders wrote to each other in Greek – even the church in Rome, the capital of the Empire, because for the large immigrant community at Rome, from all over the Empire, Greek was their common language.

Now, that was fine as far as the Eastern half of the Roman Empire was concerned, because Greek was the main language spoken there, but in the western half of the Empire, educated people spoke Latin among themselves, their literature was in Latin, the debates in the Senate were in Latin. In order to trade, Westerners had to be familiar with Greek, but it was their second language. It has been said that if you speak more than one language, the important one for you is the one in which you dream; well, educated people in the Western Roman Empire dreamed in Latin.



Tertullian was fluent in Greek as well as Latin, and he decided the time had come to put the message of the Bible, its teaching and its doctrines, into the language spoken by his educated neighbours. He is the first bridge between the Greek-speaking world of NT and the Latin-speaking West. Carthage became the cradle of Latin Christianity; it was here the Church first used Latin for its worship and its teaching. At this time, Roman Africa, not Rome, was the dynamo of Western Christianity, and it shaped the faith that we in the West practice today.

Tertullian's contribution to this is summed up by the quotation:

Whether he was a practicing lawyer, or an orator who used Roman law in his speeches,[endlessly debated] he was the first man of genius of the Latin race to follow Jesus Christ, and to re-set his ideas in the language native to that race'. (Glover, T. R., *The Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire*, London, 1909, p 307.)

3.2 Why Christian Latin matters for us today

From c400, barbarians from the North invaded the Western Roman Empire, destroying Roman civilization and replacing it with their forms of barbarism. That was the situation for nearly 400 years. However, when Charlemagne – we'll come to him in Lecture 11 – came to power in 771, he not only recreated a new Western Empire and imposed Christianity on it, but he led the people he conquered out of the wilderness of barbarianism and his scholars taught the Latin language to all educated people. It became the international language of Western civilisation and whatever their native tongue, all educated Westerners could speak Latin. Church leaders debated and wrote only in Latin – and so it was for the next 1,000 years. For example, the C18 hymn writer, Charles Wesley, brother of the evangelist John Wesley, was educated for 13 years at Westminster School in London, where the only language allowed in public was Latin. It was foundational for Western civilization – and 982 of the words used were Tertullian's creation.

We'll look at three consequences, for Christianity today, of Tertullian expressing the Christian faith in the Latin language.

(a) As mentioned, he coined or adapted 982 words – 509 nouns, 284 adjectives, 28 adverbs and 161 verbs – many of which, in English translation, we still use today. He borrowed them from secular Latin, or made them up, because there were no existing Christian words in Latin – explored in section 4.

(b) He explained the Christian faith in formulae we use today – how to understand (as far as is humanly possible) the relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit ('the Trinity'), and how Jesus' divinity related to his humanity ('Christology') – explored in section 5.

These were two positive contributions to the life of the Church, but one not so good:

(c) He introduced concepts from Roman law that (regrettably) developed in later years into the doctrines of penance and priestly absolution for sin – explored in section 6.

Before we look at Tertullian's influence on Christianity today, we'll look at the influence on him of a man called Montanus and the teaching known as Montanism:

TOPIC - MONTANUS AND MONTANISM - was taken at this point in the Lecture; here, it is printed at the end of the Notes for this Lecture.

4. CREATOR OF CHRISTIAN LATIN

4.1 The word ‘saviour’

When Tertullian began to write for the Church, there was no word in Latin for ‘Saviour’. The New Testament writers had no problem – there was a secular Greek noun, *soter*, meaning king or emperor, which the NT writers took over, and used for Jesus as Saviour. Likewise, they took over three other secular Greek words with the stem ‘*so*’, the noun *soteria*, which meant bodily health and they used it for Christian ‘salvation’; the adjective *soterios*, which meant ‘bringing salvation’ which they used for spiritually ‘saved’, and the verb *sozo*, meaning ‘I rescue’, which the NT writers turned into ‘I save from sin’. These words occur nearly 200 times in New Testament.

But there was no equivalent in secular Latin for the Greek word *soter*. When the Roman orator Cicero wanted to praise an army general for having saved a city, he had to say: ‘the general brought us salvation’, because there was no noun for ‘saviour’. Tertullian set out to create one, and in doing so, he had to surmount four hurdles. I’ll mention them to give the flavour of the enormity of the task that he faced. (Skip to the next page if this etymology is of no interest to you.)

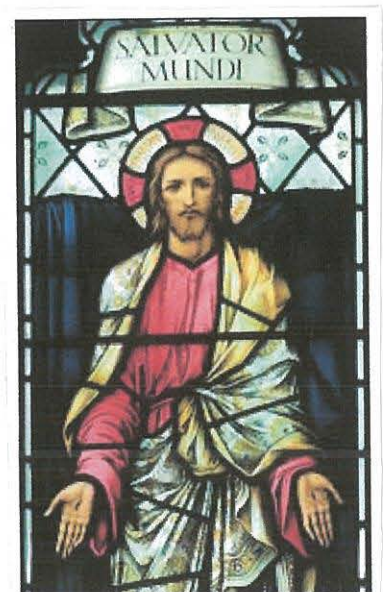
First, which stem to use? The secular noun for ‘safety’, *salus*, had the stem ‘s-a-l’, but the secular verb ‘to save’ or ‘to deliver’, *servare*, had the stem ‘s-e-r’. Tertullian wanted a matching set of words, like the Greek NT, so his first problem was to select one stem and then adapt or coin three other words to match it.

He opted for *sal*, but here was his second problem. *Salus* in secular Latin meant physical safety; how could he give it a Christian meaning? He tried adding the word ‘eternal’, but ‘eternally safe’ was too clumsy, so he used *salus* to translate Biblical passages, where the context meant ‘deliverance from sin’, and in doing so he established *salus* with a Christian meaning, ‘saved from sin’ and its consequences.

His next problem, was to find or make up a matching set of words, all with the stem ‘*sal*’. He changed *servare* (the secular word for ‘to rescue’) into *salvare*, in other words he simply coined a new word, with the Christian meaning ‘to save from sin’ and then used the secular adjective *salvus*, meaning originally ‘preserved or unhurt’, in passages which gave it the Christian concept of spiritually ‘safe’.

But Tertullian still had no word for Saviour. The obvious one was *salvator*, but heretics known as Gnostics (Lecture 4) were using the word *salvator* for the god of the Old Testament and opposing him to the God revealed by Jesus in the New Testament. Tertullian therefore coined the word *salutificator* - the bringer of salvation, an audacious word, but after he had used it half a dozen times, he realised it was too clumsy to be popular, so he rescued *salvator* from the heretics by putting it into New Testament passages that spoke of Christ and showed that Jesus was the *salvator*.

The word *salvator* has been used ever since in Western Christianity; paintings in art galleries and stained glass windows describe Jesus as *Salvator mundi*, ‘Saviour of the world’.



Jesus, *Salvator mundi*,
‘Saviour of the world’.

4.2 Another example is ‘The Holy Spirit as “the Vicar of Christ”’

Tertullian is the first extant writer after the New Testament to call the Holy Spirit ‘God’. How could he explain what that meant? He coined the phrase that the Holy Spirit is the ‘Vicar of Christ’. Nowadays, when we speak of vicars and curates, the vicar is the person in charge of a local church and the curate is his deputy. This is a reversal of how the words were originally used. Originally, the senior minister in a district was called the Curate, because he had the ‘cure of souls’ (pastoral ministry), and his deputy was called his vicar, who carried out his wishes. Using the words in that sense, Tertullian coined the phrase that the Holy Spirit is the Vicar of Christ, his deputy, who makes Christ’s cure a reality in our hearts.

5. TERTULLIAN’S INFLUENCE ON CHRISTIAN FORMULAE

5.1 *The Persons of the Trinity*

In the hymn that starts, ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty’, we sing, perhaps without giving it much thought, ‘God in three Persons, Blessed Trinity’. Where did word ‘Trinity’ come from? It isn’t in the Bible. The concept is there, of God as Three-in-One - Tri-unity, but it was Tertullian who coined the word ‘Trinity’ to describe the relationship of Father, Son and Spirit, as far human speech can.

Tertullian had been a Christian for about twenty years when a man called Praxeas came to Carthage from Rome – not of his choosing, he was expelled from the Church in Rome for teaching that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are ‘one and the same’, just three names to describe three different aspects/roles of one God. Opposing Praxeas led Tertullian to develop the first full-length treatise on the Trinity, which became the touchstone of Western orthodoxy.

‘Tertullian refuted Praxeas in this treatise, which represents the most important contribution to the doctrine of the Trinity in the Ante-Nicene period [that is, before the Council of Nicaea in 325]. Its terminology is clear, precise and apposite, its style vigorous and brilliant. The Council of Nicaea used not a few of its formulae and its influence on subsequent theologians cannot be overestimated. ... Augustine [Lecture 9], in his great work *De Trinitate*, adopted the analogy between the Holy Trinity and the operations of the human soul found in the fifth chapter of Tertullian’s treatise and devoted most of books 8-15 to an elaboration of it.’ (Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, 1995, vol. 2, Texas, Christian Classics, p. 285.)

Since Augustine definitively shaped Western theology, someone who influenced Augustine’s thinking is significant – especially if that person originated the ideas, as Tertullian did.

Tertullian chose his words and formulated his phrases in two stages. First, he had to find a word to describe the relationship of Father, Son and Spirit. He did it by adapting a secular Latin word, *trinitas*, which meant a trio, three things together, and he used it to describe, as far human speech can, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as ‘Trinity’. He then had to define what he meant by Trinity, so (stage 2) he used two Roman legal words, *substantia* (substance) and *persona* (the Latin word for a person), and he combined them to compose the formula, that God is:

‘One substance in three persons’ - the description which we still use today.

Let me explain how he got there. In Roman Law there could be joint or triple ownership of a substance, e.g. one house could belong to two or three people equally. The Father, Tertullian taught, shared His divine substance / divinity with the Son and the Holy Spirit, so all three possessed it equally, the Son and Spirit have the same 'substance' as the Father - they are as much God as He is.

But that's only half the formula. The other half depends on the other legal word, *persona* (person). In Roman law, *persona* was a technical term for a person with a particular function in society. He (or she) could share the function with others, without prejudicing his individuality. Tertullian used the illustration of the Emperor; his *persona*, his function in society, was to be the Emperor of Rome, but he had two colleagues who ruled along with him. There were three of them, three *personae*, three individuals, but only one office of Emperor. This was readily intelligible at the time, although in ordinary language today the word 'person' doesn't mean what *persona* meant in Roman law. When people today hear about three persons in the Godhead, they naturally think of three individuals, three distinct Gods, although throughout the Old and New Testaments it is axiomatic that God is One.

Tertullian taught that in the Godhead, there were three persons, but they were all of one substance - one divinity. He said, 'The Trinity can be numbered but not divided'. The order in which you use the words 'substance' and 'person' is critical. The West, following Tertullian, started with One Substance (divinity) and then asked: how can one substance be found in three persons? The East started at the other end, and said, 'There are three persons in the Trinity, so how can they be of one substance?' and the East tied itself in knots and bitter disputes for years over that approach, as we'll see in Lecture 10. The Trinity is a mystery, and we mustn't lose the mystery, but start with Tertullian's approach, that the Trinity is 'One substance in three persons', rather than the Eastern question, 'how can three persons be of one substance'? Tertullian's phrasing was so clear that we still use it today, and we sing - 'God in three Persons, Blessed Trinity'.

Tertullian used various analogies to explain this – 'look' he said, at a tree. A tree has a Root and a Trunk and it has Fruit; in one sense they can be separated, but in another sense they are inseparably connected, because no one of them can exist without others. Look at the Sun in the sky. The Sun has Rays and the Rays gives Light, one proceeds from the other; look at Water. There is the Spring where it rises, the River along which it flows, and the Sea, where it ends up. So the Son and the Spirit are not the same as the Father, as Praxeas taught, nor are they completely separate, as others taught; they are, said Tertullian, (repeating the phrases mentioned above) 'One substance in three persons' and they 'can be numbered but not divided'.

Later generations had reservations about Tertullian's analogies of the Tree and the Sun and the Spring, in case they implied that the Son and the Spirit were inferior to Father but for its time, it was a triumphant statement of orthodoxy. It ensured that the Western church was not troubled by the lengthy debates that caused division in the Greek-speaking East. Tertullian's phrasing was so clear that we still use it today.

5.2 The Person of Christ - The two natures of Christ

Another formula created by Tertullian, which has been useful and influential ever since, answers the question – what was the relationship between the divine and human natures of Christ? How could Jesus be both human and divine at the same time?

Tertullian applied the same thinking about substance and person, (the words he used to explain the Trinity), to the relationship between the divine and human natures of Christ. In Roman Law, one individual (a person) could own more than one property, and for 'property' Tertullian again used the Latin word '*substantia*'. So, said Tertullian, to those who were trying to understand the incarnation, the Lord Jesus united in himself two substances, divinity and humanity, in one person, so Christ was fully and truly God, fully and truly man, at one and the same time, in one single person, distinct, not fused.

That formula satisfied the Western Church, and they thought no more about it, but the Greek-speaking East, where people were more speculative, fought bitterly and divisively from 428 to 451 (which we'll come to in Lecture 10) about the relationship between the two natures of Christ. This is not the place to explore that, but after a series of Councils, culminating in one at Chalcedon, near Constantinople in 451, the Pope at Rome, Leo I, offered his views in a document known as 'Leo's Tome', which was essentially the formula Tertullian had coined 250 years before. If I may oversimplify a complex debate, it is well summed up by a quotation from Olson:

'The ancient faith of Tertullian was accepted in the East: Jesus Christ as one person of two natures or substances.' (Olson, 232.)

and the Church has used that formula ever since, to this day. So, you and I express our faith in many words and phrases that Tertullian coined – we use them because no one has yet found better ones.

So, two good legacies but, finally, one not so good. We need to look at one consequence of Tertullian's innovative and original thinking that, as Evangelicals, we must regret.

6. MERIT, SATISFACTION AND PENANCE

6.1 Making 'satisfaction' in Roman law

In putting the Christian faith into the Latin mind-set, Tertullian let Roman law run away with his thinking. He introduced the concept of merit – of earning favour with God – into our relationship with our Heavenly Father. As mentioned earlier, it was generally held, by Tertullian's day, that repentance followed by baptism washed away all sins committed up to that moment in a believer's life, but from then on, Christians were required to live, by their own efforts, a Christian lifestyle, to follow the rules laid down in the New Testament for Christian living. The New Testament (embryonic only at that time – Lecture 4) was a rulebook – do this, don't do that - do what is commanded and abstain from what is prohibited; breach of the rules brought penalties, just as, in a court situation, if you broke the law, you would be punished. The post-baptismal sinner had to do something meritorious to restore his or her relationship with God.

Tertullian's reasoning, based on Roman law, went like this. If you broke God's law, you offended God, you put yourself in debt to God. In Roman law, you could clear a debt in one of two ways; you could pay cash or you could offer some equivalent - called making 'satisfaction'. If you owed someone 50 *denarii*, you could either pay your creditor in cash or you could offer, e.g., to dig his garden for as long as was needed to discharge the debt – thus making 'satisfaction'. Applying this to Christian living, Tertullian taught that people who sinned after baptism, put themselves in debt to God, but they could make satisfaction for the debt by offering their good works as merit. Sin had put them in debt to God, but their merit put God in debt to them - and these cancelled each other out. If more good was done than necessary, it became surplus merit, which was carried forward as reward in heaven.

Although Tertullian was not the first Christian to write about repentance after baptism, Hermas and Irenaeus had done so, he was first to say that good works satisfied God. We'll keep coming back to this word 'satisfaction' – what do you have to do to 'satisfy' God?

Two quotes:

'Tertullian was the first Christian to regard fasting, almsgiving and ascetic performances as having the power to reconcile people to God.' (The German historian, Adolf von Harnack.)

'... the notion of satisfaction as a compensation made to God for the debt incurred by sin is a constituent part of his (Tertullian's) penitential theology. Tertullian was certainly aware of the juridical meaning of the word *satisfacere* in cases of material indebtedness. This juridical sense of the term *satisfacere* is easily transferred to express the idea of satisfaction for sin. Sin involves the contraction of a debt in the moral order. The performance of external works of penance, or better, the whole penitential process beginning with the aversion from sin and including, besides personal works of penance, the intervention of the Church, is a means of paying the moral indebtedness which the sinner has contracted by offending God.' (William P. Le Saint, *Tertullian, Treatises on Penance: on Penitence and on Purity*, 1959, London, Newman Press, p, 155.)

Tertullian didn't have much to say about ordinary, daily shortcomings in living the Christian life after baptism, what he called 'sins of daily experience'. The debt incurred to God by these was satisfied by prayer, almsgiving, and other good works. We needn't pursue that, because Tertullian's legacy is not through whatever he taught about forgiveness for minor sins, but through his innovative teaching on serious post-baptismal sin, as set out above and continued in 6.3 below.

6.2 Two other legal terms

Tertullian used two other legal words in a similar way: (1), *expungere*, to expunge, meant in Roman law 'to cancel a debt' and Tertullian used it to describe cancellation of the debt of sin. He wrote that when satisfaction had been made, the debit side of the ledger *expungendus est* = is erased and (2) the repenting sinner was *restitutus*, restored, in Roman law the rehabilitation of a delinquent who had made good whatever he had previously done wrong.

6.3 One opportunity for Second Repentance

For grievous sin after baptism, Tertullian was torn in two directions. On the one hand, his pastoral heart didn't want lapsed Christians to despair, to feel that there was no possibility of forgiveness and restoration, but on the other hand his ascetic temperament was concerned that if he allowed forgiveness after baptism, some might take that as licence to sin, because they could repent and be restored.

Balancing his pastoral concern with his ascetic temperament, Tertullian taught that if a Christian fell into serious post-baptismal sin, there was one, but only one, opportunity for a Second Repentance, which covered every sin, even the serious triad of murder, adultery and apostasy; it restored the sinner to what he had obtained by baptism and lost by sinning again. It was rigorous, because in the baptismal vow, the candidate had renounced the devil and his works, so grievous sin after baptism was breaking the promise made to God at baptism. If lapsed Christians didn't use Second Repentance to cancel the debt they had incurred to God, they suffered eternal damnation.

For Second Repentance, the support of the local church was essential. It included confession of sin to the Church leaders and the performance of penitential works determined by the Church leadership. Not only did the Church members hear the public confession of sin and witness the fasting and the sackcloth, they joined in prayers for restoration. I don't want to spend time on the details of this, because it's the principles that are important, (1) the church leaders dictated the works to be carried out, which Tertullian described as 'making satisfaction' and (2) at the conclusion of them, the church leaders allowed the penitent to attend the communion service again. What happened in the next generation is explored in our next lecture.

Ten years after writing *De Paenitentia*, Tertullian's admiration for Montanist teaching led him to change his stance, and to write a further treatise, *De Pudicitia*, saying that the Church should not forgive post-baptismal murder, adultery, apostasy, fraud, false witness, treachery and similar serious sins, not even once. The sinner should still undertake penance, and God might forgive, but the Church should never pronounce that satisfaction had been made and never readmit to communion.

6.4 The 'Higher' and 'Lower' Will Of God

Tertullian introduced this distinction, which I'll mention only briefly, because although it had huge repercussions in the later Western Church, Tertullian was not responsible for how it developed.

For Tertullian, to live a basic Christian life was good, but you could do better. 'Deeply and anxiously must the will of God be pondered again and again, to see what even in secret He may will. For what things are manifest we all know.' That is, every Christian knows the Lower Will of God, normal Christian living, but there is life on a higher plane if you are prepared to search for it. If Christians were prepared to separate themselves from the world, to choose chastity over marriage, etc, they would be following God's higher Will, and that gained surplus merit. This developed, after Tertullian's time, in various ways: for example, monastic living was following the Higher Will of God, more meritorious than any other Christian service; those who followed the Higher Will earned 'surplus merit', more than they needed for their own salvation, and the Church could draw this down and used it to grant Indulgences for the sins of others – but all of that is beyond what Tertullian envisaged, so we'll leave it for now and come back to it later.

6.5 Purgatory

I mention this briefly because the Roman Catholic Church quotes one of Tertullian's writings in support of its teaching that sins which have not been confessed and forgiven before you die are dealt with in Purgatory before you can get into Heaven. Protestants, who don't believe that Purgatory is taught in the Bible, point out that Tertullian said nothing of the sort, he said that martyrs went straight to Heaven and for everyone else, he took up Jesus' reference to Hades, which had two compartments, Abraham's Bosom and the other place, and that 'the souls of the righteous enjoy refreshment in Abraham's bosom until the final resurrection and heaven'. We'll come back to this in our next lecture, because the Roman Catholic Church also quotes Cyprian, whom we'll be studying next, in support of its teaching

6.6 Conclusion

Tertullian was the most influential Christian in the West between the close of the New Testament and Augustine. We express many parts of our Christian faith to-day in words and phrases that Tertullian coined or translated into Latin.

OVERVIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY IN 36 ILLUSTRATED LECTURES

TOPIC 5: MONTANUS AND MONTANISM

We saw in Lecture 4 how the teaching of one dissident individual, Marcion, hastened the Church's formulation of the New Testament. Marcion had issued his version of the inspired books and the Church responded by recognizing sixteen more books than Marcion had in his 'Canon'.

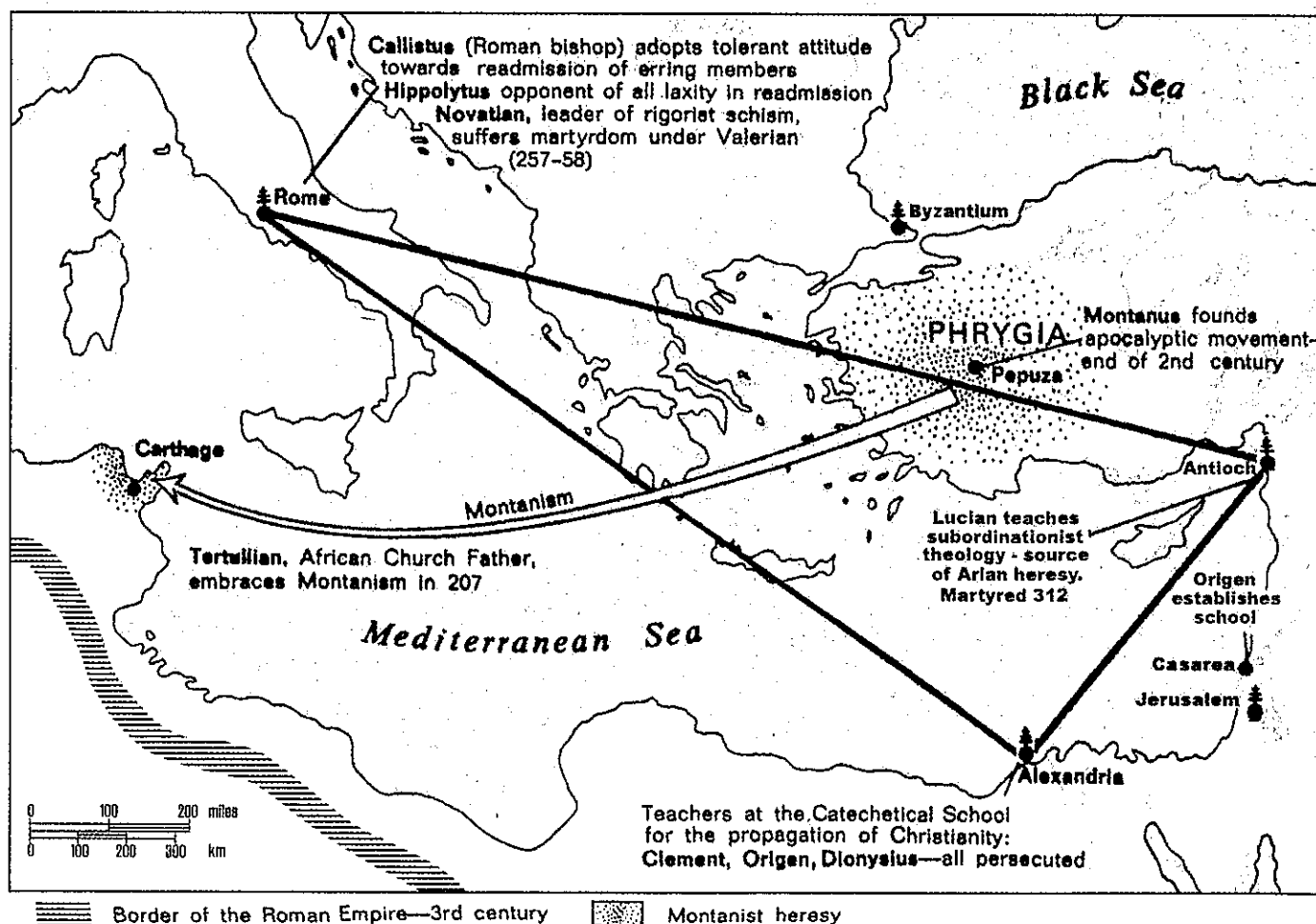
A few years later, another dissident, Montanus, forced the Church into 'closing' the Canon of the New Testament to any new books. Montanus was convinced that he and his two companions were God-given instruments of new 'inspired revelations', which they wanted to add to Scripture; the Church responded that the apostolic writings were unique and that all faith and action must be judged by them alone.

Please tell us about Montanus and outline such aspects of his teaching as you consider most important for our understanding of him.

See Cairns, 100; Lion, 87, Vos, 32-33 and Olson, 31-33. There is some background information overleaf, together with some Montanist prophecies.

The arrow on this map shows Montanus location and his influence on Tertullian. Montanism didn't influence any of the words or formulae that we looked at in Lecture 5, but it had a large impact on his views on Christian behaviour.

The triangle on the map between Rome, Antioch and Alexandria is nothing to do with Montanus, but it is relevant to Tertullian because when he became a Montanist, he criticized the Bishop of Rome, for the reasons noted on the map.



Some background information

About 156 or 172 (the date is debated), a man called Montanus, a native of a remote village in Phrygia (in modern western Turkey, see ‘Perpuza’ on the map overleaf), a new convert from paganism, felt that the Church was becoming too ‘structured’ under a hierarchy of bishops, that the liturgy was becoming ‘standardised’ and that expectations for Christian living were becoming too lax. What had happened, he asked, to Christ’s words in John 16:12, ‘... when he, the Spirit of truth, comes he will guide you into all truth’. It was a fair question, but Montanus answered it by claiming the Holy Spirit was giving him new messages for the Church, direct ecstatic revelations from God, to improve the life of the Church – frequent fasting, no attending the theatre or other worldly amusements, no second marriage, no forgiveness for serious sin after baptism, don’t flee from persecution but embrace martyrdom, and a lot more along these lines.

At this time the Church leadership was combating various heresies by stressing the authority of Scripture for doctrine and conduct, so ‘new prophecies’, new direct revelations from God which bypassed Scripture, were not welcome. Montanus was condemned, but about 207, which puts Tertullian in his late forties, Tertullian became similarly disillusioned with some aspects of the Church, especially its lax teaching on separation from the world. Without approving the source of Montanus’ teaching – direct new revelations from God – Tertullian began to speak in favour of greater austerity in daily life, more fasting, no second marriage, no flight if martyrdom loomed. There’s no contemporary evidence that Tertullian ever left the Catholic Church and founded or joined any other group, but he did become a severe critic of the Catholic Church and a defender of Montanism.

Some Montanist prophecies

Behold, a man is as a lyre, and I move over him like a plectrum. The man sleeps, and I remain awake. Behold, it is the Lord that stirs the hearts of men, and gives men hearts. (Montanus).

I am the Lord God Almighty dwelling in man. It is neither an angel nor an ambassador, but I, God the Father, have come. (Montanus)

The Lord sent me to be the advocate, teacher, and interpreter of this task, this profession, this covenant; I am forced, whether I will it or not, to learn the knowledge of God. (Maximilla)

Christ came to me in the likeness of a woman, clothed in a bright robe, and He planted wisdom in me, revealing that this place [Pepuzal] is holy, and that here Jerusalem descends from heaven. (Priscilla)

I am driven off as a wolf from the sheep. But I am not a wolf. I am word and spirit and power. (Priscilla)