


The praxis of *Adversus Praxeam*: Tertullian's views on the Trinity

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Tertullian was an African, living in Carthage during the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE. He grew up a pagan, then became a Catholic Christian, after which he moved on to the sect of Montanus, referred to as the New Prophecy in this article, where he became the leader in Carthage. While he was still a pagan, he studied and became an advocate and when he was converted to Christianity, he became a prolific writer of Christian treatises, mostly apologies in Latin. There was a heretic movement in Carthage with Praxeas as the leader, and Tertullian opposed this heresy, especially on the level of the Trinity, as most of the Christians in Carthage – the so-called *simplices* – were impressed by that heresy. Being ante-Nicene, Tertullian's arguments should be understood within his time and in light of the Catholic Rule of Faith, as he was very orthodox. The question may well be asked whether something new can still be said about Tertullian or about his *Adversus Praxeam*? This article is a critical appreciation of *Adversus Praxeam* with the aim to gain more insight into Trinitarian's point of view, specifically with reference to the Trinity. Hopefully, in this way something 'new' can be said about a well-known Church Father and his well-known treatise.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: *Adversus Praxeam* was a heretical treatise (modalist), mostly in line with the Catholic Rule of Law of the time, aimed at the Monarchianist heresy. Church History, Systematic Theology and a little Practical Theology are employed to discuss this early-3rd-century treatise within its time, specifically centred around the Trinity.

Keywords: Tertullian; *Adversus Praxeam*; Praxeas; Church Fathers; Carthage; New Prophecy; Montanism; Monarchianism; Trinity; Early Church.

Introduction and background to Tertullian

Tertullian wrote *Adversus Praxeam* (*Against Praxeas*) in ca. 213 CE, therefore ante-Nicene (Evans 2019:18). This treatise is regarded as his best work on the Trinity (Litfin 2019:89). Many scholars – some of whom will be discussed in this article – have already commented on this treatise. The aim of this article is to shortly discuss *Adversus Praxeam* (AP) within the context of a 3rd-century Carthage, occupied by followers of the Catholic Church ('Christians'), the New Prophecy (a heresy), and Monarchianism (another heresy) (cf. Evans 2019:viii).

The destruction of Carthage by Rome took place in 146 BCE. A century later, Julius Caesar rebuilt it and populated it with Roman citizens. The flourishing Carthage then became the capital of Africa Nova, which was a Roman province and which included the provinces of Africa Vetus and Numedia (New Advent 2020a). Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus was born in 155/160 CE in Carthage and he also died there in 220/225 (Carl 2009:1). Tertullian was therefore a man from Latin Africa. He was able to write in both Greek and Latin. He first practised as an advocate *cum* legal consultant and became a Christian in ca. 197 after which he started writing treatises in defence of his faith (Evans 2019:2) – therefore being an apologist (cf. Litfin 2019:81). According to Jerome (*De Viris Illustribus* 53; ed. Schaff 1885c:883) he was also a presbyter.

While Christian Latin literature was not yet produced in Rome, it was Africa that started to produce the literature (Evans 2019:1). Johannes Quasten refers to Tertullian as 'the creator of ecclesiastical Latin' (Quasten 1950:249). Tertullian was the first to use specific theological terminology such as *Trinitas* (e.g. AP2 and 3; Migne 1844:157–158; ed. Schaff 1885a:1337–1338; cf. Hillar 2012:190–220; Quasten 1950:286) and *unam substantiam in tribus cohaerentibus* (*only substance in three coherent and inseparable* [Persons] – AP12; Migne 1844:168; ed. Schaff 1885a:1358) within the context of his debate with Modalism (Haykin 2017; cf. Carl 2009:1, 3; Holmes 2012:69–70), still being used by Latin-speaking churches today. Allison (2011:237; cf. McGrath 1998:62) argues that

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Tertullian's doctrine on the Trinity 'became the foundation for the church's definition of the Trinity'.¹ However, it could be that he did not invent that terminology, but that he inherited it from a predecessor or even predecessors (Evans 2019:2).

Quasten states that '[e]xcept for Augustine, Tertullian is the most important and original ecclesiastical author in Latin' (Quasten 1950:247), called the 'Origen of the West' by Sellers (1953:187). He was more influenced by the later Roman Stoicism than by Platonism, which mostly formed the basis for the theology of that time (cf. Norris 1967:99; Tieleman 2020:163).

After almost two decades of being a Christian (ca. 213),² he became part of the New Prophecy (McGowan 2006:437), a schismatic movement started in the 2nd century, first called the Phrygians (Phrygia was a kingdom in the central to western part of Anatolia, east of Philadelphia – currently Turkey), then the Montanists (because of its founder's name), then the Pepuzians,³ while they were also called the Cataphrygians ('those from Phrygia') in the West (New Advent 2020b).⁴ This movement was founded by the prophet Montanus⁵ (supported by two prophetesses Maximilla and Prisca,⁶ cf. AP1 – McGowan 2006:440; Migne 1844:155) in the middle of the 2nd century, ca. 156–157 in Phrygia.⁷ This movement valued chastity, virginity and martyrdom, therefore advocating asceticism and also prophecy (CNA 2021). In Carthage he became the head of this movement (also calling itself the Tertullians), and it would carry on till the time of Augustine (Quasten 1950:247).

Although this movement ('sect') was in fact initially only a schism from the Catholic Church (CNA 2021), it was soon to get resistance, as early as 177, when Prisca was excommunicated by some local councils in Asia Minor (NWE n.d.). The first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 (par. 7) already referred to Montanism as a 'sect' (St Michael's Depot 2006). However, it was only in the 4th century that Constantine the Great and other emperors stood more firmly against this movement but seemingly never effectively declared it a heresy (NWE n.d.).

1. Olson (1999:95) compliments Tertullian here and in the same breath accuses his successors by stating that Tertullian has already 'settled [the doctrines of the Trinity and Christology] hundreds of years before the rest of the church settled them'. This compliment, however, fits Tertullian only halfway, as it will become clear in this article, while the accusation is almost correct.

2. Quasten (1950:247) argues that it was in 207.

3. Pepuza was a town somewhere in eastern Philadelphia that Montanus has identified together with Tymion and Ardabau to be the New Jerusalem after Jesus' second coming.

4. Montanus was already dead at that stage, as he died in the eleventh year of Marcus Aurelius, which was ca. 172 (New Advent 2020b, wrongly referring to Eusebius' *Chronicon* as a source).

5. See Jerome in his *De Viris Illustribus* 53 (ed. Schaff 1885c:883).

6. According to Hippolytus (*Philosophumena* 21; ed. Schaff 1885b:383), her name was Priscilla.

7. In his *Haeresis (Panarion)* 48.1, Epiphanius claims that *there emerges another sect, called the sect of the Phrygians... For the Montanists had their beginning about the nineteenth year of Hadrian's successor Antoninus Pius*, which was ca. 156–157 CE (Internet Archive n.d.; cf. New Advent 2020b).

Hand in hand with the New Prophecy, Tertullian (who was a married man) then started to attack the church for being unspiritual and lax with reference to his moral code. Although his doctrine later on became the basis for orthodox Christian theology, it could be regarded as 'heretical' when Tertullian wrote it, as it was part of the New Prophecy (McGowan 2006:437).⁸ However, whereas there was no real difference between the Montanism and Catholicism regarding the Trinity, the views of Tertullian, specifically in AP were in fact orthodox (cf. McGowan 2006:440). This is why Christine Trevett refers to him as a 'Montanist Catholic' (Trevett 1996:69), as he was doctrinally orthodox.

Evans (2019:4)⁹ divides Tertullian's works in three groups, namely apologetic, controversial and disciplinary, with AP belonging to the second group of five treatises.¹⁰ In these works, Tertullian attacked certain heresies, while defending the traditional Christian faith within these contexts. Although AP is classified as 'controversial' by Evans, in fact here Tertullian showed the minor differences between traditional Christianity and Montanism as it manifested at that time in Carthage.

The work and terminology of Tertullian was already used by Church Fathers of his time, like Hippolytus (dealing with the Noetic heresy) and Novatian (Evans 2019:19). These two Fathers knew each other and at a certain stage Novatian became the leader of their conservative group, while Hippolytus was the spokesperson (Evans 2019:19).¹¹

Praxeas and his doctrine

Praxeas was one of the earliest teachers of Monarchianism. Evans (2019:10) asserts that the name Praxeas 'could be a rather unusual Greek word for "busybody,"' therefore being a pseudonym (CPL 1999), or a nickname for most probably Calixtus (Callistus), who was a Roman deacon (Litfin 2019:89), who became bishop (McGowan 2006:441) and later became the pope of Rome.¹² McGowan (2006:441; original emphasis), however, depicts Praxeas as a '*persona* [who] functions in this text as a representative figure or rhetorical device through which local issues and persons can be addressed'. For the purpose of this article, Praxeas will be regarded as the leader of Monarchianism in Carthage.

Hippolytus (*Philosophumena* 9.5) pointed to the doctrine of Praxeas (which the latter has adopted from the Christian

8. In this sense, McGowan (2006:438) referred to Tertullian as being 'both a pillar of orthodoxy and a promoter of heresy'. However, in the same article McGowan argues that there could be two different Tertullians: The orthodox Tertullian and the heretic Tertullian (McGowan 2006:438–439). Quasten (1950:246) referred to a certain Tertullian who was a jurist in Rome, with whom Tertullian could be identified.

9. Quasten (1950:251–253) added that at least six different collections of Tertullian's work existed during the Middle Ages.

10. Apart from *Adversus Praxeam*, he wrote, *Adversus Marcionem* (five books), *Adversus Hermogenem*, *Adversus Valentinianos*, *Scorpiae*, *De Baptismo*, *De Carne Christi* and *De Resurrectione Carnis* (Evans 2019:4).

11. In his *Philosophumena* 9.2, Hippolytus referred to this as a conventicle (a so-called *διδασκαλεῖον*) that was founded by Callistus and that has attracted many Roman Christians (ed. Schaff 1885b:324).

12. In his *Philosophumena* 9.7, Hippolytus gave the 'personal history of Callistus' (ed. Schaff 1885b:333–338).

philosopher, Noetus of Smyrna, while Noetus derived it from a theory by the philosopher, Heraclitus of Ephesus – Evans 2019:11), in the words of Noetus:

[W]hen indeed, then, the Father had not been born, He [yet] was justly styled Father; and when it pleased Him to undergo generation, having been begotten, He Himself became His own Son, not another's. (eds. Roberts & Donaldson 1868:335; ed. Schaff 1885b:330)

The doctrine of the Monarchians distinguished between 'a human Jesus-Son and a divine Christ-Word-Father' (Evans 2019:14). This established the monarchy (sovereignty of God) for them, as they were, according to them, not two beings, but only one. It was therefore God who was born from a virgin and who confessed himself to humankind as the Son of God. At the cross, God commended his spirit to himself, as he acted to be dead, but he was not dead in reality, although he raised himself on the 3rd day (Evans 2019:14).

Evans (2019:8) refers to 'three facts' with which the Christians of these times were confronted: (1) There is a divine unity, (2) Jesus Christ as the Son of God forms part of that unity and should therefore be worshipped as part of the unity, and (3) Jesus is 'in some sense' not identical to the Father. The Monarchians claimed that the combination of the latter two 'facts' was in opposition to the first (which was what they proclaimed), pointing at a duality of gods. They therefore denied the third 'fact' in order to establish the second one so as to equal Jesus to the Father so that he could be worshipped.

By the end of the 2nd century, Monarchianism got some support in Alexandria and in Libya, but more in Rome and Antioch. This Christian movement was later called Sabellianism and was a reaction on polytheism as they claimed that there was no distinction between the Father, his Son and the Holy Spirit (Evans 2019:6). They based their belief on Judaism, which was a monotheistic religion. As Christianity had Judaism as its basis, they thought that it was also supposed to be strictly monotheistic – one deity, one unity. The Father and his Son could therefore only be different expressions of one and the same being, meaning that there was no personal distinctions between them (Litfin 2019:89). However, fact was that Christianity was introduced with the birth of Jesus and from the start he was likened or equalled to God the Father. This included the Holy Spirit. Suddenly there were three Persons who were claimed to be God; suddenly there was a Trinitarian blessing and people started to pray to Jesus while they were supposed to pray to God (the Father).

The Monarchian school or movement (there were two of them – Evans 2019:9) with which Tertullian was in conflict began with Noetus (Heraclitus?) and included Sabellius. Adolph Von Harnack (1961:166) coined the term 'Modalism' for this 2nd-century doctrine, which referred to the Trinity as consisting of 'three modes or aspects of one divine existence' (Evans 2019:10). Although this movement called themselves 'Monarchians' (Evans 2019:10), the Greek Fathers called them 'Sabellians', as Sabellius was the person who has put this

doctrine in its philosophical form, supplying its metaphysical basis (Evans 2019:12). The Latin Fathers, on the other hand, called them 'patripassians' because they have identified the Father and the Son to such an extent that they believed that it was the Father who suffered and died on the cross.

Biblical texts on which they based their doctrine are Isaiah 45:14 (*Surely God is with you, and there is no other; there is no other god*); Romans 9:5 (*the Messiah, who is God over all*); John 10:30 (*[Jesus answered,] I and the Father are one*); and John 14:9 (*Jesus answered... Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father*). Tertullian discussed each of these texts in AP.

As Praxeas was adamant to identify the Father and Son as one Person, Tertullian criticised him as follows: *Paracletum fugavit, et Patrem crucifixit [he put to flight the Paraclete, and he crucified the Father – Migne 1844:156; ed. Schaff 1885a:1335]*. In this concern, Daniel Eguiluz (n.d.:3) refers to Praxeas as the 'devil's mouthpiece'.

The composition of *Adversus Praxeam*

Tertullian wrote this treatise shortly after he became part of the New Prophecy in 213 (Quasten 1950:284). Evans (2019:5) argues that this treatise of Tertullian has set forth the 'official doctrine of the African Churches on the holy Trinity and the Incarnation'. It needs to be added that it was ante-Nicene,¹³ and therefore not fully in line with the decisions, which were taken at Nicaea in 325 CE. It was therefore aimed at the 'modalist teaching in its unmetaphysical Noetic form' (Evans 2019:18). Tertullian aimed this treatise at Praxeas, accusing him of Trinitarian heresy and also because he (Praxeas) opposed the New Prophecy, specifically in Rome, being responsible that the bishop of Rome condemned Montanus (cf. AP1 – ed. Schaff 1885a:1335).

The first chapter introduces the treatise to its reader, describing how Praxeas' teaching reached Africa and Rome *ex Asia* (Migne 1844:155). Tertullian then, in AP2, describes the traditional faith in the Trinity in order for the reader to take note of the point of departure for this treatise (Migne 1844:156–157). In line with the name of the treatise, Tertullian intends to defend this point of view. He then starts with an analogy between the Roman Empire and the Trinity. Although the Emperor has co-opted his son to help him rule the Empire, nobody was afraid that this would imperil the unity of the Empire (the monarchy). In the same way God does not imperil his monarchy with the existence of his Son and his Holy Spirit (AP3 – Migne 1844:157–159). The Bible even states that the Father has committed his kingdom to the Son,

13. Cf. Litfin (2019:94) who clearly indicated the differences between Tertullian's theology and the Nicene decisions. While Tertullian already pointed out the equality in divinity and the consubstantiality between the Father and the Son (Nicene views), he mainly differed from Nicaea in the sense that the Son was created later (AP5; ed. Schaff 1885:1342–1343, discussed inside the article), although being *in* the Father from eternity and as the Son was of a lower rank, although equal to the Father in power in status, with the Holy Spirit in the third place (cf. AP3: *...the Son and...the Holy Ghost, who have the second and the third places assigned to them – ed. Schaff 1885a:1340*). Litfin (2019:95; emphasis added) is, therefore, correct when he refers to Tertullian as 'proto-Nicene in certain fundamental ways'.

who will in the end deliver it back to the Father (AP4 – Migne 1844:159). According to Evans (2019:21), up to this point, Tertullian is addressing the ‘simple people’ (cf. *simplices enim queque* AP3 – Migne 1844:157), as from here onwards, he addresses the ‘more instructed’, supplying them with scriptural testimonies about the being of the Son, referring to him as the ‘Word’ (AP5 – Migne 1844:159–161) and the ‘Wisdom’ of God (AP6 and 7 – Migne 1844:161–162). The Son proceeded by generation from the Father and therefore became the second Person after the Father (AP7 and 8 – Migne 1844:161–164). However, the Son is not separated from the Father, as the Trinity is composed *not by way of diversity that the Son differs from the Father, but by distribution: it is not by division that He is different, but by distinction* (AP9 – Migne 1844:164; ed. Schaff 1885a:1350). The two Persons are therefore both Lord and God – they are not two lords or two gods. Their very names prove their personal distinction (AP10 and 11 – Migne 1844:164–167). In AP12 and 13, Tertullian adds Scriptures to prove the plurality of Persons in the Godhead, pointing out that it is not polytheism (Migne 1844:167–170).

Evans (2019:22) also refers to the next line of argument that Tertullian took, talking about the fact that *no one can see God’s face and live* (AP14 – Migne 1844:170–172). However, from the Bible we know that many people have seen God. Tertullian supplies an ‘easy solution’ to this by referring to the God ‘who cannot be seen’ – who is the Father – and the God ‘who can be seen’ – the Son (AP15 – Migne 1844:172–174).¹⁴ The Son has mediated the Father from the creation of the world (AP16–19 – Migne 1844:174–179). Therefore, everything that has been known of God from the beginning was mediated by his Son, also known as the Word of God (cf. Jn 1:1). It was therefore the Son who was seen and not the Father (also mentioned in AP24 – Migne 1844:186–187). However, the Son became invisible after *the days of His flesh* (AP14 – ed. Schaff 1885a:1352).

In the next chapter, Tertullian referred to the doctrine of the Monarchians being based on their interpretation of the three texts: Isaiah 45:5, John 10:30 and John 14:9–10, leading to their conclusion that God is one (AP20 – Migne 1844:179). From the Gospel of John (AP21–25 – Migne 1844:179–188), and with the help of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke (AP26 – Migne 1844:188–190), Tertullian indicates to them that Jesus and his Father are two (AP27 – Migne 1844:190–192). Jesus was the Christ, the anointed, which means that someone (other than him) had to anoint him (AP28 – Migne 1844:192–193).

In the next chapters, the Son is indicated as not identical to the Father, based on his words on the cross (‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ [Mt 27:46], AP29 – Migne 1844:193–195 and ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit’ [Lk 23:46]), his Ascension, his sitting at his Father’s right

hand and the mission of the Holy Spirit by both the Father and the Son (AP30 – Evans 2019:22; Migne 1844:195–196). Finally, in AP31 (Migne 1844:196) Tertullian likens the heresy of Praxeas to the Jewish faith.

Adversus Praxeam was Tertullian’s treatise in which he presented an orthodox view of the Trinity, although already being under the influence and part of Montanism. Therefore, this treatise is not only part of the orthodox literature but also of the Montanist movement (cf. McGowan 2006:440).

The theology of *Adversus Praxeam*

Adversus Praxeam was written to counter Modalistic Unitarianism (the Monarchians) in Africa, in order to defend the then (Catholic) doctrine of the Holy Trinity. According to McGowan (2006), the:

[C]entral purpose or argument of *Against Praxeas* is not the abstract articulation of Tertullian’s understanding of God as Trinity, but opposition to a Monarchianism (also) probably focused specifically on the relation between Father and Son. (p. 444)

In his argumentation, Tertullian usually followed a specific pattern: Firstly, a short historical narrative of the problem, then a modification or amendment of the exegesis/eisegesis being performed, followed by scriptural proof of his argument.

Adversus Praxeam cannot be regarded as a ‘single sustained thesis’, but rather as a set of linked arguments against a set of objections towards the Trinity (McGowan 2006:443). The arguments that Tertullian used against Praxeas were not self-fabricated but were his interpretations of the church’s tradition of the day (Evans 2019:19). In the next section, the discussion of the theology of AP is divided under a few headings.

The (Catholic) Rule of Faith

Although being a Montanist, Tertullian remained very close to the Rule of Faith of his time, witnessing that *[h]anc regulam ab initio Evangelii decurrisse (this rule of faith has come down to us from the beginning of the gospel; AP2 – McGowan 2006:450; Migne 1844:157; ed. Schaff 1885a:1337)*. This is a clear indication that, although Tertullian criticised the church, as indicated here, he did not separate himself from the church and specifically from the Rule of Faith.

Defending the doctrine of the Holy Trinity¹⁵

As has already been stated here, Tertullian has first used (coined) the term *Trinitas* within the context of his argumentation with Modalism, thereby indicating to them that God is one within the Trinity – the one does not exclude the other. This was over against Praxeas who contended that these two concepts exclude each other (cf. Carl 2009:3). Tertullian’s ‘doctrine of the Trinity and

14. Although Jesus was part of God’s Trinity and was therefore invisible just like the Father and the Holy Spirit, he became visible for the time between his emanation from the Father and his Ascension – he was therefore visible in the OT times and on earth (cf. AP14 and 15 – ed. Schaff 1885a:1352). Carl (2009:11) therefore concludes at the hand of Tertullian: ‘All Theophanies in Scripture are Christophanies’.

15. According to Dünzl (2011:30), Tertullian was the first author to present a proper ‘theology of the Trinity’.

the intimately connected Christology [was his] greatest contribution to theology' (Quasten 1950:324).

Adversus Praxeam is a 'robust defence of the transcendence of the Father and of the real existence of the Son' (McGowan 2006:444), although not really a strong articulation on the Trinity. Instead of portraying the Trinity in full, Tertullian rather emphasised the distinct existences of the first two Persons of the Trinity (e.g. AP9, 13, 19, and 22),¹⁶ with not so much reference to the Holy Spirit. However, in AP9 he mentions the Holy Spirit: *Thus, the Father is distinct from the Son, being greater than the Son, inasmuch as He who begets is one, and He who is begotten is another; He, too, who sends is one, and He who is sent is another; and He, again, who makes is one, and He through whom the thing is made is another. Happily the Lord Himself employs this expression of the person of the Paraclete, so as to signify not a division or severance, but a disposition (of mutual relations in the Godhead); for He says, 'I will pray the Father, and He shall send you another Comforter...even the Spirit of truth', thus making the Paraclete distinct from Himself, even as we say that the Son is also distinct from the Father.* Quite a few references to 'Spirit of God' are actually utilised to focus on the separate existence of the Son as part of the Trinity (e.g. AP14: *...the Son also, considered in Himself [as the Son], is invisible, in that He is God, and the Word and Spirit of God* – ed. Schaff 1885a:1363) – this, however, does not make Tertullian binitarian.

The main aim of the treatise was therefore to set the record straight that the second Person of the Trinity did not break up or destabilise 'the principle of a single divine power or *monarchia*' (McGowan 2006:443). In order to make his point, Tertullian discussed the *oikonomia*¹⁷ of God (AP2, 3), referring here to *God's internal and external self-disposition, whereby Word or Son and Spirit are extensions or emanations (προβολαι) of God's own being* (cf. AP8 discussed above; Carl 2009:6; McGowan 2006:443). Jesus' visibility acted as guarantee for his Father's invisibility and transcendence (AP15). Tertullian depicted Jesus as an actual *substantia*¹⁸ – he therefore did exist – over against the Monarchians' theory (AP2, 3).

In AP2, Tertullian argued that the Godhead is of *unius autem substantiae, et unius status, et unius potestatis* [one substance, and of one condition, and of one power]. The fact that the Son proceeded from the Father, while the Holy Spirit proceeded from both the Father and the Son, rather added to the unity (Carl 2009:4). This was also what made the Son equal to the Father – *He proceeds forth from God, and in that procession He is generated; so that He is the Son of God, and is called God from unity of substance with God* (AP7 – ed. Schaff 1885a:1345).

Tertullian confessed the existence of 'two *substantiae*, each with its *proprietas*' (Evans 2019:14), leaving the gap to make a

16. Here he mainly used OT texts such as Psalms 45:1, Psalms 2:7, Proverbs 8:22 and Psalms 45:7 to prove his point.

17. According to Litfin (2019:88), Tertullian 'inherited' this term from Irenaeus of Lyons, who employed it 'in the sense of a great, unfolding plan' or system.

18. The term 'substantia' is most probably the key term to understand the doctrine of Tertullian on the Trinity (Carl 2009:2).

division between them. With 'persona' Tertullian meant someone with an existence, someone who has a status and personal rights and someone who has relationships with others and obligations towards them (summarised as 'presence', discussed here). This has fit in well with the three Persons of the holy Trinity to be immutable (cf. Hallman 1981:374), and with the incarnate Word as a permanent aspect of the Godhead (Evans 2019:14–15).

God's *oikonomia* in *Adversus Praxeam*

Tertullian wrote his treatise against a heresy (Monarchianism) who presented the Father and the Son 'as different interlocutors' (Litfin 2019:89). This doctrine has infiltrated most of the church specifically in Carthage (cf. the *simplices* and *psychici* as given). His arguments are therefore not only aimed at the movement of Praxeas but also at the Catholic Christians who at that stage had a more Monarchian view than a Trinitarian one (cf. McGowan 2006:449–451).

Among most of the Church Fathers, the term *oikonomia* can best be translated with 'God's divine plan or arrangement of affairs for the sake of salvation' (Litfin 2019:90). Tertullian's application of the term is in the same vein – it is all about God's plan with his creation and redemption. God who was there from the beginning, first had discourses with his Word, before creation. Then he 'extended himself and projected himself forward' (Litfin 2019:91) in order to make the three Persons of the Trinity more visible and distinguished. In AP2 (cf. also AP3), Tertullian argued that *there is one only God, but under the following dispensation, or oikonomia, as it is called, that this one only God has also a Son, His Word, who proceeded from Himself* (ed. Schaff 1885a:1336). God's plan (*oikonomia*) thus included himself fully, as he was *under* (subject to; Latin: *sub*) *the oikonomia*. Later on in AP2, Tertullian stated that the Unity of God was distributed into the Trinity in the order of three Persons: The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (ed. Schaff 1885a:1338). To better illustrate this plan of God, Tertullian used at least two images: first of the monarch and his imperial rule (AP3 – already discussed above) and second of the root, the fountain and the sun (AP8): *Protulit enim Deus Sermonem, quemadmodum etiam Paraclete docet, sicut radix fructum, et fons fluvium, et sol radium. Nam et istae species probolae sunt earum substantiarum, ex quibus prodeunt...Omne quod prodit ex aliquo, secundum sit ejus necesse est de quo prodit, non ideo tamen est separatum [For God sent forth the Word, as the Paraclete also declares, just as the root puts forth the tree, and the fountain the river, and the sun the ray. For these are προβολαι, or emanations, of the substances from which they proceed...Everything which proceeds from something else must needs be second to that from which it proceeds, without being on that account separated]*¹⁹ (Migne 1844:163; ed. Schaff 1885a:1349).²⁰ This is therefore the way in which God has arranged himself as Trinity in his *oikonomia* (divine plan).

19. Although in its infancy, this was the forerunner of what was later called 'perichoresis.' Furthermore, in the same vein, Augustine used these metaphors of the fountain and the river, as well as the root and the tree trunk, arguing that although the Father and Son 'are of the same substance...they are not the same person' (Carl 2009:7; *De Trinitate* 9.17 ed. Schaff 1885e:702).

20. McGowan (2006:445) referred to this as an oracle. This 'temporal paternity and filiation distances Tertullian from the eventual Nicene consensus' (Litfin 2019:81) or was in fact a forerunner to the Nicene Creed.

Substantia and persona in Adversus Praxeam

Connected to the previous discussion of the Trinity is Tertullian's introduction of the two terms *substantia* (substance) and *persona* (presence). He used these terms '[i]n order to balance unity and diversity within the Godhead' (Litfin 2019:92). The use of these terms is an indication of the Stoic influence on Tertullian (mentioned here). Tertullian reduced the four categories of existence of the Stoics – substance, quality, disposition and relative disposition – to the two above-mentioned terms (Rist 1969:152–172).

Substantia comprises and refers to the existence and qualities of a 'single, discrete entity' (Litfin 2019:92), in this case 'one God' with all his qualities such as love, grace and omnipresence.²¹ This existence and qualities include the Logos, the Wisdom and the Son. In AP2, 13, 19 and 25,²² Tertullian refers to the unity of the three Persons of the Trinity, stating that although they are distinct Persons, they 'share a common divine substance' (Carl 2009:2). The Son and the Holy Spirit are therefore one substance with the Father – *joined with the Father in His substance* (AP3 – ed. Schaff 1885a:1340), while the Son is derived *from no other source but from the substance of the Father* (AP4 – ed. Schaff 1885a:1341). When Jesus said that he and the Father are one (Jn10:30), he did not refer to a singularity of number, but to a unity of substance (cf. AP25 – ed. Schaff 1885a:1391–1392). When Jesus was on earth, he had two natures – therefore being both human and divine – and these natures were joined (not confused) in one Person (cf. AP27 – ed. Schaff 1885a:1396–1398).

In line with *substantia* is the Divine plan (*οικονομία*) of the Godhead, which Tertullian closely linked to the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity as part of the Rule of Faith (cf. AP2 – ed. Schaff 1885a:1337–1338). In God's *οικονομία*, the 'substance of the godhead is relayed to each person of the Trinity' (Carl 2009:2; cf. Prestige 1952:99–102). Tertullian used this term to indicate that God is three in his 'plan' ('economy') and one in his 'monarchy' (Carl 2009:3). Tertullian refers most of the time to the Trinity in an 'economical' way, therefore within the context of his relationship with his creation. By doing this, it becomes clear that Tertullian was a practical person who did not like to think abstractly.

With *substantia* and *οικονομία* in mind – in describing the *Trinitas* – it almost follows logically that Tertullian had to utilise a term, which would differentiate the three Persons of the Trinity in both their interpersonal relationship and their relationship with the creation – he therefore used *persona*

21. Daniélou (1977:363–364) defines it in the same vein, with an addition: *Substantia* refers to 'what determines the fundamental characteristics of things and their level in the scale of realities'.

22. AP2: ...dum ex uno omnia, per substantiae scilicet unitatem (...in that All are of One, by unity [that is] of substance); AP13 (referring to the Father and the Son): ... indivisae substantiae numerabo, quam Deum et Sermonem ejus, quam Patrem et Filium (...of one undivided substance, as God and His Word, as the Father and the Son); AP19: ...sed qua Pater et Filius duo; et hoc non ex separatione substantiae, sed ex dispositione, cum individuum et inseparatum Filium a Patre pronuntiamus (...but that they are two as Father and Son; and this not by severance of their substance, but from the dispensation wherein we declare the Son to be undivided and inseparable from the Father); AP25: ...qui tres unum sint, non unus. Quo modo dictum est: Ego et pater unum sumus; ad substantiae unitatem, non ad numeri singularitatem [These Three are one essence, not one Person, as it is said, 'I and my Father are One', in respect of unity of substance not singularity of number].

(presence). The three Persons relate in different ways to each other, while each has a unique relationship with the creation. Whereas *substantia* links the Persons of the Godhead to each other, *persona* refers to each Person's characteristics, which distinguish the three Persons from each other, as well as their relationship with creation (cf. Carl 2009:3). Whereas *substantia* indicates the rulership of God over his creation, his *persona* designates that the rulership intrinsically belongs to the Father, while the Son and the Holy Spirit are deriving it from him and mediate it to the creation. Although the Son and Holy Spirit 'have no less power or status than the Father, yet they are arranged or disposed at a lower grade' (Litfin 2019:93).

In AP13 Tertullian depicted the Trinity in the following way: *Two Beings are God, the Father and the Son, and, with the addition of the Holy Spirit, even Three, according to the principle of the divine economy number...the Father is God, and the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, and each is God.* The distinction that Tertullian made between the Trinity and the three Persons is that the Trinity is one in condition, substance and power (*status, substantiae, potestatis*), while the Trinity is three Persons in degree, form and aspect (*gradus, forma and species*) (AP2; cf. Litfin 2019:95).

Monarchy and unity

The main challenge between Tertullian and Praxeas lay in the terms 'monarchy' and 'unity'. Tertullian interpreted 'monarchy' as different from Praxeas, in that he still understood it in its political sense as 'empire', equalling it to its subjective meaning of 'imperial authority' (Evans 2019:9). Tertullian claimed that there could be a delegation of authority to a second and even a third person without dividing the empire, as long as the delegated authority 'derives from one and reverts again to the one [which means that] the Father is the sole ἀρχή or origin of the Being of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Evans 2019:9). Tertullian utilised the oracle in AP8 (already given here) to extend the view of a three-fold analogy for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit: *Tertius enim est spiritus a Deo et Filio [Now the Spirit indeed is third from God and the Son – Migne 1944:163–164; ed. Schaff 1885a:1349].* From these words, one can deduce that Tertullian was an advocate of a hierarchical system in the Trinity, with the Father as the source and the Son and Holy Spirit as his emanations, being second and third (cf. Carl 2009:6).

The New Prophecy compared with the *simplices* and *psychici*

In AP3, Tertullian referred to the *simplices* ('simple people' – the majority of the Carthaginian Christians – Litfin 2019:90) (Migne 1844:157; ed. Schaff 1885a:1339) who wrongly presumed that '[t]he numerical order and distribution of the Trinity they assume to be a division of the Unity'. These believers held on to the Rule of Faith without comprehending its trinitarian element, therefore having fallen prey of the Monarchian doctrine (McGowan 2006:450; cf. Litfin 2019:90). However, these *simplices* are in fact the same as the

'ethically mediocre' Catholic *psychici* mentioned in AP1 ('carnally minded people' – McGowan 2006:451; Migne 1844:156; ed. Schaff 1885a:1335). Looking at the Carthaginian situation from this angle, it seems as if it was only the 'followers of the Paraclete' who really held on to the 'real' Catholic Rule of Faith, as the rest of the followers 'had lapsed into a sort of confessional monarchianism' (McGowan 2006:451). The bare fact of the situation was therefore that, during the early stages of the 3rd century in Carthage, and according to the view of Tertullian, it was only the followers of the New Prophecy that held on to the correct Trinitarian belief, as expounded by the then Rule of Faith.

The New Prophecy was therefore very close to the Catholic Christianity of its day, except that it was 'ethically idiosyncratic or sectarian' (McGowan 2006:447).²³ However, it is in fact impossible to refer to early 3rd-century 'Catholicism' as 'orthodox' because no 'coherent set of beliefs and practices' can be identified from this movement at that time – the implication is that 'Catholicism' was not fully defined as yet, and that the notion about the Trinity was not settled as yet (McGowan 2006:448). This also goes for the doctrines of the New Prophecy, although Tertullian's exposition is 'by far the most significant surviving "Montanist" articulation of a doctrine of God at any stage' (McGowan 2006:448).

The Paraclete or Paracletes in *Adversus Praxeam*

Apart from the fact that Tertullian also referred to the Holy Spirit as Paraclete and part of the Holy Trinity in AP, it also looks as if he had another Paraclete in mind. The term 'Paraclete' could also be the designation of or reference to a prophet of the New Prophecy during or before the time of Tertullian or it could be a direct reference to Montanus himself (who was already dead by that time, cf. as discussed). The prophets of the New Prophecy did not speak on behalf of the Lord, but as being possessed by the Lord (New Advent 2020b). This is why Montanus has declared: Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ Πατήρ, καὶ ὁ Υἱὸς, καὶ ὁ Παράκλητος' [I am the Father, the Son and the Paraclete' – Didymus, *De Trinitate* 3.41 – Migne 1863:983]. Apart from the fact that Montanus identified himself with the Trinity, he regarded himself as representing the Trinity on earth. Montanus believed that he lived in the days (age) of the Holy Spirit, referring many times to himself as the Paraclete (Wright 1984), which implies that his followers also started to refer Montanus as the Paraclete (Eusebius *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.14; ed. Schaff 1885d:545). The problem with this is that, according to Montanus, the New Prophecy could add more truth to the teachings of Jesus and his apostles, therefore creating a 'richer revelation' (Britannica 2007).

In AP, Tertullian refers to the Paraclete 11 times and seemingly his references are not always to the Holy Spirit, although it

23. Hippolytus (*Philosophumena* 11 and 12 – ed. Schaff 1885:383–384) wrongfully referred to the 'Phrygians' as being 'guilty of blasphemy, because they assert that He is Son and Father, visible and invisible, begotten and unbegotten, mortal and immortal', while this was in fact true of Praxeas and his movement. McGowan, however, states that some of the Phrygians became Monarchian in their theology, thus believing that the above mentioned was in line with Praxeas (McGowan 2006:447).

mostly is. In AP2 we read about the two uses of 'Paraclete' in one paragraph:

In the course of time, then, the Father forsooth was born, and the Father suffered, God Himself, the Lord Almighty, whom in their preaching they declare to be Jesus Christ. We, however, as we indeed always have done (and more especially since we have been better instructed by the Paraclete [of the New Prophecy?], who leads men indeed into all truth), believe that there is one only God, but under the following dispensation, or *οικονομία*, as it is called, that this one only God has also a Son... [This God has] sent also from heaven... according to His own promise, the Holy Ghost, the Paraclete, the sanctifier of the faith of those who believe in the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Ghost. (ed. Schaff 1885:1337; emphasis added)

Here, the first reference to 'Paraclete' was seemingly to a specific prophet of the New Prophecy, most probably Montanus himself or his successor in Carthage. The first sentence refers to the belief system of which Praxeas was part. Tertullian opposed this with the New Prophecy who was instructed by one of their prophets, called the Paraclete. We get the same construction in AP8: Tertullian's reference here, 'quemadmodum etiam Paracletus docet' [as the Paraclete also declares – quoted here], is also rather to one of the new prophets than to the Holy Spirit (McGowan 2006:445). In AP13, Tertullian argued: [W]e who are followers of the Paraclete, not of human teachers, do indeed definitively declare that Two Beings are God, the Father and the Son, and, with the addition of the Holy Spirit, even Three, according to the principle of the divine economy (ed. Schaff 1885a:1360). In this chapter it also becomes clear that Tertullian is not referring to the Holy Spirit in the first instance, but to the New Prophecy's Paraclete.

Whereas the *simplices* and the *psychici* in Carthage in fact represented the same (lukewarm Christian) group of believers, they were confronted with both the Catholic Rule of Faith (*doctrine*) and the New Prophecy's *discipline* of the Paraclete (McGowan 2006:451). Tertullian constructed a very close similarity between the New Prophecy (*discipline*) and faith in the Trinity according to the Rule of Faith (*doctrine*). He was therefore adamant to equal the New Prophecy with the 'old-time religion' (McGowan 2006:454), but also went further by implying that the 'defence of trinitarian faith actually depended on the followers of the Paraclete' (McGowan 2006:456). These followers' faith was authenticated by the New Prophecy, as they were witnesses to both that faith and to the Paraclete (McGowan 2006:456).

Tertullian's mission in Carthage was not only to 'market' the New Prophecy's doctrine with its ascetic rigour, but also to convince these Christians about the Trinity, specifically the relationship between the Father and the Son. The Paraclete in fact made the Rule of Faith practical, 'linking and unifying *disciplina* and *doctrina*' (McGowan 2006:452; original emphasis). McGowan (2006) added:

[F]or Tertullian, a true *doctrina* recognizes the work of the Paraclete in the church, and a true *disciplina* proceeds from the profession of the one God revealed not only in Creation and in the work of Christ, but in the activity of the Spirit even in Tertullian's day. (p. 454)

Tertullian who appealed to the Rule of Faith, however, claimed a 'firmer and clearer understanding of the Rule through the work of the Paraclete', therefore adding the Paraclete as part of the authority of the Rule (McGowan 2006:452).

'Peculiarities' in Tertullian's Doctrine

It is easy to point out and criticise specific 'errors' that Tertullian has made, as it is just as easy to accredit him for things that we read in his text, which are in fact not there. One must therefore remember that Tertullian's arguments were ante-Nicene, with a theology not developed as that of Nicaea a century later. Take the following for a good example: Jean Daniélou argues that Tertullian (being of the North African Church Father), does not reconcile 'the specific individuality of the persons of the Trinity and the ground of their distinct existence' (Daniélou 1977:364). In his theology, Tertullian has therefore not yet developed the fact that 'the distinctive individuality of each of the divine persons reflects eternal relationships within the Godhead' (Eguiluz n.d.:17). The implication is that, after Nicaea, the theologians would not argue that the Son was issuing forth by the Father and in this way 'for the sake of creation' became the Word of God (Daniélou 1977:364). The Son rather was there from the beginning in an eternal relationship with the Father, therefore not *becoming* the Son at a specific stage.

If we take a look at this treatise, we must admit that Tertullian was very orthodox and much in line with the Rule of Faith of his day. There are, however, two aspects where Tertullian's theology came really close to that of the Arians (a later heresy). However, this is not enough reason to argue that Tertullian was a forerunner of the Arian heresy. Firstly, Tertullian held that both the Son and the Holy Spirit were subordinated to the Father.²⁴ According to Tertullian, there is a 'stepwise ranking' in the Trinity with specific reference to the Persons' *gradus*, *forma* and *species* (discussed here) (Litfin 2019:95). He, however, differed from the later Arianism in that this was neither a temporal nor an ontological subordination.

Litfin (2019:96) indicates another challenging point of view by Tertullian, where the latter argued that there is no 'relationship of fatherhood and sonship...intrinsic to the Trinity' as depicted by Tertullian. One could then easily say, from our point of view, that the implication is that the first Person of the Trinity, mostly called 'God', was only temporarily a Father. When reading through AP, it becomes clear that this was not Tertullian's intention.

Then there is the issue of the Son's – the Word's, the Wisdom's – existence 'from the beginning'. Tertullian clearly stated that God's Reason – his Word – (AP5 – ed. Schaff 1885a:1342–1343), also called God's Wisdom (AP6 – ed. Schaff 1885a:1344) was with him before creation took place. Then Tertullian

argued: *Now, as soon as it pleased God to put forth into their respective substances and forms the things which He had planned and ordered within Himself, in conjunction with His Wisdom's Reason and Word, He first put forth the Word Himself* (AP6 – ed. Schaff 1885a:1344). However, in AP5, Tertullian argued that *eum magis rationem competat antiquiorem haberi* [Reason was actually the more ancient – Migne 1844:160; ed. Schaff 1885a:1342], leaving the impression that the Word only came later *because God had not Word from the beginning, but He had Reason even before the beginning* (ed. Schaff 1885a:1342). Here we have the situation where Tertullian was 'not consistent in his language' (Carl 2009:15), therefore not putting his words correctly. If we read just a few lines on, Tertullian mentioned that the Reason *became* the Word (ed. Schaff 1885a:1343), implying that the Reason who was first, developed into the Word.

This brings us to the key with which we should understand Tertullian: We must read his treatises 'in his framework' with the Monarchians and the *simplices* in Carthage on the one side and with the (Greek and Roman) polytheism on the other (Carl 2009:14). With this in mind, AP makes overall more sense.

Conclusion

Tertullian must have had many things simultaneously on his mind when he wrote AP. In Carthage he had 'Praxeas' the personification or *persona* of the Monarchians. There were also the *simplices* and the *psychici* who were supposed to be Catholic Christians, but both of these groups have fallen prey to the Monarchian doctrine. Then there was also the New Prophecy sect of which he was the leader. At this stage there were no pure definitions for Catholicism, Monarchianism or for the New Prophecy. One might even ask how 'carnally minded' the *psychici* were, or how simple the *simplices* were. The truth was therefore in the eye of the beholder, in this case Tertullian. He considered the Monarchians as direct opposition to the Rule of Faith, and he regarded the *simplices* and the *psychici* as falling prey to that new heresy – mostly unintentional. As the main difference between him (and his group) and 'Praxeas' and his followers concerned the Trinity, Tertullian had to elaborate on and criticise each point of his opponents' views in order to bring them back to what Tertullian claimed to be the truth about the Trinity. He found this truth in the Rule of Faith that *has come down to us from the beginning of the gospel* (AP2 ed. Schaff 1885a:1337). Tertullian was therefore a Montanist, but clinging to the Rule of Faith, being a Montanist Catholic, to be more precise, an *orthodox Christian Montanist Catholic*.

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²⁴Quasten (1950:286) ascribed this to the 'pitfalls of subordinationism'. Although the codified form of this doctrine seems to originate from Lucian of Antioch who was born after Tertullian died (in 240 CE), the origin of this doctrine can already be found with the Greek apologists before Tertullian (Quasten 1950:326). This would then rather make Tertullian a 'forerunner' of subordinationism than the other way round.

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