

*Interdisciplinary Journal of  
Research on Religion*

---

Volume 5

2009

Article 9

---

Identity, Psychology, and the *Psychici*:  
Tertullian's "Bishop of Bishops"

David Wilhite\*

Assistant Professor of Theology  
Truett Theological Seminary of Baylor University  
Waco, Texas

---

\* David\_Wilhite@Baylor.edu

# Identity, Psychology, and the *Psychici*: Tertullian's "Bishop of Bishops"

David Wilhite

Assistant Professor of Theology  
Truett Theological Seminary of Baylor University  
Waco, Texas

## Abstract

In his treatise *De pudicitia* ("On Modesty"), the early Christian writer Tertullian contrasts the "church of the spirit" with the "church of the bishops" and attacks a certain "Pontifex Maximus, the bishop of bishops." The identity of this "bishop of bishops" is not spelled out, but the two most likely candidates are the bishop of Rome and the bishop of Carthage. Although many scholars have concluded that Tertullian was referring to the bishop of Carthage, I seek to defend a Roman referent. In reviewing the past possibilities offered by scholars I summarize the major trends and highlight the appeal to motive in the competing arguments. The motive that most scholars have presumed for identifying the bishop as Carthaginian is that Tertullian was a member of the Montanist sect, which it is assumed was denounced by the bishop of Carthage. Although recent scholarship has called Tertullian's Montanism into question, even denying any existence of a Montanist sect in Carthage at this time, scholars still link Tertullian's "bishop of bishops" to Carthage. Recent psychological theory on social identity offers a means to illustrate why the common assumptions that underlie the preference for a Carthaginian referent are dubious. Tertullian's tract *De pudicitia* can then be read with a view toward identifying his social identity as one that is in opposition to Roman Christians.

In his work *De pudicitia* (“On Modesty”), the early Christian writer Tertullian (c. A.D. 160–225), while admitting that the church can forgive sins, questions both what sins can be absolved and what constitutes “the church.” This article explores the role of Tertullian’s contrast between the “church of the spirit” and the “church of the bishops”—particularly as associated with the actions of one titled “Pontifex Maximus, the bishop of bishops”—in terms of an alternative psychological understanding of Tertullian’s geographic Carthaginian locale in relation to the larger Roman society. The specific matter at issue was an edict by the Pontifex Maximus that offered reconciliation to baptized fornicators and adulterers (Munier 1993; Thelwall 1885 [1870]; cf. Le Saint 1959).

Who was the “bishop of bishops” opposed by Tertullian? There have been two interpretations, and I will argue against the currently prevalent one. In turn, I will defend the other, older interpretation by arguing for its explanatory value according to a different set of presuppositions. In reviewing the two possibilities that scholars offered in the past, namely, the bishop of Rome and the bishop of Carthage, I will summarize the major trends and highlight the appeal to “motive” in the competing arguments. I will show that the motive that most scholars in the past have presumed for identifying the bishop as Carthaginian is Tertullian’s Montanism.<sup>1</sup> The bishop of Carthage, it is assumed, would have denounced Montanism, thereby causing the formation of a Montanist splinter group in Carthage; therefore any alignment of Tertullian with the Montanists would create antipathy toward this Carthaginian “bishop of bishops.” Recent scholarship, however, has called Tertullian’s Montanism into question, undercutting the stated motive or psychological rationale for a Carthaginian referent. In spite of this, scholars still link Tertullian’s reference to Carthage, on the basis, I argue, of assumptions about Tertullian’s psychological rationale. As an alternative, I will invoke recent psychological theory on social identity to illustrate why the common assumptions underpinning the previous scholarship are dubious. I will then review Tertullian’s tract *De pudicitia*, explaining how his social identity can be seen as one that is in opposition to Roman Christians.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The term *Montanism* itself is now widely acknowledged by scholars to be anachronistic. A more appropriate appellation for Tertullian’s era would be “New Prophecy” (or “new prophecies”), as it was known in its own time. For discussion, see Stewart-Sykes (1999). As problematic as the term is for the original movement of Montanus, Priscilla, and Maximilla, it will be argued here that using the term *Montanism* or even *New Prophecy* as a category is especially misleading for the North African context. As Bray (1979: 55) remarks, “It is extremely doubtful whether Tertullian ever met a Phrygian Montanist in the flesh; his first contact with them was most probably through their writings.”

<sup>2</sup> Jerome’s claim that Tertullian was the son of a Roman proconsular centurion has been discounted since publication of the work of Barnes (1971).

### ROME OR CARTHAGE?

To succinctly delineate the scholarly discussion of Tertullian's "bishop of bishops," I will borrow Claudio Micaelli's (1993) alternatives of a Roman hypothesis and an African hypothesis—"l'hypothèse 'Romaine' et l'hypothèse 'Africaine'." The traditional reading of Tertullian's *De pudicitia* followed the former hypothesis, assuming that the mentioned bishop must preside in Rome, the location of the "pagan" *pontifex maximus*.<sup>3</sup> Because of the standard chronologies of Tertullian's writings, which were based on the notion that Tertullian joined the schismatic Montanist church, the bishop in question was said to have been Zephyrinus (c. 198–217). After the discovery and publication of Hippolytus' *Refutatio omnium haeresium* (see especially 9.7 [Marcovich 1986: 351–354; Schaff 1903 [1870]: 129–132]), however, many scholars understood Hippolytus' description of Callistus (218–223), Zephyrinus' successor, to coincide with Tertullian's *episcopus episcoporum*.<sup>4</sup> With clear correspondence between the themes of the writings of Hippolytus and Tertullian, scholars thought that there was sufficient evidence for this conclusion (see Merdinger 1997).

The alternative *hypothèse Africaine* arose when some scholars began to question the assumptions underlying the traditional view.<sup>5</sup> Esser (1914) notes that the term *episcopus episcoporum* could refer ironically to any high-ranking bishop, such as the bishop of Carthage. Given Tertullian's wit and rhetoric, even his use of the appellation *pontifex maximus* cannot be offered with any certainty as evidence for a Roman referent. Additionally, the correlation between Tertullian's description of the "psychic" or "unspiritual" bishop's edict and Hippolytus' accusations against Callistus does not align as neatly as scholars first claimed.<sup>6</sup> The possibility of either hypothesis being correct and the lack of any internal or

---

<sup>3</sup> Scholars who still hold to this view include Brent (1995); Robert Evans (1972: 32), who claims that it is "overwhelmingly probable"; Merdinger (1997); and Osborn (1997).

<sup>4</sup> "Bishop of bishops."

<sup>5</sup> More recent Tertullian scholars who hold this view include von Campenhausen (1964); Barnes (1971); Rankin (1995); Tabbernee (2001), citing Barnes; and Wright (2000).

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted here that reclaiming the *hypothèse Romaine* does not require an A.D. 217 dating, as earlier scholars thought. The dating of this text was once claimed to be later than 217, when Callistus took office. However, since Barnes (1971) challenged this chronology to show that such a dating is no longer necessary under the *hypothèse Africaine*, the work is usually pushed earlier into the time of Zephyrinus. Conversely, the *terminus ante quem* (the latest date when the text could have been written) is said to be c. 203 because of a reference to Tertullian's own treatise *De paenitentia* (cf. *De pudicitia* 1.10). Barnes admits that a precise dating of *De pudicitia* is impossible, so the *terminus post quem* (the earliest date when the text could have been written) cannot at this time be firmly established. Suffice it to say that nothing in the present argument requires a revision of Barnes's chronology. To claim that Tertullian's Praxeas is Hippolytus' Callistus is unconvincing to most scholars and unnecessary for a Roman referent.

external evidence to justify or refute either claim remain, leaving both sides to look for a rationale or motive when choosing one alternative over the other.

If one holds to the *hypothèse Romaine*, then Tertullian's repudiation of the *psychici*, that is, "unspiritual Christians," suggests a regional dimension: lax Roman Christians in contrast to spiritually minded Afro-Carthaginian Christians.<sup>7</sup> What would be the rationale for depicting all *psychici* as Roman? As Micaelli (1993: 34) insinuates, it seems strange that the psychic party is solely identified with Callistus and the church in Rome.<sup>8</sup> Does not Tertullian use the term *psychici* to refer to non-Montanists, meaning orthodox or catholic Christians from many regions, including some within Africa itself? In attempting to give a rationale or motive for this option, Harnack (1927: 151) suggested that bones of Peter, present in Rome, were seen as empowering the bishop of Rome mystically, including the authority to absolve mortal sins.<sup>9</sup> Harnack's claim was easily criticized as too cryptic (no pun intended) for the tone of Tertullian's works (Koch 1930). Without any rationale to explain why Tertullian would depict his opponents as Roman, the *hypothèse Romaine* was dropped as a viable option.<sup>10</sup>

If one holds to the *hypothèse Africaine*, then Tertullian's repudiation of the *psychici* has not a regional but a doctrinal dimension: Catholic Christians in contrast to Montanist Christians.<sup>11</sup> The rationale for assuming that the reference is to the bishop of Carthage seems straightforward in that Tertullian is understood to be a schismatic Montanist. This rationale is not so straightforward, however, in light of a new consensus among scholars who refute the notion of a schismatic

---

<sup>7</sup> Some proponents of this option, such as Harnack (1927), have glossed Tertullian's problematic phrase "*Omnis ecclesia Petri propinqua*" ("every church related to Peter") as "*Romananis ecclesia Petri propinqua*" ("the Roman church related to Peter"). There is no manuscript that supports such a reading.

<sup>8</sup> "*et il semble étrange que la partie adverse de celle des spirituales soit formée seulement de Calliste ou de l'Église de Rome, comme si les psychiques étaient tous concentrés en eux.*"

<sup>9</sup> "*Die mystische Bedeutung der Reliquien (hier des Apostelgrabes) als lebendige Kraft und als fortdauernde Vollmacht.*"

<sup>10</sup> However, because Tertullian often invoked region or *patria* as an identity marker for his rhetorical opponents, dropping this option may have been premature; for example, Tertullian used this marker with non-Christians (*Apologeticum* 9.2 [Arbesmann, Daly, and Quain 1950; Dekkers 1954]) and with heretics (*Adversus Marcionem* 1.1.4 [Dekkers 1954; E. Evans 1972]).

<sup>11</sup> Some proponents of this option, such as Munier (1993), have glossed Tertullian's problematic "*Omnis ecclesia Petri propinqua*" as "*Omnis ecclesia Petri prouinciam*." ("every church under the jurisdiction of Peter"). There is no manuscript that supports such a reading. Of course, the lack of manuscript evidence does not discredit either gloss. As E. Evans (1961: 199) claims: "[Manuscripts] are no more than witnesses and ought not to be elevated to the position of either judge or jury. It is the interpreter's business to hear the evidence and test its credibility. To disregard the witnesses when they may be speaking the truth is a risky proceeding. But to exalt the witnesses, and particularly one single witness, to the position of both judge and jury, is neither good jurisprudence nor, I suggest, sound scholarship."

Montanist sect in Carthage during Tertullian's lifetime.<sup>12</sup> In this view, Tertullian always remained within the Carthaginian church.

Although scholars now discount the notion that Tertullian was a schismatic, most still assume the *hypothèse Africaine*, and they do so, it appears, on the basis of a lack of motive regarding the *hypothèse Romaine*. According to this reasoning, because there is no rationale for Rome (and Tertullian, it is assumed, could not or would not have opposed the entire Roman church), the reference to a "bishop of bishops" must be to the bishop of Carthage. However, such an assumption has been made a priori. I do not intend to discredit the *hypothèse Africaine* simply because it is based on methodological assumptions; rather, I wish to underscore the fact that both interpretations rest on assumptions. Instead of attempting to "prove" one over another, I wish to test both by the level of heuristic assistance they provide. Since the *hypothèse Africaine* does not address the regional dynamics in Tertullian's rhetoric, I suggest that Tertullian's regional identity should be reconsidered and that his writings should be reread with this factor in mind, a reading that is made possible by using the *hypothèse Romaine*.

#### RATIONALE AND REGION

Given the debate over whether or not Tertullian's "bishop of bishops" was the bishop of Rome or the bishop of Carthage, it is somewhat surprising that in recent discussions, there has not been more investigation into regional and contextual matters. In other words, could there have been a Rome-Africa tension among Christians in the early third century, as there most certainly was in the Cyprianic and Donatist periods?<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Scholars had long noticed the lack of firm evidence in Tertullian's writings but nevertheless assumed that for Tertullian to have embraced Montanist prophecies, he must have left the Catholic Church in Carthage; see the discussion in Barnes (1971) and Bray (1979). A watershed moment came in the work of Powell (1975), who demonstrated the lack of any evidence of schism in Tertullian's writings: Tertullian always spoke of himself as within the church. Instead, Powell believes, Tertullian was part of an *ecclesiola in ecclesia* ("little church within the church") that still valued prophetic utterances. Powell's arguments were corroborated by the study of Rankin (1995). Another study presses Powell's conclusions even further: No evidence exists for any *ecclesiola in ecclesia*; Tertullian simply belonged to a Carthaginian church that still valued prophecy (van der Lof, 1991). While most scholars now agree with Powell and Rankin, the question is still open in regard to van der Lof's reading. In what follows, either Powell or van der Lof can be accepted, but I find van der Lof's reading the more convincing.

<sup>13</sup> For Cyprian's period, see Burns (2002). For the Donatist era, see Frend (1952). Frend, who emphasizes the indigenous constituency of early African Christianity, comments on Tertullian's attack on Rome: "In this instance, the attack may perhaps be discounted as formal polemic designed to discredit the argument that Rome had grown . . . strong through her loyalty to the worship of the pagan gods. It is, however, hard not to believe that deeper feelings inspired the denunciations of Cyprian and Tertullian" (Frend 1952: 106; cf. *Ad nationes* 2.1 (Borleffs 1929; Holmes 1903 [1870])).

In his article “Were the Ancient Heresies National or Social Movements in Disguise?” A. H. M. Jones (1959: 280) confronts such a possibility in any “heretical” group, with a rhetorical question:

Did the average Copt say to himself, “I am an Egyptian and proud of it. I hate the Roman oppressor, and will at the earliest opportunity cast off the alien yoke. Meanwhile I insist on speaking my native Coptic instead of Greek, the language of the foreign government, and I refuse to belong to its church. I do not know or care whether Christ has one or two natures, but as the Romans insist on the latter view, I hold the former”?

Similarly with the Donatists, Jones (1959: 281) gives a subtler portrayal of the premise:

What the sectaries actually said in public, so far as our record goes, was . . . “The Donatist church is the true Catholic church, and we will never communicate with *traiditores*,” but what they thought, we are asked to believe, was: “We are Africans and hate the Romans and will maintain our African church and if possible set up our African state.”

Acknowledging the “crudity” of these “cynical” portrayals, he then offers an “attenuated form of the nationalist hypothesis”:

[T]he conscious thought of a Copt might be: “We Egyptians are right in believing that Christ has one nature, and I abominate the Romans as heretics and hate them as persecutors. Rather than submit to their rule I would welcome a barbarian invader.” Or he might even say no more than: “We hold the true orthodox faith, and I abominate the government because it is heretical and persecutes us,” but really hate the Romans as foreigners (Jones 1959: 281).

Although Jones does proceed to review Coptic and Donatist sources, his portrayal of this notion alone seems sufficient to disprove it. As one respondent notes, “Jones . . . has posed the question in terms which will scarcely admit of an affirmative answer” (Markus 1972: 25). Surely, no one would claim that ancient Coptics or Donatists (or anyone for that matter) would actually have thought or uttered these propositions.

We should, however, be circumspect before accepting Jones’s pseudo-psychological dismissal a priori. Ancient Christians did not produce modern novels; they provided no omniscient narrative insights into characters’ feelings,

rationales, or motives.<sup>14</sup> Commenting on Jones's assertions, Frend (1952: 39) responds:

silence on the part of the participants concerning their non-theological motives has encouraged scholars sometimes to suppose that these did not exist. We must not ask too much of our evidence. We should be surprised to find a Montanist or a Donatist leader describing his opposition to the religion of the catholic clergy in terms of nineteenth-century nationalism. Yet when confronted by [certain emphases] . . . , the historian may be pardoned if he asks himself whether a pattern emerges.

Frend's point is that we must use caution in allowing psychodramatic empathy to predetermine answers to our questions.

Why is Jones's argument so compelling? The answer is because Jones inserts us as characters into the ancient Christian drama via role-play. Unfortunately, and apparently unforeseen by Jones, we bring with us our modernist, Western, elitist, psychological costumes (to name only a few). In other words, we read Jones's script and, as actors, find it unconvincing: "If I were a Coptic/Donatist/etc., then I would not employ criteria that are nationalistic/sectarian/racist/dogmatic/etc." The premise does not "feel right," given our psychological comfort levels, and we therefore conclude that the premise must be wrong.

To Jones's credit, he is reacting to a particular reconstruction of the past that did anachronistically project onto certain groups a form of nationalism, a modern phenomenon. I merely suggest that Jones's essay offers a false dichotomy between "national" and "purely religious" movements (Jones 1959).<sup>15</sup> In the Roman world (not to mention others), there were no purely religious movements, Christian or otherwise. Conversely, even outside of ancient Christian groups, Roman historians are hard pressed to find anything that resembles nationalism (see MacMullen 1975). Addressing this false dichotomy is necessary because much Tertullian scholarship has neglected the *hypothèse Romaine* in part because of a Jonesian psychological appeal: There is no motive or rationale that "fits" our understanding of the Tertullian mind-set. In this view, if Tertullian referred to Roman Christians with the label *psychici*, then there must be a regional factor at play such as the one that Jones attacked; therefore Tertullian must not have been

---

<sup>14</sup> In this sense, Augustine's *Confessions* is exceptional in ancient history. On Jones's lack of interest in the history of ideas and how Jones "was interested in how institutions worked, not in the minds of the men who manned them," see Garnsey (2008: 39), who discusses at length Jones's distrust of modern secondary sources.

<sup>15</sup> It should be noted, however, that the whole of Jones's work avoids this dichotomy. For a discussion of Jones's treatment of Christian history in social and economic terms, see Gwynn (2008).



referring to Roman Christians with the label *psychici*. Such use of a psychological rationale is based on dubious premises and becomes circular in its reasoning.<sup>16</sup>

For the present purposes and in light of the need for an alternative psychological framework in the present patristic discourse, I will offer a possible motive or rationale for the *hypothèse Romaine*, and I will do so by countering the *implicit* psychological assumptions of past patristic scholars with *explicit* theory of recent social psychologists. After providing a plausible rationale for the regional tension between Rome and Africa that is at play in Tertullian's writing, I will test the *hypothèse Romaine* on Tertullian's *De pudicitia* to assess whether or not the psychological framework provides sufficient hermeneutical prospects.

### THE PSYCHOLOGY OF TERTULLIAN'S AFRICA

The ancient Roman milieu was a complex web of religion, politics, and people groups. Attempting to isolate any of these factors is unfathomably difficult, and segmenting ancient societies into categories according to national, religious, or social frameworks rather than acknowledging the dynamic flux that was involved falsely reifies the ancient landscape (Laurence 1998; Mattingly 1997; Woolf 1992, 1994, 1998). Moreover, the African social landscape under Roman colonization consisted of competing degrees of Romanization and resistance to the imperial presence, the latter often seen in both military and cultural forms.<sup>17</sup> While ancient Africans were by no means a homogenous people, the insertion of the Roman colonizers created an us-versus-them (i.e., African versus Roman) distinction that many people attempted to transcend (i.e., Romanization) and that many others insisted on enforcing (e.g., resistance). To portray a plausible cognitive framework for such identity conflict in Tertullian's day, I shall employ work done by recent psychologists on social identity theory (SIT).<sup>18</sup>

SIT attempts to understand and explain interactions between various individuals and groups in terms of in-groups and out-groups. In researching the

<sup>16</sup> Schweitzer (1948 [1913]) demonstrated the problems with such criteria in the historical Jesus project. Although Schweitzer refuted scholars who claimed that Jesus was "psychotic," he nevertheless set a precedent in historical Jesus scholarship of avoiding explicitly psychological rationales. In the foreword to the English translation, Winfred Overholser claims that Schweitzer was reacting to "the quest for motives" (cf. Capps 2004). Also, Peter Brown (1967) warns against the use of modern psychology for the historian. However, Fredriksen (1978: 214) calls Brown's work "a 'closet' psychobiography." See discussion by O'Donnell (1999).

<sup>17</sup> An early critique for Tertullian's North African context is that of Broughton (1929). For recent renewals of Broughton's argument, see Cherry (1997, 1998) and Shaw (1995). Similarly, see Rives (1995). For military and cultural resistance to Rome, see Laroui (1970) and Benabou (1976). Although Roman historians have criticized both of these writers, Mattingly and Hitchner (1995: 170) have argued that their critics have been "unjustifiably harsh."

<sup>18</sup> For a comparison of SIT with identity theory from sociology, see Hogg, Terry, and White (1995).

phenomena of stereotyping and prejudice, scholars produced a series of studies on group identity.<sup>19</sup> The results showed how members of groups showed bias toward members of the in-group over members of the out-group, despite the fact that the definition of group membership was expressly arbitrary. The expressly arbitrary aspect is important in that social psychologists experiment with “minimal groups,” or groups that have no essential coherence or boundary. The most famous example is one in which young boys were asked to choose between the works of two painters, Klee and Kandinsky (Tajfel et al. 1971). The boys were then grouped together and told that the grouping was based on which boys had selected which painter. In fact, the boys were grouped at random, and the paintings seen by the two groups were often by the same artist. The individual boys were then asked to award points for their own group (“in-group”) and for the other group (“out-group”). To award these points, the boys were given a distribution matrix that would result in monetary rewards (see Table 1). The choice on the far left resulted in only one point for the out-group but also the lowest possible score for the in-group; the middle choice resulted in equal points for the in-group and the out-group; and the choice on the far right resulted in the most possible points for the in-group but even more points awarded to the out-group. The boys repeatedly gave out-group members low points, despite the low in-group score that necessarily resulted. In other words, even when given the opportunity to award equal scores for both groups or to award the greatest possible score for the in-group, with higher points for the out-group, the subjects chose to penalize the out-group despite the corresponding lower score (and money!) for the in-group.

**Table 1: Distribution Matrix for a SIT Experiment**

<b>In-group:</b>	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
<b>Out-group:</b>	1	3	5	7	9	11	13	15	17	19	21	23	25

This tendency to form a collective identity that is based on valuing (or devaluing) opponents in terms of in-group/out-group is what social psychologists refer to as *social identity*. The psychological research indicates that individuals tend to discriminate against others on the basis of their social identity, even when the social identity is entirely arbitrary. Returning to the above discussion on heresies as social movements, let us apply Jones’s line of questioning to Tajfel’s experiments:

<sup>19</sup> For bibliographies, see Rupert Brown (2000) and Turner and Reynolds (2004).

Did the average Klee fan group member say to himself, “I am a Klee fan and proud of it. I hate the Kandinsky fan, and will at the earliest opportunity give him the lowest possible score. Meanwhile I insist on awarding my fellow Klee fans lower scores than necessary, and I refuse to be fair and award equal points. I do not know or care whether Klee or Kandinsky has more critical acclaim in artistic circles, but as the Kandinsky fans insinuate the latter view, I hold the former”?

Similarly, we could emulate Jones and give a subtler portrayal of the premise:

What the students actually said in public, so far as our record goes, was “Klee was the better painter, and we will never communicate with those unskilled in fine art,” but what they thought, we are asked to believe, was: “We are Klee fans and hate the Kandinsky fans and will maintain our Klee group and if possible set up our own Klee fan club.”

Acknowledging the “crudity” of these “cynical” portrayals, we could then, like Jones, offer an attenuated form of the artistic hypothesis:

The conscious thought of a Klee fan group member might be: “We Klee fans are right in believing that Klee is the better artist, and I scorn the Kandinsky fans as ignorant and hate them as amateurs. Rather than rewarding them for their opinion, I would welcome less money.” Or he might even say no more than: “We like the best art, and I abominate the uncultured because they are unlearned and they hinder us,” but really hate the Kandinsky fans as ignorant.

If one were to apply Jones’s line of questioning, there would apparently be no need even to conduct the experiment. “Surely,” we would internally dramatize, “no student would be so arbitrary/biased/dogmatic/etc.” Such a priori role-playing, however, would lead to incorrect conclusions. If one seeks to decipher motive or rationale for prejudice, bias, and intergroup discrimination, SIT provides an explanation of individual postures toward others in terms of group dynamics.<sup>20</sup> However, if one employs Jones’s delineation of psychological processes, the evidence will unavoidably be skewed, as is demonstrated in social psychological experiments on SIT. Again, the point here is not to attack Jones or even Jones’s point about anachronistically attributing some form of nationalism to ancient writers. Instead, the objective is to illustrate where Jones’s methodological assumptions about the psychological rationale of ancient writers need to be supplemented with psychological theory that can be tested.

---

<sup>20</sup> Hogg and Abrams (1988: 48) state, “We have seen that intergroup relations are frequently competitive, hostile, and antagonistic. Explanations in terms of personality, frustration, and egoistic deprivation all fail to account for the collective nature of intergroup relations.”

The rationale or motive that explains minimal group behavior according to proponents of SIT is that people identify themselves in terms of groups to achieve a sense of self-worth and positive self-esteem. In other words, by identifying with a group, one is not only different but also *better*. While people from an individualistic society might privilege personal identity, proponents of SIT insist that one's worth encompasses a social dimension: "Thus self-esteem is not only personal: it includes a person's evaluations of the groups to which he or she belongs" (Baumeister and Twenge 2003: 334).<sup>21</sup> Along these lines, proponents of SIT allow for individuals to retain multiple identities, some of which become more salient in certain contexts (Abrams and Hogg 1990). Although people may identify themselves by certain factors in certain settings, they can easily change their self-understanding in other contexts. Haslam (2001: 46) explains:

No one level of self-categorization is inherently more appropriate or useful than another and hence none is in any sense more fundamental to who or what a person is. This proposition is at odds with a general tendency for psychological theorizing to give privileged status to personal identity, that is, believing that a person's true self is defined by their individuality.<sup>22</sup>

As we attempt to apply these ideas to the social identities of Roman Africa, it is important to remember the complexity and flexibility of the various groups that were encountering one another as part of the social change of colonization. While patristic scholars might tend to privilege Tertullian's Christian or Montanist identities, social psychologists insist on holding any social identity in tension with the encircling array of identities available to any group or individual. However, there are clues for interpreting and understanding which identities are salient in any given encounter.

A particular social identity becomes salient when one is confronted with a sense of otherness, meaning that an out-group is required to provide the in-group members with a collective identity and comparative value. It is important to emphasize that this otherness does not necessarily derive from preconditioned or essentialized homogeneity; rather, it occurs in reaction to another group's social

---

<sup>21</sup> For more on the contrast between individualistic Western concepts and those of collectivist societies, see Worchel and colleagues (1998). Although self-esteem as the sole motivating factor has now been called into question, it remains a major assumption of SIT. Rupert Brown (2000: 756) prefers to view it as a "by-product of discrimination rather than a direct cause or effect." However, Turner and Reynolds (2004: 260) acknowledge this "motivation" as an "indispensable elements" of SIT.

<sup>22</sup> Rupert Brown (2000) suggests that some in-group identities should be understood as having greater value than others yet does not dispute the premise that one's personal identity does not necessarily outrank a social identity.

identity.<sup>23</sup> To further explain how the out-group shapes the self-understanding of the in-group, psychologists formed a subset of SIT known as self-categorization theory (SCT). Turner (1982) used SCT to explain how the individual depersonalizes herself or himself and assumes the social identity.<sup>24</sup> Turner's understanding furthers Tajfel and colleagues' (1971) hypothesis wherein the out-group would be perceived as homogenous; the in-group, according to SCT, would come to be understood as homogenous as well. If applied to Tertullian's context, SCT emphasizes that not all of Tertullian's in-group must be of the same ethnic, regional, or political heritage. Instead, all that is required is for Tertullian to perceive Romans as an out-group, thereby constructing in his rhetoric an African in-group.

Although SIT was initially used in modern Western contexts, it was quickly applied to many settings. Scholars began to interpret a variety of activities with it, and "it was soon applied to a broad array of topics including prejudice, stereotyping, negotiation and language use. . . . Compared to other theories whose explanatory potential is quickly compromised by boundary conditions and caveats, a strength of Social Identity Theory is that the hypotheses it puts forward are testable in a wide range of fields and settings" (Haslam 2001: 41). The "wide range" has even extended to critical studies of early Christian writings, as is seen in the work of Esler (1998, 2003), who contends that SIT is applicable to the ancient Mediterranean world.<sup>25</sup> While I reiterate my point that psychological explanations are dubious and should not be used as criteria for conclusions a priori, I will follow Esler's example and offer a psychological framework that could explain Tertullian's *De pudicitia* in terms of the *hypothèse Romaine*. This approach does not prove the *hypothèse Romaine* but assumes it. The validity of such an approach is found in its heuristic assistance: Does the *hypothèse Romaine* offer a plausible and convincing interpretation of Tertullian's writings? In reading Tertullian's *De pudicitia*, I will test the validity of the *hypothèse Romaine* by assessing how well it explains the internal tension of Tertullian's logic, and, where appropriate, I will contrast the *hypothèse Africaine* to show its inability to do so.

---

<sup>23</sup> See Hogg and Abrams (1988). Some examples of this phenomenon in historical studies include those given by Trevor-Roper (1983) and James (1999), two studies that found what is known as "Highland Culture" in Scotland to be mostly fabricated in reaction to English oppression, and Dirks (1986), who found that the caste system in India solidified in reaction to British occupation. The findings of these particular studies do not fully extend to North Africa, in that the Roman colonizers did not attempt to suppress the indigenous customs, but the studies do illustrate how indigenous groups can respond to otherness with solidified social identity.

<sup>24</sup> For a developed discussion, see Turner and colleagues (1987).

<sup>25</sup> Psychoanalysis has been applied to early Christianity since Jung; see the bibliography in Schuyler Brown (1995). Also, see the four-volume collection on this dialogue edited by Ellens and Rollins (2004). In addition, the Psychology and Biblical Studies Section of the Society of Biblical Literature hosts a website with previously published papers, bibliographies, and other resources (see <http://psybibs.home.att.net/index.html>).

### SOCIAL IDENTITY IN TERTULLIAN'S DE PUDICITIA

Who were the *psychici*?<sup>26</sup> Although this can no longer be proven, we shall explore Tertullian's social identity as presented in *De pudicitia* along with his other so-called Montanist works to examine how Tertullian depicts the social identity of his own in-group and the *psychici* out-group. It is generally agreed that Tertullian wrote *De monogamia*,<sup>27</sup> *De ieiunio*,<sup>28</sup> and *De pudicitia* within the same time period and with the same dialogical counterparts in view.<sup>29</sup> Throughout these writings, Tertullian consistently attacks the out-group for lax discipline, such as the permission of multiple marriages (*De monogamia* 1.1), the sin of gluttony (*De ieiunio* 1.1–1.2), and the absolution of mortal sins (*De pudicitia* 1.6–1.8).<sup>30</sup> In the first instance, “new prophets” are helpful to Tertullian's cause: “*non quod alium deum praedicit Montanus et Priscilla et Maximilla, nec quod Iesum Christum soluant, nec quod aliquam fidei aut spei regulam euertant, sed quod plane doceant saepius ieiunare quam nubere*” (*De ieiunio* 1.3; cf. *De monogamia* 2).<sup>31</sup> After invoking such anecdotal evidence, Tertullian agrees to avoid “*mentio Paracliti ut nostri alicuius auctoris*” (*De monogamia* 4.1) and to focus on scriptural proofs.<sup>32</sup> He has difficulty, of course, in omitting mention of the Holy Spirit from his discussion, for just as Christ superseded Moses on marriage, the Paraclete supersedes Paul: “*nova lex abstulit repudium . . . et nova prophetia secundum matrimonium*” (*De monogamia* 14.5).<sup>33</sup>

Although Tertullian does not divulge how he first came into contact with the “new prophets,” he does explain how the Holy Spirit functions in his theology: The Paraclete is “*confirmatore omnium istorum*” (*De ieiunio* 10.6), meaning such things as postapostolic practices and disciplines (cf. *De ieiunio* 10.5).<sup>34</sup> An

<sup>26</sup> For the underlying relationship with Paul's use of this term in 1 Corinthians, see van der Lof (1991) and Rankin (1995).

<sup>27</sup> “On Monogamy.”

<sup>28</sup> “On Fasting.”

<sup>29</sup> See Barnes (1971); cf. Braun (1977 [1962]) and Fredouille (1972). Tertullian alludes to writing *De monogamia* first (*De ieiunio* 1.4; *De pudicitia* 1.13ff). For text and translation of *De monogamia*, see Mattei (1988) and Thelwall (1885 [1870]); cf. Le Saint (1951). For text and translation of *De ieiunio*, see Reifferscheid and Wissowa (1890) and Thelwall (1885 [1870]). The present treatment of these three texts will closely follow Wilhite (2007) but will instead utilize the SIT framework.

<sup>30</sup> Other than these three works, Tertullian uses the term *psychici* only in *Adversus Marcionem* 4.22.5 and *Adversus Praxean* 1.6–1.7.

<sup>31</sup> “not that Montanus and Priscilla and Maximilla preach another God, nor that they disjoin Jesus Christ (from God), nor that they overturn any particular rule of faith or hope, but that they plainly teach more frequent fasting than marrying.”

<sup>32</sup> “mention of the Paraclete, as of some authority of our own.”

<sup>33</sup> “the New Law abrogated divorce . . . the New Prophecy (abrogates) second marriage.”

<sup>34</sup> “the Confirmer of all such things.”

example is where Tertullian admits that he once held a “*sententiae . . . societatem*”<sup>35</sup> (*De pudicitia* 1.10) but later, seemingly of his own accord, came to reject his stance, which is why “*non leuiter nobiscum pactus est Spiritus sanctus, etiam ultro pactus*” (*De pudicitia* 12.9).<sup>36</sup> Tertullian claims that he once agreed with the out-group (the *psychici*), but he amended his stance and was affirmed for doing so by the working of the Spirit of God. Questions remain: How does Tertullian portray his out-group? Are they simply lax in discipline, or does the group boundary exclude them in any way ecclesiologically?

One selection of passages seems to affirm that Tertullian remained within the fold of the “catholic” church. This can be seen in the way in which he carefully distinguishes between his opponents and “heretics”: “*Haeretici nuptias auferunt, psychici ingerunt*” (*De monogamia* 1.1).<sup>37</sup> Throughout his discourse, Tertullian never abandons the framework of one universal church, “*vivit enim unicus pater noster Deus et mater ecclesia*” (*De monogamia* 7.9).<sup>38</sup> He and his out-group share this ecclesiological and eschatological sphere: “*cum Deo erimus, simul erimus, dum omnes apud deum unum*” (*De monogamia* 10.9).<sup>39</sup> Regarding the absolution of certain sins, Tertullian insists, “*Sed hoc in ecclesia legitur, et in ecclesia pronuntiat, et uirgo est*” (*De pudicitia* 1.8; cf. *De pudicitia* 19.5).<sup>40</sup> These examples suggest that Tertullian locates his out-group within the same ecclesial body as his in-group, yet elsewhere he makes statements that suggest otherwise.

<sup>35</sup> “fellowship of sentiment.”

<sup>36</sup> “it is not lightly that the Holy Spirit has come to an agreement with us, coming to this agreement even without our asking.” Dunn (2004: 7) comments, “[Tertullian] did not see himself as having anything in common with Christians who did not hold to his Montanist convictions”; cf. *Adversus Praxean* 1.6: “*et nos quidem postea agnitio paracliti atque defensio disiunxit a psychicis*” (“We indeed, on our part, subsequently withdrew from the carnally-minded on our acknowledgment and maintenance of the Paraclete”); for text and translation, see Kroymann and Evans (1954: 1160–1161) and Holmes (1903 [1870]: 598); cf. Souter, (1919) and Ernest Evans (1948). On this passage, Holmes (1903 [1870]) comments that this withdrawal is from Rome, not from Tertullian’s own Carthaginian bishop.

<sup>37</sup> “Heretics do away with marriages; Psychics accumulate them.” On the psychics’ view of Tertullian’s group, see *De monogamia* 2.1, 15.1 and *De ieiunio* 1.5, 11.2, 13.1, where some claim that Tertullian’s views are heretical and novel. Throughout these references, the claims are treated as individual accusations, not as official declarations.

<sup>38</sup> “for our one Father, God, lives, and our mother, the church.”

<sup>39</sup> “We shall be with God, we shall be together, since we shall all be with the one God.” See John 11:21; 17; Galatians 3:28. Also, in *De exhortatione castitatis* 12.6, a digamist (i.e., a person who marries after death of or divorce from the first spouse) is “among our brethren” (“*ex fratribus*”). When writing against “heretics” (e.g., Marcion, Hermogenes), however, Tertullian makes no such stipulations.

<sup>40</sup> “But it is in the church that this (edict) is read, and in the church that it is pronounced, and [the church] is a virgin.” Tertullian is capable, even in his so-called Montanist writings, of locating Christians from various regions in “*una ecclesia*” (one church) (*De virginibus velandis* 2.3); for text and translation, see Mattei (1997) and Thelwall (1885 [1870]). Robert Evans (1972) believes that Tertullian’s statement is inclusive of “psychics” and “Montanists.”

Tertullian refers to “*ille vester Uthinensis . . . ex digamia praesident apud vos*” (*De monogamia* 12.6–12.7) and “*apud te praesidentibus*” (*De ieiunio* 17.4).<sup>41</sup> The clerical leadership of the out-group stands in contrast to his in-group’s ecclesial community, wherein “*digamos foris sistimus*”<sup>42</sup> (*De pudicitia* 1.20). Powell (1975) and Rankin (1995), assuming the *hypothèse Africaine*, must insist that this passage should not be read as evidence of a schism but as an *ecclesiola in ecclesia* (see *De anima* 9.4, and discussion above in the section, “Rome or Carthage?”), and we must therefore assume that Tertullian did not intend a formal excommunication.<sup>43</sup>

Another example in which Tertullian expresses ecclesial distinction is in reference to the Shepherd of Hermas, which, despite its having been dismissed “*ab omni concilio ecclesiarum, etiam uestrarum, . . . in calice depingis*”<sup>44</sup> (*De pudicitia* 10.12). The former phrase indicates what is to Tertullian a conciliar body distinct from the councils with which he identifies, and the latter phrase refers to a different eucharistic context. Powell, however, also comments on this passage (1995: 35):

It is true that in *De pudicitia* 10,12, where the Shepherd of Hermas has been put *inter apocrypha et falsa ab omni concilio ecclesiarum, etiam uestrarum*, we might have expected *nostrorum* = African; but the councils were presumably episcopal ones, and the African bishops were to Tertullian psychics. There may perhaps have been some of them who looked kindly on the New Prophecy: Old Testament warnings are given *et populo et episcopis, etiam spiritalibus* [*De ieiunio* 16.3]. The last phrase can hardly be Tertullian’s sole reference to a schismatic Montanist episcopate; though it may of course be simply a gibe at bishops who claim a spiritual power.

In this passage, Powell again renders problematic any reading of Tertullian as schismatic, but here again Powell assumes that *psychici* were in Carthage. Why? Why not read as expected: *nostrorum* = African and so *uestrarum* = Roman?

Similarly, Rankin (1995: 32) attempts to explain Tertullian’s reference to “your council”: “Leaving aside the question of the accuracy of this assertion, this passage does not require the conclusion of two separated churches, let alone of

<sup>41</sup> “that bishop of Utina of yours . . . the many digamists who preside in your churches.” “your presiding (elders).” Nothing is known of the bishop of Utina during Tertullian’s time. If the reference is to Uthina of Africa Proconsularis, then we could read this bishop to be a sympathizer of the Roman bishop or even a Roman himself.

<sup>42</sup> “we excommunicate digamists.”

<sup>43</sup> See Micaelli (1993: 308): “*On doit donc entendre l’expression ‘foris sistimus’ comme une véritable excommunication*” (“We must understand the statement ‘*foris sistimus*’ to mean an actual excommunication”).

<sup>44</sup> “by every council of Churches, even of your own... you depict [this shepherd] upon your (sacramental) chalice.”



two separate sets of councils. First, there is little likelihood that the New Prophecy movement held formal councils of its own.” Rankin has forgotten or ignored the possibility that this is a regional distinction. Perhaps the question is not whether the “New Prophecy” (as if there was such an entity) held councils but whether the church in Africa held councils. Rankin (1995: 32) continues to comment on the stated passage: “there is, moreover, no necessary contrast here of ‘your churches’ against ‘our churches.’” Rankin is correct, but there is a clear social identity invoked (if not a “necessary contrast”) between “your council” and “our council,” a point that Rankin attempts to sidestep by saying, “all that Tertullian requires is that the ‘Psychici’ own the uncompromising decisions of those church councils with which they would normally associate themselves. That there were no exclusively African councils in Tertullian’s own time is clear from his own testimony.” Unfortunately, Rankin’s last sentence is not supplemented with any note or evidence.<sup>45</sup> While he offers a possible read of this passage, it is less than convincing, given his admission: “It must be acknowledged that Tertullian does speak at times as if he were outside of the Catholic church but only ‘as if.’ Tertullian is not outside it. To speak in this way is not unknown in the best of families!” (Rankin 1995: 33–34; cf. Cyprian, *Epistulae* 55.21.1, 70.1.2, 71.4.1, 73.3.1 [Clark 1984–1989; Diercks 1994–1999]). Rankin’s denial seems overstated, if not unfounded, given the many explanations required of him, and his reference to modern familial spats is irrelevant. Similarly, Rankin can sweep aside Tertullian’s comments (such as those on “your bishops” versus “our bishops” in *De monogamia* 12.3) by concluding, “Tertullian’s well-known penchant for exaggeration cannot be discounted here” (Rankin 1995: 33–34). Although appeal to Tertullian’s rhetorical “exaggeration” is valid, it leaves much to be desired.

Tertullian’s in-group consists of more than an *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, for his out-group is differentiated along clerical, sacramental, and conciliar lines. Any attempts to soften Tertullian’s mention of juridical and ecclesial distinction sound too much like special pleading and are required only in holding to the *hypothèse Africaine*. Without Powell’s (1975) model, however, how can one understand the apparent contradiction in Tertullian? Some passages indicate ecclesial unity; others indicate ecclesial separation. The problem can be resolved with the *hypothèse Romaine*, which elsewhere in Tertullian’s works is corroborated via the rhetorical construction of Roman and African social identities.

In many instances in these works, Tertullian describes his out-group as Roman. He refers to Rome’s history, noting that divorce was not permitted “*apud Romanos post annum sexcentimum urbis conditae*”<sup>46</sup> (*De monogamia* 9.11).

<sup>45</sup> One can only assume that he is referring to *De ieiunio* 13.6, which Rankin (1995: 14, n. 27) discusses earlier: “Tertullian’s reference to the Greek provincial councils at *De iei.* 13.6 implies that such gatherings were at that time unknown in North Africa.”

<sup>46</sup> “among the Romans, . . . not till after the six hundredth year from the building of the city.”

This reference to Roman marriage and Roman history would appear quite inconsequential in this treatise unless, of course, it were to refer to non-Christian Romans. Later in the same work, Tertullian invokes Roman law, claiming, “*Aliud est, si et apud Christum legibus Iuliis agi credunt*”<sup>47</sup> (*De monogamia* 16.6), which is again out of place without a regional social identity at play between Tertullian and the Roman “psychic” Christians.

Tertullian’s Roman out-group is contrasted with his African in-group: In the final days, “*exsurget regina Carthaginiis*”<sup>48</sup> (*De monogamia* 17.2), that is, Dido, and “*Assidebit et illi matrona Romana*”<sup>49</sup> (*De monogamia* 17.3), that is, Lucretia, to judge the *psychici*. Why is Dido, the pre-Christian founding queen of Carthage, said to be the future judge of the *psychici*? If the *psychici* are Romans and heir to Aeneas, who jilted the African Dido, then the *exempla* fit neatly with the social identities constructed by Tertullian: Dido = African; Aeneas = Roman.<sup>50</sup>

Explicitly invoking the regional dimension of his social identity, Tertullian cites a case in another province:

*Aguntur praeterea per Graecias illa certis in locis concilia ex uniuersis ecclesiis, per quae et altiora quaeque in commune tractantur, et ipsa repraesentatio totius nominis Christiani magna ueneratione celebratur. Et hoc quam dignum fide auspicante congregari undique ad Christum! Vide, quam bonum et quam iucundum habitare fratres in unum! Hoc tu psallere non facile nosti, nisi quo tempore cum compluribus cenas. Conuentus autem illi stationibus prius et ieiunationibus operati dolere cum dolentibus et ita demum congaudere gaudentibus norunt. Si et ista sollemnia, quibus tunc praesens patrocinator est sermo, nos quoque in diuersis prouinciis fungimur in spiritu inuicem repraesentati, lex est sacramenti (*De ieiunio* 13.6–13.8)*<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> “The case is different if men believe that, at the bar of Christ as well (as of Rome), action is taken on the principle of the Julian laws.”

<sup>48</sup> “there will arise a queen of Carthage.”

<sup>49</sup> “Her assessor will be the Roman matron.” Tertullian’s “queen of Carthage” blurs Dido and Matthew 12:42: the (African) “Queen of the South.”

<sup>50</sup> Note that Tertullian often cites the Carthaginian heroine favorably (*Ad nationes* 1.18.3, 2.9.13 [Borleffs 1929; Holmes 1903 [1870]]; *Ad martyras* 4 [Arbesmann, Daly, and Quain 1950; Bulhart 1957]; *Apologeticum* 50.5 [Arbesmann, Daly, and Quain 1950; Dekkers 1954]; *De anima* 33.9 [Arbesmann, Daly, and Quain 1950; Gerlo, Evans, and Harnack 1957]; *De exhortatione castitatis* 13.3 [Le Saint 1951; Moreschini and Fredouille 1985]), which leads Church (1975: 97 n. 59) to an interesting conclusion: Tertullian salvages an “indigenous account” of Dido wherein she refuses to marry a Roman, contrary to Virgil’s telling (*Aeneid* 4), in which she immolates herself because she was jilted by Aeneas, the founder of Rome. Such a reading would lend even more credence to the argument being put forth here. For Lucretia, who was raped by the last prince of Rome and whose suicide brought about the end of Roman monarchy, see Mattei (1988: 394).

<sup>51</sup> “Besides, throughout the provinces of Greece there are held in definite localities those councils gathered out of the universal churches, by whose means not only all the deeper questions are handled for the common benefit, but the actual representation of the whole Christian name is

Tertullian derides the Roman out-group members who reject the New Prophecy and who can rejoice only in “*compluribus*”<sup>52</sup> in other words, not with those from “*diuersis prouinciis*”<sup>53</sup> such as Greece, Phrygia, or Africa.

The same regional dimension of Tertullian’s social identity is found in another of his so-called Montanist tracts, *Adversus Praxean*, which was possibly composed within “a few weeks” of *De monogamia*, *De ieiunio*, and *De pudicitia* (Barnes 1971: 47).<sup>54</sup> Tertullian explains his sympathy for the “new prophets”:

*Nam idem tunc episcopum Romanum, agnoscentem iam prophetias Montani, Priscae, Maximillae, et ex ea agnitione pacem ecclesiis Asiae et Phrygiae inferentem, falsa de ipsis prophetis et ecclesiis eorum adseverando et praecessorum eius auctoritates defendendo coegit et litteras pacis revocare iam emissas et a proposito recipiendorum charismatum concessare (Adversus Praxean 1.5).*<sup>55</sup>

While Tertullian focuses on the monarchian controversy in *Adversus Praxean*, he addresses the issue mentioned in the three works on Christian discipline and

---

celebrated with great veneration. (And how worthy a thing is this, that, under the auspices of faith, men should congregate from all quarters to Christ! “See, how good and how enjoyable for brethren to dwell in unity!” This psalm you know not easily how to sing, except when you are supping with a goodly company!) But those conclaves first, by the operations of stations and fastings, know what it is “to grieve with the grieving,” and thus at last “to rejoice in company with the rejoicing.” If we also, in our diverse provinces, (but) present mutually in spirit, observe those very solemnities, whose then celebration our present discourse has been defending, that is the sacramental law.” See Psalm 133:1; Romans 12:15.

<sup>52</sup> “good company.”

<sup>53</sup> “diverse provinces.”

<sup>54</sup> However, Fredouille (1972: 488) spreads them over approximately four years.

<sup>55</sup> “For after the Bishop of Rome had acknowledged the prophetic gifts of Montanus, Prisca and Maximilla, and, in consequence of the acknowledgment, had bestowed his peace on the churches of Asia and Phrygia, [Praxeas], by importunately urging false accusations against the prophets themselves and their churches, and insisting on the authority of the bishop’s predecessors in the see, compelled him to recall the pacific letter which he had issued, as well as to desist from his purpose of acknowledging the said gifts.” It is interesting to note that the bishop was likely Victor, the first African bishop of Rome. In *Adversus omnes haerese 7*, (Pseudo-)Tertullian names him to be “Victorinus,” identified as Victor by Thelwall (1885 [1870]); and Holmes (1903 [1870]) comments (in note 8) that the bishop was “Probably Victor.” Likewise, Ernest Evans (1948: 76) believes that this passage refers not to Eleutherus but to Victor, who “was inclined to approve of the prophets” until Praxeas persuaded otherwise. Also, Hoffman (1995: 172–174), apparently on the basis of Tertullian’s statement (*Adversus Praxean 1.5*; see above), believes that Tertullian refers to Victor as the “devil.” On the other hand, Trevett (1996) believes that the reference is to Eleutherus. It should be acknowledged that the bishop referenced in *De pudicitia* need not be the same as the one in *Adversus Praxean*; Robeck (1993: 124) believes that the grantor of peace was “most likely Eleuterus” but that it was Victor whom Praxeas persuaded. McGowan (2006) adds that the teacher, Praxeas, may have been (the soon to be Roman bishop) Callistus.

portrays his out-group with the same rhetorical devices and with similar geographical descriptors.<sup>56</sup> If one understands Tertullian's in-group to be North African Christians and his out-group to be the Roman Christians, one can explain how Tertullian can speak of one universal church, in which both his in-group and the *psychici* belong, and still delineate two ecclesial communities with distinguishable councils, bishops, and even sacramental chalices, each representing different social identities.

### CONCLUSION

A portrayal of Tertullian's in-group as Carthaginian and his out-group as Roman raises numerous questions about ethnicity, colonial encounters, and resistance.<sup>57</sup> None of the questions have been answered here. Rather, I have simply offered one viable psychological explanation of motive for the *hypothèse Romaine*. Although SIT does not automatically equate in-group bias with social hostility or ethnic conflict, it does provide a psychological framework to explain social hostility and ethnic conflict (Turner and Reynolds 2004).

Similarly, the reading of *De pudicitia* that is offered here is presented not as definitive but as descriptive. SIT provides a psychological rationale that explains

---

<sup>56</sup> Also see Tertullian's mocking of the "Latini" and even the "Graeci," whom he portrays as people groups whose language he had to learn: "*Monarchiam, inquit, tenemus et ita sonum ipsum vocaliter exprimunt etiam Latini, et tam opifice ut putes illos tam bene intellegere monarchiam quam enuntiant; sed monarchiam sonare student Latini, ὀκονομίαν intellegere nolunt etiam Graeci. at ego, si quid utriusque linguae praecerpsi, monarchiam nihil aliud significare scio quam singulare et unicum imperium*" (*Adversus Praxean* 3.2) ["We,' say they, 'maintain the Monarchy' (or, sole government of God). And so, as far as the sound goes, do even Latins (and ignorant ones too) pronounce the word in such a way that you would suppose their understanding of the μοναρχία (or Monarchy) was as complete as their pronunciation of the term. Well, then Latins take pains to pronounce the μοναρχία (or Monarchy), while Greeks actually refuse to understand the ὀκονομία, or Dispensation (of the Three in One). As for myself, however, if I have gleaned any knowledge of either language, I am sure that μοναρχία (or Monarchy) has no other meaning than single and individual rule."'] On the identification of the *psychici* in *De monogamia* and *De ieiunio* (and, by implication, *De pudicitia*) with the *simplici* ("simpletons") of *Adversus Praxean* (e.g., 1.6, 3.1), see McGowan (2006). However, McGowan argues in the opposite direction: Since the *psychici* in *De monogamia* and *De ieiunio* (and *De pudicitia*) are Carthaginian, a point that assumes the *hypothèse Africaine*, and since the *psychici* in *De monogamia* and *De ieiunio* (and *De pudicitia*) are the same as the *simplici* (and *psychici*) of *Adversus Praxean* (see 1.6–1.7), then the opponents in *Adversus Praxean* are Carthaginian. McGowan's reasoning is sound, given his adherence to Powell's *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, but his conclusions could be reversed and applied to the *psychici* in Rome, and this would better fit with Tertullian's description of his out-group in *Adversus Praxean* as Roman (*Latini*) (see *Adversus Praxean* 1.5 and 3.2).

<sup>57</sup> This is a common critique of SIT. See Jenkins (2004 [1996], especially pages 88–93), who attempts to incorporate the social psychological model into a broader framework of sociology and anthropology.

how Tertullian could direct his attack against a bishop of Rome; whether or not proof for or against this stance could be offered is beyond the scope of this discussion. The plausibility of Tertullian's African social identity as the governing factor in his dispute with the *psychici* lies in this theory's explanatory assistance in reading Tertullian's writings and resolving the apparent contradiction between statements that suggest that he remained in the catholic communion of Christians and other statements that indicate ecclesial independence.

Because of the in-group/out-group distinction between Africans and Romans, Tertullian could have privileged his in-group over the Roman out-group. These social identities would have been fluid and contextualized. When he was writing his apologetic treatises to non-Christians, his Christian identity becomes salient, and his in-group very likely encompasses all Christians, *psychici* and *spirituales*. When writing polemical works against groups such as the Marcionites and the Valentinians, Tertullian constructs a "heretic" out-group in opposition to his own "orthodox" in-group. However, such examples of social identity in no way preclude Tertullian's ability to adopt manifold identities within his works, even to the point of attacking the *psychici* who are at Rome and heralding the cause for his own in-group who faithfully practice their religion in Africa.

#### REFERENCES

- Abrams, Dominic, and Michael A. Hogg. 1990. "An Introduction to the Social Identity Approach." In *Social Identity Theory: Constructive and Critical Advances*, edited by Dominic Abrams and Michael A. Hogg, 1–9. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Arbesmann, Rudolf, Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin A. Quain, transl. 1950. *Tertullian: Apologetical Works, and Minucius Felix: Octavius*. (Fathers of the Church, Volume 10.) New York: Fathers of the Church.
- Barnes, T. D. 1971. *Tertullian: An Historical and Literary Study*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.
- Baumeister, Roy F., and Jean M. Twenge. 2003. "The Social Self." In *Handbook of Psychology*, Volume 5, edited by Theodore Millon and Melvin J. Lerner, 327–352. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons.
- Benabou, M. 1976. *La Résistance Africaine à la Romanisation*. Paris: Maspero.
- Borleffs, Janus Guilielmus Philippus. 1929. *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani ad Nationes Libri Duo*. Leiden: Brill.
- Braun, René. 1977 [1962]. *Deus Christianorum: Recherches sur le Vocabulaire Doctrinal de Tertullien*, Revised Edition. Paris: Études Augustiniennes.
- Bray, Gerald. 1979. *Holiness and the Will of God: Perspectives on the Theology of Tertullian*. London: Marshal, Morgan, and Scott.
- Brent, A. 1995. *Hippolytus and the Roman Church in the Third Century*. New York: Brill.
- Broughton, T. R. S. 1929. *The Romanization of Africa Proconsularis*. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press.

- Brown, Peter. 1967. *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Brown, Rupert. 2000. "Social Identity Theory: Past Achievements, Current Problems and Future Challenges." *European Journal of Social Psychology* 20: 745–778.
- Brown, Schuyler. 1995. "Begotten, Not Created: The Gnostic Use of Language in Jungian Perspective." In *The Allure of Gnosticism: The Gnostic Experience in Jungian Psychology and Contemporary Culture*, edited by Robert A. Segal, 295–307. Chicago: Open Court.
- Bulhart, Vinzenz, ed. 1957. *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani Opera, Pars Quarta: Ad Martyras, Ad Scapulam, De Fuga in Persecutione, De Monogamia, De Virginibus Velandis, De Pallio*. (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, Vol. 76.) Vienna: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky.
- Burns, J. P. 2002. *Cyprian the Bishop*. London: Routledge.
- Capps, Donald. 2004. "Beyond Schweitzer and the Psychiatrists: Jesus as Fictive Personality." In *Psychology and the Bible: A New Way to Read the Scriptures*, Volume 4: *From Christ to Jesus*, edited by J. Harold Ellens and Wayne G. Rollins, 89–124. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Cherry, David. 1997. "Marriage and Acculturation in Roman Algeria." *Classical Philology* 92(1): 71–83.
- Cherry, David. 1998. *Frontier and Society in Roman North Africa*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.
- Church, F. Forrester. 1975. "Sex and Salvation in Tertullian." *Harvard Theological Review* 68: 83–101.
- Clark, G. W. 1984–1989. *The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage*, 4 volumes. (Ancient Christian Writers, No. 43–44, 46–47.) New York: Paulist Press.
- Dekkers, E. 1954. *Tertullianus: Opera I, Opera Catholica*. (Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 1.) Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols.
- Diercks, G.F. 1994–1999. *Cyprianus: Epistularium*. (Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, 3B–3D.) Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols.
- Dirks, N. 1986. *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Dunn, Geoffrey D. 2004. *Tertullian*. London: Routledge.
- Ellens, J. Harold, and Wayne G. Rollins, eds. 2004. *Psychology and the Bible: A New Way to Read the Scriptures*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Esler, Philip. 1998. *Galatians*. London: Routledge.
- Esler, Philip. 2003. *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Esser, G. 1914. *Der Adressat der Schrift Tertullians "De pudicitia" und der Verfasser des Römischen Bussedikts*. Bonn: Hanstein.
- Evans, Ernest. 1948. *Adversus Praxean Liber: Tertullian's Treatise Against Praxeas*. London: SPCK.
- Evans, E. 1961. "Second Thoughts on Tertullian Against Praxeas." *Studia Patristica* 3: 196–199.
- Evans, E. 1972. *Tertullian Adversus Marcionem*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

- Evans, Robert F. 1972. *One and Holy: The Church in Latin Patristic Thought*. London: SPCK, 1972.
- Fredouille, Jean-Claude. 1972. *Tertullien et la Conversion de la Culture Antique*. Paris: Études Augustiniennes.
- Fredriksen, P. 1978. "Augustine and His Analysts: The Possibility of a Psychohistory." *Soundings* 51: 206–227.
- Frend, W. H. C. 1952. *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.
- Garnsey Peter. 2008 "Writing the Late Roman Empire: Method and Sources." In *A. H. M. Jones and the Later Roman Empire*, edited by David M. Gwynn, 25–41. Leiden: Brill.
- Gerlo, A., E. Evans, and A. Harnack, eds. 1954. *Tertullianus: Opera II, Opera Montanistica*. (Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 2.) Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols.
- Gwynn, David M. 2008 "Idle Mouths and Solar Haloes: A. H. M. Jones and the Conversion of Europe." In *A. H. M. Jones and the Later Roman Empire*, edited by David M. Gwynn, 213–229. Leiden: Brill.
- Harnack, A. 1927. "Ecclesia Petri Propinqua." *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaft* 28: 139–152.
- Haslam, S. Alexander. 2001. *Psychology in Organizations: The Social Identity Approach*. London: Sage.
- Hoffman, Daniel L. 1995. *The Status of Women and Gnosticism in Irenaeus and Tertullian*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Hogg, Michael A., and Dominic Abrams. 1988. *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes*. London: Routledge.
- Hogg, Michael A., Deborah J. Terry, and Katherine M. White. 1995. "A Tale of Two Theories: A Critical Comparison of Identity Theory with Social Identity Theory." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 58(4): 255–269.
- Holmes, Peter. 1903 [1870]. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 3. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- James, S. 1999. *The Atlantic Celts: Ancient People or Modern Invention?* London: British Museum Press.
- Jenkins, Richard. 2004 [1996]. *Social Identity*, 2nd Edition. London: Routledge.
- Jones, A. M. 1959. "Were the Ancient Heresies National or Social Movements in Disguise?" *Journal of Theological Studies* 10: 280–298.
- Koch, H. 1930. *Cathedra Petri: Neue Untersuchungen über die Anfänge der Primatslehre*. Giessen, Germany: Töpelmann.
- Kroymann, Emil, and E. Evans. 1954. *Tertullianus: Opera II, Opera Montanistica*. (Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 2.) Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols.
- Laroui, A. 1970. *L'histoire du Maghreb: Un Essai de Synthèse*. Paris: Maspero.
- Laurence, Ray. 1998. "Introduction," *Cultural Identity in the Roman Empire*, edited by Ray Laurence and Joanne Berry, 1–9. London: Routledge.
- Le Saint, W. P., transl. 1951. *Tertullian: Treatise on Marriage and Remarriage: To His Wife, and Exhortation to Chastity, Monogamy*. (Ancient Christian Writers, No. 13.) New York: Newman Press.

- Le Saint, W. P., transl. 1959. *Tertullian: Treatises on Penance*. (Ancient Christian Writers, No. 28.) New York: Newman Press.
- MacMullen, Ramsay. 1975. "Tertullian and 'National' Gods." *Journal of Theological Studies* 26: 405–410.
- Marcovich, Miroslav. 1986. *Hippolytus: Refutatio Omnium Haeresium*. (Patristische Texte und Studien 25.) Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Markus, R. A. 1972. "Christianity and Dissent in Roman North Africa: Changing Perspectives in Recent Work." In *Schism, Heresy and Religious Protest*, edited by D. Baker, 21–36. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Mattei, Paul. 1988. *Tertullien: Le Mariage Unique*. (Sources Chrétiennes No. 343.) Paris: Editions du Cerf.
- Mattei, Paul. 1997. *Tertullien: Le Voile des Vierges*. (Sources Chrétiennes No. 424.) Paris: Editions du Cerf.
- Mattingly, D. J., ed. 1997. *Dialogues in Roman Imperialism: Power, Discourse, and Discrepant Experience in the Roman Empire*. (Supplementary Series No. 23 of *Journal of Roman Archaeology*.)
- Mattingly, D. J., and R. B. Hitchner, 1995. "Roman Africa: An Archeological Review." *Journal of Roman Studies* 85: 165–213.
- McGowan, Andrew Brian. 2006. "Tertullian and the 'Heretical' Origins of the 'Orthodox' Trinity." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14(4): 437–457.
- Merdinger, J. E. 1997. *Rome and the African Church in the Time of Augustine*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Micaelli, Claudio. 1993. "Introduction." In *Tertullian: La Pudicité*, translated by Charles Munier, i–xx. (Sources Chrétiennes No. 394–395.) Paris: Editions du Cerf.
- Moreschini, Claudio, and Jean-Claude Fredouille, eds. 1985. *Exhortation a la Chasteté*. (Sources Chrétiennes No. 319.) Paris: Editions du Cerf.
- Munier, Charles. 1993. *Tertullian: La Pudicité*. (Sources Chrétiennes No. 394–395.) Paris: Editions du Cerf.
- O'Donnell, James J. 1999. "The Next Life of Augustine." In *The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R. A. Markus*, edited by William E. Klingshirn and Mark Vessey, 215–231. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Osborn, Eric. 1997. *Tertullian, First Theologian of the West*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Powell, Douglas. 1975. "Tertullianists and Cataphrygians." *Vigiliae Christianae* 29: 33–54
- Rankin, David. 1995. *Tertullian and the Church*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Reifferscheid, Augusti, and Georgii Wissowa. 1954 [1890]. *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani Opera*. (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 20.) Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences. (Reprinted in *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* 2. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols.)
- Rives, J. B. 1995. *Religion and Authority in Roman Carthage from Augustus to Constantine*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.



- Robeck, Cecil M. 1993. *Prophecy in Carthage: Perpetua, Tertullian and Cyprian*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press.
- Schweitzer, Albert. 1948 [1913]. *The Psychiatric Study of Jesus: Exposition and Criticism*, translated by Charles R. Joy. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Schaff, Philip. 1903 [1870]. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 5. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Shaw, Brent. 1995. *Environment and Society in Roman North Africa*. Aldershot, UK: Variorum.
- Souter, A. 1919. *Tertullian Against Praxeas*. London: SPCK.
- Stewart-Sykes, Alistair. 1999. "The Original Condemnation of Asian Montanism." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 50: 1–22.
- Tabbernee, William. 2001. "To Pardon or Not to Pardon?": North African Montanism and the Forgiveness of Sins." *Studia Patristica* 36: 375–386.
- Tajfel, H., M. G. Billig, R. P. Bundy, and Claude Flament. 1971. "Social Categorization and Intergroup Behaviour." *European Journal of Social Psychology* 1: 149–178.
- Thelwall, S. 1885 [1870]. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 4. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Trevett, Christine. 1996. *Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Trevor-Roper, H. 1983. "The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland." In *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, 15–41. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Turner, J. C. 1982. "Towards a Cognitive Redefinition of the Social Group." In *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*, edited by H. Tajfel, 15–40. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Turner, J. C., M. A. Hogg, P. J. Oaks, S. D. Reicher, and M. S. Wetherell. 1987. *Rediscovering the Social Group: A Self-Categorization Theory*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Turner, John C., and Katherine J. Reynolds. 2004. "The Social Identity Perspective in Intergroup Relations: Theories, Themes and Controversies." In *Self and Social Identity*, edited by Marilynn B. Brewer and Miles Hewstone, 259–277. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- van der Lof, L. J. 1991. "The Plebs of the Psychici: Are the Psychici of De Monogomia Fellow-Catholics of Tertullian?" In *Eulogia: Mélanges Offerts à Antoon A. R. Bastiaensen à l'Occasion de Son Soixante-Cinquième Anniversaire*, edited by G. J. M. Bartelink, A. Hilhorst, and C. H. Kneepkens, 353–363. Steenbrugis, Belgium: Abbey of Saint Peter
- von Campenhausen, Hans. 1964. *The Fathers of the Latin Church*, translated by Manfred Hoffmann. London: Adam & Charles Black.
- Wilhite, David. *Tertullian the African: A Social Anthropological Reading of Tertullian's Context and Identities*. Berlin: Walter De Gruyter Press, 2007.
- Wright, David. 2000. "Tertullian." In *The Early Christian World*, Volume 2, edited by Philip F. Esler, 1028–1047. London: Routledge.
- Woolf, Greg. 1992. "The Unity and Diversity of Romanization." *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 5: 349–352.

- Woolf, Greg. 1994. "Becoming Roman, Staying Greek: Culture, Identity and the Civilizing Process in the Roman East." *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 40: 116–143.
- Woolf, Greg. 1998. *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Roman Civilization in Gaul*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Worchel, Stephen, J. Francisco Morales, Dario Paez, and Jean-Claude Deschamps, eds. 1998. *Social Identity: International Perspectives*. London: Sage.