

TERTULLIANISM: TERTULLIAN'S VISION OF THE NEW PROPHECY IN NORTH AFRICA

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Historians have long suspected that, after Tertullian embraced Montanism, or the New Prophecy, during the first decade of the third century, he reshaped the movement in North Africa according to his own extreme rigorism. It has been suggested that, although the founders of Montanism in Asia had made ascetic demands on their followers more severe than their Catholic counterparts, Tertullian took those expectations even further in such areas as post-baptismal forgiveness, martyrs' power of the keys, and voluntary martyrdom.

The difficulty in comparing Montanism in Asia and North Africa lies in the scarcity of primary sources due to Catholic zeal in eliminating what the larger church considered a heretical movement. As a result, most of the oracles and logia from Montanist prophets are preserved only in the polemical writings of anti-Montanists or in Tertullian's treatises. Tertullian's interpretations of these oracles and logia, however, may not reflect the tenets of the founders of the movement. Indeed, the oracles and logia quoted by Tertullian may have originated from second- or third-generation Montanists in Carthage and, therefore, may have been influenced directly by Tertullian.

A helpful tool in distinguishing North African Montanism, or "Tertullianism," from Asian Montanism is the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*. This document records the martyrdom of several catechumens and their teacher in Carthage in 203 and reflects the teachings and practices of Montanism, which arrived in North Africa just a few years earlier. If the *Passion* is indeed a Montanist document, it can serve as a bridge between Asian Montanism and Tertullian's vision for the New Prophecy in North Africa.

This research project compares what is known of Montanism in Asia with Tertullian's Montanist teachings in the areas of post-baptismal forgiveness, martyrs' power of the keys, and voluntary martyrdom. By examining also what the *Passion* reflects in these areas, proposals are offered regarding the influence that Tertullian exerted on Montanism in North Africa.

Montanism and Tertullianism

Montanism, or the New Prophecy as its early proponents and opponents called it, developed in the third quarter of the second century under the leadership of Montanus, a charismatic prophet, and his two female followers, Priscilla and Maximilla. The movement originated in Phrygia, the region immediately to the east of the cities where John's letters to the seven churches of Revelation circulated. Emphases found in Johannine literature were prominent in Montanism: the work of the Holy Spirit and

Christ's imminent return. Other Montanist tenets and practices included glossolalia, ecstatic prophecy, women's leadership in ministry, and rigorous discipline.

Historians have characterized Montanism variously as a renewal of primitive Christianity, a synthesis of Christianity and Phrygian cultic religion, and a heretical movement. Identification of Montanism with Phrygian religion, however, contradicts its rapid and far-reaching spread to Rome and North Africa. Furthermore, if Montanism were an outright heresy, it would not have attracted the adherence of Tertullian, the outstanding Christian apologist and polemicist of his day. Therefore, Montanism must be considered a reform movement, which placed authority in the hands of charismatic prophets in opposition to the developing Catholic episcopacy.

Due to the opposition of the Catholic Church to Montanism, none of the writings by the founders or their followers in Asia survived the Constantinian era, when the ecclesiastical hierarchy united with the imperial forces to purge all dissenters and their documents. As a result, the only extant records of their teachings are found in quotations by anti-Montanist polemicists used as resources by fourth-century historians and heresiologists such as Eusebius and Epiphanius. This information is tainted by hostility, speculation, or late interpolation and, therefore, obscures much of the doctrine and practice of the Asian new prophets.

For this reason, many historians have depended upon Tertullian's writings for their understanding of Montanism. Tertullian embraced the tenets of Montanism at some point during the first decade of the third century, and, because of his reputation, most of his writings, even those of his Montanist period, survived the Catholic purge, one exception being his defense of Montanism in seven books referred to as *De ecstasi*.

In his later, extant writings, Tertullian promoted several rigorous practices of the *nova prophetia*, claiming that many of them were the teachings of the Paraclete. For centuries, historians assumed that these tenets were part of the original, Asian Montanism, but more recent scholars have questioned this assumption, recognizing that Tertullian had sufficient personality to assert his own ascetic temperament on this movement.¹

Tertullian's personality was such that, eventually, those who followed his teachings became known as Tertullianists, who were first mentioned by Augustine in his treatise *De haeresibus*.² The nature of these sectarians has been the subject of much conjecture. Augustine assumed that Tertullian withdrew from the Montanists to found his own congregations, creating yet another schism. W. H. C. Frend interpreted Augustine's

¹ H. J. Lawlor, "The Heresy of the Phrygians," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 9 (1908): 481-99; Christine Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 67, 117.

² Augustine, *De haeresibus* 86.

report to mean that Tertullian became even more severe than the Montanists,³ but John de Soyres speculated that Tertullian separated from the Montanists to rejoin the Catholics.⁴ Timothy David Barnes, however, concluded that Tertullianists were not members of a separate sect but simply the “Montanist party in Africa,”⁵ a position made tenable by the consideration that other Montanist factions, such as Priscillianists and Quintillianists, adopted the names of their leaders. William Tabbernee agreed with Barnes but added that the Tertullianists were not contemporary with Tertullian but were a post-Cyprianic sect or even post-Constantinian sect.⁶

Most likely, the Tertullianists were indeed the practitioners of Montanism in North Africa, as Barnes asserted. Nonetheless, North African Montanism was not necessarily identical with Asian Montanism. Evidence indicates that, under his influence, Tertullian shaped the movement according to his even more rigorous and ascetic personality. Therefore, as the movement developed in North Africa, it may be termed, albeit anachronistically, Tertullianism.

North African Montanism

The advent of Montanism to North Africa is a mystery as is the origin of African Christianity. Both these events seemed to be linked in Frend’s estimation: “The origin of the African Church is one of the great ‘missing links’ in Church History. If we knew more about the beginnings of the Church there, we should be in a better position to say why Montanism was so successful in the West, and why the hard, rigorist, martyr-inspired code which it represented should find a permanent place in the Christianity of

³ W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 366.

⁴ John de Soyres, *Montanism and the Primitive Church: A Study in the Ecclesiastical History of the Second Century* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1878; reprint, Lexington, Ky.: The American Theological Library Association, 1965), 53.

⁵ Barnes, 258. See also J. M. Fuller, “Tertullian,” *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, vol. 4, ed. William Smith and Henry Wace (London: John Murray, 1887).

⁶ William Tabbernee, “To Pardon or Not to Pardon?: North-African Montanism and the Forgiveness of Sins,” *Studia Patristica* 36 (2001): 377.

North Africa and hence in the Western Church as a whole.”⁷ In this atmosphere, Montanism arrived and thrived near the turn of the third century.⁸

The advent of Montanism was accompanied by written documents that, among the new prophets, were considered as authoritative as the scriptures that were canonized later.⁹ Presumably, Tertullian possessed written copies of oracles and *logia* delivered by the three original and, possibly, second-generation new prophets, which are evident in quotations included in treatises from his Montanist era.¹⁰

These treatises, however, contain a number of oracles that originated from sources other than Asian new prophets. Tertullian cited prophetesses in his own congregation in support of his teachings on the corporeality of the spirit and the length of virgins’ veils, and his role in these prophecies included testing and recording them.¹¹ Aside from these two references to Carthaginian prophetesses, Tertullian quoted several *logia* from unidentified sources,¹² attributing them to the Paraclete,¹³ the Spirit,¹⁴ or the Lord.¹⁵

⁷ Frend, 361. See also Pierre de Labriolle, *La Crise Montaniste* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1913), 469; Anne Jensen, *God’s Self-Confident Daughters: Early Christianity and the Liberation of Women*, trans. O. C. Dean, Jr. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 150.

⁸ Assuming that the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* is a Montanist document, Montanism must have arrived in Carthage before 203. Assuming also that Tertullian became a Christian in the mid-190s and embraced Montanism at a later date, the influence of the movement must not have been felt in Carthage until the turn of the century, or else Tertullian would have been attracted to it immediately. Trevett, 70-1.

⁹ Hippolytus, *haer.* 8.7.

¹⁰ Tertullian, *Marc.* 3.24.4; *jej.* 1.3. See also William Tabbernee, “The Montanist Oracles: A New Classification,” unpublished paper delivered to The Second Century Seminary, Waco, Texas, February 19, 2004, 4-14; Dennis E. Groh, “Utterance and Exegesis: Biblical Interpretation in the Montanist Crisis,” in *The Living Text: Essays in Honor of Ernest W. Sanders*, ed. Dennis E. Groh and Robert Jewett (Lanham, N.Y.: University Press of America, 1985), 82-4.

¹¹ Tertullian, *anim.* 9.4; *virg.* 17.3.

¹² Tabbernee, “The Montanist Oracles,” 25-7.

¹³ Tertullian, *pud.* 21.7; *virg.* 1.7; *fug.* 11.2; *anim.* 55.5, 58.8; *Prax.* 8.5.

¹⁴ Tertullian, *fug.* 9.4, 11.2; *jej.* 13.5.

¹⁵ Tertullian, *virg.* 1.7.

Tabbernee has suggested that possibly some of these also were delivered by third-generation, Carthaginian prophets¹⁶ and prophetesses.¹⁷

As an advocate of the New Prophecy, Tertullian promoted the authority of the Spirit's continuing revelatory activity¹⁸ and did not hesitate to record, test, and accept the oracles of the prophet(esse)s in his congregation and then to cite them as support for his teachings.¹⁹ The possibility remains, however, that Tertullian may have exercised either direct or subconscious influence on these prophet(esse)s and thus shaping North African Montanism in ways suited to his rigorous asceticism.

Differences between Asian Montanism and Tertullianism

One way to measure Tertullian's impact on Montanism after it came to North Africa is to compare his treatises as well as these oracles and *logia* from unidentified, presumably Carthaginian sources to what is known of Asian Montanism. Three key issues for comparison are post-baptismal forgiveness, martyrs' power of the keys, and voluntary martyrdom.

Post-baptismal Forgiveness

Tertullian's change of position on the issue of post-baptismal forgiveness is well known. In his treatise *De paenitentia*, written around the turn of the third century, Tertullian allowed a second but final opportunity for repentance and forgiveness of sin committed after baptism. The penitent must undergo a process known as *exomologesis*, which included prostration before the elders of the church in sackcloth and ashes, fasting, praying, and confessing before the congregation. Though strict, this penitence afforded absolution for both spiritual and carnal sins.²⁰

About a decade later, Tertullian wrote *De pudicitia*, a treatise that expounded a decidedly more severe restriction on post-baptismal forgiveness. In its introduction, he repudiated his earlier views and insisted instead that indulgence must not be granted to believers who commit the most extreme sins, such as adultery and fornication.²¹ In his offensive against such practices, he condemned the *Shepherd* of Hermas, which he named

¹⁶ Tertullian, *Marc.* 4.22.5.

¹⁷ Tabbernee, "To Pardon or Not to Pardon?," 380-2.

¹⁸ Tertullian, *virg.* 1.4-7; *res. mort.* 63.7-9; *Prax.* 30.5; *mon.* 3.1; *fug.* 9.4, 11.2, 14.3; *anim.* 55.5, 58.8; *cor.* 1.4.

¹⁹ Tabbernee, "The Montanist Oracles," 14-15.

²⁰ Tertullian, *paen.* 7.10; 9.1-6; 3.8.

²¹ Tertullian, *pud.* 1.6.

“Shepherd of adulterers” (*Pastore moechorum*),²² because it permitted one opportunity for repentance after baptism.²³ Later, he included apostasy, murder, and idolatry in the list of sins that were unpardonable by the church.²⁴ Among his concluding arguments is this citation: “I have the Paraclete himself speaking in the new prophets: ‘The church has the power to forgive sin, but I will not do it, lest others also sin.’”²⁵

Traditionally, scholars have assumed that Montanus was the source of this oracle. Tertullian, however, attributed it only to “the Paraclete himself speaking in the new prophets.” Based on the observation that Tertullian did not hesitate to accept and to cite oracles delivered by prophetesses in his congregation, the assertion can be made that this oracle originated not with Montanus but with a contemporary, Carthaginian new prophet(ess).²⁶

The next issue to consider is Tertullian’s involvement with this prophecy. Anne Jensen suggested that Tertullian either uttered such an oracle himself or requested it.²⁷ Such assertions are unlikely, but the possibility remains that Tertullian discussed the restriction of post-baptismal forgiveness in his congregation and stimulated the new prophet(esse)s present to receive such a revelation from the Paraclete.²⁸ If such a scenario occurred in Carthage, then it is a distinct possibility that the restrictions that Tertullian placed on post-baptismal forgiveness went beyond the rigorism of Asian Montanism.²⁹

Martyrs’ Power of the Keys

To determine the novelty of Tertullian’s doctrine concerning post-baptismal repentance in comparison to the practice of Asian Montanism, it is necessary first to examine the attitude of the early Montanists toward the martyrs’ power of the keys. Direct evidence is scarce other than two complaints registered by the anti-Montanist

²² Tertullian, *pud.* 20.2. All English translations of ancient sources are mine.

²³ *Shepherd of Hermas*, Mandate 4.3.1-7; cf. .4.1.1-10. See also Cahal B. Daly, *Tertullian the Puritan and His Influence: An Essay in Historical Theology* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1993), 128-9.

²⁴ Tertullian, *pud.* 22.11.

²⁵ Tertullian, *pud.* 21.7.

²⁶ Tabbernee, “To Pardon or Not to Pardon?,” 382.

²⁷ Jensen, 160.

²⁸ Tabbernee, “To Pardon or not to Pardon,” 382-3.

²⁹ Jensen, 150.

Apollonius against Montanist leaders. First, he reported that Themiso bribed his way out of prison yet claimed the title of martyr and, following Paul's example, wrote a general epistle. Second, Apollonius contended that Alexander had been imprisoned not for the Christian faith but for robbery and still considered himself a martyr. After they were released, both Themiso and Alexander proceeded to exercise what they considered to be their prerogatives as confessors/martyrs to forgive sins. Apollonius questioned their rights with sarcasm: "Who pardons whose sins? Does the prophet pardon the martyr's larcenies, or the martyr, the prophet's avarice?"³⁰ Although expressed negatively, however, Apollonius' charge implied that Montanists awarded to their confessors/martyrs the authority to bind and to loose.³¹

Indirect evidence regarding the Montanists' attitude toward the martyrs' power of the keys is found in the *Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*, penned by the survivors of an anti-Christian pogrom in Gaul and addressed to their home churches in Asia and Phrygia.³² The letter includes references to a variety of Montanistic tenets: emphasis on the Spirit/Paraclete, zeal for martyrdom, leadership by women, prophetic revelation, fasting, and elevation of martyrs/confessors. These references, coupled with the geographic origin of the Gallic Christians, suggest that they had been influenced by an early, proto-Montanistic expression of the Christian faith.³³

At the conclusion of the letter, the writer said of the confessors: "They defended all but accused no one. They loosed all but bound no one."³⁴ These confessors used their authority to forgive rather than to condemn.

Eusebius added this statement to this section of the letter: "Let this then be usefully said about the love of these blessed martyrs for their brothers who had fallen, especially in view of the cruel and pitiless attitude of those who later were so unsparing

³⁰ Apollonius, quoted in Eusebius, *H.E.* 5.18.5-10. See also Frederick C. Klawiter, "The Role of Martyrdom and Persecution in Developing the Priestly Authority of Women in Early Christianity: A Case Study of Montanism," *Church History* 49 (September 1985): 255.

³¹ H. J. Lawlor, 490.

³² *The Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*, quoted in Eusebius, *H.E.* 5.1.3.

³³ Heinrich Kraft, "Die Lyoner Märtyrer und der Montanismus," in *Pietas: Festschrift für Bernhard Kötting*, ed. Ernst Dassmann and K. Suso Frank, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 8, ed. Franz Joseph Dölger (Münster Westfalen: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1980), 266.

³⁴ *The Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*, quoted in Eusebius, *H.E.* 5.2.5.

towards the members of Christ's body."³⁵ Pierre de Labriolle suggested that one possible target of Eusebius' reference to "the cruel and pitiless attitude" was the Montanists, although he pointed also to the Novatianists.³⁶ G. A. Williamson thought it more likely that Eusebius intended Novatianists or Donatists by this remark.³⁷ The Donatists were contemporary to Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* and would have been much on his mind, considering the trouble that they had caused Eusebius' hero, Constantine. All three of these movements, however, were known for their rigidity toward apostates, and he could have meant to include all three in his scathing indictment.

His understanding of Montanists' severity toward apostates, however, might have been derived from the North African movement influenced by Tertullian rather than the Asian New Prophecy.³⁸ In fact, the attitude of the original New Prophets may be reflected more by the Gallic Christians whom Eusebius extolled. The many characteristics which these two groups shared have already been pointed out. One more may have been the willingness of martyrs/confessors to use their power of the keys to forgive.

Certainly, Tertullian, in his Montanist writings, denied such authority to martyrs. In his treatise *De pudicitia*, he criticized those who granted the power of the keys to imprisoned confessors and complained that, as soon as the chains were fastened, the prisoners were sought out by adulterers, fornicators, apostates, and even murderers and idolaters for forgiveness of their transgressions. The martyr, according to Tertullian, could purge his or her own sins through death but not the sins of others.³⁹

Tertullian's position against the martyrs' power of the keys stands in marked contrast to that of the Asian Montanists as exemplified by Themiso and Alexander and reflected by the Gallic confessors. His clear departure from Montanist doctrine on martyrs' authority to forgive sins probably mirrored a similar departure on the subject of post-baptismal penance. Therefore, it seems likely that, just as Asian Montanists allowed the martyrs' power of the keys, they also allowed post-baptismal forgiveness in contrast

³⁵ Eusebius, *H.E.* 5.2.8.

³⁶ de Labriolle, 230.

³⁷ G. A. Williamson, ed., *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine* by Eusebius, trans. with introduction by G. A. Williamson (New York: Dorset Press, 1965), 205 n. 3.

³⁸ Another fourth-century patriarch, Jerome, Letter 41.3, had a similarly negative view of Montanists, that they close the church doors to errant sinners rather than to lead them back to repentance. Their strictness, according to Jerome, did not prevent sinning, only pardon. But Jerome, like Eusebius, observed a post-Tertullian Montanism, which may have varied from the original movement.

³⁹ Tertullian, *pud.* 22.1-11.

to Tertullian's restriction, which was based, in part, on an oracle delivered most likely by a Carthaginian prophet(ess) in his own congregation.

Voluntary Martyrdom

Tertullian's refusal to grant the power of the keys to martyrs/confessors derived from his denial of post-baptismal forgiveness rather than any minimization of martyrdom as a Christian discipline. On the contrary, Tertullian insisted upon voluntary martyrdom as the duty of Christians in opposition to the accepted views of the orthodox church.

In orthodox acts of martyrs, voluntary martyrdom was not approved. In the mid-second century, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* included a pericope about Quintus, a Phrygian who had given himself up voluntarily and encouraged others to do likewise. Because he recanted, the writer stated, "This is the reason, brothers, that we do not approve of those who come forward of themselves: this is not the teaching of the Gospel."⁴⁰ A century later, Cyprian reiterated the Catholic policy: ". . . our discipline forbids anyone to surrender voluntarily."⁴¹

Many scholars have assumed that the Montanists, in opposition to the Catholics, encouraged voluntary martyrdom. According to Eusebius' anonymous source, the Montanists valued the martyrs among their ranks and pointed to them as proof of their prophetic spirit,⁴² but this report did not specify that their martyrs voluntarily surrendered themselves. For the most part, scholars' assumptions about the Montanist attitude toward voluntary martyrdom have been based upon oracles recorded by Tertullian.

Two oracles were included in the treatise *De fuga in persecutione*. In the first, the Spirit says, "Are you publicly exposed? . . . It is good for you. For anyone who is not shamed before humans is shamed before the Lord. Do not be dismayed: your righteousness reveals you to the public. Why are you ashamed since you are receiving glory? There is power when you are being observed by people." In the second, the Spirit is also cited: "Do not hope to die in your own beds or in miscarriages and anemic fevers, but in martyrs' deaths, in order that he who has suffered for you may be glorified."⁴³ Tertullian possibly paraphrased part of this second oracle in his treatise *De anima*: "If you would die for God's sake, as the Paraclete advises, let it not be in anemic fevers or in

⁴⁰*The Martyrdom of Polycarp* 4.

⁴¹*The Acts of St. Cyprian* 1.

⁴² Anonymous, cited by Eusebius, *H.E.* 5.16.20.

⁴³ Tertullian, *fug.* 9.4.

your own beds, but in martyrdom.” Tertullian coupled this counsel to seek martyrdom with his belief that the “only key to Paradise is your life-blood.”⁴⁴

The origin of these oracles, like the one on post-baptismal forgiveness, has been called into question by Tabbernee and attributed by him to Carthaginian prophetesses.⁴⁵ Earlier, Tabbernee suggested that, even if the oracles had been uttered by Montanus, they were misinterpreted by Tertullian to support his argument in favor of voluntary martyrdom: “Truly, if you ask counsel of the Spirit, what does he recommend more than the word of the Spirit? In fact, nearly all are exhorted to martyrdom not to flight.”⁴⁶ No matter the source of these oracles, Tertullian’s view on voluntary martyrdom, according to Tabbernee, cannot be assumed to reflect the view of the original Montanists.

Again, the view of the Asian Montanists is obscure. Out of the historical record, however, can be drawn two possible accounts of Montanists who volunteered for martyrdom, one in the acts of the martyrs and another in a story preserved by Tertullian.⁴⁷

In the earlier reference to the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, Quintus was introduced as a Phrygian who, during the persecution of Christians in Smyrna, gave himself up and encouraged others to do the same yet, when he saw the wild animals, became a coward.⁴⁸ Quintus’ identification as a Phrygian along with his voluntary surrender has led many scholars to label him as a Montanist.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Tertullian, *an.* 55.5. See also Tabbernee, “The Montanist Oracles,” 16.

⁴⁵ Tabbernee, “The Montanist Oracles,” 16.

⁴⁶ Tertullian, *fug.* 9.4. See also William Tabbernee, “Early Montanism and Voluntary Martyrdom,” *Colloquium: The Australian and New Zealand Theological Review* 17 (1985): 36-8.

⁴⁷ Tabbernee, “Early Montanism and Voluntary Martyrdom,” 38-41, listed five disputed accounts and discounted all of them. Only two are included here because they should be considered as potentially valid accounts.

⁴⁸ *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* 4.

⁴⁹ Charles Bigg, *The Origins of Christianity*, ed. T. B. Strong (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1909), 186; W. M. Calder, “Philadelphia and Montanism,” *Bulletin of John Rylands Library* 7 (1923): 332-6; H. Grégoire and P. Orgels, “La véritable date du martyre de S. Polycarpe (23 février 177) et le *Corpus Polycarpianum*,” *Analecta Bollandistes* 69 (1951): 21-2; M. Simonetti, “Alcune osservazioni sul martirio di S. Policarpo,” *Giornale italiano di filologia* 9 (1956): 338-40; Hans von Campenhausen, “Bearbeitungen und Interpolationen des Polykarpmartyriums,” in *Aus der Frühzeit des Christentums: Studien zur Kirchengeschichte des ersten und zweiten Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1963), 270-1; W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus*

This supposition, however, is complicated by two factors. First, the dating of Polycarp's death⁵⁰ and the origins of Montanism,⁵¹ although both are debated, are almost contemporaneous, making Quintus' connections to the sect less likely. Nonetheless, Hans von Campenhausen discovered in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* three strata of redaction: the original letter; an anti-Montanistic addition; and a revision by an *Evangelion-Redaktor*, who drew attention to parallels between Polycarp's martyrdom and Jesus' passion. Therefore, according to von Campenhausen, the episode of Quintus was added later, in the late second or early third century, by an opponent of Montanists to counter their promotion of voluntary martyrdom.⁵²

Second, Quintus' description as a Phrygian did not identify him necessarily as a Montanist. Sources equating the two terms appeared late in the second century,⁵³ and the

(Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1967), 217; Gerd Buschmann, *Das Martyrium des Polykarp übersetzt und erklärt*, Kommentar zu den Apostolischen Vätern, vol. 6, ed. N. Brox, G. Kretschmar, and K. Niederwimmer (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1998), 128-9; idem., "Martyrium Polycarpi 4 und der Montanismus," *Vigiliae Christianae* 49 (1995): 110-2; William C. Weinrich, *Spirit and Martyrdom: A Study of the Works of the Holy Spirit in Contexts of Persecution and Martyrdoms in the New Testament and Early Christian Literature* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981), 179 n. 17.

⁵⁰ Internal evidence suggested that Polycarp died about 155/6 (Timothy David Barnes, "Pre-Decian *Acta Martyrum*," *Journal of Theological Studies* 19 (1968): 512; Herbert Musurillo, ed., *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, trans. with an introduction by Herbert Musurillo (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1972), xiii; B. Dehandschutter, "The Martyrdom of Polycarp and the Outbreak of Montanism," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovaniensis* 75 (1999): 430). Eusebius' dating in the *Chronicon* indicated a date of 167 (von Campenhausen, 254).

⁵¹ Eusebius, *H.E.* 4.27; 5.3.4, dated the beginning of Montanus' prophecy in the middle of Marcus Aurelius' reign (161-80), about 171, and the spread of the movement in 177. Epiphanius, *Haer.* 48.1.2, however, dated the origins of Montanism nineteen years after Anoninus Pius (138-61) became emperor, that is, 157. See also Timothy David Barnes, "The Chronology of Montanism," *Journal of Theological Studies* 21 (1970): 403-4.

⁵² von Campenhausen, 291-2.

⁵³ According to Tabbernee, "Early Montanism and Voluntary Martyrdom," 44 n. 12, the earliest example is by Anonymous, quoted by Eusebius, *H.E.* 5.16.22. For the date of the Anonymous, see Trevett, 14.

further clarification that he “had only recently come from Phrygia” suggested a geographic rather than a religious designation.⁵⁴

The proposal of von Campenhausen, however, is quite suggestive. If the Quintus-pericope were interpolated in the late second century, about the same time that Montanists began to be identified as Phrygians, then it could be assumed that Quintus represented, in the mind of the redactor, the inclination of Asian Montanists toward voluntary martyrdom. Therefore, even though the redactor disagreed with the Montanists, he or she viewed them as supporting voluntary martyrdom in contradiction to the Catholic policy.

The second, possible reference to Asian Montanists’ volunteering for martyrdom is found in Tertullian’s letter *Ad Scapulam*, one of his last, extant writings composed about 212.⁵⁵ During a persecution instigated in 185 by Arrius Antoninus, proconsul of Asia, the entire body of Christians in that province presented themselves before the judgment seat for execution. The proconsul executed a few of them but told the rest, “You wretched people, if you wish to die, you have precipices or nooses.”⁵⁶

W. H. C. Frend attributed the zeal of these Christians to the spirit of Montanism and pointed out that the letter in which the story was preserved was addressed to the proconsul of Africa, where Montanism was widespread.⁵⁷ Tabbernee, on the other hand, contended that neither the expression of voluntary martyrdom nor the authorship of Tertullian proved necessarily that these Asian Christians were Montanists. Upon careful consideration, however, the fact that Tertullian, well into his affiliation with Montanism, publicized this story in a protest against persecution written to a proconsul in North Africa weighs heavily in favor of the possibility that these Christian indeed were Montanists.

Nonetheless, although the actions of Quintus or these Asian Christians might be helpful in determining Montanist practice regarding voluntary martyrdom, neither can be identified with certainty as Montanists. Furthermore, evidence outside of Tertullian’s writings about Montanist attitudes toward this issue scarce. The same can be said concerning early Montanist teachings on the previously discussed subjects of post-baptismal forgiveness and the martyrs’ power of the keys. Therefore, it is necessary to seek elsewhere, if possible, for information about what Montanists taught when their sect arrived in North Africa.

⁵⁴ Tabbernee, “Early Montanism and Voluntary Martyrdom,” 41.

⁵⁵ Barnes, *Tertullian*, 55.

⁵⁶ Tertullian, *Scap.* 5.1.

⁵⁷ Frend, 293.

The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas

Written shortly after the turn of the third century, the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*⁵⁸ reported the martyrdom of several catechumens and their teacher in Carthage in 203. The *Passion* includes not only an eyewitness account of these Christians' deaths but also the personal diaries of two of them: Perpetua, a young noblewoman; and Saturus, the teacher. This document is one of the most precious to come out of the patristic period, but one of its most intriguing features is its many expressions of Montanistic thought, practice, and enthusiasm.

The question of whether the martyrs and the editor of the *Passion* were adherents of Montanism has spurred considerable debate among scholars for centuries. Varying positions among historians include denial of any influence of Montanism,⁵⁹ acceptance of Montanism only in the editor,⁶⁰ and affirmation of Montanism as the essential basis for

⁵⁸ The most recent critical edition of the Latin and Greek texts is Jacqueline Amat, ed., *Passion de Perpétue et de Félicité suivi de Actes*, Sources Chrétiennes, vol. 417 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cert, 1996). There are many English translations, but the standard is Herbert Musurillo, ed., *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*, in *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, trans. with an introduction by Herbert Musurillo (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1972), 106-31.

⁵⁹ Theodorici Ruinart, *Admonitio in Passionem SS. Perpetuae, Felicitatis, etc.*, in *Acta Martyrum* (Regensburg: G. Josephi Manz, 1859), 135-6; Giuseppe Agostino Orsi, *Dissertatio Apologetica pro Sanctarum Perpetuae, Felicitatis et sociorum martyrum Orthodoxia adversus Samuelem Basnagium* (Florentiae: Typis Bernardi Paperini, 1728), cited by de Soyres, 44; Philip Carrington, *The Early Christian Church*, vol. 2, *The Second Christian Century* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1957), 427-8; Hubert Jedin and John Dolan, eds., *History of the Church*, vol. 1, *From the Apostolic Community to Constantine*, by Karl Baus, with an introduction by Hubert Jedin (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980), 218-9; Joyce E. Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 158; William C. Weinrich, *Spirit and Martyrdom* (Washington, D. C.: University Press of America, 1981), 225-9; and Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., *Prophecy in Carthage: Perpetua, Tertullian, and Cyprian* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1992), 15.

⁶⁰ C. E. Freppel, *Tertullien*, vol. 1 (Paris: Ambroise Bray, 1864), 347-9; Henri LeClercq, *Les Martyrs*, vol. 1, *Les Temps Neroniens et le Deuxième Siècle* (Paris: H. Oudin, 1902), 120-1; Adhémar d'Ales, *La Théologie de Tertullien*, 3d ed. (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne and Company, 1905), 6-18; Pierre de Labriolle, *La Crise Montaniste* (Paris: Ernst Leroux, 1913), 341-53; Paul Allard, *Histoire des persecutions*, vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1919), 104-8; Louis J. Rogier, ed., *The Christian Centuries*, vol. 1, *The First Six Hundred Years*, by Jean Daniélou and Henri Marrou, trans. Vincent Cronin (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), 144, 154; Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les Passions des Martyrs et les Genres Littéraires* (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1966), 49-5; and Maureen Tilley, "The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity," in *Searching*

the work.⁶¹

Examination of the *Passion* reveals that Montanist tenets were expressed throughout the document, in both diaries, the account of the martyrdom, and the editorial framework.⁶² The exaltation of the Spirit was systemic in the *Passion* (1.3, 5; 16.1; 21.11); the validity of continuing revelation was asserted by the editor (1.1-5; 21.11); visions were plentiful and available upon demand by the prophets (4.1; 7.2-3); Perpetua's leadership was promoted unabashedly despite her gender; eschatological expectations were expressed by all the participants (1.4; 4.10; 11-13; 17.2); references to Revelation

the Scriptures, vol. 2, *A Feminist Commentary* ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994), 832-6.

⁶¹ Samuel Basnage, *Annales politico-ecclesiastici* (1706), 203, cited by Nathaniel Lardner, *The Credibility of the Gospel History*, in *The Works of Nathaniel Lardner*, vol. 2 (London: William Ball, 1838), 585; F. C. A. Schwegler, *Der Montanismus und die Christliche Kirche des Zweiten Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Ludwig Friedrich Fues, 1841), 121; John C. L. Gieseler, *A Compendium of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 1, rev. from 4th ed., trans. Samuel Davidson (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1849), 195 n. 9; John De Soyres, *Montanism and the Primitive Church: A Study in the Ecclesiastical History of the Second Century* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1878; reprint, Lexington, Ky.: The American Theological Library Association, 1965), 44; J. Armitage Robinson, ed., *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*, in *Texts and Studies: Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature* 1:2 (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1891; reprint, Nendeln/Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1967), 50-52; Paul Monceaux, *Histoire Littéraire de l'Afrique Chrétienne depuis les Origines jusqu'à l'Invasion Arabe*, vol. 1, *Tertullien et les Origines* (Paris: n.p., 1901; reprint, Brussels: Culture et Civilisation, 1963), 80-1; Adolf Harnack, *Die Chronologie der Altchristlichen Litteratur bis Eusebius*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: J. C. Heinrich'sche Buchhandlung, 1904), 321; Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2, *Ante-Nicene Christianity A.D. 100-325* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 58; Bigg, 299; B. J. Kidd, *A History of the Church to A.D. 461*, vol. 1, *To A.D. 313* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1922), 186-7; Hans Lietzmann, *The Beginnings of the Christian Church*, vol. 2, *The Founding of the Church Universal*, trans. Bertram Lee Woolf (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), 213-4; W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1952), 116-8; Timothy David Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 77-9; Elaine C. Huber, *Women and the Authority of Inspiration: A Reexamination of Two Prophetic Movements from Contemporary Feminist Perspective* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1985), 21; and Christine Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority, and the New Prophecy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 177-8.

⁶² Rex D. Butler, "New Prophecy and 'New Visions': Evidence of Montanism in the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* (Ph.D. Diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002), 110-83.

and other Johannine literature were present (4.8; 12.1-7); disciplinary activity, although not prominent, was present in Satorus' vision (13.6); and the use of Eucharistic cheese in one of Perpetua's visions (4.9) paralleled its use by a Montanist sect, the Artotyrites.⁶³

Once accepted as the work of Montanists, the diaries of the *Passion*, if not the entire document, become even more significant as the oldest, complete expression of the New Prophecy. As such, they predate the earliest writings from Tertullian's Montanist period by up to four years⁶⁴ and his later writings by as many as eight.⁶⁵ Therefore, an examination of the attitudes and practices of Perpetua, Satorus, and the other martyrs represented in the *Passion* could clarify Montanist tenets as they were taught when the movement arrived in North Africa and before it was influenced by Tertullian.

Martyrs' Power of the Keys

Two incidents recorded in the diaries of Perpetua and Satorus demonstrate that they believed that martyrs possessed special prerogatives. Perpetua related a dramatic story involving her brother Dinocrates, who had died from a facial cancer some time earlier at the age of seven. During a joint prayer time with her fellow Christians, she suddenly spoke her brother's name and realized that, as a martyr/confessor, she had the privilege of interceding for him. That night, she envisioned her brother, still bearing his cancerous wound, in a dark place, where he was dirty and thirsty but could not reach water. When she awoke, she was confident that she possessed the authority to pray for him and did so for several days that she might be granted the favor of her brother's release from suffering (7.1-10).

Then one day, she saw another vision in which she saw Dinocrates clean and refreshed with a scar in place of the wound. This time, he was able to drink his fill of water from a golden bowl and, after doing so, went to play. Perpetua awoke from the vision convinced that her brother, through her exercise of the power of the keys, had been delivered from suffering (8.1-4).⁶⁶

Satorus' contribution to the *Passion* consists of a beatific vision in which he and Perpetua had died and were borne by angels to a heavenly garden (11.1-7). There they came to a place surrounded by walls of light, and, passing through the gates, they encountered a divine being seated on a throne and surrounded by angels singing, "Holy!

⁶³ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 49.1.1. See also de Soyres, 140; and Douglas Powell, "Tertullianists and Cataphrygians," *Vigiliae Christianae* 29 (1975): 47.

⁶⁴ According to Barnes, *Tertullian*, 47, Tertullian's adherence to Montanism began about 207 or slightly earlier.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 77-8.

Holy! Holy!” (12.1-5) When they left through the gates, they were met by the bishop Optatus and the presbyter Aspasius, who were separated from each other and sad. Throwing themselves at the feet of Saturus and Perpetua, they begged them, “Make peace between us, for you have gone away and left us like this.” Although Saturus and Perpetua responded to their bishop and presbyter, embraced them, and began to converse with them, angels interrupted the proceeding and rebuked the clergymen, telling them that the martyrs deserved to rest and that Optatus and Aspasius should settle their quarrels themselves. At the close of this episode, the angels chastised the bishop for failure to discipline his congregation and attempted to close the gates (13.1-7).

In this vision, Saturus demonstrated his belief that the confessor/martyr possessed the power of the keys to mediate peace between Christian factions.⁶⁷ Frederick Klawiter interpreted Saturus’ vision in this way: “Whatever the full meaning of the episode, it seems to imply at least that one destined for martyrdom has the power of the keys and can utilize it to bestow peace on other Christians. Perhaps, once the martyr enters into peace through death, he or she is no longer to be approached in prayer by Christians on earth. But that view itself rests on the assumption that while alive the destined martyr has the priestly power of the keys.”⁶⁸

Post-baptismal Forgiveness

In Tertullian’s thought, his concern over the martyrs’ power of the keys was tied to the issue of post-baptismal repentance and forgiveness: to deny one was to deny the other. In the *Passion*, the bestowal of the power of the keys upon martyrs indicated the authority for and, therefore, the possibility of granting post-baptismal forgiveness.

In the case of Dinocrates, his relationship to baptism is subject to debate. Augustine denied the possibility that Dinocrates could have been released from suffering, even through his sister’s intercession, if he had not been baptized. Therefore, he concluded that Dinocrates, after baptism, had apostatized before his death.⁶⁹ Certainly, under this supposition, Dinocrates benefited from post-baptismal forgiveness.

Klawiter, however, believed that Dinocrates had not been baptized in life and that “[t]hrough Perpetua’s intercessory prayers and tears, her brother was pardoned and given the full forgiveness of sins by the living water of baptism, the water which previously had been out of reach because he had died as a pagan.”⁷⁰ If Dinocrates indeed had died without baptism and Perpetua still believed that she had authority to secure his

⁶⁷ de Soyres, 141.

⁶⁸ Klawiter, 259.

⁶⁹ Augustine, *Nat. orig.* 1.10.12.

⁷⁰ Klawiter, 258.

forgiveness and pardon from suffering, the implication is that she would have expected her authority to avail in the case of post-baptismal sin as well.

Regarding Saturus' vision of the martyrs' intervention on behalf of Optatus and Aspasius, Klawiter stated that the clergyman "have fallen out of fellowship because of sin."⁷¹ The nature of the sin is not made clear either by Saturus or by Klawiter, but clearly the incident is post-baptismal for the clergymen and capable of resolution.

The support of the Carthaginian martyrs for post-baptismal forgiveness can be inferred indirectly by their abundant borrowing of imagery from the *Shepherd of Hermas*.⁷² Tertullian rejected this work because he judged it too lenient, though he recognized its usage in the church.⁷³ Saturus, however, must have accepted its teachings and used it so extensively in the catechesis of Perpetua and her companions that its imagery surfaced in the visions recorded in the *Passion*.⁷⁴

The attitudes of Perpetua and Saturus toward post-baptismal forgiveness and the martyrs' power of the keys contradicted Tertullian's clear statements in his treatise *De pudicitia*, written well into his Montanist period. On the other hand, Perpetua's exercise of her prerogative in the release of Dinocrates from suffering and the martyrs' authority to resolve the sinful disputation between the clergymen reflected the power of the keys taken up by Themiso and Alexander, leaders of the Montanist movement in Asia, and by the Gallic confessors, who likely had been influenced by proto-Montanism before emigrating from Asia and Phrygia. The martyrs' differences, therefore, lay not with Montanism but with "Tertullianism," that is, Tertullian's version of Montanism reshaped through oracles uttered by Carthaginian prophet(esse)s influenced by his rigorous pronouncements against forgiveness of post-baptismal sin even through martyrs' authority.

Voluntary Martyrdom

On the issue of voluntary martyrdom, Perpetua and Saturus both demonstrated agreement with Tertullian. In Perpetua's first vision, she described Saturus as the catechumens' teacher, who surrendered himself voluntarily because he was not present

⁷¹ Ibid., 259.

⁷² In Perpetua's visions, compare the dragon (4.4) with the sea-monster of Herm. *Vis.* 4.1.1-2.4; Pomponius the deacon (10.3-4) with the white-robed lady of Herm. *Vis.* 4.2.1-2; and the green branch with golden apples (10.8) with the fruit-bearing branches of Herm. *Sim.* 8.1-2. In Saturus' vision, compare the transportation of the martyrs to the east (11.2-3) with the transportation of the white-robed woman in Herm. *Vis.* 1.4.

⁷³ Tertullian, *pud.* 20.2. See also Daly, 129 n. 299.

⁷⁴ Butler, 178-80.

when his students were arrested (4.3). Toward the end of the *Passion*, the editor, who witnessed the deaths of the martyrs, reported that, after the inexperienced executioner missed the mark and struck Perpetua on the collarbone, she actually guided his hand to her throat. Barnes referred to this act as nearly suicide, which the editor warmly applauded:⁷⁵ “Such a powerful woman, who was feared by the unclean spirit, was not able to be killed otherwise, unless she herself willed it” (21.10).

In his discussion of Montanism and voluntary martyrdom, Tabbernee passed over Perpetua’s final act without comment but did include Satorus’ surrender as an example of a Montanist who gave himself up.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, he did not conclude that Satorus was representative of Montanists in general. As he continued his research into attitudes toward voluntary martyrdom in Carthage, he found that Tertullian, as a Montanist leader in his community, did support voluntary martyrdom along with other Carthaginian Montanists but in opposition to the Catholics. Again, he did not conclude that Tertullian was representative of early Montanism.⁷⁷

Although Tertullian’s teachings may not mirror the original Montanist doctrines and practices in every case, it seems likely that Satorus, Perpetua, and the *Passion* did present a clearer picture of the New Prophecy as it was expressed in Asia and exported to North Africa. Therefore, concerning voluntary martyrdom, the evidence in the *Passion* supports the probability that Asian Montanists supported such a practice as did Tertullian and Carthaginian Montanists.

Conclusion

If the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* is the earliest, complete representation of the New Prophecy as it arrived in Carthage, then Tertullian’s impact on North African Montanism, or “Tertullianism,” can be gauged by a comparison of his writings with those of Perpetua, Satorus, and the editor of the *Passion*. Where there is agreement between Tertullian and the *Passion*, it is likely that he preserved the original Montanist ideals. Where there is contradiction, it is possible that he reshaped the movement through the oracles delivered by Carthaginian prophet(esse)s under his influence.

Asian Montanists, exemplified by Themiso and Alexander, granted martyrs/confessors the power of the keys. Gallic confessors, who came from Asia and Phrygia and evinced Montanist influences, used their prerogative to loose and not to bind. Satorus, in his vision, claimed authority for martyrs to mediate peace in the church, even

⁷⁵ Barnes, *Tertullian*, 78.

⁷⁶ Tabbernee, “Early Montanism and Voluntary Martyrdom,” 42. Tabbernee said that, aside from Satorus, “The *passio* gives no further instances of voluntary martyrdom . . .”

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

over ecclesiastical leaders. And, in her vision of Dinocrates, Perpetua used her prerogative as a martyr to loose her brother from his suffering. Tertullian, however, according to prohibitions he set forth in *De pudicitia*, would have denied to these martyrs such authority in contradiction of Montanist tradition.

Tertullian's motivation for restricting the martyrs' prerogatives derived from his rigorous opposition to post-baptismal forgiveness. His quotation of the Paraclete's oracle, however, is not a dependable statement of Asian Montanist belief due to the likelihood that it originated from a prophet(ess) in his own congregation. Therefore, earlier Montanist attitudes concerning this issue can be surmised only from the cited examples where Montanists or those influenced by Montanists exercised the martyrs' power of the keys to loose. Evidently, these martyrs/confessors did not regard post-baptismal sin with the strict rigorism demonstrated by Tertullian. Those involved in the *Passion* preserved the attitudes of Asian Montanists toward both post-baptismal forgiveness and the martyrs' power of the keys.⁷⁸

Unlike these first two issues, Tertullian and the writers of the *Passion* held the same views on voluntary martyrdom. Saturus surrendered himself; Perpetua guided the death stroke; and Tertullian would have approved of both actions. In his support of voluntary martyrdom, Tertullian cited oracles whose sources were identified as the Paraclete or the Spirit but which probably originated with Carthaginian prophet(esse)s. Because the instructions contained in these oracles correspond with the actions of Saturus and Perpetua, however, they likely follow the original ideals of Montanism, which were expressed in the *Passion*.

Based on this comparison of Tertullian's writings with what is known of Asian Montanism and the *Passion*, Tertullian's impact on North African Montanism can be understood better, at least regarding the three issues examined. Tertullian's opposition to post-baptismal forgiveness and the martyrs' power of the keys compelled him to extend the rigorism of Montanism beyond the original ideal expressed in Asia and in the *Passion*. In the case of voluntary martyrdom, Tertullian needed only to increase the prophetic support, through the Carthaginian oracles, for the practice that was already present in Montanism when it influenced Saturus, Perpetua, and the editor of the *Passion*. In summary, Tertullian either increased or enhanced the rigorous demands of Montanism, fulfilling his own vision for the New Prophecy in North Africa.

⁷⁸ Klawiter, 259.