



## Tertullian's vision of Christian teachings

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### **Abstract :**

*One of the most prominent points that distinguished Tertullian was his raising of theological issues, in contrast to the writings of the early Christians, which were of a literary nature, and his awareness and awareness of the importance of the cultural, historical, and psychological aspects in the integration of human life and his relationship with the Creator. Therefore, he was very keen in the religious field to write in order to correct erroneous opinions, not in order to provide a comprehensive presentation of the Christian religion. This clearly appears in his response to the various heretical movements that appeared in Carthage during the second century AD. A criticism of the Gospel of Marcion, which is based on the existence of El-Hin, the God of the Old Testament who is responsible for evil, and the God of the New Testament, who is the God of good. He responded to the heresy of Praxias, which is based on the fact that the Father and the Son are one, confirming the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.*

**Keywords :** Tertullianus, Roman Empire, Christianity, teachings.

### **Résumé :**

*L'un des points les plus marquants qui distinguaient Tertullien était son approche des questions théologiques, contrairement aux écrits des premiers chrétiens, qui étaient de nature littéraire, ainsi que sa conscience et sa compréhension de l'importance des aspects culturels, historiques et psychologiques dans l'intégration de la vie humaine et sa relation avec le Créateur. C'est pourquoi, dans le domaine religieux, il s'est attaché à écrire afin*

*de corriger les opinions erronées, et non dans le but de présenter de manière exhaustive la religion chrétienne. Cela apparaît clairement dans sa réponse aux différents mouvements hérétiques qui sont apparus à Carthage au IIe siècle après J.-C. Une critique de l'Évangile de Marcion, qui repose sur l'existence d'El-Hin, le Dieu de l'Ancien Testament responsable du mal, et du Dieu du Nouveau Testament, qui est le Dieu du bien. Il a répondu à l'hérésie de Praxias, qui repose sur le fait que le Père et le Fils ne font qu'un, confirmant ainsi la doctrine de la Sainte Trinité.*

**Mots-clés :** *Tertullien, Empire romain, christianisme, enseignements.*



## Introduction

The ancient Amazigh kingdoms in North Africa witnessed an active cultural, intellectual and religious renaissance thanks to its people who devoted all their efforts to serving the Amazigh identity, defending its language and civilization, and standing against the Roman invaders and occupiers, the Vandals and the Byzantines, who aimed to control the Tamazgha peoples and divide the Amazighs into Libyans, Numidians, and Moors, or divide them into Africa, Numidia, and Mauritania, and the latter is divided into Tsarist Mauritania on the one hand, and Mauritania of Tangiers on the other hand, and all of this is for the sake of exploiting the wealth of these countries, pampering their people, bringing them to their knees in humiliation and disgrace, and erasing their original identity. It seems that the Berbers fought these cruel and greedy colonizers and repulsed them with strength and steadfastness.

Masinissa, Jugurtha, Tacfarinas, Edmond, and Donatus showed rare courage and great valor in confrontation, resistance, and confrontation. Ancient history still attests to this through its speaking pages. This study aims to focus on the most important Amazigh figure who played an important role in various scientific, cultural, and literary aspects, especially the religious aspect, and he is 'Tertullian', who is considered an intellectual and audiologist whose fame shaped the borders of the 'Thamizgha' region.

**The main problem** : What is the approach adopted by Tertullian in controlling the teachings of the Christian religion ?

## **1. Introduction to Tertullian**

### **1.1. His birth and upbringing:**

His full name is 'Tertullianus quinus septimius florens'.

He was born in Carthage between 150 and 160 AD, and he is considered one of the most important resisters to the Roman occupier. His weapon in this was religious thought and the spread of the Christian religion, at a time when the Roman Empire was suffering under the yoke of Caesarean rule and the darkness of paganism, and the confiscation of the freedom of Christian Christians.<sup>1</sup> And may this Christian book live through the era of tribulation, when the Romans were torturing Christians and all converts to the new Christian religion.

At the beginning of his life, Tertullian was accustomed to the faith, and after that, he converted to Christianity and was enthusiastic about his new religion with great enthusiasm.

One of his most important religious books is 'In Defense of the Christian Religion' (Apologectus), which was published in 197 AD, in which Tertullian talks about the components of the Christian faith and Christian literature, focusing on the moral and spiritual aspects, praising virtuous character and morals, and fighting the Jews and heretics.<sup>2</sup>

Within the framework of his religious doctrine, Tertullianus called for adhering to the strong teachings of Christianity and abandoning the class principles of the Roman Church, while inciting people to get rid of military service in the Roman army.

This is what made Tertullian's call religious and political, as he raised it against the 'antichrist ruler of Rome',<sup>3</sup>. His Berber companions converted to Christianity to get rid of



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Roman oppression, its hideous oppression, and its brutal arrogance, and this is what Tertullian explains in the year 197 AD, saying: “You notice for yourself the large number of us, that the people are fed up with the occupation of the city, and that Christians are everywhere, even in the fields, the specialized villages, and the islands, and that all the names have become Christian, and then they are suffering as if a loss had befallen the state<sup>4</sup>”.

What is understood from some historical writings is that Tertullian was a revolutionary religious activist and an articulate orator who led the “current of Christian discourse by calling for martyrdom, boycotting public games, the soldiery, and the Roman administration,<sup>5</sup>”. It is certain that such teachings constituted a real danger to the Roman existence, which explains the campaigns of persecution launched by the Romans against the Berbers during the rule of Valerian and Diocletian in the third century AD, when the Berber Christians were abused and many victims fell. In this, Saint Augustine says, “...the land of Africa is full of beloved saints and martyrs.” Emperor Diophilidian also issued a decree ordering the demolition of the sweepers, and Burning their books, preventing the worship of Christ, and executing everyone who did not abandon Christianity<sup>6</sup>.

## **1.2. Tertullian's conversion to Christianity:**

Upon his return to Carthage, Tertullian underwent a major transformation in his religious life. This transformation prompted many researchers to ask about the secret of this orator's transformation from a world dominated by paganism and polytheism to one of the greatest theorists of Christianity? He lived for about thirty

years under paganism, mocking his Christian peers, and he himself confirms this to us in one of his testimonies. Unlike Cyprian and Augustine, he did not leave us a key to knowing the secret of this religious transformation that occurred in his life. However, many researchers tried to find satisfactory answers by proposing some theories based on his works<sup>7</sup>.

Tertullian did not mention what exactly attracted him to this religion, but the scenes of poor Christian patience who were subject to Roman persecution influenced him. He always wondered about the source of this patience, and he began to search for the truth of this religion as it is revealed to us in his book "The Eology", in which he expressed a real experience that he lived. He also always wondered about the secret of the steadfastness of the martyrs in his book addressed to Proconsul Scapola. Once he knew this secret, he immediately embraced the new religion<sup>8</sup>.

Tertullian's great curiosity, and his impulsive and enthusiastic nature, led him to admire the morals of Christ, and the new concept of life, calls for love and sacrifice, and other factors in which he found psychological calm and peace of mind, especially after the emptiness and distraction that paganism left in him, without forgetting the movement of persecution and its violence that Carthage experienced during the second century AD, had a major role in the conviction and conversion of the Carthaginians towards this new religion<sup>9</sup>.

After studying Tertullian's works - especially with regard to his views on Judaism - Claude Aziza concluded by putting forward two possibilities: the first is that Tertullian before his conversion to Christianity was a Jew, and this caused the clash of Jewish thought with Roman authority,



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and because he rejected Roman law, he converted to Christianity, as he found in it morals that were compatible with his thinking, and through it he was able to preserve his culture. As for the second possibility, he believes that Tertullian's adoption of Christianity was an opportunity for him to debate with the Jews about the integrity of the Old and New Testaments,<sup>10</sup>. This position appears in his book to the 'Jews', in which Tertullian evades the Jews legally in order to recognize this religion. Moreover, he concludes that in the end Tertullian did not represent a new religion, but rather confirmed the inevitable development he believed<sup>11</sup>.

There are conflicting opinions about the supposed year of Tertullian's conversion to Christianity between 190-195 AD, but most researchers date the year 195 AD, the date of his conversion to Christianity, and the Bishop of Carthage, Agrippinus, played a major role in completing the path of his conversion. After his baptism, it is reported that he married a Christian woman, about whom we know nothing except that he dedicated a work to her called 'To My Wife', and we do not know whether he had children or not<sup>12</sup>.

Tertullian was elected a priest according to St. Jerome in 200 AD, although Tertullian always described himself as an ordinary man, this is what we understand by apologizing to the martyrs for the warnings that were sent to them, turning 'I have no authority to address you myself', one of his main tasks was to teach the faithful through a set of sermons and theses in which he discussed issues related to ethics and discipline with great firmness.

### **1.3- His educational and ideological path**

Tertullian is considered a Riatorian cleric and philosopher. He is also considered one of the most famous ancient Berber writers who wrote Christian writings in Latin. He was a defender of the Christian faith and opponents of heresies.

He was against all forms of authority, including the authority of the child, Aristotle's Logos. He studied law and was educated in several sciences, including history, philosophy, poetry, and literature. With his conversion to Christianity in 197 AD, he became a literary defender of Christianity and had strict thinking, especially against theatre, the arts, poetry, and other practices that spread immoral ideas such as vice<sup>13</sup>.

Tertullian was well aware of Roman laws and an expert in other matters. Evidence of this is his recording of the rejection of the Roman Senate, reporting to the emperor in correct terms. Tertullian used his extensive knowledge to defend his religion against heretics. He is considered the father of the early church. He is quoted and contributed to Christian theories and theology. He represents a servant of Christ who works to get closer to God. They took him as a witness to Christianity and his laws are taken as part of the truth on the code of discipline<sup>14</sup>.

Tertullian went through a severe crisis with the church between 203-212 AD, and he gradually moved away from the church. Historians do not know the details of this crisis, and even he himself did not talk about it in his writings, but it is known that his views developed with time and moved towards Montanism with a prophetic formula. Tertullian believes that "Montunism" is a heresy founded by a person called "Montas" who called for revelation not to be cut off



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from the world, but rather to be continued in his person. Meaning that Montas is the revelation, which is the 'paraclete' or the setting through which the Holy Spirit speaks to the Church, and that Christ is near at the gates, and the Church must turn away from the world and await the coming of Christ, and as long as he believes that he is the Holy Spirit, he is the only one who can accept the fallen into the arms of the Church and not the bishops<sup>15</sup>.

Among Tertullian's concerns for the Church is that he does not recognize imperial rule, as he ordered his fellow Christians to avoid all manifestations of compromise with political groups and global actors, considering that the empires of the world rise and fall between them, the Church is eternal and that it is a spiritual kingdom and not an earthly or material kingdom. Tertullian also used to compose and devote writings as an evangelist to comfort the pagans and Jews and guide them to faith in the Lord Jesus, providing suggestive reasons for this, so he defended the charges against him. For the Church, he also excelled in his path of religious writing and the most important books he wrote were the teachings of theology, teachings on the Trinity...etc<sup>16</sup>.

His era is considered an era of prosperity with a virtuous way of life, as the Christian religion and the Church represented the path of compromise, justice, and the fight against corruption and racism in the ancient Maghreb. However, because of a racist group that sought to stand up to this religion, some of them, such as Ecclesiarius, sought to criticize the Christians a century and a half after the crucifixion of Christ, saying that their work would endanger the life of the empire due to their refusal to serve the army.

However, Origen defended the position, as well as Tertullian's declaration from the ancient Maghreb region that political action was complementary to the state and unity, in addition. Because his era included asceticism and the strengthening of social and family relationships, the opposite of what paganism called for<sup>17</sup>.

Tertullian considered Christian unity a great virtue and it should not be bought at the expense of the truth. New ideas must be examined, adding a comparison to the Word of God. He continued his defense of Christians and his intervention in the issue of army service by giving other reasons for why young Christians should not submit to service.

Tertullian and with him 'Mevius Felix' came in the last two years of the second century with a package of literature that expressed, since its inception, the strength and stability of the Christian faith. He wrote many books, three of which remain in Greek and twenty-eight in Latin. Where does it appear through his writings about the goodness of his comfort and his morals, and that his Christological ideas appear through the description of the doctrine of the word 'Logos'? When and how did it appear? He used the word 'wisdom' when talking about the Word, and it contains two qualities by which he describes the 'second Qunun'<sup>18</sup>.

Although Tertullian was considered the eminent of philosophy and philosophical thinking, he resorted to it when dealing with the interpretation of issues, as well as when defending religion, to the point that he attacked philosophy. Despite this, he touched on its world, where he researched the essence of the soul, its origins, and its immortality, as he entered into philosophical thinking. Philosophy was one of the only refuges for the lazy Greeks



to believe in faith, and this is according to the thinking of Clementus.

According to what historical studies and archaeological remains indicate, Tertullian had a store of philosophical, historical, dialectical, defensive, and scientific writings that he left us, in addition to the letters that he sent to the pagans, in defense of Christianity<sup>19</sup>.

Tertullian was appointed as an elder of the Carthaginian Church, similar to Clement of Alexandria and Arigatus, but he did not rise to a higher church rank. Finally, the saint is considered the first Latin writer in the ancient Maghreb region after Victor and Apollonius<sup>20</sup>.

## **2. The writings of Saint Tertullian**

The thinker has varied in his writing, so it is not possible to specify his works due to the stages he went through since his conversion to Christianity until his complete rupture from the Catholic Church. Among his most important works are<sup>21</sup>:

### **2.1- Defense literature**

In the year 198 AD, during the tyrannical rule of the empire, Spitus Severus, Tertullian wrote his book, Apology.

The book contains five parts directed to pagans, to defend the Christian faith .

- To the pagans.
- Message to protest.
- Self-will.
- Message to Escapola, Consul of Africa .
- Response to the Jews .

- And other books in which heretics argue.

## 2.2- Baptism:

The only work before the Council of Nicea, Tertullian wrote 'Baptism' in defense of the great sacrament that the Church had practiced - that is, baptism - since its birth against a heresy of his order from Carthage called 'Cantella' and attempted to cast doubt on the action of the Holy Spirit in the waters of baptism. He also mentioned the benefits of baptism in defense of the ritual that lie in eternity, as well as the absence and not being recognized at all by heretics<sup>22</sup>.

In 213 A.D., he wrote the Misguided Pyramid of Praxias in a letter he called 'de amina' in which he defended the origin of divine influence.

He urged martyrdom and patience in times of turmoil in a letter he called De Martigras.

\* and urging women to be moderate in their dress and so on.

\* In the message he prepared between the year 198 and the year 200, he preached the preaching of the preachers between the virtues of the Lord's prayer and the obligation of consent before drawing close to God through prayer, purity of heart and humility, and covering the virgins in the churches.

## Conclusion

Tertullian's attempt to establish a historical narrative during the third century AD is explained as an attempt to form the features of a religious identity for Christians, as the Christian elite sought to write an 'alternative narrative to the pagan narrative' that is based on Christian belief and



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principles, and is concerned with addressing the problems of Christians according to principles that achieve connection and cohesion among them, and this is what constitutes the collective consciousness in the ancient Maghreb thanks to the religious teachings of the theology developed by Saint Tertullian, in an attempt to focus on some issues and elaborate on Clarifying some positions while working to link any event to Divine Providence, which reveals a tight and systematic planning behind the writings of St. Tertullian, and on the one hand, refuting the claims of paganism as the creator of the glory of the empire and the need to eradicate this new myth.

Establishing the rules of Latin Christian literature by African theologians, after it was a literature expressed in Greek, Tertellian the Amazigh played a great role in opening the field of expression in it and developing it through the appearance of literature of utilitarianism, polemics, letters, and response to heretical heresy, so Tertullian had a great role in laying the foundations of Catholic theology in the Christian West, so Tertellian was considered the dean of Catholic Christian thought .

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