

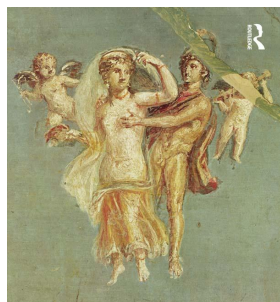
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Graham Oppy, N. N. Trakakis

Early Christian Philosophers: Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian

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EARLY CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHERS:
JUSTIN, IRENAEUS, CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA,
TERTULLIAN

Eric Osborn¹

The four writers who begin Christian philosophy in the second century are different in their origin and in their philosophical backgrounds. Justin, from Rome, is as much a Stoic as he is a Platonist. Irenaeus, from Lyons, is only a philosopher by fragmentary borrowing and such strong overall argument as caused Erasmus to name him 'Irenaeus Philosophus.' Clement of Alexandria is plainly philosophical and frequently Platonist. Finally, Tertullian of Carthage, who criticized philosophy, is strongly Stoic. As Collingwood (1961) and Skinner (1969) insisted, there are no perennial problems in the history of ideas to which successive solutions are offered, but only problems that vary from thinker to thinker and from time to time.

JUSTIN

Justin was born in Nablus early in the second century, but came to Rome, where he taught as a philosopher. He tells how he moved from one philosophical school to another until he came to Platonism and beyond Plato to Christian faith (*Dialogue with Trypho* 2–8). In another place he insists that he became a Christian because he saw that Christians were “fearless in the face of death and all that men call fearful” (*Second Apology* 12.1). Justin is called an ‘apologist’ because he defends Christianity against four strong attacks: ridicule from philosophers, persecution

1. Eric Osborn, the principal author of this chapter, died on 11 May 2007 after a lifetime dedicated to scholarship. The editors are very grateful to David T. Runia for not only contributing a chapter on Philo for this volume but also generously agreeing to review and edit the advanced draft for this chapter. The editors also express their gratitude to the Osborn family for granting permission to publish it. We believe that translations throughout are Osborn’s. [Editors’ note]

by the state, attack from the Jews and strife with heretics. He enlarges the place of argument in Christian discourse.

How can one talk about God? Justin accepts the accusation that Christians are ‘atheists’ because they reject the many gods of the state. He puts forward a Platonic account of God as ineffable and unbegotten, following the language of Middle Platonists. We cannot name God, but we can speak to him (*First Apology* 9.3, 61.11; *Second Apology* 12.4). As official ‘atheists’, Christians follow the way of Socrates in rejecting the daemons whom pagans worship as gods.

How is God active in human affairs? The Logos (word, reason) of God is distinct in number from the Father, yet entirely God. The Logos is known by many names in contrast to the unnameable God and offers the link between God and humanity. The whole human race partakes of ‘logos’ and those who have lived ‘with logos’ are Christians whether they were Greeks like Socrates and Heraclitus, or barbarians like Abraham, Ananias, Azarias, Misael and Elijah. Those who have lived ‘without logos’ have been evil men and murderers of those who have lived ‘with logos’. Yet those who continue to live with logos, the Christians, are not troubled or fearful (*First Apology* 46.1–4). There are degrees of participation in logos and also a difference between the Logos himself and those who participate in logos. Plato and the Stoics, the poets of old, all had a part of the seed of logos. Their knowledge was incomplete, but whatever they said that contained truth came from the one Logos and the one God. Justin took the Stoic idea of ‘spermatic logos’ and affirmed its universality and its dependence on the Logos himself, who is the Son of God. Those who share in logos have limited but real apprehension of the truth of the Son as Logos.

Justin is able to see all biblical and ancient history as a history of the Logos who has spoken in limited, different ways and then finally come in perfection in Christ.

What makes a philosopher? Justin’s movement from one philosophical school to another ends with a rejection of loyalty to any particular sect. From the beginning he insists that truth is the only consideration:

[R]eason directs those who are truly pious and all true philosophers to honour and love only what is true; to decline to follow traditional opinions if these be worthless. Not only does sound reason direct us to refuse the guidance of those who taught anything wrong; but it is incumbent upon the lover of truth, by all means and even if death be threatened, even before his own life, to choose and to say what is right.
(*First Apology* 2.1)

Justin describes the Christian as a lover of truth, following Plato’s theme in the *Republic* (485–90). His Christian speaker insists, “I do not care whether Plato or Pythagoras ever thought anything like this at all, for this is the truth and that is why you should learn it” (*Dialogue with Trypho* 6.1). Similarly, Justin argues in his *Apology* that “our claim to be accepted is not that we say the same things as these writers, but that we say what is true” (*First Apology* 23.1).

The Bible is important for Justin because the prophets saw the truth that surpassed all other sources. Their vision apprehended the intellectual world (*Dialogue with Trypho* 7.1). So the content of Scripture can be called the ‘true philosophy’. It shows how God’s law and God’s word (*nomos* and *logos*) had been presented in a progressive revelation. The law of Moses is now superseded and the words of the prophets are summed up in the words of Christ. A similar view of history as intellectual development is found in Celsus, a Platonist opponent of Christianity. Some have argued that Celsus wrote his great attack on Christianity (*True Logos*) after reading Justin and that his account of intellectual history is directed against Justin’s account of perfection in Christ.

To sum up, Justin took over a Greek philosophical account of God that offered support against his pagan opponents, and gave an account of universal reason or *logos* where Christianity was the final truth towards which both the Old Testament and Greek philosophy moved. Justin died as a martyr in Rome during the prefecture of Junius Rusticus (162–68 CE).

IRENAEUS

Irenaeus came from Asia Minor but lived and wrote in Lyons, where he became bishop after 177. Erasmus called him a philosopher because he made argument central and this thematic contribution to philosophy of religion remains more important than miscellaneous borrowing. First, he gave a clear account of what Christianity was about. The *kerygma* (or proclamation) of the early Church is set out in his short work entitled, “Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching”. In this work, he makes the four points that govern his thinking. What is God like? Everything begins from God, who is universal intellect and love: “he is all thought, all will, all intellect, all light, all seeing, all hearing, the fount of all good things” (*Against Heresies* 1.12.2). “For God excels nature, having in himself the will because he is good, the power because he is powerful and the perfecting because he is rich and perfect” (2.29.2). There can only be one God (1.22.1), without beginning and without end (2.34.2, 3.8.3, 4.38.1). He is perfect, eternal and unchanging. He contains all things but is contained by none. “He is the cause of being to all things” (4.38.3).

Secondly, the one God has, since his creation of the world, acted in history (divine plan or economy). Thirdly, all that he did came to finality and perfection in Christ (recapitulation). Finally, now his salvation is open to all who believe and who wait for the final triumph of his goodness (inauguration and consummation). This fourfold account of the Christian message (God, divine plan, summing up in Christ, participation in salvation) is ‘proved’ by Irenaeus as the fulfilment of the words of Scripture and set out concisely in his *Demonstration*. However, a fuller account of his ideas comes in his attack on heresies (*Against Heresies*), where he refutes the various views of those who deny his central message. Irenaeus is

important both for his statement of the starting-point of Christianity and for the wealth of argument with which he refutes his opponents. From the viewpoint of philosophy he is important because he adopts argument in his response to his opponents. Gnosticism was a complex and variable theosophy. Irenaeus was concerned to show that it lacked rational coherence, insisting that its opinions were *incredibile, fatuum, impossibile, inconstans*, while the teaching of the Church was coherent and credible, *credibile, acceptabile, constans* (2.10.4). For Irenaeus, God is a universal intelligent being, to whom all is known and who shows his reason, love and glory in the world he has made, especially in the words of his prophets and of his Son. As cosmic mind, God is incompatible with anthropomorphism, whether pagan or Gnostic (2.28.5).

God is creator, man is creature. God makes, while man is made. God creates, from nothing, all that is, bringing opposites into order as he creates. Irenaeus uses two images to describe God as creator: sovereign king and wise architect. God's royal will and command produce creation. "He spoke and it was, he commanded and it stood firm" (Psalm 31:9). The plan of creation comes from God as wise architect.

It is safer and more accurate to confess the truth: the creator who formed the world is the only God and there is none beside him who received from himself the model and figure of things which have been made ... From himself God found the model and form of created things.
(*Against Heresies* 2.16.3)

One unique first cause is known because the human mind grows weary of infinite regress and in the end recognizes God as sole creator. Irenaeus is the first to give reasons for *creatio ex nihilo*. If God depended on unformed matter that he had not himself created, he could not be the sovereign God. After Irenaeus, the concept of 'creation from nothing' is firmly established in Christian thought.

Irenaeus anticipates recurring themes with his account of the divine plan in history. Hegel later found a dialectic in God's dealings with humanity. The return of the world to God happens through the resurrection of Christ: "negation is thereby overcome, and the negation of negation is thus the impulse of the divine nature" (Hegel 1969: 294–5). Irenaeus has a universal view of history and sees the divine plan as the way in which the shepherd brings the lost sheep home on his shoulders. Development is central to Irenaeus. In history, God and man become 'accustomed' to one another; God reveals himself progressively and man moves upwards to God. Adam never leaves the hands of God. "For his hand encloses us in our hidden and secret ways" (*Against Heresies* 4.19.2).

The divine plan reaches its perfection in the coming of Christ who is *Christus Victor*:

But indeed our lord is the one true master. He, the son of God, is truly good; he, the word of God, became son of man and endured

suffering for us. For he has fought and conquered: on the one hand as man he fought for the fathers and redeemed their disobedience by his obedience; on the other hand, he has bound the strong man, set free the weak, and has poured out salvation on the work of his hands, destroying sin. For the lord is patient and merciful and loves the human race. (3.18.6)

The 'summing up' or 'recapitulation' of all things is the centre of God's plan for human history. It does four things: it corrects, perfects, inaugurates and consummates a new humanity. In contrast to the Gnostic division of spirit and matter, God and humanity, invisible and visible, Irenaeus provides an account of God and the world where God is active and present in the world he has made.

Irenaeus does not draw on contemporary philosophy except in his insistence on the transcendence of God and the unity of the cosmos. Yet by his rejection of the dualist theosophies of the Gnostics, his influence on argued Christian thought became immense. Augustine developed a similar view of cosmic history, which remained influential in Western thought.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

Clement is the first early Christian thinker to make exuberant use of philosophical sources. Born probably in Athens, he came to Alexandria in the last quarter of the second century. He travelled around the Mediterranean world, studying under different teachers, and he made most of Greek philosophy useful for the purposes of Christian thinking. While influenced more by Plato and Middle Platonism, he uses other forms of philosophy and takes whatever is useful to explain the puzzles that Christianity has brought.

He saw three main problems facing a Christian philosophy of religion. First of all, the central message of Christianity had to do with a divine movement in history that was declared in Scripture and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. How could one move from this narrative of divine action to philosophical answers about God, humanity, right and wrong? Irenaeus had shown that the Christian message was tied to time and movement. How were Christians to bridge the gap from narrative and oracle to metaphysics? Clement answered this first question with what he called 'the true dialectic'. Everything is ordered by "the goodness of the only one true, almighty God, from age to age saving by the Son" (*Miscellanies* 7.2.12). The divine plan moves to fulfilment in Christ and to a new age that offers salvation. The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. For Clement as for Justin, the divine plan included the gift of philosophy for the Greeks to prepare them for Christ; it brought human beings from sunset to sunrise and now they must respond to God's fullness. Clement finds in Scripture the 'true dialectic'. He takes Plato's concept of dialectic as rational, aesthetic and

moral order, and applies it to the biblical narrative. Scripture points to a universal providence (*Miscellanies* 1.6.2, 1.24.160.5, 2.6.29). The ‘true dialectic’ as found in Scripture is a source of instruction and education, a prophetic source of knowledge and an answer to questions concerning goodness and truth. Dialectic begins as a rational discussion of Scripture, turning its puzzles into coherent argument. As it finds its way through the detail of Scripture it moves towards universal ideas and finally to God. “The mind is the place of the ideas, and God is mind ... When the soul, ascending beyond the sphere of becoming, becomes aware of itself and has converse with the ideas ... it becomes a kind of angel and will be with Christ” (*Miscellanies* 4.25.155.2–4). By the analysis of Scripture, the ‘true dialectic’ brings a science of divine and heavenly things from which guidance in human affairs is to be derived (*Miscellanies* 1.28.177.1). Clement applies Plato’s dialectic to the content of Scripture because the intellectual world is within the mind of God. In the Platonic tradition, the *kosmos noētos* could refer to the patterns of Forms, to the way in which the Forms fit together or simply to a higher world beyond the senses. In Justin and Irenaeus, Scripture had already been identified as the mind and will of God, ordered by the one divine plan. Clement adds to the takeover of the world of Forms by the divine plan a takeover of Platonic method (Osborn 2005: 68). Clement’s fusion of Scripture and metaphysics, of prophecy and Plato, opens the way to biblical theology (Mondésert 1944: 237–52). Clement follows Paul in identifying Christ crucified as the one part of Scripture to be taken literally. All else was to be interpreted figuratively as leading to the finality of the incarnate and crucified Lord.

Clement’s second main problem, which he also solved by means of philosophy, was the question of how an uncompromising monotheist could believe in both Father and Son as God. This was the claim of the Fourth Gospel: no one came to the Father but by the Son and no one came to the Son but by the Father. There was no Father without Son and no Son without Father. The Word was the revelation of the unknown Father; he was also within the Father and yet related reciprocally to the Father. God (the Father) was beyond God (the Son); God (the Son) was within God (the Father); God (the Son) was beside God (the Father). Clement’s solution of this puzzle depended on Platonism and Pythagoreanism. Unity could be simple unity (one and nothing but one) and complex unity (one and many). Moderatus of Gades (c.60 CE) states most clearly the difference between the two principles of unity. A modern interpreter traced this move to Plato’s *Parmenides*:

Think of a principle which so completely transcends all plurality that it refuses every predicate, even that of existence; which is neither in motion nor at rest, neither in time nor in space; of which we can say nothing, not even that it is identical with itself or different from other things: and *side by side with this*, a second principle of unity, containing the seeds of all the contraries – a principle which, if we once grant it existence, proceeds to pluralize itself indefinitely in a universe of

existent unities. If for the moment we leave fragments out of account and consider only the extant works of Greek philosophers before the age of Plotinus, there is one passage, and so far as I know one passage only, where these thoughts receive connected expression – namely, the first and second ‘hypotheses’ in the second part of Plato’s *Parmenides*.
(Dodds 1928: 132)

The development in Alcinous (second century CE) points clearly to a divine mind that knows itself and whose thinking is a ‘thinking of thinking’: “But since the first mind is the noblest of things, the object of its thought must also be noblest, and nothing is nobler than it is itself; so therefore, it would have eternally to contemplate itself and its own thoughts, and this activity it has is Idea” (Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* 10.3). Clement is able to use this account of God to describe the Christian account of the unknown God and of his Mind or Logos, the unity and reciprocity of Father and Son.

From this account of God as Father and Son as simple and complex unity, Clement explains the reciprocity of the one God, Father and Son, in the Fourth Gospel. “Reciprocity in mutual knowledge, glory, love, witness and work, points to the unique oneness of father and son” (Osborn 2005: 135). Clement develops divine reciprocity into three ‘mysteries of love.’ Everything depends on Father and Son as the first ellipse of love; then follows the divine love of God for humankind and finally the love of neighbour for neighbour. He uses the remarkable image of a set of scales to explain the balance between Jesus and the Father (*Teacher* 1.8.71.3). The Father shares the goodness of the Son and the Son shares the goodness of the Father. The highest rung of the ladder of being is not a rung but a beam-balance (Osborn 2005: 140).

The third and final problem to which Clement applies philosophy is the relation between faith and knowledge. For the Greeks, faith was a miserable substitute for knowledge; for the Christian, it was where everything began and ended. Faith was a simple thing that, like the mustard seed, grew magnificently. Faith is the power of God, the perception of what eye has not seen, the searching of divine mystery and the hope that is always pointing ahead. Clement takes several arguments from philosophers to indicate the necessity for faith. First, faith as the ‘substance of things hoped for’ finds support in the Epicurean demand for preconceptions. For the Epicureans, there was no way into knowledge except by preconception, *prolēpsis*. The Stoics came next to support faith with their account of ‘anticipatory choice.’ Knowledge was a comprehension that argument could not overthrow. Both Platonists and Stoics insist that this choice or assent is in our power (*Miscellanies* 2.12.54 [= Arnim & Adler 1924: 2.992]). Again, the place of mental perception is acknowledged by philosophers from Heraclitus to Plato and beyond. Plato claimed that it was impossible to learn the truth about God except from God or God’s offspring. We have the divine oracles that tell us of God (*Miscellanies* 6.15.123). Faith is the acceptance of unprovable first

principles and these depend, according to both Aristotle and Plato, on no higher axiom. Clement also speaks of faith as judgement (*krima*), a Stoic alternative to the notion of assent (Osborn 2005: 194).

From a basis of faith, Clement is able to build his way of argument and dialectic. He reproduces a logic notebook that discusses logical terms and provides a background to his argument elsewhere (*ibid.*: 206).

Beyond all the unceasing dialectic, there lies the final vision of God as the source of truth and goodness. Goodness must be participation in divine goodness and is a recovering of the likeness to God that human beings had forfeited through sin. Knowledge is linked to reciprocity with God, living in continual prayer and dependence on God's guidance. A careful study of Clement's account of the complete Christian shows his dependence on the ideal of the Greek sage. The concept of the life that contemplates eternal truths and that is devoted to instruction and virtue can be most clearly linked to Platonic thought (Wyrwa 1983).

Clement puts forward an account of Christianity that derives much of its argument and shape from the philosophy that he uses. His three great problems – the divine plan, which becomes the true dialectic; the reciprocity of Father and Son, which becomes the unity of the transcendent one with the one-many; and faith as anticipation, assent and perception – enabled him to begin from the New Testament and to proceed along paths that the philosophers had taken. Each of the questions that challenged Christian belief provided enrichment as it opened up the world of Greek philosophy to Christian use.

TERTULLIAN

Tertullian, the fourth of our second-century pioneers, confirms what we have found in his predecessors. He shares a first allegiance to the Christian kerygma of one God, divine plan, summing up and participation. Again, he shows the remarkable originality that has already been noticed in his predecessors. None is derivative from another. Certainly, there are traces of Justin in Clement but they are only traces. The extraordinary thing is that the first Christian philosophers were remarkably different.

Tertullian begins the tradition of Western Christian thought: "In western Christianity, everything seems to commence with Tertullian: the technical language of Christians, theology, interpretation of scripture and other manifestations" (Moreschini 1990: 55). He is "astonishingly original and personal" (Daniélou 1977: 341). He wrote his own kind of Latin and set out arguments. He had a vivid sense of the power of words and lived in perpetual controversy. His final vocabulary centres on the mystery of salvation: "What in the end is for you the total disgrace of my God, is the mystery of mankind's salvation" (*Against Marcion* 2.27). He begins as a Stoic with an undefined consciousness of God and fills that consciousness with Christian content.

He is an elusive writer who has been widely misunderstood. He is best known from two notorious passages: “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” (*On the Prescription of Heretics* 7.9), and “It is credible because inept ... certain because impossible” (*On the Flesh of Christ* 5.4). The first passage is a puzzle because in Tertullian Athens has a lot to do with Jerusalem; he is constantly drawing on a classical heritage. In the second claim, there is paradox because credibility and ineptness, certainty and impossibility, are opposites. The puzzle of Athens and Jerusalem is solved very simply by the preposition ‘after’. The perfection of Christ is the climax of a history that includes Greek philosophy. All is summed up in Christ and there is no sense in going back to Greek preparation in order to elaborate Christianity.

Let them beware who put forward a Stoic, Platonic dialectical form of Christianity. For there is no need of curiosity *after* Christ, no need of inquiry after the gospel. When we have believed we have no desire to add to our faith. For this is our primary faith, that there is nothing further which we ought to believe.

(*On the Prescription of Heretics* 7.11–13)

Similarly, the paradox of Tertullian (that the ineptitude of Christ crucified makes him credible) is clearly understood when his argument is analysed. We may restate his argument concisely:

God is wholly other, and differs from man and from all else. If he is joined to man in a way which is not shameful, inept and impossible, then either God is no longer God or man is no longer man. If God is joined to man in a way which is shameful, inept and impossible, then God is truly God and man is truly man. (Osborn 1997: 62)

Recapitulation is the joining of the end to the beginning, the joining of man to God. For Tertullian, “just as alpha rolls on to omega and then omega rolls back to alpha, so he might show in himself the way from the beginning to the end and the way from the end to the beginning” (*On Marrying Only Once* 5.2). God became man either in a way that is apt and therefore untrue, or in a way that is inept and therefore true.

Tertullian’s world is Stoic and Heraclitean, governed by the strife of opposites, of light with darkness and good with evil:

That same reason which constructed the universe out of diversity, so that all things from their antithetical substances agree in a unity – empty and solid, animate and inanimate, comprehensible and incomprehensible, light and darkness, even life and death – has also so disposed the whole course of existence according to a distinct plan, so that the first

part of it which we inhabit, reckoned from the creation, flows on to its end in the age of time; and the following part, to which we look, extends into boundless eternity. (*Apology* 48.11; Osborn 1997: 69)

The soul is naturally Christian and comes to recognize God in the world. God is known only to himself, yet may be found by all who do not “refuse to recognize him, of whom they cannot be ignorant” (*Apology* 17.3). Despite all the burdens and barriers that surround it, the awakening soul names God: “Good God! Great God! ... O testimony of the soul which is naturally Christian!” (*Apology* 17.6).

Tertullian’s longest work was directed against Marcion, who posed the major threat to Christian belief. Marcion, in his *Antitheses*, argued that the God of the Old Testament could not be the God of the Gospels. The supreme, merciful bringer of salvation cannot be the ruthless judge of the Old Testament nor the creator of the cruelties of the world. God’s goodness cannot be consistent with the justice of the ancient law. Tertullian argues: “I shall by means of these antitheses recognize in Christ my own jealous God. He did in the beginning, by his own right, by a hostility which was rational and therefore good, provide beforehand for the maturity and fuller ripeness of the things which were his” (*Against Marcion* 2.29.4). Tertullian explains the rationality of divine goodness, why the same God creates and redeems, and why a good God must be just. Tertullian is generally (but not always) convincing, as when describing God’s declaration ‘let us make man’ in the following way:

It was goodness who spoke, it was goodness who formed man out of clay into that noble substance of flesh, a substance built out of one material to possess many attributes. It was goodness who breathed soul into him – soul not dead but living. Goodness gave him dominion over all things, to enjoy, to govern and even to give them names. Still more, it was goodness who gave man additional delights, so that although in possession of the whole world, he had his dwelling in the healthier parts of it: so early was he transferred to paradise as he has been transferred out of the world into the church. The same goodness sought out a help for him, so that no good thing might be lacking: “it is not good”, God said, “that man should be alone”.

(*Against Marcion* 2.4.4ff; Osborn 1997: 99)

There are antitheses in the biblical account of God, but they must be held within God and not divided between two Gods.

Tertullian’s ingenuity shows up in two other problems: Trinity and christology. His account of the Trinity becomes influential for later Christianity. Father and Son are one God, separated not by intrinsic character but by their disposition alone. ‘Father and Son’ points to a disposition or relation that exists without internal variety. The category ‘sweet and bitter’ points to a relative difference in

the intrinsic character of things, but Father and Son do not differ in intrinsic character but only in relation. “If then, despite being unaffected in themselves they change because of something else’s disposition relative to them, it is clear that relatively disposed things have their existence in their disposition alone and not through any differentiation.” This account of the fourth Stoic category (Simplicius, *On Aristotle’s Categories* 165.32–166.29, trans. in Long & Sedley 1987: 29c) was taken up by Tertullian and applied to the Father and the Son (*Against Praxeas* 10; cf. Osborn 1997: 127).

Equally remarkable is Tertullian’s use of Stoic logic to explain the ‘two natures’ in Christ. Stoics distinguished between three sorts of mixtures: one in which different things were simply juxtaposed, another in which things disappeared into a new substance and a third where two things were blended together totally without losing their initial qualities. Jesus became God and man, not in a new kind of mixture, but by the total blending of Godhead and humanity. In Stoic terms, “blended substances ... preserve their own natures in the mixture” (Long & Sedley 1987: 48d). Tertullian writes, “We see a twofold state, not confused but joined in one person, God and man, Jesus” (*Against Praxeas* 27).

Tertullian’s love of strife and the conflict of opposites gives him a much less contemplative approach to prayer than that found in Clement. Prayer is natural, for cattle bend their knees when they rise from rest and look to heaven with a bellow or a roar (*On Prayer* 29.4). Prayer is the way in which Christians join in the conflict between good and evil and the Lord’s Prayer declares the present conflict, which will end in God’s kingdom.

Sin is important, for man’s likeness to God was lost by Adam’s sin and restored by grace (*On Baptism* 5.7). Stoicism gives a physical nature to the corruption of sin, which is passed on from parent to child so that the whole race is infected (*On the Testimony of the Soul* 3.2). Yet sin remains culpable and human freedom is central to the relation between sinner and God. Tertullian signs himself, “Tertullian the sinner” (*On Baptism* 20.5).

Tertullian’s humour comes out at many points and he regards laughter as a duty in the face of philosophical stupidity. Most interesting is his rejection of Hermogenes in contrast to his rejection of the Valentinians. Both of these opponents were dualist in their account of God and their conclusions held common ground. Yet there is a remarkable difference. Against Hermogenes, who provides arguments, Tertullian gives reasonable, careful and even tedious arguments. Against the Valentinians, who simply tell the story of a Gnostic myth and who offer no arguments, Tertullian presents ridicule. When confronted by theosophy or myth, Tertullian sees ridicule as a Christian duty. The stories of the Valentinians have no basis in logic and no coherence. Against such fables, “derision is a duty” (*risus officium est*) (*Against the Valentinians* 6.2f.).

For the rest, Tertullian has many striking things to say. His account of the resurrection of the flesh is powerfully argued: “the flesh (*caro*) is the hinge (*cardo*) of salvation” (*On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 8.2). Just as a storm-damaged ship that

has limped into harbour can be renewed and refitted, so the human flesh will be transformed at the resurrection (*On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 59–63).

To sum up our first four Christian philosophers, we may note their originality and imagination. Each is different and tackles different but related problems.

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