

Bauer's Forgotten Region: North African Christianity
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Christianity in North Africa (as distinct from Egypt) did not emerge until late in the second century – a genesis period which lies outside the ‘earliest Christianity’ considered by Walter Bauer in his famous research.¹ And the story of North African Christianity, including the thought of its leading Christian theologians (Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine), was generally regarded by Bauer as too late and thus inadmissible evidence for the debate on the emergence of orthodoxy and heresy. Nevertheless, North Africa is an area of early Christianity with well-documented character, conflicts and rapid emergence. As R.A. Kraft acknowledged in the 1971 English edition of *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, “a fresh approach to the origins of Christianity in North Africa” was among the important explorations “still lacking” from Bauer’s line of research.² This chapter is designed as a first step in just such an approach. The basic question is whether the emergence and development of North African Christianity is of any relevance to the Bauer thesis? In answering this question positively it is hoped that North Africa might point to a more general “fresh approach” for understanding the unity and diversity of Christian origins and early Christian “orthodoxy” itself.

In fact, the character and development of early North African Christianity provides a useful case study, or parallel test, on a number of fronts for elements and implications of the Bauer Thesis.³ It is valid to ask whether the implied interpretative assumptions, methods and conclusions Bauer and others have applied to areas of more sparse earlier evidence of Christian origins would prove historically viable if they were brought to bear on such origins in North Africa. Such an examination reveals weaknesses in several key implications of Bauer’s thesis (and its more recent presentations). In this connection the case of Tertullian, whom Bauer does appropriate for his arguments, is particularly relevant.

Yet even beyond Tertullian, a number of unique aspects of North African Christianity’s emergence, which had they occurred 50-75 years earlier in abstracted form in the evidence would undoubtedly be grist to the mill of Bauer’s arguments, in context actually illuminate that “orthodoxy” was something conceived too narrowly by Bauer and that an “orthodox” penumbra allowed for considerable diversity and even competition. The local flavors which emerged in Roman Africa were not different entities or segments of a broader group competing in terms of essential authority and doctrine. Nor did the distinctives and internal conflicts derive from pluriform or repressed origins. Seen *in situ* such developments in Africa show that strongly distinctive regional Christianity (singular) and even competition between distinctive regional groups need not imply the existence of different or “lost” Christianities (plural). The distinctive nature of North African Christianity is clear from its earliest moments right through to Augustine.⁴ Yet it was not superseded by an authentically different “orthodox”⁵

¹ Bauer does draw on Tertullian, as will be discussed below, and extends his discussion in a number of locations to the end of the second century and beyond. However, the bulk of Bauer’s treatment centers on developments before 180. And unlike most areas focused upon by Bauer, there are no clear candidates for a first century Christianity in Roman North Africa.

² Walter Bauer, trans. team Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 315.

³ There are certainly elements of the Bauer Thesis that early North African Christianity has a bearing upon, as will be discussed; however, North Africa does not qualify as an example of “earliest Christianity.”

⁴ cf. e.g. D.F. Wright, “The Latin Fathers,” in I. Hazlett, ed. *Early Christianity: Origins and Evolution to AD 600* (1991), 148-150 and R.D. Sider, “Africa,” in E. Ferguson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 15.

⁵ Terminology is key in this discussion. When R.A. Kraft introduces a citation of Betz by saying: “Clearly there was no ‘pure’ form of Christianity that existed in the beginning and can be called ‘orthodox’”(Bauer, 309 in App. 2), we get an illustration of how essential defining terms is to avoid extremes. Three levels of meaning for “orthodox” are used in this chapter. 1. Conscious connection or perceived dependence on connections to Jesus as Messiah and risen Lord through apostolic Christianity as it was broadly received. 2. Teachings which were held to be consistent with the open, general teaching of the Scriptures in the broader (“catholic”) church. 3. “True” as opposed to “false” teachings labeled as “heresy” in contemporary sources. All three aspects, not just a narrow focus on the last, are important to retain in a consideration of unity and diversity within Christian origins.

Christianity over time.⁶ In sum, Christian emergence in Roman Africa manifests considerable diversity within a core unity; successful resistance to the church at Rome precisely on the issue of right beliefs; and a broad commitment to a Christian experience which centered on the action of the Spirit in the world and both “Apostolic” and Jewish Scriptures. That is, it seems to be a microcosm of what Bauer argued was not the case for earliest Christianity.

The Origins of North African Christianity

A review of the origins of Christianity in Roman North Africa is necessary: how, when and in what form(s) did it come there? The area of modern day Tunisia and portions of Algeria and Libya had been part of the empire since the conclusion of the Punic Wars (146 B.C.). The first undisputed evidence for Christianity in North Africa comes in an account of the martyrdom, on July 17, 180 A.D., of a group of Christians brought to Carthage from a small village, Scilli/um – so small that we are not certain of its location. The account is unusual for several reasons. First, it gives a specific date and names (including uniquely African names) and the martyrs display some sophistication in their faith. Second, the account is in Latin and the martyrs evidence a Latin Bible (representing an indigenous Latin Christianity). Third, since early Christian expansion certainly was uniform in spreading first to urban areas, only later penetrating the rural countryside, for Christianity to have reached a village the size of Scilli/um and to have a number of obvious, informed and devout converts from there, suggests that Christianity preceded this date in North Africa by some time (perhaps even decades). After this martyrdom account, Christian evidence in North Africa virtually explodes from 190–220 with accounts of multiple martyrdoms in Carthage – most notably the *Passion of Perpetua*, the earliest extant writing by a Christian woman⁷ – and numerous Christian discourses from Tertullian, beginning c. 195. Though the “brilliant Carthaginian” has been considered the “creator of Christian Latin,” Tertullian also wrote Greek.⁸ As a baseline then, that a large and indigenous bilingual Christian community, both urban and rural, existed by 200 is clear. Christianity in North Africa appeared later than in other areas, displayed clear distinctives, and began in the second century, lacking first century evidence or a tradition of evangelization.⁹

But from what location did Christianity come to North Africa? The various possible geographic sources naturally consist of Rome/Italy, Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt, and Gaul. Of these, Italy and Asia Minor are the most likely candidates in terms of frequency of contact and similarities in Christian focus and observance. In antiquity, Africa did not include Egypt – they were quite separate – and there was relatively little interaction or movement between Carthage and Alexandria.¹⁰ If preference be given to one source, the idea that Christianity came to Africa from Asia Minor is probably most correct.¹¹ Given the

⁶ Though the fourth century requirement from Rome to support Caecilian’s party only if they renounced the African practice of rebaptism does represent loss of an aspect of African tradition and a portion of Cyprian’s theology it did not constitute a loss of the legacy of Cyprianic theology, cf. J.P. Burns *Cyprian the Bishop* (2002), 166-177.

⁷ Perpetua represents the aristocratic class and Greek speaking Christians at Carthage and perhaps more broadly.

⁸ Cf. D.F. Wright, in I. Hazlett, ed. *Early Christianity*, 148-150.

⁹ A helpful broad chronology of ‘early’ Christianity in North Africa might break down as follows:

Late 1st cent. – mid-2nd cent: Possible first Christian contacts

(170s-) 180s: Clear origins

190-230: Dramatic, vibrant growth and development;

240-280s: Organization & consolidation;

280-330: Division from politics following persecution (true to NA tradition);

330-412: Internal battle over who or what constituted ‘authentic’ Christianity in North Africa.

413-500: Theological legacy amidst growing political unrest.

¹⁰ Especially between their Christian communities. There is debate about the role of Judaism as a conduit because details about the community there are unclear and the evidence is minimal. Depending on one’s perspective some anti-Jewish comments in early North African Christian writings may indicate that Christianity did or did not spread through this people group to North Africa (cf. Tertullian *Against the Jews* (chapters 1-8), François Decret, trans. Edward L. Smither, *Early Christianity in North Africa* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009), 13-15).

¹¹ One may note, in particular, the “new prophecy” (Montanist) connection that is apparent in some of the earliest evidence we have from Carthaginian Christians as well as the lack of deference accorded to Rome by the young North African church, e.g. under Cyprian. Moreover, commercial contact was very strong between North Africa and Asia Minor and the Asian churches

amount of commercial traffic between Carthage and Rome, and the proximity to Italy, that might seem the logical choice for the source. However, the characteristics of earliest North African Christianity are not as reflective of Rome as they are of Asia Minor. In all of the possible source areas, including Rome, Greek was the language of the church for some time. While the Greek component of early Christianity in Africa is clear from the earliest writings of Tertullian as well as the language of the *Passio* of Perpetua and her colleagues, North African Christianity would be dominated by Latin from the very beginning. Decret's assertion that "the Gospel converged on Africa" from both Roman Italy and the East at around the same time seems likely, even if, in the end we cannot draw strong conclusions about the precise details, timeframe and order of Christianity's arrival.¹²

What is clear is that North African Christianity emerged quickly from 180 onward as a demographically and linguistically diverse entity. This young church quickly began to relate to the broader church in Asia Minor, the East, and Rome in ways both confidently connected and independent. Moreover, it did so from a perspective that was enthusiastic and self-consciously "orthodox." As it relates to Bauer's thesis, it is worth noting that the many potential sources for Christianity in North Africa did not lead to multiple emergences or competing entities. That is to say, our earliest testimonies to Christianity in North Africa (180 – 202/3) represent clearly distinct communities:

- Perpetua and companions – urban, Greek, aristocratic classes and servants;
- Tertullian – urban, Latin, educated classes, bilingual;
- Scillitan Martyrs – rural, Latin, indigenous.

Yet the tenor, foci, and emphases from all three groups are largely indistinguishable. Such a result would not be anticipated by Bauer's assumptions and has been underappreciated. One implication is that the various sources of North African Christianity shared the same core unity evidenced by the diverse groups comprising this early regional church.

North African Christianity's Distinctive Character

Regardless of its provenance, the distinctive features of early North African Christianity are well known, illustrating that a locale can and often does introduce one or more distinctive flavors to Christianity.¹³

R.D. Sider is not unique when he lists:

1. Literary vigor & creativity;
2. A profound focus on martyrdom;
3. A tendency to be "factious and schismatic;" and
4. A focus on conciliar decision making.¹⁴

To these other marked aspects of early Christianity in this region may be added: rural penetration, a rigorous approach to Christian observance, apologetic against the world (in contrast, for example, to apologetic from Alexandria or Justin which engaged the world and philosophy more positively), a

seem to have been a little more expansive in this connection than churches in other areas – with Lyon and Irenaeus providing a case in point.

¹² The tendency of Bauer to argue from silence will not be attempted here for the hypothetical aspects of earlier second or even first century Christianity in Africa for which Decret envisages the most important conduit being Italian immigrants. V. Saxer 'Africa' in Di Berardino's *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, (1991, English ed.), 13, notes the contesting views that Christianity came to Africa from either Rome or through Libya/Egypt. R.D. Sider, noting the early Greek elements of the Christian community there, gives the nod to Greek speaking eastern merchants as the likely source (in E. Ferguson, ed., *Encyclopedia*, 14). And Decret, (2009 English ed., *Early Christianity in North Africa*, 12-13), hypothesizes a late first/early second century process whereby 'the Gospel converged on Africa from both [Roman Italy and the East] at the same time' with the most important conduit being Italian immigrants (also attended by some Jewish connections).

¹³ Celtic Christianity would be another later case in point.

¹⁴ "Africa", in E. Ferguson, *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 15.

charismatic stress on the Spirit, and a somewhat self-sufficient originality and theological inventiveness. Several of these distinctives are important in our assessment of Bauer.

Rural Penetration, Martyrdom, Rigor, and Latin

We have noted the rural penetration of early North African Christianity, but it is significant that vibrant rural Christianity would endure as a shaping influence in the African church perhaps more than in any other region of the empire. The Donatist schism in the early 4th century was only made viable with the support of rural Numidian bishops, who were wary of the influence of Carthage. Even more distinctive of African Christianity was its focus on martyrdom. It is not by accident that the first evidence of Christianity in North Africa is a martyrdom account. From this seminal point, the regional church glorified martyrdom, was characterized by rigor, took a more detached or opposing view of the world (paganism, false religion, corruption, etc.), and tended to view life as a conflict with demonic forces. The earlier *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs* is followed by the famous martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas (203/204), a vivid group account which, as Wright notes, “displays astonishing feminine sensitivity, incorporating Perpetua’s prison diary, the earliest writing by a Christian woman.”¹⁵ This emphasis on martyrdom connected directly to an emphasis on the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ The charismatic influence of martyrs and *confessors* so dramatic in this account is also visible in the later controversy surrounding the restoration of the lapsed in 253 wherein the response to persecution and avoidance of martyrdom nearly undermined Cyprian’s episcopacy in Carthage during the Decian persecution.¹⁷ The role of the faithful during the great persecution was at the core of the Donatist schism and even in Augustine’s day festivals surrounding martyrs’ anniversaries were more strongly emphasized and enthusiastic than in the broader church.¹⁸

Perhaps the best single word to describe North African Christianity is “rigorous.” The emphasis was on one’s “*religio*” (we might say “duty of observance”) and related to the Roman ideal of *pietas* (or “piety”). Behavior ought to be consistent with conviction. As Tertullian states in *On Penance* (*De Paenitentia* 4), “It is utterly vain to say, ‘I willed, but yet I did not’. Rather you ought to carry the thing through because you will; or else not will at all, since you do not carry it through.” For North African Christians like Tertullian there was a tendency to allow few, if any, exceptions to those who lapsed.¹⁹ The critiques by Perpetua of the laxity of her church leaders, or by Tertullian towards any laxity anywhere, or his progression from allowances of a very few post-baptismal lapses in his early writings to no post-baptismal lapses in his later “Montanist” writings, are but a few of the most obvious manifestations of this rigorous Latin Christianity. Good order and organization were not far behind, as represented in the person of Cyprian and his many pioneering administrative initiatives. Yet this feature is already visible in ecclesiastical structure and clerical ministry in North Africa in Perpetua’s and Tertullian’s time.²⁰ The significance of the striking emphasis on plurality in decision making and leadership structures would have been worth Bauer’s consideration. North African rigor also translated into a distinctive apologetic directed against the “world.” Tertullian again is a prime example and provided the best defense of Christianity against persecution and misinformation though his apologetic style reads in stark contrast to

¹⁵ D.F. Wright, in I. Hazlett, ed. *Early Christianity*, 148.

¹⁶ Not unlike that seen in the account of the martyrs at Lyon, c. 177, or, Phrygian Montanism, or, earlier, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, in Asia Minor.

¹⁷ An avoidance which Cyprian showed did not derive from fear when he was martyred on 14 September, 258.

¹⁸ Cf. Augustine, *Confessions* 5.8.15 (see also the note in H. Chadwick’s translation, Oxford, 1991, p. 82, n. 12) and *Confessions* 6.2.2, regarding Monnica’s observance of the martyr’s anniversaries.

¹⁹ E.g. Tertullian’s earlier *On Penitence* and his later *On Purity*.

²⁰ See, for example, clerical structure or the significant role of the council of seniores (community ‘elders’) W. Tabbernee, “Perpetua, Optatus, and Friends: Christian Ministry in Carthage, c. 203 CE” http://people.vanderbilt.edu/~james.p.burns/chroma/clergy/Tabborders.html#N_63_

Greek apologists such as Justin in Asia Minor and Rome, Irenaeus in Gaul, or Alexandrian apologists like Clement and Origen.²¹

Latly, it was in Africa that specifically Latin Christianity found its real home. The Roman church was still using Greek at this time and the first Latin speaking bishop of Rome, Victor (d. 196), was a North African. North Africa, not Rome or Italy, would be the vibrant locus of Latin Christianity in the pre-Constantinian period. Here the church, partially from necessity, developed original and theologically inventive terms and concepts to convey and understand the Christian message. Tertullian, the author of some 30 or so books from 195-215, was the most significant figure in this, as in other regards as will be seen below and in him Latin theology began and Latin Christianity gained a forceful personality.²² The Old Latin Bible glimpsed in the *Acta* of the Scillitan martyrs was the central text for the church in North Africa right up to Augustine's day.

The preceding more than demonstrates how possible it was for late second century Christianity in a new locale to develop – during its earliest phases and from common origin – marked distinctives from Christianity practiced elsewhere and from which it derived. It is equally clear that it would be a mistake to ascribe to North African local particularity the status of a competitor Christianities in the religious arena of the time. Ascription of such local varieties to unknown earlier versions of Christianity is invalid in the North African case since the distinctives are reflected within diverse communities. Additionally, these diverse communities shared a conscious affinity to unity and assumed apostolic continuity. The identity of North African Christians with the catholic church – as is the sense of possession of “authentic” Christianity – is visible in Cyprian's conciliar initiatives and theory as well as in Tertullian's appeals to witnesses of the universal church and its scriptures in his apologetic and his considered adoption of the “New Prophecy” that originated in Asia Minor. This combination of unique character and commitment to broader “orthodoxy” in North Africa is perhaps best illustrated by Tertullian.

Why Tertullian Matters to Bauer

Although Bauer did not even deal with North Africa in his geographical survey of early Christianities, he seems to contradict his own method by finding support for his arguments on more than a few occasions from Tertullian of Carthage (c. 160-220). It was for this reason that Walther Völker in his critique in 1935 concluded that Bauer “arrives at these astonishing conclusions by . . . inferences from later periods.”²³ In this focused section we will first show briefly how Bauer presents Tertullian in light of his broader argument. Second, since Bauer has opened the door to “later” early Christian thought, we will show why Tertullian's theology and example of a second- and third- century African Christian may indeed challenge Bauer's core thesis on four specific fronts. Put another way, we will show why Tertullian matters to Bauer and then argue why Tertullian ought to matter more to him.

It should interest the reader to know that Bauer refers to the Carthaginian father no less than ten times throughout his work. Also, in the appendix to the 1971 English edition, George Strecker makes mention of Tertullian.²⁴ Bauer presents Tertullian as a known heresy fighter,²⁵ one who was familiar with the Ebionite teachings,²⁶ and who also ridiculed Melito of Sardis' (d. c. 180) theology.²⁷ In his remaining interaction with Tertullian, Bauer limits his discussion to Tertullian and Montanism.

²¹ D.F. Wright, in I. Hazlett, ed. *Early Christianity*, 149. Decret's note that Tertullian “represented an entire people” is nowhere more true than in the apologist's statement: “We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ Jesus, no inquisition after enjoying the gospel.” (*Prae. ad. Haer.* 7.12). *Christianity in North Africa* (2009), 34.

²² E.g. coinage of the term “Trinity” for the Godhead and describing its meaning in the typically concise Latin expression of “one nature in three persons.”

²³ Walther Völker, trans. Thomas P. Scheck, “Walter Bauer's Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14:4 (2006), 404.

²⁴ Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy* (1971), 312.

²⁵ Bauer, 99.

²⁶ Bauer, 281.

²⁷ Bauer (154) is basing this on Jerome's account in *Illustrious Men*, 24.

Bauer identifies Tertullian as one who collected Montanist writings²⁸ and who served to interpret the movement for the church and for historians.²⁹ Bauer notes that Tertullian refers to Montanism simply as the “New Prophecy”³⁰ and that he acknowledged the presence of one woman in his congregation who participated in the liturgical assembly by offering charismatic utterances.³¹ Bauer adds that Tertullian regarded himself as one enabled by the Holy Spirit to speak correctly about the movement, not unlike those empowered by the Spirit to interpret Scripture.³² Hence, for Bauer, Tertullian was a thorough going Montanist—a member of a New Prophecy congregation that had physically split from the great church in Carthage.³³

Throughout the course of his argument, Bauer interacts with a number of Tertullian’s writings, including *Against Praxeas*, *Against Marcion*, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, and *On the Soul*.³⁴ However, he concludes that Tertullian’s Montanist related polemics—his defense of the movement—cannot be trusted and he largely dismisses Tertullian’s contributions by adding, “Tertullian is only able to teach us that even ‘the church’ has become the object of violent and unjust attacks.”³⁵

In short, Bauer depicts Tertullian as an unreliable polemicist who resides completely within a separatist community. Surely, Tertullian is of interest to Bauer because of his apparent simultaneous commitment to “heresy” and “orthodoxy.” Tertullian has, of course, troubled many historians and theologians because of his alleged dabbling in heresy while also being remembered as a key contributor to Christian orthodoxy. In the appendix of Bauer’s work, Strecker raises this very question: “What happens when we find a person who is clearly a predecessor of ‘orthodoxy’ in one sense but not in another? How do we handle a Tertullian, with his Montanist sympathies?”³⁶

Why Tertullian Should Matter More to Bauer

Given that Bauer has opened the door and referenced this otherwise later African church father in support of his thesis, it is fair to cross examine Bauer and raise some pertinent points about Tertullian’s contribution that may in fact call into question some aspects of Bauer’s overall thesis. In fact, Gerald Bray asserts that Tertullian did not merely represent his own private thoughts, but that his life and thought offer a window into the everyday life of second- and third-century North African Christianity.³⁷ Similarly, François Decret adds:

Tertullian’s prominent place in the history of the church is due to the fact that he . . . aptly represented his context and provided great evidence for the African Christianity of his day. . . . Through his genius and weaknesses, boldness in the midst of battles, revolt in the face of injustices, excesses, affinity for provocation, preference for paradox, quibbling spirit, and appetite for brilliant and subtle formulas, Tertullian represented an entire people.³⁸

For the sake of space, our cross examination will be confined to the following four areas.

Imperial Connections?

²⁸ Bauer, 142.

²⁹ Bauer, 177.

³⁰ Bauer, 180.

³¹ Bauer, 178.

³² Bauer, 180.

³³ Bauer, 177, 211.

³⁴ Bauer, 180.

³⁵ Bauer, 144.

³⁶ Bauer, 312.

³⁷ Gerald Bray, “Tertullian” in Bradley Green, ed., *Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2010), 65.

³⁸ Decret, *Early Christianity in North Africa*, 34.

If Tertullian is to be remembered as a fighter against heresy and can be located within orthodoxy, did he achieve this with the help of the Roman imperial authorities? On the other hand, if he was definitely a heretic outside of the communion of the great church, would he not have been suppressed by the state? In Bauer's view were not alternative Christianities suppressed in part by church leaders who had the emperor in their "back pocket," which ultimately assured them a place on the winning side of orthodoxy? Our contention is that Tertullian, a representative of North African Christianity, did not have strategic connections with the imperial authorities nor was he suppressed by them yet, he still managed to help shape Christian orthodoxy.

It may come as a surprise to some that Tertullian was proud to be a Roman citizen and, in some of his writings, he praises the work of certain Roman emperors.³⁹ On the other hand, Tertullian unleashed his ire against the authorities through his apologetic works. His *Apology* and *To Scapula* were aimed directly at the Roman authorities as he argued in a very Roman manner that Christians were not criminals. Evidence from his *De Corona* as well as the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*, which he probably edited, reveal that Christians were certainly in a precarious situation with the Roman authorities.⁴⁰ Because his anti-government writings were so stinging, many are surprised that Tertullian was not executed as many of his fellow North African Christians were. To this point, Decret and Bray helpfully argue that, due to his privileged upbringing, Tertullian had many well placed friends who could effectively offer him protection and the ability to keep writing against the government without personal consequence.⁴¹ While these connections may have offered Tertullian protection on a personal level, they certainly did not influence the Roman government to recognize or prefer Christianity of any sort within the pre-Constantinian empire.

Roman Ecclesiastical Dominance?

A key part of Bauer's argument is that Christian orthodoxy is really the belief system of the church at Rome—"the center and chief source of power for the 'orthodox' movement within Christianity."⁴² That is, since the episcopate of Clement of Rome (c. 88-97), when the Roman church wrote to and instructed the Corinthian church, the Roman church effectively bullied the broader church, through coercion and manipulation, toward its version of orthodoxy. It seems, however, that Tertullian's orthodox actions, especially toward the leadership of the Roman church, provide a healthy challenge to Bauer's presupposition.

We should remember that *Against Praxeas*, Tertullian's greatest theological work that anticipated the Council of Nicaea more than a century later, was leveled at the teaching of a heretical bishop of Rome—probably Callistus (c. 217-222).⁴³ Tertullian challenged this insufficient articulation of the Godhead (modalism) that was held not only by Callistus but also by at least one other second-century Roman bishop, Zephyrinus (c. 198-217). In forging a vocabulary and framework for describing the Trinity, Tertullian made orthodox Christian arguments that have largely endured. In doing so, he openly challenged the authority of the Roman church leadership.

Tertullian's theological activity in this encounter not only showed Trinitarian concerns, but it also revealed his ecclesiology, especially concerning the office of bishop or overseer. Challenging the notion that Peter's alleged Roman episcopate perpetually endowed his successors with authority, Tertullian argued that every church pastor is in reality a Peter for his church. Pastoral authority is given to leaders of *congregations*; not simply to the leader of the Roman congregation.⁴⁴ This African perspective toward Rome (and African influence over against Rome) would continue through the following centuries as Cyprian of Carthage (248-58) challenged Stephen of Rome (254-57) over the rebaptism issue or when

³⁹ Tertullian, *Apology* 30.4, 32.1; *On Idolatry*, 15.7; *On the Pallium* 2.7, 5.4; also Decret, 42-43.

⁴⁰ Decret, 35-37, 40.

⁴¹ Decret, 33; Bray, "Tertullian," in Green, 64.

⁴² Bauer, 229.

⁴³ Andrew B. McGowan, "Tertullian and the 'Heretical' Origins of the 'Orthodox' Trinity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14:4 (2006), 438.

⁴⁴ Tertullian, *On Modesty*, 21.9-10, 16-17; Decret, 40.

Augustine of Hippo (395-430) engaged Roman bishops Innocent (401-417) and Zosimus (417-418) over the Pelagian controversy.⁴⁵

What About His Montanism?

Bauer refers to the early African father as the “Montanist Tertullian.”⁴⁶ As noted, Bauer works from the premise that Tertullian officially broke with the Catholic church and embraced a Montanist doctrine that was incompatible with Christian orthodoxy. At first glance, Tertullian’s Montanist attachment seems to lend credence to the overall Bauer framework on heresy and orthodoxy. However, let us revisit Tertullian’s Montanist journey and explore what this meant for his relationship to the great church, and for his theological development.

Bauer is correct in asserting that Tertullian described the Montanist movement as the New Prophecy.⁴⁷ While Tertullian’s interest in the group was both theological and ethical, it seems that he was mostly driven by the latter. As Bray asserts, Tertullian’s Montanist leanings are most apparent in his pastoral and ethical treatises.⁴⁸ Jaroslav Pelikan adds that for Tertullian, “the central content of these visions, revelations, prophecies, and dreams was not doctrinal but ethical. Tertullian insisted that the Paraclete had come to establish a new discipline, not a new teaching.”⁴⁹ Indeed, in *Against Praxeas*, Tertullian distinguishes between average and rather lax Christians (*psychici*) and those that are following the Paraclete and living fully the intended Christian experience.⁵⁰ In a related way, he envisioned the church as a “spirit church” led by prophets instead of priests who had bought into a worldly hierarchical system. Also regarding worship, Tertullian noted that some participants in liturgical assemblies offered charismatic utterances. While this may seem distinctive of second- and third-century Montanism, Justin (d. c. 155, Ephesus and Rome), Irenaeus (d. 202, Gaul), and later Cyprian (d. 258, Carthage) also described a similar phenomenon in their contexts.⁵¹

Given that Tertullian was interested in the rigorous lifestyle and worship of the so-called Montanists, how did he regard their eschatological claims—namely that Christ would return to Papuza in Asia Minor? According to his work *Against Marcion*, Tertullian has Christ returning to Jerusalem and not Papuza. It may be that Tertullian rejected these teachings or, as Trevett has argued, he was perhaps completely unaware of these Montanist ideas that were present in Asia Minor and even Rome.⁵²

Bauer’s assertion that Tertullian was a Montanist who officially split with the great church has been largely dismissed by the consensus of scholarship of the last generation. It seems that Bauer and others who have insisted on a schismatic Tertullian, have largely depended upon Jerome’s questionable depiction of the African father.⁵³ Representing the thoughts of Decret, Trevett, and Powell, Bray asserts: “to say that [Tertullian] broke with the mainline church at Carthage and joined the sect is taking the evidence we have too far.”⁵⁴ Trevett adds that since the New Prophecy had already been condemned in Asia Minor, the form that arrived in Africa in the late second century was much more orthodox. Trevett continues: “We should not assume that a *schismatic* Prophetic community was formed apart from the catholics in Carthage. Tertullian the catholic Christian remained catholic in his thinking.”⁵⁵

⁴⁵ Cyprian, *Letter 74*; Augustine, *Letters 176-77*; also Edward L. Smither, *Augustine as Mentor: A Model for Preparing Spiritual Leaders* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2008), 29, 32-33, 38, 172-74, 201-204. See below.

⁴⁶ Bauer, 211.

⁴⁷ Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 3.24.4, 4.22.4; *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 63.3; also Christine Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 67.

⁴⁸ Bray, “Tertullian,” in Green, 70.

⁴⁹ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol. 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition, 100-600* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 100.

⁵⁰ Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 1.7; McGowan, “Tertullian and the ‘Heretical’ Origins of the ‘Orthodox’ Trinity,” 442.

⁵¹ Pelikan, 99-100.

⁵² Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 3.24.3-4; also Douglas Powell, “Tertullianists and Cataphrygians,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 29:1 (1975), 44; Trevett, 75.

⁵³ Jerome, *Illustrious Men* 53.4; also McGowan, “Tertullian and the ‘Heretical’ Origins of the ‘Orthodox’ Trinity,” 438.

⁵⁴ Bray, “Tertullian,” in Green, 64; also Decret, 37; Powell, “Tertullianists and Cataphrygians,” 33-36; and Trevett, 67-69.

⁵⁵ Trevett, 68-69.

What then can we conclude about Tertullian's theological development in light of his relationship to the New Prophecy? First, it seems that Tertullian's involvement with the group helped to clarify his Trinitarian thinking, especially regarding the person of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁶ As noted, his articulations of the Trinity were quite innovative and anticipated Nicene thinking. On the other hand, it should be noted that Tertullian, through his strength and individualism, probably shaped African Montanism by causing it to look different than its counterpart in Asia Minor, especially on the doctrines of the Holy Spirit and eschatology.⁵⁷ Second, as we will argue shortly, Tertullian's most cherished theological value and method was following the rule of faith (*regula fidei*). Hence, the thought and practice associated with the New Prophecy had to be filtered through the rule. In short, Decret argues that Tertullian's theology was not actually altered by his Montanist journey and Trevett concludes that "Tertullian the Montanist" was always "Tertullian the Montanist catholic."⁵⁸

In conclusion, Tertullian's Montanism was not so much a story of heresy and orthodoxy as it was one of diversity within an otherwise orthodox Christianity.⁵⁹ Again, Tertullian represents the passionate and, at times, uncooperative spirit of early African Christianity. In this sense, the New Prophecy gatherings could be regarded as special meetings within the great church or, as Trevett has concluded, "enthusiasts of the New Prophecy were *not* so separated, but were more probably an *ecclesiola in ecclesia*."⁶⁰

His Concern for the Rule of Faith?

Concerning Tertullian's Montanist leanings and orthodoxy, Decret has argued that Tertullian's highest priority was to uphold the rule of faith rather than to promote new ideas on ecclesiology or prophecy.⁶¹ In *On Monogamy*, Tertullian asserts that the Paraclete is a "restorer more than an innovator."⁶² In this final line of questioning, let us consider Tertullian's understanding of the rule of faith, how it connected him to the broader early Christian church, and why this is a significant rebuttal to Bauer's thesis.

Bryan Litfin defines the rule of faith as "a confessional formula (fixed neither in wording nor in content, yet following the same general pattern) that summarized orthodox beliefs about the actions of God and Christ in the world" and a "a convenient summary of catholic orthodoxy."⁶³ Articulations of the rule appear at least three times in Tertullian's writings with the clearest occurring in his *Prescription Against Heretics* where he writes:

This rule of faith . . . there is one only God, and that He is none other than the Creator of the world, who produced all things out of nothing through His own Word, first of all sent forth; that this Word is called His Son, *and*, under the name of God, was seen "in diverse manners" by the patriarchs, heard at all times in the prophets, at last brought down by the Spirit and Power of the Father into the Virgin Mary, was made flesh in her womb, and, being born of her, went forth as Jesus Christ; thenceforth He preached the new law and the new promise of the kingdom of heaven, worked miracles; having been crucified, He rose again the third day; (then) having ascended into the heavens, He sat at the right hand of the Father; sent instead of Himself the Power of the Holy Ghost to lead such as believe; will come with glory to take the saints to the enjoyment of everlasting life and of

⁵⁶ A good example of this development is comparing his thoughts in *Apology* 21.11-14 and *Against Praxeas* 3.1. McGowan, "Tertullian and the 'Heretical' Origins of the 'Orthodox' Trinity," 440-45; also Pelikan, 105-106.

⁵⁷ Powell, "Tertullianists and Cataphrygians," 50; also Pelikan, 101.

⁵⁸ Decret, 38; Trevett, 69.

⁵⁹ Indeed, this is what some of Bauer's early critics said about his thesis. See a summary of these in Andreas J. Köstenberger and Michael J. Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture's Fascination with Diversity has Reshaped our Understanding of Early Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 35-38.

⁶⁰ Trevett, 74; also Powell, "Tertullianists and Cataphrygians," 37-38.

⁶¹ Decret, 39.

⁶² Tertullian, *On Monogamy* 4.1 cited in McGowan, "Tertullian and the 'Heretical' Origins of the 'Orthodox' Trinity," 454.

⁶³ Bryan Litfin, "Learning from Patristic Uses of the Rule of Faith," in Paul Hartog, ed., *The Contemporary Church and the Early Church: Case Studies in Ressourcement* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 79; see also Köstenberger and Kruger, 54.

the heavenly promises, and to condemn the wicked to everlasting fire, after the resurrection of both these classes shall have happened, together with the restoration of their flesh. This rule, as it will be proved, was taught by Christ, and raises amongst ourselves no other questions than those which heresies introduce, and which make men heretics.⁶⁴

Contemporary Patristic scholars such as John Behr, Larry Hurtado, and Gerald Bray see the rule of faith as an effective bridge between the apostles, New Testament writings, and the early Christian creeds.⁶⁵ Köstenberger and Kruger assert that the content of the rule of faith was largely expressed in the eventual Nicene Creed.⁶⁶ It should be noted that one role of the church fathers was to faithfully hand over and pass down the apostolic teaching. For this reason, Hippolytus (c. 170-c. 236) referred to the rule as the “tradition of the apostles” (*paradosis ton apostolon*).⁶⁷ Litfin carefully asserts that the rule of faith was in process and that the most developed expression of it does not appear until the works of Irenaeus. Still, Litfin, Köstenberger, and Kruger effectively argue that the rule of faith establishes a basic theological connection between Tertullian and Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch (d. c. 110), Aristides (d. c. 133/140), Justin, Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-c. 215), Origen (185-254), Hippolytus, Novatian (200-258), Cyprian, Dionysius (d. 265), Athanasius (c. 295-373), and Augustine.⁶⁸

In short, Tertullian’s conviction about and use of the rule of faith to summarize salvation history, interpret Scripture, and ultimately make sense of Christian experiences and practice such as the New Prophecy placed him in a large community of Christian theologians from the first three centuries who were from diverse geographic and cultural backgrounds. Professor Bauer would have done well to reflect more on Tertullian and the noted fathers’ concern for the rule of faith (and orthodoxy). In fact, Henry Turner offered this same critique of Bauer in his 1954 work, *The Pattern of Christian Truth*.⁶⁹

Summary Impact

Though Bauer regarded Tertullian as too late and thus irrelevant for discussion, he nevertheless appealed to Tertullian when it was convenient. We have seen how Bauer perceived and appropriated Tertullian. However, in doing so, he has opened the door to fresh considerations for how Tertullian’s life, actions, and theology could actually pose a challenge to his overall thesis. Specifically:

1. Tertullian did not have imperial connections to back up his theologizing nor was he (or his theology) suppressed by disapproving Roman authorities.
2. Tertullian did not passively submit to the church at Rome; rather, he openly challenged the Roman church when modalism was held by its leadership.
3. Tertullian was more orthodox in his Montanism than Bauer recognized. Also, as more recent scholarship has maintained, his Montanist leanings probably did not lead him to break from the great church.
4. Tertullian’s concern for the rule of faith places him in the geographically and culturally diverse orthodox company of church fathers who lived from the first to fifth centuries.

⁶⁴ Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heretics* 13; see also *Veiling of Virgins* 1; *Against Praxeas* 2; cf. Bray, “Tertullian,” in Green, 75-76.

⁶⁵ See Behr’s general argument for the progression of orthodoxy in John Behr, *The Way to Nicaea: The Formation of Christian Theology, Vol. 1* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001). See also Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 561; Gerald L. Bray and Thomas C. Oden, eds., *We Believe in One God: Ancient Christian Doctrine Vol.1* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2009), xxxvi.

⁶⁶ Köstenberger and Kruger, 56-57.

⁶⁷ Hippolytus, *Against Noetus* 17-18; also Irenaeus, *Against All Heresies* 3.3.3; Litfin, “Learning from Patristic Uses of the Rule of Faith,” in Hartog, 88; Köstenberger and Kruger, 55.

⁶⁸ Litfin, “Learning from Patristic Uses of the Rule of Faith,” in Hartog, 80-94; Köstenberger and Kruger, 54.

⁶⁹ Henry Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth: A Study in the Relations between Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Early Church* (London: A.R. Mowbray, 1954), 28-31; also Köstenberger and Kruger, 34.

Tertullian's story within the landscape of North African Christianity seems to run counter to Bauer's thesis that heresy eventually developed or was forced into orthodoxy. However, what it does show is a church movement that was consciously clinging to the essentials of the apostolic teaching while exhibiting development and diversity within a "catholic" unity.

Diversity, Competition and Conflict within Christian North Africa

The same conscious affinity for right belief and practice visible in Tertullian highlights other broader implications of North African Christian development for Bauer's thesis. The follow discussion outlines several of these. Bauer's view of competing "Christianities" involving "orthodox" perspectives generally assumes an external force which subjects or supplants an "earlier" original regional Christianity. In North Africa, however, diverse (even competing) Christian groups emerged in the same locale early on within a consciously "orthodox" and "catholic" matrix. That is, the various flavors which Christianity took on there stimulated competition of sorts between Christians in that area. If anything, the significant embrace of the "New Prophecy" in North Africa represented by (not only) Tertullian, shows that relatively recent, distinctive, regional Christianity was capable of adopting an emphasis from the church beyond its borders on its doctrinal merits and in a way that reflected continuity with the open apostolic scriptures (e.g. predictions regarding the Paraclete) and the apostolic *regula fidei*.

The fact that Tertullian was later labeled as heretical or schismatic has often obscured a proper historical understanding of his position in and relative to the church at large and prevented appreciation of his representative character of broader North African Christianity – something of which Bauer was guilty, as was shown and corrected above. In drawing too polarized and uniform a line between "orthodoxy" and "heresy" might not similar confusion have been unintentionally promoted by Bauer and his followers in their assessment and interpretation of other "heretics" and conflicts? A suspect judgment based on suspect sources (e.g. here of Jerome's account) serves as a strong warning to too quick an appropriation of later material and labels to one's arguments about "earliest" Christianity. It also warns against truncated understanding of the orthodox spectrum of early Christian development.⁷⁰ Early evidence in North Africa does reveal considerable conflict within the church. We have already referenced criticism of local clergy by Perpetua and Tertullian. And while the view that Tertullian was excommunicated from or broke with the church at Carthage has now been rightly rejected,⁷¹ such a *possibility* still clearly indicates the level reached by voices of critical protest raised in Carthage.⁷² Yet the conflicts in North Africa occurred between constituents who considered themselves joined, not between groups which saw each other as *essentially* different – as incidences of schism and potential schism there confirm.

On a number of occasions schism did occur precisely because of the emphases which characterized Christianity in North Africa. Following the onset of the first truly empire-wide persecution under Decius many Christians lapsed under the pressure. This created a large scale problem out of what had been a long term but localized nagging issue for the church. Such *lapsi* were universally viewed as apostates who had put themselves at risk outside the communion of the church, but how were they to be reconciled, if at all?⁷³ The issue was difficult for Cyprian to handle because he went into hiding during the onset of the persecution so the church in Carthage would not be left headless during the crisis. Meanwhile some *confessors* – martyr-designates by merit of having resisted as far as they had been called upon and often assigned with a certain charismatic authority – began to restore the lapsed. Cyprian

⁷⁰ A spectrum which was "catholic" as defined by Litfin in this volume.

⁷¹ As noted above, Tertullian remained in the church as part of an internal holiness movement centered on the Spirit within the church at Carthage (see also Powell, "Tertullianists and Cataphrygians", 33-54). Moreover, he may well have retained his role on the council of lay-elders, or *seniores*, which played a significant role in the churches of North Africa (W. Tabbernee, "To Pardon or not to Pardon?: North-African Montanism and the Forgiveness of Sins" (*Studia Patristica* forthcoming), <http://ascc.artsci.wustl.edu/~chroma>, 1-3 and 11-17).

⁷² Though particularly true after he adopted the 'new Prophecy' of the Paraclete derived from Montanus, Maxilla & Priscilla in Phrygia, it was also true of Tertullian before he entered his "Montanist" phase.

⁷³ G. Bonner, "Scism and Church Unity," in I. Hazlett, *Early Christianity*, 222-223.

regarded this as the bishop's business and ordered that the lapsed should wait for peace and then let the episcopate collectively address the issue. The ensuing controversy was sharp, but eventual compromise was reached wherein the gravity of the lapse would determine the severity of the penance, following which the bishop would accept the lapsed back into communion. Some thought this too strict, some not strict enough, and both in Rome and in North Africa schisms resulted.⁷⁴

Several points deserve note here. The first is that the dialog in controversy implies the perception of and desire for overall unity; the parties tried to correct each other for the sake of (their view of) the whole. The second is the obvious spectrum of belief and practice within the entire church in Carthage (and based on Cyprian's appeal to conciliar approach we may say North Africa). Occasions of division reinforce the existence of prior diversity within an overarching unity. Many lapsed, good numbers were martyred and "confessed" Christ, committed Christians such as Cyprian went into hiding as no doubt did many of varying levels of commitment. So the fractures in the North African church revealed by general persecution testify to a breadth of diversity still held within unified confines in the mid-third century that are consistent with what has already been demonstrated about earliest known North African Christianity (c. 180-215). Thirdly, Cyprian's writings reflect the assumed authority of apostolic connection and accepted Scriptures (*passim*, e.g. *On Unity* 4-5; 14-17). Cyprian was quite able to describe a schismatic as violating the Scriptures, but he never argued as if his opponents have rejected his Scriptures, nor that they held to other Scriptures. He assumed a broadly and deeply ordered and integrated community.⁷⁵ All sides in this controversy appear to share common pictures of commitment to orthodoxy and unity as well as a claim to represent aspects of African traditional emphasis.⁷⁶ Finally, it is significant that Cyprian sought for an ordered response to the issue through conciliar methods based on the plurality of churches in the North African province.⁷⁷ Appeal to the broader church in an area characterized by strong opinions and diversity reflects a confidence in and commitment to authority beyond one's control.

The potential for internal division as Christianity developed in North Africa is clear. What is significant for Bauer is that divisions were emergent, not original; they are factious and sometimes even schismatic, but not reflective of competing "orthodoxies." Whether considering Tertullian and local and broader church leadership, Perpetua and local clergy,⁷⁸ Cyprian and the confessors of the Decian persecution, or indeed in view of the split between Donatists and Catholics; African regional Christianity shows that competitors emerge from shared origins and represent various strands along the same essential trajectory, not initially different species. The arguments in North Africa were most often over who was being true or more true to an agreed authentic Christian authority.⁷⁹ We do not see a willingness to explore new Christian variations that are outside the frame of these "authentic" connections.⁸⁰ In fact new movements in the church, such as asceticism and monasticism, were often slow to reach and take off in North Africa.⁸¹ The view of "Montanism" as the Paraclete restoring, not as an innovation bears repeating. It was a movement that was driven by engagement with the apostolic writings and the expectations of the apostolic generation of followers of Christ and expected to be consistent with the *regula fidei*. Doctrinal similarities almost always outweigh doctrinal differences in North African conflicts.

⁷⁴ The backdrop of separate laxist and rigorist congregations at Carthage helps frame Cyprian's most famous work, *On the Unity*.

⁷⁵ See e.g. J.P. Burns (2002), *Cyprian the Bishop*, 13.

⁷⁶ Tertullian's views are particularly reflected in the rigorous response and he viewed flight from persecution as a form of apostasy. However, his respect for the work of the Spirit (whether in Cyprian's claimed dream vision or through the martyr/confessors) also finds a place in both Cyprian and certain 'laxist' positions.

⁷⁷ Something anticipated by Tertullian's ecclesiology, see n. 44 above.

⁷⁸ C. Moreschini and E. Norelli observe that "opposition between martyrs and the ecclesiastical hierarchy" was common in Tertullian's time due to the tension between the spiritual authority to grant reconciliation of the lapsed that was seen to reside both with the martyrs and with the bishop. *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature: A Literary History* (English ed. 2005), 358.

⁷⁹ Also significant relative to Bauer is that such authority is not geographically dependant but is tied to the Rule of Faith, the Apostles, the Scriptures, and the Holy Spirit.

⁸⁰ "Authentic" here applies to the perception of these connections by the figures at the time, not as it relates to some objective or modern perspective. Tertullian's ability to embrace Montanism within the framework of the rule of faith and "orthodox" Scriptures is a prime example.

⁸¹ Cf. D.C. Alexander, *Augustine's Early Ecclesiology* (2008), 227ff.

“Lost Christianities,” the Retention of the Ideas, and the Influence of Dissenters

Our early North African case study shows that when certain Christian aspects or groups were “lost” in an area their evidence is not necessarily eliminated nor their influence discarded. Was Tertullian “lost” even though his name (and maybe group of like minded prophetic believers) went ‘missing’ from North African Christianity? In fact the church retained the bulk of his *corpus* of work. Indeed, the reconciliation of a small *Tertullianistae* sect in into the broader church in the 5th century shows precisely this.⁸² Though he may have been posthumously *persona non grata* in name for some official North African church circles, Tertullian was still clearly influential for Cyprian. The bishop never referred to the great theologian by name, but had read him thoroughly and likely considered to him as his doctrinal “master.”⁸³ The broader church also retained Tertullian’s apologetic arguments, theological formulations and terminology, and the North African church continued to be characterized by his earnestness and rigor. That is, both locally and universally, even when Tertullian came to be labeled with the brush of “schism” or “heresy” (his “name” was “lost”), the majority of his Christianity was retained by the church and nearly all of the distinctives.

Similarly, was the charismatic emphasis of Perpetua “lost” when Catholic editors dropped the original, arguably “Montanist,” introduction in later editions of her *Passio*? The almost canonical legacy of her account still in Augustine’s day as well as the original manuscript tradition attest otherwise,⁸⁴ as does the Spirit focus of Cyprian’s *corpus* and correspondence. Were Cyprian or Donatism “lost” even though Augustine and the eventually triumphant “Catholic” church rejected their ideas of rebaptism or sacramental holiness?⁸⁵ Though each of these was in some way repudiated (even as extensions of Augustine’s thought were tempered at the Synod of Orange), it must be recognized that the flavor they represent was preserved and assimilated into the DNA of this regional Christianity in an identifiable and enduring way that remained orthodox.⁸⁶ Their legacy certainly does not correspond to silence. More importantly, in their own times, all of these considered themselves and were treated as “orthodox” in the important sense of apostolic connection, catholic desire for unity, and reliance on catholic Scriptures. Competition of various sorts, not untainted by politics, did result in “losers” that in some cases were subject to repression or negative labeling (e.g. Donatism’s official pronouncement as a “heresy” in 405). But the retention of essentially orthodox doctrine and Scriptures by figures such as Tertullian, Cyprian, and the Donatists cannot be ignored. North Africa shows that the inevitable grey area between what is concluded to be inconsistent and to be reconcilable with authentic parameters must be recognized and appreciated.

Rome and the Church in North Africa

We close returning to the key tenet of the Bauer thesis that “orthodoxy” was a later superimposition on originally pluriform regional churches by particular powerful churches and especially Rome. The very absence of a tradition about the gospel’s arrival in North Africa is significant here. Neither source nor indigenous character are forwarded by North African Christian’s in their competition internally or with external figures and churches. The lack of concern here would seem to result from their general assumption that they were effectively tied to the Christianity of the Christ, Paraclete, and apostles through connections independent of geography or lineage and (demonstrated by) their participation in the Church of the martyrs. As discussed for Tertullian, the lens of our North African case study displays clear cases of North African influence upon the Roman church (e.g. in terms of Latin, theological vocabulary, and

⁸² G. Bonner, “Schism and Church Unity,” in I. Hazlett, *Early Christianity*, 221. Cf. Augustine, *On Heresies* 86. Even when certain followers of Tertullian did break with the broader church, their existence some 300 years later and appearance in the context of being welcomed back into the broader church at a council in Carthage shows that they had not been “lost.”

⁸³ Decret, 70-71.

⁸⁴ Cf. C. Moreschini and E. Norelli, *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature: A Literary History* (English ed. 2005), 358.

⁸⁵ Cf. “Cyprian’s African Heritage” 166-177 J.P. Burns (2002), *Cyprian the Bishop* on the broad legacy of Cyprianic theology.

⁸⁶ Indeed, one could do an entire paper profitably considering Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine as transmitters of ‘authentic’ North African Christianity.

ideas – both doctrinal and administrative).⁸⁷ Evidence to 215 did not show influence from Rome on North Africa, rather, early Christianity in the province showed a willingness to criticize Rome on explicit theological lines. That is, in this case, we observe influence *from* North Africa *upon* another Christian area; influence flowed not from Rome, but from this regional Christianity back towards Rome. One would not expect to see this inversion phenomena based on Bauer’s view of standard practice in emerging Christianity.⁸⁸

In addition to this inversion of influence, the resilience of this regional church to attempts by external forces to exercise their influence in North Africa is remarkable. North African Christianity’s independent self-sufficiency, even when embracing external influences by making them their own, is clear in Tertullian’s time and Cyprian’s as one sees ‘younger’ local area fending off such claims for control from, for example, Rome. Perhaps nothing epitomizes this more than the conflict (c. 255-257) between Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, and Stephen, bishop of Rome. In the context of dealing with the lapsed following widespread persecution, questions arose regarding the administration of baptism outside the Catholic Church. Namely, if one received baptism in schism and then came to the Catholic Church, did the received baptism count or was (re)baptism necessary? In the North African tradition, not surprisingly, such baptism was not viewed as valid and its recipients needed to be baptized “*de nova*.” Stephen took a different line stating that the traditional practice at Rome of laying on of hands in a rite of reconciliation was sufficient to validate previous non-Catholic baptism and condemned the North African practice of (re)baptism. Cyprian was not impressed by Roman tradition *per se* and such a directive flew in the face of Cyprian’s ideal of the equality of all bishops and the unity of the church resting on the unity of its episcopate. The two went head to head over this issue. It was in this conflict that Stephen made the first use of the Matt. 16.18f. passage “you are Peter, and on this *Petrus*, I will build my church...” to claim specific authority for the Roman see over all other bishops. Even so, Cyprian would not agree or back down, acknowledging only that the apostolic authority was given to Peter first as a symbol of unity of that which was given to all the apostles and thus to all the bishops of the church.⁸⁹ Things reached a fever pitch and Stephen excommunicated Cyprian, who, unfazed, returned the favor. It is significant that Cyprian received support and agreement against Stephen from Antioch and other primates.⁹⁰ Moreover, Cyprian’s conciliar initiatives and his theory of the *collegium* of bishops were affirmed by several correspondents in the East. The rift with Rome was not fought out to a bitter end since Cyprian was martyred in 258 and Stephen died soon after that (not as a martyr). The whole episode clearly shows that the resilience of this distinctive North African Christianity to external pressure, even conflict with the Bishop of Rome, is much greater than Bauer assumed for earlier contexts. North Africans were quite ready to argue true beliefs against Rome or elsewhere and the primate of Carthage was quite comfortable taking on the bishop of Rome directly. None of these phenomena would be expected by Bauer’s thesis, but more importantly, on Bauer’s view they should be less likely by the time of our test case.

Conclusions

It is clear that early North African Christianity is of value for examining Bauer’s thesis and its implications. Some of the developmental evidence from the province, if selectively evidenced 50 to 75 years earlier, might be pointed to by proponents of the Bauer thesis as evidence of another distinctive regional Christianity later subjugated to external “orthodoxy.” Yet, solid contextual information shows that on issues of authority and where it lies,⁹¹ on issues of canon, and in general doctrine, earliest North African Christianity does not line up with Bauer. The presence of early strong distinctives do not suggest

⁸⁷ Cf. also receipt of Cyprian’s *On the Lapsed* by followers of the Novatianist schism at Rome.

⁸⁸ Regarding creativity and theological exposition, Moffatt’s comment, “The real thinking upon vital Christianity for centuries was done outside the Roman Church,” (R.A. Kraft, ed., *Orthodoxy and Heresy* (1971), 292) in his review of Bauer remains generally valid and specifically so for Latin Christianity.

⁸⁹ I.e. it indicated priority, not primacy. cf. *Ep.* 68

⁹⁰ Cf. *Ep.* 75, e.g. from Firmilian.

⁹¹ In contrast to separate authority or Scriptures.

unknown or counter-orthodox Christian antecedents. Conflict in the region did not require or evidence external meddling – rather local distinctives themselves may be taken to different conclusions and provide all the fodder needed for conflict and even competition. Opponents in situations such as North Africa may well derive from the same origins but in any case their origins manifest diversity within initial unity along with antecedents sharing catholic and orthodox claims to apostolic teaching and Scriptures. North African Christianity supports the view of emergent/evolving local competition against the assumption of competing origins and superimposition of external “orthodoxy.” The enduring character of early Christianity in regions such as North Africa is quite dramatic, even when certain persons or groups “typical” of the region are condemned or marginalized. Moreover, this nature was quite resilient to external pressures. As it pertains to Rome in particular, our case study shows that it was not necessarily capable of enforcing its “orthodoxy” on other areas in the periods prior to Constantine. More than a century later than the supposed Roman oppression of Christianity in Egypt (based on Mark’s gospel),⁹² Rome proved quite incapable of bringing the upstart Carthaginian church into line.

In terms of theological doctrine, early Christianity in North Africa constitutes one of the clearest examples that the understanding of the core Christian message (Christ as risen Savior and Lord) continued to develop in the light of reflections on generally accepted Christian Scriptures and the essential elements of Christian belief, as illustrated in the *regula fidei*. Issues of practice were still acknowledged as fluid, yet with certain established parameters.⁹³ From North African, Tertullian’s contributions to Trinitarian thought and vocabulary is the most dramatic example, but Cyprian’s sacramental and ecclesiastical practical theology could also be cited. That no neatly encapsulated (i.e. formulated or completely canonized) Christianity or systematic theology came from first generations Christians does not appear to undermine the “orthodoxy” of the church in this late second or early third century church.⁹⁴ Rather, the development and diversity within an understanding of parameters for unity we see suggests a pattern that had long since been the case.

As part of an evangelical enterprise, it is hoped that this North African case would stimulate further exploration of the Incarnational concepts of the church, represented broadly in the New Testament documents, within early Christianity since these concepts inherently imply that Christianity ought to embrace diversity while retaining and pursuing unity as the great church grows. North African Christianity, for all its significant feuds within the family, some of which resulted in separation, embodied many such instructive and distinctive reflections of a unified body of Christ and unified reliance on the Spirit in the face of persecution. As occurred in the other regions where Christianity emerged, this established a legacy of “early orthodoxy” that was of benefit to the larger church of its time and to the broader church down through the centuries. In North Africa, a uniform gospel message and set of core beliefs appears in the midst of a diverse, expanding and evolving context of structure, doctrinal understanding, practice, liturgy, mission, *et cetera*. It is this evolutionary development in light of core teachings that are believed to be essential for experiencing the work of Christ (salvation) that is apparent in North Africa’s “orthodoxy.” This may well, despite Bauer’s arguments, frame a new and more balanced appreciation of “orthodoxy” in earliest Christianity.

⁹² Bauer, 116f.

⁹³ One could cite as evidence the grudging and suspect view Tertullian takes of infant baptism or the arguments in light of a younger African “tradition” of (re)baptism of heretics/schismatics against the older Roman tradition (see above).

⁹⁴ In the sense of developing apostolic parameters for “true” doctrine.