

TERTULLIAN: RHETORICAL FOUNDATION, REVELATORY INSPIRATION

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“*Credo quia absurdum*” along with “Play it again Sam” and “Beam me up Scotty” belongs to the realm of famous quotes never said. Many have used the phrase to cast Tertullian as an advocate of irrationality who set religion as a realm defined exclusively through subjectivity and inspiration. In his work *Tertullian*, Timothy Barnes wonders, “If that was his true attitude, why did he ever descend to apparently rational argument?”¹ In response John Helgeland quips, “If, as Tertullian said, Athens and Jerusalem had nothing to do with each other, Rome and Jerusalem certainly did, for Tertullian was an educated Roman.”² Instead of a clash of cultures, Robert Sider describes Tertullian’s true goal as a conjunction of rhetoric and theology “as though he would forge a new and enriched culture out of the two separate traditions.”³ Tertullian’s amalgamation of rhetorical foundations and Divine revelation expresses itself in his extant works. Through an examination of *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* and *Ad Uxorem* it becomes possible to illuminate the rhetorical superstructure employed by Tertullian in composing his works and exploring the various methodological tools stored in his armory.

Born in the middle of the second-century and raised in the Roman West, Tertullian undoubtedly received a formal education in philosophy, rhetoric, and literature. Taken together these skills could hone one into a master orator. Barnes describes the common devices of the orator as “sophistical argument (in the bad sense), irony and invective, the use of maxims, anecdotes and historical examples, a large range of stylistic tricks to impart vigour and variety.”⁴ The rhetor’s skills prepared the individual for a career in law and politics. Tertullian’s legal acumen will be illustrated below in analyzing his treatise *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*. In his work *The Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire*, T. R. Glover described Tertullian as “the first man of genius of the Latin race to follow Jesus Christ, and to re-set his ideas in the language native to that race.”⁵ While it is impossible to prove

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1. Timothy David Barnes, *Tertullian A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 223.
 2. John Helgeland, review of *Ancient Rhetoric and the Art of Tertullian*, by Robert Dick Sider. *Newsletter: Rhetoric Society of America* 4, no. 4 (October 1974), 5.
 3. Robert Dick Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric and the Art of Tertullian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 129.
 4. Barnes, 212.
 5. T.R. Glover, *The Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire* (London, 1909), 307, quoted in Bruce M.

whether Tertullian originally coined many of the concepts he used, he is the earliest extant writer to divide scripture into old and new testaments and he is also the first to use the terms *trinitas*, *persona*, and *substantia*. While he often composed invectives against philosophers and reason, an examination of Tertullian's writings leads one to ponder if the lad doth protest too much, methinks.

To properly understand the techniques underpinning Tertullian's works it is necessary to formulate a basic framework of the rhetorical method. Robert Sider defines six major characteristics common to all rhetorical speeches. The first aspect of the rhetorical model is that all speeches fall into one of three genres; following Quintilian, Barnes defines them as epideictic (show pieces), deliberative (persuade a course of action), and forensic (civil or criminal cases).⁶ The second aspect of rhetoric is that speeches are divisible into three primary parts each composed of predictable subcategories. The introduction generally contains: an *exordium* – an immediate attempt to appeal to the audience through an emotional or ethical approach; a *narratio* – a simple narration of events; a *propositio* – sets out the main point of dispute; and a *partitio* – the speaker indicated how far he agrees with the opponent, what remains in dispute, and lists essential points speech will make. The body generally encompasses: a *praemunitio* – clears away major obstacles over which no argument could proceed and builds fundamental presuppositions into its base; a *confirmatio* – confirmation of one's case; and a *reprehensio* – refutation of the opponent's argument. Finally, the Conclusion usually offers an emotional appeal to the audience. The third aspect of rhetoric defines the three forms of persuasion available to the orator as *ethos* – appeal to character, *pathos* – appeal to emotions, and *logos* – appeal to reason. For the fourth aspect, Sider claims all proofs contain evidence which is either categorized as irrefutable or probable. The fifth aspect shared by rhetorical speeches is the Topical nature of debates. The focus of a speech will either be memorized maxims; persons – centered on the individuals name, fortune, and character; actions – where the time, place, and occasion of the action are explored; and formal topics – which involves arguments from similarity or contraries. The sixth aspect common to all rhetorical method involves the issues on which argument can be based. Sider provides four possible issues: conjectural, definitional, qualitative, and competence. Each of the above aspects of the rhetorical technique are easily illustrated in Tertullian's works, proving that far from irrationality, Tertullian approached his treatises with a keen and reasoning mind.⁷

Along with mastering the rhetorical method, students were exposed to *exempla*, which were lists of examples, particularly historical examples; one could use the *exempla* to illustrate a point without the effort and tedium of actually reading the specific history, poem, or literature and running the risk of actually learning something (similar to a modern book of factoids or Cliff's notes). Barnes argues the case that much of Tertullian's erudition was borrowed by utilizing *exempla* and *compendia*.⁸ Although

Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 157.

6. Barnes, 224.

7. Rhetorical background drawn extensively from Sider, 11-20.

8. Barnes, 196.

some of his references clearly come from secondary sources, it is undeniable that Tertullian possessed a vast vocabulary and breadth of knowledge, the least of which included his expertise with scripture.

Coupled with the rhetorical style, Tertullian possessed a unique exegetical methodology. Sider argues that Tertullian's exegetical principles are not founded in theology; instead, "classical rhetoric provided him with exegetical principles, such as the rule of context, which corresponded with those available from his Christian heritage."⁹ As noted below in the analysis of both *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* and *Ad Uxorem*, Tertullian emphasized the necessity of understanding context in dealing with scriptural texts. An interest in context more closely relates to the rhetoric style than theological thought; that it finds expression in the works of Cicero is further evidence that Tertullian approached scripture with an eye toward reason.

Tertullian approached the world through the eyes of dualism. Visible throughout his discourses is the conception of a universe divided between light and dark, God and Satan, spirituality and materialism. This served not only a theological purpose but also rhetorical. By approaching topics through a dualistic framework, Tertullian could employ the comparative style, which is one of the previously mentioned formal rhetorical styles. This creates a strict either/or dichotomy in his arguments. In *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* the divide is between good Christians and heretical philosophers while in *Ad Uxorem* one belongs either to God or Satan. There is no middle ground, allowing Tertullian to more easily compare the opposing factions and readily condemn the one which wavers from his truth.

Tied to his notion of duality, Tertullian's methodology involved an unwavering quest for the Truth. In a black and white world, there must be complete truth and total falsehood. For Tertullian, the core nature of truth was simplicity. There was no need for allegory or philosophy, God placed everything one needs to know clearly within scripture. E. Glenn Hinson explains, "The western fathers used allegory cautiously . . . Tertullian preferred the literal sense of Jesus' words and did not allegorize even Old Testament dietary laws. He formulated the rule that it is better to find less meaning than more meaning in the text."¹⁰ W. H. C. Frend describes Tertullian as "a Christian sophist (*ecclesiarum sophista*) who by uniting the arts of philosophy and rhetoric solved the antitheses between Athens and Jerusalem, the Academy and the church."¹¹ But, Arnaldo Momigliano rejects the characterization of Tertullian as Sophist promoted by Barnes and Frend. Momigliano asks, "Did any Sophist ever worry about *simplicitas veritatis* . . . as much as Tertullian?"¹² He also notes, "The effort to understand exactly the message of the sacred texts is another of those primary criteria of differentiation between Pagan Sophist and Christian

9. Sider, 9.

10. E. Glenn Hinson, *The Early Church, Origins to the Dawn of the Middle Ages* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 186.

11. W. H. C. Frend, Review of *Tertullian, a Historical and Literary Study*, by T. D. Barnes. *The Classical Review*, New Series 24, no. 1 (March 1974), 72.

12. Arnaldo Momigliano, review of *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study*, by T. D. Barnes. *The Journal of Roman Studies* 66 (1976), 274.

theologians which must not be forgotten simply because they are too obvious.”¹³ Tertullian’s insistence on one simple truth and the constant search for that ideal separates him from the Sophists.

The final two aspects of Tertullian’s general methodological approach of note are his insistence on scriptural infallibility and adherence to *regula fidei* (Rule of Faith). Belief in scriptural infallibility follows logically from his dualistic approach to the universe. God is perfection and truth, God inspired scripture, therefore scripture must be perfect. The *regula fidei* exists in synch with scripture and serves to corroborate Biblical integrity. An early form of creedal expression, for Tertullian it served as the yardstick of scriptural truth and “the immemorial belief of Christians, derived from the Scriptures, and most succinctly set forth in the baptismal creed.”¹⁴ God gave his message to Jesus, Jesus transmitted it to the Apostles and the Apostles disseminated it amongst the Churches. In Tertullian’s estimation, any exhortation or writing in conflict with the *regula fidei* was de facto false. As shown below, it is the greatest charge he levels against the heretics as proof of their false teachings. Rhetorical structure, reason, legal acumen, a focus on context, dualism, truth, scriptural infallibility, and the *regula fidei* form the core of Tertullian’s methodology exemplified by the following documents.

In *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* (*Prescription of the Heretics*), Tertullian illustrates not only his adept skill as a rhetor but also his grasp of Roman legal proceedings by styling his argument against heretics as a formal objection. He attempts to terminate the debate based on what modern attorneys would call, “a technicality.” In Roman law, a prescription entailed the cutting short of a question by the refusal to hear the adversary’s arguments based on an anterior point which pulls the rug out from under his feet. Tertullian’s argument is based on Paul’s insistence that, “a man who is a heretic must be rejected after the first admonishment.”¹⁵ Paul does not suggest heretics receive even a single hearing; they are to be admonished then ignored. Further, by acting against the *regula fidei* and scripture, heretics forfeit their right to scripture. Barnes describes Tertullian’s approach, “he applies for an injunction to restrain any heretic from trespassing upon holy scripture, which is the sole property of Christians.”¹⁶ The question then becomes, “Who is a Christian?”

Tertullian begins by suggesting that heresies must exist since scripture, an infallible source, predicted their appearance. Further, they serve a positive rôle by challenging the faithful and rooting out the unfaithful. Tertullian next describes man’s inherently weak nature by offering the Biblical examples of Saul, David, and Solomon.¹⁷ The heretic’s weak will allows him to fall prey to philosophical musings. Peter Kaufman calls Tertullian’s argument a version of “enough rope.”¹⁸ You can easily divide the flock

13. Momigliano, 274.

14. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 158.

15. Tertullian. “The Prescription Against Heretics,” in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 3, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Massachusetts: Henrickson Publishers, Inc., 1995), 245.

16. Barnes, 64.

17. Tertullian, *Prescription*, 244.

18. Peter Iver Kaufman, “Tertullian on Heresy, History, and the Reappropriation of Revelation.” *Church History* 60, no. 2 (June 1991), 167.

of faithful believers from the “ravening wolves in sheep’s clothing” who constantly doubt and question. Turning to epistemology, Tertullian argues that the heretic is self-condemned, because the word heretic derives from a Greek word implying choice. Therefore, the heretic deserves no sympathy since he has succumbed to his own weakness and willfully chosen to question God.

Tertullian declares his *propositio* clearly in chapter fifteen, “In the encounter itself, however, they weary the strong, they catch the weak, and dismiss waverers with a doubt. Accordingly, we oppose to them this step above all others, of not admitting them to any discussion of the Scriptures.”¹⁹ He follows in chapter nineteen with his *partitio*, “With whom lies that very faith to which the Scriptures belong. From what and through whom, and when, and to whom, has been handed down that rule [*regula fidei*].”²⁰ The question remains, “Who is a Christian?”

To answer the question at the core of his argument, Tertullian turns to two gospel passages and a definition. The first: “Seek and ye shall find.”²¹ The second: “Your faith has saved you.”²² The definition: faith equals adherence to a creed. Tertullian first explicates Matthew’s passage insisting the reader delve into the context of the saying. Reading the entire passage, Tertullian argues, it becomes apparent that Jesus was speaking directly to the Jews, telling them to look further into scripture until they discover the truth of the Christ event. But Christians should not look, since they have already found truth. In a similar fashion we always find what we seek in the last place we look as it would be folly to continue seeking once the object of our desire is found. If the Christian keeps looking then he must not have faith in the truth he found. Together these passages form a logical syllogism for Tertullian. ‘Faith’ by definition means ‘faith in something’ which involves assent to a credal formula. Since the heretic still seeks, he cannot have found. Since he has not found, he cannot believe. If he does not believe, he is no Christian. Conversely, those who adhere to the *regula fidei* and have faith in the Apostolic Church are true Christians.²³

For Tertullian the crux of the matter rests in faith, adherence to *regula fidei*, and obedience to scripture. Trouble only arises when those of weak faith question the *regula fidei* and scripture. Peter Kaufman describes the situation as “Philosophers dragged troubling passages from their contexts. They hauled hostage sentences along a backstairs route, through the schools or systems of pagan philosophy, until they imagined they found the truth that the puzzling passages figuratively expressed.”²⁴ As shown above, Tertullian did not accept the notion of backstairs routes, God laid everything out clearly in scripture, conflicts came from a lack of context or a willful attempt to obscure what was inherently simple. *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* offers an early definition of Apostolic Succession and

19. Tertullian, *Prescription*, 250.

20. Tertullian, *Prescription*, 251.

21. Matt. 7:7

22. Lk. 18:42

23. Barnes, 65.

24. Kaufman, 171.

demonstrates a nascent conception of orthodoxy.

Tertullian did not limit himself to legalistic proceedings. Another method he employed to great effect involved amassing multiple arguments against his adversary, whether individuals, heretics, or concepts. If one argument is convincing, than an inundation of proof is far superior. By offering a multitude of responses for each situation Tertullian provides his reader with a rich arsenal against their foes. Readers could then select the most compelling or easiest to remember argument and wield it against their foe in future debates. Like a hydra, if your opponent somehow undermined one argument you could strike back with another and another, until they eventually capitulated under your withering hail of fire.

Ad Uxorem (To His Wife) provides an excellent example of Tertullian's varied methodologies marshaled against a single concept. The document is cast as an open letter to his wife in which he advises her against remarrying should he die before her. His concern in writing the work is proper Christian behavior, specifically regarding marriage and chastity. Timothy Barnes describes the work as "an appreciation of Christian marriage unequalled in patristic literature, but is deficient in casuistry."²⁵ This assessment should come as no surprise when regarding a text by Tertullian whose dualistically composed universe could not fathom the grey areas of the casuist. Although most likely written before his involvement with Montanism, the letter still offers a rigid view of human weakness and the corrupting effects of the material world. Sider describes the treatise "Tertullian works out the deliberative themes of advantage, honour, and necessity, quite specifically in relation to the idea of motivation or cause."²⁶ Tertullian organizes his attack over eight chapters; in each he presents a different argument against the problem at hand. In common with his other treatise, the primary skeleton of *Ad Uxorem* closely follows the rhetorical style.

The *exordium* sets out to illuminate the virtue of remaining unwed and disavows any personal motives for the letter. Referring to Matthew 22:23-30, Tertullian explains that "when the future time arrives, we shall not resume the gratification of unseemly passion" and further "[the dead] will, it is clear, be changed to the state of holy angels."²⁷ His not so subtle implication is that since he can gain nothing by this letter it should be received without suspicions. With the *exordium* complete, he quickly arrives in chapter one at his *propositio*, "This charge, then, I lay on you – that, exercising all the self-control of which you are capable, you renounce marriage after I have passed away."²⁸ He finishes chapter one by expanding the letter to encompass not only the concerns his wife but to all Christian women.

Chapters two and three involve the *partitio* in which Tertullian acknowledges the legitimacy of marriage and insists that he is not attempting to undermine, only limit, an institution set down by God. Since the cornerstone of Tertullian's arguments involves Biblical precedence, and the Bible contains

25. Barnes, 137.

26. Sider, 118.

27. Tertullian. "To His Wife," in *After the New Testament, A Reader in Early Christianity*, Bart D. Ehrman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 400.

28. Tertullian, *To His Wife*, 400.

many undeniable examples of marriage in, he cannot ban it outright. Further, he sides against those who forcefully demand that married Christians should divorce one another. Tertullian seems confident in narrowing marriage to an institution that Christians could only enter into once. Looking to Genesis for his support, he wittily comments, “Adam was the only husband that Eve had and Eve was his only wife; one rib, one woman.”²⁹ While he acknowledges that the patriarchs were allowed multiple wives and concubines, Tertullian insists that Jesus, the Word, replaced the Law and introduced a new spiritual circumcision, a new dispensation. What was good for the goose is not necessarily good for the gander in Tertullian’s estimation.

In chapter three, Tertullian begins his first philosophic proof against marriage. While he acknowledges marriage as a good, he turns to scripture where Paul is shown permitting marriage but “preferring” celibacy.³⁰ Human flesh is inherently weak and filled with lustful desires; out of love, God granted humanity the institution of marriage so they possess an appropriate venue for partaking in their lusts. Tertullian describes the situation as “the principle that marry we may because marry we must. But what necessity proffers necessity cheapens.”³¹ He further illustrates that Paul viewed marriage as an alternative to burning in Hell for one’s lustful acts. Utilizing a form of the “two wrongs do not make a right” argument, Tertullian opines that something can not be truly good solely because there is something worse; in fact, “How much better it is to neither marry nor burn!”³² Since marriage is offered out of necessity and is not a good in itself, Christians should choose to pursue what is inherently good: celibacy, according to Paul. After arguing against marriage, Tertullian adds further scriptural references from Philippians and I Corinthians where Paul illustrating the deficiency of the married state. While married, a wife’s attention focuses on her husband instead of God where it rightly belongs. Once widowed, a good Christian is able to return her attention and zeal solely to God.

In accord with the rhetorical style, Tertullian next provides a *reprehensio* containing three arguments against his case, and then dispatches them in chapters four and five. He acknowledges that some wish to marry due to concupiscence of the flesh, others from concupiscence of the world, and yet others desire children. The first two he describes as the weaknesses of lust and ambition respectively, which “We servants of God ought to scorn both weaknesses.”³³ While realized some would point to the passage in Matthew 26:41 proclaiming “the flesh is weak” as an excuse for their behavior, Tertullian demands a closer examination of the Biblical source. Insisting that context is key, he illuminates the complete passage including the claim “the spirit is strong.” One cannot focus on only half of the passage at the expense of the rest; to do so alters the meaning. While human weakness is acknowledge, the real meaning is that the spirit should take control of the body. When the spirit rules the body, argues

29. Tertullian, *To His Wife*, 400.

30. I Cor. 7:1-2.

31. Tertullian, *To His Wife*, 401..

32. Tertullian, *To His Wife*, 401..

33. Tertullian, *To His Wife*, 401.

Tertullian, God will replace the transient, fleshy rewards of beauty and lust with eternal rewards. Logic dictates one should forgo the fleeting for the eternal.

Moving from fleshy desires to worldly ones, Tertullian returns to Biblical citations to dissuade the widow from weakness. Like Matthew's lilies of the field and birds of the sky, the Christian widow must trust in divine providence for her needs. As God clothes the lilies and feeds the birds, so too will He provide for the widow. True Christians place their faith in God and accept the fate handed them by divine providence. A widow concerned with worldly needs exhibits a lack of faith in God and is therefore no true Christian.

The final argument for marriage, the desire for children, Tertullian emphatically describes as "sheer nonsense."³⁴ As a believer in the imminent eschaton, Tertullian could not fathom why one would chain themselves to this dying world. Once again turning to scripture for his proof, Tertullian cites Matthew 24:19 where Jesus proclaimed, "Woe to them that are with children and that give suck." Viewed at face value, his preferred method for approaching scripture, Tertullian claims it is clear Jesus viewed children as a burden and a handicap to those who bear them when the Day of Judgment arrived. Further, how embarrassing for the bride and groom if the trumpets sounded during their marriage ceremony! Tertullian then likens Christians who continue to wed with the sinners in Sodom and Gomorrah who went about their lives unaware of the doom hovering over them.

After refuting three possible objections to remaining a widow, Tertullian turns to a more *ad hominem* style to win his argument. If reason alone is insufficient in producing proper behavior perhaps shame will. The reader is reminded that many Christians have opted to swear virginity from the moment of baptism and that there are also those who, although married, mutually vow celibacy; in accordance with Matthew 19:12 they "made themselves eunuchs because of their desire for the kingdom of Heaven." In light of these rigorous individuals, Tertullian argues, "If they are able to practice continence while remaining married, how much easier is it to do so when marriage has been dissolved!"³⁵ The reader is shamed into proper behavior. If married people can willingly remain celibate, how pathetically weak must a widow be who cannot match their determination? The widow should aspire to match these Christian paragons of virtue or live in shame.

Tertullian does not stop with Christian exemplars of virtue; chapter six also highlights the actions of celibate pagans. The Vestal Virgins, the Pythia at Delphi, and the widows who minister to the African Ceres are all highlighted as instances of pagan virtuosity. In accord with Tertullian's perception of a dualistic world, the reader is reminded that unlike virtuous Christians these pagans are all in league with Satan. In structuring this invective, Tertullian utilizes a rhetorical technique common in his writings at this point: the argument from comparison. Sider reminds the reader, "A dominating idea here is the contrast between the world and the Church, the heathen and the Christians, which has the

34. Tertullian, *To His Wife*, 402.

35. Tertullian, *To His Wife*, 403.

effect of pointing sharply to the necessary course of action for the Christian.”³⁶ One can feel the wagging finger of shame. Tertullian laments, “This is what the devil teaches his disciples. And they obey! As though on equal terms, the chastity of his followers challenges that of the servants of God.”³⁷ While failing to emulate the piety of her fellow Christians would bring shame upon the widow, to be outdone by Satan worshippers is utterly inexcusable.

In case his attempts at shaming the reader into right action fails, Tertullian’s approach, in chapter seven, transitions to a logical argument concerning the human response to God’s Will. Tertullian begins the syllogism by setting the claim that no leaf falls to the ground unless God wills it. It then follows that no human dies without God willing it since we are higher up the chain. Therefore, if God wills a woman to lose her husband by his death, then God must also necessarily will that she no longer be married. In a reversal of the traditional marriage vows, Tertullian asks, “Why attempt to restore what God has put asunder?”³⁸ Therefore, a widow who remarries is acting directly against the will of God. Since good Christians desire to live in harmony with the will of God, they will not remarry. Tertullian also echoes back to his earlier arguments of continence by suggesting that the death of one’s husband is God’s way of restoring the widow to celibacy. As argued previously, marriage is a necessary evil due to bodily desires but by removing the husband, God gives the widow a second chance at purity.

Finally, chapter eight provides the conclusion for *Ad Uxorem*. In common with the rhetorical style, Tertullian closes with a *pro hominem* appeal to the widow. He admits that it is an inescapable truth that virgins will look upon the face of God most closely, but the widow can also attain a deeply personal relationship with God since He serves as their benefactor and advocate. Tertullian implies the widow can attain a relationship with God even closer than that of the virgin. The widow should feel greater pride, an odd reward for a Christian, since her sacrifice is superior to the virgin’s because the widow knows what she is missing. While the virgin exhibits grace, the widow represents virtue *par excellence*. In case the carrot fails to induce the proper response from the widow, Tertullian ends with Paul’s warning that, “Evil associations corrupt good manners.”³⁹ He adds an invective against “chattering, idle, winebibbing, scandalmongering women” whose “‘god is their belly,’ as the apostle says; and so also is that which lies adjacent to it.”⁴⁰ You better behave because you certainly do not want people to group you with such unsavory women.

The arguments in *Ad Uxorem* follow the basic structure of the rhetorical model and encompass many modes of attack. Tertullian brings ethos, pathos, and logos to bear in dissuading the reader against remarriage. In so doing, readers find themselves armed with a multitude of arguments they can bring to bear against a widow wishing to remarry. If logic fails, turn to Biblical references, if those fail turn

36. Sider, 109-110.

37. Tertullian, *To His Wife*, 403.

38. Tertullian, *To His Wife*, 403.

39. I Cor. 15:33.

40. Tertullian, *To His Wife*, 404.

to ethos and a desire for the “good,” failing that, attempt to humiliate the widow into proper behavior by contrasting them with the wicked heathen, failing all that attempt to butter the widow’s ego with promises of direct relations with God and a feeling of superiority in respect to those overly righteous virgins. Though a short treatise, *Ad Uxorem* illustrates the diversity of Tertullian’s methodology and the myriad tools at his disposal.

Contrary to the view Tertullian was foe of reason and Classical education, Sider argues, “[His] uniqueness as a second-century exegete was made possible by the special skill through which he was able to adapt his training in classical rhetoric to Biblical materials and thus sharpen and improve the tools he inherited from the tradition.”⁴¹ As demonstrated earlier, Tertullian composed his treatises in accordance with rhetorical techniques. Each idea, paragraph, and phrase finds its genesis in rhetoric. The flow of his writing is often dictated by the rhetor’s art. The significance of Tertullian’s contribution rests in the fact he “force[d] the Roman world to consider Christian realities because they had been placed in the forum of Roman rhetoric. In so doing he created new contexts, new facts, and new reality for both the Roman Imperial world and the Christian world.”⁴² Contrary to the image of Tertullian as “a doughty defender of revelation against reason,” Sider contends, “The Scriptures, then are for him not merely the ‘source of revelation’ or the ‘precipitate of revelation,’ . . . They are also a source of data which had to be sifted and weighed in a strictly rational way as any other body of facts to establish credence and authority.”⁴³ As a Montanist Tertullian believed in the power and activity of the Holy Spirit, but the exhortations of others must be scrupulously evaluated and logically compared to the *regula fidei* and scripture before gaining acceptance as true revelation. Charismatic groups often lead to chaos and anarchy as counter revelations appear and conflict with one another.

Far from tumultuous, Tertullian’s system demanded a rigorous logic and the exercise of strict reason. Peter Kaufman notes that although Tertullian expounded the sinister influence of philosophy, “his sensitive handling of pagan political thought and his profound debts to classical rhetoric betoken generally positive assessments of the culture of classical antiquity.”⁴⁴ With such a deep commitment to rhetoric techniques it becomes nearly impossible if not highly impractical to maintain the view that Tertullian wished to abandon fully the classical traditions and secular culture surrounding him. It is equally improbable that the wit and keen mind responsible for works like *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* and *Ad Uxorem* would honestly support the abandonment of reason.

41. Sider, 9-10.

42. Helgeland, 6.

43. Sider, 131.

44. Kaufman, 170.