DE RELIGIONE: HOW CHRISTIANITY BECAME A RELIGION

D E N I S A   Č E R V E N K O V Á

ABSTRACT

Following the findings of contemporary theological and religious stud-ies research, the present interdisciplinary study attempts to trace the process of adopting the originally Roman category of "religion" for referring to Christianity. The text notes, in particular, the socio-political role of *religio* in classical culture and the transformations that the relationship of the society of classical antiquity and the Christian community went through in the first centuries AD, especially the first Christian attempts at communication with the late classical Latin culture and the administrative structures of the Roman Empire. The adaptation of the catego-ry is traced back to Tertullian, whose conception appears to have fundamentally influenced later generations of Christians; the second part of the study therefore devotes considerable attention to his works. It is here that justified use of the cate-gory of "religion" in connection with the Christian tradition is first encountered, as an expression encompassing the doctrinal and philosophical, as well as ethical and liturgical aspects of Christianity. Analysis of the text of Tertullian's *Apologeticum* shows how the apologetic literature of the second century AD conveys the Chris-tian message in an exemplary and highly elaborate form, which serves the dual purpose of providing an adequate definition of the Christian religious identity and preserving it, as well as making it available to recipients of diverse contemporary cultural environments.

Keywords
Early Latin theology, Tertullian, Apologeticum, Religio, Religious identity, Incultu-ration of Christianity

The concept of religion, under which we quite naturally subsume Christianity along with other religious traditions, is one of the basic categories of contemporary theological thinking. However, applying the label "religion" (*religio*) to Christianity had not always

been a matter of course; for at least the first one and half centuries of the Church's existence Christians tried to avoid it.[1] The term "religion" applied to Christianity first occurs in texts of the Latin cultural sphere towards the end of the second century AD, specifically in the apologetic works of Q. S. F. Tertullian and somewhat later also in Minucius Felix's *Octavius*. The category came to be widely used in the fourth centuries, probably due to the impact of Eusebius' treatise *Laus Constantini* and Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*.

In order to expand on this issue and integrate it into the context of contemporary theological research, we may recall that in the first centuries of its existence, as today, the Christian community was struggling for the recognition of its unique religious offer in a relatively complex pluralistic context. Then, as today, it could not simply assume the assent of those to whom its message was directed. In fact, as the history of Christian division has shown, many elements of Christian belief were not unambiguously interpreted and accepted even within the Christian community itself. If we are again asked today about the "reason for the hope that is in us", I believe that an inspection of the way the Christian writers of the first centuries after Christ faced the question of their identity, as presented in the key category of *religio*, may help in the search for a modality of communicating the universal openness and values of Christianity and its ability to interact in culturally and religiously diverse environments.

From *philosophia vera* to *religio vera*: the concept of *religio* penetrates Christian self-conception

A number of studies[2] have already dealt with the historical background of the origin of Christianity, as well as the religious aspects

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1 They preferred to present their faith in the Graeco-Roman cultural world as a kind of *Hodos*, i.e., the way of following Christ (Aristides: Christianity as the way of truth), or they talked about Christianity as the "true philosophy" (Justin, Tatianos, Athenagoras, Theophilos). Cf. Denisa Červenková. *Jak se křesťanství stalo náboženstvím: recepce pojmu religio v Tertuliánově Apologetiku* [*How Christianity Became a Religion: Reception of the concept of religio in Tertullian's Apologeticum*]. Prague: Karolinum 2012, p. 7.

2 Cf. also Jörg Rüpke. *Náboženství Římanů* [*Religion of the Romans*]. Prague: Vyšehrad 2007; Corinne Bonnet – Jörg Rüpke – Paolo Scarpi (eds.). *Religions orientales – culti misterici: Neue Perspektiven – nouvelles perspectives – prospettive nuove*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag 2006; Jörg Rüpke. *A companion to Roman Religion*. Malden: Blackwell 2007; Simon Price – Emily Kearns. *The Oxford dictionary of classical myth*

of the Hellenistic and Christian religion in the first centuries AD. I believe, however, that it is also a theological issue of supreme interest, both from the point of view of the history of theology (as a contribution to the topic of the inculturation of Christianity into the Latin world), and from the perspective of the contemporary theological search for the role of the diverse religious traditions with respect to Christianity. How can the question of religious pluralism be dealt with in terms of Christian theology? What place does Christian faith assign to those who remain in their own distinct religious identities? Is it possible not to take members of non-Christian religious traditions seriously and approach them merely as objects of mission until they have been converted? A review of the Patristic legacy could help us see some further aspects of and attitudes towards those who encounter Christianity and nonetheless adhere to a different worldview, which they value as significantly enriching their lives.

While the Christians of the first centuries strove to adequately present and defend their own way of life and piety in the socio-cultural environment of the Roman Empire, their Roman contemporaries were wondering whether Christianity was not merely another dead end among the many philosophical and religious options of late antiquity, threatening the basic principles of the functioning and stability of the state, which required religion to fulfil a certain socio-political role as warrant of the "favour of the gods".

In the first three centuries AD the Romans' view of the followers of Christ underwent substantial transformation: from persecuting Christians[3] to progressive tolerance and cooperation with Christians, who

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and religion. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004; Robert Turcan. *Les cultes orientaux dans le monde romain*. Paris: Belles Lettres 2004; Eric M. Orlin *Temples, religion, and politics in the Roman Republic*. Boston: Brill 2002; Kurt Latte. *Römische Religionsgeschichte*. München: Beck 2001; Robert Turcan. *The Gods of ancient Rome: Religion in everyday life from archaic to imperial times*. New York: Routledge 2001; Josef Češka. *Zánik antického světa* [*Doom of the ancient world*]. Prague: Vyšehrad 2000; Mary Beard – John North – Simon Price. *Religions of Rome*. Vol. 1–2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000; Hans-Josef Klauck. *The religious context of early Christianity: A guide to Graeco-Roman religions*. London: Clark 2000 and others. See also Ugo Bonanate. *La nascita di una religione*. Torino: Bollati Borringhieri 1994; Maurice Sachot. *L'invention du Christ: Genèse d'une religion*, Paris: Odile Jacob 1998.

[3]   Recall that Christians were uncompelling to their surroundings for several reasons: their community appeared to be of a fundamentally disruptive nature since it had arisen by separation from Judaism and very soon began to split into a number of Christian sects. Their doctrine (whether concerning Jesus' birth or resurrection) appeared unoriginal, imitating other mythical tales. Their loyalty to the Empire

came to be viewed as loyal citizens of the state. It is my contention that the re-interpretation of the relationship of Christians and the state was made possible by the theoretical reflection of ecclesiastical authors who endeavoured to conceive Christianity as *religio*/religion.[4]

Religion as a socio-political phenomenon

Readers of a theological journal certainly need not be reminded of the well-known etymological problem associated with the concept of *religio* and its basic meanings.[5] In this short study I will also permit myself to leave aside late classical philosophical formulations of the quests for gods and refer the reader to what I believe is still a fairly readable classical source that can effectively help us get a glimpse of the religiosity of the Roman world in terms of philosophical questioning - Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods*.[6] To understand how the originally pagan category of *religio* came to be adapted to Christianity and later to other religious traditions, however, it is also important to note the importance of the Roman concept of religion as a socio-political phenomenon.[7] The *religio* of classical antiquity functioned as *religio civica* intended to warrant *pax deorum*, i.e., a favourable relationship of the gods to the Empire, and thereby the Empire's stability and prosperity. The Romans expected peace and forgiveness from their gods.[8] Religion in its socio-political function may thus be defined as an attitude of faithful compliance with the order established by the civil

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seemed false and they themselves arrogant (after all, not only Christians could criticize polytheism; this criticism was certainly no reason why they should feel superior to other cultural and religious traditions, according to the philosopher Celsus).

[4] There are countless studies dealing with the religiosity of ancient Rome. These cannot be ignored if we are to understand the historical circumstances accompanying the admission of the concept of *religio* into the idiolect expressing Christian self-conception in the second century AD. Extensive bibliography on the topic is to be found in the relevant sections of Červenková. *Jak se křesťanství.*

[5] For comprehensive analysis see e.g. Červenková. *Jak se křesťanství*, pp. 32–39.

[6] Cicero. *De natura deorum. Academica.* H. Rackham (ed.). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979 (= Loeb 19).

[7] Cf. e.g. Jörg Rüpke. *Náboženství Římanů*, pp. 71, 118; Giuseppe Zecchini. *Il pensiero politico romano: Dall'età arcaica alla tarda antichità.* Roma: Nuova Italia scientifica 1997; Červenková. *Jak se křesťanství*, pp. 59–72.

[8] Cf. Cicero. *Pro Rabir.* 2,5 (Loeb 9, 456); Ovidius. *Amor.* 1,2,21; Livius 39,10,5 and others quoted in Francesco Sini. *Uomini e Dèi nel sistema giurido-religioso romano.* Pax deorum, tempo degli Dei, sacrifici. [2010-01-20]. <http://www.dirittoestoria.it/tradizione/F.%20Sini%20-%20Uomini%20e%20D%E8i%20%20nel% 20sistema %20giuridico-religioso%20roman.htm>.

society and its institutions, and ultimately also as one of these institutions necessary for the socio-political cohesion of Roman society.[9]

Cult and sacrifice were considered to be the most appropriate way of securing the gods' favour and at the same time a way to draw on their immense power: the more is sacrificed to the gods, the more powerful the gods become. The sacrificial ritual was therefore viewed as "feeding the gods". In this sense one can even speak of a certain reciprocity in the relationship between deity and man, of a bilateralism (though certainly of a very different nature than the one propounded by Christianity), which the Roman *religio* presumed.[10]

One may wonder whether such understanding of the concept of *religio* in the Roman society of late antiquity is not overly utilitarian, as the Milanese historian Giuseppe Zecchini suggests.[11] According to him, we have adopted this view, i.e., (to put it in a simplified manner) the view of religion as an instrument with which the state controlled its subjects, from the historian Polybius. The error grounding this misconception of the character of the Roman religion consists, according to Zecchini, in insufficiently distinguishing between the private and the public religion of the Romans: while in the private sphere individuals were granted great freedom of belief, it was not the case in the public sphere. The system of religious rites and regulations taken over from the tradition is in fact much older than the "civil" legislation, which dates back to mid-fifth century BC. The public religious sphere exercised control over the ethical contents of the entire Roman law. Due to this, public religion was a constitutive element of society.[12]

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[9] The perception of *religio* seems to have been ambivalent already in antiquity, hence the two etymological accounts of the concept and the two derived meanings: *religio* as the totality of relationships to gods established by cult (objective aspect of religion), and *religio* as observance of these cultic practices (subjective aspect). Cf. Giuseppe Filoramo. *Che cos'è la religione*. Torino: Einaudi, 2004, p. 81f.

[10] In this context one should note e.g. Cicero's belief that humans belong to the same *societas*, the same *civitas* as the gods and that what connects them is the common law. Cf. *Cicero*. Leg. 1,2,3 (Loeb 16, 16); also cf. Pierangelo Catalano. Una civitas communis deorum atque hominum: Cicerone tra temperatio 'reipublicae' e rivoluzioni. *Studia et Documenta Historiae et Iuris* 65 (1995), pp. 723–730.

[11] Cf. Giuseppe Zecchini. *Religione e società: qualche riflessione su Roma antica.* [2009-05-15]. <www.giuseppevalditara.it/materiali/religioneromana_zecchini.pdf>. On this cf. also Giuseppe Zecchini. *Il pensiero politico romano: Dall'età arcaica alla tarda antichità*. Roma: Nuova Italia scientificá 1997.

[12] This also shows how it came about that Christians were accused of damaging the *res publica*: it was concerned with both religion and politics. Cf. ibidem.

One also needs to note that in the structures of Roman society representatives of political power were often "religious specialists" as well.[13] Not only was the emperor of a sacred character, but certain religious qualifications were granted to the political representatives of the Empire. Conversely, the functioning of state institutions was impossible without the assistance of priests.[14]

At the same time religion as an attitude of respect for the recognized pantheon of gods helped to define *romanitas*, the specificity of Roman culture with respect to other nations, and declare its supremacy.[15] The Roman religion was also capable of incorporating the cults of other nations, though it distinguished between legitimate and illegitimate religions. The latter category, known as *superstitio*, a degraded, perverted form of religion,[16] did not generally automatically result in persecution from civil authorities. Concepts such as heresy or religious intolerance indeed were not part of the normal idiolect of a member of the Roman culture; the only reason for persecuting certain groups could be proven allegations that they posed a threat to the *pax deorum*.[17]

Definition of Christian identity in Tertullian's *Apologeticum*

At the turn of a period characterized on the one hand by conflict and on the other hand by attempts to advance towards a more positive definition of the relationship of the Christian community and the society there appears the Carthaginian lawyer and "first Latin theologian"

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[13] Rüpke. *Náboženství Římanů*, p. 222.

[14] In this way the magistracies and priestly positions were linked, distinguished representatives of Roman political life were also high-positioned priests. Cf. Michal Skřejpek. *Ius et religio: právo a náboženství ve starověkém Římě* [*Law and Religion in Ancient Rome*]. Pelhřimov: Vydavatelství 999 1999, pp. 101–102.

[15] Cf. Sachot. *L'invention du Christ*, p. 150.

[16] "Not only philosophers, but also our ancestors distinguished between *superstitio* and *religio*." Cicero. *Nat. deor.* 2,28,71 (Loeb 19, 192). Apparently, s*uperstitio* did not originally include the pejorative meaning which it only acquired over time. The criterion for distinguishing *religio* from *superstitio* was antiquity (*antiquitas*) and ethnicity, which *superstitio* unlike *religio* could not demonstrate. We will return to the topic in connection with its occurrence in Tertullian's *Apologeticum*.

[17] 17 As it happened to Christians; see e.g. *Acts of the Martyrs of Scilly* 9 (Musurillo 88) from the second century where in the trial hearings there already appeared the unacceptable and from the point of view of the accused Christians contradictory *Christianus sum* and *civis Romanus sum*. On the motives of sentencing for a name (*nomen*) in the Roman legal system see below.

Tertullian.[18] His treatise *Apologeticum* provides detailed insight into the process of shaping the self-conception of Christians as *religio vera* and at the same time of the ecclesial community as loyal ally of the Empire.[19] The sophisticated composition of the text and its topics reveal the basic features of the conflict of the early Church with contemporary society as well as a fairly successful attempt (from the point of view of further development of Christian theology; there are no extant Roman reactions) at Christian communication with late classical Latin culture and the administrative structures of the Roman Empire.[20]

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[18] In a certain sense Tertullian is unique because he attempts to express the identity of Christianity also by means of its structures (see his progression from *secta*, *curia* to *religio*) using legal-religious arguments. I believe that the question of the place of Christians in society is his point of departure. Other apologists of the first centuries, starting with Justin, are not as significant for the topic of religion. In their work Christianity is as yet about to begin making a statement on its role in society: the fact that Athenagoras and Justin addressed their apologies to emperors does not mean that they were in dialogue with the same segment of society as Tertullian. Minucius will not be discussed since the overall composition and method of discourse in his treatise is closer to Cicero's *De natura deorum* and *Laelius sive de amicitia* than to Greek apologetics and Tertullian. Cf. Ferdinand Kotek. *Anklänge an Ciceros De Natura Deorum bei Minucius Felix und Tertullian*. Wien: Ober-Gymnasiums zu den Schotten 1901; O. Bottero. L'Octavius di M. Minucio Felice e le sue relazioni con la cultura classica. *Riviera filosofica* 5, 6 (1903), pp. 359–397; G. W. Clarke. The Literary Setting of the "Octavius" of Minucius Felix. *Journal of Religious History* 3 (1965), pp. 195–211; Idem. The Historical Setting of the "Octavius" of Minucius Felix. *Journal of Religious History* 4 (1967), pp. 267–86; Carl Becker. *Der "Octavius" des Minucius Felix. Heidnische Philosophie und frühchristliche Apologetik*. München: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 1967. Later apologies by Augustine, Lactantius etc. derive from an entirely different historical background: Christianity presents itself as a socially established religion.

[19] Tertullian's *Apologeticum* is sometimes considered to be the first Latin apology (in line with most contemporary scholars I believe that Tertullian's text *Ad Nationes*, written shortly before *Ap.*, is a kind of draft for it), and usually also the most famous and best of Tertullian's work. It was probably written in autumn or winter of 197 (cf. *Ap.* 35,11) and was soon translated into Greek. Cf. also Paul Monceaux. *Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne. Vol. 1: Tertullien et les origines*. Paris: E. Leroux 1901, pp. 197–198; Timothy David Barnes. *Tertullian: A historical and literary study*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971 pp. 51–58; René Braun. *Deus Christianorum*. 2nd ed. Paris: Études augustiniennes 1977, p. 568; and others. On the Greek translation of the *Apologeticum* see the work of Adolf von Harnack. *Die griechische Übersetzung des Apologeticus Tertullians*. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs 1892; cf. also Petr Kitzler. Introduction. In: Tertullianus. *O hrách. De spectaculis*. Ed. and trans. by P. Kitzler, Prague: Oikúmené, 2004, p. 29, note 91.

[20] I propose a somewhat different interpretation of the structure of this Tertullian's work than the one presented in the classical work of R. Sider, which summarizes the current research in this area. I do, however, share Sider's view that it is a topically defined structure. Cf. Robert D. Sider. On Symmetrical Composition in Tertullian. *Journal of Theological Studies* 24 (1973), pp. 405–423.

The entire treatise has a complex concentric structure: the *exordium* of chapter 1 and the concluding chapter 50 constitute the first, broadest framework; overall one can view chapters 1–6 and 46–50 as closely related and referencing each other. The introductory section presents the recipient of the text, states its objective, and announces the major topics, the concluding chapters once again return to the introductory issues of laws, knowledge and ethical practices that, according to the Christians, can put a stop to unjust hatred and transform it into Christian *caritas*. These leitmotifs also appear in other parts of the treatise, where they illustrate the individual contents related to knowing the truth and the conduct issuing from such knowledge, i.e., living in harmony with the fullness of the truth one has apprehended and consented to.

In order to captivate his audience, the author underscores the topic of knowledge by drawing a comparison (*synkrisis*) between two different ways of knowing made possible, on the one hand, by the path of philosophical questioning, and in contrast to that by knowledge mediated by the Christian revelation. Christian gnosis may appear foolish to philosophers,[21] but according to Tertullian the path of Christian truth surpasses both philosophical investigation and the mythical theology of the Varronic triad because it originates in God, and encompasses not only doctrine but also corresponding lifestyle. The path of wisdom that ordinary Romans take is warranted by the philosopher. The other path is represented and warranted by any individual Christian. As far as the trial which had prompted drafting the treatise is concerned, the final resolution of the dispute is in the hands of God: it is God who will ultimately absolve the Christians of guilt. From this point of view martyrdom appears to bear testimony to the extent in which Christian knowledge implies one's entire life, including death which in itself can be a victory. Confronted with the martyrs, the reader should ask what it was that they were willing to give their life up for. Tertullian concludes the work with an apotheosis of martyrdom.

The other chapters of the *Apologeticum* contain alternately *confutatio* and *expositio*, which – alongside *synkrisis* mentioned above – are the two classical figures of the apologetic genre.[22] In this part of the trea-

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[21] In Tertullian's time, however, it was a wild card category for any questioning and challenging of Christianity's claim to truth based on philosophical arguments.

[22] Cf. René Braun. Observations sur l'architecture de l'Apologeticum. In: René Braun. *Approches de Tertullien: Vingt-six études sur l'auteur et sur œuvre (1955–1990).* Paris: Institut d'études augustiniennes 1992, pp. 110–121.

tise I have traced the following topical structure in which defence and exposition of Christianity alternate (the common view of Christians is confronted with the presentation of what Christianity really offers):[23]

A 7–9   lifestyle – crimes
   B 10–16   atheism of Christians – society
     C 17–21   true religiosity of Christians, which consists in integrating philosophy
     C' 22–27   and religion in a single relationship to God (emphasis on doctrine)
   B' 28–38   Christians in society (emphasis on *religio*)
A' 39–45   knowledge of the lifestyle of the Church (emphasis on the ethical aspect of Christianity)

I believe that the text contained in the chapters designated A–A' may be interpreted in the following way: after introducing the topics, i.e., the public case waged against Christians and the law distorted to their disadvantage which condemns without carefully examining the whole case as required by the Roman legal system (*Ap.* 2–5), there follows a list of the secret crimes (*occulta facinora*) of Christians. In general, these were crimes related to the ethics of Christian life (e.g. accusations of incest and anthropophagy). Tertullian discusses them again especially in chapters 39–45, where he strives to present his readers with an undistorted picture of the lifestyle of Christians, closely connected to the doctrine they profess.

In the chapters designated B–B' the apologist analyses accusations of atheism, i.e., of public crimes (*manifesta facinora*), to which he responds in chapters 28–38 with an exposition of how beneficial Christians are to society and defines the fundamentally positive relationship of the Christian faithful to the (pagan) state and its representatives.

The section designated C–C' constitutes the central part of the work. The Christian attitude to the pagan pantheon is no longer supported only by rejecting the not-quite-exemplary, frequently negligent and disrespectful attitude of the Romans to their own gods, but with an emphasis on the very inconsistency of the Roman deities. At the same time the apologist notes that the number of followers of a certain doctrine (whether Christian or not) does not in itself warrant its utility and

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[23] The numbers refer to chapters of the *Apologeticum.*

beneficence. In chapters 22–27 Tertullian discusses a specific example of where he sees evil concealed under the guise of goodness: pagan deities are essentially simply demons, so accusing Christians of insulting the gods is out of place, since they are not true gods.

In chapters 17–21 (chapter 16 serves as a kind of bridge) Tertullian no longer deals with the Romans' misconceptions of the Christian God and proceeds to present the true Christian doctrine of the one and only God,[24] its source and origin. He devotes special attention to the Christological element and an outline of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. This section is also one of the most comprehensive instances of theological reflection of the Patristic period before the great councils of the fourth Christian century.

The structure of the treatise can be represented as follows (the numbers indicate chapter titles):

1–6 Preamble (*propositio* + human laws)

1   Statement of the topic – Preamble
Propositio: recipient + purpose of the work: to the magistrates of the Roman Empire based in Carthage, in order that they come out of their ignorance and recognize that their hatred towards Christians is unjust

2–6 Human Laws
    2 why Christians are judged differently than others
    3 origin of unreasonable hatred against those who profess the name Christian
    4 human laws, their ambiguity and limits
    5 origins of human laws
    6 authority of laws in the course of human history

7–16 *Confutatio* (response to allegations of *occulta* and *manifesta facinora*)

7–9   *Occulta facinora* of Christians: their moral offences

    7 allegations of secret crimes brought up against Christians

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[24] Regarding the terminology *vera religio veri Dei* see analysis of the concept of *religio* and passage devoted to *Ap.* 24,2 below.

29 reverence for the gods depends on the emperor

30 Christians' relationship to the emperor: they pray for him

31 since that is commanded by their sacred scriptures ("our law")

32 and thereby they hold off the end of the world

33 the emperor is merely human too

34 the emperor is not Lord, this attribute belongs to God alone

35 Christians exalt the emperor, with greater piety (*pietas*) than the Romans themselves

36 Christians not only respect the emperor, they are also Romans

37 although Christians are superior in numbers, they do not desire revenge

38 Christians are beneficial to society since they do not cause division and participate in its life

39–45 *Expositio*

On the beneficence of Christians for society

39 Christian agency – they contribute something new to society

40 not Christians but the Romans themselves call forth the wrath of the gods

41 not Christians but the Romans themselves occasion the scourges that plague society

42 on the beneficence of Christians for society: they reject pagan rituals

43 the prosecutors of Christians are themselves the vermin of the society

44 condemning Christians impoverishes the state

45 in the case of Christians human laws judge that which transcends them

46–50 *Synkrisis* (comparison of doctrines)

The philosophers' path of knowledge and the Christian path of knowledge

46 Christian knowledge is of divine origin, comparison of philosophy and Christianity

47 the path of philosophers and path of revelation in the Scriptures

48 resurrection and the philosophers

49 philosophers and poets appear to be wise, Christians appear to be
   foolish (true knowledge and true foolishness)
50 consummation of Christian life: Christian martyrdom

I adopt the distinction of the elements *confutatio, exposition,* and
synkrisis from the French researcher René Braun,[25] whose work has
been critically developed by another Tertullian expert R. D. Sider in his
study devoted to the composition of Tertullian's *Apologeticum.* Since
Sider's work is considered to be the last authoritative study of the com-
position of this treatise, it cannot be left aside; however, it needs to
be noted why I prefer to elaborate on Braun's solution, rather than
accept Sider's proposal. Sider, as many other scholars,[26] contests not
only Braun, but also Schönberger's[27] otherwise helpful division of
the *Apologeticum* into five basic sections (1–6, 7–17, 18–28,2; 28,3–45;
46–50).[28] Braun applied the structure of classical Greek apologies to
the *Apologeticum,* with their division into the apologetic part (*apolo-
gia* or *confutatio,* in this case the defence of Christians), the kerygmatic
part (*epideixis,* proclamation addressed to pagans), and the compara-
tive part (*synkrisis,* here as comparison of Christian and pagan truth).
According to Sider, however, detailed examination reveals that Braun's
division is not perfectly symmetric[29] and fails to explain how the sym-
metry of the work is related to its purpose and elaboration of its central
topics. One can certainly agree with Sider that the symmetry of the
composition of the *Apologeticum* cannot be understood primarily in
the quantitative sense, but is rather found in the symmetric arrange-
ment of the fundamental ideas Tertullian wanted to present in his
work. As most researchers (including Sider), I view the chapters 1–6

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[25] Cf. Braun, Observations, pp. 110–121.

[26] Cf. Paul Monceaux. Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne depuis les origines
jusqu'á l'invasion arabe. Utrecht; Brussels: E. Leroux 1951, p. 231; Jean Pierre Waltz-
ing. *Tertullien. Apologétique.* Liége; Paris: Les Belles Lettres 1919, pp. 8–9; Chris-
tine Mohrmann. *Tertullianus Apologeticum en andere Geschriften uit Tertullianus
voor-Montanischen Tijd.* Utrecht; Brussels: Het Spectrum 1951, p. 3.

[27] Cf. Otto Schönberger. Über die symmetriche Komposition von Tertullians Apologe-
ticum. *Gymnasium* 64 (1957), pp. 335–340.

[28] He contests the allocation of the 17th chapter to the previous section, as do the
authors mentioned above. He supports this view with *Ap.* 15,8 and *Ap.* 16,14 where
clear signals of an impending transition to a new section are found. Cf. Robert Sider.
Symmetrical Composition, p. 406.

[29] Eg. *synkrisis* occupies much less space than apologia, cf. Robert Sider. Symmetrical
Composition, p. 407.

and 45–50 as a kind of framework for the entire treatise, in which Tertullian's individual topics are carefully embedded.

Sider also suggests that at the core of the *Apologeticum* there is the conviction that knowledge (truth, therefore philosophy) and conduct (ethics) are interconnected; philosophy and law are thus interrelated in an institutionalized form. This carries two implications, one of them for defending Christians: if Christians are right, they are also morally blameless, and conversely pagans are morally distorted, because their truth is distorted. The second implication relates to the preaching of the Gospel: if the prosperity of a society depends on its overall moral integrity, then Roman society will not be healed by eradicating Christians, but rather by accepting the truth they offer. Sider devotes much attention to the recurrent contrast between the concealed and the revealed, the secret and the public, as evident from the overall proposal of the structure of the *Apologeticum* presented by his study.

The text is set in the context of a specific case – the prosecution and trial of Christians in Carthage in 197. Tertullian uses the case as an opportunity not only to defend Christians, but also to define for his readers the fundamentals of Christian identity, consisting not only in the major doctrinal issues presented in *Ap.* 17–21, but also a synthesis of theology, life style (from defining the unacceptable features of Roman mentality to examples of Christian individual ethics and martyrdom) and the special character of the Christian community (a *corpus* building upon *disciplina caritatis*). Important is Tertullian's reflection of the position of the Christian community in late classical society and the political structures of the Roman Empire. The book concludes with the trial-sentence motif viewed this time in light of the eschatological future, in which apparent defeat is revealed as glorious victory; this enables one to accept martyrdom, thereby confirming the Christian option and taking a step towards liberation from all human courts and entering the fullness of life with God.

The motif of trial provided Tertullian with ample opportunity to deal with the topic of law and justice,[30] which he presents exhaustively and from different perspectives especially in chapters 2–6. From noting the deformation of laws he passes on to investigating their origin, fragility and changes that specific laws have undergone in history. It is useful to note three other places where this motif reappears in

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[30] I mean categories expressed by the Latin terms *lex, ius,* and *disciplina, iustitia.*

Ap.: one is in *Ap.* 21 where the law (as well as the term discipline) is related primarily to God.[31] It is the law originating from God who wanted to reveal it to his prophets and proclaimed it first to his chosen people, Israel, and later to other nations; however, they have all abandoned the law. Restoration and perfect clarification of this divine law was the reason why Christ, the Son of God, came. The second occurrence is in *Ap.* 39, where the author discusses the law of nature: the requirement that Christians relate in a brotherly manner even to their enemies is not arbitrary, but grounded in the common human nature. The motif reappears in *Ap.* 45 where Roman "laws of morality" are discussed. According to Tertullian, Roman laws derive from the unique and much older law of God, which at the same time surpasses them because unlike human norms it is not subject to change and its authority is not limited in scope.[32] We have already had some opportunity to get acquainted with the significance of legislation and law in general in relation to the religious behaviour of Roman society (see second section of this paper); further implications of the topic for our investigation of the convergence of Christianity with the *religio* category are discussed in the following section.

A similarly organic elaboration of the motifs appears when one examines the development of the antithesis of knowledge and ignorance. According to Tertullian, Christians offer society perfect knowledge, the possibility to turn away from injustice and hatred towards brotherly love for all. Though this further introductory topic of the treatise is particularly developed in the five concluding chapters of the *Apologeticum*, it permeates the entire work which thus becomes a more or less explicit call to move away from ignorance (of Christianity) to profession of faith in God worshipped through Christ, from which the lifestyle of Church communities derives. Chapters *Ap.* 45–50 further emphasize this need for the harmony of life with the professed religious or philosophical belief, both for Christians and for those who wish to reach wisdom by the path of philosophers. Knowledge is thus presented as something supremely practical that gives direction to

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[31] The context of *Ap.* 21 is Christological, delimiting the Christian faith and Scripture with respect to Judaism.

[32] Restrictions of the scope of authority have to do with their temporality, which is not the case with God's judgment and possible punishments, cf. Tertullian's eschatology; on that cf. e.g. Jean Daniélou. *Le origini del cristianesimo latino. Storia delle dottrine cristiane prima di Nicea.* Bologna: EDB 1993, pp. 371–380.

human existence and provides the basic principles according to which good and socially beneficial life can be led. Like Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian associates true gnosis with gestures of brotherly love.[33]

Great emphasis on the lifestyle and presence of Christians in society is a further characteristic feature of this Tertullian's work. While the apologist certainly does not leave his readers in doubt as to the nature and attributes of his God, the crucial point for him is the subsequent practical acceptance of faith, which is then reflected in the concrete lifestyle of the faithful, which ought to be in harmony with the professed creed.

When we recall the religious and cultural patterns of late antiquity, as we have encountered them in Cicero and Varro, we can observe that Tertullian's confrontation with the world of Roman culture occurred both at the level of philosophical comparison and at the level of religion; it is in this respect that Tertullian's apology is not only innovative among the other apologists of the second century, but marks a certain turning point in the very self-conception of Christianity. In his work the African Latin author identified the knowledge of truth with the knowledge of a specific *religio*, i.e., Christianity, which in his work becomes the true creed, lifestyle, and authentic worship (*religio vera*). Such broad definition of the classic category of religion understandably gave rise to tension in the dialogue with Roman society accustomed to discussing the issues of identity and cognition of God separately from the realm of *pietas*, which was equated with the ritual aspect of religion.[34]

The term *religio* documents Tertullian's success in finding and adapting categories suitable for recipients living in the world of Roman state administration. Analysis of the work shows that his paramount apologetic treatise *Apologeticum* as a whole can be regarded as a kind

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[33] The epistemology of the process of knowledge from faith differs in the two authors; on that see e.g. Giuseppe Laiti. *Il Dio vivente, compimento dell'uomo*. Verona 2011 [manuscript ready for print], pp.24–27; Eric Osborn. *Tertullian, first theologian of the West*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997, pp. 38f.

[34] On the motives of the existing schism between the religious attitude expressed by public cult according to domestic traditions on the one hand and personal philosophical view on the other, which maintained loyalty in the Empire (by means of public cult) and at the same time religious tolerance (because it did not interfere with "private" beliefs), and on the reasons for conflict with Christianity which chose to designate its identity precisely by this paradoxical conjunction of the world of religious cult and philosophy cf. G. Laiti. *La Chiesa dei Padri* [manuscript ready for print], p. 97.

of bridge between the apologies of Christian authors writing in Greek[35] and Patristic reflection of the third century, both in terms of topics and in terms of genre. Like his predecessors in the process of transmitting faith (*traditio*), Tertullian was inevitably confronted with the cultural categories of his time and had to assess their potential adequacy for expressing the theological substance of the Christian experience. In the *Apologeticum* he also prepared the structure and patterns for his future theological synthesis of the main topics of Christian theology.[36] Semantic structure analysis and theological analysis show that the work as a whole allows for the individuation of aspects revealing Tertullian's effort to find a definition of Christian identity that would be both understandable and sufficiently convincing for the cultural and religious milieu of his time.[37]

Apologies played a specific part in the endeavour of Christians to appropriately express their identity within the Hellenistic culture of the second century AD. One can agree with the French scholar Jean-Claude Fredouille that apology is characterized by functional intention, which is not limited to defence in the sense of refuting objections against Christianity.[38] In fact, the defence serves to positively lay out the substance of Christianity, taking into account the recipient of the texts, who in the case of Greek authors was more likely emperor-philosopher (the prototype may have been Marcus Aurelius).[39]

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[35] A Greek apologist was mostly an educated layman, philosopher, wandering teacher, while in Tertullian we can observe how the Church penetrated organized structures and the importance of Episcopal ministry increased. Justin, Tacianus and similar authors had little interest in this aspect, their works are rather philosophical. Cf. Dieter Timpe. Apologeti cristiani e storia sociale della chiesa antica. *Annali della Facoltà di lettere e filosofia dell'Università di Siena* 7 (1986), pp. 110–112.

[36] According to P. Podolak, one of the major assets of the *Apologeticum* is its relationship to the other works of the African author, as it contains at least brief sketches of all the important themes of Tertullian's theology, from rejecting the games as an expression of Graeco-Roman idolatry (elaborated in *Spect.*), the rule of faith (see *Praes.*), basic arguments for the resurrection of the body (later in *Res.*) up to the mysteries of Trinitarian theology extensively discussed in *Prax.* Cf. Pietro Podolak. Introduzione. In: Tertulliano. *Opere apologetiche*. Roma: Città Nuova 2006, pp. 163–165. See also the analysis of the *Apologeticum* below which further confirms Podolak's idea.

[37] I analyse Tertullian's treatise in detail in the cited book Červenková. *Jak se křesťanství*, pp. 92–162.

[38] Cf. Jean-Claude Fredouille. L'Apologétique chrétienne antique: naissance d'un genre littéraire. *Revue des études augustiniennes* 38 (1992), pp. 228 and 244.

[39] Cf. the recipients of Greek apologies: Aristides turns to emperor Adrian, Justin to the imperial family (Titus and his two sons, Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus), Tatianus to "the Greeks", meaning the intellectuals, philosophers, Athenagoras dedicated his

Since for Tertullian the recipient is a magistrate pursuing practical and legal interests,[40] issues such as power, government, law, justice, and knowledge of the moral principles of society are vital for him. Tertullian makes use of these topics and on the example of a specific trial defines the fundamentals of Christian identity, which according to him includes not only the basic doctrinal contents, but also the lifestyle of Christians (what is unacceptable for them from the widespread traditional Mediterranean culture, with examples of Christian individual ethics)[41] and the characteristic features of the Christian community (i.e., that Christians constitute a *corpus*/body founded upon *disciplina caritatis*/order of love).[42]

In the Greek and Latin apologies there are some identical features appealing to the relationship of Christianity (according to the authors) to the best of the classical cultural tradition: philosophical monotheism, expectations of the end of the world, the category of Logos. No Christian apologist, however, is willing to give up what he views as the core of the Christian message of the one God, his self-revelation to man, and Christ's mediatory role. This can be well observed in the key chapters of Tertullian's *Apologeticum* (*Ap.* 17–21), where the crucial paradox of the Christian faith, i.e., the mystery of Christ, is presented to the reader in dual context: it accounts for the possible difficulty of understanding the message by those who come from the world of the Jewish faith, as well as those who belong to the classical cultural world. The apologist can offer both groups the *religio christiana* (cf. *demonstratio religionis nostrae, Ap.* 16,14), whose main content is here the theological and Christological exposition of the fundamental substance of the Christian doctrine.

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[40] treatise to Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Aurelius Commodus, similarly Theophilos's friend Autolykos may have been a philosopher.

[40] "You, rulers of the Roman Empire, seated for the administration of justice on your lofty tribunal", *Ap.* 1,1 (CCSL 1, 85).

[41] What according to Tertullian makes Christian ethics better than philosophical ethics is that it requires greater coherence between proclaimed doctrine and life, it is not concerned with social prestige, it is generally more demanding than philosophical ethics.

[42] Cf. Červenková. *Jak se křesťanství*, pp. 133f.

The concept of *religio* in other works by Tertullian

In Tertullian's other works the category of *religio* receives far less attention. Not even his other apologetic works apply the concept of religion to Christianity (*Ad Scapulam* addresses rather the question of religious freedom: one cannot be forced to adhere to a religion).[43] In Tertullian's dogmatic works Christianity is identified with the term *ecclesia*, the Church. One other topic occurring in the works of the Carthaginian apologist is important for our investigation: Christianity is presented as the consummation of the preceding search for wisdom, so that philosophical schools cannot boast of having something Christianity does not have. That this does not occur in the context of controversy with philosophers is not without significance: it is a quest for warrants of the credibility of Christianity for Christians themselves. In this sense, these warrants are not found by philosophical exploration but in the tradition.[44] In the treatise *Adversus Valentinianos* (written 206-207 AD) Christianity is already identified with the term *vera religio*. By using the term *religio* the "orthodox" line of Christianity is identified with true religion, which according to Tertullian heretics (in this case the Valentinians) misuse for their perverted religious structures. In this treatise *vera religio* is not opposed to *falsa religio* or *superstitio* of other religious traditions, but becomes an intra-Church means of delimiting the "mainstream" of Christian tradition from unacceptable interpretations of the Christian religion, which appears to have already then been a fairly common designation for Christian ethics, beliefs, and the social elements of this tradition.[45]

In Tertullian's later works the term becomes even scarcer. In the practical-ascetic works it is more often used to denote piousness, i.e., man's attitude of respect towards God,[46] or religious practices. Generally one can say that the choice of categories for presenting Christianity with the terms *secta-religio* or *ecclesia* depends on the context: he penetrates the non-Christian, Latin cultural environment with the former, while the term *ecclesia* is (particularly in the early works) addressed *ad intra*, i.e., to Christian communities.

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[43] Cf. *Scap.* 2,2 (CCSL 1, 1127).
[44] See the famous passage *Praesc.* 7,9.
[45] Cf. *Val.* 1,3 (CCSL 2, 753).
[46] Cf. *Orat.* 1,4 (CCSL 1, 257f.)

Thus, before Tertullian arrives at *religio* as a synthesizing concept adequately capturing the identity of Christianity by means of the word *religio*, a process of refining concepts can be traced in his work, from designating the Christian community and its worldview as *factio*, *superstitio*, and *secta* to identifying Christianity with the category of *religio* (this conclusion is based on semantic analysis of the occurrences of these terms in Tertullian's *Apologeticum* and other works of this Latin theologian).[47]

In summary one can say that among all of Tertullian's 31 extant texts the *Apologeticum* is unique for its balanced presentation of the role of Christianity in society and self-definition of Christians in dialogue with the world of Roman culture. It does so first by using the term *secta*, mostly neutral at that time (i.e., a group of confessors, followers of Christ), and then by identifying Christianity with *religio*, religion. The term *religio* is applied to Christianity in full awareness of the complexity of this concept in the Roman world, which required specification of how it could be used to designate Christianity with its lifestyle, set of religious ideas and beliefs, as well as ritual practices.

Christian attitude to different religious identities in second century AD

Let us now return to the questions raised in the introduction to this study: what place did Christian theology of the early centuries reserve for different religious identities? In the case of Tertullian one can say that he does not reject the philosophico-theological tradition as such. On the contrary, his method of presenting the main contents of Christian doctrine elaborates on some categories of Stoic thinking, including their material and bodily connotations (cf. his use of the concepts of *substantia, corpus* etc.). The Christian theologian also shares the Middle Platonic three-level understanding of reality, also found in Christian authors writing in Greek. Tertullian also identifies the philosophical category of truth with the person of the Son of God, Christ, Logos (the three main Christological titles found in the *Apologeticum*) and relates it to other conceptual schemes of the legal-religious sphere. To express the contents of the kerygma Tertullian selects a method

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[47] I have attempted to substantiate this fairly obvious conclusion by analysing the texts of the African theologian, cf. Červenková. *Jak se křesťanství*, pp. 178–195.

suited to the recipient, his cultural environment and patterns of perceiving and understanding reality. Tertullian links the creed (i.e., the substance of faith) to the testimony of Christ's disciples and their morally irreproachable life, i.e., to issues dear to the deep aspirations of traditional Roman guardianship of virtues. The interconnection of faith and ethics is therefore not presented as specific to the Christian offer, but rather as a possible point of contact with other (not only religious) worldviews. In the language of Roman religious mentality, as captured by the Varronic systematization of theology, one can say that the Christian religious tradition endeavours to link the sphere of gnosis, knowledge (i.e., the search for truth typical of *theologia naturalis*) with the sphere Tertullian characterizes by the term *caritas*. This second level of religious inquiry includes practical, active interest in others, which corresponds to the category of "honest life" emphasized by Varro within *theologia civilis*. Tertullian, as numerous other pre-Christian philosophical schools including Middle Platonic philosophy with its monotheistic tendencies, is critical of the third element of the Varronic triad, *theologia mythica*, on the grounds (this is also in line with the philosophical criticism of the myth) that it is incompatible with the requirement of a morally sound life of gods and humans and that the Roman cultic system is generally unacceptable.

More problematic is the socio-political aspect of religion in the Roman world (religion as constitutive of the state), since Tertullian's understanding of religion, as opposed to the Varronic synthesis, interconnects the three levels of human reality related to God. He combines doctrine, ethics, and liturgy in a single synthesis of faith, knowledge, and ethical practice governed by the criterion of brotherly love, which is on his view to be found in Christianity. An important implication of this conception is a shift in the concept of truth. The truth set in the God-world relationship is no longer perceived as a purely gnoseological category, but considered more broadly as a relational category, and as such (though it still has the character of a gratuitous gift) allows for reciprocity in the relationship of God and man. Thus it is necessarily reflected in the ethical dimension of the life of the faithful, including the dimension of celebrating this relationship in worship. As an optimally synthesizing expression emphasizing the elements of both knowledge and true respect, which is closely related to the gnoseological aspect of faith, Tertullian proposes the term *religio* widely used in Roman society and applies it to Christianity, which

thus becomes for him the only true worship, true piety and profession, the true religion. In other words: for Tertullian true gnosis/doctrine is the foundation of true ethics, which is at the same time an expression of authentic religious attitude (in the sense of worship).

Another important theological topic in the analysis of the *Apologeticum* is the universality of the Christian offer of salvation, which, according to Tertullian, is to replace both the special election of the people of Israel and the universality of the administrative structures of the Roman Empire. This new Christian universality, closely linked with the categories of *truth, wisdom, and orderly life*, is of *personal* character and a Christian is its *living witness*. Tertullian believes that the Christian path of truth is open to everyone; the offer of salvation formulated as fulfilment of the desire for truth and fullness of life in the cosmic and historical, social as well as individual order is addressed to all.[48] This fulfilment takes place within the relationship of God and man mediated by Christ (cf. Tertullian's repeated statement that "we worship God through Christ" and his Christology). In order to make these purely Christian theological contents accessible to the recipients of his treatise, whether Jews or Romans, Tertullian considers and selects categories familiar to both traditions to facilitate their understanding and acceptance.

In the sphere of *Trinitarian* theological reflection our author focuses on stipulating the relationship between God and his Son, who is characterized mainly by the term *Logos*. In order to convey the idea that Christ is situated at the same level of being as God the Father (although the term "Father" is not used to refer to God in the *Apologeticum*), Tertullian uses images to express the co-substantiality of the Son of God and God.[49] Christ's essence is defined by relation, namely the relation to God the Father and to man, in which he is the mediator of the relationship, the Logos. Thus the Christian truth is defined not only by its personal character (i.e., it is always identical with the person of Jesus Christ and addressing the human person), but also necessarily by relationality. Here Tertullian transcends the bare definition of the Logos' divine essence. Here in the *Apologeticum* we also encounter certain limitations in Tertullian's formulation of the difference between the divine Persons: while the terms *prolatio* and

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[48] Cf. *Ap.* 17–20.
[49] See *Ap.* 21,11.

generatio denoting the relationship between the Father and the Son became part of the theological phraseology of later centuries, some of Tertullian's other analogies seem less fortunate to us.[50] Analogies such as "beam emanating from the sun", "part of a whole", "matrix and what is derived from it"[51] were later suppressed in Christian theology, because they raise the risk of interpreting the distinction between God and his Logos at the quantitative level (i.e., as if the Father and the Son were of quantitatively unequal essence).[52]

Tertullian's exposition undergoes substantial change in the Christological passages seeking to express the Son's relationship to the world. When he has clarified the identity of the Son as the incarnate Logos, he opts for narrative language, rather than speculative, which culminates in detailed depiction of the Easter events. Here the apologist resigns on all interpreting comments.[53]

Besides the major Christological attributes (Christ, Logos, Son of God) the *Apologeticum* also contains several other attributes close to the Second Sophistic which Tertullian follows in some respects (e.g. the appellatives *magister, auctor, illuminator,* and also *victor*). Although Tertullian is one of the founding fathers of Christian Latin, these features show that he was also striving to adapt Christianity to the Latin mentality and the culture in which this mentality finds expression. It is therefore out of place to speak only of a purely confrontational style defining itself against the pagan antiquity, as the commonly quoted passages from Tertullian's work seem to suggest.

Noteworthy is also the specific manner in which Tertullian formulates the Christian offer as a path of salvation and fulfilment open to all. In the *Apologeticum* we find the well-known statement about "naturally Christian soul", *anima naturaliter christiana*, i.e., a certain natural human predisposition for a relationship with God. This natural

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[50] On these two words and the relationship of the term *prolatio* (*proferro*) to the Greek *proballein* cf. René Braun. *Deus Christianorum*, pp. 294–297. Tertullian uses *prolatio* to express a distinction that does not assume division or dilatation of substance, his other images (*portio ex summa, radius ex sole, matrix* and its *traduces*) evoke rather the idea of certain subordination than solidarity.

[51] Cf. *Ap.* 21,12f.

[52] However, already Antonio Orbe believes that the syntagma *portio–totum* expresses the same content as Hippolytus's antithesis *dynamis–totum*. Both are ways of balancing the co-substantiality of the Word of God and God while preserving the individual differences. Cf. Antonio Orbe. *Introducción a la de los siglos Theology II y III*. Vol. I–II. Roma: Pontificia Università Gregoriana 1987, p. 104f.

[53] Cf. *Ap.* 21,14–23.

tendency of the soul eventually finds the teacher and illuminator in Christ.[54] Besides that there is also the history of salvation, offered first of all in a special way to the Jews, consummated in Christ, the restorer of the ancient law-covenant of God with man. He is the determinant, the Logos, the mediator of the relationship of God and man.

From the ecclesiological point of view one can say that in his apologetic opus magnum Tertullian lays emphasis on representing the Church first of all as a body and fraternal community[55] whose life is governed by three fundamental elements – belief (for which faith, *fides*, is important), lifestyle (governed by order, *disciplina*) and fraternal fellowship (grounded in hope, *spes*). He avoids the term "Church" in his apologetic works for the time being and prefers to use the terms *secta*[56] and *religio* (i.e., not *factio* or *superstitio*[57]), because in the Latin environment they may more clearly convey the basic openness and perspicuity of the community of Christians who have no secret plans posing a threat to society, who assemble on the basis of shared religious belief (i.e., not only to participate in rituals as is the case with other religions) and lifestyle expressed eventually by the phrase *disciplina unitatis*.[58]

When Tertullian strives to portray the irreproachable life of Christians, he does not use the word "love" to describe its basic dynamics and prefers to use the term "discipline": it is, however, *disciplina caritatis*, the order of fraternal love, whose practical character is an expression of the reciprocity and vitality of the relationship between God and man. The relationship which unites Christians with other people reaches consummation here. The basis of Christians' fraternal relations to others as well as among themselves is the common filial identity/dignity/common humanity: at the level of common human nature Tertullian uses the phrase "mother Nature" to express it, at the level of Christian religion the uniting element is also the fatherhood of God common to all Christians, who as brothers are called to one inheritance.[59] The order

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[54] Cf. *Ap.* 21,7.

[55] See *Ap.* 38 and *Ap.* 49.

[56] In its neutral sense of philosophical school, religious current, political group: the Church as a *secta* is a group of followers, disciples of Jesus Christ. At the same time this term connotes plurality and diversity. Since Tertullian is aware of this he must defend the intrinsic unity of Christianity. Cf. *Ap.* 46.

[57] Therefore, according to Tertullian, the Church is neither an illegal political or religious society, nor a mere superstition.

[58] Cf. *Ap.* 39,1 (CCSL 1, 150).

[59] See *Ap.* 39,7–9.

of love eventually extends beyond the boundaries of the Christian community and becomes a source of good for the entire society. Only in the context of this supreme brotherly love is the topic of martyrdom, with which Tertullian opens and concludes his apology, understandable.[60] *Passio* becomes a gesture of love in offering one's life for others, disrupting the vicious circle of mutual hatred and prejudice, and becomes a symbol of the possibility of a life fulfilled in self-sacrifice for others.

As we have already seen, unlike both the Greek apologists and the later Minucius Felix, Tertullian's *Apologeticum* was addressed to the representatives of the civil administration. One of its not unimportant arguments is the appeal to the public beneficence of Christianity, where the category of *religio* re-appears as an instrument of fundamental understanding in the context of Latin culture and the institutional structures of the Empire.[61] It is important to recall that when inspecting the structure of the *Apologeticum*, it is precisely its central chapters (*Ap.* 17–21) containing the core of the Christian message of one God, his communication, and Christ's mediatory role, where Tertullian presents the main substance of *religio christiana*. He proposes it to recipients who do not yet share the horizon of his Christian faith, both those who come from the world of the Jewish faith, as well as those grounded in traditional Roman piety. This significance is pointed out by the declaration immediately preceding these central chapters, in which Tertullian announces that he is about to provide *demonstratio religionis nostrae*.[62] Thus in the *Apologeticum* the real content of this *demonstratio* and the main content of the term *religio* applied to Christianity becomes the theological-Christological exposition of the fundamental contents of Christian doctrine, subsequently extended to the aspect of the relationship of the Church to society. The public beneficence of Christianity cannot therefore be reduced to the commendable ethics of Christians, since that is grounded in fundamental theological meanings. But Christianity is not presented merely as perfect philosophy, i.e., a system of notions of the gods, since it is precisely the interconnectedness of these two spheres (notions of gods and appropriate lifestyle with a claim to truth) what captures the specificity of Christianity as a religion.

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[60] Cf. *Ap.* 50.

[61] Also rarely *curia* (*Ap.* 39).

[62] *Ap.* 16,14.

Where Tertullian strives to express the social aspect of Christianity, its character of a specific community of persons (which in other works he does not hesitate to call the Church) and its contribution to Roman society, his usage oscillates between the terms *secta* and *religio*, neither of which he considers fully accurate in its original (Roman) meaning. This gradual shift in occurrence and identification of Christianity with the category of *religio* can also be observed in his other works, especially where Christianity is confronted with the Roman conception of religion as worship. Surprisingly, the term *religio* is used to delimit Christianity against traditional Roman religion, where religion was understood as due tribute paid to the gods through the ritual acts established and sustained by the tradition and governed by Roman laws and regulations. Tertullian turned the traditional Roman charges of irreverence and impiety raised against Christians bottom up: not the traditional Roman religiosity, but Christianity is *religio*, even in the sense of the classical Roman conception of religion. Christianity is the true reverence for God and devotion, with means of expressions that adequately express this inner attitude.[63]

I view Tertullian's search for Christian identity as an entirely original synthesis: in contrast to the Roman understanding of the quest for the gods, he seeks to present Christianity as more than just one other original philosophical movement; he incorporates knowledge in one coherent whole with individual and social ethics. At the same time he defines his position with respect to traditional Roman worship: he acknowledges the importance of internal attitude of respect for the deity, but suppresses the element of external cultic expression. According to Tertullian the Christians' attitude of reverence for God is primarily grounded in their belief that they are "witnesses to the truth" which God has revealed of himself to man in Christ. God has offered this truth about himself to the Jews and to the Gentiles. Christianity in the sense of worship thus elaborates on the doctrinal aspect, which in

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[63] To what extent Tertullian's passage on the proper worship in *Ap.* 39 can be identified with structured ritual behaviour remains an open question. Not all scholars construe the description of the Christian assembly as depicting a Eucharistic celebration. In Tertullian research *Ap.* 39 has been the subject of much debate, cf. Renato Uglione. Corpus sumus. In: *Tertulliano. Teologo e scrittore*. Brescia: Morcelliana 2002, pp. 35–46; F. X. Funk. La question de l'agape – un dernier mot. *Revue d'histoire ecclèsiastique* 7 (1906), pp. 5–15; Idem. Tertullien et l'agape. *Revue d'histoire ecclèsiastique* 5 (1904), pp. 5–15; David Rankin. *Tertullián a církev* [*Tertullian and the Church*]. Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury 2002, pp. 62f. and 72f.

the Roman world traditionally belonged to the sphere of philosophical questioning (*theologia naturalis*). The basic expression of reverence for God in Tertullian's *Apologeticum* thus seems to be the ethical dimension of Christianity, or the *disciplina caritatis* category. In this sense, I believe, Tertullian adopts and reassigns the original Roman category of *religio* and introduces it to Christianity as one of the basic general categories expressing the identity of the faithful in Christ.

On the example of a particular author of the second Christian century we have attempted to examine the extent to which theology and faith are capable of inculturation in a given society, the conditions under which this occurs, and methods that can be used. The apologies of the second century AD are a form of mediating the Christian message, combining the endeavour to adequately define and preserve one's own religious identity and at the same time to make it accessible to recipients of various contemporary cultural environments. Such effort at self-understanding and enhancing one's own religious identity and at the same time passing the message on to specific recipients usually runs certain risks. When striving for empathy with a different mentality we always run the risk of reducing the view of reality we have acquired and recognized as corresponding to the truth to arguments accessible to the other or generally in some sense consonant with him. We can allow ourselves to be constrained by a "foreign" logic and find ourselves in the domain of the unacceptable (cf. the discussions of Church Fathers concerning the Middle Platonic category of Logos). However, the logic of the mystery of the Incarnation requires that we, like the ecclesiastic writers of the first centuries, dare to expose ourselves to this risk which dialogue with different cultural and religious traditions brings. Perhaps we could, as boldly as Tertullian and many others, allow ourselves to refine our language and the cultural forms of faith in encounters with specific living traditions of the contemporary pluralistic world and search for adequate ways of keeping alive that fundamental aspect of our inherited Christian identity – the universality of God's address to man embracing people of all cultures and religious traditions.

Katolická teologická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy
Thákurova 3
160 00 Praha 6 – Dejvice
e-mail: karmelitky@seznam.cz

ABSTRAKT

DENISA ČERVENKOVÁ
De religione: **Jak se křesťanství stalo náboženstvím**

Předkládaná interdisciplinární studie se v návaznosti na poznatky současného teologického a religionistického bádání snaží vystopovat proces převzetí původně římské kategorie „náboženství" pro označení křesťanství. V textu se připomíná zejm. sociopolitická role *religio* v antické kultuře a proměny, jimiž procházel vztah antické společnosti a křesťanského společenství v prvních staletích po Kristu, zejm. první vstřícné pokusy o dorozumění křesťanů s pozdněantickou latinskou kulturou a správními strukturami Římské říše. První stopy adaptace zmíněné kategorie se objevily u Tertuliána, jehož pojetí zřejmě zásadně ovlivnilo další generace křesťanů, proto je v druhé části studie věnována značná pozornost jeho spisům. Právě zde se poprvé setkáváme se zdůvodněným užitím kategorie „náboženství" v souvislosti s křesťanskou tradicí, jako s výrazem zahrnujícím jak naukově-filozofický, tak etický a liturgický aspekt křesťanství. Analýza textu Tertuliánova *Apologetika* ukazuje, jak konkrétně právě apologie druhého století po Kristu zprostředkovávají křesťanské poselství příkladnou a velmi propracovanou formou, která v sobě spojuje jak úsilí o adekvátní definici a uchování vlastní náboženské identity, tak snahu o jeho zpřístupnění adresátům různých soudobých kulturních prostředí.

Klíčová slova
raná latinská teologie, Tertulián, Apologeticum, religio, náboženská identita, inkulturace křesťanství