Baptism and Original Sin in the Early Church:

Contributions of Tertullian

By

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Summary

This study examines the baptismal practices of the early Christian community using Tertullian's ethical text on baptism in relation to his other writings to dialogue with the Roman Catholic understanding of baptism, original sin and grace. Tertullian referring to the sacramental form of baptism that is done with water, held that baptism is indispensable for salvation because it imparts the grace that washes away original sin and makes someone a Christian; and capable of attaining a matured Christian life.

At the moment, the Roman Catholic Church does not confer baptism of water on polygamists, and subsequently fails to admit them to her sacramental life because of their polygamous relations. This raises a question regarding the salvation of these polygamous families. How do they receive baptismal grace and become part of the church?

This study argues that church and baptism were inseparable right from the beginning of Christianity in the New Testament. People became members of the church by the fact of their baptism. This study does a hermeneutical retrieval of the early church's teaching on baptism and original sin in the light of Tertullian as the pillar of western theology. The study concludes by invoking pastoral consideration to baptize polygamous families (husband and wives) who married before converting to the faith. They are not to enter into any new marriage after baptism since they have received Christ in their state. "Go and sin no more," says Christ.

Key Terms

Baptism

Baptismal Grace

Original Sin

Salvation

Tertulliam

Early Church

Polygamy

African Church

African Catholicism

Roman Catholic Church

Declaration

I declare that the Master's thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree of Master of Art

(Theology) in Church History and Polity, is my own work and has not been submitted by

me for any degree at another university.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my deceased parents, who are my source of inspiration,

Peter Asue Annum (my father)

Felicia Mbatomun Asue (my mother)

Table of Contents

Chapter Two: Tertullian on Original Sin and Baptismal Grace

Chapter Three: Historical Development of the Doctrine

Chapter Four: Contemporary Roman Catholic Position

Chapter One: General Introduction

This chapter introduces baptism and original sin in the early church and gives an overview of the thesis. It lays out the research problem, hypothesis, clarifies some basic terms in the work, and examines the importance of this work to Christian understanding of baptism in Africa. This chapter further analyses Tertullian's contributions as an African theologian and reviews related relevant literature for the study.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to examine Tertullian's ethical text on baptism in relation to his other writings that inform the Roman Catholic understanding of baptism, original sin and grace. Tertullian taught that baptism is indispensable for salvation because it imparts the grace that washes away our original sin and makes us capable of attaining a matured Christian life. By baptism, Tertullian was referring to the sacramental form of baptism that is done with water. From Tertullian, we observe that baptism by water was the acceptable practice in the early church. Today, there are lots of converts in Africa whom the Roman Catholic Church does not confer the baptism of water and subsequently fails to admit them to her sacramental life because of their polygamous relations. This raises a question regarding the salvation of these polygamous families whom the church does not admit to the sacramental baptism. How do they receive baptismal grace and become part of the church? Added to this is the difficulty of presenting the concepts of grace and original sin in an African context. "The concepts of grace and Original Sin which constitute a vital element in this catechesis are not easy to understand. What does the Original Sin mean to an African?"(Wegh 1997:47).

1.2 Statement of Sub-Problems

Today, there is also an ongoing debate within the Roman Catholic Church regarding the imparting of the Holy Spirit at baptism. One view looks upon baptism as "a special grace, a new imparting of valid supposition that there can be multiple impartings of the Spirit" (McDonnell 1988:671). Another view "relates baptism to water baptism or to the rites of initiation (water baptism, confirmation, Eucharist)" (McDonnell 1988:671). This thesis sides with the multiple impartings of the Spirit. While admitting that the Holy Spirit comes to us at various times and in different ways, this study recognizes that baptism is one of the sacraments and, sacraments are special points of contact with God. Simply put, sacraments are signs; symbolic actions telling us of Christ's presence. "Symbolizing is the ability to be known: the power to self-exteriorize, or the self-expression based on an inward self-possession" (Chidili 1997:95). In this trajectory, an African understanding could view the sacraments as 'rites of passage' in the African worldview. The rites of passages are symbolic actions effecting the growth and full integration of an individual into an African society therefore, the rites are meant for everyone. If baptism forms the rites of Christian initiation, as a moment of imparting the Spirit, an African polygamist should not be excluded. This thesis therefore, examines the early church's baptismal practice especially as it affects polygamists.

1.3 Hypothesis

This is a historiography that sketches Tertullian's theology of baptism, Roman Catholic teaching on original sin, baptism and the biblical-patristic views. Of special interest in this thesis is how Tertullian's theology implicates how an African understands the sacrament of baptism. The thesis retrieves some aspects of Tertullian's teaching to enrich Roman Catholic understanding of sacramental baptism

in the Roman Catholic Church in Africa. Underlying this study is the understanding that "salvation is grace" (Haight, 1979:164). Of much importance for this study is the hypothesis that the congregation understood the sacrament and were in fact part of it.

1.4 Scope and Limitation

Tertullian as a second century church father represents the understanding of the early church. So, this thesis is based on his writing, *On Baptism* which is "the only surviving ante-Nicene treatise devoted solely to baptism" (Lewis 1983:1). Evidence from Tertullian suggests, that "[b]aptism in the Spirit has not been identified in patristic texts with any series of acts (usually including imposition of hands, praying for the descent of the Spirit, and an expectation that charisms will be imparted)" (McDonnell 1988:673). In that case, sacramental baptism was the acceptable format in the early church and those who repented were baptized accordingly. The question goes, "can [an African] man and all his wives be accepted to the sacraments, if they undergo the catechumenate, and participate in church activities?" (Wegh 1994:111).

1.5 Assumptions

Tertullian was highly concerned with sanctification of a person (Bray 1979:64). As Tertullian's major preoccupation, he believed sanctification to be the path by which one gains a more perfect knowledge of God. Pentecost is now a decisive moment in the sanctification of a Christian. The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost inaugurated a new era that makes it possible for a Christian to be sanctified by the power of the Paraclete who dwells in the hearts of believers (*De Mono* 3). For Tertullian then, sanctification essentially means the restoration of a Christian believer who is eventually renewed and led back to life as it was before the Fall (*De Mono* 17). The interplay of original sin and baptism remind us of the reality of sin and the presence of God's redemption. Christ as the second Adam came to restore creation to

3

its antelapsarian innocence. Following the ascension of Christ into heaven, the task of renewal and restoration has been entrusted to the Holy Spirit who came to the church at Pentecost in accordance with Christ's promise (Bray 1979:64). The conferring of baptism brings the effects of the Holy Spirit on Christians as seen in the early church of the New Testament times.

1.6 Importance of the Study

Baptism is central to the Christian life. In its early centuries of existence, the church recognized baptism as a sacrament that washed away all pre-baptismal sins. This gave rise to the practice of postponing baptism and having it at one's deathbed so as not to commit post-baptismal sins which were dealt with through rigorous penance. In studying Tertullian's understanding of baptism, three things stand out:

First, the early church understood baptism as the initiation rite into the community of faith. This is why even infants were also baptized. Tertullian explicitly mentions this practice in his work (Tertullian, *On Baptism* 18).

Second, the early church understood original sin as fall from grace and believed that baptism washes away the stain of original sin. This implies that all Christian believers should be included in the fold. Salvation is grace.

Third, the early church understood baptismal rite as actually imparting grace and conveying something spiritual in the life of a Christian. Therefore, baptism is necessary for salvation and for everyone (Tertullian, *On Baptism* 11*).*

1.7 Clarification of Terms

Here, this study identifies and defines some of the terms which will be used in this study which are important to understanding the scope of the work. Three key concepts are explained in this section namely, Original Sin, Baptism, and Baptismal Grace.

4

1.7.1 Original Sin

According to the Catholic Church, original sin is the general condition of sinfulness that human beings are born into, which is different from their actual sins. Though there is no "original guilt," no personal fault from Adam and Eve's particular sin, it nevertheless weighs in on us. Human nature is now deprived of original holiness and justice, weakened in its powers to resist evil is inclined to sin (this inclination is called "concupiscence") (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* nos. 416-418). The Catechism of the Catholic Church further explains that in "yielding to the tempter, Adam and Eve committed a personal sin, but this sin affected the human nature that they would then transmit in a fallen state … original sin is called 'sin' only in an analogical sense: it is a sin 'contracted' and Not 'committed' - a state and not an act" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 404).

1.7.2 Baptism

Baptism is the sacrament that washes away our sins, makes us children of God and members of the church. The Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it this way: "Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit *(vitae spiritualis ianua)*, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons [and daughters] of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: 'Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word' " (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no.1213). Tertullian had the same understanding of baptism. According to Tertullian, "Baptism itself is a corporal act by which we are plunged into the water, while its effect is spiritual, in that we are freed from our sins" (Tertullian, *On Baptism* 7). Thus the early church fathers put it in the Nicene Creed

(381 CE) that, "We believe in one baptism for the forgiveness of sins." This is the working definition of baptism that this thesis follows.

1.7.3 Baptismal Grace

Grace is God's favor which is given to us freely and underserved to respond to divine call to become God's children, adoptive sons and daughters, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 1996). Original sin has deprived humanity of original holiness and perfect charity which the sacrament of baptism imparts in our souls. Baptism confers on us sanctifying grace which every baptized Christian receives according to the person's disposition and cooperation (Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Cannon 7). And these graces grant remission of temporal punishment to a baptized Christian. Thus the Council of Trent teaches: "There is no cause of damnation in those who have been truly buried with Christ by baptism . . . Nothing whatever will delay their entrance into heaven" (Council of Trent, Fifth Session).

1.8 Review of Related Literature

Baptism is the basic sacrament of the Christian faith and it makes individual members of the faith. The problem of baptizing polygamists who have embraced the Christian faith in the Catholic tradition has increased as some authors have demonstrated in their articles and books. This literature review seeks to examine developments in the thoughts of some authors which are currently important to the topic of baptism and original sin in the light of Tertullian's understanding as the pillar of western theology. This literature review explores the topic under consideration from three aspects.

6

1.8.1 The World that Made Tertullian and His Theology

A large number of the works on Tertullian and his background which give us a hint to his world will be studied here, such as Barnes (1985), *Tertullian: a historical and literary study*; Dunn (2004), *Tertullian;* McDonnell (1988), "Communion ecclesiology and baptism in the spirit: Tertullian and the early church," in *Theological Studies*; Sider (1990), "Tertullian," in *Encyclopedia of early Christianity*, edited by Ferguson; Schaff (1989), *History of the Christian church* Vol. 3, Jewett, *Infant baptism and the covenant of grace;* Lewis (1983), "Baptismal practices of the second and third century church," in *Restoration Quarterly,* and other similar texts.

Tertullian as the first African church theologian and the father of the Latin Church "belonged to an elite in terms of his education." (Dunn 2004:5). However, his legal knowledge is questioned by scholars recently (Barnes 1971, Dunn 2004:3-4) but that does not question the fact or any evidence that his theology and knowledge of the early church is reliable. Tertullian is only condemned for his association with the Montanists (Schaff 1989:969, Sider 1990:883) and support for anti-intellectualism. Jewett (1978:21) argues in defense of Tertullian thus: "the noble African's reputation as a Christian and theologian scarcely needs defense against such beggarly invective."

1.8.2 The Early Church's Conception of Baptism and Its Ecclesiological Underpinnings

In this section, there is a review of Tertullian's main works on baptism and other theological works in/on the early church that have a direct bearing on the topic under discussion. Tertullian's texts, *On baptism; On repentance*; *To his wife*; Pelikan (1971), *The Christian tradition: a history of the development of doctrine: The emergence of the Catholic tradition (100-600)*, Bray (1979), *Holiness and the will of God. Perspectives on the theology of Tertullian;* Wainwright (2004), "Heresy then

7

and now: Reflections on a treatise of Tertullian," in *Pro Ecclesia*; Warfield (2003), *The works of B.B. Warfield: studies in Tertullian and Augustine*, and other related works that treat the early church's understanding of the sacrament in relation to the life of a converted polygamist will be studied.

Among the various fragments found on baptism in the early beginnings of the church, only Tertullian has a text exclusively devoted to baptism (Pelikan 1971:163). Pelikan observes that Tertullian's succinct take on baptism does not come directly from this text but rather from the treatise *Against Marcion*. Tertullian held that baptism imparted four gifts on a Christian: the remission of sins, deliverance from death, regeneration, and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit (Pelikan, 1971:163). Evidence from Tertullian reveals that baptism of every Christian including infants was a reality around 200 CE (Pelikan 1971:291), although Tertullian felt that baptism of infants could be delayed in some instances (Tertullian, *On Baptism* 18). That is not the focus of this study, but suffices it to note that it was the practice at that time.

1.8.3 The Development of Doctrine and Its Implication on African Catholicism

In this section, the review studies baptism in its historical and social context in works such as Moti (1984), "The early Jerusalem Christian community," a doctoral dissertation; Ferguson (2009), *Baptism in the early church: history, theology, and liturgy in the first five centuries;* Cramer, *Baptism and change in the early Middle Ages, c.200-c.1150;* Sundkler & Steed (2001), *A history of the church in Africa;* Waterworth (1995), *The Council of Trent: cannons and decrees*; Wiley (2002), *Original sin: origins, developments, contemporary meanings;* Pelikan (2003), *Credo: historical and theological guide to creeds and confessions of faith in the Christian tradition*; among other works.

The church and baptism were inseparable right from the beginning of Christianity in the New Testament. We become members of the church by the fact of our baptism. Tertullian "excoriate[s] those who called themselves Christians but who fell into mortal sin" (Aquilina 1994:89-90). To clarify the spirit of the time, Ferguson (2009) provides a detailed compendium of almost everything that is known about baptism and its associated rituals from the earliest church to it present form. Ferguson's extensive citations of both the primary and secondary sources makes his work an extremely valuable reference material in dialoguing with Tertullian's contemporaries regarding the historical development of the sacrament in Christian history. Ferguson's work complements an earlier work by Cramer (2003) who studies the medieval baptismal conceptions in the church. Through studies of the sermons and writings of Tertullian, Ambrose, Augustine, Bede, Abelard and others, of the practice of infant baptism, and of the art and architecture of the baptistery, Cramer underscores the importance of symbols in baptism.

1.9 Research Methodology

A research methodology spells out the direction of the research by specifically showing the procedures of a research. This section indicates that the work uses the hermeneutical approach and collects data from both primary and secondary sources.

1.9.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is undertaken within the framework of hermeneutics of historiography. "The method then is one of retrieval that both interprets the past history of the theology of [baptismal] grace from a contemporary point of view and fully allows contemporary [as it relates to the present day] affirmations to be informed by the Christian experience of the past" (Haight 1979:154). The study acknowledges the nature of baptismal grace, original sin, African polygamy and the Catholic

Church's response that is quite problematic to many African polygamists. This response has triple implications: soteriological, ecclesiological and pastoral.

1.9.2 Data Collection

This work uses both the primary and secondary research methods. The primary research is based in the works of Tertullian most especially the texts on baptism and sanctification. Worthy of note is that the primary research method of this study excludes empirical theological methods. The secondary research method of this study consists of a critical reading of related books and journals on church history and the Catholic Church's understanding of the sacrament of baptism, original sin and grace down through the ages.

1.10 Chapter Outline

Our inquiry opens with general introduction to the work. Here, we have discussed the ambient on which this work rotates. Included here is the review of relevant literatures that have made significant contributions to this field under study. This chapter can rightly be called the framework of the thesis.

Chapter two introduces us to Tertullian's thoughts on original sin and baptismal grace. This chapter explores the life and works of Tertullian. Of great significance is the historiography of Tertullian's contribution to the doctrine of original sin and baptism.

Chapter three examines the historical development of the doctrine of original sin and baptism. This chapter briefly reviews the development of baptismal doctrine prior to Tertullian. It includes a historiography of the contemporaries of Tertullian on this subject matter. The dialogue extends to the Middles Ages, and the reformers up to the Council of Trent.

Chapter four raises the issues involves in contemporary Roman Catholic position on the themes of original sin and baptismal grace. This chapter also presents an interaction between Tertullian's understanding and the Catholic position today. It deals with the Catholic Church's understanding of original sin particularly from scriptures and the theory of evolution.

Chapter five attempts understanding the dilemma of an African Catholic Polygamist in the face of current baptismal practices in the Roman Catholic Church and draws insights from Tertullian's take on this subject matter. This chapter engages the Catholic tradition, carefully analysing the connections and difficult areas in the tradition. This chapter while engaging the tradition it examines the relevant Christian resources as they affect baptismal practices in Africa. What are the emerging challenges in relation to the Catholic Church in Africa?

The study closes with a general conclusion. There will be a synthesis of the discussions with the presentation of a vision of how an African polygamist can experience baptismal grace in the Catholic Church. The general conclusion raises suggestions on how to go about this.

Chapter Two: Tertullian on Original Sin and Baptismal Grace

2.0 Introduction

Tertullian was a very versatile theologian who contributed much to the formation of Christian doctrines in the early church. In fact, "Tertullian's theology incorporates many topics. While he does not provide full doctrinal statement, he does provide tidbits essential to the development of orthodox theology" (Gift 2011:64). It is against this background that this chapter explores the life and works of Tertullian in relation to his take on original sin and baptism.

2.1 Retrieving Tertullian

Tertullian was born around 160 CE to pagan parents in the North African city of Carthage that was part of the Roman empire (Sundkler & Steed 2001:22). "His father was a centurion of the proconsular cohort. Both of his parents were pagans" (Quasten 1964:246). He was educated in literature, rhetoric, Greek and later turned to law and practiced in the imperial capital. "Around 196 [CE] he was converted to Christianity, and we soon find him in Carthage publicly defending, propagating, and teaching the faith" (Wainwright 2004:216). Tertullian became a Christian "when he was in his late thirties" (Aquilina 2006:89). Like the apostle Paul, he brought his education and legal background to bear on the proclamation of the gospel that he became one of the most prolific writers in early Christianity. "Except for St. Augustine, Tertullian is the most important and original ecclesiastical author in Latin. With a profound knowledge of philosophy, law, Greek and Latin letters, Tertullian combines inexhaustible vigor, burning rhetoric, and biting satire" (Quasten 1964:247). He is considered a father of the Latin Church for tirelessly answering "civil charges and religious objections against Christianity; he expounded doctrine in

12

the face of error; and he composed moral and practical treatises of advice to his fellow believers" (Wainwright 2004:216).

Tertullian was inspired to the Christian faith through the courage of the martyrs who freely gave up their lives for the faith (Aquilina 2006:89). "As he wrote in his *Apology…* the blood of the martyrs is the seed of new conversions" (Beatrice 1983:141). This conversion background contributed to Tertullian's intransigent rigorism which led him to assume extreme positions that finally led to his leaving Catholicism for Montanism, a heretical sect. Montanism was a

> Charismatic-prophetic movement, which was started by Montanus in
> Phrygia (a region of Asia Minor), spread rapidly in all the Christian
> communities of the time and soon reached Carthage. The propagators
> of this movement, among whom were many women endowed with a
> prophetic spirit, preached absolute chastity and the rejection of the
> world in view of its imminent end which was to accompany the advent
> of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete (Beatrice 1983:141).

Tertulian's conversion to Montanism shifted him away from orthodoxy and altered his views on so many earlier convictions. He no longer believed the church had powers to remit mortal sins but only venial sins. Remission of mortal sins was reserved to "the inscrutable grace of God and by the shedding of blood in the supreme witness of martyrdom" (Beatrice 1983:142). He rejected second marriages after the death of a spouse. He condemned those who ran for safety in the face of martyrdom and opposed their admittance into the Christian community viewing their lives as unworthy Christian weakness. "In time, Tertullian came to invent a distinction between the 'spiritual church' and the 'church of a bunch of bishops.' …though, ultimately, he would find even … [the Montanists] unsatisfactory" (Aquilina

2006:90). He opposed the right of women to baptize. "In the Montanist movement women could be bishops and presbyters - offices which carried the right to baptize. These practices Tertullian would not permit" (Lewis 1983:12). He eventually broke up with them and founded a more rigorist sect, the Tertullianists who survived up to the time of Augustine (Beatrice 1983:143, Aquilina 2006:90). Dunn (2004:6-7) citing Barnes (1985:258-9) questions this position supporting the notion that there were variant Christian movements within the early Christian community of Carthage of which the Montanists were one among the many. So Tertullian only aligned himself with a rigorous movement within Christianity and "no group actually had been declared schismatic" (Dunn 2004:7).

Quasten (1964) citing Jerome (*De vir. Ill.* 53) says that Tertullian became a priest. "He never refers to his clerical status, but his unique position and his preponderant role of teacher could hardly be explained had he remained a layman" (Quaten 246-247). Later scholars like Dunn (2005) contest Tertullian's ordination saying that he was married and not an ordained minister, and that he believed in the common priesthood of all Christian believers. He wrote two books titled, *To His Wife* that tell us something about his marital relationship. Though he had strict rules regarding marriage but once confessed to adultery (*On the Resurrection of the Dead* 59.3). There is strong presumption that both Tertullian and his wife were Christians and in the service of the Lord (Dunn 2004:5).

Tertullian is "the first in the line of great theologians in North Africa" (Sundkler & Steed 2001:22) and the early church. Since the earliest writing on baptism come from Tertullian, it is most appropriate to use him for a hermeneutics of retrieval. By hermeneutics of retrieval, I mean to bring the past to dialogue with the contemporary times with the aim of providing newer theological insights to explore

14

ways of handling a pastoral dilemma. Here I interpret the past history of the theology of baptismal grace as understood by Tertullian and the early Church from a contemporary point of view and at the same time, allow contemporary understandings to be informed by the teachings of the past.

2.2 His Writings: Theology Master

As the father of western theology, Tertullian's writings are marked by his period as a Catholic and later by his period as a Montanist. Before his conversion to Montanism, Tertullian was both apologetic and polemical in favor of orthodoxy but later inclined to Montanism. This does not suggest that "his later works are to be treated with suspicion as heretical" (Dunn 2004:9). Thus Dunn (2004) concludes that Tertullian's works may be unusual and extreme but not unorthodox nor heretical. At all times Tertullian was embroiled in controversy, and was trying to refute error and at the same time find solution to the dilemma concerning Christian teaching.

The works of Tertullian are difficult to classify but can be divided into three categories namely, apologetic, dogmatic, and ascetic writings. On the whole they are polemical in content (Dirksen 1959:65; Quasten 1964:247). His apologetic works are *Apologetic* (Apology)*, Ad nationes* (To the Nations)*, De testimonio animae* (On the Testimony of the Soul)*, Ad scapulam* (To Scapula --an open letter to a proconsul), and *Adv. Judaeos* (Against Jews)*. The dogmatic writings are: *De praescriptione haerecticorum, Against Marcion, Against Hermogenes, Against the Valentinians, Scorpiace* (About Scorpions)*, On the flesh of Christ, On the resurrection of the body, Against Praxeas, On baptism, On the soul.* Tertullian has seventeen works on asceticism and Christian living out of which seven were written as a Catholic and the rest as a Montanist. Those written while still in good terms with the Catholic Church are: *To the martyrs, The shows, On prayer, On patience, On repentance, On the dress*

15

Tertullian's work *Against Marcion* is the most valuable source that tells us

fairly and precisely what Marcion's heresy means (Beatrice 1983:143). "*Adversus*

Marcionem is by far the longest of Tertullian's works and one of those 'separate

treatises' against certain heresies which he promised at the end of his *De*

praescriptione. It is of great importance because it forms the main source for our

knowledge of the heresy of Marcion" (Quasten 1964:273). The treatise *Against*

Marcion consists of five books. Book one refutes the dualism that Marcion argued

that it exists between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New

Testament by insisting on the monotheistic nature of God. Book two argues against

Marcion's Gnosticism tendencies of equating the world with evil, thus believing that

"the creator of this world was an evil 'demiurge'" (Aquilina 1999:40). To the

contrary, Tertullian taught that "the Maker of the world is identical with the good

God" (Quasten 1964:273). Book three focuses on Christology. Marcion denied the

incarnation claiming that the Christ promised in the Old Dispensation was yet to

come. Against Marcion Tertullian remarked: "All these tricks about a putative

corporeality Marcion has adopted lest the truth of Christ's birth should be argued

from the reality of his human nature, and thus Christ should be vindicated as the work

of the Creator [Demiurge] and be shown to have human flesh even as he had human

birth" (*Against Marcion* 3). Books four and five critically examine the New

Testament of Marcion, noting the deficiencies of his arguments, and then turn

Marcion's arguments on his head by using his very text to refute his heretical claims

and prove that there is in fact, no contradiction between the Old and the New Testaments (Quasten 1964:274).

Tertullian was the first to use the "Latin word *Tinitas* (Trinity) to describe God" (Aquilina 2006:89), and this remains the most important aspect of his doctrinal formulation. Prior to the Council of Nicene, Tertullian had already made it clear that the Son is distinct from the Father, and the Spirit from both the Father and the Son (*Against Praxeas* 25). "The concepts and technical terminology which he expounded in his doctrinal treatises exercise a great influence on subsequent authors. The formula which defined the Trinity as one substance in three persons represented a decisive acquisition" (Beatrice 1983:143). By this Tertullian opposed Praxeas who insisted on the unity of the governing power in one God without distinction of any single person. This is technically called *monarchia* from which comes the name monarchy denoting absolute single power as opposed to *oikonomia,* which is "the salvific plan in which each person of the Trinity carries out his specific role" (Beatrice 1983:143). This heresy came to be known as *Monarchianism,* and popularly called modalism for maintaining that the reality of the persons of the trinity was only modes of the one divinity. Another variation of this heresy is called *patripassionism* in as much as it holds that the Father is only identical with the Son on the cross. Tertullian taught that there is a distinction of persons and personalities within the unity of the trinity. In his words: "These three are one substance, not one person; and it is said, 'I and my Father are one' in respect not of the singularity of number but the unity of the substance" (*Against Praxeas* 9). As regards the question whether the Son was coeternal with the Father, many believe that Tertullian did not teach that. "Unaware of later controversies, Tertullian stated that the Father is the whole substance, whereas the Son is derived and [an] inferior portion of the whole (*Against Praxeas* 9)" (Dunn

17

2004:36). From this understanding of the trinity also flows Tertullian's Christology that Jesus is one person in whom are conjoined two substances.

Tertullian clearly upheld traducianism, which means the soul was not preexistent, but rather in every person, the new soul proceeds equally with the body from the parents, and not created later and associated with the body (*On the Soul* 28). The soul is a distinct entity and has a certain corporeity and as such it may be tormented in Hell (*On the Soul* 58). The soul is tainted by sin by its origin that proceeds from the human parents (*On the Soul* 39). In each human being through traducianism the soul is enslaved to Satan though with some seeds of good, which are lifted by baptism as an individual renounces Satan (*On the Soul* 41).

A brief survey of Tertullian shows his flair for theological study. Though there has been a lot of judgment regarding the person of Tertullian, it is high time we understood him within his context. The basic thrust of his theology was to repudiate wrong teaching, "Tertullian was not a systematic theologian. If anything, he was an occasional or polemical one, in the sense that he wrote to correct erroneous opinions, not to offer a thorough exposition of a topic" (Dunn 2004:35). Since the main thesis of this work is baptism, the next section of the work highlights the main teachings of Tertullian on baptism.

2.3 On Original Sin and Baptism

Tertullian's teaching on baptism can be summarized in the following three points:

1. *Baptism and salvation*. Tertullian no doubt taught that baptism was necessary for salvation (*On Baptism* 12). He accepted that humanity is a fallen creature as a result of the sin of Adam and Eve and is in need of repentance. Baptism is the path toward restoring the original human state of grace therefore it is necessary for everybody.

18

Though the human soul is depraved by original sin, baptismal grace brings about a spiritual birth that grants a spiritual regeneration in a person (*On the Testimony of the Soul* 41). Tertullian puts it succinctly:

> Every soul, then, by reason of its birth, has its nature in Adam until it is born again in Christ; moreover, it is unclean all the while that it remains without this regeneration; and because unclean, it is actively sinful, and suffuses even the flesh (by reason of their conjunction) with its own shame (*On the Testimony of the Soul* 40).

Is that the reason why Jesus was baptized? To this question, Tertullian says, when Christ took human form, he received baptism, though repentance was not necessary on his part. Tertullian objected to the claim that the apostles followed Christ without baptism. "How, in accordance with that prescript, salvation is attainable by the apostles, whom - Paul excepted - we do not find baptized in the Lord?" (*On Baptism* 7). Tertullian disputing this cites John 13: 9-10 saying that Jesus for instance, acknowledges Peter's baptism: "which, of course, He would not have said at all to one *not* baptized" (*On Baptism* 7). The apostles had a tremendous faith to abandon everything and follow Christ - that which evokes divine graces. Tertullian continues that, the New Testament in fulfilling the Old Testament inaugurates a new era whereby "salvation by means of bare faith" (*On Baptism* 8) has already been amplified with the addition of "the sealing act of baptism"(*On Baptism* 13). In objecting to the teaching of salvation without baptism, Tertullian says that although Old Testament figures like Abraham pleased God without being baptized, "old things must give place to new, and baptism is now a law"(*On Baptism* 13). Baptism though done on the body of a person has spiritual effects.

2. *Outward sign of inward grace*. The principal elements of baptism are water and oil of Chrism. Was water not "in some way the regulating powers by which the disposition of the world thencefoward was constituted by God?"(*On Baptism* 3). Tertullian taught that water is a vehicle of divine operation and as such is found in all living elements (*On Baptism* 3). So, water is "in a manner endued with medicinal virtue" (*On Baptism* 3). With the background of Genesis 1:6-8, Tertullian argues that the Spirit of God which hovered over the waters of creation still hovers over the waters of baptism. Using logic, Tertullian held that, "an underlying material substance … catch[es] the quality of that which overhangs it…" (*On Baptism* 4). In this way, the Spirit sanctifies the waters of baptism, which is used to wash away our sins, defied "as it were by dirt, we should be washed from those stains in waters" (*On Baptism* 4). After the washing with water which Tertullian calls "bath," the newly baptized are anointed with the oil of Chrism in the manner of Old Testament priests, prophets and kings (*On Baptism* 7) which finds fulfillment in the life of Christ (Luke 4:18). The oil of Chrism and waters of baptism thus become outward signs of inward grace. This is claimed with baptismal rite.

3. *Baptismal rite* (the Trinitarian formula and imposition of hands). There was a special rite for baptism. As from biblical to post biblical times the Trinitarian formula was used for baptism. We have it from Tertullian that, "through benediction, we have the same (three) as witnesses of our faith whom we have as sureties" (*On Baptism* 6). Tertullian further recognizes the imposition of hands in baptism for the invocation of the Holy Spirit. He acknowledged that through prayers of blessings, the Holy Spirit comes upon the waters of baptism, and by laying on of hands on the head of the newly baptized, we "animate … [the] union [of the Spirit] into the one body" (*On Baptism* 8) Using a Genesis story as an example, Tertullian described Jacob blessing his

grandsons born of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh by this means. He cited other scriptural passages and accepted that the Old Testament finds fulfillment in the New Testament. Of Christ Luke says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me…" (Luke 4:18).

Tertullian held "[t]hat *baptismal* washing is a sealing of faith, which faith is begun and is commended by faith of repentance" (*On Repentance* 6). Applying this to an African polygamist as part of the central thesis of this work, three things can be said in relation to a converted polygamist. First, let the faith of the repentant polygamist be sealed by baptism of water. Evidence from Tertullian, as early as the second century shows two types of baptism in the early church - baptism by water and baptism by blood (*On Baptism* 16). One was either in or out of the church. Up to "the second century, baptism was a *sine qua non* of being a Christian" (Lewis 1983:1). This study sees the developments since the second century as positive developments aimed at addressing the gap which excluded many people from becoming Christians. The exclusion of the African polygamists from sacramental baptism tends to foster this exclusion. Second, the baptismal washing Tertullian is alluding to here is the baptism by water. So, instead of telling the repented African polygamist to receive baptism of desire, let the polygamist be given baptism of water. Africa is the land of symbols. Baptism is an outward sign of an inward grace. The baptismal elements of water and oil of Chrism represent what they signify. "The symbolic order in Africa concerns the whole drama of existence that expresses the relationships between human beings and the invisible" (Ela 1993:35). There is deep symbolism in the initiation ritual in Africa. Baptism is the sacrament of Christian initiation into the church. For Africans, an "[i]nitiation ritual is … a decisive experience bringing about a new state of being, a mode of existence in the world with reference to the ancestors

[the invisible world] …" (*On Baptism* xvi). Third, it seems there has always been a problem of marriage and Christian neophytes in the church. Tertullian commenting on the case of a heathen whose wife is converted after marriage with him says,

> If, then, a marriage of this kind (contracted *before* conversion) stands
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> ratified before God, why should not (one contracted after conversion)
>
> too go prosperously forward, so as not to be thus harassed by
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> pressures, and straits, and hindrances, and defilements, having already
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> (as it has) the partial sanction of divine grace? (*To His Wife* Bk 2,
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> 7:47).

Here we see patience and pastoral restrain exercised in condemning outright those marital unions that were not according to the mind of the church. "Tertullian speaks of God's forgiveness even when human means of penance are of no avail" (Visptzy, 1990:33). In other words, the grace of Christ abides with us even in sin. God still loves the sinner and looks at the quality of our efforts towards sincere repentance and not just on the physical appearance of the act of penance. God wants to sanctify us.

2.4 Baptism and Sanctification

By way of preliminary observation, suffice it to mention that Tertullian's association with the Montanists tells something about his conceptual view of the Holy Spirit and its place in the church. The controversy surrounding the legitimacy of the Montanists aside, as to whether they were heretics or schismatics, the fact is that their teaching was repudiated both at Rome and in Asia Minor.

> Why then did Tertullian approve of the Montanists when he was so
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> disparaging of the other sectarian movements current in his day? The
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> simplest answer, and the one most frequently put forward, is that he
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> was a convert to the sect. This view may be traced back to Jerome and

22

Augustine, and both Neander and Harnack made it a point of central importance. To men of pietistic leanings, the Montanists seemed to be the last of the true, charismatic Christians found in the New Testament, who by this time were being stamped out by an increasingly rigid, ritualistic Catholicism (Bray 1979:55).

John Wesley canvassed this view and it has been passed on to modern Pentecostals but it is in contention today. One cannot say with certainty that Montanism was the last survival of primitive Christianity (Bary 1975:55). Tertullian was most probably attracted to Montanism not just simply out of their sheer pietism nor rigorism but by an ardent desire to do the Will of God as found in Scripture believing strongly that the Will of God is our sanctification (*On Exhortation to Chastity* 1-3).

Tertullian believed that as God, the Holy Spirit is everywhere; but as the dispenser of grace, it is especially present in the church and in the souls of the just. It began to dwell in the church on Pentecost when it came down on the apostles in tongues of fire. It will dwell in the church until the end of time. The dwelling of the Spirit enables the church to teach, sanctify and rule the faithful in the name of Christ. The soul is present in the body and all its parts, giving life to all and enabling the whole body to act and grow and become perfect. So too, the Holy Spirit lives and acts in the church and its members. The Holy Spirit produces its countless effects on the soul: enlightenment, strength, consolation, purification and sanctification of the soul. In this way the Holy Spirit effects salvation by dwelling in the church as the source of its life and sanctifies souls through the gift of grace by the presence of the Holy Spirit in individual souls (Tertullian, *De Mono*. 3).

For Tertullian, the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost establishes the continuity of Christ's redemptive work with the Law of Moses and its covenant.

"Through Moses God had revealed the Divine Law which explained the nature and extent of the holiness he required. In its pure form, however, the Law could not be kept without the aid of the Holy Spirit" (Bray 1979:64). Pentecost was the fiftieth day after the glorious resurrection of the savior from the grave. It was the feast of the second importance of the great Jewish feasts. The Old Testament says, it was "the feast of harvest of the first fruits" (Exodus 23:16), "the feast of weeks" (Exodus 34:22), and "the day of first fruits" (Numbers 28:26). It was also the closing festival. Being the closing of the harvest and of the paschal season it fell on the fiftieth day from the day after the Sabbath of the Passover (Leviticus 23:11). For Christians, Pentecost becomes a great feast of thanksgiving, for on that day the Holy Spirit gathered a great harvest of souls, who as the first fruits were dedicated to the service of God through repentance and baptism. On this day, the Holy Spirit gave a new law of love and of grace to the world. And it was inscribed not on tablets of stones as the Old Testament Law of Moses but in the hearts of Christian believers. "In Tertullian's mind, the work of sanctification was essentially one of restoration, which led eventually to a renewal of life as it was before the Fall (*De Mono*. 17). Christ had come, the second Adam, to restore the creation to its primitive state of innocence" (Bray 1979:64).

Throughout Tertullian's writings, sanctification tended to take a central stage. Tertullian believed that Christians ought to cooperate with God's graces and discipline themselves to holiness. He advocated astute and ascetic life to attain holiness. He acknowledged that there are demons which torment the life of human beings pulling them toward sin (*On the Testimony of the Soul* 3). The devil (as demon) which is the evil spirit has destroyed the purity of the soul ever since the Fall and humanity is now born without such an innocence that was there from creation

24

(*On the Testimony of the Soul* 39). "For as Adam and Eve felt that they must cover their nakedness after their knowledge of good and evil, so we profess to have the same discernment of good and evil from the time that we experience the same sensation of shame" (*On the Testimony of the Soul* 38). However, God in divine goodness sends the Spirit to cleanse us in our weakness. In case of our ongoing engagement with the African Catholic church, the situation of a converted polygamist is at stake. God gradually reveals the self to different people in different times and places. "But in saying this we must be wary of suggesting that … [Tertullian] taught a theory of 'progressive' revelation. 'Progression,' in so far as it can be used at all of Tertullian's thought, means only the gradual unveiling of the eternal plan of God, in which the end is a return to the beginning" (Bray 1979:65).

Tertullian taught an ascetic way of life to attain holiness. God is holy and what is unholy will not see the face of God, but at the same time all humans desire to see the face of God. How to maintain this purity became a fundamental problem in the early history of Christianity.

> Penitential discipline involved several of Christianity's fundamental assumptions. In the earliest days, the end of the world was imminently awaited: repentance and subsequent baptism cleansed away a man's sins, and he could confidently await salvation. As time wore on and the world continued to exist, a problem arose: was a man who sinned after baptism irretrievably damned? Did such sin nullify his former repentance? The crafty and credulous (like Constantine) deferred baptism to avoid the risk (Barnes 1985:119).

Tertullian at first accepted the second time repentance (*On Repentance* 7) but later objected to second repentance for gravest sins (*On Repentance* 14). The church

25

however, later permitted unlimited number of repentance and penitence (Barnes 1985:120).

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter described Tertullian's background, the world that made him into who and what he was. That world contributed to the theology he propounded and the ascetic kind of spirituality he had, which was rigorous. He was hard on the body and conceived original sin as distorting the purity of the human person which can only be restored at baptism. Though God needs our sanctification through baptism as a necessary condition to salvation, Tertullian believed there was no forgiveness of sins committed after baptism. Though Tertullian as a well learned African theologian who fashioned many theological jargons in Latin influenced the church on a number of issues, the early church looked at the mercifulness of Christ and his forgiving posture and said repentance can be attained a number of times. Baptism washes away sins but it is not the end of the discussion. The next chapter describes the historical development of the baptismal doctrine.

Chapter Three: Historical Development of the Doctrine

3.0 Introduction

The influence of Tertullian on Catholic theology cannot be underestimated. Pope Benedict XVI paid glaring tribute to his person. In his General Audience of Wednesday, 30 May 2007, at St Peter's Square in the Vatican, Benedict XVI called Tertullian the African, who from the end of the second and beginning of the third century inaugurated Christian literature in the Latin language, and started the use of theology in Latin. Tertullian's works brought decisive benefits in Christianity with his contributions that covered the use of language and the recovery of classical culture as well as the shaping of doctrinal positions. At the same time Benedict XVI sees Tertullian as one who left the Catholic tradition and was therefore not faithful to the end (Benedict XVI 2008:46). This chapter while not focusing on this Catholic ambivalent view of Tertullian, it treats him as one who was a forerunner of future theological treatises on baptism.

3.1 Baptism Prior to Tertullian

The period before Tertullian in church history is the era of the apostolic fathers, which is about 70-135 CE. It concerns a period after the death of the apostles when they were not direct reference points for answers to daily Christian living but those who had personal encounter with them were still alive. There is more light on the importance of the apostolic fathers from this explanation:

The term *apostolic fathers* is traditionally used to designate the collection of the earliest Christian writings outside the New Testament. These documents are a primary resource for the study of early Christianity, especially the postapostolic period (ca. A.D. 70-135). They provide significant and often unparalleled glimpses of and

insights into the life of Christians and the Christian movement during a critical transitional stage in its history (Holmes 2002:1).

Writings of the apostolic fathers recognize that, in the Greco-Roman world, there were washings in water for purification in the mystery religions, which anteceded the Christian baptism. This does not mean that the use of water among the Greeks and Romans was equated with its usage in Christianity. While the washings among the Greco Romans were preliminary preparation for initiation into their Mystery religions, Christian washing in baptism was the initiation rite for entrance into the church (Ferguson 2009:25-29). So, there is no direct link between this Greco Roman practice and the Christian baptism.

There were also Jewish washing practices that existed long before Christianity and were still in place and closer to Christianity. However, Jewish washings and Christian baptism were not completely the same. While the Jewish washing practices were done repeatedly the Christian baptism was non-repeatable. From all intent and purposes, Jewish proselyte baptism targeted the conversion of gentiles into Judaism, and moved toward circumcision of an individual. Granted that both Jewish proselyte baptisms and Christian baptism were all one-time and required full immersions, whereas the Christian baptism was symbolically administered on a candidate, Jewish proselyte baptisms were self-administered in all cases (Ferguson 2009:60-82). In the Old Testament, baptism among the Jews was a symbol of ceremonial purification. The early Christians saw themselves as different from Judaism and began to separate themselves from practices that were particularly pertinent to the Jews. "Had the Christians of the apostolic age not conceived of themselves as a body of distinctive, consciously held beliefs, they would scarcely have separated themselves from

Judaism and undertaken an immense program of missionary expansion" (Kelly 1976:7).

Consequently, the New Testament introduces the baptism of John the Baptist, which was a baptism of repentance that entailed confession of sins, moral cleansing as a symbol of forgiveness and purity of heart. John the Baptist baptized Jesus as symbol of initiation and identification of this new movement of faith in Israel. Ferguson (2009:85-95) makes the following observations regarding John's baptism: i) the baptism of John had some overlaps with both the Jewish and Christian baptismal practices - one time immersion, and, ii) both have the themes of purification, repentance and forgiveness of sins. The difference between John's baptism and the Christian baptism is that, John's baptism was a confession of sin while Christian baptism goes beyond that to include a profession of faith in Jesus Christ (Ferguson 2009:89).

Consequent upon the element of faith in Jesus by a Christian believer, Jesus taught his disciples on the need for baptism. While Jesus did not personally baptize, his disciples were baptizing while he was still alive (John 4:1-2). Right here, the element of water was an essential component of the baptismal rite at this time. Mark 16:16 lays out the great commission to baptize and Matthew 28:19 says the same thing with an addition of the Trinitarian formula: 'baptize in the name of the father, and of the son, and of the Holy Spirit.'

From the very beginning, baptism as a gateway into Christianity was taken for granted. At Pentecost, Peter urged the congregation to repent and be baptized for forgiveness of sins, and receive the Holy Spirit (Act. 2:38). And the Ethiopian eunuch would ask Philip, "Look, there is water. What is it to prevent my being baptized?" (Acts 8:36). Similar experience is seen in Peter's visitation to the house of Cornelius:

29

"Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit even as we have?" (Acts 10:47). That baptism was a basis for Christian initiation and the element, water was part of it is evident in Paul's experience (Acts 9) and as recounted in his epistles (Galatians 3:27, I Corinthians 1:13, 1 Corinthians 12:13). Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians acknowledges the custom of people "having themselves baptized for the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:29). Here Paul does not commend nor disapprove of this practice but rather alludes to its existence and proceeds to use the fact of its existence as an argument for Christian belief in the resurrection of the dead.

In the administration of baptism, the form was the Trinitarian formula and the primary matter was water. The *Didache* (ca. 100 CE) as the oldest manual on practices and discipline prefers "running water," which is interpreted as living water, water in a stream, river or fresh water flowing from a fountain. In the absence of the above, it asserts, "if no running water is available, immerse in ordinary water. This should be cold if possible; otherwise warm" (*Didache* 7). Catechumens were either baptized by immersion (catechumens entered into the water and during baptism, one's head was plunged either once or three times beneath the water surface), affusion (water was poured upon the catechumen's head who stood either in water or on dry ground) or aspersion (water was sprinkled on the head or on the face of the catechumen).

In the apostolic era, there were no organized catechetical classes and catechumens were simply required to affirm their faith in Jesus as the savior. In fact, throughout the first three centuries of Christianity, "declaratory creeds of the ordinary type had no place in the baptismal ritual of the period" (Kelly 1976:48). At the same time, baptismal creeds had started taking shape, as seen in Paul's letter to the Romans:

30

"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). Suffice it to say that by the close of the second century, catechism classes and basic baptismal creeds, both declarative and interrogative though not formalized were evolving (Kelly 1976:1-61). Tertullian who came in the second century made reference to catechetical instructions for Christians (*On Baptism* 20). These instructions and practices were able to provide Tertullian and his contemporaries the resources to develop a baptismal theology in early Christianity.

3.2 Tertullian and His Contemporaries

Jon Isaak (2004) studying baptism among the early Christians acknowledges the significant symbol of baptismal life in the church traditions rooted in the second century. Though early Christian literatures of the second and third centuries treated the subject of baptism among Christians, their treatment was never coherent. As noted in the previous chapter, the first lengthy text on baptism came from Tertullian. Pelikan (1971:163) however, observes that the most precise statement of Tertullian on baptism actually came, not in his treatise, *On Baptism* but in his polemical treatise, *Against Marcion* (1:28). Isaak (2004) citing Pelikan (1971), says that Tertullian specifically taught that baptism brought forth four gifts namely, remission of sins, deliverance from death, regeneration, and bestowal of the Holy Spirit. Pelikan's list leaves out baptismal seal and baptism as a shield. These two categories are included in a later list by Lewis (1983) in explaining the same passage from Tertullian. Lewis structures a dialogue of Tertullian and his contemporaries on the teachings of baptism in the early church on six themes: remission of sin, baptism and the Eucharist, baptism as shield, the new birth or regeneration, the seal, and illumination. Interestingly, Lewis on the other hand leaves out the deliverance from death which

31

Pelikan's list had earlier on cited. This study upholds Lewis categories, goes further to include deliverance from death as an attributive gift of baptism, and examines their points of agreement as the church evolved in its early history. What follows are the various understandings by the early church fathers.

On baptism as the remission of sins, the epistle of Barnabas while elucidating the spiritual meaning of the Old Testament's theology goes on to allude to baptism as a "washing," which "confers remission of sins" (*Barnabas* 11). The epistle further states that, "after we have stepped down into the water burdened with sin and defilement, we come up out of it in full fruitage" (*Barnabas* 11). Tertullian concurs with this view by stating that, "the *act* of baptism itself too is carnal [on the body], in that we are plunged into water, *but* the *effect* [is] spiritual, in that we are freed from sins" (*On Baptism* 7). Justin Martyr in his *First Apology* taught that "By means of his life and resurrection, Christ overcame the demons, whose ringleader is Satan" (Drobner 2007:80), all people must undertake to fast and pray for the remission of sins. Justin Martyr believed that "there is no other way [to obtain God's promises] than this - to become acquainted with Christ, to be washed in the fountain spoken of by Isaiah for the remission of sins, and for the remainder, to live sinless lives" (Justin Martyr, *Trypho* 44).

The early church linked baptism and the Eucharist together. Those newly baptized had to partake of the Eucharist as a communion, and participation in the life of the church. This is best found in the words of the Didache: "No one is to eat of your Eucharist but those who have been baptized in the Name of the Lord; for the Lord's own saying applies here, 'Give not that which is holy unto dogs' " (*Didache* 9). At the Seventh Council of Carthage in 258 CE to deliberate the fate of heretics, "Aurelius of Utica said: Since the apostle says that we are not to communicate with

other people's sins, what else does he do but communicate with other people's sins, who holds communion with heretics without the Church's baptism? And therefore I judge that heretics must be baptized, that they may receive forgiveness of their sins; and thus communion may be had with them" (*The Seventh Council of Carthage Under Cyprian* cited in Roberts and Donaldson 1995:569). According to Ferguson (2009:321-325), the preoccupation was on the rebaptism on heretics. One could see the connection between the Eucharist and baptism. The Eucharistic celebration was a source of communion and heretics as outsiders needed to be reconnected with the community through renewal of baptismal vows and forgiveness of sins so as to participate in this communion. In 240 CE while making the case for the necessity of baptism and its connection with the Eucharist, Cyprian asserted that the scriptures had already testified that unless one is baptized and born again, the person could not gain admittance into the kingdom of God. He cited the gospel of John to back up his claim thus: "Except a man be born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God [John 3:5]." He further cited another chapter of the same gospel saying: "Unless ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye shall not have life in you" [John 6:53]. That it is "of small account to be baptized and to receive the Eucharist, unless one profit by it both in deeds and works" (Cyprian, *Three Books of Testimonies Against the Jews* 3:25-26). Cyprian is clear that baptism should bring newness in someone to be in a state of grace to partake in the celebration of the Eucharist. In order words, baptism preceded the Eucharist.

Baptism was also viewed as a shield against the enemy, who is Satan (devil). After Jesus' baptism the enemy led him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Luke 4: 1-2). Lewis (1983) cites Ignatius (*Polycarp* 6.2) "when he urges that baptism 'remain' as the heavy shield (*hopla*) of the Christian soldier's equipment" (Lewis

1983:4). This was based on Pauline conceptions of the life of a Christian as a continuous struggle with the forces of evil. The early Christian community adopted the soldier figure of Paul in Ephesians 6:11 to explain the new life in baptism. Around 115 CE, Ignatius of Antioch wrote to Polycarp encouraging him and the Christian community with these words, "Let none of you be found a deserter. Let your baptism serve as a shield, faith as a helmet, love as a spear; endurance as armor." (Ignatius, *Letter to Polycarp* 6).

Tertullian like his contemporaries conceived of baptism as a sacrament of water that washes away human sin, thereby setting people free for admittance into eternal life (*On Baptism* 1). In this understanding, baptism was recognized as a new birth or regeneration of life in the Christian believer. Hippolytus in 215 CE could declare that,

> The Father of immortality sent the immortal Son and Word into the world, who came to man in order to wash him with water and the Spirit; and He, begetting us again to incorruption of soul and body, breathed into us the breath (spirit) of life, and endued us with an incorruptible panoply. If, therefore, man has become immortal, he will also be God. And if he is made God by water and the Holy Spirit after the regeneration of the laver he is found to be also joint-heir with Christ after the resurrection from the dead. Wherefore I preach to this effect: Come, all ye kindreds of the nations, to the immortality of the baptism (Hippolytus, *The Discourse on the Holy Theophany* 8).

Irenaeus expressing the spirit of the time concurred with Hippolytus thus: "As we are lepers in sin, we are made clean from our old transgressions by means of the sacred water and the invocation of the Lord. We are thus spiritually regenerated as newborn

infants, even as the Lord has declared: 'Except a man be born again through water and the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven'" (Irenaeus, *Fragments From Lost Writings* 34). Cyprian in 256 CE could boldly say that it was imperative for catechumens before receiving baptism to be "prepared, in the lawful and true, and only baptism of the holy Church, by divine regeneration, for the kingdom of God . . . because it is written, 'Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God'" (Cyprian, *Epistles* 72:21).

Baptismal seal was also an important aspect of baptism at this time. "In the thought of some writers baptism imprint[s] upon the flesh a seal (*sphragis*), branding the possessor as the property of God" (Lewis 1983:5). Clement explains how it takes place: "Now God has ordered every one who worships Him to be sealed by baptism; but if you refuse, and obey your own will rather than God's, you are doubtless contrary and hostile to His will" (Clement, *Recognitions of Clement* 6.8). Clement was the first person to use the term baptismal "seal" in reference to baptism (Ferguson 2009:208). One who is baptized is then claimed by Jesus, and marked for eternal life. "For he who has been sanctified, his sins being put away in baptism, and has been spiritually re-formed into a new man, has become fitted for receiving the Holy Spirit; since the apostle says, 'As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ' "(Cyprian, *The Epistles of Cyprian* 73:5). And a Christian is then bound to follow Christ faithfully, and live in the light of Christ as one who has been enlightened.

Again, baptism was seen as an illumination that enlightened a Christian, in which "Tertullian ascribe[d] this phenomenon to the Holy Spirit" (Lewis 1983:6). Baptism illumines one to sift good from evil. Illumination contrasts a Christian being on "the way of light" as against being on the way of death (*The Epistle of Barnabas*

35

19). The description of the *Epistle of Barnabas* fits the way of life which the *Didache* acknowledges that there are two ways: "a Way of Life and a Way of Death, and the difference between these two Ways is great" (*Didache* 1). It is well stated that:

> Being baptized, we are illuminated; illuminated, we become sons;
>
> being made sons, we are made perfect; being made perfect, we are
>
> made immortal... This work is variously called grace, and illumination,
>
> and perfection, and washing. Washing, by which we cleanse away our
>
> sins; grace, by which the penalties accruing to transgressions are
>
> remitted; and illumination, by which that holy light of salvation is
>
> beheld, that is, by which we see God clearly (Clement of Alexandria,
>
> *Instructor* 1.6).

As an enlightened figure, a believer was to be joined to Christ, the messiah with the hope of eternal life. According to Lewis (1983:6), baptism as *photismos* (illumination) was first explicitly stated in Justin, who explained that baptismal candidates were illuminated in their understanding of what it means to live an authentic human life. In Justin's words, baptismal "washing is called illumination, because they who learn these things are illuminated in their understandings" (Justin, *First Apology* 61).

Baptism is then understood as a rite that joins Christians to Christ who was raised from the death and promises resurrection to Christian believers. The explanations of Tertullian and his contemporaries on baptism foreshadowed the belief in the 'resurrection of the body and life everlasting' as contained in the Nicean Creed. Tertullian puts it this way: "And so the flesh shall rise again, wholly in every man, in its own identity, in its absolute integrity" (*On the Resurrection* 62). That is why Tertullian praised martyrdom as an opportunity to witness what a Christian professed: "And certainly they who were wont to be led by the Spirit of God used to be guided

36

by Himself to endure what they had also proclaimed as requiring to be borne" (*Scorpiace* 8). Martyrdom itself is to be cherished for the recompense it brings in Christ. Instead of denying Christ, it is better for a Christian to die by confessing Christ (*Scorpiace* 9). This became a basis upon which the baptismal practices in the second and third century Christianity were built.

3.3 Second and Third Centuries Baptismal Practices

According to Lewis (1983), by the second and third centuries, the church was beginning to organize itself and the process of baptism began to follow this pattern: (i) time for someone to inquire or seek baptism, (ii) time when one became a catechumen, (iii) time when one was preliminary accepted into the church, and (iv) time when one was fully accepted into the sacramental life of the church marked by public baptism. Our most detailed descriptions of a baptismal service in the second century are those of the *Didache* and Justin Martyr. In the third century, "practices can be pieced together from scattered items in Tertullian's descriptions and from the elaborate description furnished by Hippolytus, [in the] *Apostolic Tradition*" (Lewis 1983:6).

From Kelly (1976), it is evident that right from the earliest times of the church, though fluid it was, the church was developing a catechesis in which people were formed to make declaratory and interrogative creeds. In Acts 8:26-38 Philip instructed the Ethiopian Eunuch before proceeding with baptism. Clement of Alexandria emphasized the importance of instruction before baptism (Ferguson 209:315). Baptismal candidates were to study the first six chapters of the *Didache* noting the distinction between the way of life and the way of death, after which they would be baptized. The *Didache* further stated that, "Both baptizer and baptized ought to fast before the baptism …but the candidate himself should be told to keep a fast for a day

37

or two before hand" (*Didache* 7). By the third century, Tertullian taught that in Paul's conception, preaching was prior to administering baptism to new converts (*On Baptism* 14). Tertullian devoted a whole section of his treatise on baptism talking about the preparation for baptism and a Christian conduct thereafter. Of preparations for baptism, Tertullian has this to say, "They who are about to enter baptism ought to pray with repeated prayers, fasts, and bendings of the knee, and vigils all the night through, and with the confession of all bygone sins…" (*On Baptism* 20).

There is reasonable presumption that baptism was administered to all believers including infants. Though Tertullian suggested infant baptism may be delayed (*On Baptism* 18), a council of bishops presided over by Cyprian as a leading bishop held that there was no basis for delay nor denial of infant baptism (*To Fidus, on the Baptism of Infants* 58:2). Origen explicitly picked up the question of baptism noting the various arguments involved (Ferguson 2009:368), and also upheld the practice of infant baptism. Origen said: "The Church received from the apostles the tradition of giving baptism even to infants. For the apostles, to whom were committed the secrets of divine mysteries, knew that there is in everyone the innate stains of sin, which are washed away through water and the Spirit" (Origen, *Commentaries on Romans* 5:9). The practice of baptismal sponsors especially for children was in place at this time (*On Baptism* 18).

Water was no doubt a principal element of baptism at this time as well. Making allusion to the creation narrative, Tertullian points to the scripture that it clearly testifies to the goodness and benefit of water. First, water is as ancient and ageless as the first existents in creation. Second, water has the dignity of being the seat of the Holy Spirit, which hovered over the waters at creation. Water gives vitality

38

to living beings, and it is so pleasing "that the *material substance* which governs terrestrial life acts as agent likewise in the celestial" world (*On Baptism* 3).

Baptism took different forms, and was celebrated in different ways. Tertullian reported that a candidate could be "dipped in water" (*On Baptism* 2) or "amid the utterance of some few words, is sprinkled" (*On Baptism* 2). In Tertullian's words, "it makes no difference whether a man be washed in a sea or a pool, a stream or a fount, a lake or a trough" (*On Baptism* 4). When Tertullian mentions a person being washed in a fount, this raises the possibility of the existence of baptism by afflusion (pouring of water on the head).

Tertullian urged that candidates should solemnly profess their faith shortly before baptism and renounce "the devil and his pomps and his angels" (Tertullian, *The Chaplet* 3). This is an indication that declaratory and interrogative creeds were beginning to be well developed in the life of the church at this time. Hippolytus in around 215 CE reported that a baptismal candidate on going down into baptismal waters, the person administering the baptism was to put hand on the candidate and asked, "Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty?" And the candidate would respond, "I believe." The minister would then impose hands on the candidate's head and administer the baptism at once with the first pour of water. Thereafter, the minister would question the candidate further: "Do you believe in Christ Jesus . . . ?" The candidate ought to declare: "I believe," and the minister poured the second measure of water on the forehead. Lastly, the minister would ask the candidate again, "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit and the holy Church and the resurrection of the flesh?" The candidate would say: "I believe." Water was poured on the candidate for the third and last time (Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition* 21). This tradition of pouring water three times was in line with the Trinitarian formula revealed by Jesus in

the New Testament that was passed down to the Christian community. Tertullian gives credence to the practice of threefold baptism when he said of Christian baptism; that Christians renounced the devil and "are immersed three times" in waters of cleansing (Tertullian, *The Crown* 3).

The Trinitarian formula has ever since the inception of Christianity been an important form of the baptismal rite. "After His [Christ] resurrection He promises in a pledge to His disciples that He will send them the promise of His Father; and lastly, He commands them to baptize into the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, not into an impersonal God. And indeed it is not once only, but three times, that we are immersed into the Three Persons, at each several mention of Their names" (Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 26). Justin corroborated this that baptism was done "in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit … [the candidates] then receive[d] the washing with water…" (Justin, *First Apology* 61). Tertullian asserted that thereupon the profession of faith, baptismal candidates were "immersed three times" into the baptismal waters accompanied by Trinitarian incantations (Tertullian, *The Crown* 3). Origen (in 248 CE) put it this way: "Why, when the Lord himself told his disciples that they should baptize all peoples in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, does this apostle employ the name of Christ alone in baptism, saying, 'We who have been baptized into Christ;' for indeed, legitimate baptism is had only in the name of the Trinity" (Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 5:8). *Acts of Xanthippe and Polyxena*, a little-known work of the third century (250 CE) which depended on the Acts of Thomas and other major apocryphal works of importance has this to say: "Then Probus . . . leapt into the water, saying, Jesus Christ, son of God, and everlasting God, let all my sins be taken away by this water. And Paul said, we baptize thee in the name of the Father and Son and

40

Holy Ghost. After this he made him to receive the Eucharist of Christ" (*Acts of Xantippe and Polyxena* 21). Cyprian concurred with this understanding noting that Jesus in scriptures commanded his disciples to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Cyprian opposing heretics said it was not enough just to baptize people in the name of Jesus Christ, and think the remission of sins could follow immediately. He said this was not the manner Christ himself commanded the disciples to go to all the nations and do but that they should be baptized in the full and united Trinity (Cyprian, *Epistles* 73:18).

Who was then the principal minister of baptism? Tertullian said the bishop was the ordinary minister of baptism but could grant powers to the presbyters, deacons and laypersons to confer the sacrament on baptismal candidates (*On Baptism* 17). At the same time Tertullian highly reserved the role of a baptizer to the bishop whom under his hand candidates could go into the water, solemnly profess that they renounce the devil with its pomp and empty promises, and come out as new people (Tertullian, *The Chaplet* 3). Tertullian however, exempted women from teaching and baptizing (*On Baptism* 17). While admonishing that people do not confuse the roles of laypersons with priests, Tertullian rejected women ordination and all the sacramental rites that ordained women of some Christian sects administered among some local congregations including baptism. Tertullian saw these as heretical (Tertullian, *On Prescription Against Heretics* 41). By mid third century, it appears conferring baptism was the prerogative of a bishop as the chief presbyter (Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition* 22). From the emerging positions taken at this time flowed later developments on the theme of baptism that are now with us today.

3.4 Historical Developments

A study of the history of baptism in the early church shows that some of the current understandings of baptism are a carryover from the past. There are noticeable continuities and discontinuities within the early Christian baptismal practice as enunciated by the teachings of Tertullian and his contemporaries. First, in the New Testament, Paul's characteristic teaching relative to baptism was to connect it with the death and resurrection of Christ and to draw out its moral consequences. While human cooperation (faith) is presupposed by baptism the decisive action it testifies to come from God alone (Ferguson 2009:164-165). Second, Tertullian believed the following: a) sin has changed humanity's innocence and blessedness into a state of wretchedness. Adam's sin resulted into human inclination to sin and moves people to wrongdoing, b) human free will which accords one freedom is not distorted nor taken away by Adam's sin, c) though humanity is corrupt, impure and leans towards sin, this is not equated with original sin, and d) therefore, infant baptism is not necessary but adult baptism removes one's guilt and restores one to the life of grace at creation that was lost by sin. Tertullian seems to reason that humanity's inclination to sin due to Adam's fall in itself is not a sin that requires forgiveness (Tertullian *On Baptism* 18). This has become a great doctrinal controversy down through the years. This section of the work takes a look at it, and sees how these four assertions have played in history.

3.4.1 The Heresy of Pelagius

By the fourth century there were a variety of Christian practices in regards to baptism but all aimed at purification of the individual (Ferguson 2009:455). There arose at this time in Rome, Pelagius, a British ascete who preached a strictly biblical spirituality that over emphasized the human will.

Pelagius thought that one could obtain every good by prayer except

virtue. Once having received the gift of free will, it is man's responsibility to make good moral use of it. He is responsible for his actions and, if only he has the courage to will it, there is no height of sanctity which he may not attain (Rahner 1975:1185).

The teaching of Pelagius presented serious problems for human freedom, grace and original sin, which Augustine assiduously addressed. In this way credit goes to Augustine for developing the doctrine of original sin. Though the doctrine of original sin has always been there in the church but was developed by Augustine in opposing the heresy of Pelagianism that denied original sin, that it "did not involve personal guilt leading to damnation" (Haight 1979:36). Regarding grace, the "Pelagians did not deny grace; they affirmed it. But grace was first of all our human nature, our God given ability to decide between good and evil" (Haight 1979:36).

3.4.2 Saint Augustine

Augustine argued that original sin has accompanying penalties that affect the order of creation (Augustine 1984:523). Augustine taught that original sin was physically transmitted by libido from parent to child through concupiscence (probably by lust) through sexual reproduction thereby weakening the human will and making humanity a *massa damnata* (mass damnation, condemned crowd). There is a transmission of concupiscence right from procreation (Børressen 1981:57). For Augustine, all of humanity was really present in Adam's seed (gametes) when he sinned hence the guilt of Adam is hereditary so that even "an unbaptized infant cannot be saved" (Haight 1979:36) as far as they are descendants of Adam (Børressen 1981:51). As sinners, human beings are depraved in nature.

Lacking in freedom to do good, humans cannot respond to the will of God without divine grace. Kermit Scott quotes Augustine thus: "Grace is a gift after all,

and the giver of gifts may give to whom he wills without any justification. Since we know God never acts capriciously, we know that there is some reason for [God's] choice. But that reason is hidden from us, and is not …important since his choice…requires no explanation" (Scott 1995:212). Grace is irresistible, results in conversion, and leads to perseverance. Scott (1995) sees the eruption of the problem of human determinism, whereby it is not in one's power to want God's will to be done for its own sake, but humans seek God's help for righteous behavior while God at the same time determines who is to be saved and who is to be damned, and those to be damned deserve their damnation (Scott 1995:213-214). While for the pelagians the external bonds of sin can be broken, Augustine saw grace as primary "internal force, for sin held one prisoner from within; a person's will was a prison to itself. This is … the most precise point that Augustine was at odds with Pelagius" (Haight 1979:36).

3.4.3 Thomas Aquinas

The problem of freewill, original sin and baptism spilled over to the medieval period as seen in the works of Thomas Aquinas. For Aquinas, grace is the favors bestowed on us by God. He made grace the central theme of his work but most especially in the *Summa*. According Thomas O'Meara, "the entire Summa Theologiae unfolds Aquinas' axiom, '*gratia perfecit naturam,*' grace brings nature to its full destiny" (O'Meara 1997:191). Aquinas understood grace as participation in the life, goodness and very nature of God. Aquinas put it thus: "the gift of grace exceeds every capacity of nature, since it is none other than a participation of the divine nature, which exceeds every other nature" (*ST* I-II, 109, 3). Gelpi interprets Aquinas to mean three things on grace: "(i) enjoying God's good graces, (ii) the gift of supernatural life freely bestowed on us by God in Jesus and in his mission of the

44

divine breath, and (3) the recompense which follows from human acceptance of that free gift and gratuitous gift" (Gelpi 2001:82).

Aquinas' understanding of grace was a radical shift from previous thinkers. Before this period, Augustine, understood grace as a cure for humanity's sins. He stressed the medicinal aspect of grace and how it was needed to heal human nature's sinfulness. In Aquinas, "grace is not gratuitous because of humanity's sin, but because of humanity's being…grace is needed as an elevation of human nature making it proportionate as a principle of being and acting to supernatural end"(Haight 1979:59). He approached grace teleologically, seeing grace as elevating human nature to accomplish its supernatural end. So besides its healing aspect, which Aquinas does not disregard, "grace infuses [human beings] with a new nature proportionate to the divine 'supernatural' destiny" (Gratsch 1985:70). Human beings are created for a transcendent end and grace elevates them, so they can attain this supernatural end (Haight 1979:61).

Aquinas distinguished between natural and supernatural graces, which led to a dualistic understanding of natural/supernatural as two separate and self-enclosed spheres of reality. While some critics of Aquinas see that for him grace was a structure parallel and added to that of human nature (Haight 1979:61), others believe that this dualistic understanding of the graced human condition was really the result of other interpretations within scholasticism and neo-scholasticism. In either case, it led to what has been called extrinsicism; "the extrinsicist conception of nature is that of an autonomous and closed system, in which human nature was effectively reduced to 'pure nature,' devoid of anything supernatural and of any experience of it" (Haight 1979:124). Aquinas speaks of the "state of pure nature," that is, before original sin, but even in this state God is implicated in the life of human beings: "Man in the state

of pure nature could do such good as was natural to him by means of his natural power, without any superadded gift of grace, though not without the help of God moving him" (*ST* I-II, 109, 3). Therefore pure nature is really hypothetical (Haight 1979).

Transcendental Thomists, like Joseph Maréchal, Henri de Lubac and Karl Rahner tried to correct the error of extrinsicism by showing that the natural and supernatural orders are radically one. For Maréchal "the human intellect in virtue of its constitutive spiritual essence and despite its limits as created and human, enjoys a virtual infinity, since its essential orientation to Being endows it with an infinite, insatiable thirst for Being and Truth" (Gelpi 1997:112). Following Maréchal, de Lubac attacked the concept of "pure nature," and understood the Thomist idea that "grace perfects nature" as the continuity of human nature into supernatural nature. He "characterized the human spirit's natural longing for divine union as an obediential potency for the beatific vision" (Gelpi 1997:113). Rahner rejected the notion that natural desires can of themselves aspire to supernatural fulfillment (Gelpi 1997:117). The natural desire for God in human beings is itself grace, built a priori into the essential structure of the human person. Human nature always opens to the divine: "We can only understand man in his 'undefiable' essence if we see him as *potential obedentialis* for divine life; that is his nature" (Rahner 1964:140). This is what he called the "supernatural existential." Gelpi rejects the idea that desire for the beatific vision is built *a priori* in the human person. He considers this an overly optimistic view of the relationship between human nature and divine grace (Gelpi 1997:117). He proposes a totally new approach to the understanding of the relationship between grace and nature.

The interaction of the human and the divine is further explained by the distinction Aquinas made between operative grace and cooperative grace. According to Aquinas grace works in us (*operans*) and with us (*cooperans*). Two theological schools which developed in the sixteenth century tried to defend one of the two ends of this tension: Molinists and Banezians. Molinists (Luis de Molina, Jesuit) defended human freedom to the point of compromising divine transcendence. Banezians (Domingo Bañez, Dominican) stressed divine transcendence to the detriment of the role of human freedom. In our days Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984) rejected both positions and reinterpreted St. Thomas' in search of a balance between divine transcendence and human freedom in his essays on operative grace (Lonergan 1971). This was the tension that occupied much of the medieval theological discourse on baptism, grace and original sin.

3.4.4 The Middle Ages and the Reformers

Despite thomistic intervention, the Augustinian conception of original sin continued to the Middle Ages till Anselm challenged it and defined original sin as the privation of righteousness that every human being ought to possess. Thus Anselm separated original sin from concupiscence. Though people like Peter Lombard insisted on the Augustinian identification of original sin with concupiscence, other notable theologians like Thomas Aquinas who saw God's grace "elevating" (Haight 1979:61) human nature challenged Lombard's position. As seen in the previous section, Aquinas distinguished the supernatural gifts of Adam before the Fall from what was merely natural, and said that it was the former that were lost, privileges that enabled humanity to keep its inferior powers in submission to reason and directed to its supernatural end. Even after the fall, the human person thus kept his/her natural abilities of reason, will and passions. "Concupiscence now appeared simply as the

47

consequence or as the material factor of original sin (Aquinas) and so it became more intelligible why original sin is really blotted out in baptism, although concupiscence remains" (Rahner 1975:1150).

Augustinian inspired views on original sin and freewill continued among the Franciscans even though the most prominent Franciscan theologians, such as Don Scotus and William of Ockham, eliminated the element of concupiscence from their understanding of grace. The central question here was 'would Christmas have occurred if humanity had not sinned?' Aquinas views incarnation as God's remedy for the fallen humanity whereas Don Scotus sees incarnation as an "underlying motive for creation, not merely a correction to it" (Yancey 2008:72). From this standpoint therefore, Mary's bringing to birth of Christ is a participation in an act of divine creation that continues to this day. As seen, in the works of Rahner, both approaches have "biblical support and could be accepted as orthodox" (Yancey 2008:72). Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end of Christian revelation.

> No further distinctive changes to the doctrine of original sin were made
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> by Medieval Catholic Theologians. In the sixteen century, the reformer
>
> Martin Luther recovered Augustine's existential grasp of the problem
>
> of original sin and discarded Anselm's metaphysical conceptions. With
>
> only slight modifications, the Council of Trent (1563) affirmed
>
> Thomas' synthesis of the Augustinian and Anselmian understandings
>
> of original sin and defined original sin as a dogma of the Catholic
>
> Church (Wiley 2002:87-88).

Reformers John Calvin and Martin Luther equated original sin with concupiscence, insisting that it continued after baptism and completely destroyed freedom. Some

scholars reason that Calvin believed that paradise was physically here on earth and the elect of God will find it. "In contrast to Martin Luther, who thought paradise was completely lost in the Flood and that the *imogo Dei* in humanity drowned with it, Calvin held that the earth 'still bears the traces of this largesse of God'" (Brock and Parker 2008:331).

The Council of Trent, while not pronouncing on points disputed among Catholic theologians, condemned the teaching that in baptism the essence of sin is not taken away nor imputed but is only cancelled. For Luther, "[g]race is God's word for forgiveness. Because people remain sinners and unworthy…" (Haight 1979:91). Does this mean the church should simply invite people at table by accepting and tolerating their sinful behaviors? Is this what *sola gratia* means in reformist tradition? Not exactly. This would amount to cheap grace: "Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner. Grace alone does everything, they say, and so everything can remain as it was before" (Bonhoeffer 1963:43). In baptismal catechesis, the church work towards the conversion of an individual, the church "must re-name the behavior and re-make the people who have sinned" (Volf 1996:73). Grace means treating people not as they deserve but as God intends them to be treated, namely, showing mercy and kindness on them. This was the central theme of Aquinas who was a major player of the scholastics, the bridge between Catholic theology and the spirit of the reformation. Aquinas has ever since then become a central figure in Catholic theology as seen in the Council of Trent.

3.4.5 The Council of Trent

Trent declared that concupiscence which remains after baptism is not truly and properly 'sin' in the baptized, but only to be called sin in the sense that it is of sin and inclines to sin. In the language of the scholastics, "grace is conceived of as a created

49

mode of being of the soul and consequently of the human person" (Haight 1979:92). Salvation of the human soul thus becomes primal in Catholic discourse.

Immediately following the Council of Trent, Pope Pius V in 1567 went beyond Trent and sanctioned Aquinas' distinction between natural and supernatural in Adam's state before the Fall, condemned the identification of original sin with concupiscence, and recognized that the unbaptized still experiences God. "As Aquinas said, God deals with human beings according to their free and conscious nature" (Haight 1979:116). We must note that, "... because Christianity tells the story of our humanity not only in terms of fallibility but also in terms of redemability, it shelters us from an excessively brutal view of our nature and despair concerning it" (Duffy 2005:211). To return to the question of the polygamist and baptism raised in chapter one, African polygamy as part of human fallibility is still redeemable as biblical conceptions of original sin portray.

A common ground for the doctrine of original sin concerns its inward character. "The Council of Trent defined (with the Reformers) a real inward original sin in all (except Mary)" (Rahner1975: 150) and is blotted out by justification. The doctrine that Mary was conceived free from original sin is called Immaculate Conception, meaning: "in the first instance of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace granted by God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin." On the other hand, if (as some hold), original sin did not exist, not only Mary, but also all human beings would be conceived 'exempt from all stain of original sin.' There would be no need for divine grace and salvation.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed a summary of the development of baptismal doctrine prior to Tertullian. It included a historiography of the contemporaries of Tertullian on this subject matter. The dialogue extended to the Middle Ages, and the reformers up to the council of Trent. In the words of Benedict XVI (2008), Tertullian remains an interesting witness of early Christianity, when Christians were the authentic protagonists of a "new culture" in the critical confrontation between the classical heritage and the Gospel message. The next chapter, which focuses on contemporary Catholic positions on baptism, original sin and grace, acknowledges that the treatises of Tertullian trace many themes that Catholic theology faces today.

Chapter Four: Contemporary Roman Catholic Position

4.0 Introduction

This chapter examines the contemporary position of the Roman Catholic Church on baptism and original sin. The word contemporary seems to indicate that the doctrines have changed over time. Core doctrines of a faith do not change but only develop overtime. This chapter acknowledges that baptism and original sin are part of the deposit of the faith hence have not changed but developed overtime so that Roman Catholics will be able to understand them clearer.

As part of seeking to have a deepened understanding of baptism and original sin, this chapter presents an interaction between Tertullian's understanding and the Roman Catholic position today. It deals with the Roman Catholic Church's understanding of original sin particularly from scriptures and the theory of evolution. It further examines the implications of Tertullian's theology of baptism and original sin on contemporary Roman Catholic baptismal practice.

4.1 Impact of Tertullian on Roman Catholic Theology

Tertullian linked original sin to the transmission of the soul to which he devoted a whole book, *De testimonio anima* (The Testimony of the Soul). He believed that a human being consists of body and soul. He objected to the philosophers' total separation of the body and soul as if the body were imprisoning the soul, and likened the philosophers' understanding to the thinking of the Sadducees on the same subject matter (Tertullian, *On the Resurrection*, 2). He maintained the non-separation of the body and soul from birth to death, and ultimate resurrection of the body and soul, and further acknowledged that a human person has origin in God, and in line with biblical notions, the body preceded the soul in creation (*On the Resurrection*, 5). At the same time, the body and the soul are joined together.

The oneness of the body and soul means that the flesh does affect the soul. Since Adam and Eve are the first parents of all of humanity, what happened to Adam and Eve at the Fall has also happened to the whole of the human race. By the sin of Adam, the human nature has being implicated; Adam had transmitted to the whole race such a human nature and transferred a sinful tendency into human beings. From an antecedent evil nature proceeds evil that supervenes on the human soul (*On the Soul* 41). Side by side with evil is the presence of good in every soul. Here Tertullian goes further to lay out what becomes crucial in Catholic theology of original sin, that the human race is only depraved as a result of the original sin. In spite of the Fall, the soul as having God's life still contains light. With evil, it "is rather obscured than extinguished. It can be obscured indeed, because it is not God; extinguished, however, it cannot be, because it comes from God" (*On the Soul* 41). This explains why good and evil are found in both good and bad people. As Tertullian further puts it: "Thus some men are very bad, and some very good; but yet the souls of all form but one genus; even in the worst there is something good, and in the best there is something bad" (*On the Soul* 41).

Roberts (2001:164) enumerates a number of things in Tertullian's understanding that have great implications for the development of contemporary Roman Catholic position on original sin and grace. Among these implications are: First, the idea of passing on original sin through direct descent finds tremendous impact on Augustine's struggle against the Pelagian heresy. Underneath this doctrine is the solidarity of the human race. Humanity is from one stock with its soul created by one God and that life is passed on to others through physical regeneration. There is also spiritual regeneration, which persists in the soul.

Second, sin is real in the world. Tertullian's exposition raises the centrality of sin, its universality and the saving mission of Christ in the world. Of great importance is the understanding that the soul, its stock, disposition and character, are passed on with its sinfulness that is tainted with original sin.

Third, it raises the question of the interplay of Christian determinism, freedom and free will. "If a man inherits the very substance of his soul, with all its failings and weaknesses, from his ancestors, what becomes of free will, and how is he to be held responsible for his misdeeds? How can the individual stand against the race, and how can the transient child of a day erase what generations have written upon his soul?" (Robert 2001:162).

Fourth, Tertullian linking the soul closely with the body materializes the soul which by itself is immaterial. Since the soul is intimately tied with the body how does one differentiate that which is spiritual from the material? How does one account for the differences in race since humanity descends from one stock and the body is tied to the soul? "By blending the soul so intimately with the body it materializes the former. The supremacy of the soul, which Tertullian defends so ably, is difficult to maintain when it is reduced to a materialized spirit" (Roberts 2001:164).

The above are the seeds of Tertullian's theology on original sin and baptism. In the course of history, the Catholic position has developed along the lines of Tertullian's primer conceptions. The next section begins to examine such developments.

4.2 Roman Catholic Church and Original Sin

In line with Tertullian's conception the Roman Catholic Church teaches that original sin is the fall of humanity from grace. God created a human being in God's own image in a graced world. Through disobedience humanity severed this graced

54

existence. In this sense then, original sin resulted from the Fall of Man, when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). According to the the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church:

> By his sin Adam, as the first man, lost the original holiness and justice he had received from God, not only for himself but for all human beings. Adam and Eve transmitted to their descendants human nature wounded by their own first sin and hence deprived of original holiness and justice; this deprivation is called original sin." As a result of original sin, human nature is weakened in its powers, subject to ignorance, suffering the domination of death, and inclined to sin (this inclination is called "concupiscence") (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 416).

The Catechism further explains that in "yielding to the tempter, Adam and Eve committed a personal sin, but this sin affected the human nature that they would then transmit in a fallen state. … Original sin is called 'sin' only in an analogical sense: it is a sin 'contracted' and not 'committed'—a state and not an act" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 404). However, the transmission of this sin involves no personal responsibility or personal guilt on the part of humanity (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 405). Personal responsibility and guilt were Adam's, who because of his sin, failed to pass on to his descendants a human nature with the holiness with which it would otherwise have been endowed, in this way implicating them in his sin.

Original sin expresses our condition of being in the world. Original sin "has a semi-autonomous existence … [it is] the theological code word for the human condition of living in a world where we are influenced by more evil than what we do ourselves" (Gula 1989:106). When we say, we are all born with Adam's sin on our

55

souls; it is that entrance of sin into the world through the abuse of freedom by Adam. Embedded in this sin is disobedience. This expresses the fact that humanity has in its being the tendency of rejecting and opposing God which continuously weigh heavy on human life and history. The Roman Catholic Church recognizes that though Adam's sinful act is not the responsibility of his descendants, the state of human nature that resulted from that sinful act has consequences which plague his descendants: "Human nature, without being entirely corrupted, has been harmed in its natural powers, is subject to ignorance, suffering and the power of death, and has a tendency to sin. This tendency is called concupiscence," (*Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 77) but is distinct from original sin itself, since it remains even when original sin is remitted.

4.3 Original Sin in the Scriptures

The basis for original sin in the Bible is in Genesis 3 at the incidence of the fall of Adam and Eve. Aside from there, scanty evidence exists in the scriptures to explain this fallen state of humanity, but as earlier indicated; original sin is a condition of being. It is a sin that is already inside human beings, dwelling in everyone at the point of one's origin, the very point of conception. This is well echoed in David's cry in Psalm 51:7: "True, I was born guilty, a sinner, even as my mother conceived me." This verse does not imply that the sexual act of conception is sinful. It is only a hyperbole depicting the state of humanity and proclivity to evil.

When we turn to the New Testament, we find the scriptural basis for this doctrine in two Pauline texts - Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:22, in which Paul identifies Adam as the one man through whom death came into the world. In Romans 5:12-21, Paul reflects on the sin of Adam (Genesis 3, 1-13) in the light of the redemptive mystery of Jesus Christ. He refers to the dreadful power that has seized

56

humanity that is now in revolt against the creator and engaged in revolt in the exaltation of its own desires and interests. At the same time, humans have a capacity to object to this dreadful power. In 1 Corinthians 15:22, Paul grapples with the reality that our human existence, both natural and supernatural, is corporate, involves solidarity. The sin of Adam has injured the human race at least in the sense that it has introduced death.

> But we do detect enough of a pattern in the story line to trust that it is not a story of divine indifference to but of divine empathy with our lot, and that though evil reigns, all the more grace abounds (Rom 5:21) in heights and depths yet undreamed and manifests itself in a mystery even deeper than the mystery of evil, the mystery of human goodness (Duffy 2005:234).

Paul understood the force of this evil within us when he said, "I do not do the good I want to do; instead, I do the evil I do not want to do (Rom 7:19). There is a struggle within us, which is not subject to an external object of choice but "rather a dynamism within us with which we can align ourselves to different degrees. Our Christian convictions tell us that these are unequal forces, for God's redeeming love is the more powerful" (Gula 1989:107). Hence Paul's conclusion that while sin abounds, the grace of God abounds even more (Rom 5:20). The grace of God reminds us that we "can still become who we were made to be. The … power of God's redeeming love, or grace … enables us grow toward wholeness and in communion with ourselves, others, and God" (Gula 1989:107). We realize our brokenness alongside our need for interdependence and communion hence the need for church.

4.4 Evolution and Original Sin

For so long the creation of the soul, original sin and the problem of evil were explained from the theological point of view. But following the European renaissance, scholars started asking the unusual questions and questioned the very foundations for the acceptance of these theocentric interpretations. "Jean Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, and others separated the origin and problem of human evil from its Christian explanation. Their philosophical theories of human nature severed redemption from its religious interpretations, too" (Wiley 2002: 115). The enlightenment project that resulted into a movement of intellectuals who cherished reason and independence opened the doors to independent research. Advances in modern science also followed this period. "Modern science – especially evolutionary theories- produced alternative stories to the biblical and Christian stories of creation and human origins" (Wiley 2002: 115).

One of the difficulties in reconciling the doctrine of creation and scientific evolution anchors on original sin. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* holds that one "cannot tamper with the revelation of original sin without undermining the mystery of Christ" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 389). Arguing along this line, Pope Benedict XV's encyclical, *Humani Generis Redemptionem* favors monogenism as against polygenism. Monogenism means that God immediately infused the human soul, and that a single ancestor for the human race is a reality. Polygenism is the denial of Adam and Eve as literal people who transferred the stain of original sin onto their offspring by successive generation down to us. Here, Roman Catholic theology is not arguing with scientists on issues like the age of the earth and the authenticity of the fossil record, since such matters are outside the church's area of expertise. While acknowledging the findings of scientists on the gradual appearance

58

of life on earth, Benedict XV held that God guides the temporal appearance of life. At the same time, he could not explicitly define in what way that may be. *Humani Generis Redemptionem* in rejecting polygenism puts it thus:

> When, however, there is question of another conjectural opinion, namely polygenism, the children of the Church by no means enjoy such liberty. For the faithful cannot embrace that opinion which maintains that either after Adam there existed on this earth true men who did not take their origin through natural generation from him as from the first parent of all, or that Adam represents a certain number of first parents. Now it is no way apparent how such an opinion can be reconciled with that which the sources of revealed truth and the documents of the Teaching Authority of the Church propose with regard to original sin, which proceeds from a sin actually committed by an individual Adam and which, through generation, is passed on to all and is in everyone as his own (Benedict XV, *Humani Generis Redemptionem* no.37).

Favoring monogenism in explaining the individual creation of souls, *Humani Generis Redemptionem* states:

> For these reasons the Teaching Authority of the Church does not forbid that, in conformity with the present state of human sciences and sacred theology, research and discussions, on the part of men experienced in both fields, take place with regard to the doctrine of evolution, in as far as it inquires into the origin of the human body as coming from pre-existent and living matter - for the Catholic faith

obliges us to hold that souls are immediately created by God

(Benedict XV, *Humani Generis Redemptionem* no. 36).

Though this is not scientifically deducible at this time, but Pope John Paul II affirmed the direct creation of the soul in 1996. John Paul II citing *Humani Generis Redemptionem* no. 36 affirmed that if the human body takes its origin from pre-existent living matter, God immediately creates the spiritual soul. He further argued that, "theories of evolution which, in accordance with the philosophies inspiring them, consider the spirit as emerging from the forces of living matter or as a mere epiphenomenon of this matter, are incompatible with the truth about man. Nor are they able to ground the dignity of the person" (John Paul II, 1996).

Duffy (2005) argues that evolutionists in denying the doctrines of the soul and original sin often fall into the fallacy of reductionism. This does not mean that a person must accept monogenism, but once polygenism is rejected that is what is left. Monogenism is not really incompatible with evolution. It is only when evolutionists reduce realism to their scientific and sensory perceptions alone that the difficulty comes in. Reductionism on the part of evolutionists fails to take into cognizance diversity and complexity of reality.

> Our rejection of reductionism does not arise from any conflict between
> religion and science but from a conflict between religion and
> scientism, or scientific materialism, an unwarranted metaphysical
> reductionism that goes beyond a quite legitimate methodological
> reductionism that analytically breaks things down to their constituent
> parts to understand them at that level, although without claiming that
> the deep-down physical and chemical components completely explain
> their reality. Metaphysical reductionism, on the other hand, not only

60

breaks organisms down into their basic chemical and physical building blocks but contends that a complete understanding of them can be found in those most basic constituents. This is a contention resting on the unwarranted premise that scientific analysis reigns supreme over all disciplines since it alone is able to comprehend the totality of reality, a premise that cannot itself be scientifically grounded (Duffy 2005: 218).

As Haught (2008) expains, evolutionary biology as championed by Charles Darwin is believed by scientists to have destroyed the basis for belief in a personal God. The science of Physics by explaining the indelibility and stability of the world from purely physical proofs implies that "there can be no personal deity that can conceivably act or intervene in the natural world" (Haught 2008: 80). Craig (2008: 207-246) argues that there is a danger when we reduce all forms of knowledge to scientific inquiry, that reasoning quantifies knowledge as an object outside of ourselves. Our inner experiences are ignored in the process and our cognitive abilities are lost. This is then a false premise to begin with the problem of searching knowledge. "If a hammer is your only tool, then everything looks like a nail" (Haught 2008:83). This is the fallacy of reductionism that one may accuse evolutionists of falling into.

Thus, reality is flattened out, made one-dimensional, and diminished. What is wrong with reductionism's approach is not its quest for a parsimonious and aesthetic explanation that brings out the ultimate unity of all reality but its shallow atomistic vision that misses the diversity and complexity of reality. But wholes are more than the sum of their parts, especially in living, thinking beings (Duffy 2005:218).

The presumption is that all reality about the world could have a single explanation to its meaning. "That is, they assume that there is only one explanatory slot available, namely, the one shaped to look for physical causes, and this is enough" (Haught 2008:86). This is false because there are different meanings of explanation to one reality each explaining a part of it. Evolution and theological accounts lie on logically different levels, and hence they are non-competing. Nonetheless, theological anthropology must be opened to new insights from the sciences. Since theology and science are both ways of arriving at truth - and since all truths are harmonious with each other - theology is consistent with science. If we understand theology and science correctly, there will be no conflict between what theology tells us and what science tells us. Brannan (2011) sees such attempts in Frederick R. Tennant's 1902 Hulsean lectures that "integrated Darwinism into a Christian synthesis, without diminishing soteriological concerns, by showing that Original Sin is better thought of as inherited natural propensities for self-survival, not as inherited guilt" (Brannan 2011:139). In this, he was trying to bring Darwinism to dialogue with the two primary Christian views of Original Sin – the Latin/western understanding developed by Augustine that sees it as inherited guilt and the Greek/eastern understating that sees it as human propensities toward sin (once one is aware of the law), but that a person is untainted with sin at birth.

4.5 Implications for Baptism

Tertullian was a forerunner of Augustine in two ways: pioneering of orthodox anthropology and soteriology. On the doctrine of traducianism, Tertullian believed that the soul is given to one along with the body, from one's parents and is not specially created by God at the moment of conception. We are not concerned with the rightness or wrongness of this doctrine but the fact his teaching helped in developing

the doctrine of original sin. From the understanding of total depravity from the human original state and then God's sovereign and particular grace arises the need for baptismal regeneration, fundamental decision to opt for Christ and shun evil in the world, recognizing the freedom of the human will, and becoming more aware of the limitations of the human person in a world conditioned by sin. This section of the work treats these themes and understands African polygamy in the light of human limitations.

4.5.1 Baptismal Regeneration

For Tertullian life begins at baptism. Since original sin means that sin was transmitted through conception and birth which results in a depraved human nature, we receive a corrupt body and soul from our parents who themselves have gotten it from their parents down through the years. Thus Norman (2007:434) concludes that for Tertullian, "The unregenerate soul is unclean and sinful both in condition and in action." However, Osborn (2003) argues that the idea of original sin and regeneration should be attributed to Tertullian with reservation. "While Tertullian displays the origins of the idea, one cannot attribute the later doctrine of original sin to him. He does not cite the key texts (Gen.3.15 Ps 51.5; Rom 5.12ff), nor does he see guilt and death as physically transmitted" (Osborn 2003:167). Osborn further admits that at the same time one cannot dismiss the fact that Tertullian shows his yearning for what is simple, that the sacrament of our Christian water (baptism) washes away the sins of our original blindness and frees us for eternal life (Osborn 2003:2).

It is a long held Roman Catholic understanding beginning in the third century that baptism like other sacraments effects what it signifies. This also forms part of the understanding of the church fathers on baptismal regeneration. In this connection, the prominence of water in washing away sins is emphasized. Tertullian's theology held

63

the sacred significance of that water in cleansing the sins of original blindness and releasing one to liberty and life (*On Baptism* 1). Thus, the waters of baptism heal the spirit as well as the flesh (*On Baptism* 4).

It was Tertullian's understanding that the waters of baptism also have the ability to sanctify and make a person holy (*On Baptism* 4) by washing away actual sin and original sin. "Tertullian's bias toward sin is not the equivalent of original sin as actual sin, as it will be understood later in the tradition" (Wiley 2002:45). Tertullian believed that the human soul, as created, was originally good and the good part remains in a person. Original sin forms but a second nature, which is both different and lower (*On the Soul* 16) but that it blocks out the higher nature from shining. Baptism removes that block and enables the repentant sinner to make good on his or her commitment to the new life of grace (Osborn 2003:166-167*)*.

4.5.2 Sin and Fundamental Decision

Summarizing Tertullian's understanding of original sin Wiley (2002) acknowledges that while Tertullian shared in the traducianist theory that the human soul and body are generated all at once during sexual intercourse, in Tertullian's theology, the "idea of original unity of Adam and humankind is the emergence of a metaphysical or ontological principle of explanation for human solidarity in sin with Adam" (Wiley 2002:45). That is why Tertullian struggled with the idea of infant baptism. He associated innocence entirely with children suggesting that infants were innocent of sin. When "Tertullian speaks of an innocent age [for children]. He prefers to pospone baptism to a later stage when corruption manifested itself in personal sins and when a state of sin in the full sense of the word can be said to exist" (Lukken 1973:194). Augustine picks up this theme and develops it further by downplaying the effects of Adam's heritage of guilt and arguing that one is free "to withhold one's

64

consent to this residue of sin" (Nisula 2012:297). In what Augustine called *concupiscentia* (the law of sin), which is a consistutive element of human passions; it is the human heritage from Adam's guilt that generates temptation in a Christian. For Augustine then, "Baptism severes the connection between one's personal piece of concupiscence and the universal original sin. What is left are the remains, and they are only for training (Nisula 2012:289) of a person in the Christian life.

While Tertullian and later church fathers like Augustine agreed on the necessity of baptism in Christian life and the need for a personal decision, they however differed on the timing of baptism. From Tertullian's treatise on baptism, he felt that infants were baptized partly due to the way some interpreted Matthew 19:14: "Suffer the children, and forbid them not to come to me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." He reasoned that some people understood Jesus as commanding that little children be baptized. He disagreed and argued that children should first understand why they should come to Christ and later be baptized.

The idea of making a decision for the Christian way of life becomes paramount in Tertullian's thought.

> Tertullian thought that Adam's sin introduced an irrational element
> into human nature. While persons' remain responsible for the misuse
> of freedom, the inclination to sin brought about by Adam's sin impedes
> freedom in fallen humanity and impels wrongdoing. Tertullian
> conceived of this bias toward sin as an impurity, stain, or corruption. It
> bears serious consequences for historical realm. The problem of evil is
> a product of this irrationality (Wiley 2002:45).

Henry (2000) argues in line with G. Watson that Tertullian's views on original sin apparently differed significantly from St Augustine's in that, while both Tertullian

and Augustine believed that every soul is afflicted with evil through a fault of origin, Tertullian further held that "this evil is due, not to descent from Adam, but to infection from pagan sources before and after birth" (Henry 2002:4). This would be interpreted to mean that Tertullian viewed pagan sources as anything outside of God's design in creation. Tertullian, who saw original sin as part of human heritage however, did not see it as part of God's design in creation. God created Adam pure but an agent, identified as a fallen angel outside of Adam's creation brought sin into the world. Using Ezekiel 28:11-16 Tertullian argues that God created an angel with free will but the angel abused his freewill and good nature by a free choice of evil. "The motive which led to his fall was his own lusting after the wickedness which was spontaneously conceived within him" (Roberts 2001:146). By this fall from angelic presence in paradise, the devil (or Satan) "became the adversary of God, and the author and instigator of evil and wickedness in men. … As he had misused his own free will, so he taught men to misuse theirs. Every manner of subtlety is employed by him to alienate men from God" (Roberts 2001:147).

Tertullian believed however, that with powers of the waters of baptism, human beings could be made strong to overcome the irrational element in them, shun evil, and make strong commitments to follow Jesus. In this understanding, he taught that sins are cancelled in response to the faith that is signed and sealed with waters of baptism in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (*On Baptism* 6). He strongly indicated that repentance must precede baptism (Tertullian, *On Repentance,* 4-6). Baptism necessarily goes with the responsibility of opting decisively to follow Christ alone. This is borne out of an individual conviction and decision.

66

4.5.3 Freedom and Responsibility

Unlike Augustine, Tertullian did not emphasize the doctrine of original sin to the extent of making it impossible for people even to will what is good. Tertullian saw the natural goodness of human beings that subsisted after the fall of Adam, thereby believing in the free will and the power of the grace of God to energize human will for good. And a human being ought to use his/her freewill to accept divine invitation to come back to God. That is what baptism does. But for Tertullian one ought to repent of past sins with firm faith before coming for baptism. (Tertullian, *On Repentance* 6). In the famous words of Osborn (2003:171) to describe Tertullian's attitude on baptism and repentance: "We are not baptized so that we may stop sinning, but because we have stopped sinning," we are baptised in Christ.

Tertullian urged that instructions and preparations precede baptism and thereafter, there should be fasting and praying so that the baptised was steadfast and disciplined in the faith. He acknowledged that just like Jesus' tempation in the wilderness there is bound to be temptation accompanying the Christian (*On Baptism* 20). Tertullian emphasised the purity of the church as the bride of Christ and that Christians as the body of Christ need not have any stain. Once a person was considered bad outside the church, Tertullian felt that such a person should not be allowed into the Christian community (Terrullian, *Apology* 44).

Tertullian and other Montanists believed "that there can be no remission of grave post-baptismal sins in this life but that God might save the repentant Christian in the next" (Brattston 1991:333). Tertullian taught that the church can forgive a baptised Christian only once for some non-mortal sin (Tertullian, *On Repentance* 7). Brattston (1991:332) thinks that Tertullian might have been influence by 1 Corinthians 5:3-5, which seems to say that "sins committed after baptism can be

pardoned after death, it is not apparent whether the penitent Christian would be readmitted to the church and forgiven in this life or be pardoned only after death" (332). The biblical passage in support of this understanding reads thus:

> For though absent in body I am present in spirit, and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 5:3-5).

Tertullian believed that murder, idolatry, fraud, apostasy, blasphemy, adultery and fornication; and violation of God's temple are unforgivable sins (Tertullian, *On Modesty* 19). Though a Montanist at this time he still recognised the power of penance and forgiveness, and alluded to the fact that though the church does not lack the power to forgive these sins but the church simply "ought not" forgive such sins (Tertullian, *On Modesty* 21). It was Tertullian's understanding that such leniency will encourage more sin in the church, which is clearly unacceptable. Tertullian praised bravity in dying for the faith rather than allowiing even death to disssuade one from faith in Christ (Tertullian, *To the Martyrs* 3).

4.6 Pastoral Challenge

Tertullian's understanding of Christianity and baptism, excludes many African polygamists, and poses a challenge to changing pastoral Catholic life in Africa. Tertullian, himself a rigorist with near perfectionist image of Christianity failed to grasp God's mercy for a sinner. Tertullian's theology is characterized thus:

> Certain features stand out sufficiently to be perceptible even to the occasional reader of Tertullian. He was more afraid of original sin -

68

with which his notion of a material soul easily harmonized - than reassured by the Eucharistic sacrifice (however literally he took it). He understood punishment more readily than atonement. He lived in a world of adults and was suspicious of children's baptism. He saw more devils than angels (Momigliano 1976:276).

In response to Tertullian, one would say, God loves a sinner but does not like sin. Even in sin, the graces of God abound calling a sinner unto repentance. As Ezekiel (18: 22, 32; 33:11) puts it, God is not interested in the death of a sinner but that sinners should repent and return to God. So, African Catholic polygamists as those who have gone astray should be brought back into the fold rather than allowed to wander away from the faith.

The current Catholic baptismal practices in Africa exclude converted polygamists from fuller participation in the life of the church. As indicated at the beginning of this work in Chapter one, how does an African polygamist experience grace in the Catholic Church? How does an African polygamist understand original sin and baptism and he or she pursues membership in church? The development of the doctrines of original sin and baptism down through the centuries is an indication that difference in location and time account for variation in peoples' responses to God. This accounts for the difference in approach and understanding of original sin as evident in the Western Church and Eastern Church.

Theology is people's response to God in faith. How people respond to God is very important. That is why Clovis Boff (2005) sees theology as a regional project and acknowledges context in theology as part of a people's ongoing experience as they respond to God. Anthropological studies show that Tertullian himself struggled with identity issues of understanding himself to be Christian and at the same time

69

African in a Roman colonized territory of second century North Africa (Wilhite 2007:48). One would interpret that his journey into the Montanist movement is also a struggle of understanding his personality type that attuned him to a rigorous spirituality. On the basis of this, the three prominent themes of baptismal regeneration, sin and fundamental decision; and freedom and responsibility could be interpreted in relation to an African polygamist this way: accept the polygamist in his situation. The polygamist on his part should open up to be given a new life in baptism, accept his or her sinful situation with a firm decision to gradually change, and then freely live the responsibility of these changes without hurting the feelings of their spouses and children. We shall discuss more on this in the next chapter.

4.7 Conclusion

The early church fathers like Tertullian were simply living their faith without taking into consideration what later generations would think of them. The later generations stand on their shoulders so can see deeper. This is what this chapter has done with Tertullian. This chapter did not study Tertullian alone but in relation to contemporary developments like current Roman Catholic teaching on baptism and original sin, scriptural backings, the take of evolution on the subject, and its impact on Roman Catholic baptismal practice today. Studying Tertullian alone endangers the success of such a project due to the,

> Fear of an element of risk in … [such an] isolation [study]. The risk is particularly great in the case of Tertullian because he remained in the mainstream of Catholic thought notwithstanding his Montanism and the mysterious group of 'Tertullianistae' he inspired. He was the 'master' of Cyprian and influenced St. Jerome in many ways (Momigliano 1976:276).

70

It is the same influence that impacted Catholic theology as early as possible. Quite significantly, Tertullian understood Christianity as a way of life. Since for Tertullian one could not derive intellectual satisfaction from Christianity as a form of knowledge but as a way of life, the next chapter focuses on what Tertullian's theology on baptism says to an African Roman Catholic polygamist today.

Chapter Five: African Polygamist, Baptism and Tertullian

5.0 Introduction

Polygamy, which is the marrying of more that one wife, continues to be an unsettled problem for missionary activity in Africa because of its cultural roots. Though polygamy is unchristian, it was practiced among the Jews in the Old Testament, which records that it was both forbidden and permitted at different times (Hussein 2002:83-84). However, following the New Testament as the apogee of divine revelation in Jesus Christ, the Church explicitly forbids polygamy and upholds monogamy as the legitimate form of marriage. Tertullian explicitly taught that while marriage itself was lawful and good for the human family, polygamy was illegitimate and inappropriate. He put it this way:

> We do not indeed forbid the union of man and the woman, blessed by
> God as the seminary of the human race, and devised for the
> replenishment of the earth and the furnishing of the world, and
> therefore, permitted, yet singly. For Adam was the one husband of
> Eve, and Eve his one wife, one woman, one rib (Tertullian, *To His*
> *Wife* Bk 1: 2).

Tertullian further admonished those teaching polygamy to stop it, and that church leaders should follow the advise of Paul on monogamy and chastity. That marriage itself involves chastity since a Christian is called to self control and discipline (Tertullian, *On Exhortation to Chastity* 5-7). Clearly self-control and discipline do not allow for multiple marriages. At the same time this problem of polygamy is a cultural one. This chapter calls for dialogue with indigenous cultures of Africa on the issue of the acceptance of polygamists into the church and their subsequent baptism. In the words of Kraft (1996:308), a missionary anthropologist, in

making judgment concerning an indigenous custom or seeking "to change it, respect for the people who practice it demands that we make every effort to understand the custom from their point of view." This chapter in seeking to dialogue with polygamy and the problem of baptism in Africa engages the Roman Catholic tradition, carefully analyzes the connections and difficult areas in the tradition. In the light of Tertullian's understanding of baptism and grace, how can an African polygamist experience grace and salvation in the Roman Catholic Church?

5.1 Polygamy and the African Cry

Polygamy in general refers to the union of multiple marriage partners. It is called polygamy when a single husband has several wives, and it is known as polyandry when a single wife has several husbands. "Polyandry is rare in Africa" (Gangwari 1997:38). Polygamy is more common and that is what we are discussing in this chapter in relation to Christian baptism. Polygamy as a form of "marriage between one man and several women at a time" (Bujo, 1985:230) is characterized as "a voluntary union" (Gangwari 1997:39) but at times it is a forced marriage. Families may intimidate girls into polygamous relationships for the sake of material benefits. Male ownership of land has also led to a culture of patriarchal dominance in many parts of Africa that encourage polygamy. In agrarian societies, women could get into polygamous marriages to make ends meet since land, which is owned mostly by men, is the source of livelihood. Considering this background one may summarize the basic features of polygamy thus,

> Its essential characteristic is the capacity of the man to take as many
> wives as he pleases. This form of polygamy is either simultaneous or
> successive - simultaneous when the man lives with or visits the wives
> in rotation and supports them with their children; or successive when

73

the man marries other wives without specifically divorcing the previous wife or wives (Gangwari 1997:39).

African scholars argue that, "the African polygamous marriage relationship is never to be understood in isolation of the other aspects of the African culture" (Atel 2004:124) namely community life. The community is concerned "with its own continued existence, and any theory of marriage held by the community must be evolved with a view to the children rather than to the wife" (Wegh 2003:75). Magesa (1998:128-133) gives four reasons why an African goes into polygamy: lineage continuity, security purposes, socio-economic dimensions and befitting funeral. Briefly, let us explain each of these reasons.

(a) *Lineage Continuity:* Among the Africans, procreation is regarded as the main function of marriage. "Marriages are ratified not so much by sexual intercourse as by the result of it, that is by pregnancy or the bearing of a child" (Adasu 1985:19). Most African societies being patrilineal put a premium on male children. The pattern of land property inheritance through the male child makes having a male child a great source of anxiety. Anyone who does not have a male child in the family has not established a family. Girls as a rule belong more to someone else's family. The onus is on the male child to continue with the family name. An African therefore wastes no time marrying a second wife, if the first wife fails to give birth to a male child at the expected time (Wegh 2003:37).

(b) *Security Purposes:* Children are not only a sign of lineage continuity, but also guarantee social security and bestow prestige and prosperity on their parents. Since there is no organized social security system in many places, children are responsible for taking care of their parents in old age. One can explain the wider social dimensions thus:

Since one's power and influence in the clan and lineage and in society

in general depends to some significant degree on the size of one's

family and how well one manages it, a man will be drawn into

acquiring many wives because of the potential to have a greater

number of children. This structure of marriage also provides more

protection for widows, because it makes sure that women remain

within the lineage after the death of their husbands and that they are

materially provided for (Magesa 1998:128-129).

(c) *Socio-conomic Dimensions:* Traditional African society is mainly agrarian and

rural. Agricultural production in these areas is by manual labor with a complete

dependence on mere physical strength and simple tools. For a family to raise its

economic fortunes, it must have a large work force. Related to this is hospitality.

Generous hospitality, though, is only possible in part because one has

the material means to afford it. … the many working hands of the

polygamist make this more likely than the few hands of the

monogamist. And generosity and hospitality are not only admired as

moral qualities, they are taken as clear qualities of leadership (Magesa

1998:129).

(d) *Befitting Funeral:* According to Magesa (1998:122), marriage is for the

"stabilization of the vital force [life] by legitimization of children" which is geared

toward solidarity with both the living and the living death (ancestors). In traditional

African societies, funeral rites are important because they are regarded as "rites of

passage" by which the dead are installed as ancestors (Ikenga-Metuh 1987:137). And

ancestors have a very important place in African traditional societies, which are

organized on segmentary lineage system.

75

The Roman Catholic Church objects to polygamy. The Roman Catholic Professor of Canon Law, Father John Umar Gangwari, in his 1996 lectures on the course, "Marriage/Parish Administration," at St. Augustine's Major Seminary, Jos, Nigeria has a counter argument on why the church objects to polygamy. Gangwari gives four counter reasons for polygamy saying that, (i) it is only God who continues a family lineage and not the number of wives one marries, (ii) children do not always guarantee one's security, (iii) women are treated as objects rather than humans, and (iv) emphasis on befitting funeral heightens materialism.

Roman Catholic teaching leaves a polygamist with two choices, to either stay in the marriage and receive baptism of desire; or the polygamist chooses one of his wives and weds with her in the church. Receiving the baptism of desire means that where there is an implicit or explicit faith and desire for baptism by water but such a person is prevented by extraordinary circumstances from receiving the baptism, the extrinsic means cannot overshadow his or her faith, which is a fundamental requirement for church membership. Such a person cannot be baptized with water but his or her faith suffices within the circumstances though the person will not be a practicing Catholic. The second option which is choosing one of the wives for a church wedding is stipulated in the Roman Catholic teaching in Canon 1148 sub-section 1. The implication of this canon is that the polygamist should send away the other wives or at most consider living with them as his fellow blood sisters. This practice is called Pauline Privilege. This teaching is derived from the Apostle Paul's teaching in 1Corinthians 7: 10-15 whereby one partner has the prerogative of leaving a marriage after conversion to Christianity if he or she so desires. It is specifically allowed in Roman Catholic teaching when one of the partners so desires to be married in the church. In Roman Catholic teaching, this is different from divorce. However,

76

African polygamists find it difficult to distinguish this practice from divorce, besides, it fosters injustice and misery to the women and their families. Polygamy is patriarchal in orientation and the Roman Catholic Church's solution appears patriarchal as well. In selecting and marrying one of the wives in church, a man jeopardizes the marital status of the other women. Since marriage in Africa is not just a matter of the couple, but also the entire family and community, such an act destroys the mutual relationship of the affected families (of both the bride and groom). During the Easter celebration of 1998 in St. Margaret's Parish, Tordonga, in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Katsina Ala, central Nigeria, a polygamist who was denied baptism and asked to choose one of his wives to wed in church but truly and unreservedly loved his wives and children considering the Roman Catholic teaching on marriage as hard cried out:

> How Christian is it to be that brutal to a person with whom you have shared almost everything for quite some years? If the Christ I seek to find can come to me only through the sending away of my wives, hence, an inhuman act, what would my Christ and I appear to be before my wives? Would not the two of us appear to be devils with inhuman faces, ready to execute devilish plans? That god and his kingdom I disown. The God I seek is one that has a human face.

Generally, a woman who is married in a polygamous family is not given a sense of belonging in the church. A Woman who was a catechumen for thirteen years at St. Gregory's Parish, Ikpayongo, in the Catholic Diocese of Makurdi, central Nigeria but was refused sacramental baptism at the Easter of 2006 lamented: "I am tired of just being a financial contributor in the church. A church that prefers to admit to the

sacraments prostitutes who are perpetually living in a state of sin to polygamists can never be desired."

Considering the pain surrounding Pauline Privilege, this work argues that the Roman Catholic Church needs to evaluate her pastoral approach to the sincere polygamist in Africa. If the church does not act towards this end, it might be proclaiming before the polygamists (especially women), an estranged God. Women are the ones mostly disadvantaged in this ethical conflict. From pastoral experience, one could learn that women who experience these problems are in great pains and anguish. From this perspective, their feeling of alienation is readily understandable. They see themselves as being discriminated against in church. Some have decided after great pains to leave the church. Others are clinging to the church by recognizing the need for moral support from outside official church structures. Others are still determined to continue their struggle to change the church no matter what the price. What can the church do? Should the church allow the situation to continue drifting to hopelessness? There appears some glimpses of hope from the works of Tertullian concerning this matter. To this end, the next section of the study begins from an African understanding of salvation to the Roman Catholic understanding. This work makes consideration for African belief system, which holds that the African experience contains the seed of the Christian faith in Jesus Christ.

5.2 Salvation for an African

Salvation for an African means going successfully through the rites of passage to the ancestral world (humanity's best final end). Becoming an ancestor is the goal of every African. It is an equation of the Christian sainthood. "Because ancestors have rejoined God the Father in the heavens above and in the spirit-world, they are no longer limited in time and space" (Adasu 1985:21). Ancestors have a direct link with

78

God and the community, and they also regulate the daily living of their members. To become an ancestor, one must live a good life according to the moral traditions of the community. For Africans, the family – a community itself – forms the nucleus of the large family, and larger community. The compound lineage segment, or village is the most acceptable basis for community in Africa. Shorter (1974:205) describes it as "the most realistic human community." For the Africans, life means living with others. No one exists as an individual. "I am because you are," so goes the African popular saying.

Africans believe in the existence of two worlds: the visible and invisible (earthly and heavenly). The visible world consists of the physical things while the invisible world consists of spiritual things that have mystical bearing on the visible world. The two worlds come to form one world. In African religious thought there is God, the divinities/deities, the spirits (are either good or evil) and the ancestors. God is the great One Spirit under whom all others live and move and have their power e.g. intermediaries (divinities). On the question of the hereafter, Africans have many ideas. On the whole these ideas paint the hereafter in features that are very much like those of the present life. In many parts of Africa, people believe that the next world is invisible, but very close to that of the living (Mbiti 1977:116).

Africans accept the reality of sin and evil and do recognize evil as either moral or physical. However, they differ with Christians on the source of evil. While Christianity traces evil to the devil, the devil is not an African concept. For the African mind, those responsible for evil are God, divinities, ancestors, and spirits. At the same time, both religions recognize human freedom and teach that its misuse brings about evil and sin because a wrongdoer cooperates with the source of evil. This destroys peace and harmony within the society and with God. Both religions blame

79

the advent of evil in the world on humanity and exculpate God. Africans use different rituals to reconcile broken relationships, wipe away evil and restore the wrongdoer into the community. It is through rituals that the human person makes one's experience of the past intelligible. To this end, Africans have various rites e.g. birth rites, initiation rites, rites of temporal cycles (Ikenga-Metuh 1987:185-202); and sacrifices as dictated by the different ethnic groups. This is similar to what Christians do, when they administer baptism to catechumen as a rite of initiation into the Christian community. In this regard the guilt of original sin is taken away. To use Augustinian language, one experiences renewal at baptism, which is "a process and progress in diminishing the effects of *concupiscentia* [self desires and inclinations] in the actions of the Christian" (Nisula 2012:299).

Polygamy is part of the human brokenness of original sin that baptism seeks to restore. Baptismal grace is part of God's continuous salvific will in the world. It is God who saves us and not our virtuous actions. St Paul or a Pauline author in his Letter to Titus puts it this way,

> The kindness and generous love of God our savior appeared, not
>
> because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of his mercy,
>
> he saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the holy spirit,
>
> whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our savior, so
>
> that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of
>
> eternal life (Titus 3:4-7).

Human redemption in the person of Jesus Christ is a story of God's loving relationship with people's brokenness as human beings. It is not because people merit such love, but because God, out of mercy, takes pity on our sinful condition, which alienates us from God's love, from love of neighbor and from love of self. The

80

passage from Titus could be interpreted that, when an African polygamist is "save[d] through the bath of rebirth" as a new person by the sacrament of baptism and "renew[ed] by the holy spirit," the seeds of transformation are sown in him or her. Sacramental baptism is not only a sign, but it effects inward graces. Something profound and tangible happens during baptism. The sacrament brings about newness by washing away sins (Acts 22:16) and inaugurating a new way of life. To use Augustinian language, this new person has his or her origins not in human generation but in God's willing us to take our place in God's family. Virtuous conduct is a result of this newness of life, not of any good resolutions this new person has made. For a Christian, it is not as much about what one *gives* during baptism (i.e., a profession of faith) but it is about what one *gets*, which is salvation. Here, it is not just what the polygamist does as to what God does in the life of the polygamist in the midst of his or her brokenness (original sin) that matters.

The sacrament of baptism not only effects what it causes but it also causes what it effects. Since the Second Vatican Council, Roman Catholic sacramental theology has so strongly emphasized the importance of full and active participation in the sacraments that we have lost some of the importance of sacramental causality. We need to hold these two sacramental principles in dynamic tension.

God loves us but does not like sin. At the same time, God loves us as sinners. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (John 3:16). One may reflect on the question of sin and the sinner this way:

> God loves the sinner, but not the sin. Here is the problem. When I do
> good things, they are me, they are my life. When I sin, that too is me;
> my sin is my life. My sin is not something accidental that I do. My sin

81

is me. I am an integral actor on the stage of life, and I love and I hate. I

cannot be broken up into the sinner and the sin. God cannot love the

whole me without loving everything, light and darkness, good and bad.

If God cannot embrace my darkness, then I am treated as an

abstraction. I am loved in abstraction from something that is indeed my

life. Abstract love is no love (Lee 1988:91).

It is from this background that this chapter examines the soteriological,

ecclesiological and pastoral questions surrounding the baptism of an African

polygamist. The next section focuses on the denial of baptism to African polygamists

and its implications for an African understanding of church.

5.3 Ecclesiological Implications

The understanding of baptismal grace in the early church as seen in Tertullian

subsists in the church today though the language of grace might change to reflect the

different times and places. This study adapts the language of original sin and

baptismal grace to African cosmology to fashion an embracing ecclesiology that

integrates an African polygamist into the sacramental life of the church. Here one

begins to understand the church in an African context.

In this section, this study uses the African image/model of the Church as

family to guide an African ecclesiology. Dulles (1987) reminds us that models are

both explanatory and exploratory. By explanatory, Dulles means they resonate with

our experiences and "synthesize what we already know or at least are inclined to

believe" (Dulles 1987:24). By exploratory, Dulles refers to "their capacity to lead to

new theological insights" (Dulles 1987:25). In this regard, the African family model

will help us draw concrete proposals on how to map out an African sacramental

theology of baptism and grace.

82

In Africa, there are various customs and beliefs about the birth and naming ceremony of a child. There is happiness and celebration in every tribe when a child is born. This joy increases at the child's naming ceremony. Though the naming ceremony has no specific time it is not too long after the safe delivery of a child. People look on the safe birth of a child as a sign of goodwill of the gods and ancestors, by allowing a new member into the community to help, strengthen and continue the family lineage. Among the Efik people of Nigeria, the most important event is not the birth, but the naming ceremony of the child. So, up to the day the child is given a name by the community, members of the tribe do not officially recognize the child. If it dies before this time, the Efik believe it will not reach the home of the ancestors because it has not been recognized by the living community of which the ancestors are members (O'Connor 1978:11). The Tiv people of north central Nigeria regard the naming of the Child (*iti iin wan*) so important that it is done by an elder who is closer to the ancestors than a younger person. For the Nupe of Nigeria, the naming ceremony (*Suna*) pronounces the name and identity of the child. The child is linked specially to the ancestral world through a believed reincarnated ancestor that subsists in the child (known as *Kuci*) and thanks/praises are offered to God who is called *Soko* in the local language (Ikenga-Metuh 1987:190-191). In a similar vein, among the Mende of Sierra Leone, the naming of the child marks the height of the birth and naming ceremony. The naming ceremony is the rite of incorporation into the society. The birth itself supplies for the rite of separation from both the prenatal spirit world and the physical world of the mother's womb to which the child hitherto belonged. There are three or four days' seclusion after birth for both the mother and child, which constitute an "in-between" state for the rite of separation and the rite of incorporation of the child into the community. The child no longer

belongs to the prenatal world, nor has the child yet been incorporated into the human world and human society. There are the simple rites of crying *"Hooyo"* after birth, coming out of seclusion and holding up the child to the sun and conferring on the child a name in the gathering of friends and relatives which constitute the rites of incorporation into the physical universe and the Mende society (Ikenga-Metuh 1987:189). The point of all these descriptions is to explain to some readers the African understandings of birth, name and incorporation into the tribal society. This will help everyone to see the importance of identity and membership in African worldview.

In John 3:1-8, we see how Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews, who belonged to the party of the Pharisees approached Jesus and Jesus responded that a person must be born again to inherit the kingdom of God. Nicodemus wondered: "How can a grown man be born again? He certainly cannot enter his mother's womb and be born a second time" (John 3:4). Jesus said here that a person must be born of water and the Holy Spirit for flesh gives birth to flesh and spirit gives birth to spirit. Jesus tells Nicodemus that we must be born again; in other words, we must be born into a new family. This is a clear indication that in our Christian teaching too, we realize the importance of being born and belonging to a community (the community of believers in Christ) and of being given a name to show our membership of this community. In African setup, when a child is born, the child has the life of its forefathers in the child. Similarly, when a Christian is born again at baptism, he or she is born of water and the Holy Spirit. The Christian has God's life in him or her.

An African child is born into a family and a clan. Since baptism is the fundamental sacrament that incorporates people into membership of the church, when a Christian is born a second time in baptism such a person is born into the family of

God. The baptized person is no longer only a member of a particular family and a particular tribe, but is now marked especially as a member of God's family, the church. As it is in the Roman Catholic ceremony of baptism while welcoming the catechumen into the church, the minister makes the sign of the cross on the person's forehead saying: "the Christian community welcomes you with great joy. In its name I claim you for Christ our savior by the sign of this cross I now trace on your forehead." In traditional African communities, even though a child is born into a tribe, the child belongs to a specific place i.e. the clan. Rendering Roman Catholic theology into African terms, we can say that, by baptism a Christian is born into a tribe of the Roman Catholic Church. Christ is the head with the pope as his vicar, his representative; hence the pope qualifies as a first class chief in the African sense. But a child is also born into a specific place that is a diocese (a clan). The clan head is the bishop. People then reside in different districts that are equated to parishes. As a member of one's father's family and tribe, a person is not a stranger wandering about homeless. Everybody is important and special. Every person is given attention. The clan head, the district head, all listen to the various problems of their people and act accordingly.

As noted earlier, in Africa, life is experienced as a community. This study uses the Tiv tribe to explain how a community functions. The Tiv society is communitarian and egalitarian (Yuhe 1978:16, Wegh 2003:51) and membership is by birth. "In accordance with this egalitarian logic, the office of the *Tor Tiv* (Chief of Tiv), for instance, which was created by the British Administration in 1947, is not hereditary" (Wegh 2003:51). Decisions are made by consensus. Everybody is his or her neighbor's keeper. The family set up in Tiv society is very important in the decision making process. The family unit has a wide circle of members. For the Tiv people, the

85

family consists of the children, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers and sister, who may have their own children and other immediate relatives. All of these live in one big compound known as *Ya* (Yuhe 1978:15). The eldest male who is usually called *ter* (father) of the family has the role of presiding over matters which pattern to members of that family. In this set up everyone is allowed to participate in policy formulation.

Apart from the family setup is the governing body of the lineage called *ityo*. This "decision-making body... is representative. A decision about any matter is reached by a consensus … Each individual is allowed enough time to express himself at any decision-making session" (Atel 2004: 24). The *ityo* sits in a council that is called *ijir* (literally translated as judgment). "When the *ijir* is in session, everybody is at liberty to attend and everybody present has a hearing ..." (Yuhe 1978:21). It is clear that, power is shared and decision-making is not an exclusive reserve of a social class (Moti 1984:106). The decision making process is dialogical and all decisions are binding on all members since they are involved at all levels. The community's experiences and concerns are taken into consideration when those decisions are made. Power belongs to the people and the Tiv believe that God resides with the community so *"imo i ior ka imo i Aondo"* meaning "the voice of the people is the voice of God." This corroborates with the Christian *sensus fidei* (sense of faith), which is the "instinct or spiritual capacity for discernment" (Gaillardetz 2008:216) that is aroused and sustained by the Holy Spirit within the community.

Understanding the African church as a family explains the relationship between the universal and the local church. Africans live as a community but those who live in the same compound share a deeper relationship among themselves that is different from those outside the compound. Those in the same village are closer

86

among themselves than those from another village. People from the same village would speak the same language, share the same customs and are bound strongly together by tribal ties than those from another village. Arising from this understanding, the church should take the particularity and otherness of Africans and their communities seriously. Here, this study is talking about the relationship between the universal and the local church regarding certain customs like polygamy. Polygamy is a cultural product that is complex, legal and cannot be easily treated nor dismissed.

In traditional Africa, one of the greatest punishments one could incur for violating the law is ostracization or excommunication from both the living and the living death members of the community. The treatment given to polygamous families as examined in this study can be equated to rejection and ostracization in the African sense. Polygamists are not baptized nor given a Christian burial. How then are polygamous families to be made comfortable within the faith with regards to their marital life that is the bedrock of society?

> We are accustomed in the church to making a distinction between practicing and non-practicing Catholics or Christians. … This seems inherently contradictory. Could one be accredited with the name, Christian if from all intent and purposes one did not merit such accreditation? How could one be a Christian, and not a practicing one at the same time? (Wegh 1997:47).

There is no common ground in resolving the problem of polygamists and baptism in the Roman Catholic Church. Some parish priests simply close the situation leaving them to fate, and some "have tried to simply defer the baptism of polygamous catechumens until they are very old or dying, while others deal with the whole problem in an even more negative manner: they avoid presenting the gospel to

87

polygamists" (Hillman 1975: 204).

According to Tertullian, true repentance is something that is originated by God (Tertullian, *On Repentance* 1). It is the Spirit that moves an individual, and in turn sanctifies the person. The church as the primordial sacrament acts as the channel for this sanctification. At the conversion of Cornelius, which inaugurated the world gentile mission, Peter was cautioned not to call anything unclean (Acts 10:15). "Grace … is nothing other than God's active love for humankind" (Haight 1978:165). By coming forth to be Christians, African polygamists are responding to God's invitation to share in God's love. "Let the polygamist in Africa be taught the faith and then be allowed to gradually free himself from the shackles irrelevant to the teachings of his new faith" (Yakubu & Batur 1995:13). Let the polygamist be baptized together with his wives. Let them experience God's kingdom in their concrete human situation. Let the law of the church only affect them on increasing the number of wives after receiving baptism and subsequent admission to the full sacramental life of the church. As Tertullian would say, "we are amended when we are absolved" (Tertullian, *On Repentance* 2).

5.4 Pastoral Tensions

As mentioned earlier, when we were born we had "the life of our fore-parents" (original sin of), Adam and Eve. But we know that they disobeyed God, which resulted in a destructive relationship with God and creation. In this sense, original sin is understood in terms of our condition of being. When we say we are all born with Adam's sin, it is also understood in terms of the abuse of God given freedom by Adam. As we call it disobedience, humanity has rooted in its being the tendency of the rejection and opposition to God that continues to weigh heavy on human life and history. Understood in this sense, baptism is a fundamental option for good. As the

Code of Canon Law section 1261 explains, for the infants, this decision is made on their behalf by their parents/guardians since the children are incapable of making decisions by themselves at this stage. Their parents/guardians strive for the best for them. It then follows that baptism should not be an exception. Jesus proclaimed: "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them" (Matthew 19:14; Mark 10:14, Luke 18:15-16).

Baptism is then a response to the saving will of God wrought in Christ, a response that we follow a certain way of life, to do things that are good and to avoid evil. It is a public declaration that a person belongs to a new way of life and has a mission, which is the creation of a new heaven and a new earth (2 Peter 3). One responds to the divine invitation in his or her particular situation by opting for God and fighting evil by actively working against Satan. For some this decision is seen in baptism of water, but for others it means baptism of desire (O'Connor, 1978:15) and for others still it is made manifest in the baptism of blood (martyrdom). Here we see three types of baptism appearing: baptism of water, baptism of desire and baptism of blood.

The growing difficulty of evangelization in Africa today is when people in polygamous relations are told to receive baptism of desire. As we earlier noted from Tertullian's treatise on baptism, there were only two forms of baptism recognized in the early times: baptism of water and baptism of blood. This study argues that there are no early texts to the evidence of the baptism of desire in the early church. As a matter of fact, baptism of desire is not a real baptism. It is only a (pastoral) term to indicate that somebody seems to be desiring baptism, but that in accordance with the requirements for baptism it cannot be administered. The term seems to be invented in parallel with the Eucharist and Eucharist of desire, which is a medieval invention, not

89

a term current in the early church. This seems to have been a later development to address specific pastoral situations. In this respect this study suggests that polygamous couples may be given the baptism of water in the Roman Catholic Church. This is a good hermeneutics of retrieval on Tertullian's *To His Wife*, whereby Tertullian called for patience in handling neophytes in marital unions before conversion (Tertullian, *To His Wife*, Bk 2:7). In line with Pauline understanding, Tertullian distinguishes between marriage before conversion and marriage after conversion, probably a marriage contracted outside the faith. These are not the same and the faith of those involved is not on the same level. When someone in an unchristian marriage requests for baptism or desire to receive baptism, this is the beginning of the gradual process of accepting Christ. Baptism at this point becomes the first step in the process of becoming a Christian. This study proposes that concessions be granted to polygamists who were in that state before accepting the faith. Concessions are responses to specific pastoral problems. In the sixteenth century, the church was confronted with problems associated with polygamy and it gave concessions to those involved. Pope Paul III in his Apostolic Constitution, *Attitudo* of June 1, 1535 (Hillman 1975:28), Pope Pius V's *Romani Pontificus* of August 2, 1571, and Pope Gregory XIII's *Populi* of January 25, 1585 all made concessions when confronted with difficulties in respect of polygamy in mission lands. In German missions for instance, there was a toleration of the polygamist. Converted polygamous kings were baptized with their entire households. A letter written by Pope Gregory II to Boniface, a missionary in northern Europe shows that the Church allowed polygamy in certain cases, cases that are very similar to the African context (Hillman 1975:29-30). It is unfortunate for Africa that as far back as 1959, when Pope John XXIII was elected pope with all his promises of "aggiornamento," could not grant concessions to an African delegation to Rome. The

90

delegation requested the removal of the ban on polygamy, or at least to baptize the polygamist, his wives and children. The mission was not achieved. From the look of things, polygamy can never be a closed matter in Africa or elsewhere as long as races and cultures accept it as a social institution. The church should rather reexamine "the question without prejudice and with attention to the study of cultures" (Yakubu & Batur 1995:12-13). In the light of this, this study suggests once more that good pastoral initiative includes a hermeneutics of retrieval. This amounts to allowing the Spirit of the Lord to blow freely where it wills (John 3:8).

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter admits that polygamy is a problem and cannot easily be dismissed since it is part of a people's culture. It is a complex situation that has multiple effects on traditional African family life. One may reason thus:

> If the church then forbids polygamy, it must make other arrangements
> for widows and orphans, since the people can no longer turn to their
> traditional solutions. Missionaries need to realize that the changes they
> introduce often have far-reaching consequences in other areas of the
> people's lives, and they must be sensitive to unintended side effects
> (Hiebert 1999: 49-50).

The solution that the Roman Catholic Church often proposes to solve the problem is not too acceptable to the Africans. This is a pastoral problem in as much as it is a doctrinal matter, so solutions go beyond mere ethical or systemic theological approach to include practical pastoral considerations. The current solution under Pauline privilege alienates other women and their children. At the same time the refusal of baptism for polygamists keeps them outside the church while they are still

members. The next section of this work, which is the concluding piece, hopes to

discuss the way forward

General Conclusion

If we understand the African polygamist from what is discussed in this work, a polygamist will not go into the difficulty of considering and choosing one wife and sending away the rest as required by the Roman Catholic Church's Pauline Privilege. Until the polygamist seeks baptism under the influence of grace and freely decides on what to do next with the wives, monogamy in this case could be compared to the evangelical counsels, which should never be imposed on anybody. Faith is a continuous struggle against evil in a world tainted by original sin. Gradually, the polygamist will come to accept God fully as the polygamist matures in the faith. "Putting a very difficult-to-accept condition at the very point of inception of the dynamic surrender of self is not a human way to help the sincere polygamist in Christ" (Ajomo 1991:33).

In approaching the doctrine of original sin, we should always look at the larger picture of creation and God's story of salvation. The doctrine of original sin is anchored in the reality of sin in the world and God's redemption. God created a harmonious universe and filled it with life. By rejecting our divine image, humanity brought death and brokenness into the world. However, God's will for life and blessing have prevailed. Original sin itself refers to the concrete human condition, which is present at the birth of each one of us. We are all born into a world that in fact is already broken. This brokenness is present at the birth of everyone, and human beings only enter into it. Original sin is then about the human existence right here and now. This includes the brokenness of polygamy, which needs to be consciously worked on, and the affected persons are then restored in Christ.

The denial of sacramental baptism to African polygamists leaves many of them out of the sacramental life of the church. This study is not saying that monogamy

93

should be denied while upholding the practice of polygamy. "Polygamy is incompatible with unity of marriage" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no.1664). At the same time, the Roman Catholic position on polygamy is traumatizing to many people especially the women who are victims of this patriarchal culture. This study recognizes that, while baptism is the fundamental sacrament of the church, marriage is then the basic sacrament of the church. It is from marriage that the church gets children to baptize so as to get new members to receive the other sacraments. Because marriage is the bedrock of any given society and if there are serious problems in this regard our efforts of having a strong church might be futile.

In the light of the insights gleaned from Tertullian, the Roman Catholic Church can administer sacramental baptism to African polygamists. What this study proposes is a pastoral accommodation. Pastoral accommodation means making room for an inherent problematic situation to exist for sometime, which is in itself contrary to the doctrine of the church (the ideal). There is a limit to this pastoral accommodation. Once the polygamist is accepted into the church and baptized, such a person cannot contract another polygamous marriage again. Also, the baptized children of polygamists would not be permitted to enter into multiple marriages. In this way, the church's practice of baptizing polygamists would contribute to the transformation of African culture and work toward ending the practice. Pastoral accommodation would explicitly underscore the fact that the church is a place for sinners to come and be transformed and sanctified. The baptism of a polygamist is not an end in itself but only a step towards the end.

This study employs the principle of double effect in choosing the option of baptizing the African polygamist as lesser of the two evils: the choice between sending away the women or the women remain with the man who refuses to choose

94

any of them but would rather be a nominal Roman Catholic member. And at times, because of ostracization from the Christian community, African polygamous families defect from the faith. The present practice under Pauline Privilege while not allowing divorce allows wives to be released; it in turn disrupts the harmony in the family. Remember the adulterous woman of John 8 - with all the legal prohibitions in place, Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, [and] from now on do not sin any more" (John 8:11). To use Augustinian language, there is "both a full remission of sins together with *concupiscentia* in baptism, and … a progressive perfection of new life in Christ" (Nisula 2012: 331). The Roman Catholic pastoral practice on baptism should accept the polygamist in his or her situation and from that point on, let him or her not do it again but work towards spiritual renewal and growth in the Christian life.

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