

Tertullian and the Beginning of the Metaphysics of Light in North African Christianity

Naoki Kamimura, Tokyo Gakugei University (kmmrnk@nifty.com)

Drawing on the scholarship of the metaphysics of light in the ancient world, no comprehensive analysis of the recurring use of light imagery in the tradition of North African Christianity has existed. Viewed in this light, it is not remarkable that no major work has focused on the examination of light-based images in the corpus of Tertullian. But in fact, an overarching theological and ethical formulation of imagery of light emerged in different contexts of his writings. In *Apology* Tertullian gave a significant meaning to the formula of ‘*lumen ex lumine*.’ In *Against Praxeas* he offered the argument for the distinctiveness within the transcendental unity of divine nature. Another point to note is that in *De anima* he referred to the baptism as liberation from the power of the devil, that is, regeneration and illumination. In this paper, I will draw out how together both the favoured for light-imagery and his motif are producing a more holistic view of the metaphors of light in the ante-Nicene period. In the process, I will pay attention to an approach embraced by Tertullian that had been in continuity with his concern for his fellow Christians in the community.

Miscellaneous approaches to the imagery of light

Tertullian’s use of light imagery is significant when, in some of his later writing, he referred to an attitude which Tertullian held as to the renewal of the soul through the faith and which also showed his full commitment to the life of faith for Christians in the community. In the concluding part of *On the Soul*, this treatise directed against Hermogenes about the philosophical discussions of the soul, Tertullian dealt with the growth of the soul along with the body, then with the release of the soul from the body. It is only the soul which has been purified by the permanent escape from matter (*substantia*) that can be designated as ‘pure and clear light.’

the soul is purified when by the power of death it is released from the bondage to the flesh; it is further certain that it escapes from the veil of the flesh into its own pure and clear light (*ad meram et puram et suam lucem*); then it finds itself enjoying its liberation from matter, and in this new-found liberty it regains its divinity [...] (*On the Soul* 53.6; FC 10, 296).

While securing with the soul’s spiritual transformation after death into ‘its own pure and clear light,’ another statements touching on the renewal is the idea that it is achieved through baptism. Tertullian understood baptism as a vehicle for moving from death to rebirth and sanctifying oneself through the water and the gift of the Spirit. So both the liquid and light elements have a particular place in the images of baptism. Concerning the latter, his treatise combined it with the soul received the grace of the Holy Spirit and thus empowered with the full light, by which he meant understanding.

the flesh is overshadowed by the imposition of the hand that the soul may be illumined by the Spirit (*anima spiritu illuminetur*)[...] (*On the Resurrection of the Dead* 8.3; trans. E. Evans 1960, 25).

Also he [*scil.* John] said that he was baptizing solely for repentance, and that one would soon

come who would baptize in the Spirit and in fire (*in spiritu et igni*) [...] (Cf. Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16) (*On Baptism* 10.7; trans. E. Evans 1964, 25)

when the soul embraces the faith, it is regenerated by this new birth in water and virtue celestial; the veil of its former corruption is removed and it at last perceives the full glory of the light (*totam lucem suam conspicit*). (*On the Soul* 41.4; FC 10, 273).

In connection with Tertullian's stress on the renewal of soul should be noted his view on what he regarded as the necessary for the truly Christian life. Not only was there a metaphor of light, but he also spoke of the rule of faith which would be considered to be a kind of oral credal summary (*On the Veiling of Virgins* 1, *Against Praxeas* 2, and *On the Prescriptions of Heretics* 13).

the man who is change from his former carnal state to the whiteness of faith (*in candorem fidei*) [...] and who is completely renewed, is clean. (*On Purity*, 20.7; ACW 28, 116)

It is impossible for any one to receive instruction from the same quarter whence destruction comes; it is impossible for any one to be enlightened by that which darkens (*ab eo inluminatur a quo contenebratur*). Let us make our search, therefore, in our own and from our own and concerning our own; provided only that nothing comes into question which attacks the Rule of Faith (*regula fidei*). (*On the Prescriptions of Heretics* 12.4; trans. T.H. Bindley 1914, 53)

Jesus knew that this was what he is, and wished it to be known of all men, so that although the man's faith was based on better eyesight, although it was possessed of the true light (*veri luminis compotem*), he gave it the further gift of external vision (*exteriore quoque visione donavit*), so that we too might be taught what is the rule, and also the reward, of faith (*regulam simulque mercedem fidei*). (*Against Marcion* 4.36.12; E. Evans 1972, 471)

Tertullian's use of light imagery to describe the life of faith, in which all the images represent the goal and achievements of the soul, would be led to the (self-)identification of Christians in North African society. In *On the Apparel of Women*, quoting the passages from Matthew (5:14–16), he admitted the validity of this message. He interpreted it as the exhortation, encouraging Christians in the time of persecution not only to be chaste and faithful but also 'to seem so' and exult in their faith.

Or, what did Christ mean by 'let your works shine before men (*Luceant opera uestra*)'? Why did the Lord call us 'the light of the world (*lumen terrae*)'? [...] It is our good works (*bona nostra*) that make us to be the lights of the world (*luminaria mundi*). Moreover, what is good, [...] rejoices to be seen and exults in being pointed out by others. (*On the Apparel of Women* 2.13.1–2; FC 40, 147–148)

In *Against Praxeas*, while calling one God 'the light of the world' he designated Christians 'sons of light,' referring to passages from Ephesians (5:8) and John (8:12).

since the gentiles were passing over from a multitude of idols to the one only God, a difference was established between worshippers of one divinity and worshippers of many. For it was necessary also that Christians should shine in the world as sons of light (*filios lucis*), while worshipping and calling upon the name of the light of the world (*lumen mundi*), one God as also one Lord. (*Against Praxeas* 13.7–8; trans. E. Evans 1948, 148)

The solid bond of the worshipper and worshipped combines to warrant the name of Christians 'sons of light' which derived from the name 'the light of the world' with which one God is worshipped.

Tertullian confirmed that, despite the difference existing between idolaters and 'worshippers of one

divinity, the passing over from the latter to the former could occur. He, therefore, proceeded to think about people threatened with martyrdom. His warning as to the loss of faith was given that 'at every turn—opportunity would lie open for us to escape by immediately swearing by gods and lords' (*Against Praxeas* 13.8). He likened it to the extinction of candles.

if [...] we had been calling upon the name of gods and lords, we should have put out our candle (*faces nostras*) (cf. Ps. 17:19) by being also less bold in face of martyrdom [...] (*Against Praxeas* 13.8; trans. E. Evans 1948, 148)

Concerning the fear of martyrdom, he adopted another metaphor in *To the Martyrs*. Tertullian addressed his message to the prospective martyrs. In the face of martyrdom, he encouraged those awaiting trial and execution in prison. Because of the terrible suffering, they were, in fact, free from the world in darkness. They should be called 'light.'

O blessed, you may regard yourselves as having been translated from a prison to, we may say, a place of safety. It is full of darkness, but ye yourselves are light (*lumen*); it has bonds, but God has made you free. (*To the Martyrs*. 2.4; trans. S. Thelwall)

Further, in *Antidote for the Scorpion's Sting*, he explained the state of martyr's soul by using the imagery of clothes and its brightness.

But the souls of the martyrs both peacefully rest in the meantime under the altar, and support their patience by the assured hope of revenge; and, clothed in their robes, wear the dazzling halo of brightness (*stolis candidam claritatis*), until others also may fully share in their glory. (Rev. 6:9–11) [...] For the flesh is the clothing of the soul. The uncleanness, indeed, is washed away by baptism, but the stains are changed into dazzling whiteness (*candidantur*) by martyrdom. (*Antidote for the Scorpion's Sting* 12.9–10; trans. S. Thelwall)

It is very likely that the term *candida* means a 'halo,' thereby signifying the saints on earth, that is, future citizens of heaven. Here is the view of hope and expectation, as Tertullian repeatedly suggested in his works. From some passages dealt with the palm of martyrdom, there is an interesting paradoxical connection of imageries: martyrs shed their blood and thus by the blood of the Lamb made white. In this regard, the term *candida* may associate with the imagery of colour.

Christ, as hidden light and lux nationum

Tertullian's use of the imagery of light recurred with regularity when he argued about the work of Christ in human salvation in his writings. In *Against the Jews*, he examined general prophecies about Christ after moving into the *confirmatio* of this treatise. He maintained that scriptural prophecies were fulfilled only through the operations of the predicted Christ. Tertullian's description of Jesus' ministry as being one of preaching and of power consistently corresponded to the typological reading of scriptural passages.

For the same John [sc. John the baptiser] is called not merely an 'angel' of Christ, but withal a 'lamp' shining before Christ (*lucerna lucens ante Christum*): for David predicts, 'I have prepared the lamp for my Christ (*lucernam Christo meo*);' (Ps. 131(132):17) and him Christ Himself, coming 'to fulfil the prophets,' called so to the Jews. 'He was,' He says, 'the burning and shining lamp (*lucerna ardens et lucens*);' (John 5:35) as being he who not merely 'prepared His ways in the desert,' but withal, by pointing out 'the Lamb of God,' (John 1:29) illumined the minds of men (*inluminabat mentes hominum*) by his heralding, so that they understood

Him to be that Lamb whom Moses was wont to announce as destined to suffer. (*Against the Jews* 9.24; trans. S. Thelwall)

The imagery of lamp serves as the basis for John's relationship to Christ: as a messenger who went before to prepare the way. Here Tertullian offered a further image of light, that is, the illumination of the mind, as it indicates the operation performed by Christ. It is interesting to note that Tertullian mentioned Jesus' words at John 5:35 and 1:29 and interpreted them as applicable to the typological interpretation of the passage from Psalms. In the following section he referred further to the reading of passages from Isaiah which outlined the preaching of Jesus to the gentiles.

If He 'neither did contend nor shout, nor was His voice heard abroad,' who 'crushed not the bruised reed'—Israel's faith, who 'quenched not the burning flax (*linum ardens*)' (Isa. 42:2–3)—that is, the momentary glow (*ardorem*) of the Gentiles—but made it shine more by the rising of His own light (*lucere magis fecit ortu luminis sui*), (Isa. 60:1–2)—He can be none other than He who was predicted. The action, therefore, of the Christ who is come must be examined by being placed side by side with the rule of the Scriptures. For, if I mistake not, we find Him distinguished by a twofold operation,—that of preaching and that of power. (*Against the Jews* 9.28–29; trans. S. Thelwall)

Having examined Jesus' nature, he wished to demonstrate that Christ was prophesied in Isaiah to share in his ministry of bearing light to the gentiles. He applied the imagery of flame and light to prove that the universal purpose of his operation had been predicted in the Hebrew Scriptures, thus showing that he was the one who was to be called the light to this world.

Tertullian's descriptions of the salvific work of Christ were repeatedly connected with the imagery of light in his works. *Apology* is dated early in which Tertullian made a forensic defence of Christianity against the charges, and against those of atheism or sacrilege (chap. 10–28) he gave an exposition of the God of the Christians and their belief in God.

there came the One who God had foretold would come to renew and shed light upon that doctrine; namely, Christ, the son of God. It was proclaimed before hand that the Lord and Master of this grace and doctrine, the Enlightener and Guide of the human race (*illuminator atque deductor generis humani*), would be the Son of God, [...] (*Apology* 21.7; FC 10, 62)

Without direct reference to scriptural passages, he was clear that the coming of Christ was prophesied beforehand and there was the promise of light for human beings. It has to be admitted that this imagery is important to Tertullian. He would return to it in later works. In the third book of *Against Marcion*, (3.20.4) as he did in *Against the Jews* (it is part of the parallel with *Against the Jews* 11.11–12.2), Tertullian argued for the fulfilment of the prophecy in Isaiah 42. In criticising Marcion's Christology and his claim that the expectation of the messiah promised in the Old Testament had not been met, Tertullian was proving that Jesus was not the messiah but the Saviour who had come to fulfil the prophecy of a universal messiah.

Christ, who has by now taken the whole world captive by the faith of his gospel. So also by Isaiah: *I have given thee for a covenant of the <human> race, for a light of the nations (in lucem nationum), to open the eyes of the blind, those who are in error, to loose from their bonds those that are bound, that is, to set them free from sins, and from the cell of the prison, which is death, those who sit in darkness (sedentes in tenebris), the darkness of ignorance.* (Isa. 42:6–7) (*Against Marcion* 3.20.4; trans. E. Evans 1972, 233)

Tertullian here used Isaiah's words to support the view of the nations being the inheritance of the Messiah, as predicted in Psalm 2:7. (3.20.2) The son could not be David because he did not receive the gentiles as his inheritance. A salvific light to the gentiles coming to faith would be delivered by the one who opened their eyes to the truth. The connection of the light metaphor with the promises fulfilled by Christ illustrates the point that the metaphorical language suggests divine guidance, salvation and illumination of the truth.

He referred continuously to this expression in the fourth and fifth books of *Against Marcion*. In the former, Tertullian's point is clear that the gentiles were able to be admitted to God's law (*iudicium meum in lucem nationum*) with the conversion of the gentiles and the idolatry of the Jews. (4.1.5–6) The seeming antithesis between Elisha's cleansing of a leper (cf. Luke 4:27) and the cleansing of the nations of deadly sins as 'in Christ the light of the gentiles (*per nationes emundationis in Christo lumine earum*)' offers an argument for Christ's fulfilment of the ancient prophets and the separation of the new gospel from the old law. (4.9.6) Tertullian's presentation of Peter revealed Marcion's misreading of Matthew 16:17 ('[...] received commendation for having knowledge granted him by the Father'). He maintained that it was foretold by Christ 'as the light and hope and expectation of the gentiles (*lumen et spem et expectationem nationum*).' (4.11.1) In the fifth book, he continued to quote the same passage from Isaiah 42:6 as in the book four (4.25.5) and examined Marcion's reading of God's promise in Galatians. (5.2.5) He also dealt with Marcion's misapplication of Pauline texts. Passages from Isaiah 42:4 and 42:6 afforded proof of the assurance that 'we are God's sons.' (5.4.4) Once again he referred to the same passages when he recapitulated the points made in this book. (5.6.1 and 5.7.1) Tertullian examined Marcion's interpretation of 2 Corinthians (4:6) and, quoting the passages from Isaiah 42:6 and 9:2 and questioning that 'of the giving of light to the world, who was it said to Christ', he gave the answer that was found in Psalms 4:6: the countenance of God, belonging to the Creator of this world.

The imagery of light is associated with another motif of the work of Christ, which was found in his later works. Tertullian made a brief allusion to Luke 8:16 ('No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a vessel, or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, that those who enter may see the light.') in *Against Marcion* (4.19.5) and, in arguing against Marcion's position, Tertullian pointed to Luke 8:17 ('all things secret shall be made manifest') which worked for the purposes of Tertullian's message.

Also I wonder how one can talk about a lamp never being hidden (*lucernam negat abscondi solere*: cf. Luke 8:16), who through all those long ages had hidden himself, a greater and more essential light (*maius et necessarius lumen*): and how he can promise that all things secret shall be made manifest (cf. Luke 8:17), when he is all the while keeping his god in darkness, waiting I suppose for Marcion to be born. (*Against Marcion* 4.19.5; trans. E. Evans 1972, 359–361)

While no further consideration of the passages can be found, it is clear that he ridiculed Marcion's view that his Christ hid his light from all people for long ages even though he commanded a lamp not to be hidden but placed on a candleholder to give light to all. His focus on the Christ's reprehension of the Pharisees seeking a sign began with a reaction against the view of Marcion. Then he proceeded to make a reference to 'the woe' spoken against the Pharisees and the doctors of the law.

He too is changeable, variable, capricious, teaching one thing, doing another: he tells them to give to everyone that asks, but himself gives no sign to those who do ask. (cf. Luke 11:29) All those long ages he has hidden his light from men (*lucem suam ab hominibus abscondit*), though he says a lamp ought not to be put in a corner (*lucernam abstrudendam*), but insists

that it must be set on a lampstand (*super candelabrum proponendam*) so as to give light to all. (cf. Luke 11:33) (*Against Marcion* 4.27.1; trans. E. Evans 1972, 413)

His comment also suggests that the material on Marcion's Christ seems somewhat digressive to the discussion about Christ's denunciation of the Pharisees. But the imagery of lamp was consistently applied to the figure of Christ through whom Tertullian objected to Marcion's treatment of Christ and confirmed that it was not only light for itself but he illumined the hearts of his people with this light.

He himself will bring to light the hidden things of darkness (1 Cor. 4:5)—evidently by Christ as agent—who has promised that Christ will be a light, (cf. Isa. 42: 6) and has declared that he himself is a lantern, searching the hearts and reins. (Ps. 7:9; cf. Prov. 20: 27) (*Against Marcion* 5.7.1; trans. E. Evans 1972, 547–549)

God as the light of the world; divine trinity

Like the 'lamp' just examined, Tertullian likened God to the image of light in his treatises. In *On Idolatry*, Tertullian argued for a definition of idolatry and dealt with the decorations on display in shops and gates for festivals. He asked the reasons for which doors were ornamented with 'lamps and laurel-wreaths' (*lucernis et laureis*) and came to the conclusion that these decorations were a sign of the idolatrous belief in gods of Romans and Greeks. It is admitted that those lamps and wreaths have in themselves an idolatrous nature. At the end of the same chapter, he referred with approval to the light and wreath for the entirely different purpose. The lamps of the heathens denoted the lack of true light: 'to them the testimonies of darkness [...] are suitable' (15.10) and the wreaths were to be destined to the fire. His message to the Christians was confirmed by reference to Matthew 5:14 and Psalm 1:1–3: 'You are a light of the world (*Tu lumen es mundi*), and a tree ever green.' He warned his audience not to decorate their house with things that they had renounced, that is, a temple and a brothel.

The lamp was said to be a sign of the idolatrous act of worship in *On Idolatry*. But it is also evident in other work, showing that the lamp was not a wholly pagan one. In *On Purity*, Tertullian offered his interpretation of the parable of the lost drachma (Luke 15:8–10).

In line with this we interpret the parable of the drachma, also, as having reference to a pagan, occasioned as it was by the same situation; and this, even though it was lost in the house, as it were in the Church; and although it was found by the light of a lamp, as it were by the word of God (*ad lucernae lumen repertam, quasi ad Dei uerbum*). This whole world, however, is one house for all men. In it the grace of God shines for the pagan, who is found in darkness, rather than for the Christian, who is already in God's light. (*On Purity* 7.10–11; ACW 28, 70)

As has just been shown in his understanding of the first parable, they were to be seen as pagans. They had been 'sought out' by God and 'called back' by Christ. (*On Purity* 7.6) He was extending the sequence (*ordo*) 'evident in the case of pagans' to apply to the lost drachma. According to his way of interpreting Luke, the house was to be considered as both the Church and this whole world, while with regard to 'the light of a lamp,' it is very likely that he would liken 'a lamp' to God in order for 'the light' to be seen as Christ whose continuing work of salvation was to be the fore. It is clear that, in contrast to the case of the lamp in *On Idolatry*, he dealt separately with the imagery of lamp in *On Purity*.

More explicit about the image of light in his writings is that a series of images of the divine nature, among which his early treatise *Apology* was devoted to the argument of the possible unity of divine persons, Father and Son. By using the metaphors of sun and lamp, the Son was defined as an extension

of the divine substance.

When a ray (*radius*) is shot forth from the sun, a part is taken from the whole (*portio ex summa*); but there will be sun in the ray because it is a sun ray; its nature is not separated, but extended. Thus, spirit proceeds from spirit and God from God just as light is kindled from light (*lumen de lumine*). The source of the substance remains whole and impaired, [...] what proceeds from God is God and the Son of God, and both are one [...] (*Apology* 21.12–13; FC 10, 63)

Before providing his illustrations of trinitarian relationship, Tertullian took Christian monotheism as a premise: ‘The object of our worship is the one God.’ (*Apology* 17.1) He then attempted to support his argument against the possibility of both reducing the divine nature by division and giving a plurality to God through division. Thus, the images—sun and lamp—make it clear that on the one hand, a set of the sun and a ray of light maintains the principle of unity in plurality with a correlation of a part with the whole, while on the other hand, the ‘lamp’ image (*lumen de lumine*) reveals that the quality of the source remains undiminished even if one receives many from it. It is in the context of the exposition of the Trinity that the trio of analogies should be used, but here the metaphors of sun and ray serve as a basis for justifying the unity of two realities, Father and Son.

A further use of this imagery recurs in *Against Praxeas*, in which Tertullian defended and explained trinitarian belief, with the emphasis on continuity and consistency of Christian teaching with the apostolic rule of faith. The discussion in *Against Praxeas* is closely paralleled to that in *Apology*. As done in *Apology*, Tertullian’s argument has been made for the possible unity between distinct realities or persons in God, thus applying the imagery of light, the sun and its beam, to the case of the “projections” (προβολαι) of those substances from which they proceed.’ (8.5)

God brought forth the Word, as also the Paraclete teaches, as a root brings forth the ground shoot, and a spring the river, and the sun its beam (*sol radium*): for these manifestations also are ‘projections’ (προβολαι) of those substances from which they proceed. [...] But where there is a second <one> there are two, and where there is a third there are three. For the Spirit is third with God and <his> Son, as the fruit out of the shoot is third from the root, and the irrigation canal out of the river third from the spring, and the illumination point out of the beam third from the sun (*tertius a sole apex ex radio*): yet in no respect is he alienated from that origin from which he derives his proper attributes. (*Against Praxeas* 8.5, 7; trans. E. Evans 1948, 139, 140)

Here the imagery of light is expressed in a slightly different form; the ‘lamp’ does not appear anywhere. Instead, two other images of plant and water are added and the third of all three metaphors—fruit, irrigation canal and illumination point—is highlighted, with the purpose of likening the production of the ‘Word’ with the ‘projections’ of these things. The expansion of the third element would indicate the development of his thought on the divine economy.

Tertullian’s continued commitment to these metaphors is made in the subsequent parts of this treatise. His concern for the issue still directed to the argument for the distinctive realities of Father and Son.

For also the sun’s beam (*radium solis*), when by itself, I shall call ‘the sun’ (*solem*): but when naming the sun, whose the beam is, I shall not immediately call the beam ‘the sun’. For though I make two suns, yet the sun and its beam I shall count as two objects, and two manifestations

of one undivided substance, in the same sense as <I count> God and his Word, the Father and the Son. (*Against Praxeas* 13.10; trans. E. Evans 1948, 148)

If God were your father ye would have loved me, for I came forth and am come from God (John 8:42) (howbeit they are not separated, though he said he was come forth, as some seize upon the chance which this saying gives them: for he came forth from the Father like the beam from the sun (*radius ex sole*), like the stream from the spring, like the groundshoot from the seed) (*Against Praxeas* 22.6; trans. E. Evans 1948, 163)

Another significant use of the light metaphor is connected with his argument for the nature of the two elements, Father and Son, from the point of view of what a number of scriptural texts say, including the popular Exodus 33:13 and 20, Genesis 32:30, Numbers 12:6–8 and 1 Corinthians 13:12. Tertullian is clear that in its ‘projection’ the first stage of those things is invisible and that the second is visible.

we must understand the Father as invisible because of the fulness of his majesty, but must acknowledge the Son as visible because of the enumeration of his derivation, just as we may not look upon the sun (*solem*) in respect of the total of its substance which is in the sky, though we can with our eyes bear its beam (*radium*) because of the moderation of the assignment which from thence reaches out to the earth. (*Against Praxeas* 14.3; trans. E. Evans 1948, 149)

The sun cannot be seen directly, corresponding to the Father, while ray from the sun can be looked at, corresponding to the Son, because the reality changes its mode to that perceived by sight. In emphasising the invisibility of the Father Tertullian appealed not only to the passages in the Old Testament but also to those of the New Testament, and yet these abundant biblical references do not prevent the picture of the Son as a whole. Tertullian built up it from not merely from the incarnation but from the theophanies of the Old Testament. The light metaphor also works in Paul’s witness to the Father and the Son:

But of the Father <he says> to Timothy, *Whom no man hath seen nor can see* (1 Tim. 6:16): and he piles it up even more, *Who alone hath immortality and dwelleth in light unapproachable (lucem habitat inaccessibilem)* (1 Tim. 1:17): [...] to the Son we might ourselves also ascribe the contrary, mortality and approachability. Him also he testifies to have died according to the scriptures, and to have been seen of himself last of all (1 Cor. 15:3, 8)—evidently by means of approachable light (*per accessibilem utique lucem*) (*Against Praxeas* 15.8; trans. E. Evans 1948, 152)

Again the correlation between the qualities of image and the realities of the Father and the Son is indicative of a set of trinitarian realities in his discussion.

In the concluding part of this treatise, Tertullian looked back on the argument and confirmed the unity between distinct realities or persons in the godhead. He repeatedly expressed both the light and the water metaphors as follows:

But why shall I delay over things so evident, when I ought to be attacking those <arguments> by which they seek to cast darkness over <these> evident things? For, convicted on all sides by the distinctness of the Father and the Son, which we say is ordained without disturbing the permanence of the union as of the sun and the beam and of the spring and the river (*solis et radii et fontis et fluvii*), they attempt to interpret this <distinctness> in another way, [...]

(*Against Praxeas* 27.1; trans. Evans 1948, 172)

He kept his focus on the qualities of these two elements, while that of the third, corresponding to the Holy Spirit, was relatively untouched. His concern for the third element was, indeed, offered when he made the same argument for the possible unity in multiplicity. It allowed proving the distinct existence of the Son. (13.5) There was a continued interest in defence of the teaching of two realities or persons. It probably arose from the situation in which Tertullian had to do with the actual monarchian debate. Because of its focus on the relation between Father and Son, his position should be against the charge of teaching two Gods.

Concluding observations

As we have examined in this paper, when we draw out a marked preference for the imageries of light in the corpus of Tertullian, on the one hand, and the different contexts, whether in connection with the renewal of soul and the life of faith, with the identification of Christians in the time of persecution, with the salvific work of Christ or with the unity of divine persons in the godhead on the other, we can find a certain consistency in approaches to dealing with the light metaphors from his early to later works. Deeply concerned for the reality and the ideal of the Christian way of life, Tertullian was not reluctant to liken the imagery of light to the goal and achievements of the soul, displaying them instead towards those not only within, but also outside the Christian community. Despite the criticism that the correlation between these images and his arguments was not necessarily essential, thus contributing little to the matter in question, he often reminded the reader of helpful scriptural passages and provided valuable insight into the intimate connection for him between Christian truth and practical discipline. This is quite clear in the case of the extension of a set of metaphors to the third element in trinitarian natures or realities. While his emphasis is placed on the distinctiveness of Father and Son, a seemingly arithmetic extension of the light metaphors (and water and plant) can be shown to be the intersection of the boundary between the doctrinal discourse and discipline, the latter of which serves as holding people to the rule of faith and illustrating the light as the disciplinary revelation. As a Christian who adhered to the rule of faith and pursued its theoretical and practical significance, Tertullian was not deviating from an approach and care for his fellow Christians in the use of the light imagery consistent across his corpus.