

I

Identity and the Spiritual Training of North African Christians in the Second and Third Centuries*

The tradition of the spiritual training in late antiquity has taken considerable interest among scholars, particularly in the seminal work of Pierre Hadot. In *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, collectively published in 1981, the eminent classical scholar illustrates a complex set of modes of ‘spiritual exercises’ and designates their overall purpose as the ‘metamorphosis of our personality’.¹ Some scholars have defined this discipline as the purely intellectual training of the mind. Although they suggest that primary attention should be given to its intellectual aspect, their oversimplified approach is problematic and merits careful deliberation. Hadot emphasises the need to consider the broad diversity of training and the purgation of the soul within the context of a variety of factors, including human behaviour and identity.² The spiritual training in question varies according to the circumstances of the Graeco-Roman tradition. The second-century apologist Justin Martyr claimed that philosophical investigation could guide Christians to a fuller understanding of divine truth.³ In the closing decade of the second century, Tertullian warned against the emphasis on the

* A part of this paper was presented at the 33rd conference of Australasian Society for Classical Studies on 7 February 2012 in Melbourne and the other part was delivered at North America Patristic Society annual meeting on 22 May 2014 in Chicago. I am grateful to Dr. Geoffrey D. Dunn (Australian Catholic University) for his helpful comments and suggestions at ASCS conference and to Dr. Paulus-Petrus Leeming Chang (Fu Jen Catholic University) who prompted me to revise and publish these conference talks.

¹ Hadot 1995, 82 and 127. For the significance of Hadot’s comprehensive approach to the ancient tradition, see e.g. Chase, Clark, and McGhee 2013.

² See Hadot 1995, 81–82.

³ Just. *Dial.* 3.4; Marcovich, ed., 75: *Φιλοσοφία μὲν, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, ἐπιστήμη ἐστὶ τοῦ ὄντος, καὶ τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἐπίγνωσις εὐδαιμονία δὲ, ταύτης τῆς ἐπιστήμης καὶ τῆς σοφίας γέρας.* See Barnard 1967, 27; Osborn 1973, 99.

ethical aspect of philosophical investigation and declared that divine truth was found in Jerusalem rather than Athens.⁴ All the same, he understood Christian martyrdom as an indispensable vehicle for the articulation of Christian identity and, as martyrdom served to shape the perceptions of the Christian lifestyle, maintained that the seed of the Church was the blood of Christian martyrs.⁵ In fact, after Christianity came to North Africa during the second century,⁶ it expanded rapidly, in particular among urban settlements in the Roman provinces.⁷ The remarkable spread of Christian beliefs and practices may have been expressed in the tensions and clashes between Roman imperial powers and the Christian communities in this region. While persecutions by Roman authorities may have played a decisive role in the making of the Christian identity of North Africans, the issue of spiritual training appears to have been a guiding thread of their moral, spiritual and theological preoccupations. Taking into consideration their concern for Christian identity, how did Tertullian show the significance of spiritual discipline in the community of faith? After the beginning of the African expression of faith and spirituality in the second century, how did the successors of Tertullian in the third and early fourth centuries explore the foundations of their Christian identity on the basis of spiritual discipline?⁸

In this paper, therefore, I shall focus first on Tertullian's view of the spiritual training. For the sake of clarity, I have divided the paper along thematic lines into two groups. Next, I turn my attention to the writings of both Cyprian of Carthage and Lactantius, thereby examining how their view of the spiritual training served as an impetus for the cultivation of the Christian identity that they hoped for. Finally I shall provide some understanding of the dimension of the spiritual discipline on which they dealt with the temporal and transient realities in speaking about the exercises in question.

⁴ Tert. *Praescr.* 7.9; CCSL 1, 193.

⁵ Tert. *Apol.* 50.13; CCSL 1, 171.

⁶ For the first traces of Christianity in North Africa, in particular, about the 'act of martyrs', see Telfer 1961, 512–517.

⁷ For the historical overview of the first stages of Christianity in North Africa, see Burns and Jensen 2014, 1–33; Dunn 2004, 13–18.

⁸ For the secondary literature on the broad diversity of spiritual training in late antiquity, see in general Leclercq 1961; Foucault 1988; Madec 1996–2002; Daly 1993; Nehamas 1998; Sorabji 2002; Gill 2006; Sorabji 2006; Otten 2009; and Pavie 2012.

TERTULLIAN: ABSTINENCE, PRAYER, AND MARTYRDOM

Tertullian (c. 160–225) was the earliest Latin theologian from the North African church at the turn of the second century. His influential and prolific writings have enabled us to expand our knowledge of the period, not only regarding the theological and ecclesiastical elements of North African Christianity but also about social and cultural aspects of society in late antiquity. While a relatively small number of his treatises have been lost, those that remain nonetheless leave his biographical details unspecified. We know fairly little about Tertullian's life. In his catalogue of Christian authors, *On illustrious Men*, Jerome gave us a sketch of his life,⁹ most of which is also taken from Tertullian's own writings. In addition to this picture, in his letter Jerome called Tertullian a 'learned and zealous writer'.¹⁰ Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*, one of the main sources of Jerome's biographical compendium, also remarked that Tertullian was 'a famed, distinguished expert on Roman law'.¹¹ Regardless of whether much of the biographical tradition on Tertullian is trustworthy,¹² it serves to highlight a crucial facet of his career: as an ethically rigorous and well-educated elite in Carthage, Tertullian was fanatical about being perfect from the standpoint of his uncompromising Christian faith. Then, with regard to his concern about spiritual training, what does he consider its significance in his treatises?

I will begin by considering the moral and practical aspects of his views, thereby illuminating the role of the spiritual exercises. In *To His Wife*, written after 198,¹³ Tertullian entangled himself with the question how coherent the goodness of marriage was with Paul's preference for celibacy (1 Cor. 7:1).¹⁴ This epistolary message to his wife demands a compelling justification both from those marrying for the first time and those marrying again.¹⁵ He concedes that

⁹ Jerome *Vir. ill.* 53. See Halton, trans., FC 100, 74–77.

¹⁰ Jerome *Ep.* 84.2; CSEL 55, 122. See also *Ep.* 70.5; CSEL 54, 707.

¹¹ See Eusebius *He.* 2.2.4; LCL 153, 112; Maier, trans., 55: *Τερτυλλιανὸς τοῖς Ῥωμαίων νόμοις ἠκριβωκόως, ἀνὴρ τὰ τε ἄλλα ἐνδοξὸς καὶ τῶν μάλιστα ἐπὶ Ῥώμης λαμπρῶν.*

¹² For a thorough examination of the traditional description of Tertullian's life, see Barnes 1985. See also, for a detailed evaluation of Barnes' argument and the concise summary of Tertullian's life and works, Dunn 2004, 3–11.

¹³ Timothy Barnes tentatively classifies this treatise in the pre-Montanist period, together with *Bapt., Or., Paen.* and *Pat., Vx.* dated around between 198 and 203; see Barnes 1985, 55. See also Rankin 1995, xvii.

¹⁴ See Clark 2013; MacDonald 2013. For Tertullian's exegesis of 1 Cor. 7, see Rambaux 1976–1977; Braun 1992, 111–118.

¹⁵ For the reader of this treatise, Georg Schöllgen suggests that Tertullian may not write it for his wife (Schöllgen 1984, 207).

his wife might remarry, like other Christian women who would otherwise be widows after divorce or the death of their husbands. However, by following ‘the example of those sisters of ours—their name are know to the Lord’¹⁶ who would rather be nothing than not belong wholly to God, he hopes for and expects her to be resolute enough to remain a widow.

Train yourself to imitate the example of continence furnished by such women as these and, in your love for things of the spirit, you will bury concupiscence of the flesh. You will root out the fleeting, vagrant desires which come of beauty and youth, and make compensation for their loss with the blessings of Heaven, which last forever.¹⁷

His repeated argument against fleshly concupiscence seems to indicate it to be the standard treatment of the desire for temporal things. Not only is Tertullian persistent in his attitude and strongly advises against remarriage in a later to a widower some years later—‘And if this is his [*scil.* Paul’s] attitude with respect to a first marriage, how much more will it be his attitude with respect to a second!’¹⁸—but also, in his later works, as for example in *On Fasting* and in the second book of *Against Marcion*, he explicitly mentions that the exercise of self-restraint can be an efficient remedy for those determined to live in accordance with divine prescription: ‘you must understand there an advice on the exercise of self-restraint, and observe how a bridle was put upon that gluttony which, while it was eating the bread of angels, hankered after the cucumbers and pumpkins of the Egyptians.’¹⁹

It is interesting to note that, in his another letter to a widower, that is, *On Exhortation to Chastity*, Tertullian tells us of the close relationship between abstinence and prayer for each individual: ‘How much better a man feels when he happens to be away from his wife. He has a fine appreciation of spiritual things (*spiritualiter sapit*). When he prays to the Lord, he comes close to Heaven.’²⁰ Comparing carnal desires with spiritual fruits, he draws his attention to the conscience itself: ‘Deny the flesh and you will possess the spirit. As a proof

¹⁶ Tert. *Vx.* 1.4.3; CCSL 1, 377; ACW 13, 15.

¹⁷ Tert. *Vx.* 1.4.5; CCSL 1, 377; ACW 13, 15: *Talium exemplis feminarum ad aemulationem te continentiae exercens spiritali affectione carnalem illam concupiscentiam humabis, temporalia et uolatica desideria formae uel aetatis immortalium bonorum compensatione delendo.*

¹⁸ Tert. *Exh. cast.* 4.3; CCSL 2, 1021; ACW 13, 49. See also *Exh. cast.* 11.1; CCSL 2, 1030–1031.

¹⁹ Tert. *Marc.* 2.18.2; CCSL 1, 495; Evans, ed. and trans., 1972, 137: *consilium exercendae continentiae intellege et frenos impositos illi gulae agnosce, quae, cum panem ederet angelorum, cucumeres et pepones Aegyptiorum desiderabat.* See also Tert. *Ieiun.* 5.4 and 13.5.

²⁰ Tert. *Exh. cast.* 10.2; CCSL 2, 1029; ACW 13, 58. For Tertullian’s view of the effectiveness of abstinence from sex for the purity of soul, see Brown 1988, 78.

of this, let us reflect on what our own experience (*ipsam conscientiam nostram*) teaches us.²¹ Tertullian enumerates a sequence of spiritual practises in their own right.

If he applies himself to reading the Scriptures, he is completely absorbed in them. If he sings a Psalm, he sings with joy in his heart. [...] It is for this reason that the Apostle recommends periodic abstinence, so that we may be able to pray more effectively. He wishes us to recognize that a policy which is temporarily expedient ought to be made permanent, so that it may be permanently expedient. Men need prayer every day and every moment of the day; and if prayer is necessary, so, also, of course, is continence.²²

As he has already reflected, even more practically, on the mental attitude prerequisite for prayer,²³ Tertullian argues for the coherence of prayer with the exercise of abstinence in daily life. He begins by the sustained discipline of desires, which supports faith and permits the leading of a spiritual life towards heaven: 'It is our conscience (*conscientia*) which leads us to pray; if our conscience feels shame, we shall be ashamed to pray.'²⁴ His awareness that a Christian's proclamation (*disciplina domini*) must be put into practice is evident.²⁵

In the so-called pre-Montanist period,²⁶ Tertullian rhetorically made clear the linkage between the practice of almsgiving and the exercise of patience, which worked as the key to nourish all forms of virtuous conduct.

In all probability, a man who has not resolved to bear with fortitude a slight loss [...] will not readily or willingly touch what he owns for the sake of charity. [...] Patience to endure, shown on occasions of loss, is a training in giving and sharing. He who does not fear loss is not reluctant to give. Otherwise, *how would one who has two tunics give one of them to him, who is destitute, unless the same is one who can offer his cloak as well to the one going off with his tunic? How will we make friends for ourselves with mammon if we love him*

²¹ Tert. *Exh. cast.* 10.1–2; CCSL 2, 1029; ACW 13, 58.

²² Tert. *Exh. cast.* 10.2; CCSL 2, 1029–1030; ACW 13, 58: [*S*]i scripturis incumbit, totus illic est; si psalmum canit, placet sibi; [...] Ideo apostolus temporalem purificationem orationum commendandarum causa adiecit, ut sciremus, quod ad tempus prodest semper nobis exercere esse, ut semper prosit. Si quotidie, omni momento oratio hominibus necessaria est, utique et continentia, post quam oratio, necessaria est.

²³ See Tert. *Or.* 10–12. For the significance of this work and his view of the prayer in general, see Osborn 1997, 150; M. Brown 2004, 216–254.

²⁴ Tert. *Exh. cast.* 10.3; CCSL 2, 1030; ACW 13, 58–59. For the importance of Stoicism in Tertullian's view of conscience, see Osborn 1997, 238–241.

²⁵ See Tert. *Exh. cast.* 10.4; CCSL 2, 1030. For his view of the disciplina, see Morel 1944–1945; Francine 1985; and Wilhite 2013, 45–71.

²⁶ For the implications of the division of Tertullian's literary career, see Dunn 2004, 8–9.

only to the extent that we do not share in his loss? We shall be damned together with the damned.²⁷ [*Italics mine*]

Here, he does not describe the concrete situation of the poor and destitute in his community.²⁸ Instead of facing the reality of poverty, including the loss of property, Tertullian draws on the authority of dominical teaching in the Gospels: Luke 3:11, Matthew 5:40 and Luke 16:9.²⁹ What one would rather see, through his references to the scriptural message, is that he praises those who give alms to the destitute and who practise the act of dispossession for cultivating thoroughly their patience to endure. Although he in no way explains anything specific about making friends out of mammon, he reminds us of the necessity of reciprocal charity and its accompanying exercises as the means of ensuring the solidarity and group identity in the community.

In *To the Martyrs*, which probably dates from 197, before *Apology*,³⁰ Tertullian provides advice to Christians awaiting execution for their faith,³¹ referring to the exercise of tribulations and trials as a necessary Christian duty that requires training. He encourages the future martyrs to regard the imprisoned state of their minds and bodies as a starting point for showing exemplary behaviour during their trials and executions at the hands of the Romans.³²

O blessed, consider whatever is hard in your present situation as an exercise of your powers of mind and body. You are about to enter a noble contest in which the living God acts the part of superintendent and the Holy Spirit is your trainer, a contest whose

²⁷ Tert. *Pat.* 7.8–10; CCSL 1, 307; FC 40, 206: *Iam qui minutum sibi aliquid [...] non constanter sustinere constituit, nescio an facile uel ex animo ipse rei suae manum inferre possit in causa elemosinae. [...] Patientia in detrimentis exercitatio est largiendi et communicandi: non piget donare eum qui non timet perdere. Alioquin quomodo duas habens tunicas alteram earum nudo dabit, nisi idem sit qui auferenti tunicam etiam pallium offerre possit? Quomodo amicos de mammona fabricabimus nobis si eum in tantum amauerimus ut amissum non sufferamus? peribimus cum perdito.*

²⁸ Tertullian does not show his audience the systematic and self-contained treatment of this subject. Although his explicit intention is to protect the status quo of the dominant society, his contribution is also in a warning to the community to ensure its solidarity and to encourage righteous living in its eschatological dimension. For Tertullian's engagement in socio-ethical issues, see Rhee 2012. See also Rhee 2013.

²⁹ For Tertullian's method and principles of scriptural exegesis, see O'Malley 1967. See also Countryman 1982; Dunn 2006.

³⁰ See Barnes 1985, 52–53 and 55; Rankin 1995, xvii; and Dunn 2004, 165.

³¹ For the comprehensive investigation of martyrdom in North African Christianity, see Burns and Jensen 2014, 519–551. See also Friend 2000; Price 2008; Moss 2013; and Still 2013.

³² For the relationship between martyrdom and the construction of religious identity, see Perkins 1995; Boyarin 1999; Shaw 1996; and Kelley 2006.

crown is eternity, whose prize is angelic nature, citizenship in heaven and glory for ever and ever. And so your Master, Jesus Christ, who has anointed you with His Spirit and has brought you to this training ground, has resolved, before the day of the contest, to take you from a softer way of life to a harsher treatment that your strength may be increased. [...] And they do this, says the Apostle, to win a perishable crown. We who are about to win an eternal one recognize in the prison our training ground, that we may be led forth to the contest before the seat of the presiding judge well practised in all hardships, [...].³³

Tertullian uses expressions of military struggle and athleticism to describe martyrs and athletes, thereby showing prospective martyrs the necessity of preparing themselves for martyrdom. This type of language was not uncommon in ancient Christian texts.³⁴ Presumably, although most Christians who learnt from examples of martyrs by their lives or literary works (including the Acts of martyrs as well as other types of writings) did not consider themselves as preparing for their real death, martyrdom itself could be supposed to be an undertaking that required the exercises for their 'suffering' selves. Indeed, Tertullian holds that Christians are provided with ample opportunities to advance in virtue through trials and sufferings. At the same time, however, he argues that martyrdom is an immediate duty for Christians. Their struggle would take on an eschatological dimension: both with God as producer of the games (*agonothetes*) and with the Holy Spirit as the trainer (*xystarches*), they are prompted to prepare for the event of persecution, with the hope of receiving the eternal reward. Furthermore, his persistent enthusiasm for the involvement of Christians is clear from the mention to the 'peace' to be kept in the church: 'Some, not able to find this peace in the Church, are accustomed to seek it from the martyrs in prison. For this reason, too, then, you ought to possess, cherish and preserve it among yourselves that you may perhaps be able to bestow it upon others also'.³⁵ There is no doubt that Tertullian speaks here of the reconciliation to the church of those who have

³³ Tert. *Mart.* 3,3–5; CCSL 1, 5–6; FC 40, 23: *uos, benedicti, quodcumque hoc durum est, ad exercitationem virtutum animi et corporis deputate. Bonum agonem subituri estis in quo agonothetes Deus uiuus est, xystarches Spiritus Sanctus, corona aeternitatis, brabium angelicae substantiae, polittia in caelis, gloria in saecula saeculorum. Itaque epistates uester Christus Iesus, qui uos Spiritu unxit, et ad hoc scamma produxit, uoluit uos ante diem agonis ad duriozem tractationem a liberiore condicione seponere, ut uires corroborarentur in uobis. [...] Et illi, inquit Apostolus, ut coronam corruptibilem consequantur. Nos aeternam consecuturi carcerem nobis pro palaestra interpretamur, ut ad stadium tribunalis bene exercitati incommodis omnibus producatur, [...].*

³⁴ See n. 70. See also Hoppenbrouwers 1961; Sider, ed. 2001, 111 n. 18; Kelley 2006, 727 n. 21; and Moss 2013, 108–109. For the rhetorical influence on Tertullian, see Sider 1971.

³⁵ Tert. *Mart.* 1.6; CCSL 1, 3; FC 40, 19.

lapsed. For, through their willingness to undergo martyrdom, lapsed Christians are vested with an exceptional means to effect forgiveness. They are regarded as having a vehicle with which to absolve their own sins. All of this means that, despite the differences between most Christian readers and imprisoned martyrs, Tertullian sees Christian identity as being shaped from Christians' perception of the 'suffering self' in both the unlikely event of persecution and the past danger of martyrdom.

TERTULLIAN: INTELLECTUAL DISCIPLINES

Tertullian's attitude towards the intellectual aspect of spiritual training is made clear by several passages in his relatively early works. In *On the Testimony of the Soul*, written in 197 or 198 as an appendix to the *Apology*,³⁶ he explicitly refers to this aspect.

I do not call upon thee who art formed in the schools, practices in the libraries, nourished in the Attic academics and porticoes—thou who dost belch forth wisdom. I address thee who art simple, unskilled, unpolished and uneducated, that is, of such a nature as they have thee who have thee alone, that very soul in its entirely coming from the crossroads, public square and workshop. It is thy inexperience that I need, since no one has any faith in thy little bit of experience.³⁷

In this short treatise, intended to be read by the ordinary reader rather than by the learned, he directed criticism at the tradition of ancient philosophy.³⁸ Very distinct and vigorous is the protest he utters against the tendency to search for the indispensable elements of Christian truth in the writings of the 'philosophers, poets, and any other teachers of secular learning and wisdom'.³⁹ Therefore, he asks the educated pagans to be plain, unadorned and uncorrupted by learning. Tertullian confirms that this is the soul of the ordinary people, which at its deepest level is an entity inclined towards Christianity.

³⁶ See Barnes 1985, 55; Rankin 1995, xvii; and Dunn 2004, 8.

³⁷ Tert. *Test.* 1.6–7; CCSL 1, 176; FC 10, 133: *Sed non eam te aduoco, quae scholis formata, bybliothecis exercitata, academiis et porticibus Atticis pasta sapientiam ructas. Te simplicem et rudem et impolitam et idioticam compello qualem te habent qui te solam habent, illam ipsam de compito, de triuio, de textrino totam. Imperitia tua mihi upus est, quoniam aliquantulae peritiae tuae nemo credit.*

³⁸ For Tertullian's appreciation and use of philosophy, see Osborn 1997, 31; Dunn 2004, 31–34; and Wilhite 2007, 22–23. For his understanding of the philosophical schools, in particular the expressions 'schola' and 'scholae', see Rankin 1995, 86–88.

³⁹ Tert. *Test.* 1.1; CCSL 1, 175; FC 10, 131.

In *On the Prescriptions of Heretics*, written after 198,⁴⁰ in which he is concerned about the way that learned heretics make use of the scriptures with the teaching of the various philosophical schools,⁴¹ Tertullian makes the claim that, because of their curious and endless search for belief, the heretics' use of the scriptures is unsanctioned and ultimately powerless. Scriptures are not the possession of heretics but belong to the church: 'For only where the true Christian teaching and faith are evident will the true Scriptures, the true interpretations, and all the true Christian traditions be found'.⁴² Thus, in order to avoid all debate with heretics, he introduces the rule of faith,⁴³ which is a kind of integrated core of the scriptural messages, served as an essential guide for belief and the scriptural interpretation: 'This Rule, taught [...] by Christ, allows of no questions among us'.⁴⁴ Despite his effort to establish the rule of faith, it is noteworthy that he admits the existence of well-educated fellows in the community whose curiosity and ceaseless inquiry may violate and transgress the rule of faith.⁴⁵

There must surely be some brother endowed with the gift of knowledge who can teach you, someone who moves among the learned who will share your curiosity and your inquiry. In the last resort, however, it is better for you to remain ignorant, for fear that you come to know what you should not know.⁴⁶

His encouragement to the reader, then, comes to be likened with the argumentation that there can be no effective inquiry without the rule of faith. Tertullian recapitulates his idea of an appropriate use of the scriptures by quoting a passage from Luke 18:42 and emphasising both the danger of curiosity and the redundant ability to expose the scriptures.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ See Barnes 1985, 55; Rankin 1995, xvii.

⁴¹ Tert. *Praescr.* 7.8–11; CCSL 1, 193. See Rankin 1995, 88.

⁴² Tert. *Praescr.* 19.3; CCSL 1, 201; Greenslade, trans., LCC 5, 43.

⁴³ For the importance of *regula fidei* in the scriptural exegesis of Tertullian, see Waszink 1979, 26–29; Countryman 1989; Osborn 1989; Ferguson 2013; and Rothschild 2013.

⁴⁴ Tert. *Praescr.* 13.6; CCSL 1, 198; Greenslade, trans., LCC 5, 40: *Haec regula a Christo, [...] instituta nulla habet apud nos quaestiones.*

⁴⁵ For the significance of curiosity and its relation to the scriptural exegesis in Tertullian's works, see Fredouille 1972, 411–442; Waszink 1979, 19–21.

⁴⁶ Tert. *Praescr.* 14.2; CCSL 1, 198; Greenslade, trans., LCC 5, 40: *est utique frater aliqui doctor gratia scientiae donatus, est aliqui inter exercitatos conuersatus, aliqui tecum curiosius tamen quaerens. Nouissime ignorare melius est ne quod non debeas noris quia quod debeas nosti.*

⁴⁷ For the quotations from Luke in Tertullian's treatises and the possibility of his debt to Marcion's version of Luke's Gospel, see Aalders 1937; Higgins 1951; O'Malley 1967, 62; Gregory 2003; and Dunn 2004, 20–21.

'*Thy Faith hath saved thee,*' it says; not thy biblical learning. Faith is established in the Rule. There it has its law, and it wins salvation by keeping the law. Learning derives from curiosity and wins glory only from its zealous pursuit of scholarship. Let curiosity give place to faith, and glory to salvation.⁴⁸ Let them at least be no hindrance, or let them keep quiet. To know nothing against the Rule is to know everything.⁴⁹ [*Italics mine*]

Tertullian's disapproval of the scriptural exercises appears again in his attack on those heretics who are willingly to enlarge or diminish the scriptural texts.

They rely on passages which they have put together in a false context or fastened on because of their ambiguity. What will you accomplish, most learned of biblical scholars, if the other side denies what you affirmed and affirms what you denies? True, you will lose nothing in the dispute but your voice; and you will get nothing from their blasphemy but bile.⁵⁰

Although the debate with heretics about their dealings with scriptural texts must not be based on these texts, where the 'victory is impossible or uncertain or not certain enough',⁵¹ there is, consequently, a risk of showing that a critical interpretation of the scriptures is contradicted by the rule of faith. He is not satisfied with such argument as this; however, his negative assessment of the exercises is clear to the reader. In this context, his addition to the passage from Luke, that is, 'biblical learning' would be interpreted as a restless preoccupation with the scriptures: this exercise conflicts with the rule of faith. In his writings, in fact, there is a continuing, even if sporadic, criticism of spiritual training in its intellectual aspect. At the centre of the problem lies Tertullian's almost dismissive attitude towards the philosophical thought within which the various types of philosophical endeavour were divergent in his times: philosophy creates more uncertainty and confusion than simplicity and clearness.⁵²

⁴⁸ This phrase, in its formal structure, is derived from Cicero's *De officiis* 1.77; LCL 30, 78: *cedant arma togae concedat laurea laudi*. See Fredouille, 1972, 427 n. 65. For the implication of this allusion, see also Waszink 1979, 21.

⁴⁹ Tert. *Praescr.* 14.3–5; CCSL 1, 198; Greenslade, trans., LCC 5, 40: *Fides, inquit, tua te saluum fecit, non exercitatio scripturarum. Fides in regula posita est, habet legem et salutem de observatione legis. Exercitatio autem in curiositate consistit, habens gloriam solam de peritiae studio. Cedat curiositas fidei; cedat gloria saluti. Certe aut non obstrepant aut quiescant. Aduersus regulam nihil scire omnia scire est.*

⁵⁰ Tert. *Praescr.* 17.3–4; CCSL 1, 200; Greenslade, trans., LCC 5, 42: *his nituntur quae ex falso composuerunt, et quae de ambiguitate ceperunt. Quid promouebis, exercitatissime scripturarum, cum si quid defenderis, negetur ex diuerso, si quid negaueris defendatur?*

⁵¹ Tert. *Praescr.* 19.1; CCSL 1, 201; Greenslade, trans., LCC 5, 43.

⁵² See Tert. *Apol.* 47.9; CCSL 1, 164. See also O'Malley 1967, 117. For Tertullian view of the 'sect' in the Church, see Rankin 1995, 89–90.

However, a further characteristic of his view of the training must not be ignored: in order to cultivate the virtuous conducts, one is urged to accept divine discipline and to discipline oneself.

There has been given to us as a model in the practice of patience no [merely] human product fashioned of the dullness of Cynic indifference, but the divine ordinance of a life-giving and heavenly way of life which points out as an exemplar of patience God Himself.⁵³

We must walk worthily in the discipline of the Lord, and not according to the unclean desires of the flesh. In line with this, the Apostle also says that to be wise according to the flesh is death, but to be wise according to the spirit is life eternal in Christ Jesus our Lord.⁵⁴

In these passages, it is clearly admitted that he does not refer to the intellectual aspect of the exercises. Both in the cultivation of patience and of chastity, he admits the need to abandon the carnal desires. It may be safely assumed that here Tertullian renders the word '*disciplina*' to be more practical rather than theoretical. Yet, in order to discipline oneself against desires in daily life, one should comprehend what the discipline is and is not. This necessity to understand the nature of discipline takes precedence over the observance of the rule and custom by which Christians live. Any practice can be good only in so far as it is justified by reason or argument.⁵⁵ Thus, one should prepare oneself to make rational choices over the course of one's entire life. As a rational being, one should be ready to 'walk worthily in the discipline of the Lord'. This implies that the demands of the training of mind and reason be intentionally suppressed in a way that serves to emphasise the simply way of living and to turn the audience's attention to its conformity with the rule of faith.⁵⁶

CYPRIAN

Cyprian of Carthage (c. 200–258) is the second, distinguished theologian in the church of North Africa. His personality is dissimilar from Tertullian. Cyprian

⁵³ Tert. *Pat.* 2.1; CCSL 1, 300; FC 40, 195: *Nobis exercendae patientiae auctoritatem non adfectatio humana caninae aequanimitatis stupore formata sed uiuae ac caelestis disciplinae diuina dispositio delegat deum ipsum ostendens patientiae exemplum.*

⁵⁴ Tert. *Exh. cast.* 10.4–5; CCSL 2, 1030; ACW 13, 59: *Debemus enim ita ingredi in disciplina domini, ut deo dignum fructum *, non secundum carnis squalentes concupiscentias. Ita enim et apostolus dicit, quod sapere secundum carnem mors sit, secundum spiritum uero sapere uita aeterna sit in Christo Iesu domino nostro.*

⁵⁵ Tertullian comments on it in *Cor.* 4.7, 10.9 and *Ieiun.* 3.1, 10.9.

⁵⁶ See Tert. *Praescr.* 1–2.

did not have the strength of legal mind shown by Tertullian, which led the latter to enter the service of the church despite the empire-driven persecutions of Christians. He preferred to instil the spirit of union and harmony among his congregations.⁵⁷ Yet, it is interesting to note that, according to the testimony of Jerome in *On Illustrious Men*, Cyprian himself affirmed the supremacy of Tertullian: ‘Cyprian was accustomed never to pass a day without reading Tertullian and would frequently say to him [*scil.* his secretary], “Hand me the master”, meaning, of course, Tertullian’.⁵⁸ Then, concerning the dealing with the spiritual exercises, does he entirely follow Tertullian’s views?

By the end of 250 the Decian persecution had gradually waned, but a horrible epidemic was threatening the whole community in North Africa. Therefore, in *On Mortality*, written around in 252,⁵⁹ Cyprian concerned himself with the question of knowing what it was for the faithful to suffer the punishment of death. He encourages his fellow Christians to shut out the fear of death despite their suffering from incurable disease. In the exhortation to the whole faith community, he regards the apparently horrible plague not as a correction of sinners but as ‘mortality’ examining the state of their mind. He compares it to martyrdom: ‘we have begun gladly to seek martyrdom while we are learning not to fear death. These are trying exercises for us, not deaths; they give to the mind the glory of fortitude; by contempt of death they prepare for the crown’.⁶⁰ Martyrdom is inspired and constituted by divine grace: ‘martyrdom is not in your power but in the giving of God’.⁶¹ As he attempts to control the whole community’s eagerness for martyrdom and, in particular, the prestige of the confessors who have survived the persecution, whose status has been high in the congregation, Cyprian confirms that ‘God does not ask for our blood but

⁵⁷ For the biographical survey in general, see *e.g.* Sage 1975. Introductory parts in Graeme W. Clarke’s translation of Cyprian’s letters provide us the details of his life and activities: Clarke, trans., 1984–1989; Brent 2010. For the analysis of *Acta proconsularia Cypriani*, see Hunink 2010.

⁵⁸ Jerome *Vir. ill.* 53; Richardson, ed., 31: *solutum nunquam cyprianum absque tertulliani lectione unam praeterisse diem ac sibi crebro dicere ‘da magistrum!’ tertullianum uidelicet significans.*

⁵⁹ For the dating of this work and the plague which appeared to have struck Carthage by the summer of 252, see Scourfield 1996, 23.

⁶⁰ *Cypr. Mort.* 16; CSEL 3.1, 307; FC 36, 212: *martyrium coepimus libenter adpetere, dum mortem discimus non timere. exercitia sunt nobis ista, non funera: dant animo fortitudinis gloriam, contemptu mortis praeparant ad coronam.* For the significance of Cyprian’s theology of martyrdom, in particular from its new aspect of his reaction to the martyrs in his time, see Brent 2002; Brent 2010, 250–289.

⁶¹ *Cypr. Mort.* 17; CSEL 3.1, 307; FC 36, 213: *non est in tua potestate sed in Dei dignatione martyrium.* See also *Ad Quirin.* 3.4; CSEL 3.1, 116.

our faith'.⁶² Their reward of gaining access to heavenly peace can be realised by every Christian's firm faith through the exercises of their mind, not only by martyrs and confessors.

In his treatise *On Jealousy and Envy*, written probably in 256 or 257,⁶³ Cyprian was concerned with how the devil aroused jealousy and envy, provided a further source of vices and carnal sins, and violated the 'bond of the Lord's peace' (*dominicae pacis uinculum*).⁶⁴ He enumerates, therefore, the benefit and impact of meditative exercises against such evil tendencies as a sickness of the soul.

The mind, dearest brethren, must be strengthened by these meditations: it must be confirmed against all the arts of the devil by exercises of this kind. Let divine reading be in the hands; let thoughts of the Lord be in the senses; let prayer never cease at all; let saving labor persevere. Let us all be occupied by spiritual actions, so that, [...] he may find the heart closed and armed against him.⁶⁵

By means of the training of scriptural reading, meditating, prayer and the renunciation of their property, individuals commit to strengthen their mind: such training is designed to help them conquer unregulated desires and fears.⁶⁶ This view of spiritual exercises seems to be associated with Stoic practice and perspective. Despite the similarity of its function, however, Cyprian's discourse takes different forms. He confirms that Christians should live as Christ did and regenerate in Christ: 'For this is to have changed what you had been, and to begin to be what you were not, so that the divine birth shine in you, so that the divine discipline (*deifica disciplina*) may respond to God the Father'.⁶⁷ By creating the focus on the example of Christ as his death and resurrection, he describes the spiritual discipline from the perspective of divine guidance.

Cyprian corpus of letters comprises an inexhaustible source of the time; they date from the time of his election as bishop by the people and clergy of Carthage in 248 or 249. Of the eighty-one letters of the corpus, Cyprian's view of spiritual exercises becomes clear from several passages in his relatively early correspon-

⁶² Cypr. *Mort.* 17; CSEL 3.1, 308; FC 36, 213.

⁶³ For the dating of this work, see Clarke, trans., ACW 44, 98 n. 22.

⁶⁴ Cypr. *Zel. et liu.* 6; CSEL 3.1, 423; FC 36, 298

⁶⁵ Cypr. *Zel. et liu.* 16; CSEL 3.1, 430; FC 36, 306: *His meditationibus corroborandus est animus, fratres dilectissimi, eiusmodi exercitationibus contra omnia diaboli iacula firmandus. sit in manibus diuina lectio, in sensibus dominica cogitatio, oratio iugis omnino non cesset, salutaris operatio perseueret. spiritualibus semper actibus occupemur, ut [...] et clausum aduersum se pectus inueniat et armatum.*

⁶⁶ See Blowers 2009, 31.

⁶⁷ Cypr. *Zel. et liu.* 15; CSEL 3.1, 429; FC 36, 305.

dence. In *Letter 25*, dating from approximately 250,⁶⁸ replied to a message from his brother (*Ep. 24*), Cyprian expresses a positive attitude towards the intellectual aspect of spiritual training. In the greeting of this short letter, he admires the way Caldonius has restored peace to the congregations in the urgency of a new persecution: 'Nor are we surprised to find you acting in all matters with discretion and prudence, experienced and well versed as you are in the Lord's Scriptures'.⁶⁹ Cyprian regards divine reading as the vehicle of divine aid to grant peace to his colleagues.

In *Letter 58*, probably dating from 253⁷⁰ and addressed to the North African community at Thibar (modern Thibar), Cyprian exhorts his 'dearly beloved brethren' to remain faithful to God and the Church amidst a renewal of persecution. His words draw upon the imagery from the secular combat in the arena regarding the need be prepared and trained for the terror of future persecution.⁷¹ No one should 'be so panic-stricken by fear of the approaching persecution or by the imminent arrival of Antichrist'.⁷² Adopting a Stoic view of the world and quoting passages from Ephesians (6:12–17),⁷³ he speaks of the virtue-oriented aspect of the exercises.

In the case of worldly contests men train away and practise, and they account it a great mark of honour for their reputation if they should have the luck to win their crowns watched by the people and in the presence of their emperor. But see! There is coming a magnificent and wonderful contest glittering with the prize of a heavenly crown; it is God who now watches us as we compete [...] Therefore, dearly beloved brethren, let us arm ourselves with all our strength, let us prepare ourselves for the contest with an unblemished heart, a sound faith, and a dedicated courage. [...] Such are the arms we should now take up ourselves, with these spiritual and heavenly weapons we should now protect and defend ourselves so that on that most evil of days we may be able to withstand and repel the menaces of the devil.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ For the chronological order of Cyprian's letters, see Duquenne, 1972; Sage 1975, Appendix I 'The Chronology of the Letters'; Clarke, trans., 1984–1989. For the chronology of his letters written during the Decian period (250–251), see also Clarke 1999, 692–698.

⁶⁹ *Cypr. Ep. 25*; CSEL 3.2, 538; ACW 43, 110: *nec miramur si exercitatus et in scripturis dominicis peritus caute omnia et consulte geras.*

⁷⁰ See Clarke, trans., ACW 46, 11.

⁷¹ See n. 33 above. See also Clarke, trans., ACW 44, 191–192. For the imagery of the spiritual combat of God, see *Cypr. Ep. 10.2*; CSEL 3.2, 49: *caeleste certamen Dei et spiritale, proelium Christi*. With regard to the emergence of *ἀγών* in the Pauline literature, see Pfitzner 1967, 201.

⁷² *Cypr. Ep. 58.7*; CSEL 3.2, 662; ACW 46, 65.

⁷³ See A. Fahey 1971, 493–494.

⁷⁴ *Cypr. Ep. 58.8–9*; CSEL 3.2, 663–664; ACW 46, 66: *Ad agonem saecularem exercentur homines et*

This letter considers the problem of martyrdom and, along with the gladiator metaphor, exhorts the reader to be prepared for the fear of future persecution and the arrival of Antichrist. Thus, Cyprian draws attention to a prescription for assuaging and conquering the disordered state of mind. As has been mentioned in the analysis of *On Jealousy and Envy*, after offering Stoic perspective on the discipline, Cyprian finds another path. His emphasis on the imitation of Christ as the ‘soldier of Christ’ (*miles Christi*) shows the inherent possibility of training their mind by divine ‘precepts and counsels’.⁷⁵ Here too, he describes the spiritual exercises from their eschatological dimension.

LACTANTIUS

Lactantius (c. 250–325) was another leading theologian and one of the earliest Latin writers. His elegant and excellent writing style came from his education in philosophy, earning him the label of the ‘Christian Cicero’.⁷⁶ He was a native African and the last Latin apologist personally affected by the persecution of Christians. Although he revealed few details of his life, he likely converted to Christianity before the beginning of the Diocletian persecution in February 303. Under this persecution (303–313), he was forced to resign his position as a professor of rhetoric. Yet, this was to be the his most productive period. Lactantius spent much of his time writing treatises: in 303/304, he wrote an apologetic treatise, *The Workmanship of God*, and then, probably in 305–310, he composed his main work, the seven books of *The Divine Institutes*.⁷⁷

Apart from his *magnum opus*, a small fragment of the *Codex Ambrosianus* of Milan with the marginal inscription ‘*Lactantius de motibus animi*’ provides a valuable description of the exercises in question. Since its content and form suggest the authorship of Lactantius, it is likely that he writes these lines as a

parantur et magnam gloriam computant honoris sui, si illis spectante populo et imperatore praesente contigerit coronari. ecce agon sublimis et magnus et coronae caelestis praemio gloriosus, ut spectet nos certantes Deus [...] armemur, fratres dilectissimi, viribus totis et paremur ad agonem mente incorrupta, fide integra, uirtute deuota. [...] Haec arma sumamus, his nos tutamentis spiritalibus et caelestibus muniamus, ut in die nequissimo resistere diaboli minis et repugnare possimus.

⁷⁵ Cyp. Ep. 58.10; CSEL 3.2, 666; ACW 46, 66.

⁷⁶ Pico della Mirandola, *De studio diuinae atque humanae philosophiae* 1.7-19. Pico’s evaluation derived from a passage in Jerome’s Ep. 58.10; CSEL 54, 539: *Lactantius, quasi quidam fluius eloquentiae Tullianae, utinam tam nostra adfirmare potuisset, quam facile aliena destruxit!* See further Kendeffy 2015, 56–57.

⁷⁷ For Lactantius’s life and his intellectual and historical background, see e.g. Bryce 1990; DePalma Digeser 2000; and Bowen and Peter, trans., 2003.

complement to *The Workmanship of God*.⁷⁸ In this note, he deals with human motivation and considers its origin as planted into human nature by God from the beginning. It is likely that he adopted the Ciceronian account of the soul, virtues and its order. His list of these motions of the soul includes not only its strength and twist but also the proper direction of the soul that it should take.⁷⁹

Hope, fear, love, hate, joy, sadness, pleasure, desire, anger, compassion, zeal, admiration. These motions or affections of the soul have existed from the beginning of the creation of man by God. They are implanted in human nature for its full well-being and utility, so that, through their ordered and rational control, man might be able to exercise them in performing manfully [...] when these motions of the soul are restrained within their proper lines, that is, posited in good proportion, they prepare the good acts of virtue during the present life, and they prepare for the everlasting rewards of the future.⁸⁰

Motions of the soul were given for the purpose of returning to God through the discipline of virtue ‘in accordance with reason’. Thus, while Stoics attempt to reject the passions as though they were the sickness of human soul,⁸¹ Lactantius would rather focus on the proper use of passions and the reward for the exercises. He confirms the significance and consequence of the discipline of virtues in its pure form.

Responding to the accusations against Christians, in particular after the Diocletian persecution started, Lactantius engaged in writing *The Divine Institutes*.⁸² Not only did he object to the hostile campaign vigorously promoted by pagans, but he intended to set forth the systematic (structured in the Ciceronian style) religious instruction of Christian doctrine and worship, thereby persuading the learned pagans that only Christianity was capable of telling the truth. In the prefatory part of Book 1, in which he attempts to refute polytheism, Lactantius distinguishes two different forms of the ‘profession’ and ‘science’ of searching for divine truth: one is that of ‘speaking well’ and the other is that of ‘living rightly’.

⁷⁸ For the authenticity of this fragment, see Brand 1891.

⁷⁹ See Nicholson 2001, 192–193.

⁸⁰ Lact. *De motibus animi*; CSEL 27.1, 157–158; FC 54, 223–224: <Spes > timor, amor odium, laetitia tristitia, libido cupiditas, ira miseratio. zelus admiratio, hi motus <animi > uel affectus a deo ab initio hominis existunt conditi et naturae humanae utiliter et salubriter sunt insiti, ut per eos ordinate et rationabiliter regendos homo uirtutes bonas uiriliter agendo exercere possit: [...] hi namque animi motus intra fines proprios coartati, hoc est in bona parte positi, in praesenti uirtutes bonas et in futuro aeterna praemia parant.

⁸¹ See e.g., Lact. *Inst.* 6.14–19. For the treatment of passions in Lactantius, see Hagendahl 1958, 338–341; Ingremeau 1998; and Kendeuff 2000.

⁸² For a chronological survey of *Inst.*, see DePalma Digeser 1994.

According to the dichotomous viewpoint of its benefit for observing the ‘heavenly precepts’, he gives preference to the latter. This seems probable because the knowledge of eloquence ‘instructed youth not toward virtue but plainly toward “argued” evil’.⁸³ Indeed, ‘living rightly’ belongs to all and ‘speaking well’ pertains to the few. Nevertheless, Lactantius claims, together with particular attention to the target audience of this treatise, the privilege of ‘that exercise in imaginary lawsuits [...] it may more potently seep into minds’.⁸⁴ Despite the limited scope of its functions, towards the erudite pagan audience, he exhibits an appreciation of the oratorical discipline as the indispensable guide to true wisdom and Christianity.

In Book 3, Lactantius focuses on the errors of philosophers’ teachings on ethics, stating that the virtues are the vehicle for the acquisition of the soul’s immortality, not the objective themselves of life. It is admitted that, along with his interest in virtue, he persistently speaks of the exercises combined with the cultivation of virtues. After drawing the outline of moral philosophy—Stoics, Cyrenaics, and Academics, he explains the nature of the good and defines immortality as the highest good.⁸⁵ Happiness in this life consists only in the liberation of the soul from the body: ‘beatitude does not fall to man in that manner in which the philosophers believed it did, but it so comes [...] when his soul lives in spirit alone’.⁸⁶ He encourages those who hope for it to live in the labours and burdens, because they nourish and strengthen the virtues: ‘if we seem to be least happy [...] if fleeting the enticements of pleasures and serving virtue alone [...] if, finally, we hold to that rough and difficult way which opens unto beatitude for us’.⁸⁷ A linkage between immortality, virtues, and spiritual training serves as the key to define the secure way of human life. Based on the close relationship of these forms, he turns his attention to the teachings of Lucretius, Seneca, and Cicero and then proceeds to examine those of Epicurus, Leucippus and Democritus as sources of error.⁸⁸ Although there are no detailed descriptions about

⁸³ Lact. *Inst.* 1.1.8; CSEL 19, 3; FC 49, 16: *non ad uirtutem, sed plane ad argutam malitiam iuuenes erudiebamus*. For the parallel between Cicero and Lactantius in this respect, see Kendeffy 2000, 58–59.

⁸⁴ Lact. *Inst.* 1.1.10; CSEL 19, 3; FC 49, 16.

⁸⁵ Lact. *Inst.* 3.12.

⁸⁶ Lact. *Inst.* 3.12.34; CSEL 19, 211–212; FC 49, 194.

⁸⁷ Lact. *Inst.* 3.12.35; CSEL 19, 212; FC 49, 194: *si minime beati esse uideamur, si fugientes inlecebras uoluptatum solique uirtuti seruientes [...] si denique asperam illam uiam difficilemque teneamus, quae nobis ad beatitudinem patefacta est*.

⁸⁸ For Lactantius’ (dis)approval of the ancient philosophical tradition, see Harloff 1911, 8–51; Hagedahl 1958, 48–76, 81–88 and 338–341; Bryce 1990; Colish 1990, 37–47; and Smolak 1995.

the exercises, the repeated references to the benefit of the discipline of virtue are given when he determines the harmful results from the excessive engagement in the practice of speaking and in Epicurean hedonism.⁸⁹

It is noteworthy that, at the ends of Book 3 and 5,⁹⁰ Lactantius is concerned about the persecution and trials. Although it seems that the sufferings of the Christians are at the hands of criminal persecutors, in Book 5, he quotes a passage from Seneca: ‘God has men as his children,’ he says, ‘[t]he good, however, whom he loves, he often chastises, and with constant labors he trains them to the practice of virtue, nor does he allow them to be corrupted and depraved by passing mortal goods’.⁹¹ Lactantius follows the idea of Seneca, in which the virtue of fortitude shifts its focus from being representative of physical courage to the endurance of torture and considers further that the suffering of the good is part of divine plan to keep his people free from corruption. Thus, the exercises of virtue are involved in the process of the embodiment of divine justice. In the introductory part of Book 7,⁹² he speaks again about the close relationship between the exercise of virtues and its significance. Because of his intention to deal with the path to beatitude from the eschatological viewpoint, Lactantius emphasises the divine arrangement of the world and the rational judgement of good and evil things. Indeed, in the diversity of the world, the long-continued exercises of reason and virtues are indispensable for knowing and seeking the good. Here, the reason and virtue seem to have combined to show the necessity of continual commitment to the exercises.

CONCLUSION

The treatises of Tertullian that I have considered so far, which date from around 197 to 213, reveal the sporadic but distinct presence of his view of spiritual training, for the ascetic aspect of which he had persistent concern. There is early evidence to suggest that Tertullian exhorted prospective martyrs to regard their circumstance as training of the mind. His emphasis throughout is on how Christians should live in accordance with divine precepts. He maintained his concern for a mode of self-restraint in his later writings. Despite the complexity

⁸⁹ Lact. *Inst.* 3.16.1–2; CSEL 19, 224: 3.17.3; CSEL 19, 228. See Goulon 2003.

⁹⁰ Lact. *Inst.* 3.29.16; CSEL 19, 270: 5.22.12; CSEL 19, 475.

⁹¹ Lact. *Inst.* 5.22.12; CSEL 19, 475; FC 49, 388: *deus inquit homines pro liberis habet, [...] bonos autem, quod diligit, castigat saepius et adsiduis laboribus ad usum uirtutis exercet nec eos caducis ac mortalibus bonis corrumpi ac deprauari sinit.*

⁹² Lact. *Inst.* 7.1.17–18; CSEL 19, 584: 7.4.13; CSEL 19, 595.

of dating his works, there appears to be no confirmation of a chronological development in his understanding of spiritual discipline. It is interesting to note that his disapproval of the exercises in their intellectual and exegetical aspect is clear. Also clear is the idea that these aspects provide inadequate training to justify the curiosity and cultivate the propensity to engage in the endless search. Thus, he repeatedly warns his audience to avoid confusion and controversy.

Both Cyprian's and Lactantius' writings occasionally deal with spiritual training, yet these are restricted to the short span of their literary careers. Cyprian's remarks are found mainly in the decade after he was elected bishop in 248 or 249. Lactantius' approach is found mainly in *Divine Institutes*, except for the passage in the small fragment discussed above. With regard to the distinctive feature of spiritual discipline, they focused on its ascetic dimension. Some of their texts should be interpreted as an exhortation for their fellow Christians: they perceived difficulty as a therapeutic opportunity for cultivating one's state of mind. Their emphasis throughout is also, as mentioned above regarding Tertullian, on their view of how Christians should live in accordance with the working of divine justice. Consequently, in this respect, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Lactantius gave similar descriptions of spiritual training in its ethical dimension. From an intellectual viewpoint, however, both Cyprian and Lactantius expressed a positive attitude towards these types of exercises, while Tertullian often rejected them. It is clearly admitted that Tertullian was not so much anti-rational but, rather, preferred to show how to follow the Christian ideal of life: Christians should live in such a way as to see the perfection of life from a rational viewpoint in accordance with the rule of faith. His view of its ideal then turned his attention to both moral behaviour and spiritual testimony. Tertullian confirms that people can see and appreciate things of the world when they follow the rule of faith. Taking into account the diversity and plurality that make distinctive the spiritual discipline from the second to early fourth centuries, Tertullian, Cyprian and Lactantius focused on its practical aspect, while, all the same, not distinguishing between the theoretical and practical dimensions. The spiritual training serves to construct the 'rational self', who should be primarily justified in accord with divine wisdom and justice. Devotion to spiritual training as part of a Christian programme of self-cultivation was a significant feature of the writings of North African Christian writers.