

## **‘TANTUM IN DOMINO’**

TERTULLIAN’S INTERPRETATION OF 1 CORINTHIANS 7 IN HIS

*AD UXOREM*

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### **Summary**

*Tertullian of Carthage (c. AD 155–240) is most remembered for his adherence to the Montanist sect and subsequent moral rigidity. While various opinions exist as to the Montanist influence upon his writings, signs of such adherence are evident from an early period. This is true of his treatise *Ad uxorem*, written in the early third century. His views of marriage, specifically in light of the Pauline injunctive from 1 Corinthians 7:39, provide readers with an early, and relatively unexplored, perspective on Christian marriage. This essay examines this early treatise from Tertullian, and his interpretation of Paul, in order to better understand the complexities of Tertullian’s early view of marriage. Addressing the work of Elizabeth Clark on this topic, this essay presents the *tantum in Domino* (‘only in the Lord’) phrase as pivotal for understanding Tertullian’s view of marriage (and subsequent remarriage) as a created good.*

### **1. Introduction**

In assessing Tertullian on marriage in his *Ad uxorem*, Elizabeth A. Clark observes,

‘Commenting on 1 Cor. 7, Tertullian repeats Paul’s argument that marriage may be “necessary” to stave off sexual temptations, but what is

only “necessary,” Tertullian claims, is easily deprecated. As merely “permitted,” marriage cannot be classed among the “goods.”<sup>1</sup>

Marriage, in this regard, is not truly good because it is considered obligatory and inevitable for the purpose of procreation. Does this notion accurately portray Tertullian’s exegesis of Paul, particularly 1 Corinthians 7, in *Ad uxorem*? This essay will seek to answer this question.

Additionally, to what extent, if any, do Tertullian’s Montanist tendencies affect his moral exhortation in *Ad uxorem*? Regarding remarriage in Tertullian, Christine Trevett notes,

‘Tertullian had trawled for Jewish scriptural, Christian and pagan precedents for arguing the rejection of remarriage and he used them in both pre-Montanist and Montanist writings ... [According to Tertullian] to opt for marriage was to compromise with the flesh.’<sup>2</sup>

Though *Ad uxorem* may be considered a pre-Montanist writing, are there any discernible Montanist tendencies that would influence Tertullian’s reading of Paul? This essay will also address this question.

These two questions – whether Tertullian considered marriage a good and to what extent can readers discern Montanist tendencies – will be addressed in three movements. First, I will provide a careful survey of Tertullian’s *Ad uxorem*. Second, I will collate instances of Tertullian’s interaction with Paul, primarily centred upon 1 Corinthians 7:39, in order to highlight his concern for Paul’s command of ‘only in the Lord’. Third, I will offer a rendering of Tertullian’s view of marriage which seeks to address observations made by Clark and Trevett. I will argue that even though Tertullian demonstrates a certain moral strictness aligned with Montanist tendencies, his reading of 1 Corinthians 7 in *Ad uxorem* promotes marriage as a created good which necessitates a clear understanding of Paul’s command to marry ‘only in the Lord’.

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth A. Clark, ‘Status Feminae: Tertullian and the Uses of Paul’ in *Tertullian and Paul*, ed. Todd D. Still and David E. Wilhite (Pauline and Patristic Scholars in Debate, vol. 1; New York: Bloomsbury, 2013): 142.

<sup>2</sup> Christine Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy* (revised edn; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 112–13.

## 2. Tertullian of Carthage and Montanism

It is helpful to note something of Tertullian's pedigree and background in order to better understand his rendering of marriage and his exegetical tendencies. Tertullian was born sometime around the mid-second century AD.<sup>3</sup> Jerome, in his *De viris illustribus*, relates his birth to a well-known centurion in the Roman army, but this is doubtful.<sup>4</sup> His education took him to Rome, where he apparently studied law and rhetoric. While in Rome, Tertullian converted to the Christian faith, yet the exact details of his conversion remain undisclosed. Upon conversion, he began exercising his training and skill to combat heresy in the church. Regarding his literary ability, Moreschini and Norelli remark, '[Tertullian was] one of the greatest [writers] in the Latin language, pagans included. His greatness rests not only on his artistry but also on the contribution he made to the thought of western Christianity.'<sup>5</sup>

Historians continue to debate the reasons for Tertullian's shift to Montanist theology. He leaves us with no explicit confession or rationale for this subtle conversion. Because of this lack of confession, some doubt any true adherence to the sect.<sup>6</sup> David Rankin posits that Tertullian most likely did not break from the Catholic faith, seeing Montanism as aiding in his 'campaign against what he saw as the decreasing rigor in its life from within its bounds'.<sup>7</sup> Though the exact origins and context for the rise of Montanism are uncertain, there appears to be a connection between 'the apocalyptic vision [becoming] less vivid and the church's polity more rigid' and the lack of the 'extraordinary operations of the Spirit characteristic of the early church'.<sup>8</sup> Montanists claimed moral laxity had fallen upon the church.

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<sup>3</sup> Everett Ferguson, 'Tertullian', *The Expository Times* 120, no. 7 (April 2009): 313.

<sup>4</sup> Ferguson, 'Tertullian': 313.

<sup>5</sup> Claudio Moreschini and Enrico Norelli, *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature: A Literary History* (From Paul to the Age of Constantine, vol. 1; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005): 332.

<sup>6</sup> Gerald Lewis Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God: Perspectives on the Theology of Tertullian* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979).

<sup>7</sup> David Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 41. Rankin posits that Tertullian's group existed as a church within a church.

<sup>8</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition, vol. 1; Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1975): 98. Pelikan further notes '[Tertullian's] Montanism dated from a period almost two generations later than the origins of the movement; and it is almost

Montanism attracted those in search of austere morality and spiritual zeal. It was this attention to austerity that likely swayed Tertullian. Though it likely aligned with tendencies he already possessed, the Montanist movement provided what he believed was the spiritual authority behind such rigorist practice. Bonwetsch asserts, '[Tertullian's] basic direction remains the same as before his conversion to Montanism. But what he had previously demanded as a result of a pietistic-rigorist conception of Christianity, he [now] calls for as a Montanist on the basis of divine authority.'<sup>9</sup> Peter Brown quips, 'If the "New Prophecy" had not existed, one suspects that Tertullian would have had to invent it.'<sup>10</sup>

For Tertullian, basic Catholic orthodoxy was maintained; however, practices and activities differed. Rankin identifies the main issue: to what extent did adherence to New Prophecy teaching affect the development of Tertullian's theology?<sup>11</sup> Gerald Bray asserts that Tertullian's writings do not present 'anything which could properly be called a conversion'.<sup>12</sup> Tertullian sought to merely defend the sect, 'not propagate their beliefs'.<sup>13</sup> The question of Montanist influence upon *Ad uxorem* will be addressed below. Before we consider this question, however, a thorough survey of *Ad uxorem* must take place. In this treatise, Tertullian takes a magnifying glass to 1 Corinthians 7, expanding its implication and exploring the deep crevices of each word. Particularly concerning to Tertullian is Paul's seemingly minor phrase 'only in the Lord'. The treatise, as well as Tertullian's representation of marriage as a created good, lies within his understanding of this phrase.

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axiomatic that two generations can and usually do alter the character and emphasis of a movement considerably ... [Tertullian changed Montanism] at least as much as he was changed by it' (101).

<sup>9</sup> G. Nathanael Bonwetsch, *Die Geschichte des Montanismus* (Erlangen: Verlag von Andreas Diechert, 1881): 119.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (2nd edn; New York: Columbia University Press, 2008): 76.

<sup>11</sup> Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church*: 41--42.

<sup>12</sup> Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God*: 56.

<sup>13</sup> Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God*: 56.

### 3. *Ad uxorem*

William le Saint observes, '[To] know Tertullian the Montanist it is necessary to know his treatises on marriage.'<sup>14</sup> Le Saint argues for a gradual shift and definitive break from the church as demonstrated in the writings of Tertullian on marriage. The relationship between Tertullian's views on second marriage and this conversion to Montanism are unclear.<sup>15</sup> Le Saint avers, 'There are ... interpretations of Scripture which are either naive misapprehensions or tendentious distortions of its sense.'<sup>16</sup> Le Saint neglects to mention how this so, arguing generally for a misreading of the text and unconvincing argument on the part of Tertullian.

The writing of *Ad uxorem* is generally agreed to have been between AD 200 and 206.<sup>17</sup> Writing to his wife at this time places Tertullian around the age of 50, with his wife most likely being younger, perhaps significantly, than him.<sup>18</sup> Tertullian encourages his wife to renounce marriage following his death. He urges this action for two reasons: earthly passions will not continue in the new age, and, similarly, the married state itself will not continue in the new age. This being said, Tertullian does not place any regulation on his wife regarding remarriage. He affirms, 'Yet it is still permitted us to consider whether the course of action I recommend is of advantage to you personally or,

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<sup>14</sup> William P. Le Saint, 'Introduction' in Tertullian, *Treatises on Marriage and Remarriage: To His Wife, An Exhortation to Chastity, Monogamy*, trans. William P. Le Saint (Ancient Christian Writers, vol. 13; Westminster, MD: Paulist Press, 1978): 5.

<sup>15</sup> Le Saint asserts: 'We cannot say ... that Tertullian's views on second marriage were decisive in making him a Montanist, but there can be no doubt that they contributed materially to his defection from the church' (Le Saint, 'Introduction': 5).

<sup>16</sup> Le Saint, 'Introduction': 6.

<sup>17</sup> Le Saint, 'Introduction': 8.

<sup>18</sup> It was not uncommon for wives to be considerably younger than their husbands. In 19 BC, Augustus passed legislation which regulated marriage under the authority of the state, mandating certain expectations for men and women with regards to marriage. Ferguson notes, 'Men between twenty-five and sixty and women between twenty and fifty were given every encouragement to be married, and special benefits were offered to the fathers and mothers of three or more children.' Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (3rd edn; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003): 75. For more on marriage in ancient Roman perspective see Jane F. Gardner, *Family and Familia in Roman Law and Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Beryl Rawson, *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

for this matter, to the advantage of any other woman who belongs to God.’<sup>19</sup>

### 3.1 Various Themes in *Ad uxorem*

Throughout the work there are various themes worth noting. Understanding these themes provides additional substance in understanding Tertullian’s overall project in *Ad uxorem*.

*Sovereignty of God.* Tertullian in numerous places asserts the providential nature of God with regards to losing one’s spouse. His tone, far from morbidity, affirms the foreknowledge of God and encourages his wife to consider that when God wills that one departs this life, he also wills that the spouse ‘be done with marriage itself’. This understanding of God’s sovereignty is a direct reflection upon Paul’s decree in 1 Corinthians 7:27.

*Monogamy.* Whereas in modern contexts one may see this as the simple commitment to a single spouse by marriage, Tertullian extols monogamy as the state of having one marriage in one’s lifetime. In reading 1 Timothy 3, Tertullian interprets ‘one-woman man’ as one who has only been married once. The assumption for Tertullian is not divorce in this instance, but one who, even if the wife is deceased, the elder did not choose to marry again. Those leaders who chose to be remarried, hence being a two-woman man, are immediately disqualified by ‘[the] law of the Church and the precept of the Apostle’.<sup>20</sup>

*Virtue.* Language of virtue penetrates the entirety of Tertullian’s text. Tertullian maintains that widows are crowned with virtue, especially since they have to live virtuously when they are widowed. Tertullian’s understanding of the Christian life is one of attaining to virtue. This virtue is not that which is solely asserted by Greco-Roman moral philosophers, but that life which is truly honouring to God. He particularly relates the life of virtue to widows and virgins in *Ad uxorem*.

*Widows and virgins.* Tertullian expands on the concept of virtue as it relates to the widows and virgins in the church. Tertullian asserts that

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<sup>19</sup> *Ad ux.* 1.1. Unless otherwise noted, text from *Ad uxorem* comes from Tertullian, *Treatises on Marriage and Remarriage: To His Wife, An Exhortation to Chastity, Monogamy*, trans. William P. Le Saint (Ancient Christian Writers, vol. 13; Westminster, MD: Paulist Press, 1978).

<sup>20</sup> *Ad ux.* 1.7.

virgins will experience the presence of God more closely, based on a 'perfect integrity and inviolate purity'.<sup>21</sup> Widows, on the other hand, have a greater difficulty, based on the nature of their position being foisted upon them. Widows are compelled to find the good which is seemingly more naturally possessed by virgins. Tertullian contends, 'In the former it is grace which is crowned, in the latter, virtue. The church is to support such individuals, both virgins and widows since they are fully dependent upon God's mercy.'<sup>22</sup> Tertullian continues this dichotomy of virgins and widows by describing the origin of their state. Virgins, according to Tertullian, have the state of receiving God's generosity while widows have earned such virtue. Tertullian seems to be drawing a distinction between the two groups, generating the notion that widows need to earn God's favour. It is unclear whether this is the case, but what Tertullian does affirm is the fact that virgins by nature have not experienced intercourse or companionship that comes in marriage. In this regard, they are carried through by God's grace. Since widows have an experience of marriage and intercourse, potentially struggling with desiring this again, theirs is a more conscious effort to maintain chastity. This is the crux of the argument. Virtue, for Tertullian, is more evident in those who must struggle to achieve it. Tertullian does not construct a contrasting soteriological image between the grace received by virgins and the personal effort in earning virtue. His wording is best interpreted by understanding the reality of human relationships. Virgins need God's grace to sustain their status while widows need God's grace along with a conscious effort to forsake that which they had previously experienced.

### 3.2 Book 1

Tertullian affirms the state of marriage as a God-created institution for the purposes of procreation and populating the earth. Tertullian continues to discuss the nature of marriage as one man and one woman. From here he relates the fact that only one marriage may be contracted, based on Adam and Eve's marriage to each other. He quips, 'One rib, one woman.'<sup>23</sup> Following Adam and Eve, the misdirection of the Patriarchs regarding marriage was corrected by the Law. Such practices

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<sup>21</sup> *Ad ux.* 1.8.

<sup>22</sup> *Ad ux.* 1.8.

<sup>23</sup> *Ad ux.* 1.2.

were necessary for a time, Tertullian admits, but later revelation amended such practices. First, the Law added certain restrictions, and eventually the full revelation of the gospel, including instruction from the Apostle Paul, ‘did away with excesses or controlled irregularities’.<sup>24</sup>

Tertullian addresses gnostic error early on in his text, specifically the error of the Marcionites, who affirmed the necessity of dividing those who were joined as one flesh for the purpose of further spiritual enlightenment.<sup>25</sup> In the wake of these claims, Tertullian affirms the state of marriage as a created good instituted by God. Though a created good, he admits to something that is better than this created good. Following Paul in 1 Corinthians 7, Tertullian affirms the preference of celibacy, though marriage ‘is conceded to us on the principle that marry we may because marry we must’.<sup>26</sup>

Tertullian, interpreting Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:9, creates a hierarchy of goods with regards to marriage. To burn is certainly not preferred to marriage, yet, as Tertullian declares, it is ‘much better ... neither to marry nor to burn’.<sup>27</sup> Marriage has a ‘transparent goodness’ and therefore has no need of commendation – that which is revealed by God to be better that requires esteem. There are things which are truly good and those that are simply not bad. Tertullian argues for a pursuit of those things which are truly good. Once again, Paul forms this ethical paradigm of choosing the good for Tertullian. Paul is continually set forth as the exemplar: ‘Blessed is he who is like Paul!’<sup>28</sup>

Chastity, according to Tertullian, demonstrates a dedication to something higher than marriage – an exclusive relationship to God. In extolling those who have chosen chastity after the death of a husband, Tertullian notes ‘They are God’s fair ones, God’s beloved. With Him they live, with Him they converse, with Him they treat on intimate terms day and night.’<sup>29</sup> Tertullian argues against prevailing notions of a woman needing a husband ‘to be her strength and comfort’ or for protection. Such a radical notion affirms God’s providence in care for

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<sup>24</sup> *Ad ux.* 1.2.

<sup>25</sup> *Adv. Marc.* 1.29. Tertullian describes Marcion’s supposed view of virginity or widowhood as a prerequisite for baptism.

<sup>26</sup> *Ad ux.* 1.3.

<sup>27</sup> *Ad ux.* 1.3.

<sup>28</sup> *Ad ux.* 1.3.

<sup>29</sup> *Ad ux.* 1.4.



virgins and widows. Christians are not 'solicitous about how we are to be supplied with the necessities of life' but rather acknowledge that God grants all that is necessary for life, especially to those who are 'stamped with the seal of God's approval' by choosing chastity.<sup>30</sup> The higher way of being wedded to God allows these women to 'bury concupiscence of the flesh'.<sup>31</sup> Tertullian relates a dichotomy of the 'weaker force', which is human nature, and that which is 'nobler in origin' – that is, the spirit. Such an image is not meant to declare the flesh as evil but to affirm the limitations of human nature in contrast to the things of the spirit. The temporal realities of beauty and youth are nothing compared 'with the blessings of Heaven which last forever'.<sup>32</sup>

Additionally, Tertullian discusses the potential difficulty of having children. This 'baggage of marriage' represents a potential burden that will prevent Christians from the ability to endure persecution. Such notions demonstrate a harsh reality for Christians living in a time of oppression. Moreover, this conviction appears to emanate from a biblical understanding of the second coming of Christ.<sup>33</sup> Regarding those without children, Tertullian asserts, 'At the first sound of the angel's trumpet they will leap forth lightly, easily able to endure any distress or persecution.'<sup>34</sup> Tertullian relates the relationship of marriage to the vices God finds detestable. Tertullian seems to interpret the Pauline instruction in 1 Corinthians 7:29 to be a directive towards renunciation, even for those who are already married.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Ad ux.* 1.4.

<sup>31</sup> *Ad ux.* 1.4.

<sup>32</sup> *Ad ux.* 1.4.

<sup>33</sup> The claim is often made that Tertullian's later view of marriage was shaped by a certain New Testament apocalypticism. Here we see this notion arising in an earlier treatise. Burns and Jensen note, '[Tertullian] followed Paul in insisting that the time was short and that those who were married should live as though they were not. Responsibility for a spouse and children could be a hindrance to the practice of Christian virtue: it made a person less ready and willing to face persecution and give up earthly life when fidelity to Christ required it.' J. Patout Burns and Robin M. Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa: The Development of Its Practices and Beliefs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014): 443.

<sup>34</sup> *Ad ux.* 1.5.

<sup>35</sup> Regarding 1 Cor. 7:29, Gordon Fee observes, 'Paul's concern here seems to go beyond "staying celibate" to the very understanding of Christian existence that caused them to urge celibacy in the first place. The Corinthians think that the unmarried should stay as they are – for ascetic reasons related to their new spirituality. Paul is urging on them a wholly different worldview. Because of the "present distress" and "shortened time," the betrothed may wish to remain single; but being single or married in itself is not the crucial question. Either is all right, he has said and will say again;

Pagans affirm the role of virgins and widows, specifically related to pagan cultic practices. Those who are declared virgins serve in various cults and certain widows assist in groups that promote separation from their husbands. These examples serve as the antithesis to Christian virtue. Tertullian maintains, 'For Satan has discovered how to turn the cultivation of virtue itself to a man's destruction, and it makes no difference to him whether he ruins souls by lust or chastity.'<sup>36</sup> It is important to note an area of distinction between pagan practice and what Tertullian affirms via his reading of Paul. Pagan cultic practices as noted by Tertullian affirm the necessity of breaking the monogamous bond. Tertullian certainly denies this act as valid. Though he follows Paul in relating the idea of men living as if they had no wife, this does not translate into the necessity to break the marriage bond.

### 3.3 Book 2

Upon promoting the single life following the death of a spouse, Tertullian turns his attention to 'an alternative course of action'.<sup>37</sup> Though Tertullian promotes 'the higher ideal' of chastity, he also recognises the reality of human frailty. He blames himself for potentially clouding the judgement of his wife, pushing her to neglect this lofty ideal. Tertullian declares the life of the widow as 'heroic'. The status of hero means that few can accomplish it with success. Those who are not heroic in this sense do well to marry in the Lord. Tertullian asserts 'Failure is easy to excuse wherever success is difficult to achieve.'<sup>38</sup> He affirms 1 Corinthians 7:39 and promotes that marriage should be in the Lord. If one is freed from a spouse who was an unbeliever, Christians should seek remarriage only with other

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what is important is that in either situation one live "as if not," that is, without one's relationship to the world as the determining factor.' Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987): 341. Eric Osborn notes, 'Tertullian speaks of the spiritual affection of those who are married to Christ or God and the attractiveness of those who are his. This is all spiritual. In the last days, he who has a wife should be as he who has none, when God draws near in special intimacy.' Eric Francis Osborn, *Tertullian, First Theologian of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 234.

<sup>36</sup> *Ad ux.* 1.6.

<sup>37</sup> *Ad ux.* 2.1.

<sup>38</sup> *Ad ux.* 2.1.

Christians.<sup>39</sup> Commenting on this, in 1 Corinthians 7:39, David Garland states:

Paul warns about marriage bringing affliction when Christians are married to Christians. Would he not object even more to a widow voluntarily putting herself into a more difficult situation by marrying a non-Christian who may be unsympathetic to her faith?<sup>40</sup>

For Tertullian, disobedience equates to contumacy with regards to Scripture. This is a Scriptural command, according to Tertullian. For Tertullian, remarriage 'in the name of the Lord' is taken 'unquestionably' to be to a Christian.<sup>41</sup>

From this point in the treatise, Tertullian provides a lengthy directive, straight from the heart of 1 Corinthians, regarding the spiritual tragedy of marriage outside the Christian faith. He more fully explains the idea of 'only' (Gk. *monon*; Lt. *tantum*). This 'weighty word' adds gravitas to a command or exhortation. Tertullian declares, 'It is in itself a whole sentence, sharp, concise, and eloquent in its very brevity.'<sup>42</sup> Tertullian affirms the apostolic perceptiveness of this *tantum* command. That which is forbade by the Lord, even if contracted here in on earth, will not stand 'before the tribunal of our Lord'.<sup>43</sup> Tertullian relates improper remarriage to profaning the temple of God and joining a member of the body of Christ to a prostitute. For Tertullian, a significant spiritual truth is affirmed by relating the marriage of a Christian to a non-Christian. It is the Christian who is spiritually fornicating and profaning God's people, the temple. Tertullian takes an ecclesiastical turn by affirming the need to remove that one from the fellowship of the church. That person is to be 'cut off completely from combination with the brethren'.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> According David Garland, the idea of remarriage in the Lord best fits the context. See David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003): 343.

<sup>40</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians*: 343.

<sup>41</sup> *Ad ux.* 2.2. Tertullian excuses, as does Paul, those who become Christians and who choose to remain married to pagans. Tertullian's injunction speaks specifically to those who lose a spouse and choose to remarry, whether their previous spouse was a pagan or Christian. Paul states in 1 Cor. 7.14, 'For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.' More on this is addressed below.

<sup>42</sup> *Ad ux.* 2.2.

<sup>43</sup> *Ad ux.* 2.3.

<sup>44</sup> *Ad ux.* 2.3.

Tertullian elaborates upon the notion of a Christian and pagan union. The couple will naturally be at odds, based on their opposing rhythms of life. Fasts are met with feasts and private prayers are met with invitations to public baths. Naturally, a pagan husband would be concerned with a woman who visited strangers and who left at midnight for special Christian services. Tertullian refers to the rumours regarding Christian practice, asserting that pagans perceive Christian practices to be immoral and generally unreasonable. Would a pagan spouse who could not understand such practices allow a husband or wife to participate without some measure of distaste? The holy kiss of Christian fellowship alone might fill a spouse with jealous indignation. This elaboration reflects a thorough expansion of understanding what it means to be married in the Lord.<sup>45</sup> Tertullian asserts the having a 'servant of Satan' alongside in marriage would prevent a Christian wife from her various Christian duties.<sup>46</sup>

Tertullian, while reflecting upon Paul regarding the danger of pagan-Christian marriage, draws in material from Matthew 7:6 to further bolster his position. Christian practices such as prayer and participation in the Eucharist are likened to pearls, pearls which are cast before swine. Christian wives give over their precious spiritual jewels to be trampled, and, ultimately, they become trampled in the process. To a pagan, Christian practices are easily likened to magic rituals. The Eucharist especially is cause for confusion, based on the rumours against Christians that such things are magical charms or something worse.<sup>47</sup> Finally, the danger exists that pagan spouses may become intolerant and turn their spouse over to the authorities. Early Christian witnesses attest to examples of pagan husbands condemned their wives based on their Christian faith.<sup>48</sup> Some unscrupulous husbands only want the dowries of their wives and therefore expose them or threaten to turn them over. Tertullian maintains, 'This is a thing a great many women failed to think about.'<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> See Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa*: 444--45.

<sup>46</sup> *Ad ux.* 2.4

<sup>47</sup> Among other apologists of the second and third centuries, Tertullian addresses accusations against Christian practices in his *Apology* 8--9.

<sup>48</sup> For instance, see Justin Martyr, 2 *Apol.* 2.

<sup>49</sup> *Ad ux.* 2.5.

Based on the pagan nature of her marriage, the wife is often engaged 'in duties foreign to her calling'.<sup>50</sup> Tertullian provides a long list of pagan practices which would assume that her life would be preoccupied with various occasions contrary to Christian life and practice. Tertullian paints the picture of one who is out of place, wandering in the midst of foreign affairs and alien rituals. The songs are not hymns to Christ but rather tunes 'popular in theatres and pothouses'.<sup>51</sup> Fully drawing upon the implications of 1 Corinthians 7:19-20, Tertullian affirms that such a union cannot glorify God. He asserts, 'All is foreign, all is hostile, all is damned – the work of the Evil One to procure the destruction of souls.'<sup>52</sup> He clearly contrasts this position with those who are 'already living in this state when God laid hold of them'.<sup>53</sup> Their promise is that they may gain their spouse through holy conduct. This is the only sort of Christian and pagan union that God approves. Spouses who witness a conversion to 'heavenly virtue' are less prone to attack the faith since they are 'brought into touch with the miraculous'.<sup>54</sup> Since these men have come into such close contact with the grace of God by means of their wives' piety, they are more easily won for the faith.<sup>55</sup>

Tertullian continues to give ample reason for why Christian women should not marry pagan husbands. The primary reason is that such marriages are condemned by God, but Tertullian gives additional evidence based on the nature of slave marriage in Roman households. According to Tertullian, Roman masters are reluctant to allow their slaves to marry into other households because such marriages would detract from the performance of their duties. Additionally, one's slaves may appear to become the property of another master. To this, Tertullian decries, 'Are we to regard earthly laws as more severe than those of heaven?'<sup>56</sup> Tertullian further condemns the actions of Christians who willfully choose to enter into a pagan marriage. These apparently deny that the Lord, speaking through Paul, 'has formally prohibited their conduct'.<sup>57</sup> Such a denial can only be attributed to

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<sup>50</sup> *Ad ux.* 2.6.

<sup>51</sup> *Ad ux.* 2.6.

<sup>52</sup> *Ad ux.* 2.6.

<sup>53</sup> *Ad ux.* 2.7.

<sup>54</sup> *Ad ux.* 2.7.

<sup>55</sup> Except, it seems, in the case previously mentioned in Justin, 2 *Apol.* 2.

<sup>56</sup> *Ad ux.* 2.8.

<sup>57</sup> *Ad ux.* 2.8.

weakness of faith. Tertullian perceives this temptation seizing primarily the wealthy. He maintains,

For the richer a woman is and the more puffed up she is with her position as a great lady, so much the more extensive an establishment does she require to fulfil her social obligations and to serve her as a kind of field in which her ambition may maneuver without restraint.<sup>58</sup>

It is unclear whether Tertullian has a specific example in mind here, that is, he may be constructing an ideal here or he may be referring to real examples. He compares Christian women who desire to marry for money and status to pagan women who ‘unite themselves promiscuously’ to slaves and freedmen simply to ‘gratify their passions’.<sup>59</sup> Christian women, on the contrary, should be honoured to marry a godly man, even if that man may only have moderate means. Tertullian draws upon Jesus’s teaching on the Kingdom from Matthew 5:3, asserting the place of the kingdom among the poor. He promotes a kingdom vision wherein the poor are those who are considered rich in the eyes of God. Tertullian affirms, ‘[Thus] a woman who is wealthy will be better off with a man who is not.’<sup>60</sup> Any dowry she receives pales in comparison to the riches provided by a godly marriage. Though a woman may come from means and higher social status, a Christian husband may quite likely be on a higher heavenly level than his temporal social standing.

Tertullian extols the beauty of Christian marriage. He appears to provide a brief description of a marriage ceremony in the church, a ceremony which has cosmic significance. A happy marriage comes from that which the church arranges, ‘the Sacrifice strengthens ... [and] upon which the blessing sets a seal’.<sup>61</sup> This is the marriage attended by angels and consented by God. From here Tertullian extols the numerous virtues of Christian marriage based on the ‘two in one flesh’ relationship. He notes, ‘They pray together, they worship together, they fast together; instructing one another, encouraging one another,

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<sup>58</sup> *Ad ux.* 2.8.

<sup>59</sup> *Ad ux.* 2.8.

<sup>60</sup> *Ad ux.* 2.8.

<sup>61</sup> *Ad ux.* 2.8. The translation ‘Sacrifice’ comes from the the Latin *oblatio*. The Catholic translator appears to assume the idea of the paschal sacrifice of Christ, likely represented in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. This idea is unclear from the passing mention by Tertullian and a further exploration is outside the scope of this paper.

strengthening one another.’<sup>62</sup> Tertullian continues to depict the idealised marriage from a Christian perspective. Tertullian offers this image in contrast to intentional Christian and pagan marriage. Whereas one is promoted and supported by Satan, true Christian marriage causes Christ to rejoice, granting his peace. Alluding to Matthew 18:20, Tertullian affirms that the Lord is present among the gathered couple. He adds, ‘[And] where He is, there evil is not.’<sup>63</sup> Tertullian concludes by affirming the entire basis for his exhortation as based upon Paul’s command of ‘only in the Lord’ in 1 Corinthians 7:39.

#### 4. ‘Only in the Lord’ in *Ad uxorem*

The lengthy discussion, particularly in book 2 of *Ad uxorem*, regarding the Pauline phrase ‘only in the Lord’ in 1 Corinthians 7:39 is revealing of Tertullian’s goal for the treatise. Tertullian takes care to distinguish the particularities of this text, drawing out its implications, bringing in common secular illustrations, and demonstrating the seriousness not only of Paul’s authority, but that of the Lord in Scripture. Burns and Jensen note, ‘Even before his commitment to the discipline of the New Prophecy ... Tertullian strongly objected to a Christian’s beginning a union with a non-Christian, insisting that Paul had forbidden it.’<sup>64</sup> Geoffrey Dunn, commenting on Tertullian’s apologetic literature, notes the sharp invective against pagan life and practice in Tertullian.<sup>65</sup> This was most certainly true for Tertullian in regards to marriage. Paul’s invocation of the Lord is crystal clear for Tertullian on this point.

Tertullian asserts the nature of 1 Corinthians 7:39 as an explicit command from the Lord. This command reveals the seriousness of remarriage – it is an act that Christians should not lightly consider. This is a boundary which God has established, a boundary that Tertullian truly does not wish his reader – that is, his wife – to cross. Understanding Tertullian’s interpretation of the phrase *tantum in Domino* gives readers a deeper insight into Tertullian’s strict, though primarily Pauline, rendering. So how might understanding this phrase

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<sup>62</sup> *Ad ux.* 2.8.

<sup>63</sup> *Ad ux.* 2.8.

<sup>64</sup> Burns and Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa* 444.

<sup>65</sup> Geoffrey D. Dunn, *Tertullian* (The Early Church Fathers; London: Routledge, 2004): 39.

of ‘only in the Lord’ help us to discern the questions posed at the beginning of this essay? I will offer two brief assessments.

#### 4.1 Marriage as a Created Good

Tertullian clearly affirms marriage as a created good, one that is intuited from nature to be recognised by all peoples.<sup>66</sup> While it is clear that Tertullian favours one marriage, even upon the death of the spouse, he affirms Paul’s provision for remarriage so long as it is ‘in the name of the Lord, which means, unquestionably, to a Christian’.<sup>67</sup> It is only in this way that God allows for ‘the sacrifice of one’s chastity’.<sup>68</sup> This is how Tertullian continues to affirm that marriage is a created good from God. It is evident that marriage is a basic good, though celibacy might be better. However, only a marriage which denies the command of the Lord in 1 Corinthians 7:39 is considered evil and at odds with God’s desire for his people. Remarriage in the Lord, though not desirable in the eyes of one such as Tertullian, is permissible and reaffirms the goodness of marriage as opposed to that type of marriage which promotes sin (namely, a pagan and a Christian union). While marriage is a natural good, it can retain its goodness for Christians who wish to remarry so long as it is ‘only in the Lord’.

With this in mind it is difficult to affirm Clark’s assertion regarding Tertullian’s view of marriage in *Ad uxorem*. Clark perceptibly notes the lack of affectionate language in *Ad uxorem*.<sup>69</sup> Though this is the case, Tertullian demonstrates such language in his description of the idealised Christian marriage. Tertullian does not have to use *affectio* to paint an affectionate portrait, though perhaps modern readers would expect this. The focus for Tertullian is the building of Christian virtue in a marriage pertaining to those things that are ‘only in the Lord’. One might expect that ‘love’ would be among the description, but the text does not necessarily exclude the idea. Christian virtues described by Tertullian would naturally be founded upon an affection for the Lord and, as he appears to illustrate, a desire to see the other one grow in that affection. One could fault Tertullian for his neglect of explicit language of ‘love’, but certainly his description of a Christian married couple lends itself to a high view of such a relationship.

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<sup>66</sup> *Ad ux.* 1.3.

<sup>67</sup> *Ad ux.* 2.2.

<sup>68</sup> *Ad ux.* 2.2.

<sup>69</sup> Clark, ‘Status Feminae’: 142.



#### 4.2 Montanism and *Ad uxorem*

While it likely true that *Ad uxorem* represents a pre-Montanist Tertullian text, it also true that the treatise demonstrates a stricter moralising than readers are accustomed to. I affirm Bonwetsch and Pelikan in their assertions regarding Tertullian, namely, that a conversion to Montanism carried less of its original theological baggage and more of its supposedly higher moral rigour.<sup>70</sup> This being said, it is difficult to escape tendencies in *Ad uxorem* which would lead Tertullian to affirm the legitimacy of the New Prophecy. This text, therefore, represents a stepping stone towards a more discernibly 'Montanist' Tertullian, portraying some Montanist tendencies. With this in mind, even if the text has a Montanist trajectory, Tertullian's affirmation of remarriage is not negated by any sort of moral rigidity related to the movement.

Tertullian, in drawing out his contrast of two possibilities for marriage from 1 Corinthians 7, brings a heavy hand to the preferment of celibacy and, to a lesser degree, monogamy. He seems to want to prevent the possibility of remarriage, though he affirms the reality of Paul's allowance. Paul allows for the freedom of remarriage yet strongly encourages celibacy following the death of a spouse. In drawing out the implications of 'only in the Lord', Tertullian perhaps extracts stronger implications than Paul's original intention. Though Tertullian asserts that Paul offers a strong command, such a notion is not clear. Fee interprets this as a bit of apostolic 'good sense' given to his readers, in context of Paul's encouragement to have an eschatological view in mind.<sup>71</sup> Tertullian, on the other hand, appears to have a more immediate moral perspective in mind. While *Ad uxorem* may not present a Montanist Tertullian on full display, it certainly contains the strands of strict piety that would continue to define this North African theologian for the remainder of his life.

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<sup>70</sup> Bonwetsch, *Die Geschichte des Montanismus*: 119; Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*: 101.

<sup>71</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*: 356. Additionally, Frank Thielman observes, 'Paul may be responding in this passage to people in Corinth who imbibed the notion that the world is eternal whereas people are ephemeral and that they should "eat, drink, and be merry" while the opportunity presents itself. Paul is saying that the truth is actually the reverse of this: People are eternal whereas the world as we know it is ephemeral, and the closing days of the world are upon us. Believers, he says, should live in a way that shows their awareness of this truth.' Frank S. Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (2nd edn; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005): 457.

## 5. Conclusion

Tertullian provides a helpful look at an early Christian view of marriage in his *Ad uxorem*. A potentially thorny writer based on a later adherence to Montanism, Tertullian demonstrates a desire to represent a Pauline view of marriage particularly in his interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7. His focus on ‘only in the Lord’ from 1 Corinthians 7:39 provides a clear indication of his exegetical tendencies, yet ultimately demonstrates one who viewed marriage as a created good and not simply a necessary evil. He allows for remarriage so long as it is ‘only in the Lord’, which necessitates Christian marriage. Whether one was previously married to a Christian or not, remarriage to a Christian is non-negotiable. His interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:39 as a command reveals that he views Christian marriage as nothing to be trifled with. Though presenting a moralising tendency towards celibacy based on Paul’s various encouragements, Tertullian provides readers with a perspective on marriage which should propel further study in early Christian interpretation of Paul with regards to marriage and sexuality.