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# Lost Prophets: Tertullian, Eusebius, Epiphanius, and Early Montanism

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GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

LOST PROPHETS:

TERTULLIAN, EUSEBIUS, EPIPHANIUS, AND EARLY MONTANISM

SUBMITTED TO DR. DANIEL BRUNNER (PRIMARY ADVISOR)

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## ABSTRACT

The dearth of reliable primary source material on the New Prophecy has led to a proliferation of interpretations of the character of the movement. However, a careful examination of the New Prophecy's preserved sayings, the writings of Tertullian, and the movement's earliest critics preserved by Eusebius and Epiphanius reveal a movement steeped in the Christian tradition that came into conflict with other Christians because of their willingness to pay ministers and their passive understanding of the *charisma* of prophecy.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION:	i
MONTANIST ORACLES AND SAYINGS:	1
TERTULLIAN:	23
EUSEBIUS:	39
EPIPHANIUS:	60
SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSIONS:	71
AFTERWORD:	84
BIBLIOGRAPHY:	85

## INTRODUCTION

The historical phenomenon we call Montanism began with the ministries of three prophets—Prisca, Maximilla, and Montanus—in Phrygia in the late second century.<sup>1</sup> It emerged from what later came to be recognized as orthodox Christianity, but by 230-235 CE, the two groups had split.<sup>2</sup> Montanism survived in Phrygia for nearly four hundred years from the second to the sixth century, and its adherents found a place in cultures and geographies as diverse as North Africa, Rome, Phrygia, and Constantinople.<sup>3</sup> It cannot be reduced to a single, homogenous sect, but instead must be treated as a multivalent and evolving movement. The destruction of Montanist writings and socio-religious centers from the fourth to sixth centuries further complicates the task of the historian of Montanism. In light of the diversity of historical expressions of Montanism and the dearth of reliable primary sources, the variety of scholarly interpretations of the movement should not surprise us.

Rex Butler's "Montanist matrix" consisting of "prophecy, women's authority, eschatological expectation, rigorism, and exaltation of martyrdom" provides a succinct illustration of the major themes traditionally (but by no means universally) appealed to in distinguishing the movement from its orthodox cousins.<sup>4</sup> More specific interpretations of the

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<sup>1</sup> Traditional portraits of Montanism cast Montanus as the leader and Prisca and Maximilla as his followers. However, as Anne Jensen points out, these sources are relatively late and our earliest source (Tertullian) cites Prisca twice without ever quoting Montanus or Maximilla. Thus, the interpretation of Prisca and Maximilla's ministries stemming from Montanus's must be questioned.

<sup>2</sup> This date refers to the regional Council of Iconium which ruled that converts from Montanism to proto-orthodox Christianity must be re-baptized. See William Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy and Polluted Sacraments* (Boston: Brill, 2007), 80. Polemical works from both sides can be dated much earlier. However it is possible that Montanist and proto-orthodox Christians continued to recognize one another's sacraments outside of Asia Minor even after this council.

<sup>3</sup> These are the Montanist communities for which we have strong evidence. Weaker evidence exists for communities associated with the Montanist movement in Lyons and Egypt and, given that both buildings and writings of Montanist origin were systematically destroyed or confiscated for use by the state sponsored church in the fourth-sixth centuries, we must remain open to the possibility that other Montanist communities existed only to be forgotten by history.

<sup>4</sup> Rex Butler, *New Prophecy and New Visions: Evidence of Montanism in The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 2.

movement include: a prophetic tradition marginalized by emerging ecclesial hierarchies;<sup>5</sup> a radically ascetic sect gathered around leaders who claimed absolute authority as the voices of God;<sup>6</sup> a simple sociological result of persecution that glorified martyrdom and ethical rigorism;<sup>7</sup> or a unique expression of Christianity thoroughly leavened by its original Phrygian context.<sup>8</sup> Others have postulated that Montanism was everything from a fundamentally rural incarnation of Christian teachings,<sup>9</sup> to a “conservation of primitive Christianity in the face of ecclesial secularization and imperial persecution,”<sup>10</sup> to a repository for alternative feminine narratives that can challenge dominant “patristic” accounts of Christianity and Christian history.<sup>11</sup> Still other interpretations of the movement include an early precursor of Pentecostalism,<sup>12</sup> a form of Christianity rejected for its extreme and irrational pursuit of martyrdom,<sup>13</sup> an expressive and ethically fanatical, but ultimately theologically orthodox, form of Christianity the orthodox church sought to dissociate from,<sup>14</sup> the heirs to a “rich heritage of prophecy and biblical

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<sup>5</sup> James L. Ash, “The Decline of Ecstatic Prophecy in the Early Church,” *Theological Studies* 37, no. 2 (1976): 234-236; William Gordon Murdoch, “A Study of Early Montanism and its Relation to the Christian Church” (PhD diss., Birmingham University, 1946), 199.

<sup>6</sup> Stanley M. Burgess, “Montanism,” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 904.

<sup>7</sup> David Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 313.

<sup>8</sup> Bernard Gerard Francis Doherty, “The Montanist Milieu: History and Historiography in the Study of Montanism” (PhD diss., Macquarie University, 2011), 312.

<sup>9</sup> W.H.C. Frend, “Montanism: A Movement of Prophecy and Regional Identity in the Early Church,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library of Manchester* 70, no. 3 (1988): 334; Alistair Stewart-Sykes, “Original Condemnation of Asian Montanism,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 50, no. 1 (1999): 2-3.

<sup>10</sup> Rex Butler, *New Prophecy*, 21. For Butler, “primitive Christianity” refers to eschatological expectation and visible *charismata*.

<sup>11</sup> Christine Trevett, “Gender, Authority, and Church History: A Case Study of Montanism,” *Feminist Theology: The Journal of the Britain and Ireland School of Feminist Theology* 17 (1998): 15-18. Trevett’s interpretation, particularly in *Montanism: Gender, Authority, and the New Prophecy* is far more nuanced than this. See footnote 15. Nevertheless, she suggests the presence of counternarratives to patristic assumptions about gender are one significant reason for taking Montanism seriously today.

<sup>12</sup> Lucien Jinkwang Kim, “Is Montanism a Heretical Sect of a Pentecostal Antecedent?” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 12, no. 1 (2009): 113-124; Cecil Roebuck, “Montanism and Present Day ‘Prophets,’” *PNEUMA* 32, no. 3 (2010): 427.

<sup>13</sup> Frederick C. Klawiter, “The Role of Martyrdom and Persecution in Developing the Priestly Authority of Women in Early Christianity: A Case Study of Montanism,” *Church History* 49, no. 3 (1980): 253-254.

<sup>14</sup> David F. Wright, “Why Were the Montanists Condemned?,” *Themelios* 2, no. 1 (1976): 21.

exposition,”<sup>15</sup> and a variegated movement united by the identification of its prophetic leaders as the mouthpieces of the Holy Spirit and a commitment to mold the church into ethical conformity with the expectations the Holy Spirit revealed.<sup>16</sup> In light of these (often overlapping) interpretations, it seems that, whatever else Montanism may or may not have been, it has served as a historical depository for scholars’ pet ideas as often as it has as the subject of open-minded historical investigation. It also suggests Nasrallah’s suggestion that we think of Montanism as a pluralistic movement instead of seeking to draw out a coherent picture of the whole should be given careful consideration.<sup>17</sup>

Fortunately, our purpose here is not to draw broad conclusions about Montanism as a whole, but only to attempt to discern the character of early Montanism as represented by Prisca, Maximilla, and Montanus. We will focus on the major available written sources for the first generations of the Montanist movement, beginning with an examination of the handful of preserved sayings attributed to the three founders of the movement in our first chapter. In chapter two, we will undertake a brief examination of what Tertullian, Montanism’s most famous advocate, can add to our understanding of the movement’s founders. Unfortunately, distinguishing between the ideas Tertullian took from Phrygian Montanism and those he received from other sources or used to support his own agenda is more art than science. Because of the polemical nature of Tertullian’s writing, there is a strong possibility that the context in which he places Montanist oracles may not match the context in which they were originally given. Moreover, some of the traditional distinguishing characteristics of Montanism may actually be more accurately labeled characteristics of Tertullian’s own thought. As Pelikan puts it,

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<sup>15</sup> Christine Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority, and the New Prophecy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 150.

<sup>16</sup> Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, xxxi.

<sup>17</sup> Laura Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy of Folly* (Cambridge MA.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 156-162.



Tertullian “may have changed Montanism at least as much as he was changed by it.”<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, while Tertullian certainly influenced North African Montanism, there is no strong evidence he had a similar impact on its Phrygian or Roman incarnations.

The second half of our study will focus on two major fourth century sources that preserve the writings of some of Montanism’s early opponents: Eusebius’s *Church History*, and Epiphanius’s *Panarion*. Their value for understanding second- and early third-century Montanism rests primarily in their use of works by earlier opponents of the movement that occasionally quote Montanist sayings. However, because both Eusebius and Epiphanius write with the clear agenda of discrediting the movement and rely heavily on their predecessors who had worked toward the same goal, any evidence they supply must be subject to suspicion. This study will focus on their use of earlier sources that can shed light on the early Montanism of Prisca, Maximilla, and Montanus and their immediate successors. Chapter three will be devoted to Eusebius while chapter four will focus on Epiphanius.

Finally, we will synthesize our study and draw some conclusions regarding the state of some modern hypotheses about the movement. We will conclude that Montanism represents a sub-sect of Christianity set apart not by fanatical eagerness for martyrdom, specific eschatological expectations, or a broad commitment to extreme asceticism, but by the specific rejection of second marriages and a commitment to specific fasts, by an openness to leadership by women and willingness to pay its ministers, and by a commitment to an understanding of prophecy as the passive reception and proclamation of revelation from the Living God. We will discover that it was Montanism’s willingness to pay ministers and passive understanding of

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<sup>18</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, “Montanism and its Trinitarian Significance,” *Church History* 25, no. 2 (1956): 104.

prophecy that resulted in its rejection by the early orthodox authors of the sources upon which Eusebius and Epiphanius rely.

## MONTANIST ORACLES AND SAYINGS

### Montanist Oracles in Tertullian

Our study of Montanism begins with the precariously sparse record we have of the words of its founders.<sup>1</sup> According to the scholarly consensus, only twelve such sayings with any connection to the movement's three founders have been preserved.<sup>2</sup> Despite the difficulties thrown up by Tertullian's own agenda, he stands as an earlier, more direct, more sympathetic, and hence more reliable source for Montanist sayings than either Eusebius or Epiphanius. Thus, we will begin with the sayings he preserves. While Tertullian does cite several anonymous Montanist sayings, only two have any stated connection to any of the three founders of the movement. Both are attributed to Prisca.

The first of these is found in *On the Resurrection and the Flesh* and is quite short. Ronald E. Heine translates the relevant passage: "The Paraclete has also said well of them through the prophetess Prisca: 'They are flesh, and they hate the flesh.'"<sup>3</sup> In this case, Tertullian's introduction of Prisca's oracle tells us more than the oracle itself: namely that Prisca was considered a prophetess through whom the "Paraclete" spoke. By identifying Prisca as a prophetess, Tertullian also implies that she held an office or was recognized for an ability that was reserved for only a few within the church: when it came to prophecy Prisca had more authority than most of her contemporaries. As Anne Jensen has pointed out, this emphasis on prophecy as a source of authority for the church closely mirrors the model set out in the *Didache*

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<sup>1</sup> The movement we know as "Montanism" originally identified itself as the "New Prophecy." I will use these terms interchangeably. See footnote 5 for more on the label the "New Prophecy."

<sup>2</sup> These twelve sayings have been compiled and translated into English by Ronald Heine along with a significant collection of other relevant primary source material. His work follows and updates the 1913 work of Pierre de Labriolle in *Les Sources de l'Histoire du Montanisme* and is invaluable to the English language student of Montanism. See Ronald Heine, *The Montanist Oracles and Testimonia* (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1989), 2-5 for an easy point of reference for these twelve sayings.

<sup>3</sup> Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, 11.2. As translated in Ronald Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 5.

where prophets and apostles are emphasized above bishops and deacons. Thus, we can hardly suggest it represented a unique Montanist distinctive.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, an idea of the activity of the “Paraclete” in the present tense and the concept of prophecy were important parts of the early Montanist self-understanding. In fact, according to both Tertullian and the early opponents of the movement we call Montanism, the movement originally referred to itself as the “New Prophecy.”<sup>5</sup> Whatever else Montanism may have been, the nexus of prophets, prophecy, and the Paraclete rested at the heart of their self-understanding. Unfortunately, the actual content of Prisca’s message divulges very little. In Tertullian, the antecedent for “they” was clearly the opponents of the teaching of the resurrection of the flesh. There is no guarantee Prisca’s message shared Tertullian’s concern.

Without more information, all we can conclude is that the language of “flesh” played a role in Prisca’s oracle. We might tentatively speculate Prisca’s choice of vocabulary echoes the Johannine theology of the incarnation (thus, “they are flesh [embodied humans] and they hate the flesh [the Incarnation]).” This works well with Sheila McGinn’s suggestion that the oracle is fundamentally anti-Gnostic in character.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, William Murdoch follows Tertullian’s lead and identifies those who are flesh with indulgent Christians and the flesh they hate with the resurrection.<sup>7</sup> While we cannot definitively identify the context or antecedent for this particular

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<sup>4</sup> Anne Jensen, *God’s Self-Confident Daughters: Early Christianity and the Liberation of Women* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 128. See also the *Didache*, 11.3-6.

<sup>5</sup> Eusebius cites an Antiochene bishop by the name of Serapion who opposed early Montanism in *Church History* 5.19: “this false order of the so-called new prophecy has been abhorred by the whole brotherhood throughout the world.” See Heine, *Montanist Oracles*, 27. Marjanen places Serapion’s episcopacy from 190-210. See Luomanen Petri and Antti Marjanen, *A Companion to Second-Century Christian ‘Heretics’* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 193. Tabbernee dates it from 199-210. See Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 53-55. Tertullian quotes “the Paraclete himself who says in the new prophets. . .” Tertullian, *On Modesty*, 21.4. As translated in Heine, *Montanist Oracles*, 7. See also footnote 3 in Butler for other places Tertullian refers to the “new prophets.” Butler, *New Prophecy*, 140.

<sup>6</sup> Sheila McGinn, “The ‘Montanist’ Oracles and Prophetic Theology,” *Studia Patristica* 31, (1997): 130.

<sup>7</sup> Murdoch, “A Study,” 74.

prophecy without more information, the vocabulary of “flesh” and “Paraclete” hints that Montanists were conversant in the broader Christian tradition, including at least parts of what would come to be known as the New Testament.<sup>8</sup>

The second saying Tertullian cites is found in *Exhortation to Chastity*. It is also attributed to Prisca. Interestingly, unlike the previous oracle, this saying is presented as the words of Prisca, not the Paraclete: “For purification produces harmony . . . and they see visions, and when they turn their faces downward they also hear salutary voices, as clear as they are secret.”<sup>9</sup> This brief saying offers two new ideas we can add to our conception of early Montanism. First, Prisca teaches that there is a relationship between harmony and the mystical experiences she identifies. Moreover, harmony stems from purification. The context of the oracle in Tertullian and the later accusation that Prisca was called a virgin despite leaving an earlier marriage for her ministry provides some support for Tabbernee’s postulation that “purification” here should be thought of in terms of “celibacy.”<sup>10</sup> However, we must avoid jumping to conclusions. Trevett suggests “purification” may reference both celibacy and fasting.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, Jensen is correct to point out that we have no definite reason to assume the original context was this specific.<sup>12</sup>

Second, this saying clearly shows that seeing visions and hearing voices are two dimensions of the Montanist experience. While we cannot say for certain from this saying if these experience were *limited* to prophets, we can infer that the intertwined concerns for harmony and purity did apply to them. Epiphanius preserves a description of a vision that he

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<sup>8</sup> Aune, *Prophecy*, 313.

<sup>9</sup> Tertullian, *Exhortation to Chastity*, 10.5. As translated in Heine, *Montanist Oracles*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 113. See Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.18.3 for the claim Prisca was called a virgin.

<sup>11</sup> Trevett, *Montanism*, 106.

<sup>12</sup> Jensen, *God’s Self-Confident Daughters*, 161-162.

attributes to either Prisca or the otherwise unknown Quintilla and it may be inferred that this phenomena (at least when connected to a recognized prophet) implied some level of authority. However, we cannot confidently describe the relationship between prophecy and visions within the New Prophecy beyond pointing out that they were both seen as the work of God and could be appealed to as revelatory events.

While Heine lists four other sayings of Montanist prophets quoted by Tertullian, we know neither from whence nor from whom they originated. Jensen goes so far as to suggest Tertullian may have composed one or more of them for his tracts.<sup>13</sup> These oracles glorify persecution and martyrdom and support the withholding of pardon from those who sin on the grounds it might encourage further misconduct.<sup>14</sup>

### **Oracle in Eusebius's Church History**

Eusebius makes use of several early sources in his treatment of Montanism, but only once does he provide us with a quote from the Montanist tradition itself. This quote is found in an unidentified source generally referred to as "the Anonymous." Even the Anonymous was not directly familiar with this quote, but picked it up from the even earlier work of one Asterius Orbanus. Thus, Maximilla is quoted by Asterius Orbanus who is in turn quoted by the Anonymous author who Eusebius quotes as saying "I am pursued like a wolf from the sheep. I am not a wolf. I am word, and spirit, and power."<sup>15</sup> Despite the game of literary telephone that brings us this oracle, it offers several notable additions to our sketch of the Montanist movement. First, the scriptural allusion concerning false prophets coming amongst the sheep as wolves

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<sup>13</sup> Jensen, *God's Self-Confident Daughters*, 160.

<sup>14</sup> Heine, *Montanist Oracles*, 7. The sayings are found in *On Modesty* 21.7, *On Flight* 9.4, and *On the Soul* 55.5.

<sup>15</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.16.17. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 3.

(Matt. 7:15) again suggests the early Montanists were conversant in at least some of the writings that were in the process of being canonized as Scripture.

Second, the formula “word, and spirit, and power” offers a glimpse into how early Montanists viewed the God to whom they attributed their prophecy. Significant disagreement exists among scholars concerning how to interpret this phrase. Drawing on the Trinitarian structure of this formula, Jaroslav Pelikan suggests that “power” here refers to the Creative work attributed to the Father.<sup>16</sup> He further claims that the doctrine of the Trinity is one of the major contributions of Montanism to the history of Christian doctrine via its influence on the development of Tertullian’s Trinitarian thought in general and pneumatology in particular.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, Blanchetierre sees the three-part description as referring to the Spirit alone and echoing the descriptions of the work of the Spirit in the New Testament.<sup>18</sup> If this is a Trinitarian formula, it is odd by later standards. The later tendency to follow the pattern of Matthew 28:19 and name the Father first, followed by the Son and the Spirit, is replaced by a Son-Spirit-Father formulation. The identification of the Father as “Power” also initially seems odd. Nevertheless, both of these irregularities are witnessed to in a later Montanist formula recorded by Theodore of Heracleia usually left off lists of Montanist oracles: “I am the Word, the Bridegroom, the Paraclete, the Omnipotent One, I am all Things.”<sup>19</sup> While these two introductory oracles should not be understood as evidence of a well-developed Montanist Trinitarianism, they constitute a pattern that foreshadows later Trinitarian thought even as it differs from it in order and in its

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<sup>16</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, “Trinitarian Significance,” 101-102.

<sup>17</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* vol. 1 in *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 101-105. Pelikan is followed by McGinn, “The ‘Montanist’ Oracles,” 130.

<sup>18</sup> Francois Blanchetierre, “Le Montanisme Originel (Suite),” *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 53, no. 1 (1979): 5-6. See also Murdoch, “A Study,” 58-59.

<sup>19</sup> Theodore of Heracleia, *Fr. Mt.* 24.5. As cited in Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 281, 381.

tendency to identify the Father with Power. Thus, these Montanist oracles identified with Montanus and Maximilla can be looked to as early examples of a proto-Trinitarianism.

### **Montanist Oracles in Epiphanius's *Panarion***

Epiphanius's late fourth century *Panarion*, his definitive anti-heretical work, offers several more brief glimpses into the teachings and practices of the Montanists through his record of the words of Maximilla, Montanus, and a second prophetess identified as either the aforementioned Prisca or the mysterious Quintilla. Just as Eusebius received his information concerning Montanism from a third party (the Anonymous), so Epiphanius is dependent on an unidentified source.<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, while the Anonymous is happy to grant that Maximilla's speech was inspired by a spirit (albeit an unclean one), when Epiphanius cites one of the Montanist prophets, he simply attributes the words to the prophets themselves. The main thrust of the argument against Montanism in this work is that true prophets prophesy "with a powerful understanding, and in full possession of their intellect," while Montanist prophets "prophesy neither with steadfastness nor in possession of the persuasion of reason."<sup>21</sup> As a result the Montanists "separated from the Church [sic] because of spiritual gifts," they "alienated themselves from the truth" because they have "been found outside the fold (of the church)."<sup>22</sup> Once again we are receiving our information third hand in a voice unsympathetic to the Montanist perspective. Nevertheless, we can coax several concepts salient to our investigation of the Montanist identity from the material he preserves.

### *Oracles of Maximilla*

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<sup>20</sup> Both Nasrallah and Tabbernee helpfully refer to this source as "the Anti-Phrygian" to distinguish from Eusebius's source "the Anonymous." See Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy*, 4; Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 50.

<sup>21</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.3.1; 48.3.11. As translated in Heine, *Montanist Oracles*, 31-33.

<sup>22</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.12.1; 48.2.8. As translated in Heine, *Montanist Oracles*, 31; 47. The first quote is from 48.12.1 and the second two are from 48.2.8.



We will begin with the sayings of Maximilla before examining Montanus's words and finally turning to the oracle of Prisca/Quintilla. The first oracle Epiphanius presents is meant to invalidate Montanist prophecies, "After me there will no longer be a prophet, but the end."<sup>23</sup> Epiphanius takes Maximilla's "the end" to refer to the eschaton, and, as he points out, a great deal of time had passed and still the world continued in its accustomed course. However, the minimal context we are given ("after me there will no longer be a prophet") suggests "the end" refers to the prophetic gifting, not necessarily the eschaton. Still, the dichotomy between the end of prophecy and the end of the age may have been entirely foreign to the early Montanist mind.

Along these lines, Jensen suggests Maximilla's prophecy concerning the end originally made no mention of Maximilla herself, but simply asserted that prophecy would cease at the *eschaton*. Her followers did not change the oracle until Maximilla's death brought the end of prophecy in the movement. According to Jensen, after the prophetess's death, her followers found that prophecy had disappeared from the New Prophecy and tweaked Maximilla's prophecy to meet this unexpected challenge.<sup>24</sup> Jensen's argument is difficult to sustain. It seems unlikely the prophetess's followers would intentionally change the meaning of one of her oracles even under such extraordinary circumstances. Thus, Trevett's suggestion the oracle the Anonymous echoes the signs of Christ's return in Matthew 24:6 (c.f.: Mark 13:7 and Luke 21:9) and conclusion that Maximilla was likely "doing some eschatological timetabling" is likely correct.<sup>25</sup>

It is also possible Maximilla's oracle reflects an interpretation of Paul's thought in I Cor. 13. Paul teaches that, at present, we see dimly through spiritual gifts (prophecy is specifically named), but when completion comes we will see face to face. Similarly, Maximilla seems to

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<sup>23</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.2.4. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Jensen, *God's Self-Confident Daughters*, 157.

<sup>25</sup> Trevett, *Montanism*, 101.

teach that prophecy will cease at “the end.” While it is impossible to discern the shape of Maximilla’s eschatology, it is clear the New Prophets were not content to rest on their laurels as the legitimate heirs to the Hebrew and Christian prophetic tradition. They also looked forward to an even more sublime eschatological hope in which the gift of prophecy would be replaced by even more direct encounter (union?) with God.

The picture of the New Prophecy as a bridge between the earlier tradition and the ultimate, eschatological revelation of Christ fits nicely with the second brief saying of Maximilla that Epiphanius has preserved: “Hear not me, but hear Christ.”<sup>26</sup> Epiphanius attacks Maximilla for abandoning the pattern of the apostles who passed on what they had seen and heard instead of claiming to offer their followers direct access to divine revelation through their words. However, as David Aune has pointed out, the pattern of a prophet speaking not in their own authority, but in the voice of a divine figure, was well-established in both the Judeo-Christian tradition and the larger 2<sup>nd</sup> century cultural milieu.<sup>27</sup> Of course, the proclamation of the words of Christ was not foreign to either the Montanist or the orthodox church. Still, while Maximilla’s claim to offer her audience direct access to the voice of Christ is well attested in the Judeo-Christian tradition, this oracle puts the fundamental conflict between prophetic movements like Montanism and institutionalized ecclesiologies like those emerging in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century church in high relief. If apostolic succession and the development of the Christian canon placed a premium on historical proximity to the 1<sup>st</sup> century reality of Jesus of Nazareth (possibly partially in response to the abuses of self-proclaimed prophets), the Montanist idea of “prophetic succession” claimed an authority rooted in an un-mediated encounter with Christ. Members of the rising episcopacy

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<sup>26</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.12.4. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 5.

<sup>27</sup> Aune, *Prophecy*, 313.

who did not claim their own prophetic experiences simply could not match this authority.<sup>28</sup> Put another way, the Montanist worldview saw history as the irresistible advance of the Kingdom of God furthered by the ongoing ethical instruction of the Paraclete.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, “to validate its existence, the [orthodox] church looked increasingly not to the future, illumined by the Lord’s return, nor to the present, illumined by the Spirit’s extraordinary gifts, but to the past, illumined by the composition of the apostolic canon, the creation of the apostolic creed, and the establishment of the apostolic episcopate.”<sup>30</sup>

Maximilla’s third saying is perhaps the most opaque. “The Lord has sent me as partisan, revealer, and interpreter of this suffering, covenant, and promise. I am compelled to come to understand the knowledge of God whether I want to or not.”<sup>31</sup> “I am compelled” seems to suggest the claims made here concern Maximilla, not the Paraclete and the language reflects major themes in both the Hebrew Scriptures and early Christian writings. An antecedent to the “suffering, covenant, and promise” Maximilla refers to would go a long way in helping us unravel her meaning. Nevertheless, we can say with confidence that Maximilla’s self-understanding as “partisan, revealer, and interpreter” was embedded in a story that she characterized with words like “suffering, covenant, and promise.” Since her opponents at no point accuse her or her compatriots of unfaithfulness to central Christian doctrines, and since the structure of the saying as we have it parallels “suffering, covenant, and promise” with “the knowledge of God,” it is most likely that they refer to the Christian gospel. Thus, Maximilla saw

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 203. As Ash points out, the practice of prophecy from the episcopal office was not unknown in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century church. Both Ignatius and Cyprian explicitly practice it. See Ash, “Decline of Ecstatic Prophecy,” 235, 250.

<sup>29</sup> Jensen, *God’s Self-Confident Daughters*, 181.

<sup>30</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, 107.

<sup>31</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.13.1. As translated in Heine, *Montanist Oracles*, 5.

herself as a proclaimer of the gospel compelled to receive special insight into God's redemptive activity and plan.

Just as significantly, the recurrence of biblical themes and language in Montanist oracles typified here suggests that the possibility of moving away from the Christian tradition latent in an unmoderated emphasis on prophecy was not realized in the first generation of Montanist prophets. Instead, it implies that the Montanist view of revelation was progressive. New prophecies were expected to build on the foundation of what had already been revealed. Tabbernee, drawing heavily on Tertullian's defense of Montanist oracles as a new code of conduct for mature Christians, makes much of the ethical (as opposed to doctrinal) nature of Montanist "novelties."<sup>32</sup> However, while Tabbernee's facile bifurcation of ethics and doctrine may find some support in the thought of the polemicist Tertullian, the Montanist community seems unlikely to have entertained such subtle distinctions. The introductory formulae of the Montanists suggest ethical obedience was rooted in communal encounter with Christ/the Paraclete. Doctrine did not precede ethics, but both emerged from the ongoing relationship shared between the community and the divine. Indeed, as McGinn has pointed out, Maximilla's self-proclaimed role as "partisan, revealer, and interpreter of this suffering, covenant, and promise" places her firmly at the intersection of the old covenant, the gospel, and the lived experience of her community.<sup>33</sup> One can hardly doubt that, should the work of connecting her community to her tradition benefit from the reinterpretation or recontextualization of some doctrine without compromising her idea of faithfulness, she would not have hesitated any longer than any other theologian.

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<sup>32</sup> Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 146.

<sup>33</sup> McGinn, "The 'Montanist' Oracles," 134.

The final saying of Maximilla that Epiphanius preserves is not a saying at all, but rather a claim. He writes, “For indeed even Maximilla said she compelled those who were willing and those who were not . . . such a woman will be lying even on the basis of her own word. For neither did she teach the willing the knowledge of God, which she did not know, nor did she compel those who were not willing.”<sup>34</sup> Maximilla’s failure is made clear by her lack of fame and the failure of her teachings to spread. Because Epiphanius does not attribute Montanist sayings to a spiritual source even when they are clearly meant to be the words of God prophetically given, it is impossible to tell whether the saying he references claims Maximilla or the Paraclete “compels” the audience. Indeed, while it seems likely this claim has roots in a genuine Montanist saying based both on scholarly consensus and on the vocabulary it shares with the previous saying, its lack of specificity, its source, and the way it fits into Epiphanius’s argument, suggests the version we have received has been manipulated to make a point. Apart from collaborating Montanism’s emphasis on passivity before God, is of minimal value in determining the character of early Montanism.

### *Oracles of Montanus*

The first two oracles Epiphanius attributes to Montanus are similar: “I am the Lord God, the Almighty dwelling in man,” and, “Neither angel nor envoy, but I the Lord God the Father have come.”<sup>35</sup> While some have attacked Montanism on the grounds that Montanus claims to be divine, these oracles should be understood as introductory formulae to larger prophecies similar to the Old Testament “Thus says The LORD,” not as the prophet making his own claim to

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<sup>34</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.13.7. As translated in Heine, *Montanist Oracles*, 51.

<sup>35</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.11.1 and 48.11.9. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 3.

divinity.<sup>36</sup> It is even possible the “man” in view in the first oracle is Jesus and not Montanus.<sup>37</sup> Nor should we fail to notice the marked contrast between Tertullian’s attribution of inspired Montanist speech to the Paraclete, Maximilla’s exhortation of her listeners to hear Christ, and Montanus’s claim to prophesy in the voice of “the Lord God, the Almighty dwelling in man.”<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, the introductory formulae preserved by Epiphanius also stand in contrast to several oracles attributed to Montanus in the fourth century *Dialogue of a Montanist and an Orthodox Christian* and Didymus the Blind’s *On the Trinity* which follow the pattern “I am the Father, and the Son, and the (Holy) Spirit/Paraclete.”<sup>39</sup>

While it is possible the oracles preserved by Epiphanius reflect Montanus’s sayings while those in the aforementioned *Dialogue* and Didymus’s *On the Trinity* reflect later theological developments in Montanism paralleling those in the orthodox church, Tabbernee argues the clearly Trinitarian formulae attributed to Montanus in *Dialogue* and *On the Trinity* are meant to be read as Jesus’ words through Montanus, proving that Montanus was a Modalist. According to some of Montanism’s fourth century opponents, the Montanist Christ claims to be the fullness of the Trinity.<sup>40</sup> Ultimately, the charge of Modalism does not stick to the Montanist movement as a whole since it fails to find its way into many orthodox critiques and Tertullian himself takes a strong anti-Modalist stance in *Against Praxeas*. However, there is no reason to assume Montanism couldn’t accommodate a little diversity of its own. Likely there were Montanists who held to both Modalistic and Orthodox views of the Trinity and the process of distinguishing

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<sup>36</sup> Aune, *Prophecy*, 315. While presenting prophecy as direct divine speech is rare in early Christianity, Aune points to precedent in both John (Revelation 1:8, 21:5-8) and Ignatius of Antioch (Philadelphians 7:1).

<sup>37</sup> Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 382.

<sup>38</sup> Compare Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.11.1 and 48.11.9 with Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, 11.2. *On Modesty*, 21.7. *Concerning Flight*, 9.4. And *On the Soul* 55.5. All works as translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 3-7.

<sup>39</sup> *Dialogue of a Montanist and an Orthodox Christian* and Didymus, *On the Trinity*, 3.41.1. Both works as translated in Heine, *Montanist Oracles*, 7-9.

<sup>40</sup> Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 382.

between the two ran roughly parallel to the Trinitarian developments in the orthodox church.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, neither the connection between Montanist and early Trinitarian thought nor the accusations of Modalism they were subjected to in the third century should come as a surprise.<sup>42</sup>

Dennis Groh has pointed out that the first of these introductory formulae is exceptional in another sense. While other oracles hint at the esteem the New Prophecy had for earlier tradition, Montanus appears to be directly citing the Septuagint's translation of Isaiah 63:9.<sup>43</sup> Thus, Montanus created consonance between his own prophetic activity and the Hebrew prophetic tradition to reinforce the claim that the same God who spoke in Isaiah (and the rest of the prophets) and set forth the vision of a renewed Israel was speaking through the New Prophecy. Unfortunately, without more to go on, we can only guess at how Montanus adopted the themes of the last chapters of Isaiah to his own context and the towns he appears to have called Jerusalem.<sup>44</sup>

The first part of the third saying of Montanus that Epiphanius preserves is probably the best known of the Montanist oracles. "Behold, man is like a lyre, and I flit about like a plectron; man sleeps, and I awaken him. . ." The oracle continues, "behold, it is the Lord who changes the hearts of men and gives men a heart."<sup>45</sup> Just as Maximilla sees herself as "compelled to come to understand the knowledge of God," so Montanus emphasizes his passivity as God acts upon him. While this claim could certainly be read to enhance the authority of the prophet by reassuring their audience they are hearing from God, the second half of the oracle hints that more than a self-interested grasp at influence is at play here. The pattern of Montanus's oracles moves from

<sup>41</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, "Montanism and its Trinitarian Significance," 102.

<sup>42</sup> On third century accusations of Modalism, see Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 157-158.

<sup>43</sup> Dennis E. Groh, "Utterance and Exegesis: Biblical Interpretation in the Montanist Crisis," in *The Living Text: Essays in Honor of Ernest W. Saunders*, eds. Dennis E. Groh and Robert Jewett (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1985), 90-91.

<sup>44</sup> On Montanus calling Pepuza and Tymion Jerusalem see Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.18.2.

<sup>45</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.4.1. As translated in Heine, *Montanist Oracles*, 3.

the specific (“man is like a lyre”) to the general (“it is the Lord who changes the hearts of men”). Montanus does not claim any unique work of God upon his heart, but instead speaks to the work of God among humankind “chang(ing) the hearts of men [sic] and giv(ing) men [sic] a heart.” While the interpretation of Epiphanius as well as the image flitting, plucking, and awakening makes it clear that the first part of Montanus’s oracle refers to prophecy, the reference to the divine work on the human heart suggests prophecy is only half of what Montanus has in view.

Montanus is also referencing the creative and redemptive work of God. After his shrill condemnation of Montanus’s choice of language as inappropriate to a true prophet, Epiphanius launches into a critique of a Montanist teaching on the work of God on Adam as he slept during the creation of Eve in Genesis 2 that paralleled the sleep of Adam with the ecstatic (suspension of reason, not necessarily hysteria) manner of their prophecy.<sup>46</sup> The context is the Montanist apology for their prophecy based on Adam’s abdication of his reason in his sleep before he prophesies about Eve: “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Gen. 2:23). Thus, Montanus’s oracle is a poetic reinterpretation of the movements of creation and prophecy in the Genesis 2 creation account. The prophet in view is Adam, not Montanus. If we remain sympathetic to the content (if not the tone) of Epiphanius’s shrill contention that Montanus is underselling the role of the human will, cynicism regarding his motives should not extend beyond what the text indicates. Instead, especially in light of the consonance readily heard in this saying and Maximilla’s claim to being “compelled,” we can conclude with confidence the founders of early Montanism taught the

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<sup>46</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.4.1-48.5.2 Heine, *Montanist Oracles*, 33-35. On ecstatic prophecy, see Ash, “Decline of Ecstatic Prophecy,” 238.



prophetic gifting was the result of God changing the human heart just as human existence is the result of God gifting the human heart.<sup>47</sup>

The final saying of Montanus preserved by Epiphanius sheds further light on the self-understanding of early Montanists. “Why do you call the more excellent man saved? For the just, he says, will shine a hundred times brighter than the sun, and the little ones among you who are saved will shine a hundred times brighter than the moon.”<sup>48</sup> Epiphanius refutes this saying by claiming that it is the purview of God, not of Montanus to give the gift of glory and that Christ only promised that the faces of the saints would shine “like the sun” (Matt. 13:43), not “a hundred times brighter.” He goes on to associate Montanus’s rhetoric with the serpent’s temptation, “You will be as gods” in Genesis 3.<sup>49</sup> Once again we find early Montanist-orthodox conflict taking place on the battleground of Genesis’s second creation story.

Murdoch has suggested this oracle should be understood as a conversation between Montanus and the Paraclete, with Montanus asking the why the “superior man” is called saved and the Paraclete responding with the promise that the “just” and the “little ones who are saved” will be filled with glory.<sup>50</sup> However, the oracle itself implies that the one who teaches (only?) the “most excellent” of humanity is saved stands in contrast to Christ’s teaching of the glory of the redeemed community. McGinn’s theory that this oracle responds to Gnostic soteriology has some merit, but cannot be substantiated.<sup>51</sup> Aside from the contextual hints at the conflict between Montanism and its opponents, this oracle reveals an egalitarian bent, an emphasis on the

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<sup>47</sup> See Groh, “Utterance and Exegesis,” 84-86 on Montanus’s use of Genesis 2.

<sup>48</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.10.3. As translated in Heine, *Montanist Oracles*, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.10.7. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 43.

<sup>50</sup> Murdoch, “A Study,” 49.

<sup>51</sup> McGinn, “The ‘Montanist’ Oracles,” 130.

glory of the Christian, and a tendency to reference the writings that would become Christian Scripture (or at least Matthew's gospel) without a strong concern for verbatim accuracy.

### *Oracle of Prisca or Quintilla*

Finally, Epiphanius offers an oracle he attributes to "either Quintilla or Priscilla, I cannot say precisely which" that recounts a vision that includes a prophecy:

Either Quintilla or Priscilla . . . had been asleep in Pepuza and the Christ came to her and slept with her in the following manner, as that deluded woman described it. "Having assumed the form of a woman," she says, "Christ came to me in a bright robe and put wisdom in me, and revealed to me that this place is holy, and that it is here that Jerusalem will descend from heaven."<sup>52</sup>

The identity of the prophetess who gave this oracle is of more than passing importance.

Epiphanius attributes the belief in the millennial Jerusalem coming in Pepuza only to the sub-sect that gathered around either Quintilla or Prisca, "these Quintillians, or Priscillians," not to the Montanist movement as a whole. Prisca we have already met through the writings of Tertullian. If the oracle was hers, it must date to the earliest period of Montanist activity. Quintilla is a more mysterious figure. She was a prophetess and leader of a distinct subgroup of the larger Montanist tradition. While we can say no more with confidence, she most likely ministered in the fourth century.<sup>53</sup> If we attribute the oracle to her, it is likely the teachings and emphases it implies can only be attributed to the Quintillian sub-sect Epiphanius identifies. This has prompted scholars of Montanism to reexamine the apocalyptic bent and the descent of Jerusalem in Phrygia that are often cited as important components of the Montanist identity.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 49.1. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 5. Priscilla is the diminutive of Prisca.

<sup>53</sup> Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 118.

<sup>54</sup> Charles Hill provides the fullest treatment of Montanist eschatology and argues that this oracle is the exception to the broadly amillennial eschatology of Montanism. Thus, Hill argues, earlier Montanists thought of "Jerusalem" as the spiritual-social reality being rebuilt through the work of the Spirit in the Montanist church. See Charles Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 147-153.

Hill argues that, for early Montanists, the early association of Pepuza with Jerusalem did not mean the expectation that Jerusalem would literally descend. He concludes that even the imagery of this later (in Hill's view) oracle is more suggestive of reliance on Revelation than the actual Montanist eschatological imagination which saw Jerusalem as being re-established, "built from the ground up," by the faithful in Pepuza.<sup>55</sup> Thus, on the strength of Hill's work, the millennial expectation associated with Montanism is largely imported from the writings of Tertullian and only supported by some interpretations of this oracle, which may not have any connection to Montanism's founders.<sup>56</sup>

The description of the vision is at least as interesting as the content of the message. The imagery of the female Christ in a bright robe has been read as a cypher for the church as the Body of Christ drawing on the imagery of Revelation, 4 Ezra, and The Shepherd of Hermas.<sup>57</sup> However, the close relationship between wisdom and Christ in the vision makes it difficult to avoid the conclusion that the prophetess is referencing Christ as a Sophia figure in the tradition of Jewish wisdom literature read through the Christian identification of Christ as the wisdom of God (I Cor. 1:24, 30).<sup>58</sup> Poirier refines this suggestion, arguing that The Wisdom of Solomon which describes Jerusalem as the dwelling place of wisdom, and not Revelation, provides the semantic field against which the oracle is to be understood.<sup>59</sup> A third possibility is more intriguing still. Perhaps in this oracle the semantic fields of Jewish/Christian apocalypse and

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<sup>55</sup> Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, 149-150.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 144-145; 150-151.

<sup>57</sup> Christine Trevett, *Montanism*, 169. See also Douglas Powell, "Tertullianists and Cataphrygians," *Vigiliae Christianae* 29, (1975): 46.

<sup>58</sup> Nicola Denzey, "What Did the Montanists Read," *Harvard Theological Review* 94, no. 4 (2001): 436-439.

<sup>59</sup> John C. Poirier, "Montanist Pepuza-Jerusalem and the Dwelling Place of Wisdom," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7, no. 4 (1999): 495-502.

Jewish wisdom literature overlap with the Montanist visions of the immanent Christ and Spirit dwelling in the community.

Regardless of one's interpretation of the oracle, it again suggests the movement interacted with the Jewish/Christian tradition. As Jensen points out, the term "slept with" has no sexual connotation.<sup>60</sup> Instead, because we know there was significant debate between Montanists and some of their opponents surrounding the second creation narrative, we should look toward Adam's sleep in Genesis 2 as conceptual field in which to place this vision.<sup>61</sup> Thus, the ecstatic sleep the prophetess experienced was a gift of God that made space for the "creation" of a new prophetic vision and the gift of wisdom Sophia-Christ gave the prophetess.

While relevant evidence is scant, cases have been made for both Priscilla and Quintilla as the prophetess who had this vision. The argument for Quintilla as the prophetess rests largely on the logic of attributing a later oracle to a more easily recognizable founder, on the lack of prior reference to the oracle, and on the strength of H.G. Voigt's work that identifies this oracle as the a part of Epiphanius's "later and inferior" source.<sup>62</sup> In contrast, Jensen argues for Priscilla as the prophetess who gave this vision based on her identification of dream/visions with the early period of Montanist activity, the assumption that concepts like the feminine Christ, the bridal personification of Jerusalem, and the Gnostic personification of Sophia she sees as embedded in the vision were borrowed from other traditions and on this interpretation's value in explaining the centrality of Pepuza in early Montanism.<sup>63</sup> Of course, making an irrevocable judgment regarding the identity of our mysterious prophetess would place us squarely in the proud,

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<sup>60</sup> Jensen, *God's Self-Confident Daughters*, 163.

<sup>61</sup> See Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.4.1-48.6.4 for the Anti-Phrygian's side of the debate surrounding Genesis 2.

<sup>62</sup> Charles Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, 146-150. See also Trevett, *Montanism*, 167-168. And Groh, "Utterance and Exegesis," 80-81.

<sup>63</sup> Jensen, *God's Self-Confident Daughters*, 163-166.

epistemological folly that has too often characterized historical scholars. Nevertheless, Jensen fails to convince and at present the evidence is weighted toward Quintilla as the prophetess.

Integrating this hypothesis into our vision of Montanism, we must recognize Hill's point that the evidence early Montanists expected the imminent, literal descent of Jerusalem in Asia Minor is far thinner than has often been assumed.

### **Some Tentative Conclusions**

With our examination of the available material attributed to the founders of Montanism complete, let us attempt to integrate the most important parts of our work concerning the three founders of Montanism into one coherent picture. First and most importantly, the movement self-identified as the "New Prophecy." Presumably, this means they had a conception of an "old prophecy," felt it was obsolete, and intentionally set out to move beyond it. While it is tempting to assume these "New Prophets" sought to separate themselves from the "old prophecy," their consistent use of Christian Scripture/tradition instead suggests that they saw the relationship in terms of building upon rather than moving away from their now outdated prophetic forebears. Thus, the Montanist worldview assumed both continuity with the Christian tradition and fresh growth emerging from those roots.

Tertullian's treatment of Prisca's oracle in *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* reveals prophets were seen as uniquely gifted and had a special station and role within the movement that included the authoritative proclamation of the word of the Lord. Maximilla's exhortation, "Hear not me but Christ," reflects the habit of speaking in the voice of God that was shared by all three prophets and is evident in the Montanus's introductory formulae preserved by Epiphanius. However, prophets were not the primary source of authority for Montanism. Instead, the prophets themselves are constantly creating connections with earlier Christian tradition. Prisca

makes suggestive use of the word “flesh” and Maximilla alludes to Matthew’s teaching on sheep and wolves. Similarly, Maximilla picks up on important vocabulary like “covenant,” “promise,” and “revealer.” More specifically, Montanus makes a direct reference to Isaiah 63:9 and Epiphanius’s extended treatment of Genesis 2 strongly suggests a competing Montanist interpretation. Finally, the Priscillian/Quintillian vision of Sophia Christ and the New Jerusalem is absolutely steeped in the imagery of apocalyptic and wisdom literature traditions. Thus, we can confidently assert that the early Montanist movement was deeply familiar with both the Hebrew Scriptures and most of what would become the Christian New Testament. While Montanus’s oracle concerning the glory of the just does take some minor liberties with the imagery of Matthew, the pattern of presenting visions and oracles in the imagery and terms of the writings that would become the Christian Scriptures suggests that the authority of early Christian tradition and writings was embraced as logically prior to that of the movement’s prophets by early Montanists.

Nevertheless, it is unlikely the movement would have parsed the issue quite so finely. Their prophets, indeed, their community, were the living embodiment of the true Christian tradition, the New Prophecy rising up to replace the withered and dying church in which prophecy had passed away or lost its power, a new shoot growing out of old roots. To the Montanist mind, the New Prophecy’s source of authority was “the Paraclete,” or “the Lord God, the Almighty,” who had spoken in the past through Israel and the church, been revealed in Christ, and was speaking in the present through their own prophets. If the “New Prophets” assumed some discontinuity with “old” forms of spiritual community, they equally assumed continuity with the work of the God in Christ through the Holy Spirit in their own communities.

The evidence in the preserved Montanist oracles from which we can begin to construct to the Montanist worldview is scant. Maximilla's vague prophecy concerning "the end" may or may not reference the eschatological end of the age, or the culmination of the redemptive work of the Spirit in the church, but it certainly suggests the early Montanists sensed they were playing a vital role at an important historical juncture. The vision attributed to Prisca or Quintilla would tempt us to associate this end with the descent of Jerusalem at Pepuza, but as we know neither who had this vision nor when it was experienced, we cannot add it to the general worldview shared by early Montanists. Prisca's teaching about the importance of purification hints at the Montanist vision of a godly life—pure, in harmony, expectant of visions, "hearings," and, likely, other spiritual gifts—but we cannot say with confidence what sort of purity (ritual, ethical, or some combination of the two) Prisca had in mind nor what exactly she taught would be put in harmony.

There are hints of the development of both early Trinitarian thought (Maximilla's "word, and spirit, and power" formula) and the Modalism of which Montanists would later be accused (Montanus's "I am the Lord God, the Almighty dwelling in man") in early Montanist oracles. Montanus's teaching that God "changes the hearts" and Maximilla's understanding of herself as "compelled to come to understand the knowledge of God" lead us to conclude that early Montanists taught that the transcendent God acted upon the human will as both Creator and Redeemer instead of emphasizing the role of the human will in conforming to the will of God. Finally, Montanus's oracle about the radiance and glory of "the just" and "the little ones among you" suggests that early Montanists were egalitarian, in theory if not in practice, and honored each member of their community.

Thus, the early Montanist mind can be characterized as self-consciously living at a historical crossroads, practicing purity leading to harmony, which left them open to the gifts of the Spirit. Their very existence was prophetic: a New Prophecy springing up to pick up where the old left off. They saw themselves as a faithful people, accountable not so much to the tradition, but to the Living God they encountered through the prophetic gifting and to whom the tradition witnesses. Insofar as they were “just” or “saved,” both they and the other members of their community shone “brighter than the sun.” This glorious life was not the result of their own efforts: instead God formed their hearts as surely as God created them. Some among them were specially gifted as prophets who, not by their own choice but by the will of God, were “compelled to come to understand the knowledge of God” and in turn offered this revelation to their communities as the word of God. Significantly, women as well as men were looked to as leaders.<sup>64</sup> Most significantly, they saw themselves as heirs of the Christian tradition, committed to Christ and to the God proclaimed by their forebears. Let us now turn to the characterization of early Montanism by Tertullian to see if we can fill out this picture further.

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<sup>64</sup> Of course, we must not cling to these ideas too closely. While some (i.e.: the reverence for Scripture, the centrality of prophecy, the existence of women leaders) are beyond doubt, others (i.e.: the glory of the Christian life, the centrality of harmony and purity) are based on single sayings of one of the founding figures of Montanism ripped from their original context.



## TERTULLIAN

Tertullian's presentation of the New Prophecy presents unique challenges. If the construction of reality he seeks to propagate is influenced by Montanist teachings and ideas, it remains difficult to tell where the Montanist point of view comes to the fore and where it is replaced by another influence or Tertullian's own thought. Moreover, the likely variety in both practice and relationship with the larger church between the Phrygian Montanism of the movement's founders and the North African variant known to Tertullian must also be taken into account.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, even if our picture is destined to remain incomplete, we must use the resources we have at hand to provide as clear a portrait as possible. Thus, it is to this celebrated North African we now turn.

The picture of Montanism offered by Tertullian introduces four important themes not readily evident in the oracles of the movement's founders: a description of some of the mechanics of Montanist prophecy, zeal for martyrdom, ethical rigor, and the teaching of the progressive nature of revelation linked to Trinitarian thought. He also provides a small amount of additional information on the movement's eschatology. Most scholars date Tertullian's migration to a Montanist perspective around 207-209 and have often generalized any writings after that date as typical of Montanist thought.<sup>2</sup> That said, the once popular view Tertullian left the orthodox church to become a Montanist lacks support. Instead, it appears that Montanism in North Africa during Tertullian's career represents a movement within the larger church, not an alternative to it. Simply put, "Tertullian the Montanist was Tertullian the Montanist catholic."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 132.

<sup>2</sup> Trevett, *Montanism*, 71. See also Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 130. Trevett offers 207, citing scholarly consensus, while Tabbernee prefers 208-209 on the basis of the first indisputable reference to the New Prophecy in *Adversum Marcionem*.

<sup>3</sup> Trevett, *Montanism*, 69.

## Manner of Prophecy

*De Ecstasi*, Tertullian's most significant work defending the Montanist model of prophecy, is lost to history. Doubtless its rediscovery would go far in fleshing out the debate between Montanist and orthodox Christians on the topic. Fortunately, Tertullian's defense of Montanist prophecy was not entirely limited to his *oeuvre* on the topic: he offers some quite pertinent comments in his other works. For example, he writes in *Against Marcion* that when a prophet "beholds the glory of God, or when God speaks through him" the prophet temporarily loses their natural senses "since he has been manifestly overshadowed by the divine power."<sup>4</sup> Not only did Tertullian consider the passivity of the prophet overshadowed by the transcendent God to be the model for the Montanist experience of ecstatic prophecy in particular, he considered it the normative model for Christian prophecy in general.<sup>5</sup>

Nasrallah has argued that Tertullian rejects the idea that, through the careful application of reason, (redeemed) humanity holds within itself the possibility of encountering the divine. Instead he posits that, even in its original created state, the human soul has no natural ability to apprehend the spiritual. However, in prophecy, the normal functions of the human soul are suspended and God offers revelation directly. Tertullian compares this process to dreaming in which normal sense perception is put on hold, yet memory persists. Moreover, as in a dream (or, presumably, as vision), this revelation is not limited to the faculty of reason: instead the soul knows through reason, emotion, and even the perception of stimuli that would be associated with the physical senses in wakefulness. If Nasrallah is right, the practical effect is profound. Instead of working in an epistemological framework that limits encounter with the divine to those "few

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<sup>4</sup> Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 4.22. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 69.

<sup>5</sup> Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 133.

who are noetically trained,” Tertullian’s conception of prophecy opens the doors of prophetic revelation to the whole of the church.<sup>6</sup>

Tertullian also offers a concrete example of prophecy in the North African Montanist mold. He reports an unnamed prophetess who practices several prophetic activities during the Sunday gathering of believers. “She converses with angels, sometimes even with the Lord; she both sees and hears secret things; she discerns the hearts of some, and she obtains instructions for healing for those who want them.” After the service is closed, the prophetess reports to a group of leaders Tertullian refers to as “us” and describes her visions “very carefully that they may also be tested.” After recording the content of this particular vision (the appearance of a soul to the prophetess), Tertullian points out “God is witness, and the apostle is a sufficient guarantor of future gifts in the church.”<sup>7</sup>

Tabbernee offers six pertinent observations about this report. First, Montanist prophetic activity was not limited to Phrygia or the three founders. Second, the apostolic witness is seen not only as revelation in its own right, but as guaranteeing the ongoing experience of prophecy. Third, the prophecy takes place in the church and, fourth, is tested by a group of leaders. Fifth, the prophetess does not disrupt the worship service, and, finally, the prophecy was inspired by the content of the church service.<sup>8</sup> Although we cannot rush to generalize this description to early Montanism in general, it nevertheless provides one valuable example of how Montanism’s more well-traveled teachings on prophecy found shape in the early third century.

The picture of the manner of Montanist prophecy we can glean from Tertullian’s available writings is remarkably consistent with the picture available in the oracles of the

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<sup>6</sup> Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy*, 130-140.

<sup>7</sup> Tertullian, *On the Soul*, 9.4. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 71.

<sup>8</sup> Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 136.

movement's three founders. The prophet continues to be presented as the passive instrument of the Spirit of God and, for both Tertullian and the earlier prophets, the witness of the apostles is seen as an earlier work of the Spirit pointing forward to the work of the Spirit in their midst. Similarly, interpretations of Christianity that emphasize the authority of specially trained or qualified individuals continue to be challenged by a theology that makes space for any believer to function as the mouthpiece of God. Moreover, we should not underestimate the importance of Tertullian's account of the third century prophetess. While we cannot look to it as *the* template of Montanist prophecy, we can confidently assert that it provides a concrete example of how some of the teachings of the New Prophets could be manifested in an early third century community of faith. Nevertheless, Jensen is ultimately correct to point out that this testimony cannot be projected back onto the early Phrygian Montanism of the movement's founders.<sup>9</sup>

### **Zeal for Martyrdom**

Tertullian's zeal for martyrdom and faithful witness in times of persecution is well known. Frend has gone so far as to suggest that the roots of the Donatist controversy a century later can be identified in his writings.<sup>10</sup> While our North African friend does appeal to the authority of the prophecy to support his rather severe teachings on martyrdom, it is difficult to ascertain if the New Prophecy affected Tertullian's approach to persecution or if he merely borrowed their concept of prophetic authority to support a point he would have made with or without their influence. Tertullian cites two anonymous oracles with regard to persecution, both of which can be found in *On Flight*. The first appears to encourage those who have been arrested as Christians:

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<sup>9</sup> Jensen, *God's Self-Confident Daughters*, 146.

<sup>10</sup> WHC Frend, *The Donatist Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 118.

It is good for you to be publicly exposed. For he who is not exposed among men is exposed in the Lord. Do not be disturbed; righteousness brings you before the public. Why are you disturbed when you are receiving praise? There is opportunity when you are observed by men.<sup>11</sup>

The second encourages Christians to desire martyrdom over more mundane deaths.

Significantly, the reference to miscarriage suggests it may have been specifically addressed to women.<sup>12</sup> “Wish not to choose to die in your beds, nor in miscarriages and mild fevers, but in martyrdoms, that he who has suffered for you may be glorified.”<sup>13</sup>

Tertullian clearly presents these oracles as instruction and exhortation for those facing persecution. However, Jensen suggests the original context of the oracles was not the terror of arrest, imprisonment, and martyrdom itself, nor the uncertainty of a coming persecution, but a service remembering family and church members who had been martyred.<sup>14</sup> In the end, the original *sitz im leben* of the oracle makes little difference in our understanding of Montanism’s, (or at least early third century North African Montanism’s) attitude toward persecution. A direct prophetic challenge to faithfulness in the face of persecution would be unlikely to have greater effect on the formation and behavior of potential martyrs than witnessing and participating in the glorification of martyrs as faithful witnesses to Christ *par excellence* after their deaths. Nevertheless, understanding these oracles as originally arising from martyrs’ funerals would suggest that their content is more a function of a local response to the martyrdom of church members than a genuine reflection of prior theological commitments characteristic of the Montanist movement as a whole.

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<sup>11</sup> Tertullian, *On Flight*, 9.4. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 7.

<sup>12</sup> See Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 213.

<sup>13</sup> Tertullian, *On Flight*, 9.4. As translated by Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Jensen, *God’s Self-Confident Daughters*, 148-149, 160.

Some scholars have argued Montanists went beyond the ideal of steadfastness under persecution that characterized the teachings of the larger church and taught Christians should *volunteer* as martyrs.<sup>15</sup> However, the emphasis on voluntary martyrdom stems from the writings of Tertullian that have no proven connection with the New Prophecy apart from their origin in Tertullian's Montanist period. His work in *Ad Scapulam*, an open letter to a proconsul who had pursued a policy of persecuting Christians in North Africa, typifies this approach. Tertullian threatens that, should the persecution continue, the Christians of the region would voluntarily present themselves to the proconsul for their deaths. Yet, even here, the suicidal impulse often attributed to Tertullian and, by extension, Montanists, in the face of martyrdom is nowhere to be found. Tertullian is referencing a precedent in which Christians presented themselves for martyrdom *en masse* and most were subsequently released with the admonition to commit suicide by other means if they so desired, effectively undermining a period of regional persecution.<sup>16</sup> Thus, it is likely Tertullian is referencing a high stakes strategy of non-violent resistance of targeted persecution and not a mindless eagerness for the glory of a martyr's death.

Even if Tertullian's zeal for martyrdom has often been overstated, his glorification of martyrs and suffering unto death as a Christian cannot be denied. For Tertullian, "(a martyr's) blood is the complete key of Paradise" and martyrdom itself was a gift from God.<sup>17</sup> However, once again, in this he does not fall far from the orthodox glorification of martyrs. Furthermore, as Tabbernee has pointed out, in orthodox Christian circles, even voluntary martyrdom appears to be acceptable if it prevented a Christian experiencing persecution from apostatizing,

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<sup>15</sup> For example, Klawiter, "The Role of Martyrdom," 253-254. See also Butler, *The New Prophecy*, 43.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Middleton, "Early Christian Voluntary Martyrdom: A Statement for the Defense," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 64, no. 2 (2013): 565-566. See also Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam*, 5.1.

<sup>17</sup> Tertullian, *On the Soul*, 55.5. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 71. See also Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 214-215.

represented a reversal of a previous denial of Christ under persecution, or was undertaken by a member of the Roman military if one's conscience made the life of a soldier impossible.<sup>18</sup> Thus, while Tertullian takes an extreme stance against those who flee in the face of persecution and occasionally seems to promote voluntary martyrdom, he can more accurately be described as pushing at the boundaries of orthodox Christian practice than separating entirely from it. Even if the exaltation of martyrs witnessed to in the oracles Tertullian preserves is typical of early Montanism as a whole, we cannot posit a meaningful deviation from the attitude of the larger church on the basis of these oracles: orthodox Christians also glorified martyrs and exhorted community members to faithful witness even to the point of death.

More importantly for the study at hand, there is no clear connection between Tertullian's more extreme positions on martyrdom and the teaching or practice of the larger Montanist movement. Nor do any of the sayings of the founders of Montanism suggest anything approaching an extreme position with regard to martyrdom. Thus, the conclusion that Montanists promoted voluntary martyrdom on the basis of Tertullian's writings cannot be adequately supported by the available evidence.

### **Ethical Rigor**

Tertullian clearly identifies his stringent ethical views with the New Prophecy (again through an anonymous oracle) in *On Modesty*. "I have the Paraclete himself who says in the new prophets: 'The Church can pardon sin, but I will not do it, lest they also commit other offences.'"<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Tertullian's position on post-baptismal forgiveness shifts. He allows for such forgiveness (at least for fornication) in *On Forgiveness* before he is influenced by

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<sup>18</sup> William Tabbernee, "Early Montanism and Voluntary Martyrdom," *Colloquium* 17 (1985): 34-35.

<sup>19</sup> Tertullian, *On Modesty*, 21.7. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 7.

Montanism but reverses course in the aforementioned *On Modesty*.<sup>20</sup> Of course, correlation proves neither influence nor causation. If the oracle itself suggests a strong correlation between Montanist teaching/prophecy and unusually high ethical expectations, it, like the other oracles reported by Tertullian, represents a saying ripped from its context to support his argument.

More surely reflective of early Montanism as a whole is Tertullian's identification of the Montanists with "spiritual" Christians. In *On Monogamy* he identifies himself with those "who are justly called 'spiritual' because [they] recognize spiritual gifts" and other Christians as "psychics" (soulish ones) who "are compelled to deny the Paraclete for no other reason than that they consider him to be the instigator of new discipline, and one that is too harsh indeed for them."<sup>21</sup> Apart from the division over spiritual gifts and the Paraclete that clearly identifies this dichotomy as relevant to the divide between the New Prophecy and the larger church, Tertullian identifies spiritual Christians as allowing one marriage, but denying remarriage in any circumstances. He argues this position is in line with both the revelation of the Paraclete *and* the Christian tradition.<sup>22</sup> Thus, at least in North Africa, Montanists emphasized the unique character of marriage and denied themselves a second marriage even in the case of the first spouse's death.

The division between spiritual and "psychic" Christians reappears near the beginning of *On Fasting* where Tertullian complains:

[New prophecies] are not rejected [by psychics] because Montanus, Priscilla, and Maximilla preach another God . . . but simply because they teach that our fasts ought to be more numerous than our marriages. . . They censure us because we keep our own special fasts, because we frequently extend fastdays into the evening, because we also practice the eating of dry food, stripping our diet of all flesh and all juice, and every

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<sup>20</sup> Luomanen and Marjanen, *A Companion*, 202.

<sup>21</sup> Tertullian, *On Monogamy*, 1.3 and 2.1. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 77. For Tertullian, people are naturally soulish creatures, incapable of the spiritual knowledge of God unless they encounter the breath of God through ecstasy/spiritual gifts. See Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy*, 129-154.

<sup>22</sup> Tertullian, *On Monogamy*, 3.11. See also Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 151-153.



succulent fruit, nor do we eat or drink anything that has the flavor of wine. We also abstain from the bath in keeping with our dry diet.<sup>23</sup>

Again, Tertullian spends the better part of his treatise presenting Montanist practice as faithful to both tradition/scripture and present revelation. The concept of dry fasts seems to have been particularly contentious: Tertullian takes pains to make it clear that “spiritual” Christians do not believe in continual fasts from meats like some heretics, but only practice such fasts for two weeks of the year.<sup>24</sup> He is not contending for a heretical rejection of creation, but instead for a disciplined decision to forego certain parts of it for a season.<sup>25</sup>

Tertullian’s treatment of the veiling of virgins has also been linked to the New Prophecy via his appeal to the Paraclete as his source of authority on the issue. After arguing that the work of the Paraclete is to bring Christians and the ethical teachings of the church to maturity, Tertullian makes his point: “Those who have heard [the Paraclete] prophesying even to the present, veil virgins.”<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, while the connection between the New Prophecy and Tertullian’s position on remarriage and fasting is quite explicit, he does not use the language of “spiritual” and “psychic,” reference one of the movement’s founders or an anonymous oracle, or use the phrase “New Prophecy” in this treatise. His only connection with Montanism here is his use of the label “Paraclete” and he drops even that vocabulary after he introduces the subject. While “Paraclete” is often found in conjunction with descriptions of the Montanist movement in Tertullian’s work, neither the term nor the portion of John from which it is drawn has any

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<sup>23</sup> Tertullian, *On Fasting*, 1. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 83.

<sup>24</sup> Tertullian, *On Fasting*, 15.

<sup>25</sup> See Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 147-150 for a fuller treatment of Tertullian’s defense of these fasts.

<sup>26</sup> Tertullian, *On the Veiling of Virgins*, 1. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 65.

identifiable connection with what we know Montanism in Phrygia outside of Tertullian's writings.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps Tertullian keeps his distance from the New Prophecy because the practice of Prisca and/or Maximilla would undermine the assumption underlying his argument that, outside of the household, a woman's primary duty is chastity. Thus, as Karen Jo Torjesen reminds us, for Tertullian and many others, as the church transitioned from a household to a public setting, women leaders were expected to allow their concern for sexual propriety to supersede (if not completely override) the exercise of *charismata* like leadership and prophecy.<sup>28</sup> If Prisca, Maximilla, and other single Montanist prophetesses prophesied without preoccupying themselves with managing their sexuality, any reference to them would have weakened Tertullian's more specific argument regarding veiling virgins, especially if Apollonius's report that Prisca was called a virgin is correct.<sup>29</sup>

Tertullian explicitly connects allowing for only one marriage and a particularly stringent approach to fasting with the Montanist movement. While we should be wary of treating even early Montanism as a monolithic movement, the consonance with both Prisca's oracle regarding purity and Eusebius's report of her leaving her marriage to pursue her ministry suggests that, broadly speaking, the emphasis on a single marriage was typical of the New Prophecy. Similarly, Tertullian's quite specific identification of a stringent approach to fasting with Montanism's three founders strongly argues for both its general acceptance and origin in the movement's earliest days.

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<sup>27</sup> Ronald Heine, "The Role of the Gospel of John in the Montanist Controversy," *The Second Century* 6, no. 1 (1987): 1-2. See Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 153-154 for a fuller treatment of Tertullian's argument concerning the veiling of virgins.

<sup>28</sup> Karen Jo Torjesen, "Reconstruction of Women's Early Christian History," in *Searching the Scriptures*, ed. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, 2 vols. (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 1:303-307.

<sup>29</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.18.3.

Montanism's approach to post-baptismal forgiveness and the veiling of virgins remains less clear. Of the two, the refusal to offer forgiveness is the stronger candidate for inclusion in our Montanist paradigm because it is supported by a specific (albeit decontextualized) oracle and demonstrates consonance with some interpretations of Prisca's oracle about purity.

Nevertheless, as we shall see, other evidence provided by the New Prophecy's opponents suggests it may not be characteristic of early Montanism. The connection between Montanism and veiling virgins is tenuous at best. If we make anything of Tertullian's treatment of the subject, we might take his failure to appeal to the authority of the New Prophecy (unless we understand the label "Paraclete" to always imply the movement as a whole in Tertullian) on the subject as evidence Montanism did not insist on veiling their virgins. However, we cannot draw any conclusions on the basis of such thin evidence. In my opinion it is most likely Montanism dealt with both the veiling of virgins and the larger questions of the place of women in public ministry raised by the legacies of Prisca and Maximilla on a local basis.

### **Progressive Revelation and the Trinity**

If *On the Veiling of Virgins* is of minimal value for our understanding of Montanist practices, the defense of the ongoing nature of revelation Tertullian offers in its first chapter may help us develop our picture of how Montanists understood their prophecies in relationship with tradition. Tertullian begins by rooting all truth in Christ who is more ancient than all creation. Because it is rooted in Christ, the rule of faith also stands unchanging and unassailable. However, for Tertullian, the fullness of truth is beyond the limited grasp of humanity and thus God must mature our collective understanding of the ethical life little by little, like a tree emerging by stages from a seed. Thus, for Tertullian, the Old Testament corresponds to

humanity's infancy, Christ to our youth, and the work of the Paraclete to our maturity.<sup>30</sup> After all, as Tertullian points out in *On Monogamy*, even Christ promised that the disciple's instruction would continue through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.<sup>31</sup>

As Pelikan has pointed out, this understanding of progressive revelation lends itself nicely to a Modalistic interpretation of the Trinity. However, Tertullian is quite clearly not a Modalist.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, he strongly attacks the Modalist Praxeas on the grounds that he "put the Paraclete to flight and crucified the Father."<sup>33</sup> For Tertullian, the Godhead reflects both unity and distinction:

The Son has poured forth the gift which he received from the Father, the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the third name of the divinity, and the third grade of the majesty, the proclaimer of the one monarchy but also the interpreter of the economy, if one receives the word of his *new prophecy*, and he is the leader of all truth which resides in the Father and in the son [sic] and in the Holy Spirit according to the Christian religion.<sup>34</sup>

As Pelikan reminds us, we cannot assume Montanism was *the* driving force behind the evolution of Tertullian's Trinitarian thought.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, if we are to take Tertullian at his word, his experience with the "New Prophecy" must have spurred his reflection on the person and role of the Holy Spirit.

It is highly unlikely Tertullian's Trinitarian thought was reflected in Montanism as a whole. However, he does offer some evidence that Montanism was engaging in the Trinitarian discussion, attributing the metaphors of root and tree, fountain and stream, and sun and ray as applied to the relationship between God and Word to the Paraclete.<sup>36</sup> Despite some ancient

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<sup>30</sup> Tertullian, *On the Veiling of Versions*, 1. See also Jensen, *God's Self-Confident Daughters*, 144-145.

<sup>31</sup> Tertullian, *On Monogamy*, 2.2-4. On Tertullian's ideas of Progressive Revelation see also Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 146.

<sup>32</sup> Pelikan, "Montanism and its Trinitarian Significance," 102.

<sup>33</sup> Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 1. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 89. Emphasis mine.

<sup>34</sup> Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 30. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 91.

<sup>35</sup> Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, 105.

<sup>36</sup> Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 8. See also Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 160-161. Of course, as we have seen, while an appeal to "the Paraclete" remains suggestive of the New Prophecy in Tertullian, it cannot be tied to

disparagements and modern interpretations, we can confidently portray Montanism as a movement both consuming and creating theology. While the ideas about progressive revelation expressed by Tertullian are not explicitly collaborated by the known sayings of the founders of the New Prophecy, they seem to be a natural extension of the *zeitgeist* of a movement conscious of their place at a vital point in history and convinced they were specially chosen and equipped to play their role as the faithful people of the Living God. Nevertheless, in light of the attribution of prophetic speech to all three members of the Trinity in the known oracles of Montanism's founders, it would seem the progression of revelation from the Father to the Son and then from the Son to the Holy Spirit/Paraclete was not typical of the movement. Thus, Doherty is likely correct to attribute this particular interpretation of the Trinity to Tertullian and not the New Prophecy as a whole.<sup>37</sup>

### **Eschatology**

Tertullian presents an undeniably millennial interpretation of eschatology in *Against Marcion* and, in addition to Scripture, cites the New Prophecy as a source for his thought: “[The New Prophecy] has predicted that an image of the [heavenly] city will appear as a sign before the manifestation of its presence.” Tertullian goes on to describe how this prophecy was fulfilled when “pagan witnesses” partaking in an “expedition to the East” saw a city “suspended from the sky” for forty mornings in a row.<sup>38</sup> At first glance, Tertullian seems to have presented us with a clear indication of the dominant Montanist eschatology in terms quite easily reconciled with the oracle attributed to either Prisca or Quintilla. However, any consonance between Tertullian and

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Phrygian Montanism. Thus, it remains unlikely that Tertullian's identification of the work of the Paraclete is identical with the historian's understanding of the Montanist movement. Instead, for Tertullian the Johannine concept of the Paraclete serves as “a springboard for launching a new and burdensome discipline for mature Christians.” See Turid Karlsen Seim, “Johannine Echoes in Early Montanism,” in *Legacy of John: Second Century Reception of the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Tuomas Rasimus (Boston: Brill, 2010), 362.

<sup>37</sup> Doherty, “The Montanist Milieu,” 30.

<sup>38</sup> Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 3.24. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 69.

Pricca/Quintilla is undermined by the location of their cities: the Phrygian oracle names Pepuza as the location of the city while Tertullian refers to “the restoration of Judea.”<sup>39</sup>

Charles Hill has argued Montanist eschatology was predominately amillennial.<sup>40</sup> According to Hill, the interpretation of eschatology Tertullian offers represents his attempt to integrate Irenaeus’s millennialism with his own thought: the appeal to a Montanist oracle is merely meant to bolster his argument and we cannot assume it accurately represents the movement’s thought. Instead, Hill suggests an understanding of Montanist eschatology in which the “image of the heavenly city” is understood as the redemptive lives and society of the church, not the literal city hiding behind the clouds to which Tertullian refers.<sup>41</sup>

Trevett’s interpretation is more balanced. Since the New Prophecy drew on the influence of both Revelation and Jewish apocalyptic literature, she suggests they must have inherited some understanding of the millennium. However, she also suggests that the influence of Revelation 3 would encourage the movement to view the heavenly Jerusalem in terms of a people instead of a location.<sup>42</sup> Thus, she posits a shift in early Montanism from traditional millennialism to a realized eschatology in which the spiritual reality of the New Jerusalem lay within the Montanist community of faith.<sup>43</sup> If the reconstruction of Montanist eschatology Trevett offers remains vulnerable to critique, her final admonishment on this subject is indispensable: “When we try to reconstruct the New Prophecy of the first generations it is well to acknowledge how little we

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<sup>39</sup> Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 3.24. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 69.

<sup>40</sup> Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, 144-146. Hill is picking up on Tabbernee’s idea that Montanus called Pepuza and its neighbor Tymion Jerusalem for organization reasons. See William Tabbernee, “Revelation 21 and the Montanist ‘New Jerusalem,’” *Australian Biblical Review* 37 (1989): 57-58.

<sup>41</sup> Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, 149-159.

<sup>42</sup> The reference to Revelation 3 reflects Trevett’s understanding that the roots of Montanism can be traced back to the late first/early second century church of Philadelphia based on the concerns evident in both the letter in Revelation and Ignatius’s epistle to the Philadelphians. See especially Christine Trevett, “Apocalypse, Ignatius, Montanism: Seeking the Seeds” *Vigiliae Christianae* 43 no. 4, (1989): 313-338.

<sup>43</sup> Trevett, *Montanism*, 98-100.

know.”<sup>44</sup> Tertullian’s reference to the New Prophecy’s teaching on eschatology does suggest that the inauguration of a divine city, almost certainly referred to as the New Jerusalem, took a central place in their thought. However, beyond that unsurprising and rather ambiguous detail, Tertullian’s reference in *Against Marcion* only stirs up already muddied waters with regard to Montanist eschatology.

## Conclusions

Tertullian has filled in some of the blank spaces and added depth to our portrait of early Montanism. With regard to the manner of Montanist prophecy, he reinforced the understanding that Montanist prophets saw themselves as the ultimately passive servants of a transcendent God and similarly strengthened our understanding of the connection the Montanist mind would have made between Scripture/tradition and the prophecies of their own day. Moreover, he offered a concrete example of how influential elements of the Montanist conception of prophecy was adopted to a North African context. A closer study of Tertullian’s appeals to Montanism on the subject of martyrdom suggested that interpretations of the movement that emphasize voluntary martyrdom based on the writings of Tertullian have little to support them. However, the North African provided us with strong evidence that the New Prophecy was known for its fasts and only allowed for a single marriage. However, appeals to Phrygian Montanism’s exceptional “ethical rigor” should not be extended beyond these two distinctives. While Tertullian’s emerging understanding of the Trinity should not be taken to exemplify the New Prophecy as a whole, neither can Tertullian’s lived experience as a Montanist Christian be discounted in the development of his thought. Finally, Tertullian’s reference to the New Prophecy to support his eschatology does suggest that the theme of the New Jerusalem took a central place in Montanist

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 105.

eschatology quite early in the development of the movement but does not clarify the significance of that city in the mind of the New Prophets.

The roots of interpretations of the New Prophecy that prioritize the obsessive desire for martyrdom, general appeals to ethical fanaticism, or a unified expectation for the end of the age can be traced, to greater or lesser degrees, to the writings of Tertullian. However, they have no demonstrable connection with the early Phrygian Montanism of the movement's founders. However, Tertullian offers further evidence for the passive understanding of prophecy within the Montanist community, the movement's willingness to take their cues from female prophets, and the specific ethical distinctives of instituting new fasts and refusing to sanction second marriages. The more oppositional writings preserved by Eusebius will provide another helpful perspective for our study.



## EUSEBIUS

While the portrait we can paint using the words of Montanism's founders and celebrated North African supporter remains incomplete, using the writings of their opponents to expand our proverbial color palette puts us in danger of doing more to distort the image than mend it. Those who addressed threats to the orthodox faith like Montanism made no attempt at objectivity. Instead heresiologists like Epiphanius and church historians like Eusebius played an important role in reaffirming their culture's dominant social-political-religious construction of reality. Heresiology's concern was the formation of society, not the accurate portrayal of its subjects.<sup>1</sup> However, a cautious reading of these texts can nevertheless help us to see Montanism in a more nuanced light. We shall examine the late second and/or early third century sources Eusebius reproduces in this chapter and take up Epiphanius's use of his early third century source in the next.

Montanism seems to have been of special concern to Eusebius. No other heresy receives as thorough a treatment in his early fourth-century *Church History*.<sup>2</sup> The bulk of Eusebius's material concerning early Montanism is borrowed from two sources: a series of treatises written by an unnamed opponent of the movement generally referred to as "the Anonymous," and the anti-Montanist apologist Apollonius. The Anonymous seems to be passing on information he or she receives second hand and occasionally expresses reservations about its accuracy. This unidentified writer would have been unlikely to have had any contact with the founders of the movement since his or her second treatise reports Maximilla had died thirteen years before its composition.<sup>3</sup> Apollonius wrote even later than the Anonymous. Thus, any contact he might

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<sup>1</sup> Averil Cameron, "How to Read Heresiology," *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33, no. 3 (2003): 484.

<sup>2</sup> Francois Blanchetierre, "Le Montanisme Originel," *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 52, no. 1 (1978): 131.

<sup>3</sup> Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 5-6.

have had would have been through second or third generation adherents. Unlike the Anonymous, he has no qualms about presenting the leaders of the New Prophecy in the harshest of lights.<sup>4</sup> Eusebius also briefly cites the anti-Montanist writing of Bishop Serapion of Antioch.

### **The Anonymous: Book One**

#### *Content*

Eusebius cites three books written by the Anonymous. Unfortunately, it is unclear if they are three distinct works or three parts of one larger work. Eusebius seems to treat them as a whole, but inconsistencies in their content suggests they were not composed at the same time. The portion of the first book that Eusebius cites was composed in response to repeated requests to write against “the heresy of those who follow Miltiades.” An examination of this group necessitated a visit to Ancyra on the part of the author.<sup>5</sup> It recounts that the movement began when the recently converted Montanus, an inhabitant of Ardabav in Phrygia, exposed himself to the influence of evil and “in his soul’s immense ambitious desire . . . he was inspired and began to speak and say strange things.”<sup>6</sup> Montanist prophets are also described as speaking “in a frenzied manner, unsuitably, and abnormally.”<sup>7</sup>

Significantly, the Anonymous also introduces the idea that Montanus was the movement’s founder and Prisca and Maximilla were his followers. So pervasive is this assumption that Prisca and Maximilla are not even named. Instead they are simply referred to as “two other women” who, with Montanus, were overcome by their desire for greatness and so succumbed to the influence of evil.<sup>8</sup> Finally, he or she reports that “[the Montanists] were thrust

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 47-49.

<sup>5</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.16.3. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 15.

<sup>6</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.16.7. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 15-17.

<sup>7</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.16.9. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 17.

<sup>8</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.16.9. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 17.

out of the Church and excluded from the fellowship.”<sup>9</sup> To hear the Anonymous tell it, the Montanists did not leave the “orthodox” church of their own accord.

### *Analysis*

As we might have expected, the Anonymous’s first “book” has left us some evidence that is well worth integrating into our understanding of the early New Prophecy and some that is entirely inadmissible. The small detail about “those who follow Miltiades” and the visit to Ancyra in the introduction is probably the most revealing. It comes as no surprise that Ancyra, with its relatively close proximity to Phrygia, would be a good place to investigate the movement. It is more surprising that Avircius Marcellus would associate the movement with Miltiades but not Prisca, Maximilla, or Montanus and that the Anonymous finds it necessary to track down and report details about the founder of the movement. Before undertaking his investigation it seems the Anonymous is familiar with the New Prophecy, but does not even know Montanus’s name! Clearly, the influence of second generation of the New Prophecy had outstripped the reputation of its founders.

There is no compelling reason to doubt the claim Montanus hailed from Arbadav. However, because of the Anonymous’s clear anti-Montanist bias, the details about his history as a pagan priest and his status as a recent convert at the beginning of his ministry cannot be accepted at face value. Both of these claims undermine his authority and so implicitly deny the legitimacy of the movement the Anonymous attributes to his leadership.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the attribution of the prophetic activity of Prisca, Maximilla, and Montanus to the influence of evil must be discarded as orthodox rhetoric worthless in regard to our understanding of the New Prophecy. However, it does shed some light on the understanding at least some orthodox

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<sup>9</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.16.10. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 17.

<sup>10</sup> Luomanen and Marjanen, *A Companion*, 188-189.

Christians would have had of their neighbors. Just as there is no reason to doubt Montanus's origin in Arbadav, so there initially seems to be no reason to doubt the Montanus was the first of the three to begin his ministry. As Trevett puts it, "it was surely no more advantageous for the Anonymous to claim, as he did, that Montanus was the first to manifest the Prophecy than it would have been to blame the heinous ravings on women."<sup>11</sup>

However, the Anonymous's claim that the relationship between Montanus and both Prisca and Maximilla was hierarchical in nature should raise our suspicions for at least five reasons. First, our histories have a tendency to assume the leadership of men over women. Second, the fact that early Montanists had female leaders who ministered in the public sphere shows they were fully capable of challenging traditional gender roles. Third, as Jensen has pointed out, the earliest preserved Montanist oracles are attributed to Prisca and Maximilla, not Montanus.<sup>12</sup> Fourth, the Anonymous witnesses to the fact that second (or perhaps third) generation Montanism was known to at least some by the name of second generation leaders, not of Montanus. If Montanus's reputation did not dominate the movement after his death, it should not be assumed it dominated during his life. Finally, our study of Montanist oracles themselves suggests a worldview in which prophets are seen as directly under the influence of God and Tertullian witnesses to oracles being submitted to local communities, not to regional overseers.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the idea that Montanus was the movement's leader and Prisca and Maximilla were his followers seems to be a projection based on patriarchal ecclesial models.

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<sup>11</sup> Trevett, *Montanism*, 162.

<sup>12</sup> Jensen, *God's Self-Confident Daughters*, 154-155.

<sup>13</sup> Of course, early Phrygian Montanism may have had different practices than the North Africa examples preserved by Tertullian.

The colorful description of Montanus's early prophetic activity has inspired some debate about the possibility that glossolalia found a place in the Montanist community.<sup>14</sup> Some like Trevett and Stewart Sykes argue the presence glossolalia in early Montanism opened the door to the movement's critics drawing parallels between the New Prophecy and pagan prophets.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Kim argues for the presence of glossolalia in early Montanism based on the description of Montanus's prophecy here and the Anonymous's later use of the word *ametrophonous* to describe Montanist prophecy in general in his second book. Unfortunately, much of Kim's case hangs upon his acceptance of Ronald Kydd's translation of *ametrophonous* as "in an indefinite number of what sounds like language." However, even Kim cannot help but hint that Kydd's translation is atypical.<sup>16</sup> Thus, our support for the presence of glossolalia in early Montanism based on the writings of the Anonymous can only claim the place of the phenomenon in earlier Christian tradition and the portrayal of Montanist prophecy as parallel to pagan religious practices as support. Since the Anonymous can hardly be credited with restricting himself or herself to reasonable lines of attack in the attempt to discredit Montanism, and since the possible connection to earlier practice is hardly sufficient grounds to draw hard and fast conclusions, Christopher Forbes's conclusion that the Anonymous is merely referencing the "ecstatic and frenzied" manner in which the New Prophecy put forth its strange teaching remains

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<sup>14</sup> Heine translates *xenophonein* "say strange things." See Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 17. Translating Eusebius's *Church History* 5.16.7.

<sup>15</sup> Trevett, *Montanism*, 89-91. See also Stewart-Sykes, "The Original Condemnation," 9-12. Stewart-Sykes's argument is built upon the connection between the Septuagint's use of *pseudoprophetis* in Jeremiah to refer to pagan prophets and the Anonymous's use of *pseudoprophetis* for Montanus. He supports this by coupling the Anonymous's attempt to link Montanus's prophecies to demons with the early Christian understanding that pagan gods were themselves demons.

<sup>16</sup> Kim, "Is Montanism a Heretical Sect," 116-117. See also Ronald Kydd, *Charismatic Gifts in the Early Church: An Exploration into the Gifts of the Spirit during the First Three Centuries of the Christian Church* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1984), 35.

as likely as glossolalia playing a significant role in the movement.<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, we are again forced to acknowledge the limits of our scholarship.<sup>18</sup>

The claim the Montanists did not leave the church of their own accord presents no immediate difficulties and, as Blanchetierre has pointed out, fits nicely with Maximilla's oracle about being treated as a wolf.<sup>19</sup> However, this understanding will be nuanced by the evidence of the Anonymous's second book.

### **The Anonymous: Book Two**

#### *Content*

The information Eusebius preserves from the Anonymous's second book mostly consists of a story of short accounts of events involving the leaders of the movement. Before embarking on his collection of stories, the Anonymous suggests Montanists had taken to calling "us" (orthodox Christians?) "prophet-slayers."<sup>20</sup> Apparently, this label was not descriptive of actual events, but merely meant to reflect the rejection of the Montanist prophetic gifting within the group with which the Anonymous identified. The division surrounding Montanist prophets is not the only way The Anonymous distinguishes between Montanist and orthodox: our nameless

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<sup>17</sup> Christopher Forbes, *Prophecy as Inspired Speech in Early Christianity and its Hellenistic Environment* (Peabody MA.: Hendrickson, 1997), 161-162.

<sup>18</sup> William Tabbernee also argues speaking in tongues was important to early Montanists, suggesting their prophecies sometimes included oracles given via glossolalia and translated by designated interpreters. Thus, orthodox bishops are frustrated in their attempts to confront the demons in Maximilla or Priscilla by the refusal of the translators to relay the glossolalic ravings of the prophetesses to the bishops. It hardly needs to be pointed out that exorcisms which can be thwarted by the simple refusal to translate on behalf of a demon look more like an academic disputation than an act of spiritual authority over evil. See Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 95-96.

Similarly, Stewart-Sykes argues glossolalia had the effect of providing an air of authority for otherwise unimpressive prophecies. His argument is built upon the faulty premise that rural leaders like Montanus, Maximilla, and Prisca would have been incapable of delivering extended coherent oracles due to their presumed lack of education as rural Christians. This premise must be attacked on two fronts. First, Eusebius connects both Prisca and Maximilla to Philadelphia in *Church History* 5.17.4. Second, many uneducated rural leaders are capable of extended extemporaneous discourse without any formal training. See Stewart-Sykes, "The Original Condemnation," 14-18.

<sup>19</sup> Blanchetierre, *Le Montanisme Originel*, 133.

<sup>20</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.16.12. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 17.

polemicist also suggests that, while Christians of his or her own flavor sometimes die for their faith, Montanists have no martyrs.<sup>21</sup>

The Anonymous then relates a handful of accounts of the deaths of Montanists clearly designed to undermine the movement. As Eusebius preserves the story, both Montanus and Maximilla hung themselves after the pattern of the archetypal traitor Judas. Similarly, when one of their followers by the name of Theodotus was “taken up into heaven,” he “entrusted himself to a spirit of deceit,” was thrown down, and “died miserably.”<sup>22</sup> So transparent were these slanders that even the Anonymous suggests they may not be true.

The account Eusebius preserves of a failed examination of Maximilla at the hands of the “esteemed men and bishops” Zoticus and Julian is far more constructive. Apparently, these men were somehow thwarted by Maximilla’s followers: “the party of Themiso muzzled their mouths and did not permit the false and people-deceiving spirit to be refuted by them.”<sup>23</sup> The Anonymous sets forth the argument that any Spirit from God would not simply declare that it is “word, and spirit, and power,” but allow itself to be examined by the bishops and prove itself to them. The final detail from the second book of the Anonymous that Eusebius preserves has to do with an oracle Maximilla is said to have made which predicted significant amounts of war and unrest. Since the Anonymous writes “more than thirteen years” after the death of Maximilla and that particular prophecy had yet to be fulfilled, it is concluded that she must be a false prophetess.<sup>24</sup>

### *Analysis*

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<sup>21</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.16.12

<sup>22</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.16.14. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 19.

<sup>23</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.16.17. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 19.

<sup>24</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.16.19. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 19.

The Anonymous's second book's illustration of the tone of the conflict between orthodox Christianity and the New Prophecy is its most pertinent contribution to our study at this point. Clearly, at least some orthodox communities were not above outright slander of their opponents. Moreover, the detail about Montanists using the invective "prophet-slayer" for their opponents seems unlikely to be a fabrication and suggests the rhetorical warfare went both ways. Even if the New Prophets were cast out of fellowship with their orthodox neighbors, at least some early Montanists made an ample contribution to the conflict that led to the two movements parting ways.

While the accounts of the deaths of Montanus, Maximilla, and Theodotus cannot be taken seriously without collaboration from independent sources, the story of the attempted confrontation of the spirit speaking through Maximilla has the ring of truth, if only because it ended in failure for the orthodox bishops. The encounter is not preserved in sufficient detail to offer clarification on how the bishops sought to examine Maximilla's spirit or how Themiso and his colleagues undermined their attempts. Nevertheless, the simple fact that such a confrontation took place offers an important insight into the struggle surrounding early Montanism. Up to this point, we have repeatedly observed that conflict waged with the weapons of Scripture, prophecy, and reason: all sources of authority claimed by both the New Prophecy and its opponents. Here, for the first time, we have evidence that these agreed upon sources of authority were sometimes circumvented in favor of a more direct conflict. Thus, the authority of the bishop measured itself against the authority of the prophetess. If history tells us the bishops ultimately won the war, the account Eusebius preserves suggests they lost the occasional battle.

The two final details preserved in the Anonymous's second book are of mixed value. The claim that Montanists did not have martyrs seems to further undermine those who would



make the zeal for martyrdom a defining characteristic of the movement. However, the Anonymous contradicts himself or herself on this point in the third book.

The second detail concerning Maximilla's prophecy about anarchy and conflict, seems to point us back toward her oracle about the culmination/end after her death. Despite our lack of reliable primary data on Montanist eschatology, such a connection is certainly possible. On the other hand, it remains possible Maximilla's prophecy of conflict had no connection to the eschaton or even that it was fabricated or intentionally misinterpreted to provide fodder for orthodox polemicists. Still, given what we know of the New Prophecy's self-image as a movement living at a historical turning point and the movement's exposure to Christian and Jewish apocalyptic writings, it remains likely the Anonymous is referencing a genuine oracle predicting war and anarchy and connected to the prophetess's eschatological vision. Thus, we should see Maximilla's predictions of conflict as an extension of the "eschatological timetabling" in which Trevett suggests the prophetess indulged.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Anonymous: Book Three**

#### *Content*

The portion of the Anonymous's third book preserved by Eusebius begins by recording the Montanist claim that the martyrdom of some members of their community witnesses to the genuineness of their discipleship. Instead of repeating the denial of the existence of these martyrs in the second book, here the Anonymous points out that the Marcionites also have a great number of martyrs despite their unfaithfulness to Christ. She or he continues with the observation that orthodox Christians "separate to themselves and die not in fellowship with"

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<sup>25</sup> Trevett, *Montanism*, 101.

adherents of “the heresy of the Phrygians.”<sup>26</sup> However, this generalization appears to be based on a single account from the town of Apamea.

The remainder of the material from this third book is situated between references to an even earlier work composed by one Miltiades who argues against the ecstatic manner of Montanist prophecy. The Anonymous appears to summarize a portion of Miltiades’s argument: “but the false prophet speaks in spurious ecstasy, which licentiousness and impiety accompany. He begins with voluntary ignorance, but ends up in involuntary madness of soul.”<sup>27</sup> The Anonymous goes on to reference and repudiate the Montanist claim that Agabus, Judas, Silas, the daughters of Philip, and Ammia and Quadratus of Philadelphia provide Christian precedent for their ecstatic manner of prophecy. Finally, Eusebius points out that, despite being founded on the idea of contemporary prophecy in line with traditional Christian prophets and in witness to the promise that prophecy would remain in the church until “the end,” according to the Anonymous the New Prophecy had not produced a successor to “the followers of Montanus and the women” by the fourteenth year following Maximilla’s death.<sup>28</sup>

### *Analysis*

The sharp change in tact the Anonymous takes in his or her account of the New Prophecy’s relationship to martyrdom seems to indicate that sometime in between the writing of the second and third book our unknown author either discovered new information regarding Montanist martyrs or witnessed a rash of martyrs who confessed as adherents to the New Prophecy. In either case, even allowing for the uncertainty the Anonymous expresses, the time period between the authoring of these two works cannot have been much longer than a year (if

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<sup>26</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.16.22. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 21.

<sup>27</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.17.2. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 21.

<sup>28</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.17.4. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 21.

they represent two separate works at all). The Anonymous places the authorship of book two “more than thirteen years to this day since [Maximilla] died” and that of book three in “the fourteenth year, I suppose, since the death of Maximilla.”<sup>29</sup> This short period of time suggests the change was more likely the result of discovering new information than a large number of martyrdoms. Nevertheless, a case can be made that the Anonymous’s reversal mirrors a similar reversal in the Montanist experience.

Tabbernee suggests that the work of the Anonymous be dated near the end of Commodus’s reign based on its relative peace and stability which could have led to the dismissal of Maximilla’s prophecy about war and anarchy.<sup>30</sup> This date may work nicely with Andrzej Wypustek’s proposal that local persecution increased toward the beginning of the rule of Commodus’s successor Septimus Severus. According to Wypustek’s hypothesis, this increase in persecution can be attributed to the need to reign in the political threat represented by seers and magicians of various stripes who could use their unique influence to inflame potential enemies of the state. If this hypothesis is correct, it follows that the New Prophecy’s commitment to ecstatic prophecy would have left it especially vulnerable to a persecution targeting potential charismatic religious troublemakers.<sup>31</sup> Thus, one could posit an increase in persecution corresponding with the beginning of Severus’s reign that forced the Anonymous to reevaluate his or her interpretation of the Montanism and martyrdom.

Despite this possibility, we must keep in mind that the Anonymous needed a trip to Ancyra to discover even some basic facts about the New Prophecy. It is more likely his or her

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<sup>29</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.16.19 and 5.17.4. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 19-21.

<sup>30</sup> Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 6-7.

<sup>31</sup> Of course, this assumes the Anonymous was wrong to report that Montanist prophecy was dead. See Andrzej Wypustek, “Magic, Montanism, Perpetua, and the Severan Persecution” *Vigiliae Christianae*, 51 no. 3, (1997): 280-281.

abrupt reversal regarding Montanist martyrs is the result of remedied ignorance, not dramatic changes in the Montanist experience. Regardless of whether the Anonymous's shift is the result of his or her discovery of new information or simply mirrors a shift in the experience of the New Prophecy, we have no reason to doubt the accuracy of the account of Montanist and orthodox martyrs refusing to die together in Apamea. However, because there is no clear evidence that Montanism and orthodox Christianity had definitively split in Asia Minor until the Council of Iconium in 233, we should hesitate to follow the Anonymous in generalizing this account to all instances in which Asian orthodox and Montanist Christians faced martyrdom together in the late second and early third centuries.

The concern for the ecstatic manner of Montanist prophecy shared by the Anonymous and Miltiades is a central theme in the conflict surrounding early Montanism. Tertullian did not chose to call his defense of the movement *On the New Prophecy* or *On the Paraclete* or *On Prophecy*, but *On Ecstasy*. As we shall see in the next chapter, Miltiades was not the only opponent of the New Prophecy to call their ecstatic tendencies into question. Epiphanius's early source also assails the movement precisely on these grounds. The Anonymous does not offer any of the details of the philosophical debate surrounding the nature of true prophecy, but instead denies the New Prophecy's claim to a place in Christian tradition, arguing that the manner of their prophecy is no more than novelty without roots in the true church.

Behind this claim it is not difficult to discern the Montanist counter-point: the prophecy they practiced was faithful to Christian precedent, including those the Anonymous names. The Anonymous further reports that "the women who were disciples of Montanus" claimed to be the prophetic heirs of Quadratus and Ammia, both of Philadelphia.<sup>32</sup> On one hand, the Anonymous

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<sup>32</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.17.4. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 21.

restates the claim made in his or her first book that Prisca and Maximilla are Montanus's followers. However, on the other, he or she suggests that their prophetic roots can be traced to Ammia and Quadratus in Philadelphia, not Montanus in Arbadav. Once again we must question the assumption that Montanus was the dominant personality of the movement that eventually inherited his name.

Of course, the Anonymous is obligated to continue to elevate Montanus over Prisca and Maximilla. The mythology he or she has built around the New Prophecy is rooted in the claim that Montanus's ambition caused him to reach beyond his natural gifting and place in the community of faith. This spiritual grasping left Montanus open to the influence of evil which contaminated the movement from the beginning.<sup>33</sup> If the roots are tainted, the fruit is sure to be bad. While the Anonymous's work does not leave us any hints at the New Prophecy's version of Montanus's claim to authority, it is clear Prisca and Maximilla would have bolstered their own claims by appealing to their connection to the Philadelphian prophets. Since the Anonymous chooses to follow Miltiades in defending the orthodoxy of Ammia and Quadratus, the only course left is to seek to divorce Maximilla and Prisca from those roots. This is accomplished by attacking the manner or the Montanist prophetesses' prophecy and seeking to connect them to the already discredited Montanus instead of the prophetic tradition they claimed.<sup>34</sup>

Trevett has posited that the Montanist connection to Philadelphia ran deeper than its influence on Prisca and Maximilla. She observes that Ignatius's early second-century letter to the Philadelphians suggests the city was already home to a church in which a lack of respect for the bishop, a preoccupation with "heavenly" matters, and a tendency to flaunt one's celibacy

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<sup>33</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.16.7.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 5.17.2-4.

were evident.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps even more telling is Ignatius's appeal to prophecy when he exhorts the Philadelphians to keep the bishop at the center of their shared life of faith.<sup>36</sup> Of course, the authority of prophecy, conflict with bishops, emphasis on spiritual matters, and a distinctive focus on celibacy are also evident in early Montanism. As Trevett tells it, the church of Philadelphia was representative of Christians who "would have clung to traditional freedoms" in the face of the increasing authority of bishops and it was from this fertile soil that the Montanist tradition later emerged.<sup>37</sup>

## Apollonius

### *Content*

It is tempting to dismiss the work of Apollonius that Eusebius preserved as nothing more than an impressive display of libel and *ad hominem* argumentation. Much of his invective centers around the wealth he claims Montanist leaders received for their ministries. Thus, prophetesses "received gold and silver and expensive clothes" and Montanus "contrived the acceptance of bribes in the name of offerings."<sup>38</sup> Similarly, second generation Montanist leader Themiso is able to buy his way out of prison after being arrested as a Christian. Presumably the wealth he obtained as a paid Montanist leader made this possible.<sup>39</sup>

Apollonius also claims Montanus encourages divorce, creates new fasts, called people to Pepuza and Tymion, and named these two small towns "Jerusalem."<sup>40</sup> He tells us Montanist prophetesses left their husbands "the moment they were filled with the spirit" and hints that,

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<sup>35</sup> Trevett, "Apocalypse, Ignatius, Montanism," 317-319.

<sup>36</sup> See Ignatius, *Epistle to the Philadelphians*, 7.

<sup>37</sup> Trevett, "Apocalypse, Ignatius, Montanism," 317, 330.

<sup>38</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.18.2 and 5.18.4. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 23.

<sup>39</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.18.2 and 5.18.5. Tabbernee points out that, even if this account is true, the practice of buying one's way out of prison was not unheard of in orthodox Christian circles. See William Tabbernee, "Montanist Regional Bishops: New Evidence from Ancient Inscriptions," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1, no. 3 (1993): 252.

<sup>40</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.18.2.

despite this inconvenient detail, Prisca was referred to as a virgin.<sup>41</sup> After an overlong diatribe against a Montanist Christian by the name of Alexander who had the misfortune of having been arrested for theft before joining the Montanist community, Apollonius makes further accusations about Montanist prophets dying their hair, painting their eyes, ornamenting themselves, playing dice, and practicing usury. Finally, he offers a shortened version of the Anonymous's story of the failed exorcism of Maximilla.<sup>42</sup>

### *Analysis*

If some of the scintillating details Apollonius provides about the lifestyle of the leaders of the New Prophecy are simply not credible, his writing nevertheless reveals a grain of truth. Tertullian clearly collaborates the idea that early Montanists enforced more fasts than their orthodox counterparts.<sup>43</sup> Apollonius adds that Montanus called people to Pepuza and Tymion and gave these towns the label "Jerusalem." While the oracle attributed to either Quintilla or Prisca suggests that this location eventually took on eschatological significance for Montanism, there is no reason Montanus's call must be understood in eschatological terms. Instead, Tabbernee suggests Pepuza and Tymion be understood as an "administrative headquarters" and an "organizational rather than eschatological innovation."<sup>44</sup> Similarly, although the particular claims that Maximilla and Prisca left their husbands and the report of Prisca being referred to as a virgin cannot be substantiated, Tertullian clearly distinguishes between the understanding of marriage in "psychic" and "spiritual" circles.<sup>45</sup> This suggests Apollonius's portrayal of Maximilla and Prisca's marital histories *may* be rooted in reality. Furthermore, precedent for

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<sup>41</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.18.3. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 23.

<sup>42</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.18.6-12.

<sup>43</sup> See particularly Tertullian, *On Fasting*, 1.

<sup>44</sup> William Tabbernee, "Revelation 21," 57.

<sup>45</sup> Tertullian, *On Monogamy*, 3.11.

Apollonius's report can be gleaned from the motif of the values of celibacy and asceticism and women serving the church at the expense of their family roles that runs through the apocryphal *Acts of Paul, John, Peter, Andrew, Thomas, and Xanthippe*.<sup>46</sup> However, D.H. Williams suggestion that Montanism required its spiritual elite to annul their previous marriages makes far too much of too little.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, Apollonius makes no suggestion this pattern extended beyond Maximilla and Prisca to Montanist prophetesses in general.

The most intriguing detail that Apollonius might contribute to our understanding of Montanism stems from his repeated diatribes against Montanist preachers receiving pay for their work. Both Marjanen and Powell argue this innovation was one of central features that distinguished Montanism from its orthodox opponents.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Williams identifies the development of an organizational structure that allowed for salaried preachers as an important foundation that allowed the New Prophecy to transition from a successful late-second-century religious movement to a successful institution capable of surviving well into the sixth century despite imperial opposition.<sup>49</sup> Tabbernee picks up this train of thought, suggesting that

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<sup>46</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (New York: Cambridge Press, 1988), 195.

<sup>47</sup> D.H. Williams, "The Origins of the Montanist Movement: A Sociological Analysis," *Religion* 19, (1985): 341-342. Williams actually goes so far as to suggest that all converts to the New Prophecy may have been required to renounce any previous marriage. As I see it, such a suggestion leaves us with three possible explanations for the survival of Montanism into the middle of the sixth century. First, we may ignore both Tertullian's insistence that followers of the New Prophecy do not remarry (*On Monogamy* 3.11) and Epiphanius's collaboration of this detail (*Panarion* 48.9.7) and presume new unions blessed after conversion provided the offspring that carried the movement into the next generation. Second, we could ignore Tertullian's insistence that spiritual Christians exercise sexual self-control (*On Monogamy* 1.3) and the conspicuous lack of accusations of sexual impropriety by the New Prophecy's opponents and postulate that Montanists engaged in atypical sexual patterns. Third, we can argue that Montanists did not propagate by natural means and that the movement consisted entirely of first generation converts for at least its first several generations. Of these three, the first is most tenable, particularly if it is assumed Montanism incorporated a theology of conversion strong enough to support the premise the individual could not be held responsible for their pre-conversion/baptism actions because they were now a new creation. Of course, this is assuming *far* more than can be supported by the available evidence.

<sup>48</sup> Luomanen and Marjanen, *A Companion*, 208-209. See also Powell, "Tertullianists," 50-51.

<sup>49</sup> Williams, "The Origins," 342.



Montanism's fiscal structure created a strong link between Pepuza and other local congregations.<sup>50</sup>

Stewart-Sykes further argues paying preachers would have upset the established, urban pattern of churches gathering around a relatively wealthy household which would then support the church out of its largesse. The leaders of these households then became the pool from which church leadership was chosen. Thus, Apollonius's reaction against the Montanist practice of paying its leaders was motivated by "a reversal of the normal social relationships deriving from the household organization of the Asian Church."<sup>51</sup> This tension between old and new models of church leadership mirrors the shifts surrounding understandings of the place of women in church leadership as the church's primary locus shifted from the household to the public.<sup>52</sup> The New Prophecy found itself involved in both debates. However, it is likely Apollonius's response to the idea of paying preachers and prophets runs deeper than a reaction to the overturning of elitist societal norms. The *Didache* forbids the practice of prophets asking for money in an apparent attempt to curb abuse.<sup>53</sup> In this case, the New Prophecy found itself genuinely opposed to a formidable piece of Christian tradition.

Unfortunately, Apollonius provides little else of value to our growing picture of early Montanism. Even if the accusation of Themiso bribing his way out of prison is true, it would hardly set Montanism apart from its orthodox contemporaries.<sup>54</sup> The attack on Alexander only reinforces the general observation that the debate between the New Prophecy and orthodoxy could take on an unnecessarily vicious and personal tone. Accusations of moral laxity and the

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<sup>50</sup> Tabbernee, "Montanist Regional Bishops, 250.

<sup>51</sup> Stewart-Sykes, "The Original Condemnation," 18-20. Stewart-Sykes further argues this shift was made necessary by the rural context from which Montanism emerged.

<sup>52</sup> Torjesen, "Reconstruction," 303-307.

<sup>53</sup> *Didache* 11.12. See also Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 192-193.

<sup>54</sup> Tabbernee, "Montanist Regional Bishops," 252.

abuse of power/wealth by Montanist leaders lack substantiation and cannot be credited as more than slander or hearsay. The account of the attempted exorcism of Maximilla places the incident in Pepuza but otherwise adds nothing to the Anonymous's account.

Nevertheless, Apollonius does provide some useful information. He offers the clearest indication yet that Pepuza and Tymion had a central place in the Montanist movement from its beginning. The information he gives about Maximilla and Prisca's marital history cannot be substantiated, but could certainly be true. Finally, he strongly implies that Montanism adopted the practice of financially supporting its preachers which both set the foundation for the movement's continued success and ran against more securely established models of the church. If we read between the lines of Apollonius's consistent returns to the indulgent lifestyles of Montanist leaders, it is reasonable to posit that his more substantive concern was the undermining of the gospel by paying those who preached it.

### **Serapion**

The final early source Eusebius cites against Montanism is Serapion, who is identified as the bishop of Antioch. Unfortunately, there is very little to learn from him. The entirety of the brief section Eusebius devotes to his work consists of appeals to other presumably well respected Christian leaders. Besides Serapion himself, Bishop Apolinarius of Hierapolis of Asia, a martyr by the name of Aurelius Cyrenaeus, and Aelius Publius Julius of Debelum in Thrace are shown to have opposed the New Prophecy. The only detail of any interest is the brief story of Sotas who desired to cast a demon out of Prisca and was undermined by her companions.<sup>55</sup> Of course, this story is quite similar to the accounts regarding confrontations with Maximilla provided by both the Anonymous and Apollonius. Trevett points out that, while we have records of both

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<sup>55</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.19.1-4.

leading Montanist women being targeted for confrontation by established, orthodox leaders, we do not have similar accounts regarding Montanus or any other male leader.<sup>56</sup> It would seem orthodox leaders saw Prisca and Maximilla to be either especially threatening or particularly vulnerable (perhaps both!). The inclusion of a leader from Thrace in the list opponents of the New Prophecy hints that the movement gained a foothold across the Bosphorus quite early.<sup>57</sup>

## Conclusions

Eusebius's treatment of the Anonymous's first book provides little in the way of new information about the New Prophecy. Most revealing is the author's need to investigate the movement. When this is coupled with Avircius Marcellus's identification of the movement with Miltiades instead of its more notorious founders, it suggests that, as the New Prophecy spread, it did not identify itself with its traditional founders. Although the description of Montanist prophecy as chaotic and unusual does little to provide a coherent picture of Montanist prophets in action, it does hint that their practices were offensive and strange in the eyes of their orthodox neighbors. The Anonymous's first book's claim that Prisca and Maximilla were Montanus's followers is suspect. The only other substantial contribution it makes is to suggest the New Prophecy did not leave the church of their own accord.

The portion of our mysterious author's second book preserved by Eusebius is dominated by slander. Indeed, this clear defamation and its preservation of terms like "prophet-slayers" serve to illustrate the amount of animosity shared by some within the New Prophecy and at least some of its early opponents. Nor was this conflict limited to mutual denunciation. The story of the attempted exorcism of Maximilla shows that it sometimes spilled over into actual

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<sup>56</sup> Trevett, "Gender, Authority," 18.

<sup>57</sup> Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 23-24.

confrontation. The reference to Maximilla's prediction of anarchy likely sheds light on her eschatology.

The preserved material from the Anonymous's third book is the most illuminating for our study. The reversal of position on martyrdom between books two and three suggests that while the New Prophecy doubtless produced martyrs, martyrdom was not one of the distinguishing marks of the movement uncovered by the Anonymous when he or she began to investigate the movement. The story about orthodox martyrs refusing to witness with Montanists in Apamea provides further evidence of animosity between the groups. While the reference to Miltiades does not provide much nuance to the argument over the proper manner of prophecy, it does introduce the conflict over ecstatic models of prophecy. Finally, the detail the Anonymous provides about Montanist women (almost certainly Prisca and Maximilla) claiming connection to the orthodox prophets Ammia and Quadratus from Philadelphia provides further evidence the New Prophecy can claim historical continuity with a well-established Christian tradition.

Apollonius's account of early Montanism may be the most entertaining preserved by Eusebius, but it is not the most helpful. Nevertheless, we have no compelling reason to doubt his claim that Montanus established the heart of his movement in Pepuza and Tymion. His account of the confrontation between Maximilla and Zoticus also places at least part of the prophetess's ministry in Pepuza. Apollonius's preoccupation with the paying of Montanist preachers strongly suggests that Montanism participated in the exploration of new models of ecclesiological organization quite possibly spurred by the ineffectiveness of dominant urban models in rural settings. Doubtless, this would have contributed to the conflict between orthodox leaders and the New Prophecy.

Finally, Serapion's reports that Prisca was also targeted by at least one orthodox leader for exorcism and hints that the New Prophecy gained an early foothold in Thrace.

Significantly, as the Anonymous builds a case against the New Prophecy, he or she appeals to the spiritual pride of its founders and to the work of Miltiades condemning the manner of Montanist prophecy. In contrast, Apollonius's condemnation of the lifestyle of Montanist leaders likely points to a concern about the practice of paying ministers. While we only have access to the portions of these works Eusebius chose to preserve, there is no evidence the Anonymous and Apollonius share one another's concerns. Instead, these two sources suggest distinct reasons for rejecting the movement specific to each author. Speaking of a unified orthodox opposition to early Phrygian Montanism seems to be an oversimplification. While the inference that Apollonius is concerned with the paying of ministers is ultimately no more than a well-founded hypothesis, Epiphanius's Anti-Phrygian source confirms and fills out one version of the critique of the manner of Montanist prophecy hinted at by the Anonymous's reference to Miltiades. Let us now turn our attention to Epiphanius's source.

## EPIPHANIUS

Just as the information preserved in Eusebius's *Church History* concerning Montanism cannot always be taken at face value because of his oppositional stance toward the movement, so Epiphanius's late fourth-century heresiological work must be treated with suspicion. Similarly, just as Eusebius never names the Anonymous, Epiphanius does not name his source. However, where Eusebius tends to clearly delineate where he cites his sources and quote large blocks of text, Epiphanius is less clear about when he is citing his earlier source and has no qualms about adding his own thoughts to the work he preserves.<sup>1</sup> Here we will follow both Nasrallah and Tabbernee in referring to Epiphanius's source as the Anti-Phrygian to avoid confusion with Eusebius's Anonymous.<sup>2</sup>

### Content

Epiphanius's use of the Anti-Phrygian attempts to prove that the early Montanists separated themselves from the true church by misunderstanding spiritual gifts and following demonic teachings. These claims are made despite Epiphanius's concession that the New Prophecy accepted both the Old and New Testaments, held to the hope of the resurrection of the dead, and taught an orthodox understanding of the Trinity. Still, the Anti-Phrygian is very clear that the Montanists left the church "by their own contentiousness, devoting themselves to spirits that are both erring and fictions."<sup>3</sup> The Anti-Phrygian launches his or her first attack against the three prophets who set the foundation for Montanism. Our mysterious writer hints at the argument that their ministries took place after the proper time for prophecy had passed. However, the main thrust of the Anti-Phrygian's opening salvo surrounds Maximilla's

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<sup>1</sup> Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 52.

<sup>2</sup> Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy*, 4 and Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 50.

<sup>3</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.1.3-7. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 29 from 48.1.7.

unfulfilled prophecy that her ministry would be followed by the end, which is clearly understood as a reference to the eschaton. Warming to the battle, our polemicist argues that, if there continued to be prophets after Maximilla's prediction, then Maximilla was a false prophet. Similarly, if the prophecy ceased after Maximilla, then those who prophesied after her prediction were not inspired by the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

The bulk of the argument Epiphanius has received from the Anti-Phrygian concerns the argument that the Montanist model of prophecy is incompatible with Christian tradition. Thus, while Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel were in full control of their reason and will as they prophesied, Montanus claims to be passive and compares himself to an instrument played by the Almighty God. Where apologists for the New Prophecy appear to have appealed to the passive "ecstasy" of the sleeping Adam in Genesis 2, the Anti-Phrygian argues that the ecstasy of sleep, which dulled Adam's pain during the creation of Eve from his rib, is fundamentally different from the abdication of both reason and the will intentionally practiced by Montanist prophets. The Anti-Phrygian concludes her or his assault on the ecstatic manner of Montanist prophecy by appealing to Peter, David, and Abraham as precedents who prophesied "with sound understanding and a sober power of reasoning, and not in madness."<sup>5</sup>

The Anti-Phrygian then hints that the New Prophecy made the argument that the gift of prophecy had changed in nature following the work of Christ and/or Pentecost. Again piling the weight of tradition against her or his opponents, our polemicist calls upon those who spoke to the disciples at the ascension, Peter, Agabus, the prophets of Antioch who predicted famine, and Paul. The *coup de grace* is an appeal to Paul's words in I Timothy 4 that opponents of the truth will arise who will forbid marriage and teach abstention from food in agreement with demons.

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<sup>4</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.2

<sup>5</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.3-48.7. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 39 from 48.7.10.

The Anti-Phrygian does not hesitate to suggest that Paul is referring to the New Prophecy, pointing out that they condemn remarriage. Curiously, she or he seems to leave the reader to make the connection between the severity of Montanist fasts and the detail about the devaluing of food in I Timothy.<sup>6</sup>

Finally ready to press his or her advantage home, the Anti-Phrygian turns toward Montanus himself and attempts to prove that his prophecies are irreconcilable with Scripture. First, he attacks Montanus's teaching that "the just . . . will shine a hundred time brighter than the sun," pointing out that Christ himself only promises that the just will shine like the sun (Matthew 13:43). The Anti-Phrygian also accuses Montanus of falsehood based on his introductory formulae which are (deliberately?) misinterpreted as glorifying Montanus himself. It is pointed out that the mission of the Paraclete in Scripture is to glorify Christ (John 16:14) who Montanus does not mention in the introductory oracles the Anti-Phrygian preserves.<sup>7</sup>

The Anti-Phrygian then turns from Montanus to Maximilla. After describing Maximilla's name as "wild and barbarous," his or her attention shifts to the introductory formula "hear not me, but hear Christ."<sup>8</sup> This saying is attacked on three fronts. First, Peter, Paul, and even Jesus himself are shown to have passed on what they had received, not claimed to directly channel the voice of God. Again, the Anti-Phrygian places the New Prophecy and Christian tradition at odds. Second, the call to hear Christ instead of Maximilla is compared to evil spirits in Scripture who are compelled to recognize and bear witness to the authority of Christ (Acts 16:17, Matthew 8:29). Finally, the oracle is shown to be logically inconsistent. The Anti-

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<sup>6</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.8-9.

<sup>7</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.10-11. Montanus only mentions "The Lord God, the Almighty dwelling in man" (48.11.1) and "the Lord God the Father" (48.11.9) in the formulae preserved in Epiphanius's work. However, several oracles listed as questionable in Heine from *Dialogue of a Montanist and an Orthodox Christian* and Didymus the Blind's *On the Trinity* preserve similar introductory formula in explicitly Trinitarian form. See Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 2-3, 6-9.

<sup>8</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.12.3-4. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 47.



Phrygian argues that, if it was spoken in the voice of the prophetess, it could not be prophecy in the manner Maximilla would have claimed. Similarly, if it was spoken in the voice of God, it would not distinguish between itself and Christ nor exhort that it not be heard. Having sufficiently pummeled this oracle, the Anti-Phrygian moves on to Maximilla's use of the language of compulsion. In contrast to Christian tradition, Maximilla denies her own free will. Moreover, she claims to compel both "those who were willing and those who were not" despite her teaching's lack of notoriety the world over.<sup>9</sup>

While our combative author spends a significant amount of time attempting to discredit both Montanus and Maximilla, he or she does not mention Prisca at all. However, Epiphanius does briefly reference Prisca in his treatment of the Quintillians, who he seems to consider a subset of the New Prophecy. In Epiphanius's view, this group was set apart from the Montanists by the oracle he attributes to either Prisca or Quintilla, by a variety of emphases surrounding rituals and leadership roles centered specifically on women, by emotionally charged approaches to worship, and by celebrating what appears to be the Eucharist with bread and cheese.<sup>10</sup> Epiphanius presents Prisca as a leading figure in both the Quintillian and Montanist movements.<sup>11</sup>

## Analysis

While it can be difficult to distinguish between the voice of the Anti-Phrygian and that of Epiphanius, the *Panarion* provides us with many of the oracles generally accepted as the genuine words of the movement's founders. Since most of the oracles Epiphanius preserves are not oracles at all, but simply introductory formulae, we are left to surmise that, at least in the Anti-

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<sup>9</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.12-13. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 51 from 48.13.7.

<sup>10</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 49.1-2.

<sup>11</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 49.2. "And they have Quintilla as their leader, together with Priscilla who was also with the Cataphrygians." As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 133.

Phrygian's view, the conflict between Montanism and its opponents had to do with authority, not doctrine.<sup>12</sup> This treatise also confirms some of the characteristics of the New Prophecy that we have postulated based on other sources. However, apart from preserving several Montanist sayings, the Anti-Phrygian's most substantial contribution is to our understanding of the early debate between the New Prophecy and at least some of its opponents.

As an Anti-Montanist writer, Epiphanius has every reason to preserve details that would weaken the position of the New Prophecy in relation to Christian tradition. Despite this, he reports they accept both the entirety of Scripture as well as the resurrection. Moreover, he vouches for their orthodoxy with regard to the Trinity.<sup>13</sup> While this should not be interpreted to mean the earliest Montanists anticipated later development in Trinitarian thought, it definitively removes questions surrounding the authority of Scripture, the resurrection, and Trinitarian heresy from the pool of possible reasons Montanism and orthodoxy split. The Anti-Phrygian also collaborates that Montanists did not allow for second marriages. Moreover, the lengths he or she considers it necessary to go to to make the strong orthodox commitment to sexual morals exceedingly clear suggests the New Prophecy had a habit of trying to colonize the moral high ground on this subject.<sup>14</sup>

This treatise clearly attempts to prove that the New Prophets had abandoned the true church and become something other. Ironically, the Anti-Phrygian's argument instead repeatedly supports the observation that early Montanists consistently engaged with earlier Christian tradition. The repeated appeals to Scriptural precedent clearly confirms that the early Montanists did not simply place that authority of their prophets against that of Scripture.

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<sup>12</sup> Jensen, *God's Self-Confident Daughters*, 159.

<sup>13</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.1.3-4.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 48.9.

Instead, they saw their prophecy in continuity with Christian tradition. It represented both the Spirit's work guarding Scripture, tradition, and the rule of faith from being warped in the hands of mere individuals and the voice of the Spirit calling the church into a purer, more ethical life.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the conflict between the New Prophecy and the tradition represented by the Anti-Phrygian surrounding Scripture ran deep. Where the Anti-Phrygian brought the gift of reason to bear on Scripture, Montanism claimed to interpret both Scripture and receive the self-understanding of their community through direct encounter with Living God of Scripture.

The bulk of the Scriptural critique the Anti-Phrygian brings against Montanism revolves around this distinction. The Anti-Phrygian marshals the full strength of Christian tradition to show that prophecy in Scripture is not the passive revelation of the will of God to one's community, but the act of expressing such a revelation through one's own understanding. Moreover, Montanus is shown to contradict the simple, literal meaning of Scripture in his oracles.<sup>16</sup> The Anti-Phrygian's strategy is simple. He or she piles examples of prophets functioning with their understanding one upon another until the New Prophecy is drowned out in the harmonious voice of the established tradition and the New Prophecy is placed outside of the church because they are not faithful to Scripture despite holding both the Old and New Testament in high esteem.<sup>17</sup> Thus, when David says "every man is a liar" he is speaking from his own understanding.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, he does so despite being a prophet speaking *ecstatically*.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Ezekiel actually refuses God's command to bake with human dung and Peter

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<sup>15</sup> Groh, "Utterance and Exegesis," 88-90.

<sup>16</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.10-11.

<sup>17</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.11.4. See also Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy*, 178-179.

<sup>18</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.7.6-7. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 39. This quotation is taken from the Septuagint's translation of Psalm 115:2.

<sup>19</sup> Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy*, 180-181. Nasrallah points out that the text of Psalm 115:2 in the Septuagint identifies David as speaking "in (his) ecstasy."

questions God's command to eat unclean foods in his vision.<sup>20</sup> According to the Anti-Phrygian, Christian tradition and Montanist practice are simply not compatible.

Despite this critique, Ash makes the case that "ecstasy . . . was never seen as the heretical feature of Montanism." Instead, he suggests "the appearance of psychosis and irrationality" was the antecedent for the split, basing his case on the established place of ecstatic prophecy (understood as the prophet allowing the divine to speak through him or her) in the Christian tradition.<sup>21</sup> While Ash is undeniably correct to point to an orthodox tradition of ecstatic prophecy, I suspect he significantly overestimates the solidarity of early Montanism's opponents. In any case, the Anti-Phrygian clearly condemns Montanus for his passive role in the metaphor of being played like a lyre despite the place for such understandings within parts of the orthodox tradition.<sup>22</sup>

The Anti-Phrygian's subtle suggestion that the founders of the New Prophecy ministered "after the prophecies which were approved by the holy apostles and the holy Church" appears to echo Hippolytus's attack on Montanism as saying "more through [the teachings of their prophets] than from the Law and the Prophets and the Gospels."<sup>23</sup> Pelikan interprets Hippolytus as limiting the gift of prophecy to the period in which Scripture was written.<sup>24</sup> However, Ash rejoins that Hippolytus is only arguing that the canon is closed, not that the age of prophecy has passed.<sup>25</sup> Regardless of the intent of Hippolytus and the Anti-Phrygian, it seems clear that the

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<sup>20</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.3.7-8; 48.8.3. See Ezekiel 4:12 and Acts 10:14. See also Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy*, 190-191.

<sup>21</sup> Ash, "The Decline of Ecstatic Prophecy," 238-239.

<sup>22</sup> See Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.4.1-3. The most relevant example of this pattern of thought for our purposes here is Athenagoras's description of prophecy as the Spirit playing a flute (the prophet). See Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians*, 9. See also Murdoch and Kydd for further examples of passive understandings of prophecy in the Christian tradition. Murdoch, "A Study," 41-43. Kydd, *Charismatic Gifts*, 33.

<sup>23</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.2.2 and Hippolytus, *Refutation of all Heresies*, 8.19. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 29, 57.

<sup>24</sup> Pelikan, *The Emergence*, 106-107.

<sup>25</sup> Ash, "The Decline of Ecstatic Prophecy," 246.

suggestion that the proper time of prophecy had come to an end found its way into the debate between the New Prophecy and their orthodox opponents.<sup>26</sup>

The Anti-Phrygian's critique of the manner of Montanist prophecy is not limited to a Scriptural attack on its passive tendencies. He or she condemns the behavior of their prophets as well. It is reported that the Montanist prophet "undertakes things that are frightening, and often abuses himself and those near him in a frightening manner. For he is ignorant of what he utters and does, since such a man has fallen into an ecstasy of folly."<sup>27</sup> While this description cannot simply be accepted as accurate, it does resemble the Anonymous's description of Montanist prophecy as "strange," frenzied," "unsuitable," and "abnormal."<sup>28</sup> However, it seems the opponents of the New Prophecy would have made far more of any truly self-harming or abusive behavior. Instead, the Anonymous and the Anti-Phrygian treat this critique as an afterthought. Apollonius does not mention it at all in the portion of his work preserved by Eusebius. While we might speculate that the critique of the immoderate manner of Montanist prophecy is an echo of flamboyant tendencies in the movements' founders, the most that can be responsibly concluded is that at least one well known Montanist prophet's flair for the dramatic left the movement open to criticism by their opponents on the grounds of propriety.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Nasrallah, for one, interprets the Anti-Phrygian as placing a temporal limit on the authentically Christian prophetic gifting. See Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy*, 173-174.

<sup>27</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 18.5.8. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 37.

<sup>28</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.16.9. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 17.

<sup>29</sup> Trevett makes the point that any signs of religious frenzy would have marked the New Prophecy as an easy target for critics seeking to link them to paganism. Given the agenda of Eusebius, Epiphanius, and their earlier sources, it seems unlikely such a rich vein of criticism would have been left unmined! See Trevett, *Montanism*, 89. Even if the Phrygian founders of the New Prophecy all practiced prophecy in what could be interpreted as an unseemly way, such a critique certainly would not stick to the North African prophetess Tertullian introduces us to in *On the Soul* 9.4. Insofar as we understand Montanism in Phrygia and North Africa to be a unified movement, it cannot be accused of universally engaging in unsettling methods of prophecy.

When placed alongside the writings of the Anonymous, there is sufficient evidence to *postulate* that glossolalia may have contributed to the sense of spectacle that appears to have set orthodox nerves on edge. However, as was the case in chapter 3, there is simply not enough information to *prove* the presence of glossolalia in Montanist practice.

The Anti-Phrygian's omission of Prisca is puzzling. On one hand, it might be taken to suggest that Prisca rose to prominence after Montanus and Maximilla were already involved in their ministries. Dating the Anti-Phrygian's treatise to the Montanist period before Prisca rose to influence could account for the omission. However, if Nasrallah is correct to date the Anti-Phrygian's treatise to between 210 and 213 CE, this hypothesis becomes difficult to maintain in light of Prisca's oracle in Tertullian's *Exhortation to Chastity*.<sup>30</sup>

If we postulate that the Anti-Phrygian is specifically targeting the Pepuzan Montanist community, another possibility opens up. Prisca may not have ministered in Pepuza during this time. The Anonymous hints that both Maximilla and Prisca had roots in the Philadelphian tradition, and Serapion's report of the attempted exorcism of Prisca involves Sotas, a bishop from Anchialus which Tabbernee places on the Black Sea coast in present day Bulgaria.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps Prisca was ministering as an itinerant preacher whose travels and lack of strong ties to Pepuza had placed her beyond the notice of the Anti-Phrygian.<sup>32</sup> Of course, it also remains possible the Anti-Phrygian simply chose to ignore Prisca despite his or her familiarity with the prophetess.

## Conclusions

The Anti-Phrygian offers further support to the place of Scripture, the teaching against remarriage, and the doctrinal orthodoxy (specifically with regard to the Trinity and the resurrection) in the New Prophecy. She or he also hints at the Montanist view of their prophecy

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<sup>30</sup> Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy*, 51; Tertullian, *Exhortation to Chastity*, 10.5. Tabbernee dates *Exhortation to Chastity* to 209-210 CE. See Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 113.

<sup>31</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.17.4; 5.19.3; Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, 22.

<sup>32</sup> Such an itinerant ministry would have not have been unprecedented. See the *Didache*, 11.3-6. As Jensen points, out the *Didache* makes no reference to the prophet's sex or gender. See Jensen, *God's Self-Confident Daughters*, 128.

We must also note that other early sources omit Maximilla instead of Prisca. See Trevett, *Montanism*, 162. Trevett specifically mentions Firmilian and Basil the Great.

as an extension of previous revelations within the Christian tradition and confirms that the founders of Montanism saw themselves as the passive conduits of divine revelation. The anthropology and doctrine of revelation this view implies placed them at odds with some portions of what would become orthodoxy and the Anti-Phrygians exposition of the Christian tradition.

Philosophically, this debate seems to have centered on the human ability to perceive the divine. The New Prophecy believed that God alone was active in revelation. Their opponents (at least as represented by the Anti-Phrygian) believed the human mind and will also had a part to play. However, neither of these claims were meant to stand on their own. Both groups consistently appealed to Scripture and Christian tradition for support. The Anti-Phrygian's persistence in this argument despite the clear place for ecstatic prophecy in the Christian tradition as illustrated by Athenagoras's use of the metaphor of God playing a flute witnesses to the lack of uniformity in the emerging orthodox tradition.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, Apollonius's lack of concern for the manner of prophecy and preoccupation with the New Prophecy's paying of prophets and preachers suggests there was no one, consistent, simple reason orthodoxy rejected Montanism.

However, the distinct differences between the theologies that undergirded these appeals had profound implications for the life of the community. If, as the Anti-Phrygian seems to have believed, the faculty of reason brought to bear on Scripture/tradition played an important role in revelation, then the information received from past tradition becomes a central part of the present revelatory event. In contrast, if, as the Montanists implied, the connection between present

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<sup>33</sup> Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians*, 9.

revelation and past revelation is simply that the same God is speaking, the authority of the individual receiving revelation is implicitly heightened.<sup>34</sup>

The manifestation of Montanist prophecy is critiqued as bizarre and even dangerous. Clearly, the flamboyant practices of at least some of the leaders of the New Prophecy drew the ire of their orthodox neighbors. However, we cannot confidently describe the nature of these practices. Neither can we be certain just how pervasive they actually were.

Finally, the Anti-Phrygian's enthusiastic attacks on Montanus and Maximilla combined with his apparent ignorance of Prisca's ministry challenges the understanding that Montanism's founders formed a working team. When coupled with Prisca and Maximilla's claims upon the prophetic tradition in Philadelphia and Serapion's account of the confrontation between Prisca and a bishop from the west coast of the Black Sea, we are left to consider the possibility that Prisca's ministry may have been more itinerant than that of Montanus or Maximilla. Further support for postulating Prisca's relative independence can be taken from Epiphanius's identification of the prophetess with the Quintillian sub-sect of the movement.

The degree of early Montanist unity may be subject to debate, but it is clear that orthodox opponents like the Anti-Phrygian rejected the movement as a whole because of its passive understanding of the practice of prophecy.

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<sup>34</sup> In any case, this is the claim Montanus seems to make in his adaptation of Isaiah 63:9 in the oracle preserved in Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.11.9. On the relative authority of the individual and tradition in the debate surrounding Montanism see Stavros S. Fotiou, "Orthodoxia as Orthopraxis According to Saint Epiphanius of Salamis," *Phronema* 24, (2009): 57-58.



## SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSIONS

### Synthesis

We have completed our study of the New Prophecy through the lenses of the oracles of their founders, Tertullian's use of their thought, the treatises of the Anonymous, Apollonius, and Serapion preserved by Eusebius, and the Anti-Phrygian's polemic preserved by Epiphanius. Now it remains to synthesize the glimpses these sources have offered into one coherent portrait.

#### *Prophecies and Oracles*

The movement's self-understanding as the "New Prophecy" firmly places the theme of prophecy at the center of our study. However, this emphasis alone did not separate them from the Christian tradition. They could point to ample precedent in both what would become Scripture and the experiences of Christian communities in the first and second centuries.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the "New Prophecy" saw itself in continuity with the implied old prophecy, not in competition with it. It represented new growth emerging from an ancient root.

Tertullian's treatment of Prisca's oracle in *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* and the self-commendation formulae of both Montanus and Maximilla make it clear that these prophets understood themselves to be passively conveying the very words of God.<sup>2</sup> Their only responsibility was to purify themselves so that their lives might be found in harmony.<sup>3</sup> The direct, precognitive nature of this revelation gave them claim to an authority that could not be matched by many other Christian leaders. It also inspired conflict with those who, like Epiphanius's Anti-Phrygian and Miltiades, the Anti-Montanist writer referenced in the

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<sup>1</sup> Most notably the *Didache*. See *Didache* 11 and Jensen, *God's Self-Confident Daughters*, 128. *The Shepherd of Hermas* provides another significant antecedent.

<sup>2</sup> Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, 11.2; Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.11.1; 48.11.9; 48.12.4.

<sup>3</sup> See Prisca's oracle in Tertullian, *Exhortation to Chastity*, 10.5. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 5. Unfortunately, the preserved portion of the oracle does not offer any hint as to what Prisca taught prophets must be in harmony with.

Anonymous's third book, understood (redeemed) reason to be a gift that can lead to the knowledge of God.<sup>4</sup> For these opponents of the New Prophecy, the use of reason was necessary to an authentically Christian practice of prophecy.

Some of the opponents of early Montanism found their prophetic practices to be offensive. The Anonymous describes them as saying "strange things" and speaking "in a frenzied manner, unsuitably, and abnormally."<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the Anti-Phrygian tells us the Montanist prophet "undertakes things that are frightening, and often abuses himself and those near him in a frightening manner."<sup>6</sup> It is difficult to know what to make of these accusations. In my view, they are not prevalent enough in the writings of the New Prophecy's opponents to accept that Montanist prophecy was universally wild, frenzied, or abusive of the prophet or the community. Nevertheless, these descriptions seem unlikely to be simple fabrications, particularly in light of their presence in both the Anonymous and the Anti-Phrygian. Thus, they are likely referencing either a specific, well-known incident or the ministry of a particular prophet (perhaps one of the three?) who had a tendency to such excesses. In any case, Tertullian's description of the prophetess in his North African church can hardly be faulted along these lines.<sup>7</sup> In practice, Montanist prophecy must have taken on a variety of forms.

### *Scripture*

Despite the emphasis on prophecy, early Montanists also had a high regard for Christian tradition. Their own oracles suggest a movement steeped in the vocabulary of what would become the Christian Scriptures. Nowhere is this more evident than in Montanus's adaptation of

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<sup>4</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.17.1; Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.3.4-48.13.8.

<sup>5</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.16.7; 5.16.9. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 15-17.

<sup>6</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 18.5.8. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 37.

<sup>7</sup> Tertullian, *On the Soul*, 9.4.

the Septuagint's translation of Isaiah 63:9.<sup>8</sup> The vision reported by Quintilla (or Prisca) suggests Jewish and Christian apocalyptic sources and the Jewish wisdom tradition were also influential in Montanist circles.<sup>9</sup> Finally, the Anti-Phrygian's extended treatment of Genesis 2 strongly suggests the story of Eve's creation was central to the New Prophecy's understanding of the *charism* of prophecy.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the high regard for Scripture shared by Montanists and their opponents, their disparate approaches caused conflict. For the Montanist, neither Scripture nor past prophecy was the final authority. In a very real sense, they sought to submit themselves to the Living God who had inspired both but reserved the right to change the community's praxis and self-understanding.<sup>11</sup> Practically speaking, it seems this would have placed the prophet in a position to take advantage of the community.<sup>12</sup> However, Tertullian suggests this danger was mitigated by asking prophets to submit their revelations to the wisdom of community leaders.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to the understanding of the New Prophecy, some of the movement's opponents saw tradition as the only sure way to accurately protect the teachings of Christ and the self-revelation of God from distortion at human hands. Where the Montanists turned to experience, they turned to the revelation of Scripture/tradition and the faculty of reason. Some even seem to have believed the gift of prophecy was a thing of the past.<sup>14</sup> In their view, the passivity of Montanist prophets was not only dangerous, it was inconsistent with how God went

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<sup>8</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.13.7. See also Groh, "Utterance and Exegesis," 90-91.

<sup>9</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 49.1.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 48.4.4-48.6.6.

<sup>11</sup> This point is made fairly explicitly in Tertullian, *On the Veiling of Virgins*, 1. It is also implicit in the Montanist willingness to ban remarriage and institute new fasts.

<sup>12</sup> Fotiou, "Orthodoxia as Orthopraxia," 57-58.

<sup>13</sup> Tertullian, *On the Soul*, 9.4.

<sup>14</sup> Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy of Folly*, 173-175.

about the business of self-revelation. Thus, the God they perceived could not be the Christian God.

### *Eschatology*

Our most detailed window into the Montanist understanding of eschatology comes from the vision Quintilla (or Prisca), which indicates the New Jerusalem would descend on Pepuza.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, it is unlikely this vision accurately preserves the eschatology of the movement's founders. The central place Pepuza receives in the vision fits nicely with Apollonius's comment about Montanus gathering his followers in Pepuza and Tymion.<sup>16</sup> However, Tabbernee and Hill make a compelling case that Montanus was seeking to set up a redeemed earthly community, not wait for the descent of a heavenly city.<sup>17</sup> Maximilla's prediction "after me there will no longer be a prophet, but the end" only further confuses the issue.<sup>18</sup> Tertullian's clear expectation of a descending New Jerusalem in *Against Marcion* and "the restoration of Judea" completes our survey of Montanist eschatologies.<sup>19</sup> Clearly, even if the earliest Montanists expected the descent of Jerusalem in Phrygia, this belief did not make its way into the understanding of their North African supporter.

Quintilla's oracle demonstrates that at least one version of Montanist eschatology developed under the influence of apocalyptic literature and the central place of Pepuza in the Montanist community into an expectation of the coming of the New Jerusalem in Phrygia. Unfortunately, we do not know which parts of this vision are consistent with earlier Montanist

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<sup>15</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 49.1.

<sup>16</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.18.2.

<sup>17</sup> William Tabbernee, "Revelation 21," 57; Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, 144-151.

<sup>18</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.2.4. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 3.24. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 69.

teaching and which are Quintilla's innovation.<sup>20</sup> Given the resources we have at hand, the attempt to discover one, coherent, early Montanist eschatology is a fool's errand. Still, based on their self-understanding as the "New Prophecy," Maximilla's oracle about the end, and Montanus's call to gather in Pepuza, we can confidently state that early Montanists saw themselves as invited by the Spirit of God to take a central role at a pivotal historical moment.

### *Ethics*

Historically, much has been made of the Montanist zeal for martyrdom. However, the Anonymous suggests in his or her second book that Montanists could not claim any martyrs.<sup>21</sup> Even though this claim is contradicted in the Anonymous's third book, it strongly suggests that martyrdom was not one of the characteristics that set the New Prophecy apart from the rest of the church. Instead, Tertullian's emphasis on martyrdom is to be understood as his alone, despite his appeals to the authority of prophecy.<sup>22</sup>

Tertullian's work in *On Monogamy* and the Anti-Phrygian's defense of a less strict understanding of remarriage indicate that the denial of second marriages was an important Montanist teaching.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Tertullian's identification of Prisca, Maximilla, and Montanus with the initiation of new fasts witnesses strongly to its place in Montanism. The concept of a "dry fast" in which the believer abstained from fruit, wine-flavored drinks, and bathing seems to have been particularly controversial.<sup>24</sup> However, despite Tertullian's appeals to the authority of the Paraclete/Spirit to support the veiling of virgins and the refusal of post-baptismal forgiveness,

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<sup>20</sup> Nor can we ignore the possibility that this oracle actually originated with Prisca. It is also possible that some of the major themes like the descent of Jerusalem at Pepuza or the figure of Sophia Christ originated in Prisca's ministry while the vision itself was Quintilla's.

<sup>21</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.16.12.

<sup>22</sup> See especially *On Flight*, 9.4.

<sup>23</sup> Tertullian, *On Monogamy*, 3.11. Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.9.

<sup>24</sup> See Tertullian, *On Fasting*, 1.

there is no outside evidence of these practices in early Phrygian Montanism.<sup>25</sup> Instead, Apollonius suggests that the leaders of Montanism were morally inadequate. Of course, his comments can hardly be accepted at face value.

### *Montanist Organization*

While most studies have followed the Anonymous's suggestion that Montanus founded the movement and recruited Maximilla and Prisca as his followers, this understanding has been called into question by Jensen.<sup>26</sup> She points out that Tertullian lists Montanus, Prisca, and Maximilla as a trio and explicitly references Prisca's oracles twice without ever doing the same with Montanus's sayings.<sup>27</sup> We might add that the Anonymous benefits from prioritizing Montanus above Prisca and Maximilla by wedding the movement to Montanus's purportedly pagan past instead of to the women's connection to the Philadelphian prophetic tradition.<sup>28</sup> Still, Montanus was an extremely influential figure in the development of the movement. While he might not be responsible for the eschatological vision surrounding Pepuza that eventually took hold amongst the disciples of Quintilla (and perhaps the New Prophecy as a whole), he did instigate Pepuza and Tymion's place of privilege in the Montanist mind by associating these towns with Jerusalem.<sup>29</sup>

The Anonymous's immediate point of reference for the New Prophecy before studying the movement is the otherwise unknown Miltiades, not any of the movement's founders.<sup>30</sup> It seems the reputation of Prisca, Maximilla, and Montanus did not spread as quickly as their followers. The Montanist theology of their prophets as passive mouthpieces of the Spirit and

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<sup>25</sup> See Tertullian, *On the Veiling of Virgins*, 1 and Tertullian, *On Modesty*, 21.7.

<sup>26</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.16.9. See Jensen, *God's Self-Confident Daughters*, 135-167.

<sup>27</sup> Jensen, *God's Self-Confident Daughters*, 153.

<sup>28</sup> Compare Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.16.7 and 5.17.4.

<sup>29</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.18.2.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 5.16.3.

Montanus's teaching that each member of the redeemed community would have their own glory suggests that the Anonymous's need to seek out the history of the movement's founder(s) may have been the result of a relatively egalitarian ethic with the New Prophecy.<sup>31</sup> At the very least, Prisca and Maximilla's positions of leadership illustrate that Montanism did not feel bound to the traditional hierarchical relationship between the genders. However, if Tertullian's identification of the New Prophecy with spiritual Christians is any indication, any egalitarian spirit that may have existed in early Montanism was not extended beyond the boundaries of their movement.<sup>32</sup>

The New Prophecy's adoption of the practice of paying their preachers was likely an attempt to adapt its organizational model to a rural setting.<sup>33</sup> While some of their opponents (the Anonymous, the Anti-Phrygian) reacted to the theology supporting their model of revelation, paying preachers seems to be the issue that caused Apollonius to react so harshly to the movement. His consistent critique of the wealth of Montanist leaders suggests he felt the Montanist movement had abandoned the safeguards the church had put in place against the abuse of authority.<sup>34</sup> Instead of being motivated only by the gospel, Montanist leaders (much like many pastors today) also had to consider their source of income as they went about their ministry.

### *Conflict with Orthodox Opposition*

The New Prophecy was forced to defend itself against orthodox opponents on at least two further fronts. First they were subject to slander and *ad hominem* attacks. This theme is most noticeable in Apollonius's critique, which accuses Montanist leaders of accumulating great

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<sup>31</sup> On the glory of each member of the Montanist community see Montanus's oracle in Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 48.10.3.

<sup>32</sup> Tertullian, *On Fasting*, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.18.2-4. Stewart-Sykes, "The Original Condemnation," 18-20.

<sup>34</sup> See especially *Didache*, 11.12.

wealth, indulging their vanity, gambling, and lending money at interest. Apollonius goes on to spill a good deal of ink describing the moral failings of the otherwise unknown Alexander.<sup>35</sup> The Anonymous also attacks Montanus for his ambition and asserts the leaders of the New Prophecy were inspired by demons instead of the Holy Spirit.<sup>36</sup> In his or her second book, the Anonymous relates stories about Montanus and Maximilla hanging themselves in the manner of Judas and another Montanist leader dying from his injuries after ascending to heaven and being cast down.<sup>37</sup> Finally, the Anti-Phrygian accuses Montanist prophets of abusing both themselves and those around them when they prophesy and later suggests Maximilla's name is "wild and barbarous," unfit for a Christian prophetess.<sup>38</sup> We must hasten to add that the New Prophets almost certainly launched a collection of similar attacks of their own. Naturally, few of these have been preserved, but the Anonymous does tell us Montanists labeled their opponents "prophet slayers."<sup>39</sup>

Maximilla and Prisca were also attacked more directly. Both the Anonymous and Apollonius preserve accounts of the attempt of orthodox bishops to confront the demon assumed to be operating through Maximilla.<sup>40</sup> Serapion preserves a similar account in which Prisca is targeted.<sup>41</sup> Since we have no record of Montanus or any male Montanist leaders being subjected to attempted exorcisms, it seems reasonable to assume Maximilla and Prisca were targeted because they were women. However, in each case their communities are reported to have successfully foiled the attacks.

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<sup>35</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.18.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 5.16.6-10.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 5.16.13-15.

<sup>38</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion* 48.5.8; 48.12.3. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 47.

<sup>39</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.16.12. As translated in Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, 17.

<sup>40</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.16.16-18; 5.18.13.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 5.19.3.



Of course, the two previous methods orthodox writers and leaders used to attack the New Prophecy do little to illuminate the roots of the conflict between the two movements. Ultimately Montanism and its opponents were contesting their competing claims as heirs to the Christian tradition and keepers of the true gospel. Montanism's opponents refused to allow the New Prophecy a claim to this tradition for at least two distinct reasons. Some, like Apollonius, felt the practice of paying prophets and preachers would taint the well of the gospel with the poison of self-interest. Others, like the Anti-Phrygian, found that the passive form of prophecy Montanists claimed (and the direct authority that form of prophecy implied) undermined their worldview.<sup>42</sup> They believed God could be known through reason and the Christian tradition, especially the Scriptures. This belief limited revelation to the well-educated elite and served as the foundation for the authority of theologically trained bishops.<sup>43</sup> It would be overly simplistic to assume these two concerns always complemented one another. Instead, they represented two voices, sometimes converging, sometimes disagreeing, but always participating in the ongoing development of Christianity. Of course, for a time the New Prophecy represented a third such voice.

## Conclusions

We began this study by referencing the traditional "Montanist matrix" of "prophecy, women's authority, eschatological expectation, rigorism, and exaltation of martyrdom."<sup>44</sup> In light of this study, this matrix must be revised. Prophecy and women's authority remain important parts of the Montanist identity. However, apart from an emphasis on the passivity of

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<sup>42</sup> The Miltiades referenced by the Anonymous likely follows this line of reasoning as well. See Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.17.1.

<sup>43</sup> Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy*, 136. Robeck, "Montanism and Present Day 'Prophets,'" 418. See also Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 198.

<sup>44</sup> Rex Butler, *New Prophecy and New Visions*, 2.

the individual and the activity of God, Montanist prophecy does not seem to have consistently conformed to any one model.

While early Montanists operated in the conviction that God had invited their community into a central role in the work of redemption at a significant moment of history, we cannot identify the shape of their eschatology. Maximilla does seem to have expected the imminent return of Christ after her death. However, Montanus's work establishing an organizational center and a model for sustaining Montanist preaching provided the foundation that allowed the movement to survive for more than four hundred years suggests a more tempered vision.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, it seems that, like expressions of Montanist prophecy, Montanist eschatologies cannot be reduced to any one model.

Some of the ethical rigorism that has traditionally been attributed to Montanism can be more accurately credited to Tertullian. Most significantly, the idea that the New Prophecy refused forgiveness for post-baptismal sin has no clear connection to the movement's founders. Instead, the oracle Tertullian uses to support this teaching almost certainly emerges from the North African prophetic tradition.<sup>46</sup> That said, the denial of second marriages and initiation of new fasts, particularly the dry fast, were authentic early Montanist teachings. Finally, the exaltation of martyrdom can be entirely attributed to Tertullian and has no connection to early Phrygian Montanism.

Based on this analysis, the visions some scholars present of the Montanist movement must be dismissed out of hand. For example, both Aune and Klawiter place the experience of

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<sup>45</sup> Williams, "The Origins," 342.

<sup>46</sup> Tertullian, *On Modesty*, 21.7.

persecution and martyrdom at the center of the Montanist identity despite the lack of emphasis on martyrdom in the movement's original Phrygian context.<sup>47</sup>

Other interpretations cannot be dismissed entirely, but are of only limited value. Burgess's characterization of the New Prophecy as an ascetic sect gathered around leaders who claimed absolute authority is a good example.<sup>48</sup> The material we have examined here may allow for this interpretation, but the judgment he passes against the movement seems needlessly uncharitable and goes far beyond the available evidence. Similarly, Doherty makes the Phrygian context of early Montanism the movement's defining characteristic while both Frend and Stewart-Sykes point to its rural provenance.<sup>49</sup> While its context doubtless influenced the development of the movement (particularly with regard to the innovation of paying its ministers), our study has suggested the movement's defining characteristic was its appropriation of Christian tradition.

The value of Wright's characterization of the movement as expressive and ethically fanatical also has some resonance with our sources but ultimately misses the mark.<sup>50</sup> There is no evidence Montanism's emphasis on unique ethics extended beyond its teachings on marriage and fasting and focusing on the expressiveness described by the movement's opponents promotes a relatively minor critique to a defining characteristic. In the same way, interpretations that focus on modern concerns like Feminism and Pentecostalism demonstrate obvious consonance with some characteristics of the movement, but are ultimately of limited value.<sup>51</sup> Although Maximilla, Prisca, and even Quintilla enjoyed positions of authority within the movement, there

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<sup>47</sup> Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity*, 313; Klawiter, "The Role of Martyrdom," 253-254.

<sup>48</sup> Burgess, "Montanism," 904.

<sup>49</sup> Doherty, "The Montanist Milieu," 312; Frend, "Montanism: A Movement of Prophecy," 334; and Stewart-Sykes, "Original Condemnation," 2-3.

<sup>50</sup> Wright, "Why Were the Montanists Condemned?," 21.

<sup>51</sup> On parallels with feminism see Trevett, "Gender, Authority," 15-18. On parallels with Pentecostalism see Kim, "Is Montanism a Heretical Sect," 113-124; and Roebuck, "Montanism and Present Day 'Prophets,'" 427.

is no evidence Montanists themselves saw this as a central part of the New Prophecy's identity. Similarly, the attempt to draw parallels between Montanism and modern Pentecostalism pulls us into a debate surrounding glossolalia that is ultimately parenthetical to the Montanist self-understanding.

Butler's interpretation of the movement as a conservative movement preserving the primitive Christian impulse toward visible *charismata* as the larger church moved away from these commitments and toward more secular organizational models draws us closer to the self-understanding of Montanism itself. Unfortunately, Butler supplements this this laudable starting point with a fixation on the importance of persecution and martyrdom in producing the New Prophecy's eschatological expectation.<sup>52</sup> There is little evidence persecution played a central role in the thought of the early Montanists and our understanding of their eschatology is rudimentary at best. Ash and Murdoch's understanding of early Montanism as a prophetic movement in the process of being swept to the side by emerging ecclesial hierarchies preserves the best parts of Butler's interpretation without falling prey to its faults.<sup>53</sup> However, it still defines the New Prophecy in relationship to its opponents instead of seeking to understand the movement on its own terms. Moreover, it suggests solidarity amongst the opponents of Montanism where such unity may not have existed.

It will come as no surprise that the two most helpful characterizations of early Montanism come from the movement's two most prolific recent scholars: William Tabbernee and Christine Trevett. Tabbernee portrays Montanism as a movement united by both its leaders and its commitment to faithfully live in accordance to the ethical revelation of the Holy Spirit.<sup>54</sup> While

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<sup>52</sup> Rex Butler, *New Prophecy*, 21. In Butler's defense, it should be noted that he is far more concerned with North African Montanism than we are here.

<sup>53</sup> Ash, "The Decline," 234-236; Murdoch, "A Study of Early Montanism," 199.

<sup>54</sup> Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy*, xxxi.

we might call the importance of the movement's leaders as a unifying force in early Montanism into question (remember, the Anonymous originally associated the New Prophecy with a different figure altogether), the movement's willingness to organize itself around new ethical revelation lies near the heart of the Montanist identity. Trevett's identification of the movement as the heirs of a "rich heritage of prophecy and biblical exposition," strikes even nearer to the heart of the Montanist self-understanding.<sup>55</sup>

The New Prophets saw themselves as faithful followers of the Living God revealed in Christ and heirs to the Christian tradition as surely as their orthodox opponents saw themselves as the guardians of the gospel. While a nuanced account of their conflict(s) with what would become the dominant Christian tradition lies beyond the scope of the sources available to us, a close examination of the writings of their opponents preserved by Eusebius and Epiphanius reveal two major critiques. Apollonius attacks the Montanist practice of paying ministers while the Miltiades referenced by the Anonymous and Epiphanius take exception to the New Prophecy's passive understanding of prophets and claim to speak in the voice of the Living God.

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<sup>55</sup> Trevett, *Montanism*, 150.

## AFTERWORD

We cannot end our study without acknowledging its limits. First, we must reiterate that while some characteristics of Montanism identified here rest on solid foundations (i.e.: its connection to earlier Christian tradition, the identity of its leaders, the centrality of prophecy, etc. . .), others simply represent a reasonable and careful interpretation of limited data (i.e.: its relative egalitarianism, the multiplicity of its eschatologies, the precise nature of its conflict with different ideas that would come together to form orthodoxy). Second, while we have carefully studied the most important primary sources on the subject, we have neglected many potentially fruitful extensions of our study. Chief among these neglected sources are *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*, and the later *Dialogue of a Montanist and an Orthodox Christian*. A study of parallels between Montanist prophecy/visions and the *Shepherd of Hermas* would no doubt prove equally fruitful. Moreover, we have neglected Montanism in Rome and our brief stop in North Africa only attempted to use Tertullian to shed more light on Phrygian Montanism.

This study would have also benefited from deeper examinations of topics directly related to the subject at hand, including (but by no means limited to) the intersection of prophecy, visions, and dreams in second century Christianity in particular and the second century Roman Empire in general, and the relationship of these supernatural means of revelation to the authority of martyrs, the writings that would become Scripture, and the episcopal heirs to apostolic authority. The development of early Christian pneumatology, the emergence of the episcopacy, and the sociology of religious movements similar to Montanism also deserve far more attention than they have received here. Finally, we must note that our focus on the first generations of the Montanist movement has failed to begin to do justice to the movement's 400 year hidden history. The development and ultimate demise of Montanism remains a topic in need of careful study.

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