

# Was Tertullian a Misogynist? A re-examination of this charge based on a rhetorical analysis of Tertullian's work.

Submitted by Donna-Marie Cooper to the University of Exeter  
as a thesis for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Theology  
In September 2012

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

# **CONTENTS.**

TITLE PAGE.	PAGE 1.
ABSTRACT.	PAGE 2
CONTENTS.	PAGE 3.
INTRODUCTION.	PAGES 4 - 15

## **PART 1: THE “DEVIL’S GATEWAY” PASSAGE AND *DE CULTU FEMINARUM***

INTRODUCTION.	PAGES 16 - 21
CHAPTER 1: <i>De cultu feminarum</i> and Eve’s Role in the Fall.	PAGES 22 - 37
CHAPTER 2: <i>De cultu feminarum</i> : What is it Really About?	PAGES 38 - 67

## **PART 2: MARY**

INTRODUCTION.	PAGES 68 - 81
CHAPTER 3: Tertullian and Mary’s Virginitly.	PAGES 82 - 103
CHAPTER 4: Mary and the Son of David.	PAGES 104 - 123
CHAPTER 5: Mary and the Flesh of Christ.	PAGES 124 - 150

## **PART 3: WOMAN**

INTRODUCTION.	PAGES 151 - 160
CHAPTER 6: Tertullian and Women.	PAGES 161 - 205
CHAPTER 7: Women’s Role’s Within the Social Order.	PAGES 206 - 249
CONCLUSION.	PAGES 250 - 256
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	PAGES 257 - 268

## **ABSTRACT.**

Feminist scholars have long assumed that Tertullian, a second-century Church Father, was a misogynist. This assumption is based almost exclusively on the infamous “Devil’s gateway” passage in the opening chapter of *De cultu feminarum*. However, feminist scholars have read this passage in isolation without reference to its wider context in *De cultu feminarum* and without considering other passages from Tertullian’s treatises. Furthermore, they have failed to recognize the influence which ancient rhetoric had on Tertullian’s work. By reading the “Devil’s gateway” passage in a wider context, and by engaging in a detailed analysis of Tertullian’s use of rhetoric, it becomes evident that Tertullian’s comments in that passage are not based on misogynistic view of women. Rather, they serve a specific rhetorical purpose in one particular treatise. Furthermore, by looking beyond the “Devil’s gateway” passage to other passages in which Tertullian makes reference to women, it is clear that his comments in the “Devil’s gateway” passage are not representative of his view of women. An examination of themes such as Mary, the anthropology of woman and woman’s role in the social order reveals a more nuanced picture of Tertullian’s view of women, than the one offered by some feminist scholars.

By bringing together two areas - Tertullian’s use of rhetoric and feminist critique of Tertullian and of the Fathers in general - I will challenge the assumption that Tertullian was a misogynist and show that in some areas Tertullian can make a positive contribution to the feminist question.