

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN TERTULLIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT: SOURCES AND COORDINATES FOR A CONTEMPORARY RETHINKING

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The article intends to argue that the roots of religious freedom in the West can be found many centuries before the time of the Reformation, namely in the writings of Christian apologists who wrote in defense of the right to practice the Christian faith in the Roman Empire, in the political context of the time, which was otherwise tolerant of the religious pluralism present in its space. Moreover, we talk about Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, known as Tertullian (160-225): "the first theologian of the West" and "the first political theologian." In last, we will argue that religious freedom is a natural right according to the philosophical and political developments over the centuries.

*Keywords: Christianity, *humani iuris*, *naturalis potestatis*, religious freedom, Tertullian.*

INTRODUCTION

It is undeniable that today's social reality is a complex of identities that are interrelated at economic, cultural, religious, and political levels (Dura 2021, 79-96). On the one hand, social change has energized secularist tendencies to eliminate religion from the public sphere (especially in Europe), and on the other hand, political authorities have sought new ways of framing religious freedom as a fundamental human right, given the increasing awareness of diversity in global dynamics. For these reasons, we find it timely to explore the ancient sources of religious freedom, and with this in mind, the relevance of such an update seemed all the more interesting, given that one of the first voices to advocate for the free right to choose one's own religious version was the Tertullian. The Christian theologian, Christian Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, was a complex and intellectually creative thinker whose works encompass rhetorical strategies, literary form, and intellectual, theological, and philosophical debates. His apologetics provided the Roman magistrates with a rhetorical and sophisticated defense of Christians against charges of impiety and treason for their refusal to participate in Roman civil religion. Tertullian was the first

exponent to use the term "religious freedom" (*libertatem religionis*) in his apologetic argument, declaring it a "fundamental human right" (*humani iuris*) (Taliaferro 2019, 105).

In order to understand the substance of the Tertullian argument for religious freedom, it is necessary to contextualize it in the Romanesque space contemporary with him. We do not propose an exhaustive analysis of Roman religion in the early centuries but only to outline a framework relevant to the topic addressed here.

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF TERTULLIAN

It should be noted that the model of Roman religion did not aim at an expansionist dynamic but was quite absorbing. Many gods were imported from other cultures. However, 'embodied religion' was not reserved exclusively for temples but permeated all areas of society. However, politics was not identical with religion. A distinction must be made between *res sacrae* and *res publicae* (Mainusch 2022). Thus conceptualized and separated, religion could be used as a seemingly independent source of legitimacy for political action. It set the guidelines for freedom and control and explained the harsh reaction to every movement that seemed to create an alternative, a counter-public movement, through religion.

In the sphere of Roman polytheistic religion, the word *religio* requires that it be interpreted in the normative, public and political sense, i.e., as "correct practice." This aspect of conformity is extremely important for understanding the Roman attitude to Christianity. From Augustus onwards, the emperor became the highest of the priests, and by virtue of this title, he became the leader of the Roman civil religion. The purpose of this civil religion was to encourage loyalty to the Roman political order represented by Caesar. To the extent that imperial worship was tied to the emperor as a sovereign authority, abstention from participation in worship could call into question commitment to Roman sovereignty (Atkins 2020, 168-70).

Roman 'sovereignty' or 'supremacy' (*maiestas*) was a key political value that, by the time of Tertullian, had been enforced by a series of laws and decrees passed over two centuries. Originating in the Roman Republic as a means of protecting the "sovereignty" of the Roman people by prohibiting treason, the *lex maiestatis* was extended to criminalize any speech or action deemed hostile to the Roman emperor (Williamson 2016, 333). Consequently, the tolerant attitude reached its limit when religious rites threatened to disrupt the civil order or when they constituted hotbeds of opposition to Roman political authority and the cult of the emperor so that freedom of worship became a matter of imperial policy.

With the articulation of Christianity on the religious scene of the ancient Roman world, a new complex reality was born: the possibility to opt for a religion beyond one's ethnic and social identity as a Roman citizen, but this religious formulation did not structurally have an expression of conformity to the emperor's policy. Christianity involved a profound transformation in the religious identity of the individual and in the religious map of the ancient world. It was not an ethnic religion - although the ethnic argument was used from the early years of the Church, but in apologetic contexts, a religion with a universalist tendency. Becoming a Christian required an

intensive personal commitment beyond the membership of a nation or city, as well as total adherence to the Gospel and the renunciation of all previous religious activity, and, not least, the adoption of a new lifestyle.

THE SIGNIFICANCES OF *LIBERTAS RELIGIONIS* IN *APOLOGETICUS PRO CHRISTIANIS* AND *AD SCAPULAM*

From the above, we understand the reasons why Christianity, as a new religion entering the geographical sphere of Roman rule, was considered illicit and consequently censored. The non-conformity of Christians with Roman norms of religiosity led some Roman emperors to resort to brutal persecution to stop Christianity's spread.

In this context, Tertullian, in two of his famous works - *Apologeticus pro Christianis* (2018b) and *Ad Scapulam* (2018a) - summarises and argues for the right to religious freedom in a way that was entirely new in the Roman area. *Apologeticus pro Christianis* is a theologically, socially, philosophically, and politically argued exposition of the situation of the Christian community in Roman society. This situation was completely unfavorable to this religious community, despite the fact that the religious policy of Roman authority was a tolerant one. This treatise is an elaborate response to the accusation that Christians deserved punishment, not for their alleged wrongdoing but simply because they bore the name 'Christian.' Thus, it was not legal for Christians to live because they did not sacrifice to the gods of the Roman pantheon and because they did not fit into the Roman religious policy. Tertullian (2018b, 370) says:

Let one worship God, another Jupiter, one stretch out praying hands to the sky, another to the altar of the goddess Fides; let one count the praying clouds (if you can believe this), and another the ceiling planks, let one dedicate his own soul to his God, and another that of a goat. For take heed lest it be added to the charge of unbelief (*inreligiositatis*) to take away the freedom of religion and to deny the right of choice of divinity, that is, that I am not permitted to pray to whom I will, and am forced instead to worship whom I will not. No one would want to be worshipped by anyone in anger, not even a human being.

Only we are prevented from having a religion of our own. We offend the Romans and are not counted as Romans because we do not worship one of the Roman gods (Tertullian 2018b, 371).

We are worshipers of one God (...) You think that others are gods, whom we know to be devils. Yet it is a fundamental human right (*humani iuris*), a privilege of nature (*naturalis potestatis*), that every man should worship according to his own convictions: one man's religion neither harms nor helps another (Tertullian 2018a, 592).

Two important themes can be identified in Tertullian's thought. First, the Christian writer believes that being religious arises from inner conviction and therefore considers religion to consist of more than outward gestures and rituals. While the Romans regarded outward practice and conformity as the most important aspect of religion, Tertullian (2018b, 408, 446) argued that faith - what Christians held in their hearts - is what matters most. Moreover, because religious faith is inherently spiritual, it cannot be coerced. Second, Tertullian argued that religious freedom applies to the beliefs of communities, not just individuals. Tertullian's perspective offers theological arguments for religious freedom rooted in a biblical understanding of man as the image of God. Humans are endowed with freedom, and religious faith is an inner disposition of mind and heart and, therefore, cannot be coerced.

Robert Louis Wilken (2019, 11-12) points out that the Christian theologian's argument includes theological, social, and political concepts such as *libertas religionis*, *humani iuris*, *naturalis potestatis*, and *inreligiositatis*. First of all, the term *liberty* must be understood in its religious meaning, as Tertullian understood it. Using this word, the Christian apologist advances the reasoning that human beings are moral agents capable of acting on the basis of their beliefs. There is a realm of self-government in human intimacy without external boundaries, and its space must be respected. It is unfair to force free people to offer sacrifices against their will. The Christian theologian's argument focuses on the nature of religious faith, whereas for the Romans, the focus was on practice, not faith, the essence of religion. Thus, the act of faith was completely devalued at the expense of interest in what Christians did or did not do publicly. By this reasoning, the Christian community was in a condition of illegality.

On the other hand, the expression *libertas religionis* enters the vocabulary of the West with reference to the privileges of a community, not the beliefs of individuals. This is a point of utmost importance: it defends the rights of Christians to gather for worship, to organize, to elect leaders, to care for one another, and even to have their own burial places for their dead. In its earliest use, *libertas religionis* refers to the freedom of the community of Christians to have their own protected space and to follow their distinctive way of life (Wilken 2019, 13).

Tertullian's perspective on religious freedom includes what we would today call freedom from coercion in matters of conscience. This view, based on a theory of natural law, frames two essential elements: the call for tolerance and the defense of religious freedom in the sense that coerced worship is not worship (Taliaferro 2019, 116). Tertullian formulates a call for freedom of conscience, proto-modern in spirit, which promotes indifference to one's chosen deity to worship as long as one does so freely.

Jed W. Atkins (2020, 145) points out that Tertullian's argumentative discourse on religious freedom derives its theoretical significance from his creative reframing of the Roman idea of freedom as non-domination. Tertullian (2018b) argues that the treatment of Roman magistrates towards Christian citizens and loyal subjects amounts to tyrannical rule characterized by the absence of the traditional conditions for non-domination: the rule of law, government in the interests of the people, and the rights of citizens. In reconfiguring these criteria, he argues that citizens and loyal subjects should have the right to act publicly according to the convictions of their conscience, even if these actions conflict with the civil religion of Rome. Tertullian (2018b, 408,

446) shows that non-domination is a flexible idea that does not necessarily imply participatory "free status." Thus, the Christian theologian offers a particular theorization underlying religious freedom, which derives not from an exposition of natural or human rights but from a creative appropriation of the Roman idea of freedom as non-domination.

It should be noted that the Roman view of freedom as non-domination requires that one not be subject to the arbitrary will of another. Morten Ebbe Juul Nielsen (2016, 155-163) states that non-domination is the absence of the ability of other agents to arbitrarily intervene in one's life. One is free to the extent that others cannot dominate him and cannot subject him to their commands unjustifiably. Frank Lovett (2018, 110) notes that mastery or domination does not refer to any actual interference, but rather to the ability to interfere when that ability is not adequately controlled.

While proponents of "negative liberty" believe that all conditions for freedom are satisfied by the absence of (external) interference, proponents of non-domination argue that one is not free even under a liberal and just authority/power that does not actively interfere with one's actions. Since, at any time, this "master" could coerce his subjects to act at his whim, they remain in a state of dependency and are, therefore, not free. For Cicero, one of the theorists of this freedom, non-freedom is ensured by equality under the law, by the rights of citizens, and by some assurance that political authority is exercised in the interests of the people (Atkins 2018, 57). In practice, freedom as non-domination implies a republican form of government characterized by the rule of law in the interests of the people. Two assumptions have been made about the concept underlying this theory: (a) first, freedom conceived as non-domination downplays the importance of the distinction between rule and tyranny - good and bad forms of government; (b) second, republican theorists of freedom as a non-domination note that the duty of the state to serve the interests of the people is best fulfilled by popular, participatory government (Atkins 2020, 148).

In adapting the conceptual framework of the language of non-domination for his argument for religious liberty, Tertullian (2018b, 408, 446) rejects both assumptions about this interpretation of liberty. Unlike treatments of the loss of liberty within the Roman republican tradition, Tertullian does not attribute the problem to the monarchy itself: the rule of a monarch does not always have negative connotations. After all, as the *Apologeticum* frequently points out, the New Testament teaches that the king's authority is derived from God, the highest Lord - dominus. According to Atkins (2020, 149), for the Christian apologist

...the problem arises when a monarch misuses the political authority God grants him. Tertullian therefore argues that there is an important distinction between *dominatio civilis* (civil rule), under which the monarch or magistrates act on its behalf, rightly using this authority, and *dominatio tyrannica* (tyrannical rule), under which either the monarch or the magistrates misuse political authority. While *dominatio civilis* interpreted as civil domination was a contradiction according to traditional republican theory, Tertullian reinterprets the term as civil rule and suggests that it meets the primary general criterion for non-domination (including responsiveness to the people); conversely,

Tertullian's view of *dominatio tyrannica* bears all the hallmarks of tyrannical domination according to republican theory. If a monarch's *dominatio civilis* meets the requirements of non-dominance, then there is no contradiction between having freedom and living under a monarchy.

In his argument, Tertullian (2018b, 408, 446) adapts the traditional criteria for non-domination and extends them in new directions. First, he argues that respect for the rule of law means that legislation must not be arbitrary, but fair, known to all, and should seek the good of all citizens, including Christians; its effectiveness in meeting these criteria must be open to the scrutiny and judgment of citizens. Second, he suggests that governance in the interests of the people, like the rule of law itself, requires responsiveness to the common knowledge of what is good and right. Tertullian develops this insight and takes it in a new direction, focusing on the important role of conscience when citizens from diverse communities come to different judgments about what is just, good, and morally advantageous. Third, Tertullian extends the idea that citizens' rights limit domination and argues that citizens and loyal subjects should have the right to act publicly according to the convictions of their conscience. This right, Tertullian argues, includes the right to refrain from participating in imperial worship when conscience is violated. Tertullian argues that granting such rights of conscience to Christians will not threaten the sovereignty of the emperor. Karen Taliaferro (2019, 106) makes an important point:

Religious freedom is a fundamental challenge because of the conflicts, real or apparent, between human and divine law. Attempts to resolve these challenges through supposedly neutral secular frameworks, however well-intentioned, miss the point because, by starting from a purely human or immanent discursive framework, they implicitly ignore a whole part of the conflict, thus denying the validity of a real problem. In other words, attempting to resolve the divine-human conflict by human means alone is the essential problematic, assuming the secular framework that lies at the heart of the problem. In contrast, with Tertullian we have a paradigm developed from within the confines of his own religion, Christianity, including its laws and customs, but addressed to an audience he did not share. As such, his historical and philosophical testimony is better able to demonstrate the possibilities of religious freedom, because his appeal admits the validity of both human and divine law and wisdom operating simultaneously in the political and legal spheres. Basically, Tertullian holds together the sacred and the profane, faith and reason.

On the other hand, Tertullian's argument about religious freedom was based on a theory of natural law (Shah 2016). Tertullian called religious freedom a "human right" early centuries before religious freedom received widespread attention in political philosophy.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM - *HUMANI IURIS* (HUMAN RIGHT) AND *NATURALIS POTESSTATIS* (NATURAL POWER)

The apologist gives philosophical depth to his argument by using two phrases: *humani iuris* (human right) and *naturalis potestatis* (natural power). Commenting on Tertullian's statement - "religious freedom is a fundamental right, a privilege of nature," - Karen Taliaferro (2019, 105-106) argues that *humani iuris* indicates that the Christian theologian saw a basis for religious freedom that could not be defined strictly as divine law or human law, because it is inscribed in humanity, regardless of creed or political affiliation. Religious freedom should, therefore, not be limited by either political or religious/cult boundaries. *Naturalis potestatis* indicates that the power or capacity to worship has been legitimized by nature, which implies normativity. In other words, this capacity to worship was not simply descriptive but was sustained by nature as good. Tertullian structured the implementation of natural law reasoning, and the defense of religious freedom is based almost entirely on this reasoning.

These clarifications are supplemented by R. L. Wilken (2019, 14), who expands the meanings of *humani iuris* and *naturalis potestatis*. The Latin term *ius* can be rendered as "right" in Western translations, but in third-century Rome, "right" had the meaning of an individual's natural right protected by the state. Therefore, in Roman law, the term *ius* meant right order – like the authority of a father over his children, the authority of a householder over his slaves, or the authority over the management of property or inheritance. Rarely did it refer to the right of an association, for example, merchants, to meet. A public official in charge of enforcing the law had the "right" to appoint other officials and punish the bad ones. In Roman law, *ius* was not used to designate the right of a citizen against the state. *Naturalis potestas* (natural power), if translated literally, could lead to misunderstanding. Its main meaning is the ability to do something. It could also mean power over one's actions, i.e., freedom of choice. In Cicero's words, "freedom is the power to live as one wishes." When 'power' is associated with 'natural' and 'human right,' it is tempting to think that Tertullian is talking about 'natural right.' However, the concept of natural right appears in the late Middle Ages and during the Reformation, and it is unlikely that Tertullian would have given this meaning to the construct in question. By "natural," it meant that the power of choice is innate, an endowment given at birth. Although Tertullian had a sound knowledge of the law, he did not make a legal claim against the Roman authorities. His case is moral and theological. Early Christian thinkers defended freedom of choice as essential to the moral life. Without the ability to choose, a man cannot be responsible for his actions. In Greek, the term *freedom* of choice literally denotes "that which is within one's power," so when Tertullian says that one should be able to practice the religion of one's choice, he means the freedom to act on the basis of reasoned judgment.

Thus, the Christian apologist is "a defender of a universal human right, especially the right to choose one's religion, being the first ancient thinker to refer to *libertas religionis*, which is not specific to Christians alone, but to all people. The intention of the Latin Christian writer was to present the true nature of Christian practice on the basis of an apologetic argument against those who misinterpreted

certain cultic practices, thus making a series of the most aberrant accusations against Christians, on the basis of which they were radically censured and killed.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM - A NATURAL RIGHT

In the logic of the argument for religious freedom as a human right, one can invoke the scientific argument of the naturalness of religion. If religion is a feature of human nature and experience, then the naturalness of religion helps to ground and shape an apology for religious freedom as a natural right. In the volume coordinated by Timothy Samuel Shah and Jack Friedman - *Homo Religiosus? Exploring the Roots of Religion and Religious Freedom in Human Experience* (2018) - a series of analyses are undertaken to justify religion as a natural and structural human fact. Moreover, everything that falls within man's structural horizon falls within the register of his rights.

The idea of natural rights has been articulated since the 12th century among lawyers and, to a lesser extent, among philosophers and theologians (Tierney 1997). This idea has been used to replace the perfectionist idea of the State with what might be called the protectionist idea: the State must protect citizens against violations of their natural rights by their fellow citizens, and citizens must, in turn be protected against violations of their natural rights by the State. Citizens must have a civil right to freedom of religious exercise. The emergence of this belief was the result of the contingent conflict of three factors: (1) the traditional understanding of Church and State as two distinct institutions with different jurisdictions; (2) the break-up of the religious unity of Europe and the subsequent abandonment of the perfectionist conception of the State; (3) the establishment of the idea of natural rights to regard the State as an institution for their protection (Wolterstorff 2018, 198-200).

Christian Smith (2018, 44) raises a question that generates his extensive analysis of the religious fact itself: are human beings naturally religious? The answer to this question invariably depends on what we mean by 'natural.' If "natural" refers to an innate and irrepressible impulse that guarantees that all humans are bound to become religious in some obvious and conventional sense, then religion is not natural. Similarly, if by "natural" we mean that all human cultures have a functional need to make religion a "central defining feature of society," then neither is religion natural in this sense because societies vary in the way religion is configured in their way of life.

Invalidating these presuppositions, Christian Smith proposes that religion is natural in the sense that all people possess "a complex set of innate traits, capacities, powers, limitations, and tendencies which enable them to be religious (i.e., to think, perceive, feel, imagine, desire, and act religiously), and which, under the right conditions, tend to predispose and direct them toward religion" (Smith 2018, 45). These traits, capacities, powers, limitations, and tendencies are constitutive of the human condition, which is itself characterized by four components that collectively incline people towards religion: a) First, the human condition is one of epistemological uncertainty. We lack access to fundamental and indubitable truths because all knowledge is built on presuppositions that must take something as given. This makes

people believe with all conviction. b) Second, people gravitate towards religion because they possess the ability and desire to solve problems, especially those that cannot be answered in finite, immanent terms. c) Third, people want to answer questions, existential anxieties for which religion has historically been a primary source of answers. d) Fourth, people are drawn to religion by what Charles Taylor (1989) called the moral condition of inevitably operating with reference to normative commitments that are not relatively cultural or based on personal preferences (Smith 2018, 47-50).

To the extent that religion is natural and, therefore, fundamental to the human experience, governments that uphold a commitment to the values of freedom, equality, and human development must protect religious freedom. To restrict religious freedom would be to suppress the basic capacities that make us human. Moreover, because religion is a fundamental aspect of the human condition, attempts to suppress, control or eliminate it provoke coercive and violent responses from those affiliated with a religious community. Preserving religious freedom is a practical necessity as a prerequisite for peace and social justice (Smith 2018, 52-53).

Justin Barrett articulates and defends the thesis of the naturalness of religion through his research in cognitive science: "(...) because of the nature of the human mind, religious expression in beliefs and practices is almost inevitable in most people" (Barrett 2018, 67). Barrett draws on research in the cognitive sciences, which suggests that religious behavior is embedded in several basic features of human cognition: a) First, human minds are prone to detect intentional agents in their environment even when they are not visible. b) Second, once an agent is detected, human minds are inclined to draw inferences about the motivations and internal experiences of these agents. c) Third, human minds are conditioned to seek purpose and meaning in the natural world (Barrett 2018, 72-79).

When combined, these three modes of cognition generate religious reasoning about supernatural entities, such as gods and spirits, and about the natural world, to which human beings naturally ascribe order and teleological design. Religion is natural because it arises predictably from basic human cognitive systems. In other words, our natural cognitive systems, as they interact with our environment, predispose us to religious ideas and behaviors. Barrett makes a further distinction between the two types of naturalness. When behaviors require significant practice, cultivation, or expertise to reach the point of "automaticity and fluency," they are forms of practiced naturalness. However, when they occur as part of normal human development, requiring little or no practice, they represent mature naturalness. Religion thus arises from basic cognitive faculties, which include our hypersensitive tendency to perceive intentional agents, to reason about what other agents experience, and to seek purpose in the natural world. These faculties are embedded in our natural cognitive functioning. The implication is that, contrary to claims that religion constitutes pathogenic or defective behavior, human cognitive systems function properly when they generate religious beliefs and religious forms of engagement with the environment. Also, contrary to the claim that religion requires an elaborate cultural structure to sustain it, this suggests that religiosity is rooted in unmediated human experience (Barrett 2018, 68-69).

Despite this scientific evidence confirming the structural dimension of religion in the cognitive process and in human social and psychological experience, religious freedom today is under increasing pressure. According to the *Pew Research Center*, in 2013, approximately 5.5 billion people, or 77% of the world's population, lived in countries with a high overall level of restrictions on religion, increasing from 68% as of 2007 to 76% in 2012 (Wormald 2015).

Rex Ahdar and Ian Leigh (2013, 14-15) have put forward a number of explanations that try to find the reasons for this. Firstly, the increasing diversity of religions in modern liberal democracies compared to previous centuries. Religious pluralism, highlighted by the phenomenon of migration, and new digitized communication techniques, including the internet and social networks, is an undeniable reality. The dynamics of globalization are accelerating at an accelerating pace, bringing with them new trends in social and cultural life and behavior, as well as religious ones (Rosenfeld 2009). The 21st-century citizen has so many religious options. This may imply what Charles Taylor (2007, 808) calls the "fragilization" of human identity in the sense that religious identity is being drawn into new social realities. The plurality of religious versions leads to permutations in the structure of society, with a tension of presence and occupying a more visible position in society. Homogeneous, cohesive societies with an implicit and stable consensus on moral, social, and religious values are increasingly rare in the globalized West. Globalization can either magnify or transcend or undermine the diversity of cultures and identities of persons (Aguas 2015, 46).

Secondly, there is a rapid growth of Islam in the West, both demographically and in terms of social visibility and political presence in state institutions. To varying degrees, there are reactionary, even xenophobic, elements in all liberal democracies that perceive the presence of Muslims as an attack on identity culture. These expressions of cultural defense can take a radical form. Thus, two poles emerge that support fundamentalist perspectives, and their expression inevitably leads to a series of religious conflicts.

Thirdly, one can note the expansion of the state and its penetration into the most intimate areas of human interaction, with the risk that this monopoly may result in the promotion of strictly secular vectors, whereby religion is eliminated from the public space, and consequently the exercise of religious freedom is removed from the political agenda. In practice, the state is intervening in personal decisions, and the demarcation between the 'public' and 'private' spheres is becoming increasingly blurred. The social, economic, cultural, and political dimensions of human life overlap and could be merged into one. What we see is a blurring of the demarcation among these realms or dimensions of human life (Aguas 2015, 46).

Fourth, the nature of liberalism itself has changed. Early liberal political philosophy was not opposed to religion. On the contrary, classical liberalism emerged from a set of ideas rooted in Christian theology and congenial to religious institutions. Liberalism and religion could be understood as 'unconventional partners.' Liberal democracy, with its protection for religious freedom, was a support for religion; and religion, in turn, provided the moral and cultural foundations for a liberal society (McConnell 2000, 1243).

CONCLUSION

We can deduce from Tertullian's statements that, although we do not have a developed argumentation like the argumentation in contemporary thought, this does not invalidate the force of the principle to militate for the defense of religious freedom. The Christian theologian elaborates an empirical argument, which summarizes a human right so necessary and valued today. Moreover, religious freedom is an attribute of individuals, not an exclusive attribute of the *polis*. Tertullian firmly rooted his principle in both human and natural (or divine) law. The Christian theologian's argument can also be interpreted in the logic of philosophical and political developments that found religious freedom as a natural right, with concrete applications in the field of society built on political liberal principles.

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