

**THE DRESS**

**IN THE**

**EARLY**

**CHURCH**

The dress in early Church – Tertullian and Scribe of Christ

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## **PURPOSE OF THIS WORK**

This book, like the others I have published, is intended to lead men to become better, to love God above all, and to love others with themselves. My works are not intended for entertainment, but to provoke reflection on our existence. In God there is an answer to everything, but the walk to knowledge is gradual and we will not reach answers to everything because our mind has not enough free space to support. But in this book you will find some answers to some of the dilemmas of our existence.

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## INTRODUCTION

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This book is about the truth of Tertullian of Carthage, the great theologian of the early church, my part may also be to comment on this masterpiece left for posterity. This book is also part of the collection of patristic manuscripts or texts of church fathers, that is, the leaders of Christianity right after an apostolic age. It cannot be denied that the Early Church disapproves of the use of feminine makeup and embellishment that is only for seduction and receives an illusion of beauty. We must be humble and recognize that Tertullian is no theologian, is a voice of ancient Christianity, a voice of a still-living person, or a climate of expansion of Christianity by the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ. Tertullian doesn't care about a full church that can support him financially. His preaching is not interesting, but the visa makes it clear what God's will is for women. But there is no doubt that Tertullian would be today or the greatest enemy of feminists.

## **BOOK I**

Chapter 1. Introduction. Modesty in Apparel  
Becoming to Women, in Memory of the Introduction of Sin  
into the World Through a Woman

If there dwelt upon earth a faith as great as is the reward of faith which is expected in the heavens, no one of you at all, best beloved sisters, from the time that she had first known the Lord, and learned (the truth) concerning her own (that is, woman's) condition, would have desired too gladsome (not to say too ostentatious) a style of dress; so as not rather to go about in humble garb, and rather to affect meanness of appearance, walking about as Eve mourning and repentant, in order that by every garb of penitence she might the more fully expiate that which she derives from Eve, — the ignominy, I mean, of the first sin, and the odium (attaching to her as the cause) of human perdition. In pains and in anxieties do

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you bear (children), woman; and toward your husband (is) your inclination, and he lords it over you. And do you not know that you are (each) an Eve?



(2) The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the devil's gateway: you are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree: you are the first deserter of the divine law: you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert — that is, death — even the Son of God had to die. And do you think about adorning yourself over and above your tunics of skins?

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(3) Come, now; if from the beginning of the world the Milesians sheared sheep, and the Serians spun trees, and the Tyrians dyed, and the Phrygians embroidered with the needle, and the Babylonians with the loom, and pearls gleamed, and onyx-stones flashed; if gold itself also had already issued, with the cupidity (which accompanies it), from the ground; if the mirror, too, already had licence to lie so largely, Eve, expelled from paradise, (Eve) already dead, would also have coveted these things, I imagine! No more, then, ought she now to crave, or be acquainted with (if she desires to live again), what, when she was living, she had neither had nor known. Accordingly these things

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are all the baggage of woman in her condemned and dead state, instituted as if to swell the pomp of her funeral.



Chapter 2. The Origin of Female Ornamentation, Traced Back to the Angels Who Had Fallen.

(1) For they, withal, who instituted them are assigned, under condemnation, to the penalty of death — those angels, to wit, who rushed from heaven on the daughters of men; so that this ignominy also attaches to woman. For when to an age much more ignorant (than ours) they had disclosed certain well-concealed material substances, and several not well-revealed scientific arts — if it is true that they had laid bare the operations of



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metallurgy, and had divulged the natural properties of herbs, and had promulgated the powers of enchantments, and had traced out every curious art, even to the interpretation of the stars — they conferred properly and as it were peculiarly upon women that instrumental mean of womanly ostentation, the radiances of jewels wherewith necklaces are variegated, and the circlets of gold wherewith the arms are compressed, and the medicaments of orchil with which wools are colored, and that black powder itself wherewith the eyelids and eyelashes are made prominent.

(2) What is the quality of these things may be declared meantime, even at this point, from the quality and condition of their teachers: in that sinners could never have either shown or supplied anything conducive to integrity, unlawful lovers anything conducive to chastity, renegade spirits anything conducive to the fear of God. If (these things) are to be called teachings, ill masters must of necessity have taught ill; if as wages of lust, there is nothing base of which the wages are honourable. But why

was it of so much importance to show these things as well as to confer them?

(3) Was it that women, without material causes of splendour, and without ingenious contrivances of grace, could not please men, who, while still unadorned, and uncouth and — so to say — crude and rude, had moved (the mind of) angels? Or was it that the lovers would appear sordid and — through gratuitous use — contumelious, if they had conferred no (compensating) gift on the women who had been enticed into connubial connection with them? But these questions admit of no calculation. Women who possessed angels (as husbands) could desire nothing more; they had, forsooth, made a grand match!

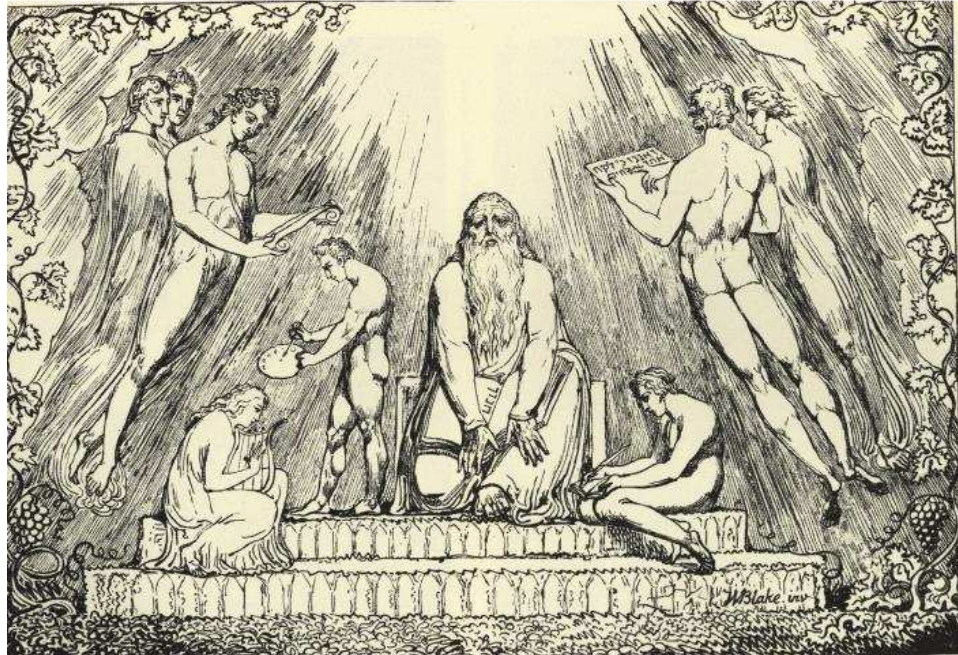
(4) Assuredly they who, of course, did sometimes think whence they had fallen, and, after the heated impulses of their lusts, looked up toward heaven, thus requited that very excellence of women, natural beauty, as (having proved) a cause of evil, in order that their good fortune might profit them nothing; but that, being turned from simplicity and sincerity, they, together

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with (the angels) themselves, might become offensive to God. Sure they were that all ostentation, and ambition, and love of pleasing by carnal means, was displeasing to God. And these are the angels whom we are destined to judge: these are the angels whom in baptism we renounce: these, of course, are the reasons why they have deserved to be judged by man.

(5) What business, then, have their things with their judges? What commerce have they who are to condemn with them who are to be condemned? The same, I take it, as Christ has with Belial. With what consistency do we mount that (future) judgment-seat to pronounce sentence against those whose gifts we (now) seek after? For you too, (women as you are,) have the self-same angelic nature promised as your reward, the self-same sex as men: the self-same advancement to the dignity of judging, does (the Lord) promise you. Unless, then, we begin even here to pre-judge, by pre-condemning their things, which we are hereafter to condemn in themselves, they will rather judge and condemn us.

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### Chapter 3. Concerning the Genuineness of The Prophecy of Enoch.

I am aware that the Scripture of Enoch, which has assigned this order (of action) to angels, is not received by some, because it is not admitted into the Jewish canon either. I suppose they did not think that, having been published before the deluge, it could have safely survived that world-wide calamity, the abolisher of all things. If that is the reason (for rejecting it), let them recall to their memory that Noah, the survivor of the deluge, was the

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great-grandson of Enoch himself; and he, of course, had heard and remembered, from domestic renown and hereditary tradition, concerning his own great-grandfather's grace in the sight of God, and concerning all his preachings; since Enoch had given no other charge to Methuselah than that he should hand on the knowledge of them to his posterity. Noah therefore, no doubt, might have succeeded in the trusteeship of (his) preaching; or, had the case been otherwise, he would not have been silent alike concerning the disposition (of things) made by God, his Preserver, and concerning the particular glory of his own house.

If (Noah) had not had this (conservative power) by so short a route, there would (still) be this (consideration) to warrant our assertion of (the genuineness of) this Scripture: he could equally have renewed it, under the Spirit's inspiration, after it had been destroyed by the violence of the deluge, as, after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian storming of it, every document of the Jewish literature is generally agreed to have been restored through Ezra.

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But since Enoch in the same Scripture has preached likewise concerning the Lord, nothing at all must be rejected by us which pertains to us; and we read that every Scripture suitable for edification is divinely inspired. By the Jews it may now seem to have been rejected for that (very) reason, just like all the other (portions) nearly which tell of Christ. Nor, of course, is this fact wonderful, that they did not receive some Scriptures which spoke of Him whom even in person, speaking in their presence, they were not to receive. To these considerations is added the fact that Enoch possesses a testimony in the Apostle Jude.

## **Chapter 4. Waiving the Question of the Authors, Tertullian Proposes to Consider the Things on Their Own Merits**

Grant now that no mark of pre-condemnation has been branded on womanly pomp by the (fact of the) fate of its authors; let nothing be imputed to those angels besides their repudiation of heaven and (their) carnal marriage: let us examine the qualities of the things themselves, in order that we may detect the purposes also for which they are eagerly desired.

Female habit carries with it a twofold idea — dress and ornament. By dress we mean what they call womanly gracing; by ornament, what it is suitable should be called womanly disgracing. The former is accounted (to consist) in gold, and silver, and gems, and garments; the latter in care of the hair, and of the skin, and of those parts of the body which attract the eye. Against the one we lay the charge of ambition, against the other of prostitution; so that even from this early stage (of our discussion) you may look forward and see what, out of (all) these, is suitable,

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handmaid of God, to your discipline, inasmuch as you are assessed on different principles (from other women) — those, namely, of humility and chastity.

(Tertullian even accepts the use of jewelry, but not makeup, as far as he can tell he would be against what changes the natural like nail painting, hair dyeing, maybe hair straightening, lipstick and various makeups.)

## **Chapter 5. Gold and Silver Not Superior in Origin or in Utility to Other Metals**

Gold and silver, the principal material causes of worldly splendour, must necessarily be identical (in nature) with that out of which they have their being: (they must be) earth, that is; (which earth itself is) plainly more glorious (than they), inasmuch as it is only after it has been tearfully wrought by penal labour in the deadly laboratories of accursed mines, and there left its name of earth in the fire behind it, that, as a fugitive from the mine, it passes from torments to ornaments, from



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punishments to embellishments, from ignominies to honours.



(2) But iron, and brass, and other the vilest material substances, enjoy a parity of condition (with silver and gold), both as to earthly origin and metallurgic operation; in order that, in the estimation of nature, the substance of gold and of silver may be judged not a whit more noble (than theirs). But if it is from the quality of utility that gold and silver derive their glory, why, iron and brass excel them; whose usefulness is so disposed (by the Creator), that they not only discharge functions of

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their own more numerous and more necessary to human affairs, but do also none the less serve the turn of gold and silver, by dint of their own powers, in the service of juster causes. For not only are rings made of iron, but the memory of antiquity still preserves (the fame of) certain vessels for eating and drinking made out of brass.

(Tertullian goes on to criticize human admiration for gold and silver, for according to him iron is more important to humanity than gold. A logical perfection of the wise)

(3) Let the insane plenteousness of gold and silver look to it, if it serves to make utensils even for foul purposes. At all events, neither is the field tilled by means of gold, nor the ship fastened together by the strength of silver. No mattock plunges a golden edge into the ground; no nail drives a silver point into planks. I leave unnoticed the fact that the needs of our whole life are dependent upon iron and brass; whereas those rich materials themselves, requiring both to be dug up out of mines, and needing a forging process in every use (to which they are

put), are helpless without the laborious vigour of iron and brass.

(4) Already, therefore, we must judge whence it is that so high dignity accrues to gold and silver, since they get precedence over material substances which are not only cousin-german to them in point of origin, but more powerful in point of usefulness.

(Tertullian's purpose is to make us value the simple things in life, not the sophisticated and glamorous ones.)

## **Chapter 6. Of Precious Stones and Pearls**

(1) But, in the next place, what am I to interpret those jewels to be which vie with gold in haughtiness, except little pebbles and stones and paltry particles of the self-same earth; but yet not necessary either for laying down foundations, or rearing party-walls, or supporting pediments, or giving density to roofs? The only edifice which they know how to rear is this silly pride of women: because they require slow rubbing that they may shine,

and artful underlaying that they may show to advantage, and careful piercing that they may hang; and (because they) render to gold a mutual assistance in meretricious allurements.

(2) But whatever it is that ambition fishes up from the British or the Indian sea, it is a kind of conch not more pleasing in savour than — I do not say the oyster and the sea-snail, but — even the giant muscle. For let me add that I know conchs (which are) sweet fruits of the sea. But if that (foreign) conch suffers from some internal pustule, that ought to be regarded rather as its defect than as its glory; and although it be called pearl, still something else must be understood than some hard, round excrescence of the fish. Some say, too, that gems are culled from the foreheads of dragons, just as in the brains of fishes there is a certain stony substance. This also was wanting to the Christian woman, that she may add a grace to herself from the serpent! Is it thus that she will set her heel on the devil's head, while she heaps ornaments (taken) from his head on her own neck, or on her very head?