

“TALES” OF *DANIEL* IN THE TYPOLOGY OF THE CHURCH

5. FROM THE “FURNACE” TO THE PRESENT OF COMMUNITIES

The analysis of *Dn* “tales” circulation reveals the subsistence of a conspicuous tradition which assumes the types and the events derived from the biblical text and directly connects them with the present life of Christian communities, through a relation of typology that does not explicitly involve the figure of Christ, but immediately establishes a link between the figures of First Testament and the believers exposed to persecution. Such approach can be considered as an expression and a manifestation of that “typology of the church” efficaciously individuated and described by J. DANIELOU¹ as a characteristic phenomenon of the so-called “Latin Christianity”.

Evidences of this interpretative trajectory can be derived from both literary production, where the biblical exegesis becomes an instrument to reflect and materially intervene in the concrete life of the church, and from iconographic documentation, where such perspective seems to be adopted to built and define the traits of the “Christian identity”.

Concerning the literary outcomes, the privileged *Sitz im Leben* of such typology appears to be that one of African Christianities, where the types derived from “tales” are frequently connected with the condition of the “threatened church”.

The continuity between *Dn* protagonists and the life of communities emerges with striking evidence from Cyprian’s production, mainly in elaborations touching the practical problems linked with the running and the organization of the church in the critical frame of persecutions. His exegesis and interpretation of martyrdom, constantly focused on the definition of the role and the function of the martyr and prone to active modulations, can be better clarified through the comparison with the voice of another African author, Tertullian, in whose work an apologetic objective systematically mixes with an articulated, theological reflection involving the prophetic components of the martyrial experience.

¹ Such approach differs from the “Paulinian exegesis”, which tends to primary associate the figures of the First Testament to the same Christ (see M. SIMONETTI, *Lettera e/o allegoria*, Roma 1985 [Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum 23], in part. p. 23), and represents, according to the mentioned reconstruction of J. DANIELOU 1978, a specificity of “Latin christianity”, which introduces the time of church in the parable of salvation history. Especially in the chapter dedicated to the figures of the church, the author underlines the diffusion of an interpretative line that establishes a direct link between Scriptures and community, next to the typologies associated to Christ’s *Pascha*. The definition of this category seems to remain in a certain measure problematic, since – in many cases – it becomes difficult to determine whether the typological relation between biblical event and historical communities involves the presence of Christ in an implicit way, or actually does not presuppose such mediation. For this reason in this context the definition of “typology of the church” will not be assumed in the stricter sense, but rather in a broad perspective, with the principal objective to stress the existence of a peculiar tradition in “tales” reception which mainly focuses on the connection between them and Christian life.

Tertullian's interpretation of "tales", as it will be underlined, seems as much to be grounded on the application of a typological exegesis that directly includes the coeval church, mainly tending to delimitate the perimeter of prophecy in early Christian context. Detached from pastoral worries and rather interested in a theological and speculative perspective, this author seems to express a "martyrial radicalism" that contrasts with Cyprian's moderated flexibility.

Considering figurative documentation, the relation between *Dn* and the present of the communities emerges from the same elaboration process of single types and themes, with respect to both the selection of specific materials from the biblical "book" and the further definition of the visual characteristics of each scene.

5.1. "TALES" BETWEEN MARTYRS AND CONFESSORS: DANIEL "TYPES" AND EARLY CHURCH IN CYPRIAN

The study of the exegesis and biblical interpretation in Cyprian, lived "two centuries after Christ and about half a century before Constantine"², cannot leave aside the principal, historical events that characterized his tumultuous life, at least during the years – less than ten – in which he was bishop of Carthage. In such a relatively short period, he actually saw "first, the fierce and protracted persecution of Decius (250-251); then, the treat of renewed persecution under Gallus (252) which however, did not materialize in Carthage", then again the outbreak of a serious plague during that same year, and finally the persecution of Valerian in 257-258, which "forced him to spend his last year in exile from Carthage, but did not prevent his returning to achieve his martyrdom there"³.

In quality of bishop, the author had to directly face the critical consequences of such turbulent circumstances, among which it is possible to mention, for instance, "the prolonged dispute over the recognition of any baptism conferred outside the Church"⁴ around 255 and 256, which brought him into conflict with Stephen, the bishop of Rome, or the problem of the reintegration of those who had lapsed during persecutions.

Cyprian's production, which is the principal source allowing a reconstruction of his life and death, offers at the same time an "unparalleled sight into the Christian life and thought of the mid third century"⁵, since the fundamental purpose of its composition has to be researched in the

² M. BÉVENOT, *Cyprian. De Lapsis and De Ecclesiae Catholicae Unitate*, Oxford 1971 (Oxford Early Christian Texts), p. vii. About the life of the author and his episcopate see IBID., p. vii. For a generic overview concerning the principal problems and issues which Cyprian had to face see J.P. BURNS, *Cyprian the Bishop*, London 2002. See also S. CAVALLOTTO, *Il magistero episcopale di Cipriano di Cartagine: aspetti metodologici*, Piacenza 1990.

³ M. BÉVENOT 1971, pp. vii.

⁴ M. BÉVENOT 1971, pp. vii-viii.

⁵ M. BÉVENOT 1971, pp. vii-viii. As even the scholar notices, other information about Cyprian can be derived from the "Life" written by Pontius, one of his deacons, and the official *Acta proconsularia*. For an

necessity to communicate with the church in order to lead it. In this sense, it will not seem strange to find in this literary context the most interesting examples of the typological connection between *Dn* “tales” and the historical church, and not even to mainly spot them in those works whose precise function is the active intervention in the present life: on one side, the treatise of *De Lapsis*, which deals with one of the most critical problems emerged during the episcopate; on the other, the *Epistulae*, overall written to supervise his people, orient their behaviour and support them in difficult circumstances.

In the following sections the analysis will try to shed light on the specific function of “tales” in the documents which played an active role in the concrete running of paleochristian life and which anyway adumbrate – though in a secondary and indirect perspective – the traits of Cyprian’s theology.

5.1.1. What Daniel could not do: the interpretation of “tales” in *De Lapsis*

In the wide panorama of Cyprian’s works, interesting elements can be first of all derived from the treatise of *De Lapsis*, ascribable to 251⁶ and reflecting “the effects of Decian persecution”, during which the phenomenon of apostasy⁷ spread so strongly to induce a decisive crisis in the running of the community⁸. Before the same persecution concluded, the bishop had to deal with two critical

overall view about the author’s *Sitz im Leben* it seems appropriate to cite once again the dated but efficacious works by W.H.C. FREND, *The Donatist Church, a Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa*, Oxford 1952 and W.H.C. FREND 1965.

⁶ About the chronology of the text see M. BÉVENOT 1971, p. viii. As M. VERONESE, in A. CERRETINI ET AL., SCAR 6/1, p. 285, notices, the same Cyprian in *Ep* 54 to Roman confessors affirms to have sent a copy of *De Lapsis* together with *De Catholicae Ecclesiae Unitate*, and adds: “poiché nella lettera si parla di una lettura pubblica dei due scritti ciprianei, gli studiosi hanno pensato che essi fossero stati presentati dal vescovo al concilio radunato a Cartagine nella primavera del 251, e di seguito copiati e diffusi, affinché tutti i vescovi potessero essere a conoscenza delle decisioni assunte dai vescovi africani in seguito alla grave crisi sorta nella comunità cristiana a causa della persecuzione di Decio” (this opinion is accepted also by A. CARPIN, *La penitenza tra rigore e lassismo. Cipriano di Cartagine e la riconciliazione dei lapsi*, “Bibliotheca Sacra Doctrina” 53/3 [2008], p. 109). Other scholars as P. SINISCALCO (ed.), SC 500, pp. 22-25, propose to contextualize the reading of the work in a reunion of believers “happened a little after, always in 251, after the violent death of Decius”.

⁷ About the figure of the “lapsed” see M. BÉVENOT 1971, p. viii, who describes them as “those wanting to regain their position among the faithful and be readmitted to the eucharist”, who had to “do public penance, expressing their repentance in their general conduct and, besides their personal prayers to God for mercy, by humbling themselves publicly in the assemblies of the faithful (*exomologesis*). Such penance might last for years, but always with the expectations of reconciliation to be granted in a public ceremony when the bishop, assisted by his presbyters, laid hands upon them as a sign of readmission to the eucharist among the faithful.” About “la riconciliazione dei lapsi” see A. CARPIN 2008, pp. 43-45 (about Rome dispositions) and pp. 45-47 (about Cyprian’s dispositions).

⁸ As underlined in the short introduction of M. VERONESE, in A. CERRETINI ET AL., SCAR 6/1, p. 286, between the end of the 249 and the beginning of 250, the emperor Decius promulgated an edict which forced the inhabitants of the empire to take part to pagan ceremonies. Such edict immediately revealed to be an effective persecution against Christians, and “moltissimi furono coloro che non trovarono la forza

situations, reciprocally connected: first of all, the possible reintegration in the community of those who had “lapsed” and clamoured to be received back⁹; secondly, the increasing power of the so-called *confessores*, those who had proclaimed their faith and survived persecution, to whom the same apostates started to address in order to obtain “dei biglietti per la riammissione nella comunità”¹⁰.

In order to better understand the context of *De Lapsis* elaboration, it is necessary to underline that the attitude of Cyprian, who was far from Carthage but still communicated with his community through epistles, is defined by critics as “cautious”, since “da un lato egli riconosce i meriti di martiri e confessori, ma deve salvaguardare l’autorità della chiesa fondata sul vescovo, rivendicando a lui solo l’amministrazione della penitenza; dall’altro non prende una posizione a proposito degli apostati, dichiarando di voler...rimandare ogni decisione fino al suo ritorno a Cartagine”¹¹.

The writing of the treatise can be ascribed to the very moment of the bishop’s return to the city, and corresponds with the intention to expose his position¹², also in order to face the schism arisen by Novatian, who had decided to grant the apostates the unconditioned readmission in the

necessaria per confessare la fede cristiana”. About the Decian persecution see A. CARPIN 2008, in part. pp. 37-43, “La persecuzione di Decio e la chiesa di Cartagine”; CH. SAUMAGNE, *Saint Cyprien évêque de Carthage “pape” d’Afrique (248-258): contribution à l’étude des persécutions de Dèce et de Valérien*, Paris 1975 (Études d’antiquités africaines); ID., *La persécution de Dèce en Afrique d’après la correspondance de S. Cyprien*, “Byzantion” 32 (1962), pp. 1-29 and A. BRENT, *Cyprian and Roman Carthage*, Cambridge-New York 2010. A description of Decian persecution is also presented by G.W. CLARKE, *The Letters of St. Cyprian of Carthage*, I, New York 1984, pp. 21-39. See also J.P. BURNS 2002, pp. 12-24: “Christians of Carthage under persecution”.

⁹ M. BÉVENOT 1971, p. ix.

¹⁰ M. VERONESE, in A. CERRETINI ET AL., SCAR 6/1, p. 286. A. CARPIN (2008), p. 47: “alcuni martiri e confessori, forti dei meriti acquisiti per aver sofferto patimenti o torture a motivo della fede, rilasciavano ad alcuni lapsi dei certificati di comunione con la Chiesa (*libellum pacis*) ossia chiedevano per iscritto al vescovo la riammissione dei lapsi nella comunione ecclesiale...si riconosceva, dunque, la forza della loro intercessione presso Dio per ottenere il perdono di quanti avevano peccato...L’assenza di Cipriano da Cartagine, rispetto alla presenza eroica dei martiri, indusse alcuni a rivolgersi più alle figure carismatiche che all’autorità episcopale”.

¹¹ M. VERONESE, in A. CERRETINI ET AL., SCAR 6/1, p. 286. A. CARPIN 2008, p. 47: “Cipriano...non contestò il ruolo dei martiri e dei confessori, a cui riconobbe la possibilità di intercedere...ma condannò l’operato di quei presbiteri che agirono di propria iniziativa...Egli non era contrario alla riconciliazione dei lapsi, ma alla fretta eccessiva nel riammetterli alla comunione ecclesiale”. In this context it is not possible to linger on the author’s conception of ministry and church, but it seems certainly useful to underline that he moves from a strong conception of ecclesiastic hierarchy, which he constantly defends. As E. CATTANEO (cur.), *I ministeri della chiesa antica. Testi patristici dei primi tre secoli*, Milano 1997 (Lecture cristiane del primo millennio 25) notices, “dagli scritti di Cipriano la chiesa appare anzitutto come una *fraternitas*...È però una comunità strutturata. Da una parte vi è la *plebs*...dall’altra vi è il *clerus*, cioè i ministri della chiesa”. For bibliographical coordinates about the argument see pp. 503-504. Among the titles indicated there, it seems interesting to recall in particular U. WICKERT, *Sacramentum unitatis. Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der Kirche bei Cyprian*, Berlin-New York 1971.

¹² The public reading of *De Lapsis* in the context of the African council of 251 is only a possible theory.

ecclesia. Cyprian assumed a sort of intermediate option “tra rigorismo e lassismo, e rivendicò al vescovo la piena autorità in materia”¹³.

The two references to *Dn* included in the treatise are derived from different sections of “tales”: one is extracted from the episode of the prophet in the lions’ den, the other from the story of the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace.

a) *Can a martyr grant forgiveness? Daniel “tales” in the light of Ezekiel*

The first citation is set in the context of an exposition concerning the eminent role of God in granting forgiveness: the author reports here different biblical allusions in order to demonstrate that “chi concede alla leggere la remissione ai colpevoli non solo causa loro un grande danno, ma provoca anche l’ira di Dio”¹⁴.

De Lapsis 19. For even Moses prayed for the sins of the people and did not secured pardon for the sinners he was pleading for. “I beseech you my Lord”, he said, “this people have committed a great crime. And now, if you want to forgive them their crime, forgive them; but if not, strike me out of the book you have written”. And the Lord said to Moses: “If a man has sinned against me, I will strike him out of my book”¹⁵. He, who was a friend of God, he, who had often spoken with the Lord face to face¹⁶, yet could not obtain what he asked for, and his intercession did not placate God’s offended anger. God praises and celebrates Jeremiah, saying: “Before I formed you in the uterus I knew you, and before you came out of the womb I sanctified you and I appointed you as a prophet among the nations”¹⁷; and (*scil.* God said) to him, when he repeatedly besought and prayed for the sins of the people: “Do not pray for

¹³ M. VERONESE, in A. CERRETINI ET AL., SCAR 6/1, p. 286. About Novatian position see also M. BÉVENOT 1971, p. ix-x. The scholar alludes to the distinction between “those who had sacrificed (*sacrificati*)” and others, “hardly less guilty, who had bribed the officials to give them the certificate of sacrifice in spite of their abstention (*libellatici*)”. According to the scholar, the position of Cyprian and the African council was “that each case should be examined for itself and that at least the *libellatici* could be dispensed from further penance and admitted again to communion”. About the lapsed see in part. P. GRATTAROLA, *Il problema dei lapsi fra Roma e Cartagine*, “Rivista di Storia della Chiesa in Italia” 38 (1984), pp. 1-26; C. MINELLI, *La questione dei lapsi: il caso delle insignes personae*, in M. SORDI (cur.), *Responsabilità, perdono e vendetta nel mondo antico*, Milano 1998 (Scienze storiche 65. Contributi dell’Istituto di Storia Antica 24), pp. 239-247. About Cyprian’s works see in particular W.S. SWANN, *The Relationship between Penance, Reconciliation with the Church, and Admission to the Eucharist in the Letters and De Lapsis of Cyprian of Carthage*, Washington 1981 (Diss. Catholic University of America).

¹⁴ M. VERONESE, in A. CERRETINI ET AL., SCAR 6/1, p. 287; see IBIDEM, pp. 287-288 also for a presentation of the sections and the arguments of the treatise; see also A. CARPIN 2008, pp. 109-130.

¹⁵ Cf. *Ex* 32:31-33.

¹⁶ Cf. *Ex* 33:11; *Deut* 5:4; 34:10.

¹⁷ Cf. *Jer* 1:5.

this people, and do not ask for them in prayer and petition, because I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their affliction”¹⁸. Again, was ever righteousness greater than Noah who was the only righteous man found on earth, when the world was full of sins? Was ever glory greater than Daniel, had anyone such robust constancy of faith in enduring martyrdoms, was ever anyone more favoured by God, since every time he fought he won, and when he won he survived? Was there ever alacrity in service greater than Job, greater fortitude in temptations, greater patience in sufferance, greater resignation in fear, greater truth in faith? And God said he would not have grant (their prayer), not even if they were to ask. When the prophet Ezekiel was praying for his sinful people, (*scil.* God) said: “Whatever land shall sin against me so as to commit sin, I will stretch my hand upon it, and I will destroy its support of bread and I will send famine upon it, and I will carry off man and animals from it; and even if these three men shall be in it, Noah, Daniel and Job, they shall not free neither sons nor daughters: they alone shall be saved”¹⁹. So true is it that not every request is settled by the merits of the one who asks, but that it lies at the discretion of the giver; and no human sentence can presume to claim any authority, unless divine judgement concurs.²⁰

The chapter is included in a section beginning in *De Lapsis* 15, where Cyprian introduces “a new source of disaster...which masquerades as compassion”, that is the fact that “contrary to the strength of Gospel, contrary to the law of your Lord and God, through certain people’s presumption

¹⁸ *Jer* 11:14.

¹⁹ Cf. *Ez* 14:13-16.

²⁰ Cyprianus, *De Lapsis*, ed. M. BÉVENOT, CCSL 3, pp. 231-232; 19. *Nam et Moses pro peccatis populi petit nec tamen peccantibus veniam cum petisset accepit. “Precor, ait, Domine, deliquit populus hic delictum grande. Et nunc si dimittis eis delictum, dimitte; sin autem, dele me de libro quem scripsisti”. Et dixit dominus ad Moysen: “Si qui deliquit ante me, deleam eum de libro meo”. Ille amicus Dei, ille facie ad faciem locutus saepe cum Domino, quod petit impetrare non potuit, nec Dei indignantis offensam sua deprecatione placavit. Hieremiam Deus laudat et praedicat dicens: “Priusquam te formarem in utero, novi te, et priusquam exires de vulva, sanctificavi te et prophetam in gentibus posui te”; et eidem pro peccatis populi deprecanti frequentius et oranti: “Noli”, ait, “orare pro populo hoc, et noli postulare pro eis in prece et oratione, quia non exaudiam in tempore quo invocabunt me, in tempore afflictationis suae”. Quid vero iustius Noe qui, cum repleta esset terra peccatis, solus inventus est iustus in terris. Quid gloriosius Danihele, quid ad facienda martyria in fidei firmitate robustius, in Dei dignatione felicius, qui totiens et cum confligeret vicit et cum vinceret supervixit? Quid Iob in operibus promptius, in temptationibus fortius, in dolore patientius, in timore summissius, in fide verius? Nec his tamen, si rogarent, concessurum se Deus dixit. Cum propheta Ezechiel pro delicto populi deprecaretur, “Terra”, inquit, “quaecumque peccaverint mihi ut delinquat delictum, extendam manum meam super eam, et obteram stabilimentum panis et immittam in eam famem, et auferam ab ea hominem et pecora; et si fuerint tres viri hi in medio eius, Noe et Danihel et Iob, non liberabunt filios neque filias: ipsi soli salvi erunt. Adeo non omne quod petitur in praeiudicio petentis sed in dantis arbitrio est; nec quicquam sibi usurpat et vindicat humana sententia, nisi adnuat et censura divina.* Apart from the already cited editions by M. BÉVENOT 1971 and M. VERONESE-A. CERRETINI-C. DELL’OSSO (edd.), in A. CERRETINI ET ALII (curr.), SCAR 6/1 (2009), pp. 285-331, the written is included also in J. SUÁREZ, *San Cipriano. La unidad de la Iglesia católica. Los renegados*, Sevilla 1991 and E. GALLICET, *Cipriano di Cartagine. La Chiesa. Sui cristiani caduti nella persecuzione. L’unità della chiesa cattolica. Lettere scelte*, Milano 1997 (Lecture cristiane del primo millennio 26).

a deceptive readmission to communion is being granted, a reconciliation that is null and void, dangerous for the givers and worthless for those who receive it”²¹.

After such premise, the author reprimands those “presbiteri «lassisti»” who claimed for themselves to grant *lapsi* the readmission to church, “senza un’adeguato periodo di penitenza e senza il consenso del vescovo”²². The exposition particularly mentions the scandal of their access to the Eucharist, which is in contradiction both with the prescriptions of *Lev* (*omnis mundus manducabit carnem*²³), and with Paul’s words (*non protestis calicem Domini bibere et calcium daemoniorum, non potestis mensae Domini communicare et mensae daemoniorum*²⁴...*quicumque ederit panem aut biberit calicem Domini indigne, reus erit corporis et sanguinis Domini*²⁵).

After declaring the ineffectiveness, the falsity and the risks connected with the concession of forgiveness *ante expiata delicta, ante exomologesin factam criminis, ante purgatam conscientiam sacrificio et manu sacerdotis*²⁶, the author affirms that *solus Domini misereri potest* and that, consequently, anyone assuring such forgiveness for the sins committed against God is adding a new crime to the one already existing²⁷. Moreover, that intervention would have certainly damaged also the same lapsed, since *non servasse sententiam nec misericordiam prius Domini deprecandam putare, sed contempto Domino de sua facilitate praesumere* unavoidably means stimulating God’s *ira*²⁸.

In this context, the author introduces the mention of *Rev* 6:10 – the passage about martyrs asking for vengeance –, which both unveils the typical characteristics of Cyprian’s theological and pastoral positions concerning the problem of *lapsi*, and introduces two essential elements for the comprehension of the following allusion to *Dn* “tales”.

The author first of all attracts the attention on the behaviour of the martyrs mentioned in *Rev*, which becomes a proof of the fact that a request can be formulated only “if it is good and lawful, if it

²¹ Cyprianus, *De Lapsis*, ed. M. BÉVENOT, CCSL 3, pp. 228-229; 15. *Emersit enim, fratres dilectissimi, novum genus cladis et quasi parum persecutionis procella saevierit, accessit ad cumulum sub misericordiae titulo malum fallens et blanda pernicies. Contra evangelii vigorem, contra Domini ac Dei legem temeritate quorundam laxatur incautis communicatio: invrita et falsa pax, periculosa dantibus et nihil accipientibus profutura.*

²² C. DELL’OSSO, in A. CERRETINI ET ALII (curr.), SCAR 6/1 (2009), pp. 306-307. The scholar points out that the same abuse is mentioned in Cyprian’s *Epistulae* 15; 16; 17.

²³ The reference is to *Lev* 7:19-20.

²⁴ See *1Cor* 10:20-21.

²⁵ See *1Cor* 11.

²⁶ Cyprianus, *De Lapsis*, ed. M. BÉVENOT, CCSL 3, p. 229; 16. According to C. DELL’OSSO, in A. CERRETINI ET ALII (curr.), SCAR 6/1 (2009), p. 308, in this section it would be possible to recognize the three moments of the penitential discipline proposed by the author: *confessio*, “ossia l’accusa dei propri peccati dinanzi al vescovo”; *satisfactio* “ovvero l’espiazione volontaria con cui il penitente si sforza di dare soddisfazione alla giustizia di Dio in proporzione della gravità del suo peccato”, *remissio* “cioè la riconciliazione con la chiesa per mezzo dell’imposizione delle mani del vescovo”.

²⁷ Cyprianus, *De Lapsis*, ed. M. BÉVENOT, CCSL 3, p. 230; 17. *Nemo se fallat, nemo decipiat: solus Dominus misereri potest...Homo Deo esse non potest maior nec remittere aut donare indulgentia sua servus potest quod in Dominum delicto graviore commissum est, ne adhuc lapsus et hoc accedat ad crimen si nesciat esse praedictum: “Maledictus homo qui spem habet in hominem” (Jer 17:5).*

²⁸ Cyprianus, *De Lapsis*, ed. M. BÉVENOT, CCSL 3, p. 231; 18.

is not something against God himself that God's bishop is expected to do"²⁹. Through such clarification Cyprian indirectly implies that martyrs are "in no position to dispense forgiveness on their own"³⁰, but rather have to insubordinate their plea to the bishop's action. Immediately after, Cyprian imposes another condition on the completion of any request addressed to God, which depends on the position of those who ask for it: *sit obtemperantis facilis et prona consensus, si petentis fuerit religiosa moderatio*.

In other words, through the exegesis of *Rev* 6:10, the author manages to define two central coordinates of his position concerning the action of the confessors: he both reaffirms the superiority of the bishop compared with the martyrs in the concession of forgiveness, and alludes to the subordination of the readmission to the peculiar condition of the "mediator". As critics have underlined, Cyprian seems here to imply that "l'intercessione dei martiri/confessori non assicura automaticamente la remissione dei peccati", since only God knows which merits they have actually obtained with their *confessio*³¹.

If in this short exposition Cyprian surely expresses his decisive sustain to the pre-eminence of ecclesial hierarchy, he manages to maintain a moderate position about the role of *confessores*: he does not nullify nor invalidate their action as a matter of principle, but he warns and informs the community about the risks and the uncertainties that wrap up their intervention, whose efficacy cannot be actually tested by anyone but God and depends for this reason on single cases³².

The allusion to *Dn* "tales" is included among other examples demonstrating that God's will represents the discriminant element in the process of remission of sins, leaving aside the condition of those who grant it, so that "non c'è automatismo tra l'intercessione dei confessori per i *lapsi* e la

²⁹ Cyprianus, *De Lapsis*, ed. M. BÉVENOT, CCSL 3, p. 231; 18. *Sub ara Dei animae occisorum martyrum clamant magna voce dicentes: "Quousque, Domine, sanctus et verus, non iudicas et vindicas sanguinem nostrum de his qui in terris inhabitant?" (Ap 6:10). et requiescere ac patientiam tenere adhuc iubentur. Et quemquam posse aliquis existimat remittendis passim donandisque peccatis bonum fieri contra iudicem velle, aut prius quam vindicetur ipse alios posse defendere? Mandant aliquid martyres fieri: si iusta, si licita, si non contra ipsum Deum a Dei sacerdote facienda. Sit obtemperantis facilis et prona consensus, si petentis fuerit religiosa moderatio. Mandant aliquid martyres fieri, sed si scripta non sunt in Domini lege quae mandant, ante est ut sciamus illos de Deo impetrasse quod postulant, tunc facere quod mandant; neque enim statim videri potest divina maiestate concessum quod fuerit humana pollicitatione promissum.*

³⁰ M. BÉVENOT 1971, p. 29. The scholar adds a reference to the fact that the same passage of *Rev* is generally used by Tertullian and other authors to ground the theory that martyrs went straight to heaven and the rest had to wait for the last judgement. The elaboration of Cyprian would be on the contrary coherent with his different perspective on such argument: actually "elsewhere he clearly implies that others besides martyrs could reach heaven without any such delay".

³¹ It seems possible to agree with the position of C. DELL'OSSO, in A. CERRETINI ET ALII (curr.), SCAR 6/1 (2009), pp. 310-311. About the problem of the management of apostasy and the relation between martyrs and the episcopal hierarchy see A. BRENT, *Cyprian's Reconstruction of the Martyr Tradition*, "Journal of Ecclesiastic History" 53 (2002), pp. 241-268. The problem of the "efficacy of the reconciliation ritual" has been faced by J.P. BURNS 2002, pp. 51-77. About Cyprian's conception of martyrdom see E.L. HUMMEL, *The Concept of Martyrdom According to St. Cyprian of Carthage*, Washington 1946 (Studies in Christian Antiquity 9).

³² The middle-position assumed by Cyprian about the question has already been underlined *supra*, chapter 5, n. 13.

remissione dei peccati da parte di Dio”³³. Two introductive examples are mentioned at the beginning of section 19:

- 1) Moses, who asked for his people’s forgiveness but did not obtained it, notwithstanding his proximity with God;
- 2) Jeremiah, who was suggested by the same God not to pray for his people, since they would not have been forgiven in the moment of prayer, but rather in that one of sufferance.

It is plausible to think that the choice of such examples and their immediate mention depend on the fact that the biblical stories narrated in *Ex* and *Jer* already included all the elements needed by Cyprian to argument his position: the divine reaction in front of Moses’ and Jeremiah’s requests confirms that even God’s favourite men do not automatically nor necessarily accede to the function of “mediators” for their people.

After such preliminary allusions, the author presents a sort of twofold exegesis that starts from a sentence of *Ez*, in which the figures of Noah, Daniel and Job are mentioned because they could not mediate salvation for their sons or daughters, but obtained it only as personal and individual benefit. The bishop of Carthage develops a short discourse about these biblical characters’ exceptional qualities, which could not anyway assure them the capacity to extend God’s favour towards someone else. In this way, the exegesis of *Ez* becomes, at the same time, an “indirect exegesis” of the biblical stories cited there.

The first figure mentioned is Noah, presented as a champion of righteousness (*solus inventus est iustus in terris*), immediately followed by Daniel, whose record concerns:

- glory in a generic sense (*quid gloriosius Danihele*);
- constancy of faith in enduring martyrdoms (*quid ad facienda martyria in fidei firmitate robustius*);
- God’s support, since every time he fought he won, and when he won he survived (*quid...in Dei dignatione felicius, qui totiens et cum confligeret vicit et cum vinceret supervixit?*).

The conclusive mention makes of Job an unequalled example of alacrity in service, fortitude in temptations, patience in sufferance, resignation in fear, truth in faith (*quid Iob in operibus promptius, in temptationibus fortius, in dolore patientius, in timore summissius, in fide verius?*).

³³ C. DELL’OSSO, in A. CERRETINI ET ALII (curr.), SCAR 6/1 (2009), p. 312.

The allusion to the fact that Daniel constantly sustained martyrdoms can be interpreted as a possible reference to the repetition of the den's episode, mentioned in both the Greek translations of the texts (chapter 6 and 14), or as a more generic allusion to his proverbial greatness; in any case, it can be noticed that the prophet seems to represent here a far closer reference to the confessors' condition in comparison with the other cited *exempla*, at least because of the martyrial background connected with this figure and his story: as the *confessores* do, Daniel performed both constancy of faith in enduring tortures, and the capacity to win and survive every time he was exposed to trial.

Though Cyprian seems to be prevalently interested in the fact that the prophet escaped from martyrdom and obtained salvation, the perspective here assumed is only apparently similar to that one developed in the already mentioned iconographic tradition concerning Daniel in the lions' den: actually, if in figurative production - and signally in catacomb paintings - the accent is placed on the theological and eschatological value of the prophet's salvation, which becomes the type of the martyrs' destiny³⁴, in the case of *De Lapsis* the story of Daniel is connected with the experience of those who did not die during the persecutions, so that his salvation appears to be here endowed with an historical, concrete character.

Moreover, through the mediation of *Ez*, Cyprian manages to fully adapt the biblical narration to the historical context he writes for and to the position he is trying to support: the fact that the biblical protagonist escaped *martyria* interests the author only in so far as it did not represent a sufficient condition to make him capable to save "sons and daughters"; the extraordinary qualities which sustained his strength in sufferance could not allow him to obtain such capacity either.

A relevant trait of this elaboration, which can be considered as a typological outcome, is represented by the fact that the function of antitype is here performed by members of the community toward whom the author maintains a critical position³⁵. Even though the cause of Cyprian's ambiguity about confessors is not indeed represented by the unquestionable "martyrial prerogative" they share with Daniel, it remains true that, calling into question their capacity to grant forgiveness, the author unavoidably limits and contains their function, in contrast with the wider power attributed to the bishops.

Under the methodological and hermeneutical point of view, the interpretative process activated here does not that much aim at the elaboration of original, theological contents or at the

³⁴ See *supra*, chapter 4, pp. 158-200.

³⁵ About Cyprian's exegesis see J.D. LAURENCE, "Priest as type of Christ". *The Leader of Eucharist in Salvation History According to Cyprian of Carthage*, New York 1984. The scholar investigates the "revers typology", which would be the prevailing conception of salvation history in "writings of the 2nd and early 3rd century", consisting in the fact that "holy living after the time of Christ are seen to participate in Christ and make him in his saving events present in subsequent history". The scholar presents an inspection about the words that would mark, in Cyprian's speculation, the activation of such typology (apparently corresponding with the exegesis here mentioned as "typology of church"), and does not mention *Dn* "tales".

apologetic defence of a specific option; it rather pertains to the exposition of a theoretical system which is meant to support the assumption of a practical attitude in the running of the community. In spite of this, such system is not composed of a sum of simple indications about the behaviour prescribed to Christians; it rather has the character of a complex, exegetical reflection that makes explicit the theological reasons underling pastoral choices. In this way, the assumption of a specific position concerning present life seems to depend on the peculiar relation which links the protagonist of the Bible with the members of the community and their experiences³⁶.

b) From “typology of the church” to parenesis

The hermeneutical range of the reference to the figure of Daniel in *De Lapsis* can be better grasped through the comparison with chapter 31, where another section of “tales” is mentioned.

After taking position about those who have obtained a “certificate for sacrifices” – which would represent, in the author’s opinion, an even worse “confession of apostasy”³⁷ since it presupposes the attempt to “mock God”³⁸ – Cyprian affirms that the only, possible option for any sinner to be reintegrated is the confession “in this world”, when it “can still be heard, while satisfaction and forgiveness granted through priests are pleasing to God”³⁹.

³⁶ It seems substantially possible to agree with A. MUSONI, *Ecclesia Mater chez Cyprien de Carthage: signification et portée théologique*, Roma 2013 (Flumina ex fontibus 3), p. 27, who calls into question the diffused tendency to “nier toute pensée théologique chez Cyprien” (the scholar mentions in part. the position of M. SIMONETTI, *Letteratura cristiana antica greca e latina*, Firenze-Milano 1969, pp. 158-159, according to whom “l’esegesi e la teologia non hanno progredito di un punto per opera di Cipriano”). It must be noticed that such prejudice can have in some measure weighted on the scientific reflection about Cyprian’s theology: the bibliography concerning this author’s thought is quite scarce and the most cited study which has apparently tried to systematically face the argument remains A. D’ALÈS, *La théologie de Saint Cyprien*, Paris 1922. Notwithstanding this, as A. MUSONI notices, “l’enracinement historique de l’oeuvre de Cyprien ne l’empêche pas de véhiculer une théologie (de l’Église en particulier)”, though not in the form of a congruent system explicitly elaborated. The problem of Cyprians’ theological thought cannot certainly be faced in this context, where it seems enough to underline the possibile elements of such theology emerging from the passages here analyzed. Concerning the relation between Cyprian and the *ecclesia* see also Y. DUVAL, *Les chrétientés d’Occident et leur évêque du IIIe siècle: “plebs in ecclesia constituta” (Cyprien, Ep. 63)*, Paris 2005 (Collection des Études augustiniennes. Série antiquité 176).

³⁷ Cyprianus, *De Lapsis*, ed. M. BÉVENOT, CCSL 3, p. 236; 27. *Nec sibi quo minus agant paenitentiam blandiantur qui, etsi nefandis sacrificiis manus non contaminaverunt, libellis tamen conscientiam polluerunt. Et illa professio est denegantis, contestatio est christiani quod fuerat abnuentis: fecisse se dixit quidquid alius faciendo commisit.*

³⁸ Cyprianus, *De Lapsis*, ed. M. BÉVENOT, CCSL 3, p. 237; 28. *Plus immo delinquit qui secundum hominem Deum cogitans evadere se poenam criminis credit, si non palam crimen admisit.*

³⁹ Cyprianus, *De Lapsis*, ed. M. BÉVENOT, CCSL 3, p. 237; 29. *Confiteantur singuli quaeso vos, fratres, delictum suum dum adhuc qui deliquit in saeculo est, dum admitti confessio eius potest, dum satisfactio et remissio facta per sacerdotes apud Deum grata est.*

In other words, the necessary condition is “a genuine sorrow”⁴⁰, conceived as the opposite attitude in comparison with the behaviour of those who *ex primo criminis die lavacra cottidie celebrat, qui epulis affluentibus pastus et sagina largiore distentus cruditates suas postridie eructat, nec cibos et potus suos cum pauperum necessitate communicat*⁴¹. The author conclusively affirms that greater wounds and deeper guilt afflict those who after sinning made no atonement and after crime do not repent⁴².

In order to describe the importance and the meaning of such repentance, the author introduces the allusion to Daniel’s companions:

De Lapsis 31. Those noble and splendid youths, Ananias, Azarias and Misael, ceased not making confession to God, even in the flaming heat of the fiery furnace. Though they were clear in conscience, having often earned God’s favour by their faith and reverence, yet they did not desist in humility and repenting⁴³ in front of the Lord, even in the midst of those glorious testimonies of their virtues⁴⁴. Divine Scripture says: “Standing, Azarias prayed and opened his mouth and made

⁴⁰ Cyprianus, *De Lapsis*, ed. M. BÉVENOT, CCSL 3, p. 237; 29. *Convertamur ad Dominum mente tota, et paenitentiam criminis veris doloribus exprimentes Dei misericordiam deprecemur*. According to M. BÉVENOT 1971, p. 45, the chapters 29-32 would put a particular emphasis on the “need for active personal repentance”; Cyprian would be here implying that “the bishop should not only exhort and help in this, but afterwards could in his priestly character grant forgiveness in God’s name”.

⁴¹ Cyprianus, *De Lapsis*, ed. M. BÉVENOT, CCSL 3, pp. 237-238; 30.

⁴² Cyprianus, *De Lapsis*, ed. M. BÉVENOT, CCSL 3, p. 238; 30. *Ecce peiora adhuc peccandi vulnera, ecce maiora delicta: peccasse nec satisfacere, deliquisse nec delicta deflere*.

⁴³ The translation here offered of the syntagma *Domino satisfacere* (translated by M. BÉVENOT 1971, p. 47, as “making satisfaction to the Lord”) requires to be shortly explained. In *De Lapsis* the verb *satisfacere* recurs also in chapter 30, signally at the end of a section describing the behavior of those who do not repent: *Ecce peiora adhuc peccandi vulnera, ecce maiora delicta: peccasse nec satisfacere, deliquisse nec delicta deflere* (“So your wounds are even greater, your guilt still deeper: sinning and not atoning, acting a crime and not repenting”). According to C. DELL’OSSO, in A. CERRETINI ET ALII (curr.), SCAR 6/1 (2009), p. 324, the author would be here referring to “il secondo momento del cammino della penitenza, ovvero della *satisfactio*... In sostanza, il peccatore, dopo aver confessato il proprio peccato, doveva rendere soddisfazione alla giustizia di Dio per la colpa commessa. La *satisfactio*, dunque, corrisponde a quella che oggi si intende propriamente per la «penitenza» di un peccato”. For this reason, it seemed efficacious to choose a form that alluded to such specific meaning of the word in Cyprian’s vocabulary instead of the generic “make satisfaction”. The form returns also in chapter 32. *Haec mites, haec simplices, haec innocentes in promerenda Dei maiestate fecerunt: et nunc satisfacere et Dominum rogare detrectant qui Dominum negaverunt!* (“This is what the meek and simple and innocent people did to win the favor of God’s majesty: and also now those who have denied the Lord refuse to pray to the Lord or to repent!”). In this occasion A. CERRETINI, in A. CERRETINI ET ALII (curr.), SCAR 6/1 (2009), p. 327, translates the expression with the verb “fare penitenza”, but then opts for the form “piacere a Dio” in the case of chapter 31.

⁴⁴ *Dn* 1:7; 3:28; 89. About this expression M. BÉVENOT 1971, p. 47, underlines: “There may be an intended ambiguity: «in the midst of all that so gloriously testified to their virtues» as well as «the tortures for which they had been prepared but which they were spared»”. This translation – which returns also in A. CERRETINI ET AL., SCAR 6/1, p. 325 – seems appropriate, except for the singular form adopted to render *gloriosa martyria*: “Sebbene fossero consapevoli della loro retta coscienza e avessero spesso avuto molti meriti di fronte a Dio grazie alla loro fede e al loro timore per il Signore, tuttavia non cessarono di essere umili e di piacere a Dio neanche durante la testimonianza gloriosa delle loro virtù”.

confession to God together with his companions in the midst of the fire”⁴⁵. Daniel too, even after the many graces received for his faith and innocence, after the honour repeatedly received by the Lord for his virtues and merits, yet tries to deserve God’s favour with fasts, rolling on the ground in sackcloth and ashes, and makes confession in sorrow, saying: “Lord, God, the great and strong, who has to be feared, who keeps the covenant and mercy to those who favour you and keep your commandments, we have sinned, we have done wrong, we were impious, we have transgressed and we abandoned your commands and your judgements. We have not listened to what your children and prophets have spoken in your name over our kings and all the nations and over all the earth. To you, Lord, to you be justice, but to us distress”⁴⁶.

In this context, Cyprian’s approach to *Dn* “tales” seems to radically change under the exegetical and technical point of view: the figures of Ananias, Azarias and Misael are not actually conceived in a typological perspective, since their experience is not presented as an anticipation of an historical circumstance, nor as an allusion to the further destiny predisposed for Christians; they seem to be simply mentioned as examples of the behaviour and the conduct that believers should maintain. In this case, the reference to “tales” can be considered as a generic admonition, that does not sanction a continuity between figures and facts of the two Testaments and economies, but rather offers an ever valid suggestion. In this sense, such assumption of chapter 3, though pertaining to an interpretative perspective that associates biblical motifs to the church and its exponent, should more properly be conceived as a case of “allegoric” reception of *Dn*⁴⁷.

⁴⁵ *Dn* 3:25.

⁴⁶ *Dn* 9:4. Cyprian, *De Lapsis*, ed. M. BÉVENOT, CCSL 3, pp. 238-239; 31. *Ananias, Azarias, Misahel, inlustres ac nobiles pueri, quominus exomologesin Deo facerent nec inter flammis et camini exaestuantis incendia quieverunt. Bene sibi licet conscii et Deum fidei ac timoris obsequio saepe promeriti, humilitatem tamen tenere et Domino satisfacere nec inter ipsa gloriosa virtutum suarum martyria destiterunt. Loquitur scriptura divina: “Stans”, inquit, “Azarias precatus est et aperuit os suum, et exomologesin faciebat Deo simul cum sodalibus suis in medio ignis”. Daniel quoque post fidei adque innocentiae suae multiplicem gratiam, post dignationem Domini circa virtutes ac laudes suas saepe repetitam, ieiuniis adhuc promereri Deum nititur; in sacco et cinere volutatur exomologesin facies dolenter et dicens: “Domine, Deus magnus et fortis et metuendus, qui servas testamentum et miserationem eis qui te diligunt et conservant imperia tua, peccavimus, facinus admisimus, impii fuimus, transgressi sumus ac deserimus praecepta tua et iudicia tua. Non audivimus puerorum tuorum prophetarum quae locuti sunt in nomine tuo super reges nostros et omnes gentes et super omnem terram. Tibi, Domine, tibi iustitia, nobis autem confusio”.*

⁴⁷ About the “allegoric” approach to “tales” see *infra*, chapter 7. As already mentioned in the introduction, the coexistence of different hermeneutical tendencies in the same work does not represent anything odd but rather it is a trait characterizing the entire interpretative panorama of ancient Christianities, which is typically “fluid” and heterogeneous. The assumption of different exegetical perspectives about the same argument emerges also from the analysis of *IClementis*, where the author seems to apply a typological reading to the same material from *Dn*. If, on one side, the Hebrews are mentioned as types of the menaced presbyters, they are contextually cited, in another section of the epistle, as generic examples of the “good behaviour” prescribed for Christians. For an analysis about the document see C. VALENTI, *Una peculiarità del cristianesimo romano precostantiniano. I “racconti” di Daniele nella IClementis e nella produzione figurative*, “Annali di Scienze Religiose” 7/11 (2014), pp. 239-288.

5.1.2. The identity of the “martyr”. “Tales” in Cyprian’s *Epistulae*

Beside the treatise of *De Lapsis*, the literary instrument to which Cyprian resorts in order to orient and organize his community is represented by the epistles⁴⁸, and particularly by those written during the period of his absence from Carthage; mainly for that phase, they can actually be considered as the privileged vehicle through which the bishop could carry on his action of coordination and support of the believers⁴⁹, implicitly expressing the core of his theological perspective⁵⁰.

If *De Lapsis* is a unitary document endowed with a specific and peculiar objective, each letter reflects a different, concrete situation demanding a punctual intervention, and has for this reason to be considered and analysed as an individual case; notwithstanding this, the entire *corpus* seems to touch and intersect the cross-cutting argument “du martyre et des martyrs”⁵¹.

a) “Et si non”: the *Hebrews* as confessores

The epistle number 6, addressed to “Sergius, Rogatian and the other confessors”⁵², can be ascribed to a period during which the bishop, far from his city, communicates with his people by letters, and belongs to the group of documents (from 5 to 7) sent to Carthage during Decian persecution⁵³. The

⁴⁸ About Cyprians’ epistolary see G.W. CLARKE I 1984: for an overview about the compilation of the letters see pp. 4-12; for “editions, translations and bibliography” see pp. 44-49. For chronological coordinates see L. DUQUENNE, *Chronologie des lettres de S. Cyprien: le dossier de la persécution de Dèce*, Bruxelles 1972 (Subsidia Hagiographica 54); about manuscripts and editions. G.F. DIERCKS, CCSL 3D, pp. 711-919. In the conclusive section of this recent edition by G.F. DIERCKS (1994 for letters 1-57, 1996 for letters 58-81) there is also a rich *bibliographia selecta*, pp. 949-956.

⁴⁹ G.W. CLARKE I 1984, pp. 13-21, introduces the generic coordinates of the epistolary historical background, with an insight into Cyprian’s life. See also G.F. DIERCKS, CCSL 3D, pp. 679-686, for a bibliography about the bishop.

⁵⁰ G.W. CLARKE I 1984, p. 5: “those letters...disclose a wide view of his mentality”.

⁵¹ H.A.M. HOPPENBROUWERS, *Recherches sur la terminologie du martyre de Tertullien à Lactance*, Noviomagi 1961 (Latinitas Christianorum Primaeva 15), p. 90.

⁵² Rogatian, “presbitero di Cartagine”, is among those to whom Cyprian commits himself in order to be represented in Carthage, and also to keep in contact with the community of believers. About Cyprian’s imprisonment see G. TAPONNECO, in C. DELL’OSSO ET ALII., SCAR 5/1, pp. 108. G.W. CLARKE I 1984, pp. 189-190: “he (*scil.* Cyprian) is informed that Rogations and Felicissimus were the first to be imprisoned...Sergius is otherwise unknown. Rogatianus is a presbyter. By the rule of precedence in epistolary address we must infer that Sergius was at least of that clerical rank also. And as this is Carthage, and there was but one bishop there, he ought, accordingly, to be a fellow *presbyter* and probably senior to Rogatianus in that class”.

⁵³ See in part. Cyprian, *Epistulae*, ed. G.F. DIERCKS (ed.), CCSL 3b, p. 29; 6, 1:1. *Salus vos, fratres carissimi, optans ipse quoque conspectu vestro frui, si me ad vos pervenire loci condicio permitteret*. According to G.W. CLARKE I 1984, p. 189, “from his place of hiding Cyprian felicitates certain confessors in prison in Carthage”.

author turns to confessors, “les félicite et les encourage dans la voie où ils viennent d’entrer: qu’ils ne pensent pas aux souffrances et à la mort, mais à la gloire et à l’immortalité”⁵⁴.

In the first chapter Cyprian expresses the desire to find himself together with his people but, unable to fulfil such intention, he sends the letter as *vicaria*. He immediately offers supportive suggestions concerning patience in enduring afflictions and inviting the believers not to focus on pain but rather on the glory deriving from it (2:1 *Nemo mortem cogitet sed immortalitatem, nec temporariam poenam sed gloriam sempiternam*); in this context he cites scriptural passages in which the condition of the persecuted ones seems to be in some measure evoked (such as the frequently cited *Wis* 3:4-6; 3:8). The author mentions *Abel iustus*, killed as first, and the glorious death of *iusti prophetae* and *apostoli* (2:1), who are presented as those to whom the Lord brought his example with his own experience, *docens ad suum regnum non nisi eos qui se per suam viam secuti sint*. In this occasion, Cyprian indirectly reveals the traits of his conception of martyrdom, considered as a part of a divine plan predisposed in order to test the righteous men⁵⁵.

In chapter 3 – that one in which *Dn* citation returns – Cyprian focuses on a specific group included in the community, which embodies a peculiar condition of fragility: women, considered as a stronger example of perseverance since they are *sexu suo fortiores* (3:1), and youths⁵⁶. Both categories are involved in persecution *ne quid deesset ad gloriam numeri vestri, ut omnis vobiscum et sexus et aetas esset in honore*. Such peculiar circumstance, predisposed by God to the advantage of the entire *consortium* of the believers, would be biblically anticipated – in the bishop’s conception – by the experience of Ananias, Azarias and Misael.

Epistula 6, 3. Blessed too are those women who are set with you in the same glory of confession, who, holding fast to their faith in the Lord and with fortitude above their sex, not only they are personally close to winning their crowns, but they have also given an example to other women by their constancy! That there might be nothing lacking in the glory of your company, so that every sex and age might be

⁵⁴ L. DUQUENNE 1972, in part. pp. 60-64. The situation presented in letter 6 is substantially comparable to that one emerging from letter 5, a coeval text describing the same panorama. G.W. CLARKE I 1984, p. 189, underlines: “there can be little doubt that this letter was composed about the same time as *Ep* 5; Cyprian in his place of concealment has heard some details of the confessors whom he mentions in that letter and whose needs, spiritual and material, he there urges his clergy to meet”. Also G.F. DIERCKS, CCSL 3D, p. 692, considers epistle 7 as the earliest among Decian letters, “located in the very early months of 250”, while the epistles 5 and 6 would come “next in sequence”.

⁵⁵ G. TAPONNECCO, in C. DELL’OSSO ET ALII, SCAR 5/1, p. 110.

⁵⁶ According to G.W. CLARKE I 1984, p. 195, the fact “that the terms of Decius’ edict included children emerges both from Cyprian...and Gregory of Nyss” so that “we may be dealing here with some family groups”.

with you in honour, the divine condescension⁵⁷ has allied with you in glorious confession young boys as well, manifesting to us the deeds such as those Ananias, Azarias and Misael, illustrious youths, once did. When they were shut up in the furnace, the fire drew back from them and the flames yielded them a place of refreshment⁵⁸, for the Lord was present with them proving that the heat of the hellfire could effect nothing against his confessors and martyrs, but on the contrary those who believed in God would continue ever safe and in every way secure. I ask you in you regard for sacred things to consider carefully the faith which those boys possessed, a faith which could deserve God's favour so fully. Ready to undergo anything, as we all ought to be, they said to the king: "King Nabuchadnezzar, there is no need for us to reply to you on this matter. For the God whom we serve can rescue us from the blazing flames of the furnace, and he will deliver us from your hands, oh king! But if not, let it be known to you that we will not serve your gods neither will we worship the golden statue which you have erected"⁵⁹. Though they not only believed but, such was their faith, knew that they could be delivered even from their sufferings, yet they would not boast of this nor claim to it for themselves, saying "but if not", lest, without the testimony of suffering, the virtue of confession might be weakened. They added that God can do all these things, but that nevertheless what they had faith in was not that they were going to be set free in present, but they were rather thinking of the glory of their eternal safety and deliverance⁶⁰.

⁵⁷ The expression translates the term *divina dignatio*; about this concept in Cyprian see M. GUERRA, *El sacerdotio sombra de la dignatio divina y del Espíritu Santu según San Cipriano*, "Teología del Sacerdocio" 17 (1983), pp. 7-40.

⁵⁸ G.W. CLARKE I 1984, p. 195, highlights that the term represents a specific Christian word, "rare in pagan usage" and clearly connected with the martyrial liturgical *praxis*.

⁵⁹ *Dn* 3:16-18. The passage is discussed in F.C. BURKITT, *The Old Latin and the Itala*, Cambridge 1892, p. 25.

⁶⁰ Cyprianus, *Epistulae* 6, G.F. DIERCKS (ed.), CCL 3b, pp. 34-36; 3:1. *Beatas etiam feminas quae vobiscum sunt in eadem confessionis gloria constitutae, quae dominicam fidem tenentes et sexu suo fortiores non solum ipsae ad coronam proximae sunt, sed et ceteris quoque feminis exemplum de sua constantia praebuerunt. Ac ne quid deesset ad gloriam numeri vestri, ut omnis vobiscum et sexus et aetas esset in honore, pueros etiam vobis gloriosa confessione sociavit divina dignatio, repraesentans nobis tale aliquid quale Ananias, Azarias Misael inlustres pueri aliquando fecerunt, quibus inclusis in caminum cesserunt ignes et refrigerium flammae dederunt, praesente cum illis domino et probante quod in confessores et martyras eius nihil posset gehennae ardor operari, sed quod qui in Deum crederent incolumes semper et tuti in omnibus perseverarent. 2. Et consideretis diligentius peto pro vestra religione quae apud illos pueros fides fuerit, quae promereri plenius Deum potuit. Ad omnia enim parati, sicuti omnes esse debemus, aiunt regi: "Nabuchodonosor rex, non opus est nobis de hoc verbo respondere tibi. Est enim Deus cui nos servimus potens eripere nos de camino ignis ardentis, et de manibus tuis, rex, liberabit nos. Et si non, notum tibi sit quoniam diis tuis non servimus et imaginem auream quam statuisti non adoramus". Cum se et crederent et pro fide sua scirent posse etiam de praesenti supplicio liberari, iactare hoc tamen et vindicare sibi noluerunt dicentes "et si non", ne minor esset confessionis virtus sine testimonio passionis. Addiderunt posse omnia Deum facere, sed tamen non in hoc fidere, ut liberari in praesentia vellent, sed illam libertatis et securitatis aeternae gloriam cogitarent.* About the text see also R.B. DONNA, *St. Cyprian. Letters (1-81)*, Washington 1964 (The Father of the Church), pp. 18-19; G.W. CLARKE I 1984, pp. 63-66; C. DELL'OSSO-G. TAPONECCO-M. VINCELLI, *SCAR* 5/1 (2006), pp. 113-115.

The element apparently activating and propelling a typological link between the biblical story and a peculiar condition to which a certain part of the community is exposed, seems in this case to be represented by the young age of Daniel's companions. The author underlines the fact that the Hebrews were not damaged by fire as they were thrown in the furnace, but they obtained on the contrary to be refreshed by a coolness: it happened since the Lord – who was present with them – wanted to show that *ardor gehennae* has no power against confessors and martyrs, since those who believe in him can remain *incolumes semper et tuti in omnibus*.

After such preliminary and – so to speak – “traditional” exegesis of the biblical “tale”, the bishop of Carthage introduces a more punctual reflection, warmly suggesting the readers to focus on the nature of the faith that allowed the Hebrews to achieve salvation (3:2. *Et consideretis diligentius peto pro vestra religione quae apud illos pueros fides fuerit*): ready to face every kind of destiny, they fearlessly turn to Nabuchadnezzar and declare the strength of their God, capable to save them from fire and from the emperor's hands; such certainty does not anyway prevent them from courageously state that “if not” – which means “even if God does not save them” –, they would as much refuse to serve gods and to adore the statue.

The bishop significantly goes on offering a deeper explanation of such “*et si non*”: notwithstanding the solidity of their faith, which makes them sure of God's intervention in their favour, the expression is necessary to prove that the lack of passion does not diminish the courage of the confession. In other words, what makes the Hebrews firm is not the certitude of divine help and earthly salvation, but their full projection toward the eternal, “martyrial” reward.

The reference to *Dn* “tale” represents, in the context of the short letter, the biblical example to which is assigned the important task to sustain and communicate the author's message to his community. Many interpretative levels concerning its reception can be spotted.

On the surface, the case of the Hebrews seems to be evoked in order to stimulate and support the believers in front of the harshness of the persecution⁶¹; in particular, the story apparently has the role to give a stronger consistence to the bishop's introductive recommendation to assume martyrdom as the “paradoxical” instrument of salvation and eternal glory, rather than as a miserable circumstance of sufferance and pain.

This may be the real meaning attribute by Cyprian to Daniel's companions' episode, as it emerges from a linguistic consideration: as in chapter 2.1. the author had recommended that *nemo mortem cogitet sed immortalitatem, nec temporariam poenam sed gloriam sempiternam*, he seals the biblical reference to the Hebrews specifying that they *addiderunt posse omnia Deum facere, sed tamen non in hoc fidere, ut liberari in praesentia vellent, sed illam libertatis et securitatis aeternae gloriam cogitarent* (3:2). The use of

⁶¹ G.W. CLARKE I 1984, p. 189, states that Cyprian, turning to confessors, “exhorts them by means of a variety of text to be both humble and steadfast in their faith”.

the same vocabulary seems to link the example from *Dn* with the previous generic exhortation, so that the former, on one side, obtains a more specific interpretation, while the latter, on the other, is eventually grounded on a biblical support.

Cyprian's exegesis of the Hebrews' story does not anyway simply represent a piece of a wide, generic reflection about Christian martyrdom, conducted in a theological and theoretical perspective: also considering the nature of the document in which it is exposed, it becomes possible to spot a connection with a practical circumstance characterizing the situation of Carthage in those years. The author seems in fact to assume the episode from "tales" in order to offer an explanation – and apparently a justification – for the peculiar condition of *confessores*, in the following steps:

- 1) he explicitly refers to Ananias, Azarias and Misael, thrown in the furnace and restored by a refrigerating wind, with the epithets of "martyrs and confessors"⁶², immune from the fire of hell and saved by God. At this stage, the author establishes an equation between the two categories of persecuted – the martyrs and the confessors – implying that both of them benefit of the same privileged relation with God, and share for this reason the same destiny.
- 2) In this context, the author introduces a further and quite unexpected implication: rather than interpreting the salvation of *Dn* protagonists as a type of the future, eschatological destiny of the martyrs – whose death is the real birth – Cyprian seems to conceive the "refrigerating" experience in the furnace as an allusion to earthly and concrete salvation during historical persecutions – a reference that clearly evokes the condition of *confessores*.
- 3) After such preliminary exposition, he focuses on the words pronounced by the Hebrews in front of Nabuchadnezzar, and mainly on the following declarations:

⁶² H.A.M. HOPPENBROUWERS 1961, pp. 89-151, in part. pp. 91-119, analyses Cyprian's assumption of the martyrial terminology, with particular reference to the use of the substantives "martyr and confessor". The scholar affirms that "on a l'impression qu'il emploie les termes...sans toujours faire de distinction" (p. 91). As it will be progressively underlined in the present exposition, the "martyr" in Cyprian, at least in the typological association with *Dn* "tales", seems to correspond with the one who is ready to sacrifice his life for faith, while the confessor would be the martyr who does not come across physical death. It does not seem perfectly appropriate, in this sense, the definition of the term "martyr" offered by H.A.M. HOPPENBROUWERS 1961, p. 92, as "celui qui a donné sa vie pour la foi": according to the *data* emerging here, in Cyprian's perspective death would not apparently represent the discriminating element that justifies the attribution of a "martyrial prerogative" to anybody, which rather depends on an inner predisposition. The term "confessors" appears to be more restricted and indicates a sub-group of the category of "martyrs": they can be identified with those who did not die, even though they would have been ready to run into such possibility.

- a) that they do not need to defend themselves;
- b) that their God is going to save them from the furnace and from the emperor's hands;
- c) that "even if not", they would be as well ready to refuse idolatry.

The interpretation of such profession represents for Cyprian an occasion to express the sense of Christian martyrdom, which results to be characterized by the following coordinates:

- a) faith: the Hebrews know "in their faith that they could be delivered even from the present suffering";
- b) humility: the Hebrews do not boast nor claim it for themselves, since they say "and if not";
- c) courage: the Hebrews consider death as a concrete, possible outcome of the situation they are facing, so that their confession is not weakened by the final lack of the bodily "passion";
- d) "eschatological projection": they do not actually crave for earthly salvation nor pay attention to such dimension, being rather projected toward eschatology and eternal glory.

Through such refined interpretation of chapter 3 of *Dn*, Cyprian manages to describe the real sense of martyrdom, which should not have to be researched in the subsistence of an actual and physical passion, but rather in the attitude of the believers in front of persecution. Adopting a typological exegesis, the author manages to both link the condition of the Hebrews, saved from the furnace, to the experience of the confessors, and offer all the elements needed to understand "how" to face martyrdom in a Christian perspective.

The comparison between the passage of *Epistula* 6 and the case of *De Lapsis* confirms Cyprian's attitude of "mediation and compromise"⁶³ in the definition of the *confessores'* position: on one side, the author fully legitimates the condition of those who survived the persecutions, even making of them the real antitypes of the biblical martyrs; on the other, he limits and perimeters their concrete prerogatives in the life of community, whenever their action menaces to compromise the record of the bishop and the clergy. Such oscillating and fluid attitude, constantly sustained by the help of the Scriptures, may depend on Cyprian's necessity to cope with the tensions coexisting in the historical church.

⁶³ See *supra*, in part. p. 243.

The second reference to *Dn* “tales” in Cyprian’s epistolary can be found in the document 58, ascribable to the years 252-253⁶⁴. In this letter the bishop declares his necessity to “cancel his projected trip to Thibaris in the expectation of advancing dangers”⁶⁵, a forthcoming persecution “more savage than ever before”⁶⁶. Such persecution, perceived by the community as an acutely feared possibility for the imminent future, is unavoidably connected with that one foretold “as coming in the last days”, going to “put Christians to the test, bringing to them by their deaths life everlasting, for Christ has promised to confess before his father those who confess him”⁶⁷.

In this way, the letter assumes since the very beginning a strongly eschatological and apocalyptic tension⁶⁸, so that the world is described as *moriens* and the earthly experience of persecution is identified with the battle against the Antichrist⁶⁹. Once again the author recommends his community to face danger constantly turning to the eternal glory⁷⁰ and without lingering on any regret for the present world that is anyway reaching its final end⁷¹.

⁶⁴ The chronology of the epistle oscillates: G.W. CLARKE III 1986, pp. 29 and 226, places it immediately after the letters 56 – which “comes round about Eastertime” of year 253, “raising questions on penitence which were to be reviewed at the subsequent Council meeting” – and 57 – a “conciliar document” in which it is possible to read “that a major shift in penitential discipline has been taken under fears of coming persecution”. G. TAPONECCO, in G. TAPONECCO-M. VINCELLI (edd.), SCAR 5/2, p. 72, affirming that the *epistula* presents “un'esortazione ai cristiani di Tibari a resistere all'imminente persecuzione di Gallo”, places it between 252 and 253, “poco prima della lettera 57”. About the chronology of the document see also L. DUQUENNE 1972, p. 20. According to G.F. DIERCKS, CCSL 3D, p. 701, the epistle “belongs to the same general context of Ep. 57 with the divine sign of coming persecution (not an actuality)... This places the letter vaguely somewhere in the vicinity of middle-year 253”.

⁶⁵ The signs of this persecution had already been nominated by the author in epistle 57, see G.W. CLARKE III 1986, p. 226.

⁶⁶ G.W. CLARKE III 1986, p. 225. About the epistle see G. LOMIENTO, *Cipriano per la preparazione al martirio dei Tibaritani (Ep. 58)*, in A.A. V.V., *Annali della Facoltà di Magistero dell'Università di Bari* 2, Bari 1962, pp. 7-39, who analyses the theological connotations of Cyprian’s conception of martyrdom as emerging in the document, and offers, since page 19, a description of the literary expedients adopted in the elaboration.

⁶⁷ G.W. CLARKE III 1986, pp. 225-226. See also G. TAPONECCO, in G. TAPONECCO-M. VINCELLI (edd.), SCAR 5/2, p. 73: “l’idea che la fine dei tempi sia ormai imminente ricorre con frequenza: le varie persecuzioni a cui sono soggetti i cristiani ne sono la prova, perché il Signore ha predetto che proprio alla fine dei tempi verranno meno le cose buone e prevarranno invece le malvagità e la perversità”.

⁶⁸ E. GALLICET, *Cipriano e l'Apocalisse*, “Civiltà Classica e Cristiana” 4 (1983), pp. 69-85, in part. pp. 78-79, notices that “tutta la lettera è dominata dalla convinzione che la fine dei tempi sia imminente”.

⁶⁹ About the theme of the Antichrist in Cyprian see F. SBAFFONI, *L'Anticristo nel pensiero del cristianesimo antico (I-III sec.)*, in M. NALDINI (cur.), *La fine dei tempi. Storia ed escatologia*, Firenze 1995 (Lecture Patristiche 1), pp. 24-49, in part. pp. 36-37: “l'utilizzazione del tema dell'Anticristo a scopo di monito e di conforto nell'imminenza della tribolazione è...cosa abbastanza diffusa e assume nell'opera di Cipriano un peso quanto mai rilevante” (p. 36).

⁷⁰ Cyprianus, *Epistulae* 58, ed. G.F. DIERCKS, CCSL 3c, p. 320; 1:2. *Scire enim debetis et pro certo credere ac tenere pressuram diem super caput esse coepisse et occasum saeculi atque Antichristi tempus adpropinquasse, ut parati omnes ad proelium stemus nec quicquam nisi gloriam vitae aeternae et coronam confessionis dominicae cogitemus, nec putemus talia esse quae veniunt qualia fuerunt illa quae transierunt*. See also Cyprianus, *Epistulae* 58, ed. G.F. DIERCKS, CCSL 3c, p. 321; 2:2. *Nec quisquam miretur persecutionibus nos adsiduis fatigari et pressuris angentibus frequenter urgeri, quando haec futura in novissimis*

In this specific panorama, Cyprian's reflection about martyrdom necessarily conveys the perception of the imminent deflagration of the world. The specific modulation of the theme emerges from chapter 3:1, where the persecution is described as an event to exult and feel happy about, a circumstance corresponding with the granting of the crown of faith. Death, on its side, is conceived as the destiny unavoidably predisposed for every man, so that martyrdom, far from being something to be afraid of, can be accepted as a special occasion to obtain, together with such death, also the reward of immortality⁷². "*Nec vereamur occidi*", suggests the author, "*quos constat quando occidimur coronari*"⁷³.

If, on one side, the epistle certainly moves from the intention to face problematic matters concerning the reign of Gallus and to practically support and orient Christians' behaviour during the forthcoming persecution⁷⁴, the strength of the apocalyptic tension seems to influence, on the other, the role and the space assigned by Cyprian to the theme of physical death in his reflection about the "martyrial experience". The analysis of *Dn* "tales" reception in the present context – and mainly in comparison with the epistle 6 – reveals some interesting elements. In order to set the mention of the Hebrews' story in the frame of the entire letter, it becomes necessary to consider a section of the preceding chapter.

Epistula 58, 4:1. None of you, dearly beloved brethren, when you see our people scattered and driven to flight through fear of persecution, has to feel distressed at no longer finding the community assembled together, at no longer hearing the bishops preach. At such a time it is just not possible for everyone to be gathered in one place; even though they may not kill, it is necessary for them to be killed⁷⁵. In those days, whenever any of our brothers happens to be parted from the flock temporarily, by force of circumstances, and finds himself separated from them in body, but not in

temporibus Dominus ante praedixerit et militiam nostram magisterio et hortamento sui sermonis instruxerit. Concerning the connection between the end of times and the meaning of persecutions see in part. A. D'ALÈS 1922, in part. pp. 78-80. About the glorious outcome of persecution see in part. Cyprianus, *Epistulae* 58, ed. G.F. DIERCKS, CCSL 3c, p. 323; 3:1. *Gaudere nos et exultare voluit in persecutionibus Dominus, quia quando persecutiones fiunt, tunc dantur coronae fidei, tunc probantur milites Christi, tunc martyribus patent caeli.*

⁷¹ Cyprianus, *Epistulae* 58, ed. G.F. DIERCKS, CCSL 3c, p. 321; 2:1. *Quae nunc omnia consideranda sunt nobis, ut nemo quicquam de saeculo iam moriente desideret, sed sequatur Christum, qui et vivit in aeternum et vivificat servos suos in fide sui nominis constitutos.*

⁷² Cyprianus, *Epistulae* 58, ed. G.F. DIERCKS, CCSL 3c, pp. 323-324; 3:1. *Gaudere nos et exultare voluit in persecutionibus Dominus, quia quando persecutiones fiunt, tunc dantur coronae fidei, tunc probantur milites Christi, tunc martyribus patent caeli...* 3:2. *Si mortem possemus evadere, merito mori timeremus. Porro autem cum mortalem mori necesse sit, amplectamur occasionem de divina promissione et dignatione venientem et fungamur exitum mortis cum praemio immortalitatis nec vereamur occidi, quos constat quando occidimur coronari.*

⁷³ Cyprianus, *Epistulae* 58, ed. G.F. DIERCKS, CCSL 3c, p. 324; 3:2.

⁷⁴ L. DUQUENNE 1972, p. 20. The letter is included by the scholar in the group of documents that deal with the "restauration de la discipline" and "affaire diverses sous le règne de Gallus".

⁷⁵ Cf. *Mt* 24:9.

Spirit⁷⁶, let him not be dismayed at the terrors of his flight; as he looks for refuge and concealment, let him not be alarmed at the loneliness of his desert region. He is not alone who has Christ as his companion in flight; he is not alone who by dint of preserving his temple has God always with him, wherever he may be⁷⁷. **2.** And if, as he seeks flight among the lonely mountains, some brigand should overpower him, if some wild beast should attack him, if hunger, thirst, or cold should overcome him⁷⁸, or if, as he sails in desperate haste over the seas, storm and tempest should overwhelm him, Christ watches over his soldier wherever he fights, and to the one who dies in persecution for the honour of his name he presents the recompense which he promised he would give on the day of the resurrection⁷⁹. Nor is the glory of such a martyrdom any the less because he did not die in the public gaze and among many, since to die for Christ is still the reason of his dying. That one witness who puts martyrs to the test and gives to them their crowns provides adequate testimony for his martyrdom.⁸⁰

This portion of the text represents a real “key” to fully understand both the perspective of the whole document and the peculiar use of the biblical citations, since the “twofold character” of the letter – which means, so to speak, its “pastoral nature” and its “eschatological vocation” – emerges here with paradigmatic strength. Two elements have to be underlined.

- The “pastoral nature” surfaces since the beginning of the chapter, when Cyprian clearly alludes to the concrete, present situation: he both warns about the possible scattering of the believers during the persecution, and mentions the consequent impossibility for the community to accede to the bishop’s teaching⁸¹. The author, rather than recommending the unity of the “flock”, reassures his people about the fact that Christ is going to stay

⁷⁶ Cf. *Col* 2:5.

⁷⁷ Cf. *1Cor* 3:16; *2Cor* 6:16.

⁷⁸ Cf. *2Cor* 11:27.

⁷⁹ Cf. *Lk* 14:14.

⁸⁰ Cyprianus, *Epistulae* 58, ed. G.F. DIERCKS, CCSL 3c, pp. 324-325; 4:1. *Nec quisquam, fratres dilectissimi, cum populum nostrum fugari conspexerit metu persecutionis et spargi, conturbetur quod collectam fraternitatem non videat nec tractantes episcopos audiat. Simul tunc omnes esse non possunt, quibus occidere non licet, sed occidi necesse est. Ubi cumque in illis diebus unusquisque fratrum fuerit a grege interim necessitate temporis corpore non Spiritu separatus, non moveatur ad fugae illius horrorem nec recedens et latens deserti loci solitudine terreatur. Solus non est cui Christus in fuga comes est. Solus non est qui templum Dei servans ubi cumque fuerit sine Deo non est. 2. Et si fugientem in solitudine ac montibus latro oppresserit, fera invaserit, fames aut sitis aut frigus adflixerit, vel per maria praecipiti navigatione properantem tempestas ac procella submerserit, spectat militem suum Christus ubi cumque pugnantem et persecutionis causa pro nominis sui honore morienti praemium reddit quod daturum se in resurrectione promisit. Nec minor est martyrii gloria non publice et inter multos perisse, cum pereundi causa sit propter Christum perire. Sufficit ad testimonium martyris sui testis ille qui probat martyras et coronat.*

⁸¹ G.W. CLARKE III 1986, p. 230, stresses “Cyprian’s assumption that there will be a mass scattering of the flock, in flight before the onset of persecution”. The same reference returns also in epistle 57.

close to anyone who is separated from the church, so that no one should feel scared. Notwithstanding the difficulty to define and inspect the specific, historical references underling the allusion to the possible “scattering” of the community, it may be licit to wonder whether Cyprian is somehow justifying the condition of those who escape during persecution – in this sense, it would not seem inappropriate to sense here a sort of “self-justification”, since the bishop himself was not in Carthage during the years of Decian action, immediately preceding the composition of *De Lapsis*⁸².

- In the second part of the chapter, Cyprian’s position about physical death appears to be substantially different compared with that one exposed in letter 6⁸³, where the author, establishing an equation between *confessores* and martyrs, substantially disengages the concept of martyrdom from the subsistence of a bodily sacrifice. In the case of *epistula* 58, he simply underlines that *what* determines the validity of martyrdom is not death happened *publice et inter multus*: on the contrary, anyone who dies in the name of Christ – whatever the circumstance of his death is – can be considered as a witness of the faith. The necessary importance of physical death is not really denied, nor called into question: *propter Christum perire* remains a condition of martyrdom. Such approach to the theme of bodily death seems to perfectly correspond to the “eschatological tension” of the epistle: if the world is destined to a forthcoming end, as Cyprian affirms since the premises of the document, and if death is expected for every men, then there is no need nor space to actually extend the “martyrial prerogative” to those who are going to survive persecutions. In other words, since death is perceived as imminent for everyone, the condition of *confessores* does not need to be defended nor explicitly mentioned.

The change of perspective from epistle 6 emerges even more from the analysis of a passage returning, almost identical, in both documents: this is exactly the citation from *Dn*, mentioned among the biblical examples presented – together with the actions of the same Christ⁸⁴ – as models of conduct.

⁸² About the difficult relation between the bishop’s conception of martyrdom and the approach to the theme of *fuga* during persecutions see in part. H. MONTGOMERY, *The Bishop Who Fleed: Responsibility and Honor in Saint Cyprian*, Leuven 1989 (Studia Patristica 21), in part. pp. 264-267.

⁸³ See *supra*, pp. 249-254.

⁸⁴ G. TAPONECCO, in G. TAPONECCO-M. VINCELLI (edd.), SCAR 5/2 (2007), pp. 73-74, commenting a passage of epistle 58:1:3, affirms: “Cristo ha dato insegnamenti non solo con le parole, ma anche con le azioni ed è importante osservare che questi *facta* non consistono tanto nei miracoli bensì nelle azioni virtuose di tutti i giorni che ogni buon cristiano può e deve compiere per ottenere la vita eterna”.

Epistula 58, 5:1. Let us imitate, dearly beloved brethren, the just Abel, who inaugurated martyrdom since he was the first one to be killed for justice⁸⁵. Let us imitate Abraham, the friend of God, who did not hesitate to offer with his own hands his son as a victim, acting in obedience and faithful devotion to God⁸⁶. Let us imitate the three youths, Ananias, Azarias, Misael, who were not terrified in spite of their age, nor were they cowed by captivity; after Judea had been conquered and Jerusalem captured, they overcame the king in his own kingdom by the virtue of their faith. When ordered to worship the statue which king Nebuchadnezzar had made, they proved themselves mightier than all the kings' threats and flames, proclaiming and bearing witness to their faith with these words: "King Nabuchadnezzar: there is no need for us to reply to you on this matter. For the God whom we serve can rescue us from the blazing flames of the furnace, and he will save us from your hands. And if not, let it be known to you that we will not serve your gods neither will we worship the golden statue which you erected"⁸⁷. They believed, according to their faith, that they were able to escape, but they added, "And if not", so that the king should know that they were also able to die for the God whom they worshipped. **2.** The strength of virtue and faith is manifested in believing and knowing that God can deliver from present death and yet at the same time having no fear of death, nor flinching from it, and thereby proving one's faith all the more vigorously. The incorrupt and invincible vigor of the holy Spirit burst forth through their mouth, in order to reveal the truth of the Lord's pronouncement which he made in his gospel by saying: "But when they deliver you up, give no thought as to what you are to say; for it shall be granted to you at that hour what you are to say. It is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks through you"⁸⁸. He has said that what we may say and answer will be granted and presented to us at that hour through divine power, and that at that time is not we who speak but the Spirit of God the Father. And as he neither departs nor is parted from those who confess him, he is the one who not only speaks but also is crowned in us. Hence too, Daniel, when he was being compelled to adore the idol Bel, which the people and the king then worshipped, he boldly spoke forth in the fullness of his faith, claiming the honour of his God and saying: "I worship nothing save the Lord my God, who made heaven and earth"⁸⁹.

⁸⁵ *Gn* 4:8.

⁸⁶ *Gn* 22:10.

⁸⁷ Cf. *Dn* 3:13-16.

⁸⁸ *Mt* 10:19-20.

⁸⁹ *Dn* 14:4. Cyprianus, *Epistulae* 58, ed. G.F. DIERCKS, CCSL 3c, pp. 325-327; 5:1. *Imitemur, fratres dilectissimi, Abel iustum qui initiavit martyria dum propter iustitiam primus occiditur. Imitemur Abraham Dei amicum qui non est cunctatus ut filium victimam suis manibus offerret, dum Deo fide devotionis obsequitur. Imitemur tres pueros Ananiam, Azariam, Misael,*

The apparent similarity between the allusions to *Dn* of epistles 6 and 58 should not mislead about the substantial difference in Cyprian's use and interpretation of this material. Here follows a presentation of the traits of continuity between the citations, and a further reflection about their distinctive specificities.

- The preliminary mentions of the *iustus* Abel in *Ep* 58, 5:1 returns also in letter 6, 2:1. In both cases, the patriarch is cited because he was the first one among the prophets to have been killed.

Epistula 6, 2:1. *In origine statim prima Abel iustus occiditur et exinde iusti quique et prophetae et apostoli missi.*

Epistula 58, 5:1. *Imitemur, fratres dilectissimi, Abel iustum qui initiavit martyria dum propter iustitiam primus occiditur.*

- The characterization of Daniel's companions in the letters touches common points.
 - 1) The Hebrews' age is an element that gives further eminence to their courage and strength.

Epistula 6, 3. *Ac ne quid deesset ad gloriam numeri vestri, ut omnis vobiscum et sexus et aetas esset in honore, pueros etiam vobis gloriosa confessione sociavit divina dignatio, repraesentans nobis tale aliquid quale Ananias, Azarias Misael inlustres pueri aliquando fecerunt...*

Epistula 58, 5:1. *Nec aetate territi.*

qui nec aetate territi nec captivitate fracti Iudaea devicta et Hierosolymis captis in ipso regno suo regem fidei virtute vicerunt, qui adorare statuam quam Nabuchodonosor rex fecerat iussi et minis regis et flammis fortiores extiterunt, proclamantes et fidem suam per haec verba testantes: "Nabuchodonosor rex, non opus est nobis de hoc verbo respondere tibi. Est enim Deus cui nos servimus potens eripere nos de camino ignis ardentis, et de manibus tuis liberabit nos: et si non, notum sit tibi quia diis tuis non servimus et imaginem auream quam statuisti non adoramus". Credebant se illi secundum fidem posse evadere, sed addiderunt "et si non", ut sciret rex illos propter Deum quem colebant et mori posse. 2. Hoc est enim robur virtutis et fidei credere et scire quod Deus a morte praesenti liberare nos possit, et tamen mortem non timere nec cedere, ut probari fortius fides possit. Erupit per os eorum Spiritus sancti incorruptus et invictus vigor, ut appareat vera esse quae in evangelio suo Dominus edixit dicens: "cum autem vos adprehenderint, nolite cogitare quid loquamini. Dabitur enim vobis in illa hora quid loquamini. Nos enim vos estis qui loquimini, sed Spiritus patris vestri qui loquitur in vobis. Dixit quid loqui et respondere possimus dari nobis in illa hora divinitus et offerri, nec nos tunc esse qui loquimur, sed Spiritum Dei Patris, qui cum a confitentibus non discedit neque dividitur, ipse in nobis et loquitur et coronatur. Sic et Daniel cum compelleretur adorare idolum Bel quem tunc populus et rex colebant in adserendum Dei sui honorem plena fide et libertate prorupit dicens: "nihil colo ego nisi Dominum Deum meum qui condidit caelum et terram". About the text see also R.B. DONNA 1964, pp. 166-167; G. TAPONECCO, in G. TAPONECCO-M. VINCELLI (edd.), SCAR 5/2, pp. 78-79.

- 2) Faith is their principal prerogative.

Epistula 6, 3:2. *Et consideretis diligentius peto pro vestra religione quae apud illos pueros fides fuerit, quae promereri plenius Deum potuit.*

Epistula 58, 5:1. *Imitemur tres pueros Ananiam, Azariam, Misael, qui...in ipso regno suo regem fidei virtute vicerunt...proclamantes et fidem suam per haec verba testantes.*

- 3) The nature and the essence of such faith is expressed by the words addressed to Nabuchadnezzar, which are reported in the same way. The Hebrews first of all declare the intention not to defend themselves in front of the emperor, since they are protected by their God; secondly, they state their firm intention to refuse idolatry, even in case their God would not save them.

Epistula 6, 3:2. *“Nabuchodonosor rex, non opus est nobis de hoc verbo respondere tibi. Est enim Deus cui nos servimus potens eripere nos de camino ignis ardentis, et de manibus tuis, rex, liberabit nos. Et si non, notum tibi sit quoniam diis tuis non servimus et imaginem auream quam statuisti non adoramus”.*

Epistula 58, 5:1. *“Nabuchodonosor rex, non opus est nobis de hoc verbo respondere tibi. Est enim Deus cui nos servimus potens eripere nos de camino ignis ardentis, et de manibus tuis liberabit nos: et si non, notum sit tibi quia diis tuis non servimus et imaginem auream quam statuisti non adoramus”.*

The radical difference in Cyprian’s use of the same material, can be tested by the analysis of the sense attributed to the expression “*et si non*”.

As has been mentioned⁹⁰, in letter 6 the phrase is integrated in a discourse concerning the peculiar condition of *confessores*, whose experience is presented by the author as fully comparable to the martyrs’ one: since Daniel’s companions, types of those who survived the persecution, do not consider salvation from fire as a certainty, they can obtain the “martyrial dignity” as a reward for their inner courage and predisposition.

The elaboration of letter 58 follows a different interpretative path. First of all, the author states that the confidence in salvation originates from faith (*credebant se illi secundum fidem posse evadere*); at the same time, he affirms that the specification “*et si non*” expresses the real essence of virtue and faith (*hoc est enim robur virtutis et fidei*). In other words, if it is true that trusting in God’s intervention is a

⁹⁰ See *supra*, pp. 249-254.

prerogative of the faithful men, the real value of the Hebrews' testimony is eminently associated with their predisposition to face death, strongly remarked by the expression: *credere et scire quod Deus a morte praesenti liberare nos possit, et tamen mortem non timere nec cedere, ut probari fortius fides possit*. If in letter 6 the accent seems to be put on the conquered salvation, the real core of *Dn* citation in letter 58 is represented by the acceptance of death.

Two details can be interpreted in this perspective: first of all, the theme of the "refreshment" in the furnace, mentioned in letter 6 (*inclusis in caminum cesserunt ignes et refrigerium flammae dederunt*), is not recalled in epistle 58; secondly, the divine presence in the flames, associated in letter 6 with the Hebrews' salvation from fire, is connected in epistle 58 with Daniel's companions' capacity to formulate those words which made of them real martyrs (that is the refusal of idolatry and the acceptance of death). In other words, the elements and patterns connected with the theme of salvation are highlighted in letter 6 and weakened in 58.

It is necessary to underline that *epistulae* 6 and 58 do not actually contradict each other, since in both cases physical death is not presented as a condition which determines the validity of martyrdom; what actually changes is one of the elements of the typological relation established between the First Testament protagonists and the members of the community: if in letter 6 Cyprian wants to evoke the confessors' condition, stressing the fact that the same Hebrews were rescued from flames, in epistle 58 he apparently recalls, in a more generic sense, the destiny of those who die during persecutions, which means the prototype of the martyrs who lose their life to have it safe⁹¹. This interpretative proposal may find a confirmation in the other biblical *exempla* of letter 58, 6: here Cyprian mentions the tortures of Maccabean martyrs and affirms that prophets and apostles taught Christians to die, since they have been killed for justice⁹².

c) *End times and the martyr: Daniel and the three Hebrews in Epistle 67*

The use of *Dn* "tales" in document 58 seems to be in some measure comparable with the reception of the same material in epistle 67, a document concerning the case of two Spanish bishops who

⁹¹ G. LOMIENTO 1962, p. 6, underlines that, according to Cyprian "Dio potrebbe impedire le persecuzioni, ma esse danno la certezza ai cristiani di essere come il maestro; l'imitazione di Cristo fino al martirio è la più alta prova di fedeltà". This would be the meaning attributed by the bishop to martyrdom in a generic sense, and without further specifications this seems to be the core of *Dn* reception in this letter.

⁹² Cyprianus, *Epistulae* 58, ed. G.F. DIERCKS, CCSL 3c, p. 327; 6:1. *Quid in Machabeis beatorum martyrum gravia tormenta et multiformes septem fratrum poenae et confortans liberos suos mater in poenis et moriens ipsa quoque cum liberis, nonne magnae virtutis et fidei documenta testantur et nos ad martyrii triumphum suis passionibus adhortantur? Quid prophetae quos ad praesentiam futurorum Spiritus Sanctus animavit? Quid apostoli quos dominus elegit? Nonne cum iusti occiduntur propter iustitiam mori nos quoque docuerunt?*

claimed to reassume their episcopal role after having “lapsed” in front of idolatry⁹³. The letter exposes Cyprian’s positions – openly against their reintegration⁹⁴ – through a rhetorical structure that explicitly makes of *divina praecepta* its fundament and grounding⁹⁵.

As it happens in letter 58, the argumentation is included in a strongly apocalyptic frame: the bishops’ weakness in front of idolatry is presented and understood as a trace of both the end times proximity and the upcoming arrival of the Antichrist, a moment in which *bona* are going to extinguish⁹⁶. Also in this occasion, Daniel and the Hebrews are mentioned as an allusion to martyrial courage, which keeps on being expressed and manifested also in such a critical moment:

⁹³ For an exposition concerning the date of composition of the document see G. TAPONECCO, in G. TAPONECCO-M. VINCELLI (edd.), SCAR 5/2, p. 188, according to whom the letter must have been composed “verso l’autunno del 254-primi mesi del 255, successivamente al concilio di Cartagine in cui, come Cipriano osserva, si era discusso sui due vescovi di Spagna che, dopo aver apostatato, avevano voluto riprendere le funzioni episcopali dalle quali erano decaduti”. As G. TAPONECCO, in G. TAPONECCO-M. VINCELLI (edd.), SCAR 5/2, p. 189, further underlines, the events took place during Decius’ persecution. The first bishop, after having refused martyrdom, initially decided to retire from his episcopal charge; soon after, he went to Rome claiming to be reaccepted in his former role. The answer he received from pope Steven was positive, but in the meanwhile two new bishops had been elected. Cyprian, questioned about the problematic situation, takes position against pope Steven’s decision and stimulates the community to refuse those who had sinned. About the chronology of the epistle, critics are not unanimous; for instance, G.F. DIERCKS, CCSL 3D, p. 703, affirms that the letter must have been written after epistle 68, “one possibility is in autumn 256... Spring 257 is another possibility”. On the date of the document see also L. DUQUENNE 1972, p. 2; J.G.D. DUNN, *Cyprian of Carthage and the Episcopal Synod of Late 254*, “Revue de Études Augustiniennes” 48 (2002), pp. 230-237. About the problematic background of the letter see J.C. SALISBURY, *The Bond of a Common Mind. A Study of Collective Salvation from Cyprian to Augustine*, “Journal of Religious History” 13 (1985), pp. 235-247, in part. p. 238, where the scholar affirms that Cyprian, in epistle 67, “articulates the importance of community responsibility for its own salvation”.

⁹⁴ E. CATTANEO (cur.) 1997, pp. 513-514, describes the prerogatives of church ministries in Cyprian, and underlines how “quei vescovi, presbiteri e diaconi che si sono separati dalla chiesa, e poi, pentiti, vogliono ritornarvi, non potranno più esercitare il loro ministero”.

⁹⁵ Cyprianus, *Epistulae* 67, ed. G.F. DIERCKS, CCSL 3c, pp. 447-448; 1:2. *Sed enim desiderio huic vestro non tam nostra consilia quam divina praecepta respondent, quibus iam pridem mandatur voce caelesti et Dei lege praescribitur, quos et quales oporteat deservire altari et sacrificia divina celebrare.*

⁹⁶ Cyprianus, *Epistulae* 67, ed. G.F. DIERCKS, CCSL 3c, p. 458; 7:1. *Nec vos moveat, fratres dilectissimi, si apud quosdam in novissimis temporibus aut lubrica fides nutat aut Dei timor inreligiosus vacillat aut pacifica concordia non perseverat. Praenuntiata sunt haec futura in saeculi fine et Domini voce atque apostolorum contestatione praedictum est deficiente iam mundo atque adpropinquante Antichristo bona quaeque deficere, mala vero et adversa proficere.* It seems possible to find here traces of the theme of the *senectus mundi*, inaugurated in Christian literature by the bishop of Carthage and consistently developed in *Ad Demetrianum*. E. ZOCCA, *La senectus mundi. Significato, fonti e fortuna di un tema cipriano*, in A.A. V.V., *Studi sul cristianesimo antico e moderno in onore di M.G. Mara*, II, Roma 1995, pp. 641-677, considers such topic as the result of the convergence of two different lines: “da un lato la tradizione escatologica giudeo-cristiana, con la sua visione apocalittica della finis temporum, dall’altro una prospettiva pessimistica di stampo genericamente filosofico, che si rifà vuoi all’idea sallustiana dell’inevitabile declino di tutte le cose..., vuoi agli schemi biologici relativi alle età del mondo, già ben diffusi...in ambiente romano” (p. 263). Commenting *Ad Demetrianum*, the scholar underlines how the description of the progressive diffusion of evil in the world had the function to “rendere più dolce la rinuncia ad esso e più appetibile una scelta vantaggiosa ma difficile” (p. 648), in a way that reveals substantially coherent with the panorama delineated in the letter. About the theme in epistle 58 see G. LOMIENTO 1962, p. 7.

Epistula 67, 8:1. Yet although in these last times evangelical rigor not so failed in the church of God, nor the strength of Christian virtue or faith so languished, that there does not remain a portion of priests which in no respect gives way under these ruins of things and wrecks of faith; but, strong and steadfast, they maintain the honour of the divine majesty and the priestly dignity, with full observance of fear. **2.** We remember and we hold in mind that, although others yielded and succumbed, Mattathias bravely vindicated God’s law, that Elijah stood and nobly contended, when the Jews gave way and departed from the divine religion; that Daniel, deterred neither by the loneliness of a foreign country, nor by the harassment of continual persecution, frequently and bravely suffered martyrdoms; also that the three youths, subdued neither by their years nor by threats, stood up faithfully against the Babylonian fires and conquered the victor king even in their very captivity. **3.** Let the number either of prevaricators or of traitors see to it, who have now begun to rise in the church against the church and to corrupt as well the faith as the truth. Still remains, among very many, a sincere mind and upright religion and a Spirit devoted to nothing but the Lord and God. Nor does the perfidy of others reduce the Christian faith to ruin, but, rather, it excites it and exults it to glory according to what the blessed apostle exhorts and says: “For what if some of these have fallen from their faith? Will their unbelief make the faith of God of none effect? By no means! For God is true, but every man is a liar”⁹⁷. But if every man is a liar and God only true, what else ought we, the servants, and especially the bishops of God, to do, than forsake human errors and lies and continue in the truth of God, keeping the Lord’s precepts?⁹⁸

The citations from “tales” involve here both the story of Daniel, mentioned in its generic lines – with particular reference to the themes of exile and persecution – and the episode of the Hebrews, once again remembered for their young age and their resistance in front of the fire and the king. In

⁹⁷ Cf. *Rm* 3:3-4.

⁹⁸ Cyprianus, *Epistulae* 67, ed. G.F. DIERCKS, CCL 3c, pp. 458-460; 8:1. *Non sic tamen quamvis novissimis temporibus in ecclesia Dei aut evangelicus vigor cecidit aut Christianae virtutis et fidei robur elanguit, ut non supersit portio sacerdotum quae minime ad has rerum ruinas et fidei naufragia succumbat, sed fortis et stabilis honorem divinae maiestatis et sacerdotalem dignitatem plena timoris observatione tueatur. 2. Meminimus et tenemus succumbentibus licet et cedentibus ceteris Mattathian legem Dei vindicasse fortiter, Helian Iudaeis deficientibus atque a religione divina recedentibus stetit et certasse sublimiter, Danielem nec solitudine regioni alienae nec persecutionis adsiduae infestatione deterritum frequenter ac fortiter gloriosa edidisse martyria, tres item pueros nec annis nec minis fractos contra ignes Babylonios fideliter obstitisse et victorem regem in ipsa sua captivitate vicisse. 3. Viderit vel praevaricatorum numerus vel proditorum qui nunc in ecclesia contra ecclesiam surgere et fidem pariter ac veritatem labefactare coeperunt. Permanet apud plurimos sincera mens et religio integra et non nisi Domino et Deo suo anima devota, nec christianam fidem aliena perfidia deprimit ad ruinam, sed magis excitat et exultat ad gloriam, secundum quod beatus apostolus hortatur et dicit: “Quid enim si exciderunt a fide quidam eorum, numquid infidelitas illorum fidem Dei evacuabit? Absit. Est enim Deus verax, omnis autem homo mendax”. Si autem omnis homo mendax est et solus Deus verax, quid aliud servi et maxime sacerdotes Dei facere debemus nisi ut humanos errores et mendacia relinquamus et praecepta dominica custodientes in Dei veritate maneamus?* See also R.B. DONNA 1964, pp. 237-238.

this occasion, even more than in epistle 58, the biblical stories are evoked as allusions to martyrdom, and as examples of the bravery of few, righteous people in harsh circumstances. Together with Mattathias and Elijah, the prophet and his companions are conceived as the anticipators of those who are going to keep their mind “sincere” and their religion “upright” even in end times, when the Antichrist’s arrival is announced by the languishing of virtue: in this sense, the scriptural figures become the type of those who *do not* act as the “lapsed bishops” did, so that it is possible to say that the relation between Scripture and present certainly includes the historical protagonists of the letter, but in an “inverse” perspective.

As it happens in *epistula* 58, also in document 67 the “apocalyptic perception” of the imminent deflagration of the world prevails; in such frame, the core of martyrdom ends up being more strongly connected with the unavoidable outcome of death, so that the biblical examples, such as those derived from *Dn*, are consequently assumed and interpreted in this key. Once again, the prophet’s and the Hebrews’ experiences are not evoked to prove the dignity of those who are rescued by God in the moment of sufferance, but rather to demonstrate, in a more generic sense, the importance of enduring martyrdom⁹⁹.

⁹⁹ E. GALLICET 1983, p. 84, affirms that apocalypse in Cyprian “non annuncia...«l'imminente ritorno di Gesù Cristo, con grande potenza e gloria a distruggere i suoi nemici...», bensì...indica ai cristiani precise scelte teologiche e morali da realizzare nella vita presente”. More punctually, about epistle 58, p. 79, the scholar underlines that it is used “come esortazione a essere forti e a non temere la persecuzione...in funzione pastorale”. E. GALLICET seems to operate here a “simplification” of the panorama: if certainly the apocalyptic atmosphere is used, on one side, to strongly encourage the people in front of martyrdom, the eschatological tension and the perception of the imminent, unavoidable deflagration modify in turn the author’s approach to the martyrial thematic, so that the reference to *confessores* disappears and a conception of martyrdom as physical death surfaces. In this sense, the apocalyptic element cannot be simply considered as “on the service” of pastoral worries, since the same approach to the present situation seems to be sensibly modified and influenced by the increase of the eschatological tension.

d) *When the confessor is a bishop*

The letter sent to Lucius the pope¹⁰⁰, probably ascribable to 253 or 254¹⁰¹, presents another peculiar case attesting the “fluid reception” of *Dn* “tales” in Cyprians’ production.

Also in this occasion, the central topic of the exegesis is represented by the role of *confessores*, since the same letter is conceived as an encouragement to the pope who managed to come back to Rome after being condemned for having confessed¹⁰².

A decisive element allows anyway to consider epistle 61 as a peculiar example of *Dn* reception, worthy to undergo an individual analysis: in this specific circumstance, the *confessor* is actually a bishop, so that the heart of Cyprian’s reticence against those who survived persecution – which has already been identified with their rivalry with clergy¹⁰³ – unavoidably dissolves, since the martyr is at the same time a licit guide of the church.

The implications of this evidence emerge since the very beginning of the document, when Cyprian affirms:

Epistle 61, 1:1. It was only recently, dearly beloved brother, that we congratulated you, for through divine favour you had been twice honoured in the administration of his church, being appointed at once confessor and bishop. But also now, no less warmly, we congratulate you and your companions and all the brethren, for with that glory and those praises of yours, you have now been brought back to his people, through the abundant and beneficent protection of the Lord, **2.** so that the shepherd might be restored to feed the flock and the helmsman for piloting the ship, the ruler for governing the people, and it becomes clear that your banishment was so ordained by divine providence, not in order that the bishop should be parted from his church through expulsion and exile, but so that he might return to his church increased in greatness¹⁰⁴.

¹⁰⁰ The epistle is addressed to *Lucio fratri*; see G.F. DIERCKS (ed.), CCSL 3C, p. 380.

¹⁰¹ See L. DUQUENNE 1972, pp. 36-37, and G. TAPONECCO, in G. TAPONECCO-M. VINCELLI (edd.), SCAR 5/2, p. 128, who places it in 254; G.F. DIERCKS (ed.), CCSL 3D, p. 701, proposes the end of 253.

¹⁰² Lucius was pope in 253 after Cornelius (R.B. DONNA 1964, p. 196). In the present letter Cyprian congratulates for his return to Rome. About the story of Lucius see R.B. DONNA 1964, pp. 196, and G. TAPONECCO, in G. TAPONECCO-M. VINCELLI (edd.), SCAR 5/2, pp. 128.

¹⁰³ See *supra*, in part. pp. 243-244.

¹⁰⁴ Cyprianus, *Epistulae* 61, ed. G.F. DIERCKS, CCSL 3c, p. 380; 1:1. *Et nuper quidem tibi, frater carissime, gratulati sumus, cum te honore geminato in ecclesiae suae administratione confessorem pariter et sacerdotem constituit divina dignatio. Sed et nunc non minus tibi et comitibus tuis atque universae fraternitati gratulamur quod cum eadem gloria et laudibus vestris reduces vos denuo ad suos fecerit benigna Domini et larga protectio, 2. ut pascendo gregi pastor et gubernandae navi gubernator et plebi regendae rector redderetur et appareret relegationem vestram sic divinitus esse dispositam, non ut episcopus relegatus et pulsus ecclesiae deesset, sed ut ad ecclesiam maior rediret.*

This introduction, which anticipates the biblical reference to “tales”, already presents some interesting elements testifying the attitude maintained by the author in the whole epistle.

Alluding to the contents of a lost letter sent in a previous moment to Lucius¹⁰⁵, Cyprian affirms that the pope had been “appointed at once as confessor and bishop”: these attributes are presented as a twofold honour (*honore geminato*) granted by *divina dignatio* and pertaining to the perimeter of the church management (*in ecclesiae suae administratione*).

Passing from the mention of the previous letter to the development of the present one, the focus progressively shifts to the specific role of Lucius as bishop, through the use of metaphors that, highlighting such aspect, indirectly cast a shadow on his quality of *confessor*: the Lord made him come back as a shepherd for his flock, as a helmsman who guides the ship and as a ruler for his people (*pascendo gregi pastor et gubernandae navi gubernator et plebi regendae rector redderetur*). In other words, presenting a list of periphrasis about the figure of the church-leader, Cyprian apparently relegates the title of *confessor* to a secondary role.

A deeper analysis of the final sentence of the section may suggest a different interpretation. Cyprian seems actually to imply that the afflictions that Lucius had to endure were predisposed so that he could eventually come back to his church increased its greatness (*appareret relegationem vestram sic divinitus esse dispositam, non ut episcopus relegatus et pulsus ecclesiae deesset, sed ut ad ecclesiam maior rediret*). This development can be considered as another slight variation in Cyprian’s “theology” of martyrdom: if in epistle 58 the centrality of death is substantially affirmed and in letter 6 salvation represents an outcome that does not anyway have to be taken for granted, in the case of *epistula* 61, the pope’s final return can be identified with the same sense of the whole martyrial experience, that is conceived by God since the beginning in order to “make a confessor”¹⁰⁶ who could come back to his community.

¹⁰⁵ G. TAPONECCO, in G. TAPONECCO-M. VINCELLI (edd.), SCAR 5/2, p. 128, affirms: “Lucio succede a Cornelio il 25 giugno 253 e Cipriano gli invia subito una prima lettera di congratulazioni, che però non ci è pervenuta”.

¹⁰⁶ In order to better understand this point, it is possible to start from the translation of the passage proposed by M. VINCELLI, in G. TAPONECCO-M. VINCELLI (edd.), SCAR 5/2, p. 129, which offers interesting elements of reflection: “...la protezione benevola e generosa del Signore vi ha fatto ritornare nuovamente fra i suoi, 2. perché...risultasse evidente che il vostro esilio è stato organizzato per volontà divina così che non venisse a mancare alla chiesa il vescovo esiliato e bandito, ma vi facesse ritorno ancora più forte”. The scholar introduces two positive-final clauses “così che non venisse mancare alla chiesa” and “(cosicché) vi facesse ritorno”. It seems more appropriate to interpret the first sentence as a negative-final clause (“not in order that the bishop should be parted from his church”), and the second one as a positive-final clause: “ma affinché vi facesse ritorno”. The difference is subtle but substantial: the second translation actually stresses a disjunctive contraposition between two different orders of sufferances, those ones predisposed by divine providence in order to “make a martyr” and those ordered since to beginning to “make a confessor”. In this way, the survival of the bishop does not represent an accidental, “lucky” conclusion of a persecution which

Consistently with these premises, the following biblical *exempla* are meant to offer proofs, confirmations and irrefutable guarantees of the full dignity of the *confessores*' condition. The section deserves to be studied from its very first part.

Epistula 61, 2:1. In the case of the three youths the dignity of their martyrdom was in no way diminished because, having thwarted death, they came forth unscathed from the fiery furnace¹⁰⁷, no were Daniel's honours incomplete because the one who had been delivered up as prey to the lions – protected by the Lord – lived in glory¹⁰⁸. Among the confessors of Christ the fact that their martyrdom has been deferred does not detracts from the merits of their confession; rather, it serves to make manifest the greatness of divine protection¹⁰⁹.

Two “tales” of *Dn* are evoked in order to prove that there is nothing incomplete in the confessors' experience. The first reference is, once again, to the episode of the Hebrews, here simply recalled by mentioning the positive conclusion of the punishment in the furnace. The second citation is as much generic: the episode of Daniel in lions' den is alluded as the circumstance in which the prophet was saved from lions to obtain glory thanks to God's protection¹¹⁰. In this case, the author does not simply underline how *dilata martyria non meritum confessionis minuunt*, but he rather adds that they *magnalia divinae protectionis ostendunt*. In this sense, far from simply certifying the validity of the confessors' condition, he eminently makes of it the principal and most creditable kind of martyrdom, that one capable to show the greatness of God.

The author goes on explaining the specific function of the biblical *exempla*, which have to be considered as types of the *confessores*. More precisely, the typological link is here presented in a perspective that goes from the present to the past: in other words, Cyprian describes *of whom* the *confessores* are antitypes.

Epistula 61, 2:2. We can see in your experience what has been proclaimed before the king by the courageous and celebrated youths, that for their part they were

could have had a double outcome, but rather becomes the only possible solution of a circumstance predisposed since the beginning to “make a confessor”.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Dn* 3:49-50.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *Dn* 6:16-23.

¹⁰⁹ Cyprianus, *Epistulae* 61, ed. G.F. DIERCKS, CCSL 3c, pp. 380-381; 2:1. *Neque enim in tribus pueris minor fuit martyrii dignitas, quia morte frustrata de camino ignis incolumes exierunt aut non consummatus Daniel extitit in suis laudibus, quia qui leonibus missus fuerat ad praedam, protectus a Domino vixit ad gloriam. In confessoribus Christi dilata martyria non meritum confessionis minuunt, sed magnalia divinae protectionis ostendunt.*

¹¹⁰ It appears impossible to specify whether the author is here referring to chapter 6 or 14. In the case of both the Hebrews and Daniel, Cyprian seems to generically have in mind the biblical stories, without the intention to cite a specific portion of the text and rather evoking the principal guidelines.

prepared to burn in the flames, in order not to serve his gods or adore the idol which he had made; yet, (they proclaimed) that God whom they worshipped – and whom we also worship – had the power to release them from the fiery furnace and to rescue them from the hands of the king and from the present sufferings¹¹¹. We can discern all this has been accomplished, thanks to the faith of your confession and to the protection of the Lord¹¹², for whereas you showed yourself ready and willing to undergo every kind of affliction, yet the Lord delivered you from suffering and preserved you for the church. **3.** For you who are coming back, the dignity of the bishop's confession has not been diminished; his authority as bishop has rather been increased, for at the altar of God now takes his stand someone who exhorts his people to take up the arms of confession and to become martyrs not by his words, but by his deeds; and while the Antichrist is coming, he trains his soldiers ready for the battle not just with rousing words and speeches, but with the example of faith and virtue¹¹³.

Those who survived persecutions are first of all presented as those in whom *repraesentatum videmus...quod apud regem fortes atque inlustres pueri praedicaverunt*. The core of the exegesis is also in this case anchored to the words pronounced by the Hebrews, rather than their own actions, so that the typological antecedent is not here represented by an event, nor by a biblical character, but more precisely by a discourse referred in an indirect form and, in some measure, summarized by the author of the epistle. The contents of Daniel's companions' words (which means both the declared intention to burn in flames and to refuse the idols and the confession of trust in God's salvific power) find an accomplishment, according to Cyprian, both in the profession of *confessores*, and in God's intervention on behalf of those good Christians who were ready to face every kind of pain.

An interesting element emerges from the comparison between this section and the equivalent direct speech reported in letters 6 and 58: it consists in a significant "inversion" of the passages. In the previously analysed letters, the discourse was introduced by the Hebrews' declaration of faith in

¹¹¹ Cf. *Dn* 3:16:18.

¹¹² According to G. TAPONECCO, in G. TAPONECCO-M. VINCELLI (edd.), SCAR 5/2, pp. 129, Cyprian is here alluding to God's providence, to which Christians can turn, in order to face enemies and dangers.

¹¹³ Cyprianus, *Epistulae* 61, ed. G.F. DIERCKS, CCSL 3c, pp. 381-382; 2:2. *Repraesentatum videmus in vobis quod apud regem fortes atque inlustres pueri praedicaverunt, ipsos quidem paratos esse ardere flammis, ne diis eius servirent aut imaginem quam fecerat adorarent, Deum tamen quem colebant quemque et nos colimus potentem esse ut eos de camino ignis eximeret et de regis manibus ac de poenis praesentibus liberaret. Quod invenimus in confessionis vestrae fide et in domini circa vos protectione nunc gestum, ut cum vos parati fueritis et prompti omne subire supplicium, Dominus tamen vos poenae subtraheret et ecclesiae reservaret. 3. Regredientibus vobis breviata non est in episcopo confessionis suae dignitas, sed magis crevit sacerdotalis auctoritas, ut altari Dei adsistat antistes qui ad confessionis arma sumenda et facienda martyria non verbis plebem sed factis cohortetur et imminente Antichristo parat ad proelium milites non solo sermonis et vocis incitamento sed fidei et virtutis exemplo.* See also R.B. DONNA 1964, pp. 196-198; G.W. CLARKE III 1986, pp. 92-93; G. TAPONECCO-M. VINCELLI (edd.), SCAR 5/2, pp. 128-131.

God's intervention, so that the expression "*et si non*" was needed to demonstrate their courage in front of death. In the present passage, the indirect speech first of all reports the Hebrews' intention to choose death against apostasy, and only in a second moment the salvific action of God is mentioned. Such inversion unavoidably stresses the courage of the confessors' types, who are firstly described as those who are ready to face sufferance and death, rather than those who rely on salvation.

The choice of the author finds a possible explanation immediately after, when he exposes the present events typologically adumbrated by the biblical discourse: as the Hebrews did, also the *confessores* were ready and willing to undergo afflictions when God saved them. In other words, Cyprian may have substituted the speech of Ananias, Azarias and Misael with an indirect reformulation of it, in order to underline the courage of those who escaped the persecution: if the biblical words stress indeed the hope of salvation, the author rather highlights the motif of death acceptance.

The final passage of chapter 2 explicitly declares the function of the typological elaboration: in the light of the story narrated in *Dn*, it is necessary to consider the return of the bishop as an element strongly increasing his episcopal authority, since it allows him to exhort his threatened church by the efficacious instrument of his own concrete experience.

The conclusion of the epistle discloses another step in the "typological path" that starts from the Hebrews' words and develops in the experience of those who confessed their faith: in chapter 4:1 Cyprian actually establishes a further connection between the *confessores* and the return of the same Christ. After mentioning John the Baptist as *praecursor* of Jesus, the author states that *nunc episcopo confessore domini et sacerdote redeunte appareat et dominum iam redire*. In other words, the scope of the typology here presented goes from the biblical prophecy to the final landing place of eschatology, passing through the intermediate phase of the present life of the church. In this context the experience of the Hebrews represents the necessary presuppose for the correct interpretation of the confessors' role, allowing, at a further stage, the association between historical community and the same return of Christ.

5.1.3. *Excursus: some considerations about the text of Daniel assumed by Cyprian*

The citations of *Dn* so far examined offer a paradigmatic occasion to reflect about the difficulty to determine which translation was assumed by the author and, consequently, which version of the “book” circulated in a specific context.

The composite nature of the text manipulated by the bishop of Carthage was underlined since the very beginning of the research concerning this field, which was tackled at the end of the 90th century by F.C. BURKITT¹¹⁴. The hypothesis proposed by the author, and on the whole accepted by the other scholars¹¹⁵, was that, contrary to what is generally supposed to happen in antiquity, Cyprian would not have prevalently assumed Θ , but rather a mixed text, probably a copy of an OL version translated from *Dn*^{OG} and half corrected from the new version of *Dn* ^{Θ} . In other words, against what is overall affirmed about patristic literature, Cyprian would be supposed to use, so to speak, Θ less than OG. Without meaning to take a stand against such hypothesis, that moves from a general analysis of the whole assumption of *Dn* in the bishop’s work, it is necessary to stress that the passages here studied seem to unveil a more complicated panorama.

The citation of “tales” in epistle 6 can be divided into two different parts: the first section¹¹⁶ does not represent a literal quotation, but rather a generic description of the situation in the furnace, that does not tell a lot about the possible text from which it would have been taken. The author may have resorted to his own memory and personal knowledge of the biblical passage, evoking it “by heart”. The most specific and literal element in the exposition is represented by the allusion to the *refrigerium* offered to the Hebrews in the furnace, which allows to establish a connection with *Dn* 3:49-50; the detail does not anyway offer a real indication about the text assumed, since both *Dn* ^{Θ} and *Dn*^{OG} include the same reference to the $\pi\nu\epsilon\delta\mu\alpha$ $\delta\rho\acute{o}\sigma\omicron\upsilon$ provoked by God’s angel.

¹¹⁴ F.C. BURKITT, *The Old Latin and the Itala*, Cambridge 1892, develops a line-by-line comparative analysis that takes in consideration the parallel quotations in Tertullian’s production, in *De Pascha Computus* and in Victorinus of Pettau’s work.

¹¹⁵ See in part. M.A. FAHEY, *Cyprian and the Bible: a Study in Third-Century Exegesis*, Tübingen 1971 (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Biblischen Hermeneutik 9), pp. 592-596. The study of *Dn* use in Cyprian has not been widely inspected in a punctual way. For references to the Bible used by the author see J.N.D. KELLY, *The Bible and the Latin Fathers*, in D.E. NINEHAM (ed.), *The Church’s Use of the Bible Past and Present*, London 1963, pp. 41-56; O. SKARSAUNE, *The Development of Scriptural Interpretation in the Second and Third Century*, in M. SAEBO (ed.), *Hebrew Bible Old Testament. The History of its Interpretation*, I/1: *Antiquity*, Göttingen 1996, in part. pp. 440-442.

¹¹⁶ Cyprianus, *Epistulae*, ed. G.F. DIERCKS, CCL 3b, p. 34; 6, 3:1. *Inclusis in caminum cesserunt ignes et refrigerium flammae dederunt praesente cum illis Domino et probante quod in confessores et martyras eius nihil posset gehennae ardor operari, sed quod qui in Deum crederent incolumes semper et tuti in omnibus perseverarent.*

The second part of the citation represents, on the contrary, a literal quotation that directly reports the Hebrews' words in the furnace. Here follows a scheme presenting in red the words that can be connected with *Dn*^{OG} 3:16-18 and in green those from the same chapter of *Dn*^Θ¹¹⁷.

*Epistula 6, 3:2. Nabuchodonosor rex, non opus est nobis de hoc verbo respondere tibi. Est enim Deus cui nos servimus potens eripere nos de camino ignis ardentis, et de manibus tuis, rex, liberabit nos. Et si non, notum tibi sit quoniam diis tuis non servimus et imaginem auream quam statuisti non adoramus*¹¹⁸.

Facing readings of scarce significance, which may be interpreted as due to an operation of Latin conversion of the Greek text, a specific element emerges and definitely suggests that Cyprian is assuming in this case *Dn*^Θ. Only this text actually presents the inclusion of the significant *et si non*, the expression on which the entire exegesis of the author focuses¹¹⁹. In *Dn*^{OG} version the clause is not included at all, so that Ananias, Azarias and Misael would not have represented a proper type of those *confessores* whose “martyrial dignity” strictly depends on their intimate and fearless acceptance of the possible bodily death¹²⁰. As has been underlined, such declaration could represent, in a generic sense, a good point to support communities and give sense to their difficult condition, becoming even more so a gorgeous propeller of Cyprian’s reflections about the same sense of martyrdom.

In the light of such evidence, it becomes easier to understand why Ananias, Azarias and Misael are not called, in the same epistle, with the Greek names they assume in *Dn*^{OG}: if G. TAPONECCO considers such detail as an evidence that testifies “la grande popolarità di costoro, indipendentemente dalla LXX, presso le comunità cristiane nel nord Africa”¹²¹, it becomes here

¹¹⁷ *Dn*^{OG} 3:16-18. Βασιλεῦ, οὐ χρειάν ἔχομεν ἀποκριθῆναί σοι ἐπὶ τῇ ἐπιταγῇ ταύτῃ. 17. ἔστι γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ὁ ἐν οὐρανοῖς εἷς κύριος ἡμῶν, ὃν φοβούμεθα, ὃς ἐστι δυνατὸς ἐξελεῖσθαι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῆς καμίνου τοῦ πυρός, καὶ ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν σου, βασιλεῦ, ἐξελεῖται ἡμᾶς. 18. καὶ τότε φανερόν σοι ἔσται, ὅτε οὔτε τῷ εἰδώλῳ σου λατρεύομεν οὔτε τῇ εἰκόνι σου τῇ χρυσεῖ, ἣν ἔστησας, προσκυνοῦμεν.

Dn^Θ 3:16-18. Οὐ χρειάν ἔχομεν ἡμεῖς περὶ τοῦ ῥήματος τούτου ἀποκριθῆναί σοι. 17. ἔστι γὰρ θεός, ᾧ ἡμεῖς λατρεύομεν, δυνατὸς ἐξελεῖσθαι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῆς καμίνου τοῦ πυρός τῆς καιομένης, καὶ ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν σου, βασιλεῦ, ῥύσεται ἡμᾶς. 18. καὶ ἐὰν μή, γνωστὸν ἔστω σοι, βασιλεῦ, ὅτι τοῖς θεοῖς σου οὐ λατρεύομεν καὶ τῇ εἰκόνι, ἣ ἔστησας, οὐ προσκυνοῦμεν.

¹¹⁸ Cyprianus, *Epistulae*, ed. G.F. DIERCKS, CCL 3b, p. 35. The passage is discussed also in F.C. BURKITT 1892, pp. 26.

¹¹⁹ See *supra*, pp. 249-254.

¹²⁰ It is interesting to notice that the same passage is cited by Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 8, according to *Dn*^{OG}, which means without the mention of the *et si non*. About the passage see *infra*, in part. pp. 284-285, and F.C. BURKITT 1892, p. 20. In this occasion, it is clear that Cyprian and Tertullian are using different biblical versions to convey different theological meanings.

¹²¹ G. TAPONECCO, in C. DELL’OSSO-G. TAPONECCO-M. VINCELLI (edd.), SCAR 5/1, p. 113.

possibile to simply underline that Cyprian may have assumed the Hebrews' names of *Dn*^Θ because he was actually using that text.

A similar situation seems to emerge from the analysis of epistle 58: also in this occasion the story of the Hebrews is remembered at the beginning by the generic mention of some biblical elements shared by both translations of *Dn*, such as the young age of the protagonists, the conquest of Jerusalem and their subsequent refusal of idolatry¹²². The following, literal citation is identical to that one of epistle 6, and clearly derives from *Dn*^Θ. The same consideration can be formulated for epistle 61, where the element of *et si non*, allows to establish a dependence from that translation, although the reference to the story of chapter 3 is absolutely generic and non-literal.

The situation changes in the case of epistle 67, which presents a reference to the strength of Daniel in front of persecutions and isolation, without mentioning details that may allow either to understand which narration of the prophet's story is recalled (chapter 6 or 14), or which translation is assumed; in the same way, also the episode of the Hebrews is mentioned in its guidelines, with an undefined allusion to the courage of the Hebrews in front of the menaces and the king.

Conclusively, two principal elements seem to emerge from the short panorama here presented: on one side, the difficulty to assume, for the case of the epistles, the diffused paradigm that makes of *Dn*^{OG} the text from which Cyprian would depend in the most consistent way, since on the contrary, at least the reading *et si non* apparently establishes a privileged link between the author of Carthage and *Dn*^Θ. In addition, it must be noticed that the author prevalently mentions the biblical narrations in their outlines, apparently resorting to his personal and absorbed knowledge rather than to a specific text reporting them. Such considerations represent a paradigmatic occasion to reflect about the fluidity of *Dn* "tales" circulation, which probably resulted from a mix and a conjunction between the individual background and memory of each author – probably influenced also by the diffusion of a widespread patrimony of images that must have contributed in "fixing" each story in the conscience of the community members – and the circulation of different translations.

¹²² Cyprianus, *Epistulae* 58, ed. G.F. DIERCKS, CCSL 3c, pp. 325-327; 5:1. *Imitemur tres pueros Ananiam, Azariam, Misael, qui nec aetate territi nec captivitate fracti Iudaea devicta et Hierosolymis captis in ipso regno suo regem fidei virtute vicerunt, qui adorare statuam quam Nabuchodonosor rex fecerat iussi et minis regis et flammis fortiores extiterunt, proclamantes et fidem suam per haec verba testantes(...)*.

5.1.4. A final reflection on Cyprian's reception of "tales"

Due to the variety and the complexity of Cyprian's use of "tales", it seems useful to schematize some essential points concerning the author's position about the theme of martyrdom and, strictly speaking, the role of *confessores* in the elaborations involving the figures from *Dn*.

First of all it is necessary to notice that the position of the bishop reveals to be overall not-unitary and oscillating: his reflection is not as a coherent exposition of a theoretical, well-elaborated system, but rather as the sum of circumstantiated argumentations that constantly depend on the present situation of the community and on the specific problems he has to face. The author "moulds and modulate" his position as to find a compromise between the concrete needs underling his literary elaboration and wider coordinates belonging to his theological belief. In this frame, the materials derived from *Dn* represent a sort of middle-territory: being easy to associate with the historical experience of a threatened community, the figures mentioned in the "book" are typologically connected with different exponents of historical present; being part of the scriptural patrimony, "tales" undergo a cautious and subtle process of interpretation that allows – in a certain sense – to "harmonize" pastoral worries and theological coherence.

In the treatise of *De Lapsis*, where the main goal of Cyprian is clearly that one to perimeter the action of the *confessores* in the readmission of those who lapsed, the protagonists of *Dn* "tales" become the biblical proof of the fact that none but God can grant forgiveness: the author is interested in stressing what the prophet's companions "could not do", in order to consequently limit the power of their antitypes, the confessors. In this occasion, Cyprian is not actually calling into question the "martyrial dignity" of those who survived persecution, but he is rather trying to delimitate their concrete function in the running of the community, in order to confirm the bishop's primate, which they were strongly menacing.

In the context of the letters, the author does not have to deal with such a specific situation, so that he can assume a less conditioned position in respect to *confessores* and, more generally, the theme of martyrdom. In this occasion, some traits of his theological position seem to emerge with a substantial congruence – at least concerning the main points –, but significant oscillations and subtle differences in the use of the biblical materials keep on depending on each document *Sitz im Leben*.

Considering the mention of *Dn* "tales" in the epistles, it is possible to affirm that the episode of the Hebrews keeps on representing the best instrument to evoke the dimension of martyrdom. The most cited section is the moment in which the three Hebrews turn to Nebuchadnezzar and pronounce their discourse. Twice quoted in a literary way and once reported in the indirect form,

such discourse provides the needed elements to certificate the martyrial validity of the confessors' experience, and the reasons can be easily hypothesized:

- 1) first of all, the Hebrews' words are a "confession" expressed in the face of the emperor, and could be for this reason perceived as a strong *tertium comparationis* between the biblical episode and the confessors' experience;
- 2) one of the recurring topic in Cyprian's theology is the idea that the validity of martyrdom does not result from the concrete development and outcome of the persecution. In this sense, Daniel's companions' discourse can be considered as the element of the biblical story which actually reveals – more than the same furnace – the "martyrial connotation" of the experience.

In the Hebrews' speech two different elements are systematically evoked by Cyprian as proofs of the effectiveness of their martyrdom:

- 1) the expression of the faith in God's power;
- 2) the clause "*et si non*", declaring their intention to undergo death. Such clause, more than any other element of the story, expresses in Cyprian's interpretation the courage of the victims, who do not manifest any fear in front of the possibility to lose their lives. Such intimate intention represents the element that makes of an experience a "martyrial one", whatever conclusion the persecution may know.

From a general overview of letters it appears reasonable to affirm that bodily death does not play a role in Cyprian's definition of Christian martyrdom and in the acceptance of *confessores*' "martyrial dignity".

Affirmed in letter 6, such "dignity" finds its fullest expression in letter 61, where an "addressee-confessor" can be praised with no reticence, for he is at the same time a bishop. The letter, that places itself on the opposed extremity of *De Lapsis*, represents for the author the occasion to even affirm that God himself wants to make *confessores* in order to reinforce the threatened church with the strength of direct testimonies.

Notwithstanding such "disregard" for physical death – that actually does not result to be ever contradicted – the panorama has to change when the perception of an imminent and unavoidable deflagration of the world leads the bishop and the community to the acceptance of a necessary

death. In those cases, since death is expected for everyone, the experience of martyrdom coincides with an occasion to die – so to speak – in the best way, which means conquering at the same time the reward of the eternal salvation. In front of apocalyptic sceneries, the condition of those who survive persecutions does not deserve to be mentioned anymore.

For this reason, in the case of letter 58, the expression “*et si non*” does not represent the certification of a respectable salvation, but the element that justifies the same citation of Daniels’ companions in the document: they indeed can be enumerated among those who were ready to face death. In this occasion the author seems to offer a support to those Christians who, unavoidably destined to die, should better choose to die as martyrs. This perspective emerges even more clearly from letter 67, where Daniel and his companions’ experiences are mentioned as an allusion to the strength of those who keep on manifesting the validity of faith also in the moment of the worlds’ deflagration; here the bishop does not even mention the discourse of the Hebrews, and simply alludes, in a generic sense, to the pain and the afflictions they accepted to sustain.

It must be conclusively stressed that the analysis of Cyprian’s works offers, apart from important elements concerning *Dn* reception, a wider occasion to notice how the same biblical material can be used to argument different positions and to actively deal with a range of various situations in community life. Scriptures become in this case a sort of *trait d’union* allowing to “manage and modulate” a theological position according to different urgencies emerging from the *Sitz im Leben*.

5.2 *HONORATA MORS. DANIEL* “TALES” IN TERTULLIAN’S ELABORATION ABOUT MARTYRDOM

The definition of a link between *Dn* “tales” and the present of the communities does not represent a peculiarity simply ascribable to Cyprian: as has been mentioned, African context offers at least another important author who exploits such biblical material to elaborate a typological interpretation of the life of the church, that is Tertullian. In two different works both Daniel and mainly his companions are mentioned in order to articulate a discourse concerning the theology of martyrdom and the historical persecutions.

Before approaching those passages – one from *Scorpiace* and the other from *Adversus Marcionem* – it becomes necessary to underline a fundamental gap that distances him from the bishop of Carthage. If the treatise of *De Lapsis* and the epistolary of Cyprian can be considered as concrete tools allowing the absent bishop both to run a church menaced by problems of authority and to support believers in the time of persecution, the principal objectives of the works of Tertullian here considered should be researched, so to speak, in the exposition of a well organized and coherent theological system, capable to tackle other options and to prove the efficacy of the author’s position under a theoretical point of view.

In other words, it should be constantly remembered that if Cyprian’s principal care is represented by “concrete efficacy”, Tertullian’s main goal resides in “theoretical solidity”.

5.2.1. From death to God’s Spirit: *Jeremiah* and the three Hebrews in *Scorpiace*

The treatise of *Scorpiace* can be considered as “il primo tentativo di una sistematica riflessione sul martirio”¹²³ in Latin Christianity, probably composed in front of a heavy crisis of the African

¹²³ G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, in G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI-F. RUGGIERO-E. SANZI-C. SCHIPANI (curr.), SCAR 4/1, p. 141. The bibliography on this work of Tertullian is quite scarce, and the deeper reflection about this text seems to have been conducted by G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, whose investigation proceeds from contextual problems (like chronology, relation with other works and theological themes) to the elaboration of a critical edition that substituted that one by A. REIFFERSCHIED-G. WISSOWA (edd.), CCSL 2, “certamente benemerita quale unico strumento e riferimento per tutti gli studi successivamente apparsi” but “bisognosa di aggiornamenti e numerose rettifiche nel testo e nell’apparato” (G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, *Problemi e proposte per l’edizione critica di “Scorpiace”*, in P. SERRA ZANETTI [cur.], *In verbis verum amare*, Bologna 1980, pp. 11-52, in part. p. 13). In a study of 1980, the scholar presents the principal features connected with the reconstruction of *Scorpiace*, “uno degli scritti tertulliani più poveri di tradizione, che si fonda unicamente sull’autorità del codice Agobardino (Parisinus Lat. 1622, sec. IX), e della *editio princeps* (Gagny, Parigi 1545), *instar codicis* perché fondata su di un ms. perduto” (p. 11). G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI could complete the reading of Agobardino manuscript “mediate l’esplorazione dei suoi margini corrosi, slavati e illeggibili” through the adoption of new technologies (p. 13). Notwithstanding this, the critical edition

church, exposed to both an external persecution¹²⁴ and an internal break, due to the Valentinian propaganda¹²⁵. Since Gnostics were trying to refute the importance of martyrdom, insinuating the idea that faith did not have to be proclaimed in front of earthly authorities¹²⁶, Tertullian tries to provide the community with an instrument to counter a theological position that he considers as a menace: for this purpose, he composes a treatise that should represent “la *theriaca* specifica, che immunizzi chi ancora non è stato colpito e guarisca chi già lo è stato, esattamente come fa la *scorpiace*, l’antidoto dalla duplice efficacia”¹²⁷.

The whole argumentation of Tertullian, intended to demonstrate the fundamental importance and the absolute centrality of martyrdom in Christian life, is sustained by a systematic reading of

finally presented by G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, *Scorpiace*, Firenze 1990 (Biblioteca patristica 14) – whose text is reported in SCAR 4/1 – still leaves between <> many words and letters which were considered by A. REIFFERSCHIED-G. WISSOWA as unreadable since “*vetustate evanuerunt*” (CCSL 2, p. 1068). The edition of G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI 1990, pp. 32-39, can be also assumed as a reference for information concerning the structure of the text. Apart from specific studies that will be progressively cited, for an over panorama about the text see also E. BUONAIUTI, *L’Antiscorpionico di Tertulliano*, “Ricerche Religiose” 3 (1927), pp. 147-152; G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, *Problemi della Scorpiace di Tertulliano*, “Convivium” 4 (1960), pp. 335-348; 450-461, and T.D. BARNES, *Tertullian’s Scorpiace*, “Journal of Theological Studies” 20 (1969), pp. 105-132.

¹²⁴ According to G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, in G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI-F. RUGGIERO-E. SANZI-C. SCHIPANI (curr.), SCAR 4/1, p. 142, the possible wide context of the text’s elaboration may be represented by “gli anni della persecuzione del proconsole romano d’Africa Tertullo Scapula” (p. 241). Notwithstanding this, the same G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, *De quaestionibus confessionum alibi docebimus* (*Tertulliano, Cor 1:5*, in G. GRANAROLO-M. BIRAUD (ed.), *Autour de Tertullien. Hommage à René Braun*, II, Nice 1990 (Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et de Sciences Humaines de Nice 56), pp. 5-84, in part. p. 51, underlines how the chronology of *Scorpiace* is a problem that brought to “le soluzioni più disparate”, so that the scholarship has to “arrendersi davanti alle incognite insormontabili degli avvenimenti cittadini che Tertulliano rammenta”. The scholar tries to establish a chronological placement of the text starting from a comparison with other works of the same author, and identifying possible traits of evolution in his theological elaboration about martyrdom. Under this point of view, *Scorpiace* would represent, according to the scholar, a more conscious step in his reflection, in comparison with *De Corona*: if in the latter work Tertullian would simply assume biblical citations as quick references, in the former he operates a deeper inspection on theological themes and articulates theme in a more elaborated perspective (pp. 81-82). In this study the scholar defines *Scorpiace* as “anello mediano fra il *De Corona* e il *De Fuga in Persecutione*... al centro del politico tertulliano sul martirio”, while in the critical edition of 1990, G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI modifies her position affirming that it should be placed in the middle between, on one side, *Ad Martyras* and *De Corona Militis* and, on the other, *De Fuga in Persecutione* and *Ad Scapulam*, which means that “il trattato fu dunque composto assai probabilmente nel 212, durante la persecuzione indetta dal proconsole romano d’Africa Tertullo Scapula”, when the author “aveva già aderito al montanismo” (pp. 10-11).

¹²⁵ See G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI 1990, pp. 7-12. G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, in G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI-F. RUGGIERO-E. SANZI-C. SCHIPANI (curr.), SCAR 4/1, p. 142, underlines how the Gnostics of Valentin considered martyrdom as useless for their category, that one of the so-called “pneumatics”, who were saved by nature. About Valentinians’ option see G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI 1990, pp. 13-26.

¹²⁶ G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI 1990, pp. 8-9: “...l’eroismo dei martiri non desta ammirazione in egual modo in tutti i membri della comunità. Vi sono anche gli impreparati...terrorizzati dalle atrocità perpetrate...Sono la facile preda dei valentiniani, che all’occasione...si risvegliano e passano all’attacco”.

¹²⁷ G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, in G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI-F. RUGGIERO-E. SANZI-C. SCHIPANI (curr.), SCAR 4/1, p. 141. The dangerous positions of his adversaries, acting like scorpions against weak Christians, are described in chapter 1:4-10.

Scriptures, considered and presented as a sort of veritative criterion¹²⁸. Gathering a rich dossier of passages from First and New Testament, the author wants to prove the uninterrupted function of martyrdom as the real expression of God's will, in order to refute his adversaries' position¹²⁹. Conducting this operation, Tertullian more or less directly lets all the principal coordinates of his martyrdom theology emerge.

Before introducing the specific passage in which *Dn* "tales" are mentioned, some fundamental aspects of the author's reflection about martyrdom deserve to be shortly presented. According to Tertullian's conception:

- martyrdom is *lavacrum sanguinis* and *sequela*, the space that connects Christians' earthly persecution to the core of *Pascha*, that is Christ's sacrifice¹³⁰;
- martyrdom is the real essence of *ecclesia*, which means the "chain" that fastens Christ and his church: it is the covenant certifying the reciprocal trust between human and divine, and allowing the same generation of God's people¹³¹;

¹²⁸ "È pur sempre nella S. Scrittura che Tertulliano ricerca il criterio di verità", G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, *Sangue e antropologia biblica in Tertulliano*, in F. VATTIONI (cur.), *Sangue e antropologia nella letteratura cristiana antica. Atti della III Settimana di Studi*, II, Roma 1983, pp. 1039-1054, in part. 1048.

¹²⁹ G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, in G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI-F. RUGGIERO-E. SANZI-C. SCHIPANI (curr.), *SCAR* 4/1, p. 142.

¹³⁰ About the relation between Christ's sacrifice and martyrdom see G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, *Il sangue di Cristo e la redenzione del peccato in Tertulliano*, in F. VATTIONI (cur.), *Sangue e antropologia nella liturgia. Atti della IV Settimana di Studi*, II, Roma 1984, pp. 1025-1041. The scholar underlines the "reality" of Christ's flesh as central instrument of his passion (p. 1028) and the strong connection of passion, death and resurrection, which would represent a unique event performing a salvific efficacy. Even though the scholar does not here directly deal with the theme of martyrdom, the traits of Tertullian's conception of Christ's experience, and mainly its sacrificial interpretation (p. 1034), can be assumed as the theological grounding and fundament of the author's interpretation of persecution and Christian death. G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI affirms: "Assumendo su di sé (*scil.* Christ) dall'incarnazione fino alla discesa agli inferi, tutta la condizione umana con il peso della sua soggezione al peccato, all'iniquità, al dolore, alla morte, nella sua stessa persona poteva applicare alla «sostanza» dell'uomo e immettere, quasi dall'interno di essa, nella carne e nel sangue umano le virtualità della propria carne e del proprio sangue di risorto, rendendo tutti gli uomini che credono nel suo nome e si pongono nella sua *sequela* virtualmente partecipi della sua impeccabilità e della sua immortalità" (pp. 1036-1037). In another study, G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, *Ecclesia sanguis. Spunti di ecclesiologia Tertulliana*, in F. VATTIONI (cur.), *Sangue e antropologia, riti e culto. Atti della V Settimana di Studi*, II, Roma 1987, p. 1133, underlines how Tertullian would generate an "accostamento della morte del martire alla morte di Cristo attraverso le interessanti espressioni *mortem morte dissolvere, occisionem occisione dispargere*". The connection between Christ's death and Christians' martyrdom, already developed in *De Corona*, in part. 14:4, seems to be articulated in *Scorpiace* "con ben altra fermezza, ampiezza e puntualità di citazioni bibliche" (G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, in G. GRANAROLO-M. BIRAUD [ed.] 1990, pp. 73-74, in part. p. 73).

¹³¹ See G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, in F. VATTIONI (cur.), II, 1987, pp. 1127-1155. The scholar tries to explain in this study the meaning of the expression *ecclesiae sanguis* recurring in *Scorpiace* and manages to underline how the martyr would be placed, according to Tertullian, at the center of that *magnum sacramentum* identifying the same unity between Christ and his church; for this reason, the intimate essence of martyrdom expresses the same nature of the church (pp. 1136-1137). In the conclusive section of the study, the scholar affirms that "l'essenza del martirio sta nella fedeltà del martire a Dio e di Dio al martire, quasi in un reciproco affidamento nel quale si realizza il patto e si costituisce il popolo di Dio: realtà teandrica dunque e

- martyrdom is the exclusive instrument to achieve an immediate, eschatological salvation: dying for God is the only, privileged way to enter Lord's kingdom without being exposed to an intermediate wait before the final resurrection¹³². In this sense, martyrdom can be also considered as the providential experience granted by the same God to preserve, in an eschatological perspective, those who refuse idolatry and accept to die for him, bringing them eternal life and glory against the Antichrist;
- in the specific context of *Scorpiace*, martyrdom is conceived as strictly connected with the theme of idolatry: the author explicitly affirms that martyrdom is nothing but opposition to idolatry, so that it can be received by God – who exactly punishes idolatry – as *bonum*¹³³.

The elements here introduced, which characterize Tertullian's conception of martyrdom, are expressed by the author through the mention of scriptural examples that are chosen and selected in order to demonstrate the central role played by persecutions in the economy of God's plan since its very beginning. In this way, the author manages to dismantle Gnostics' position: the fact that First Testament's protagonists were involved in martyrial experiences would actually testify and prove the substantial importance of such coordinate also in Christian life, which places itself in perfect continuity and in a perspective of accomplishment of such prototypic dimension¹³⁴.

The reference to "tales", recurring in a presentation of *testimonia* concerning the centrality of martyrdom in the first economy¹³⁵, testifies all the mentioned traits of Tertullian's conception, shedding light even on a further interpretative trajectory that can be considered as a specific

perciò stesso anche essenzialmente ecclesiale... Tertulliano istituisce così i rapporti profondi tra il martire e la chiesa" (pp. 1147-1148).

¹³² This is an eschatological perspective attested also in Irenaeus and quite diffused in paleochristianity; see G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, in G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI-F. RUGGIERO-E. SANZI-C. SCHIPANI (curr.), SCAR 4/1, p. 143. About the conception of martyrdom emerging from *Scorpiace* see in part. D. VAN DAMME, *Gott und die Märtyrer. Überlegungen zu Tertullian, Scorpiace*, "Freiburg Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie" 27 (1980), pp. 107-119, in part. pp. 116-117, "Exegese als Suche nach dem Willen Gottes".

¹³³ Tertullianus, *Scorpiace*, ed. G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI 1990, pp. 86-87; 4:3. *Bonum contendo martyrium apud eundem Deum, a quo et prohibetur et punitur idolatria. Obnititur enim et adversatur idolatriae martyrium*. See also G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI 1990, pp. 30-31.

¹³⁴ The objectivity of the scriptural interpretation is tested in Tertullian's *Scorpiace* by four criteria, as G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, in G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI-F. RUGGIERO-E. SANZI-C. SCHIPANI (curr.), SCAR 4/1, pp. 142-143, describes: 1) the consonance between doctrine and discipline in Testaments; 2) the conformity in respect to prophecy and events; 3) the conformity of Christ's and the apostles' teaching; 4) the conformity of the apostles' predication and their death. G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI 1990, p. 29, notices that the author particularly resorts to Scripture in the context of his works concerning martyrdom. About Tertullian's exegetical technique see J. MOINGT, *Théologie trinitaire de Tertullien*, I, Paris 1966, pp. 173-182.

¹³⁵ The citations recur in the context of a wide section in which the author faces the problem of God's will in First Testament, followed by a reflection concerning the same argument in New Testament. About the structure of the work see G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, in G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI-F. RUGGIERO-E. SANZI-C. SCHIPANI (curr.), SCAR 4/1, pp. 144-146.

characteristic of *Dn* reception. Due to the extension of the passage, that anyway requires to be entirely considered, the analysis will be conducted section by section.

a) *Scorpiace 8:1: declaring the role of death*

Chapter 8 of *Scorpiace* begins with the definition of the author's intention to contrast Gnostics' positions, and with the specific presentation of the logical and theological groundings of his theory: martyrdom is "by reason" being commanded by the same God since first economy, and God does not command anything wrong¹³⁶:

Scorpiace 8:1. We keep therefore the one position, and, in respect of this question only, we summon to an encounter, whether martyrdoms have been commanded by God, so that you may believe that they have been commanded by reason, if you have known that they have been commanded (by him), because God would not have commanded anything without reason¹³⁷.

Starting from such premises, the subsequent *testimonia*¹³⁸ are collected to demonstrate that God considers his followers' death as *honorata*, which means different from any other kind of death, defined on the contrary as *ignominiosa*¹³⁹.

¹³⁶ G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI 1990, p. 33: "il principio dal quale si deduce la necessità e l'obbligo del martirio, sono la stessa autorità e volontà di Dio. In via pregiudiziale infatti si deve ritenere ottimo ciò che è provatamente istituito e comandato da Dio". About martyrdom as the expression of God's will and as the principal content of alliance see also G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, in F. VATTIONI (cur.) 1987, pp. 1131-1132.

¹³⁷ Tertullianus, *Scorpiace*, ed. G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI 1990, pp. 108-109 8:1. *Unum igitur gradum insistimus et in hoc solum provocamus, an praecepta sint a Deo ma<r>tyria, ut credas ratione praecepta, si praecepta cognoveris, quia <ni>hil Deus non ratione praeceperit.*

¹³⁸ The definition of such biblical examples as *testimonia* seems appropriate since the author, as G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI 1990, p. 30, notices, "intraprende la sua lettura nell'intento prioritario di *elicere Dei voluntate* mediante il semplice accostamento e la concatenazione dei passi scritturistici che evidenzia l'interna coerenza della Parola e il suo significato oggettivo".

¹³⁹ Tertullianus, *Scorpiace*, ed. G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI 1990, pp. 108-109; 8:1. *Si quidem honorata est apud illu<m mors> religiosorum ipsius, ut canit David, non, opinor, ista communis <et om>nium debitum – atquin ista etiam ignominiosa est ex elogio tra<nsres>tionis et merito damnationis – sed illa quae in ipso aditur ex te<stimo>nio religionis et proelio confessionis pro iustitia et sacramento.* In the passage 8:1, Tertullian cites *Ps* 115:5, providing a translation which differs from that one of *Vulgata*: the term τῖμος, referred to ἡ θάνατος, is translated by him as *honorata* instead of *pretiosa*. As G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, in G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI-F. RUGGIERO-E. SANZI-C. SCHIPANI (curr.), *SCAR* 4/1, p. 203, underlines, the verse of *Ps* is referred by Tertullian to the theme of martyrdom in order to point out the fact that the only death which can be considered as full of honor belongs to the martyr: if "la morte è un castigo ignominioso comune a tutti e dovuta da tutti per il peccato d'origine", it must be noticed that "soltanto la morte del martire se ne distacca radicalmente ed apre immediatamente l'accesso a Dio" (the conception of the martyrs' death as "key" to God's kingdom is underlined also in *Scorpiace* 10:6. *Christiano caelo ante patet quam via, quia nulla via in caelo nisi cui patet caelum*). In this sense "la morte del martire è onorata presso Dio perché rovescia il carattere della morte derivata *ex elogio transgressionis et merito damnationis*". Also the following passage from *Is* 57:1-2 is read in a martyrial perspective, and conceived as a

One of the principal features of Tertullian's conception is in this way immediately hooked: martyrdom consists in Christian death *par excellence*, so that it can be conceived in opposition with "ordinary death", from which it does not differ under a concrete point of view, but on the level of its theological meaning. If "ordinary death" testifies the guilt of men, "martyrdom" expresses on the contrary *religio*, which means the same covenant between God and humanity¹⁴⁰: "l'obbligo del martirio, chiaro e costante già nell'Antico Testamento, perdura pienamente confermato anche nel Nuovo, ove esso assume altri e più profondi significati e valori dal sacrificio stesso di Cristo, del quale appare, in qualche modo, una partecipazione ed una continuazione"¹⁴¹.

Bearing in mind Cyprian's elaboration – according to which death was a possible outcome of the experience of persecution and not a diriment element in the definition of a martyrial experience¹⁴² – it becomes even more significant to underline how, on the contrary, Tertullian's approach immediately puts the accent on bodily sacrifice and on the character of martyrdom as *sacramentum sanguinis*. Though gifted with an extraordinary nature in respect to the "ordinary" one, martyrdom is anyway characterized as a specific kind of earthly death, and – exactly in this sense – the author attributes a clearly martyrial interpretation to the passage of *Is* about the *iustus* who perishes¹⁴³.

b) Scorpiace 8:2-3: *the sacrifice of the prophets*

Immediately after, Tertullian sets a list of biblical allusions to *iusti* and *prophetae* who were persecuted – and signally Abel, David, Elijah, Jeremiah, Isaiah and Zachariah¹⁴⁴ – in order to prove the fact

prophecy of the reward predisposed for the martyrs. The specificity of the martyrs' death in Tertullian theology is further described by G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, in F. VATTIONI (cur.) 1987, pp. 1139-1142: "La morte del martire si differenzia nettamente per Tertulliano dalla «comune» nei modi e nelle finalità, ma soprattutto perché essa comporta l'immediato accesso a Dio", so much that for him "il sangue dei martiri è tutta la chiave del paradiso". The characters of such "*mors in Christo*" are delineated in part. in *De Anima*, where the author presents his anthropologic conception of the martyr as the only one for whom the paradise is disclosed.

¹⁴⁰ At the beginning of passage 8:3 the term *religio*, according to G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, in G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI-F. RUGGIERO-E. SANZI-C. SCHIPANI (curr.), SCAR 4/1, p. 204, indicates a synonym of *pietas* with a positive character and assumes the value of *iustitia*, a term mentioned immediately before to indicate the behavior of those who try to live their life according to God's will.

¹⁴¹ G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI 1990, p. 31. The connection between the sacrificial nature of martyrdom and Christ's experience is affirmed in chapter 7.

¹⁴² See *supra*, in part. pp. 249-254.

¹⁴³ See *supra*, n. 139.

¹⁴⁴ The list returns in *Mt* 23:35 and *Lk* 11:51. Tertullian had already lingered on Isaiah's death in *Pat* 14:1 (about the argument see E. NORELLI, *Il martirio di Isaia come "testimonium" anti-giudaico?*, "Henoc" 11 (1980), pp. 37-57). About the allusion to Zachariah's blood see G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, SCAR 4/1, p. 205. The passage has been considered as derived from Ps. Cyprian's *Adversus Iudaeos* 24-25. According to D. VAN DAMME, *Pseudo Cyprian Adversus Iudaeos*, Freiburg 1969, pp. 81-84, the passage of Tertullian would be

that God wanted martyrdom since the first economy. In other words, two characters of martyrdom seem to emerge from the passage, respectively connected with the author's theology in a generic sense, and with the polemic with Gnostics in a more specific way: 1) martyrdom is an event that envisages bodily death; 2) it is "ancient", which means "prescribed" since the beginning of salvation history; for this reason it can be also considered as a necessary aspect of Christian living.

Scorpiace 8:2. As Isaiah said "See how the righteous man perishes, and no one takes it to heart; and the righteous men are taken away, and no one considers it: before the face of unrighteousness the righteous man perishes, and he shall have honour at his burial"¹⁴⁵. Here too you have both an announcement and a recompense of martyrdoms. From the beginning, indeed, righteousness suffers violence. **3.** Forthwith, as soon as God has begun to be worshipped, piety was cursed by envy. The one who had pleased God is killed, and that by his brother¹⁴⁶. Beginning with kindred blood, in order that it might the more easily harass that of strangers, ungodliness made the object of its pursuit, finally, not only that of righteous persons, but even that one of prophets. David is persecuted; Elijah put to flight; Jeremiah stoned; Isaiah cut asunder; Zachariah slain between the altar and the temple, imparting to the hard stones lasting marks of his blood¹⁴⁷. That person himself, at the close of the law and the prophets¹⁴⁸, and called not "prophet" but "messenger"¹⁴⁹, with an ignominious death is beheaded to reward a dancing girl^{150,151}

extrapolated from *Adversus Iudaeos*, while the opposite direction of the dependence is sustained by A.P. ORBAN, *Die Frage der ersten Zeugnisse des Christentums*, "Vigiliae Christianae" 30 (1976), 215-219.

¹⁴⁵ *Is* 57:1-2.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. *Gn* 4:5-8.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. *Mt* 23-35; *Lk* 11:51.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. *Lk* 16:16. *Lex et prophetae* is a technical expression with which the author refers to First Testament, see J.E.L. VAN DER GEEST, *Le Christ et l'Ancien Testament chez Tertullien*, Nijmegen 1972 (Latinitas Christianorum Primaeva 22), pp. 35-39.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. *Lk* 7:27 (*Ex* 23:20; cf. *Mal* 3:1)

¹⁵⁰ Cf. *Mt* 14:6-11; *Mk* 6:24-28.

¹⁵¹ Tertullianus, *Scorpiace*, ed. G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI 1990, pp. 108-111; 8:2. <Si>cut Eseiās, "Videte", inquit, "quomodo perit iustus, et nemo excipi<t cor>de, et viri iusti auferuntur, et nemo animadvertit; a fa<cie enim> iniustitiae perit iustus et erit honor sepulturae eius". Habes <hic> quo<que> et praedicationem et remunerationem martyriorum. A pri<mordio> enim iustitia vim patitur. 3. Statim ut coli Deus coepit, invidiam <religio> sortita est. Qui Deo placuerat, occiditur, et quidem a frat<re>. Quo pro>clivius impietas alienum sanguinem insectaretur, a suo au<spicata in>sectata est denique non modo iustorum, verum etiam et prophetarum. David exagitur, Helias fugatur, Hieremias lapidatur, Eseiās secatur, Zacharias inter altare et aedem trucidatur perennes cruoris sui maculas silicibus assignans. Ipse clausula legis et prophetarum nec prophetae, sed angelus dictus contumeliosa caede truncatur in puellae salticae lucar.

If, on one side, the centrality of death in the definition of martyrdom may presuppose the perception of the continuity between the experience of Christ and that one of his followers¹⁵², the necessity for the martyr to perish has to be probably connected with the same action performed by God during the martyrial event. Concerning the first point, G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI affirms that “esiste...una saggia e buona e ragionevole finalità per la quale Dio espone i suoi figli all’uccisione...scegliendo per i martiri la medesima fine scelta per il Figlio, li accomuna alla sua stessa immolazione. In questo senso è Dio a fare il martire”; concerning the second argument, the scholar underlines how, according to Tertullian, “utilizzando lo stesso annientamento della sua creatura nel martirio, egli (*scil.* God) la rigenera e la ristabilisce in una condizione definitiva e perfetta” so that “Dio opera nel martire una radicale trasformazione”¹⁵³.

In the light of such considerations, it would seem reasonable to infer that death represents the prejudicial characteristic in Tertullian’s definition of martyrdom, at least because the same divine action exploits bodily sacrifice to give new shape and new form to creatures.

c) Scorpiace 8:4-6: from death to Spirit

A significant change can be apparently spotted in the context of the following passages, when the allusion to *Dn* “tale” is introduced and interpreted.

Scorpiace 8:4. And certainly those who were guided by the Spirit of God, by the same (*scil.* Spirit) were also led to martyrdoms, so that they also endured what they had proclaimed. And then also the three brothers¹⁵⁴, when the dedication of the royal image forced everyone to worship, did not ignore what the faith – which alone in them had not been taken captive – required: that they had to die against idolatry¹⁵⁵. **5.** For they remembered also the words of Jeremiah writing to those over whom that captivity was impending: “And now you shall see the gods of the Babylonians, of gold and silver and wood, bore upon shoulders, which cause fear to the nations. Beware, therefore, that you also do not be altogether like the foreigners, and be seized with fear while you see crowds worshipping those gods before and behind, but say in your mind «We have to worship you, Lord»”¹⁵⁶. **6.** Therefore,

¹⁵² See *supra*, chapter 2.

¹⁵³ See G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, in F. VATTIONI (cur.) 1987, pp. 1131-1132 and 1137-1138. Such development signally emerges from *Scorpiace* 5:8-10.

¹⁵⁴ G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, in G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI-F. RUGGIERO-E. SANZI-C. SCHIPANI (curr.), SCAR 4/1, p. 207: “I tre giovani giudei, amici di Daniele...costituiscono una «fraternità», un gruppo religioso”.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. *Dn* 3:1-15.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. *Bar* 6:3-5.

having got confidence from God, they said, when with strength of Spirit they repel the conditioning menaces of the king: “There is no necessity for us to answer to your command. For our God whom we worship is able to deliver us from the furnace of fire and from your hands; and then it will be clear to you that we shall neither serve your idol, nor worship your golden image which you have set up”^{157,158}

In this context, the role and the space attributed to physical death seems to be in some measure reconsidered, in the light of another essential argument of Tertullian’s reflection about martyrdom, that is *Spiritu Dei*. Those who were guided by such Spirit, affirms the author, were certainly led toward martyrdom, so that they could also concretely suffer what they had preached by words¹⁵⁹.

Affirming that *utique qui Spiritu Dei agebantur ab ipso in martyria <di>rigebantur*, the author reveals something quite specific concerning the link between “Spirit” and “martyrdom”: actually, Tertullian is not here affirming that every martyr is led by Spirit, but rather that everyone who is guided by Spirit unavoidably faces martyrdom. Since the Spirit is a typical prerogative of “prophets”¹⁶⁰, the argumentation seems to both determine, in a generic sense, an identification between the martyrs and the prophets, and imply, more precisely, that every prophet is a martyr.

¹⁵⁷ *Dn* 3:16-18.

¹⁵⁸ Tertullianus, *Scorpiace*, ed. G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI 1990, pp. 110-113; 8:4. *Et utique qui Spiritu Dei agebantur, ab ipso in martyria <di>rigebantur ut etiam patiendo quae et praedicassent. Proinde et <tr>ina fraternitas, cum dedicatio imaginis regiae urbem urgeret offi<c>io, non ignoraverunt, quid fides, quae sola in illis captiva non fuerat, exi<ger>et, moriendum scilicet adversus idololatriam. 5. Meminerant <enim> et Hieremiae scribentis ad eos, quibus illa captivitas imminerebat: “<Et nunc vi>debitis deos Babyloniorum aureos et argenteos et ligneos por<tari super> umeros ostentantes nationibus timorem. Cavete igitur, ne <et vos con>similes sitis allophyllis et timore capiamini, dum aspicitis turbas <ador>antes retro eos et ante, sed dicite in animo vestro: te Domine ad<orare> debemus”. 6. Itaque dixerunt a Deo concepta fiducia, quanto vigo<re anim>i condicionales illas minas regis excutiunt: “Non habemus <necessi>tatem respondendi huic tuo imperio. Est enim Deus noster, <quem> colimus, potens eruere nos de fornace ignis et ex manibus tuis, <et tunc m>anifestum fiet tibi, quod neque idolo tuo famulabimur nec ima<ginem t>uam auream, quam statuisti, adorabimus”.*

¹⁵⁹ As G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, in G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI-F. RUGGIERO-E. SANZI-C. SCHIPANI (curr.), *SCAR* 4/1, p. 206 notices, Tertullian is affirming here that “tutti coloro che erano sospinti dallo Spirito Santo...erano condotti anche a sostenere il martirio” and the use of the verb *agere* “assume questo particolare significato relativo all’azione propria dello Spirito Santo” (about this term see also W. BENDER, *Die Lehre über den Heiligen Geist bei Tertullian*, München 1961, p. 142, n. 40, p. 144). It seems possible to agree with the translation proposed G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, in G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI-F. RUGGIERO-E. SANZI-C. SCHIPANI (curr.), *SCAR* 4/1, p. 206, for the expression *etiam patiendo quae et praedicassent*: “L’azione dello Spirito li conduce a professare anche con la sofferenza e la morte quello che essi avevano predicato a parole...perché infine essi potessero dare la loro testimonianza di fatto, dopo la predicazione a parole”.

¹⁶⁰ The study of J.D.G. DUNN, *Jesus and the Spirit. A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in New Testament*, London 1975, pp. 82-92, allows to notice how, since New Testament, the expression “owing the Spirit of God” means being a prophet. In this perspective the definition provided by the scholar seems quite appropriate, especially when he implies that Jesus and those who are assumed as “charismatic” figures are those who manifest a power or an authority directly granted by God through its Spirit (in part. p. 87). For a definition of the prophetic model in New Testament and early Christianity see R. PENNA (cur.), *Il profetismo da Gesù di Nazaret al montanismo. Atti del IV Convegno di Studi Neotestamentari (Perugia 12-14 Settembre 1991)*, Bologna 1993 (Ricerche storico bibliche 5), in part. R. PENNA, *Introduzione al tema: sfondo e aspetti del profetismo protocristiano*, pp. 5-10 and R. FABRIS, *Gesù di Nazaret e il modello profetico*, pp. 43-66.

It is not surprising that such a subtle and apparently slippery statement is set in a quite delicate passage of the exposition: Tertullian, who has so far clearly affirmed the importance of physical death to make an experience a “martyrial” one¹⁶¹, is apparently trying to manage with biblical exceptions to such panorama, namely those cases in which God did not command the death of his prophets and mainly the story narrated in *Dn*’s “tales”¹⁶².

The Hebrews are immediately cited as the proof of such connection between Spirit and martyrdom, and presented as those who remained strongly intentioned to face death against idolatry in a city subjected to the emperor’s command. According to Tertullian’s interpretation, they kept in mind the words of Jeremiah, stating the importance not to deny God in front of the menaces of idols, and for this reason they could pronounce their confession of faith, telling Nabuchadnezzar that there would not have been any need¹⁶³ for them to undergo his impositions: God would have actually saved them from the furnace.

The author interprets such episode as an evidence of the fact that martyrdom can be “perfect”¹⁶⁴ also without passion, as explicitly stated immediately after (*O martyrium <et sine> passione perfectum!*¹⁶⁵). What actually determines the attribution of a “martyrial” character to the Hebrews’ experience seems to be represented, also in the light of the already mentioned premise (chapter 8:4), by their “prophetic” condition, which means by the presence of God’s Spirit in them, which becomes here a more decisive element than the same subsistence of a physical death.

¹⁶¹ See *supra*, pp. 281-284.

¹⁶² G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, in G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI-F. RUGGIERO-E. SANZI-C. SCHIPANI (curr.), SCAR 4/1, p. 145: “da Abele a Battista, i testimoni di Dio...hanno incontrato la morte...ha valore di eccezione il caso dei tre giovani israeliti rimasti illesi della fornace ardente e quello di Daniele rimasto illeso nella fossa dei leoni”.

¹⁶³ According to G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, in G. GRANAROLO-M. BIRAUD (edd.) 1990, p. 67-68, Tertullian often resorts to the concept and the term of *necessitas* to present martyrdom as “obbligo prioritario e ineludibile” (p. 67), in constant though implicit dialogue with the position of the Valentinians, who, on the contrary, did not consider it as an unavoidable stage in Christians’ path. “Tertulliano intuisce che il martirio scaturisce dalla decisione di Dio che proibisce l’idolatria per salvare l’uomo (Scorp. 4:1). Quando si dia il caso di costrizione all’idolatria la disciplina cristiana non ammette connivenze ed esige che si affronti il martirio senza accampare alternative” (p. 68). It seems for this reason interesting to notice that the same term of *necessitas* is included in the citation of *Dn* recurring in chapter 8, where the Hebrews’ denial of Nebuchadnezzar’s order, reporting *Dn* 3:16-17, precisely says: *non habemus necessitatem respondendi huic tuo imperio*. Through the biblical quotation and signally through the amphibological use of the term *necessitas* Tertullian seems to indirectly establish a strong antithesis: if martyrdom expresses the unavoidable necessity to correspond to God’s order, the refusal of idolatry precisely assumes the traits of the denial of such necessity towards the emperor. Such opposition seems to represent a sort of emanation of one of the cores of Tertullian’s reflection about martyrdom: the fact that “il cristiano non può servire a due padroni, poiché l’uomo appartiene esclusivamente a Dio” (it is the theme developed in *De Corona* 12:4).

¹⁶⁴ About the fact that martyrdom represents the highest degree of spiritual evolution in Tertullian’s conception, and identifies the “perfection” see G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI 1990, pp. 34-35.

¹⁶⁵ For the passage see *infra*, pp. 287-289. As the brackets show, the words *sine passione* disappeared in the manuscript tradition (G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI 1990, p. 56: *his uncinis includuntur litterae quae in A vetustate evanuerunt*) and it becomes necessary to assume here the reconstruction of the scholar, which seems to be anyway acceptable in the light of the context of the whole passage.

A subsequent question that deserves to be formulated concerns the instruments adopted by Tertullian to evoke and spot the presence of such Spirit in the episode of the Hebrews. A first, possible answer can be researched in the connection established by the author between Jeremiah's teaching and the events in the furnace, which are presented as "in compliance" with the biblical words. In other words, the presence of the Spirit would be denounced, in Tertullian's conception, by the coherency between a certain circumstance and the lesson of Scriptures, which would prove, so to speak, the inclusion of the former in the parable of salvation history, that uninterruptedly extends from the origins to the present of community.

The "prophetic importance" of such quotation of Jeremiah can be grasped considering the fact that, eminently in Jewish-Christian context, "la funzione comunitaria principale esercitata dai profeti" consists in the so-called "esegesi carismatica": "essi sono esegeti, dal momento che spetta loro la responsabilità di offrire un'interpretazione del «mistero» nascosto nelle Scritture considerate sacre... Naturalmente questa esegesi è ispirata, ma il fatto che sia «carismatica» implica la presenza di alcuni caratteri specifici: essa richiede l'attualizzazione del messaggio scritturale, vale a dire i significati segreti devono essere rivelati negli avvenimenti della contemporaneità dell'interprete cristiano"¹⁶⁶.

According to such considerations it becomes possible to identify a sort of "prophetic chain" that allows to better understand the same sense of Christian martyrdom. The role performed by Daniel companions towards Jeremiah's words is the same that should be performed by the persecuted members of the community towards the story of Daniel's companions': assuming and learning from Scriptures as the "biblical *fraternitas*"¹⁶⁷ did, also the "historical *fraternitas*" could be included in God's plan and in the divine economy through a link of typological accomplishment.

d) Scorpiace 8:7-8: coming back to the importance of sacrifice

After focusing the attention on the pneumatic component of the typological experience reported by *Dn* "tales", the author seems to "come back" to the sacrificial acceptance of its interpretation, specifying how the "perfection" of such bloodless martyrdom is anyway combined with a strong, physical sufferance:

Scorpiace 8:7. O martyrdom even without suffering perfect! Enough did they suffer, enough were they burnt, those who were protected by God so that it might

¹⁶⁶ G. BAZZANA, *Autorità e successione. Figure profetiche nei testi del giudeo-cristianesimo antico*, Milano 2004, pp. 7-8.

¹⁶⁷ About this term see *supra*, n. 158. It can be additionally noticed here that its adoption allows Tertullian to present martyrdom as an event connected with the entire community rather than as an individual option.

not seem that they had given a false representation of his power. Also Daniel, who besought none but God, was for this reason accused and demanded by the Chaldeans, and he would have been devoured by the pent-up and wanted savageness of lions, if it had been right that the worthy anticipation of Darius concerning God should have proved delusive¹⁶⁸. **8.** For the rest, it was necessary that every preacher of God and every worshipper also – who having been summoned to idolatry had refused compliance – suffered, agreeably to the tenor¹⁶⁹ of that argument by which the truth ought to have been recommended both to those who were then living and to those following in succession, (namely), that the suffering of its defenders themselves bespeak trust for it, because nobody would have been willing to be slain but one possessing the truth. Such commands and instances, since the earliest times, show that believers are under obligation to suffer martyrdom¹⁷⁰.

Alluding to the reasons why God decided to preserve Ananias, Azarias and Misael from death, Tertullian mentions both the divine intention not to have them taken for liars, and their perseverance in physical tortures, once again remarking the theme of the “bodily proof” as a necessary aspect of martyrdom.

In this context, the author introduces further references to another biblical figure who escaped death but still conquered the crown of martyrdom: that one of Daniel, whose experience expresses another fundamental element in martyrdom theology, that does not primarily deal with its origin and internal definition, but rather with its function of “revealing the truth”. Daniel would have been actually devoured by lions if God would not have had the intention to prove his strength in front of the emperor: in this perspective, the biblical story testifies the necessity for each prophet and true believer to suffer in front of the menace of idolatry with the final objective to show *veritas* to contemporary and later generations. Such *veritas* is identified with faith, which unavoidably needs the testimony of martyrdom to be proved: *nemo*, in fact, *voluisset frustra occidi*¹⁷¹. In other words, the

¹⁶⁸ Cf. *Dn* 6:4-24.

¹⁶⁹ About the use of the term *status* in Tertullian see R. BRAUN, *Deus Christianorum: recherches sur le vocabulaire doctrinal de Tertullien*, Paris 1977 (Études Augustiniennes. Série antiquité 70), pp. 200-207.

¹⁷⁰ Tertullianus, *Scorpiace*, ed. G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI 1990, pp. 112-115; 8:7. *O martyrium <et sine> passione perfectum! Satis passi, satis exusti sunt, quos propterea Deus texit, ne potestatem eius mentiri viderentur. Nam et Danielum, nullius praeter Dei supplicem et idcirco a Chaldaeis delatum ac depostulatum, statim utique conclusa et usitata feritas leonum devorasset, si Dar<ii> digna praesumptio de Deo falli debuisset. 8. Ceterum pati oportebat omnem Dei praedicatorum atque cultorem, qui ad idolatriam provocatus negasset obsequium, secundum illius quoque rationis statum, qua et praesentibus tunc et posteris deinceps commendari veritatem oporteb<at>, pro qua fidem diceret passio ipsorum defensorum eius, quia ne<mo> voluisset frustra occidi nisi compos veritatis. Talia a primordio et praecepta et exempla debitorum martyrii fidem ostendunt.*

¹⁷¹ As also G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, in G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI-F. RUGGIERO-E. SANZI-C. SCHIPANI (curr.), *SCAR* 4/1, p. 209, notices, it would be possibile to see here a further allusion to the Gnostics, who considered martyrdom as worthless; the phrase seems indeed to echo the expression of chapter 1:7 *perire homines sine causa*.

fact that the Scripture's protagonists accepted the possibility of death represents the same demonstration of the truth of faith, so that *talia...praecepta et exempla debitricem martyrii fidem ostendunt*.

e) *In conclusion*

In order to offer an overall-view of the extensive interpretation of “tales” developed by Tertullian in *Scorpiace*, some elements have to be stressed and highlighted.

First of all, under the literary and technical point of view, the author seems to have elaborated a sort of “circular structure”, placing at the extremities of the passage the references to the importance of bodily death in the context of a martyrial experience, consistent with the purposes and the radical attitude of the whole treatise. The death of the believers is conceived as an instrument of perfection and as a proof of the truth of faith, prescribed by the same God since the origins of salvation history.

In the frame of such conception, he introduces a sort of “inclusion”, that in some measure debunks the role of physical sacrifice in comparison with another important factor in the balance of the martyrial experience, namely God's Spirit, representing the same trigger of martyrdom and its principal guarantee. In the light of such argument, the author can introduce those biblical cases in which the persecution did not brought to the outcome of death – such as the Hebrews' and Daniel's ones – in order to describe the “prophetic component” of martyrdom¹⁷². Such insisted mention of the role of Spirit, grounded on the assumption of its continuous presence in salvation history¹⁷³, generates a “typological chain” that goes from the words of Jeremiah to the experience of the furnace, and finally involves also the present of Christians.

Though such developments suggest at least to wonder whether a trace of Tertullian's adhesion to Montanism should be here seen¹⁷⁴, also a different interpretative option can be formulated. The

¹⁷² See G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, in F. VATTIONI (cur.) 1987, pp. 1145-1146.

¹⁷³ The same structure of *Scorpiace*, which starts from First Testament *exempla* and continues with New Testament's ones, finally alluding to the time of the apostle, seems to reprise such conception.

¹⁷⁴ According to G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI 1990, p. 11, *Scorpiace* would not include any reference nor trace of Montanism, “ma è possibile che il fervore montanista per il martirio avesse in qualche modo già toccato il suo (*scil.* of Tertullian) animo. *Scorpiace* deve dirsi perciò uno scritto criptomontanista”. The importance of the prophetic element in the elaboration seems to actually represent a possibile reference to such theological context. For references about the prophetic element in Montanism see in part. G. VISONÀ, *Il fenomeno profetico del montanismo*, in R. PENNA (cur.) 1993, pp. 149-164, with a rich *status quaestions* and accurate bibliographical indications (see in part. section “una nuova profezia”, pp. 158-164). See also E. NORELLI, *Parole di profeti, parole sui profeti: la costruzione del montanismo nei frammenti dell'anonimo antimontanista (Eusebio di Cesarea, Storia Ecclesiastica 5:16-17)*, in G. FILORAMO (ed.), *Carisma profetico. Fattore di innovazione religiosa*, Brescia 2003 (Centro di Alti Studi in Scienze Religiose di Piacenza 3), pp. 107-132, who describes this movement as a “fenomeno profetico-estatico...che si manifestò per la prima volta in alcuni villaggi della Frigia, in Asia minore, verso il 156/157” p. 107. About Montanism see also the dated by still significant P. DE LABRIOLLE, *La crise montaniste*, Paris 1913 and C. TREVETT, *Montanism. Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy*, Cambridge 1996.

analysis of *Dn* “tales” reception in documents coming from African communities – and signally from Cyprian’s production – allows to consider the possibility that author of *Scorpiace* felt the necessity to anticipate the possible objections moved by those who affirmed the importance of death in the context of the martyrial experiences. In other words, the stories of the “saved” Hebrews and Daniel, often assumed in African literature as types of the condition of *confessores*, could invalidate Tertullian’s conception of the strong link between martyrdom and bodily death. Stressing the allusion to Spirit, the author – apart from answering to Gnostics’ position – would have also avoided possible theological problems triggered by such biblical stories which did not actually end with a *passio*. This interpretative option may also explain the subtle prudence of the elaboration, in which the fact that death would not be necessary to sanction martyrdom is not clearly mentioned but just cautiously implied¹⁷⁵.

5.2.2. From “earthly survival” to “eschatological salvation”: *Luke and the three Hebrews in Adversus Marcionem*

The conception emerging from *Scorpiace* seems to find another development in *Adversus Marcionem* 4:21:8¹⁷⁶, a passage already mentioned¹⁷⁷ as regards the “fourth figure” in the furnace, here named as “Son of Man”. The section presents an exegesis of *Lk* 9:24, an evangelic passage in which the same Christ declares the importance to lose life in order to preserve it¹⁷⁸. It will be useful to recall here the entire section.

***Adversus Marcionem* IV 21:9.** “Who will want”, he says, “to save his soul will lose it, and who will lose it for me, will save it”. Certainly it was the Son of Man who pronounced this sentence. Do you too then, together with the king of Babylon, look into his burning fiery furnace and you will find there one “like a Son of Man” – he

¹⁷⁵ A final, conclusive consideration deserves to be formulated about the Greek version of *Dn* possibly used by the author. The situation seems clearer than the one delineated for Cyprian, since Tertullian evidently uses, in the literary mention of the Hebrews’ discourse, the version of *Dn*^g 3:16-18. In spite of this evidence, as G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI, in G. AZZALI BERNARDELLI-F. RUGGIERO-E. SANZI-C. SCHIPANI (curr.), *SCAR* 4/1, p. 208, notices, “la traduzione della *vetus latina* ora aderisce letteralmente, ora si discosta dal testo greco. *Non habemus necessitatem* ricalca *Dn* 3:16 οὐ χρείαν ἔχομεν; *potens eruere* ricalca la forma sintattica di 3:17 δυνατὸς ἐξελέσθαι, ma senza rispettare il tempo all’infinito; *neque idololo tuo famulabitur* si discosta nel numero e nel tempo da *Dn* 3:18 τοῖς θεοῖς σου οὐ λατρεύομεν”.

¹⁷⁶ The book’s chronology is probably ascribable to 209-210, but the problem remains open; see R. BRAUN, *SC* 456, pp. 17-19.

¹⁷⁷ See *supra*, chapter 4, pp. 228-229.

¹⁷⁸ The argument of book IV of *Adversus Marcionem* is “la réfutation de l’évangile marcionite” and presents “après un prologue...un plan simple et...linéaire”. In particular, “l’ensemble des chapitres 2 à 5 fournit au lecteur cette *praestructio* dont le but est de démontrer que cet évangile sans nom d’auteur – en fait celui de Luc – utilisé et interpolé par Marcion est une oeuvre de faussaire” (R. BRAUN, *SC* 456, p. 19).

was not yet actually that, not yet having being born by human – already he had set this course of action. He saves the lives of the three brethren, who agreed together to lose them for God, but he destroyed the Chaldeans who preferred to keep safe by idolatry. Which is such new doctrine, whose instances are ancient? **10**. Indeed also prophecies have accomplished, both about martyrdoms which are going to happen, and about those who will receive their reward from God: “You see”, says Isaiah, “how the righteous one perishes, and no man suffered from it, and the righteous ones are taken away, and no man considered it”. When does it more truly take places than in persecution *** of his saints? Surely neither in simple (death), nor in the one by the law of common nature, but in that noble (death) in fighting for the faith, in which the man who loses his life for God preserves it, so that here at least you may see you have a judge, who rewards an evil gaining of life by the losing of it, and a good loss of life by its salvation.¹⁷⁹

The interpretation of the words of Jesus offered by Tertullian has to be understood in the light of the function and the nature of the entire treatise, composed in polemic against the Marcionite theology according to which “il ne doit rien y avoir de commun entre le Christ du Créateur et cell de l'autre dieu¹⁸⁰”. In order to dismantle the adversaries’ position, the African author tries to underline the continuity and the undeniable identity between the God of the two Testaments. In the specific case of the Jesuan saying examined in the passage, Tertullian structures a sort of hermeneutic cycle, organized in the following passages:

- 1) he extrapolates the words reported by *Lk* and attributes them to the “Son of Man”, in order to establish an equivalence between him and Jesus;
- 2) he identifies an example from First Testament¹⁸¹ capable to prove the coherence between the action of the “Son of Man” and the words pronounced by Jesus. Such

¹⁷⁹ Tertullianus, *Adversus Marcionem*, ed. R. BRAUN (ed.), SC 456, pp. 270-272; IV 21:9. “*Qui voluerit*”, inquit, “*animam suam salvam facere perdet illam, et qui perdiderit eam propter me salvam faciet eam*”. Certe filius hominis hanc sententiam emisit. Perspice igitur et tu cum rege Babylonio fornacem eius ardentem et invenies illic “*tamquam filium hominis*” – nondum enim vere erat, nondum scilicet natus ex homine – iam tunc istos exitus constituentem. Salvas facit animas trium fratrum, qui eas pro deo perdere conspiraverant, Chaldaeorum vero perdidit, quas illi per idolatriam salvas facere maluerant. Quae est ista nova doctrina, cuius vetera documenta sunt? 10. *Quamquam et praedicationes martyriorum tam futurorum quam a Deo mercedem relaturorum decucurrerunt: “Vide”, inquit Esaias, “quomodo perit iustus, et nemo excipit corde, et viri iusti auferuntur, et nemo considerat”. Quando magis hoc fit quam in persecutione? *** sanctorum eius? Utique non simplex, nec de naturae lege communis, sed illa insignis et pro fide militaris, in qua qui animam suam propter Deum perdit servat illam, ut et hic tamen iudicem adgnoscas, qui malum animae lucrum perditione eius et bonum animae detrimentum salute eius remuneraturus.*

¹⁸⁰ R. BRAUN, SC 456, p. 19.

¹⁸¹ Scripture is widely used in *Adversus Marcionem* IV, as the same argument of the book demands: as R. BRAUN, SC 456, p. 31, underlines, “l’objet de ce livre était de montrer qu’en dépit des altérations apportées,

example is that one of the Hebrews, conceived as the perfect biblical testimony to be linked with the saying of the Gospel: on one side, Daniel’s companions, who were ready to die not to deny their God, obtained salvation (which fully fits with the expression *qui voluerit...animam suam salvam facere perdet illam*); on the other, Chaldeans, who embraced idolatry not to lose their lives, were destroyed (which gives sense to the statement *et qui perdiderit eam propter me salvam faciet eam*);

3) he finally interprets such event as a prophecy of Christian martyrdom.

In order to stitch the pieces of his argumentation, Tertullian adds a final reference to the fact that such “ancient instances” (which means those expressed by the biblical example) are fulfilled in the “new doctrine” represented by “persecution”, that is to say the space in which the words of *Is* 57:1 concerning the death of the righteous men find their accomplishment. Such death, prophetically and typologically anticipated by the biblical event and by Isaiah’s words and further expressed through the saying of Jesus, is not a “common” one, but rather it consists in that “noble” fighting for the faith that ends up bringing eternal salvation to those who were ready to resign from earthly survival.

Under the exegetical point of view, the hermeneutic circle articulated by the author represents an efficacious instrument in two senses:

- it confirms the identity between First and New Testament’s God, against the Marcionite theology: the situation expressed by Jesus’ words is absolutely coherent with the actions performed by the “Son of Man” in Scriptures, in a way that leaves no doubts about the fact that these entities (Christ and the “Son of Man”), are the same one¹⁸²;
- in the light of such premise, the scriptural examples – both the events narrated in *Dn* and the words of Isaiah – can be assumed as an antecedent step in salvation history, which is uninterrupted and unite, so that they can find a prosecution and a fulfilment in the present of community.

les textes évangéliques maintenus par Marcion militent quand même en faveur du «Christ du Créateur», il est naturel qu’une large place y soit faite aux textes de l’Ancien Testament”.

¹⁸² The approach clearly testifies a typical trait of Tertullian’s exegesis, as efficaciously stressed by J. MOINGT I 1966, p. 174: “La consonance des déclarations de la Prophétie et de celles du Seigneur est la grande règle d’exégèse que Tertullien répète et applique partout”. According to the scholar it would emerge with particular strength exactly in *Adversus Marcionem*, where Tertullian “souligne le plus fortement la conjonction de la Loi et de l’Évangile, que Marcion séparait pour mieux disjoindre le Christ du Créateur” (pp. 174-175).

More or less explicitly, some important arguments of Tertullian's conception of martyrdom – which is the real thematic core of the argumentation – surface from the passage. A clear continuity with *Scorpiace* can certainly be spotted, but in the case of *Adversus Marcionem* it is possible to notice an even deeper elaboration.

First of all, in both works martyrdom is conceived as an experience connected with physical death¹⁸³. The topic, developed in *Scorpiace* without the mediation of neotestamentary references, is introduced in the section of *Adversus Marcionem* through the mention *Lk* passage, which is the object of an exegetical reflection: ever since the Gospel, salvation is presented as a reward for those “who will lose” their life.

It has already been possible to describe how, in the case of *Scorpiace*, the allusion to God's Spirit brought at least to a partial and momentary reevaluation of the role of bodily death in the definition of martyrdom¹⁸⁴. In the case of *Adversus Marcionem* the panorama seems to modify: the salvation granted to the Hebrews in the furnace seems to be actually interpreted as an equivalent of that eschatological and eternal reward predisposed for the martyrs, and not as an earthly, concrete emancipation from physical death. In other words, Ananias, Azarias and Misael are not assumed here as types of those who accede to a “martyrial condition” *even though* they do not die, but rather as antecedents of those who, undergoing flames and persecution, conquer at the same time the final and eschatological salvation promised by Jesus in *Lk* saying.

Such exegesis perfectly fits with Tertullian's conception of martyrdom as a “new creation” immediately performed by God at the moment of persecution¹⁸⁵. The discrepancy between the experience of those who physically die and the three Hebrews' condition is – so to speak – overtaken, resorting to an eschatological projection of their divine salvation. Thanks to such expedient, no actual gap separates neither *Dn* “tale” from Isaiah's words concerning the death of *iusti*, nor the biblical prophecies from the experience of Christian persecutions.

Another topic recurring in both *Scorpiace* and *Adversus Marciones* is represented by the “prophetic” connotation of martyrdom. As has been suggested¹⁸⁶, Tertullian's conception of “prophetic martyrdom” emerges in *Scorpiace* from the importance attributed to “God's Spirit”, considered as the element which unavoidably guides each righteous believer toward a martyrial option, so that no martyrdom is actually possible without its presence. Trying to explain why the experience of the Hebrews could be considered as “martyrial” even *sine passione*, the author, exactly resorting to such conception of the Spirit, describes it as perfectly congruent with the biblical words

¹⁸³ About the allusion to such element in *Scorpiace* see *supra*, pp. 281-284.

¹⁸⁴ See *supra*, pp. 284-287.

¹⁸⁵ See *supra*, pp. 283-284.

¹⁸⁶ See *supra*, pp. 284-287.

pronounced by Jeremiah. It seems possible to say, in this sense, that the the prophetic character of martyrdom deals, according to *Scorpiace*, with two different arguments:

- 1) with the “genesis” and the origins of the same martyrial tension in the victims, who are guided by the Spirit toward the acceptance of death;
- 2) with the subsistence of a link between the persecution and a biblical prophecy anticipating it and “certifying” its sense and its place within the parable of salvation history.

Considering the perspectives assumed in *Scorpiace* about this topic, it seems possible to say that *Adversus Marcionem* simply develops the second one: here the prophetic component of martyrdom seems to be implicitly certified by the relationship between First Testament and the present of community (certainly such argument is perfectly integrated in a treatise which aims at showing the seamless unity of salvation history).

Such relation could be at first sight assumed as an outcome merely depending on the Christian vocation towards a typological interpretation of reality, but – in addition to it – the treatise includes an element that may suggest a more specific assumption of a “Montanist perspective”¹⁸⁷ and a more specific allusion to a new phase of revelation¹⁸⁸. In must indeed by noticed that the author attributes to the persecutions the value of “new doctrine whose instances are ancient”, a formulation that can be easily compared with the definition of *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* prologue¹⁸⁹, where martyrial literature and historical persecutions are conceived as equivalent to *vetera fidei exempla* (that is Scripture), being defined also in this context with the adjective *novus*. The

¹⁸⁷ About the specific approach to Montanism in book IV of *Adversus Haereses*, R. BRAUN, SC 456, pp. 36-39, states: “L’adhésion de Tertullien à ce mouvement est effective depuis qu’il a commencé à répondre en une troisième édition son écrit contre Marcion...Le livre IV marque un sensible progrès dans le même sens”. See also C. TREVETT 1996, pp. 67-76, in part. p. 72: “The long work *Against Marcion* probably takes us into Tertullian’s early Montanist years.”

¹⁸⁸ As underlined by G. VISONÀ, in R. PENNA (cur.) 1993, p. 158, the Montanist option should not be interpreted “come resistenza di una chiesa carismatico-profetica alla chiesa istituzionale dei vescovi”, but rather as the allusion to “nuova fase di rivelazione, come annuncio di una nuova e ultima fase della storia della salvezza”. What is enough to notice in this occasion is that “alle sue origini si pone la pretesa di una nuova effusione/dispensazione dello Spirito...nel senso dell’invio dello Spirito, della venuta del nuovo Rivelatore...” (p. 158).

¹⁸⁹ In this context it is not actually necessary to mention the problematic matter concerning the attribution of the *Passio* to Tertullian, since the objective is to simply stress the use of a same vocabulary which may resend to a common Montanist background. About Montanism in *Passio Perpetuae* see C. TREVETT 1996, p. 67, and pp. 178-183. P. DE LABRIOLLE 1913, pp. 338-353, mentions the points of contact between the *Passio* and Tertullian’s early Montanist phase. Citing the prologue of the martyrial document (p. 345), the scholar offers a sort of synoptic table between this section of the text and Tertullian’s works, but he does not cite the passage of chapter IV here mentioned (a similar, cited parallel can be represented by *Adversus Marcionem* I 8: *novitas initium testificatur*).

contextual and linguistic proximity¹⁹⁰ between the texts allows to glimpse here a possible assumption of a Montanist perspective in the elaboration of the theology of martyrdom. In other words, an implicit allusion to the exuberance of the Spirit and to its active intervention during present persecutions may underlie the equivalence between *vetera documenta* and *nova doctrina*, between Scripture and Christian life.

¹⁹⁰ Though the argument cannot be investigated in this context, it seems possibile to wonder whether the use of the term *novus* represented a sort of “technical expression” connected with the same self-definition of the Montanism as “New Prophecy” (“non capiamo il montanismo se non partiamo dal fatto che esso si autodefiniva la «Nuova Profezia»”, G. VISONÀ, in R. PENNA [cur.] 1993, p. 158). As E. NORELLI, in G. FILORAMO (ed.) 2003, pp. 107-108, underlines, such movement “definì se stesso «la Profezia» o «la Nuova Profezia», attribuendosi dunque forme espressive, comportamenti e funzioni che secondo i suoi rappresentanti lo situavano in continuità con i profeti dell’epoca precristiana e cristiana”. C. TREVETT 1996, p. 67, mentions the fact that also Tertullian defined the movement as *nova prophetia*.