RHETORICAL STRUCTURE IN TERTULLIAN’S AD SCAPULAM

BY

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A generation ago Robert Sider demonstrated that classical rhetoric provided an important tool for Tertullian in crafting his treatises. In this he was supported by the work of other scholars who considered the rhetorical dimension of Tertullian’s work. This position has now been accepted generally among the academic community who cite Sider’s work with approval. In his work Sider discussed all but two of Tertullian’s treatises in terms of their rhetorical structure, style and method of argumentation. Elsewhere, I have discussed at length the rhetorical influence on adversus Iudaeos, one of the two treatises not dealt with in Sider’s book, arguing that a rhetorical approach to this text helps to address questions of its authenticity, its integrity and its relationship with book three of adversus Marcionem. In this


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article I wish to examine the rhetorical influence on the other untreated treatise, *ad Scapulam*, particularly in order to determine whether the tenets of classical rhetoric play a part in its structure and in order to understand better its purpose. Useful for what it says about Roman political history and the story of the persecution of Christians in the earliest centuries, the text has been little considered by scholars as a piece of literature.

Addressed to the African proconsul Scapula late in 212, and actually intended for him to read, I would contend, this is a very small treatise. Timothy Barnes, for one, does believe that there is a discernible rhetorical structure to *ad Scapulam*, for in his book he mentions the *exordium* of the work. It is not surprising that he finds such a structure, considering he believes this text to be a summary of the earlier *Apologeticum*, a work which has an undeniable rhetorical shape. As possibly the latest of Tertullian’s works, Barnes believes that it is a crisper presentation of the kind of Sophistic oratory common to the age.

That Barnes has argued for such a close connection between *Apologeticum* and *ad Scapulam* means that it is important to review what has been written about the larger, earlier work, particularly with regard to its rhetorical nature. Put simply, there has been some debate as to whether *Apologeticum* is to be classified as a forensic *genus* or *causa* or as a deliberative or even an epideictic one. One’s position on this point will have some bearing on an interpretation of *ad Scapulam*. Sider himself accepted that *Apologeticum* was a piece of forensic literature.

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5 For commentaries on *ad Scapulam* see A. Quacquarelli, Q. S. F. Tertulliani ad Scapulam. Prolegomeni, testo critico, traduzione e commento, vol. 1 of Opuscula patrum (Rome 1957); Pier Angelo Gramaglia, Tertulliano: A Scapula. Introduzione, traduzione e note (Rome 1980).


8 Ibid. 166.

9 Ibid. 45.

10 Ibid. 222.

11 R. D. Sider, *op. cit.* 22-23, 34, 37. On 38 he indicates that his discussion to that point had been about forensic treatises and that his discussion about deliberative and epideictic works was only beginning from this page. His concession to Keresztes on 45 is purely for the sake of argument. Nowhere in his chapter on deliberative and epideictic themes (115-125) does Sider mention *Apologeticum*. 